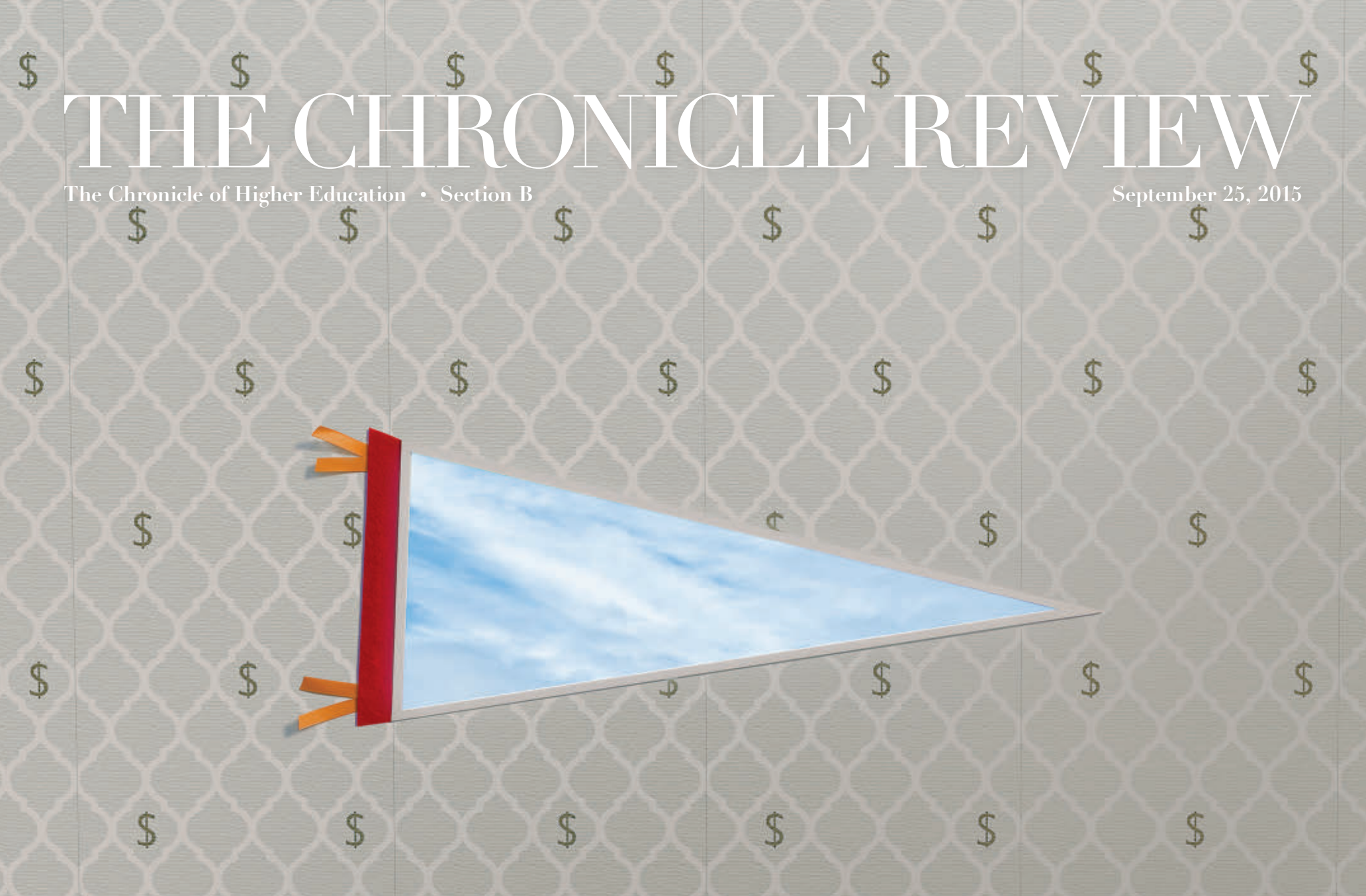
THE CHRONICLE REVIEW

The Chronicle of Higher Education • Section B

September 25, 2015



Why College Is Not a Commodity

By GARY GUTTING

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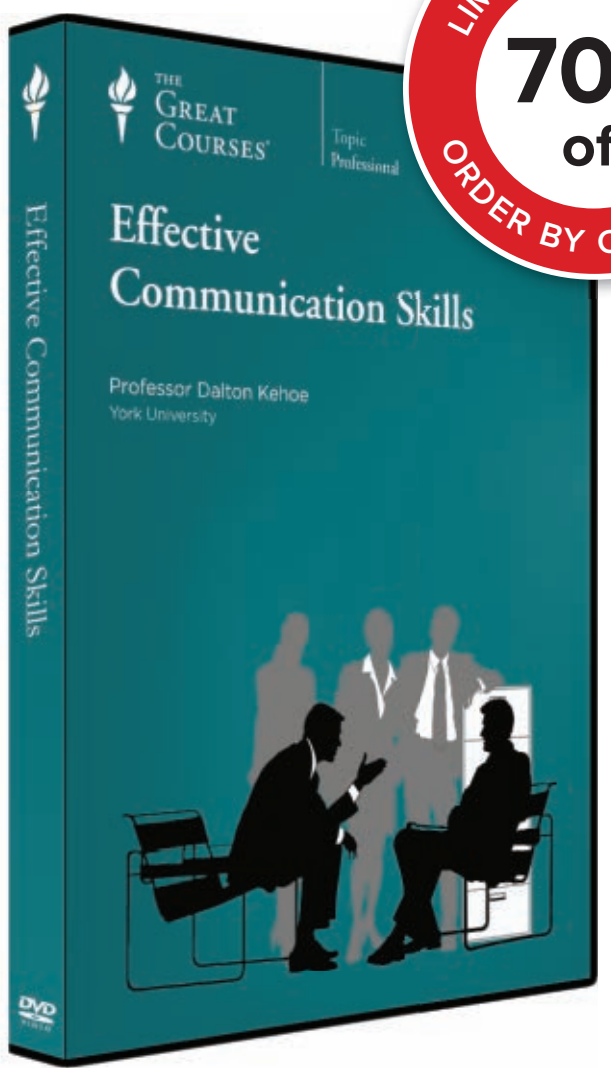

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THE CHRONICLE REVIEW, SECTION B OF THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION, VOLUME LXII, NUMBER 4, IS PUBLISHED AT 1255 23RD STREET, N.W., WASHINGTON, D.C. 20037. TELEPHONE: (202) 466-1000. EMAIL: EDITOR@CHRONICLE.COM.

Corporal Thinking

Recent research in cognition gives new meaning to the term 'carnal knowledge'

CONSIDER THIS
By GUY CLAXTON

IN A WILDLY POPULAR TED talk, the creativity guru Sir Ken Robinson jokes about the impoverished and rather distant relationship that many academics seem to have to their own bodies. Professors, those cultural epitomes of intelligence, act as if their bodies were a form of transportation for their heads: a way of getting their minds to a meeting. Robinson suggests that, if you want to observe a variety of out-of-body experience, you should gate-crash the evening disco at a conference of senior academics, "where you will see grown men and women writhing uncontrollably … off the beat."

Exaggerated though this portrait may be, it bears some truth. Higher education had its European beginnings in the cathedral schools of the Middle Ages, and to this day bears the antiphysical marks of those religious origins — despite the appearance of engineering departments and the recent fashion on college campuses for fancy tool shops called "makerspaces." Bodies are fallible, corruptible, irrational; they don't offer us firm ground on which to base knowledge, action, and decision. So we should turn instead to a world of abstract and timeless verities. Reason is our highest and most precious achievement, the pinnacle of intelligence, and sober rationality brings us nearer to the divine, while the body drags us down to the world of beasts and beastliness. Students can "let off steam" on the sports field, through sex, or, indeed, on the dance floor, but physicality per se has nothing to do with erudition, or even cognition.

Recent research is forcing us to rethink that schism. The adage *mens sana in corpore sano* is of renewed interest to cognitive scientists, and thus to educators at all levels. We used to think of the brain as the "chief executive" of the body, but it turns out to be more servant than master. And the conventional image of a chain of processing that runs from perception through memory and thinking to decision-making and finally into action is plain wrong. The body is not just linked to our sensory and motor extremities; it is intricately involved with all stages and aspects of our intelligence. Without it, even our loftiest thoughts become less smart.

One of the best-known streams of this research comes from Antonio Damasio and his colleagues at the University of Southern California. They have shown that records of the personal significance of our experiences are distributed throughout the body, especially through the skin, the major organs — heart, lungs, stomach — and the fluid systems known as the endocrine and immune systems. When we encounter something that reminds us (often subliminally) of a previous experience, that distributed network of visceral reactivity fires up and serves to guide or steer our thoughts, reactions, and decisions. We have a kind of somatic rudder that primes us — intelligently — to refine the range of solutions and responses we consider.

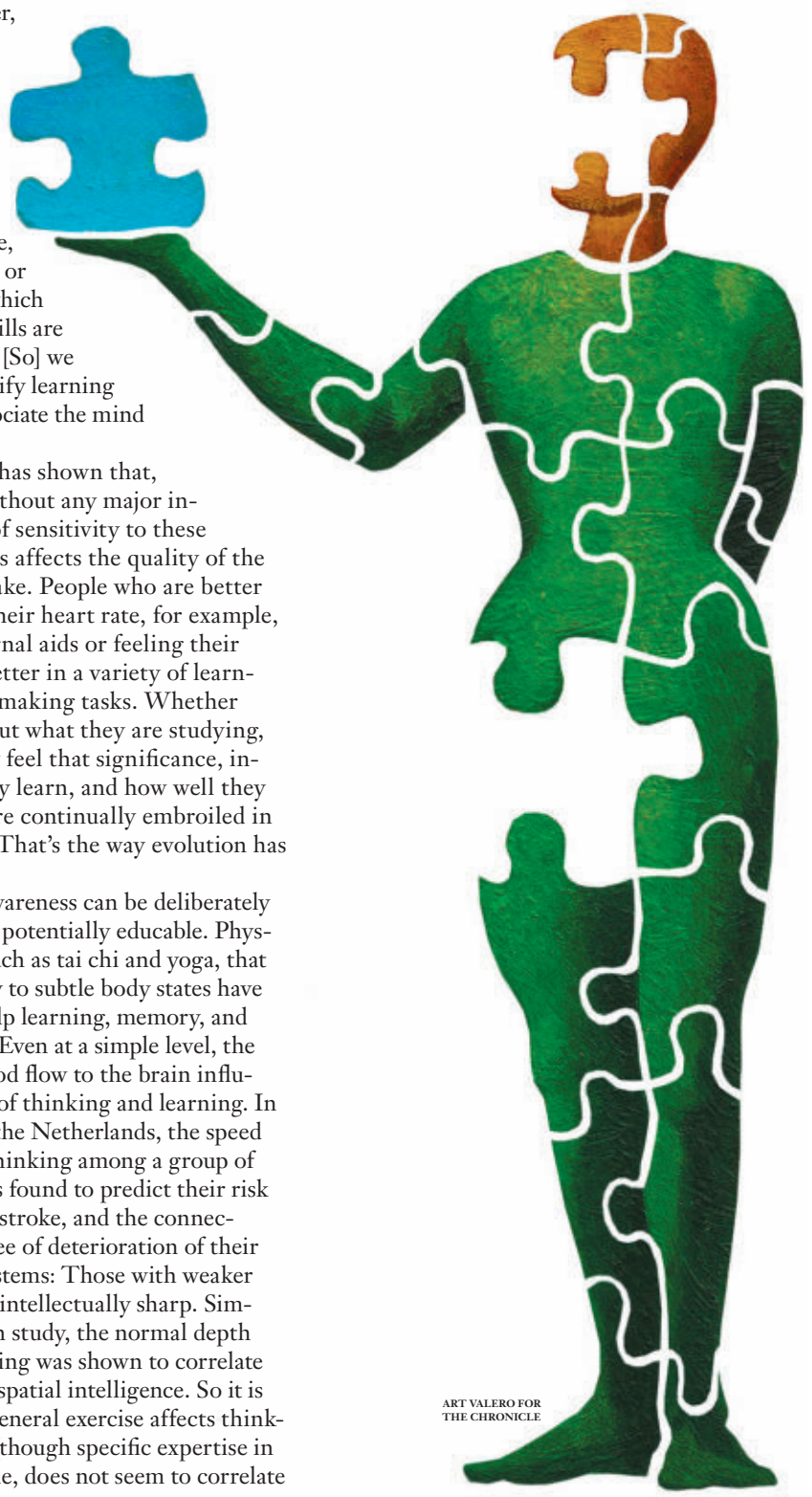
When this system of "somatic markers," as Damasio calls them, is disrupted through injury, our intelligence falls apart. Far from being a nuisance, these feelings turn out to be essential to intelligent cognition. In a 2007 paper, Damasio and Helen Mary Immordino-Yang argue that human decisions, behaviors, thoughts, and creations, no matter how far removed from survival in the homeostatic sense, bear the shadow of their visceral beginnings. No matter how complex or abstract they become, the researchers say, our repertoires of behavioral and cognitive options continue to exist in the service of embodied goals.

In another paper, Immordino-Yang concludes, "Emotion plays a critical role in all of these stages of problem solving, helping the student to evaluate, either consciously or nonconsciously, which knowledge and skills are likely relevant. … [So] we can no longer justify learning theories that dissociate the mind from the body."

Later research has shown that, even in people without any major injury, the degree of sensitivity to these embodied feelings affects the quality of the decisions they make. People who are better able to monitor their heart rate, for example, without any external aids or feeling their pulse, perform better in a variety of learning and decision-making tasks. Whether students care about what they are studying, and whether they feel that significance, influences what they learn, and how well they learn it. Bodies are continually embroiled in our intelligence: That's the way evolution has designed us.

And internal awareness can be deliberately improved. So it is potentially educable. Physical disciplines, such as tai chi and yoga, that require sensitivity to subtle body states have been shown to help learning, memory, and problem-solving. Even at a simple level, the quality of the blood flow to the brain influences the quality of thinking and learning. In a recent study in the Netherlands, the speed and accuracy of thinking among a group of elderly people was found to predict their risk of heart attack or stroke, and the connection was the degree of deterioration of their cardiovascular systems: Those with weaker systems were less intellectually sharp. Similarly, in a Turkish study, the normal depth of people's breathing was shown to correlate with measures of spatial intelligence. So it is no surprise that general exercise affects thinking and learning (though specific expertise in sports, for example, does not seem to correlate strongly with cognitive performance). *Mens sana in corpore sano*, indeed.

A NEW IMAGE of the mind-body relationship is emerging. When people began to look for a natural home of the mind in the 19th and 20th centuries, the first and most obvious place to look was the brain. This allowed the old apartheid, a division between one clever and masterful bit of the psyche, and another dumb and menial bit, controlling basic functions like breathing, to continue. Physiology courses divided the body into separate systems — nervous, endocrine, im-



ART VALERO FOR THE CHRONICLE

mune, sensory, cardiovascular, digestive, pulmonary — of which only the central nervous system was seen as underpinning cognition and intelligence. Now the body is being revealed as a single dynamic system in which nerves, stomach, skin, and lymph are all in constant conversation with one another. The body *is* the brain. The part between our ears is not the executive suite but the common room, where all the many factions of the body can resolve their concerns and a course of action can emerge (sometimes in milliseconds, sometimes in years).

In fact, the "organ of intelligence" is not even bounded by the envelope of the skin. Our systems are in direct electrochemical communication with the tools at hand, the clothes we are wearing, the people nearby. They actually become incorporated. Our bodies end not at the tips of our fingers but at the tip of the pencil or the wheels of the car. When two people are understanding each other well, their brain waves are coordinated, and their brains are predicting the ends of each other's sentences. Mirror neurons in the cortex automatically prime us to synchronize our own bodies with what we see those around us doing. Chemical signals — so-called pheromones — influence those around us in complex ways. Bettina Pause, a German researcher who has studied pheromones for 15 years, says, "My guess is that a lot of our communication is [subliminally] influenced by chemosignals." The basic organ of intelligence is not the conscious mind, nor even the brain: It is mind + brain + body + environment all rolled into one.

The implications of this new view of human intelligence for education, as well as for other institutions, such as medicine and the law, are only just beginning to be worked out, but they may well be seismic. If physical feelings and emotions are central to intelligent functioning, and if their contribution depends on our sensitivity to them, then physical health and interoceptive awareness are crucial to the process of learning even the most abstract material. Should there be compulsory classes in tai chi on campus, at least for those students who aspire to top grades? It will sound rather too Californian to some, but in 10 years' time, who knows?

And if their professors turn up in yoga class as well, they could be improving their chances of tenure, or even of getting their hands on a Nobel Prize. For many years, when Nobel laureates go to Stockholm to collect their awards, they have been invited to take part in a survey of, among other things, their attitude toward intuition. The vast majority have said they value their intuition highly and could not have made the breakthroughs they did without heeding it. While gut feelings can and do lead us astray, an attitude of what you might call "skeptical respect" toward those little inklings and promptings is worth cultivating.

Sometimes feeling and emotion get in the way of learning, but often they are valuable guides, and without them learning feels pointless and mechanical. The branch of scholarship called embodied cognition may just be showing us the way back to a more integrated, and more wholesome, experience of college. ■

> The basic organ of intelligence is mind + brain + body + environment all rolled into one.

Guy Claxton is a visiting professor of education at King's College, University of London. His new book, Intelligence in the Flesh: Why Your Mind Needs Your Body Much More Than It Thinks, *is published by Yale University Press.*

Why College Is Not a Commodity

By GARY GUTTING

WHAT IS COLLEGE FOR? We typically answer this question by citing a variety of purposes, of which liberal education is only one. Most other goals — marketable skills, moral and social development, learning how to learn — are tied to the demands of employers. Yes, young people need all of those qualities. But, apart from liberal education, our best colleges — say, the top 100 major research universities and the 50 best four-year colleges, which are our models of undergraduate education — aren't an efficient way to provide them.

These institutions are built around their faculties: the remarkable array of physicists, biologists, economists, psychologists, philosophers, historians, literary scholars, poets, and artists who do cutting-edge, highly specialized scholarly and creative work. Such scholars may be superb as teachers, but they are far from a cost-effective source of job training. Even if we include liberal education as a goal, colleges do not need such high-powered faculties to teach undergraduates. People dedicated entirely to teaching, with no special interest in research but with master's degrees in their subjects, could do an excellent job.

KEVIN VAN AELST FOR THE CHRONICLE REVIEW

Given the role and the nature of its faculty, the only plausible raison d'être of a college is to nourish a world of intellectual culture: a world of ideas dedicated to what we can know scientifically, understand humanistically, or express artistically. In our society, this world is populated mainly by members of college faculties. Law, medicine, and engineering are included to the extent that they are still understood as "learned professions," deploying practical skills that are nonetheless rooted in scientific knowledge or humanistic understanding.

Support for our current system of higher education makes sense, therefore, only if we regard this intellectual culture as essential. Otherwise we could provide job training and basic social and moral formation for young adults far more efficiently and cheaply. There would be no need to support, at great expense, the highly specialized interests of tenured academics. Colleges and universities have no distinctive purpose if we do not value highly the knowledge and understanding to which their faculties are dedicated.

Many colleges — for example, branches of state universities and some liberal-arts colleges — participate in this project to a lesser though still significant extent. Others, like community colleges, have quite different goals, more akin to the job training provided by high schools and trade schools. But recognizing the diverse goals of various colleges does not affect the central role of intellectual culture in our premier institutions of higher education.

There are important questions about the precise value and role of various academic disciplines in our intellectual culture. Some think that literary scholars have been corrupted by politicized intellectual fads, others that philosophers are lost in the minutiae of logical hair-splitting. But it's absurd to say that this culture, over all, is not of fundamental importance in our society. Can we seriously say that we don't want a society that supports a high level of pure scientific research, art and music, historical understanding, and philosophical reflection?

There have been societies that sustained intellectual culture without universities (ancient Greece and Rome are clear examples). But most of our scientific research and almost all work in the humanities takes place in colleges; and increasingly, colleges are where poets, novelists, artists, and musicians are trained and employed. For us, the tie between intellectual culture and university life is so close that separation would destroy both.

Further, centering intellectual culture in colleges has a distinctive advantage. Specialists need contact with intelligent and challenging nonexperts. Otherwise, submerged in the complexities of their advanced research, they will lose sight of the general human significance of what they are doing. This is the wisdom of making universities not just research institutions but also centers of undergraduate education.

Of course, a college has functions other than the preservation, development, and transmission of intellectual culture. Students hope to qualify for better jobs, to make friends and find spouses, even to play sports. But none of these functions require the elite faculties at the heart of our colleges. They could all be carried out by vocational schools with dormitories, social events, and athletics facilities. The only justification for our major investment in college professors is transmitting knowledge and an appreciation of intellectual culture to the next generation. We could readily eliminate professors if the main point of college were not for students to open themselves to new dimensions of knowledge and understanding.

This conclusion, however, conflicts with another common presupposition: that college teachers need to focus on "making their subjects interesting" to students by showing how they relate to students' vocational and pop-cultural interests. On the contrary, students need to see how academic subjects are intrinsically interesting. It is more a matter of students' moving beyond their current interests than of teachers fitting their subjects to interests that students already have. Good teaching does not make a subject more interesting; it initiates students into a fascinating part of intellectual culture — and so makes them more interesting.

Here we need the Aristotelian distinction between instrumental knowledge and knowledge for its own sake. An education centered in a research university will focus on knowledge for its own sake: knowledge that forms a major part of a fulfilling life.

AN OBVIOUS OBJECTION: If going to college is primarily for nurturing students' intellectual culture, how can we provide the training they need to get good jobs? Well-qualified employees require instrumental knowledge: information and skills of no special value in their own right, but essential as means to providing the goods and services a capitalist society requires. For those interested in careers in traditional "knowledge professions," such as engineering, law, and medicine, universities can simply maintain the standard graduate schools and undergraduate programs. This makes sense because these professions call for a combination of liberal education and high-level vocational training.

Current thinking about education, however, assumes that college is the natural place to acquire the relevant instrumental knowledge not only for these elite professions but also for the vast majority of good jobs. This leads to the supposition that almost everyone should go to college. But the basis of this belief begins to collapse once we ask how college in fact prepares students for the workplace. For most jobs, it merely provides certain basic intellectual skills: the ability to understand complex instructions, to write and speak clearly and cogently, to evaluate options critically. Earning a college degree shows that you have the moral and social qualities that employers need. You have for a period of time, and with little supervision, deferred to authority, met deadlines, and carried out difficult tasks even if you found them pointless and boring. What better background for most jobs?

Such intellectual and moral/social training, however, does not require studying with experts on Homeric poetry, particle theory, experimental psychology, or Kant. It does not, that is, require the immersion in intellectual culture that a college faculty is designed to provide. So why think that almost everyone should go to college? Because — and here we encounter yet another widely held supposition about education — we believe that college is the only place for most young people to gain the instrumental knowledge they need for good jobs.

This is an odd assumption. Why shouldn't a good elementary- and high-school education provide the needed instrumental knowledge? What is needed, intellectually, to succeed in most of the "good jobs" in our society? Here's one plausible and traditional model: a background in literature, art, science, history and politics adequate to read and comprehend the articles in national media; a grounding in precalculus mathematics; an ability to write well-organized and grammatically sound business memos and blog posts; and an intermediate level of competence in a foreign language.

Students with that sort of education would be excellent candidates for most satisfying and well-paying jobs (sometimes with the addition of an M.B.A. or other specialized master's degree). From the standpoint of employment, high-school graduates with such training would not need a college degree unless they wanted to be accountants or engineers, pursue preprofessional programs leading to law or medical school, or train for doctoral work in science or the humanities. Apart from that, the primary reason for going to college is its intellectual culture.

The only plausible raison d'être of a college is to nourish a world of ideas.

Of course, many high schools do not provide the needed instrumental education, and we make up the deficit with remedial work in college. This is an enormous waste of resources. In principle, there is no reason why elementary and high schools could not provide the instrumental knowledge that employers require. We hear various explanations for this failure: overcrowding, lack of technology, low teacher salaries, lack of parental involvement. Those factors are important, but, apart from the hard work of students themselves, the results of education depend mostly on who does the teaching. The other possible explanations for failure are relevant only because they make it impossible for students and teachers to do what they ought to do.

But isn't it clear that our K-12 teachers are not able to provide this sort of education? Even many students from the best public schools, which have small classes, lots of computers, well-paid teachers, and concerned parents, enter college far below the level I'm suggesting they should have achieved. The obvious explanation is the stunningly low standards we set for our K-12 teachers. For every other knowledge-based profession — law, medicine, university teaching — we recruit from the top 10-20 percent of our undergraduate students. Not so for K-12 teachers.

There was a time when outstanding women chose elementary- and high-school teaching because other professions excluded them. Now that these other professions are more open to women, we have come to accept that precollege teachers will, on the whole (and with admirable exceptions), be our less successful students. We try to work around that fact by emphasizing training, credentials, and external accountability. But in the end, as in other professions, there's no substitute for talent.

Even the best teachers may be ineffective if they have to work with

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the oversized classes, lack of discipline, and inane bureaucracies that plague so many of our schools. Above all, they may not be able to reach students with lives devastated by poverty. In fact, there is little chance of attracting the best students to teach in schools with such problems. Alleviating those problems has to be part of the effort to attract a better cohort of teachers. Why not adopt the same model for elementary- and high-school teaching that works for other professions?

One objection is that the best students have little interest in teaching. But there is reason to think the opposite. Top doctoral programs, designed for those who want to be college teachers, have far more applicants than they can accept. Further, many excellent students who would find satisfaction in teaching don't apply to graduate school, either because they lack certain specialized research skills or because they do not want to risk the highly competitive academic job market. Those students would form a natural pool for noncollege teaching if the pay and working conditions were anywhere near those of most colleges. There are also many top students who have no interest in the advanced research that is the focus of doctoral programs but who would prefer noncollege teaching to less intellectually engaging and less socially useful work.

Another objection is that teaching children and teenagers requires social and emotional abilities — to empathize, to nurture, to discipline — that may not come along with the intellectual qualities of the "best" college students. But there is no reason to think that people who are smart, articulate, and enthusiastic about ideas are in general less likely to have those pedagogical abilities. We need only choose those who have both high intellectual ability and the qualities needed to work successfully with students at a given grade level. Moreover, it's important that teachers be — as they now often are not — credible authority figures. Teachers with the justified self-confidence and prestige of an elite professional will more readily exercise such authority.

> The tie between intellectual culture and university life is so close that separation would destroy both.

A high level of intellectual ability may not be required to understand subjects in high school, not to say those in elementary school, but with our current low standards, it is not uncommon to find teachers who lack even this basic understanding. Moreover, it requires considerable intelligence to respond adequately to the questions and needs of students.

Most important, the greatest intellectual challenge of teaching at any level is to present the content effectively. Our current system seems often to assume that K-12 teachers will need the guidance of "experts" on this. There's considerable doubt as to the existence of this alleged expertise. For decades, educational theory has produced a series of failed panaceas (new math, whole-language reading, writing across the curriculum, discovery-based learning, group projects). But, in any case, more-intelligent teachers will be both more likely to develop better methods of teaching on their own and better able to understand and apply any wisdom that may come to them from above.

The final objection is that, sensible as it might seem, turning K-12 teaching into an elite, highly respected profession is too expensive. Can we seriously expect to compensate the three million people who teach elementary and high school at the level of doctors and lawyers? How can we afford to?

First we need to overcome our self-destructive aversion to raising taxes to pay for what we need. But beyond that, several factors would reduce the cost. We don't need to pay teachers on par with doctors and lawyers. College teaching (apart from the wage slavery of adjuncts) is strongly attractive at far lower pay levels, and K-12 teaching would not require the pay of full professors at elite institutions. Further, in the long run, the model of a faculty of elite professionals to whom we can entrust the education of our youth may pay for itself. There would be far less turnover of teachers who aren't up to the job. We would no longer need the current elaborate — and demoralizing — processes of external evaluation and the continual retraining of teachers in accord with outside experts' latest ideas. Nor would we need the extensive and expensive network of nonteaching administrators who oversee these processes.

Further, if we professionalize elementary- and high-school teachers, we could rely on them to provide the knowledge and skills that most people need to qualify for good jobs. College will be for those seeking to enter certain professions (law, medicine, engineering, teaching) and those who want to take part in intellectual culture at levels beyond that required by most jobs. This means that we could transfer to K-12 schools the considerable resources that colleges now use to teach students what they should have already learned.

At the core of this discussion is the conflict between liberal education and capitalism. If capitalism alone determines a society's fundamental values, intellectual culture will be marginalized. But what we have seen is that, in our society, the de facto privileged status of universities as centers of intellectual culture shows that our values are not entirely determined by the capitalist system. That is why we must separate education for instrumental knowledge from education for knowledge for its own sake.

A professionalized K-12 faculty can meet the instrumental needs of capitalist enterprises, leaving to college the pursuit of knowledge that makes us happy simply because we have it. In that way, college education would function as a counterforce to capitalism's materialistic values.

Simply put, the fate of liberal education depends on improving K-12 education. Colleges would then be freed of the burden of educating for the job market. Absent this improvement, colleges will have to compromise their commitment to intellectual culture to take up the instrumental slack from elementary and high schools. Avoiding this disaster requires remaking K-12 teaching as a desirable profession.

Even if our commitment to capitalism has not eliminated our commitment to liberal education, it supports ways of thinking that can distort what goes on in our classrooms. The system encourages us to suppose that everything we value is what Marx calls a commodity: something that has a measurable value and that can be produced and transferred impersonally. We speak of knowledge as a commodity, saying that the amount of it is growing rapidly, and that schools transfer it to students. This way of thinking distorts the purpose of education, the role of tests, and the nature of teaching.

Teaching is an action. Philosophers have paid considerable attention to actions, and their reflections provide useful ideas for talking about the action of teaching. An action is something we do, as opposed to something that happens to us. If my head drops as I'm falling asleep in my chair, the dropping is an event, not an action. By contrast, nodding my head in agreement is an action. Going back to Plato and Aristotle, most philosophers who have addressed the topic have concluded that the nature of an action depends on its purpose, the goal (or as philosophers often put it, the object) that the intention aims to achieve. The same physical movement — say, my hand's moving an electric switch — may be intended to turn on a light, startle a thief, or signal the start of a revolution.

In the commodity view, teaching is an action that has as its object the transfer of knowledge to a student, either knowing how (skills) or knowing that (information). If an argument is needed for this view, it seems enough to note that we need tests to measure the results of our teaching. What does a test do if not determine what knowledge (and how much) teaching has imparted? Therefore the object of teaching is to

increase the quantity of a commodity — knowledge — that students have.

But let's think about the many tests we have taken in the course of our education. How well would most of us do on those we aced even just a few years ago? Here's a quick quiz:

Discuss the causes of the Thirty Years War.

Mary is 20 years old, which is twice the age Ann was when Mary was the age Ann is now. How old is Ann?

How do Shakespeare's early comedies differ from his late romances?

Give a brief summary of Mendel's Laws.

IF THE OBJECT of teaching is knowledge, then its effects seem short-lived. We may know enough to do well on a test at the end of a course, but unless we return regularly to the material, we will forget everything except a few disjointed elements. Of course, almost everyone eventually learns how to read, write, and do basic arithmetic, along with the rudiments of other subjects, such as history and geography. But that's because such knowledge is constantly reviewed as we deal with life — texting, paying bills, keeping up with the news — and not because we learned it once in third grade.

The same is true of more-sophisticated adult knowledge, even in areas in which we specialize. I know a lot about certain philosophers whom I studied in college and graduate school, but only the ones whom I've repeatedly returned to in my teaching and research. In general, this is the sort of knowledge we retain. But what we studied once and haven't taken up again and again is largely lost. At best the traces of learning serve as signs of an "educated person" (you say madeleines and I'll say Proust).

The commodity picture falls far short of what actually goes on when students "learn." There is some knowledge acquired, but in most cases only for the short term. The object of education — especially liberal education — is something that endures, and that object is not usually knowledge.

But if the object of teaching is not knowledge, what is it? In recent years I've taught a seminar to first-year honors students in which we read a wide range of texts, from Plato and Thucydides to Calvino and Nabokov. We have lively discussions that require a thorough knowledge of a given text, and the students write excellent papers that require close readings of particular passages. But I'm sure the half-life of their detailed knowledge is less than a year. The real goal of my teaching, I've come to believe, is that my students have close encounters with great writing. If the object of my teaching were knowledge, then my efforts would be mostly in vain. My actions are successful only if their object is helping students have certain experiences: intellectual, emotional, aesthetic, even moral experiences of reading, discussing, and writing about classic works.

What's the value of such experiences? They make students aware of new possibilities for intellectual and aesthetic fulfillment — enjoyment or, perhaps better, happiness. They may not enjoy every book we read, but they enjoy some of them and discover that — and how — this sort of thing (Greek philosophy, modernist literature) can bring them happiness. They may never again exploit the possibility, but it will remain part of their lives, something that may start to bud again when they see a review of a new translation of Homer or a biography of T.S. Eliot, or when *Tartuffe* or *The Seagull* is playing at a local theater.

College education introduces students to our intellectual culture mainly through a proliferation of such possibilities: the beauty of mathematical discovery, the thrill of scientific understanding, the fascination of historical narrative, the mystery of theological speculation. We should judge teaching first by the enduring excitement it generates, not by the amount of knowledge it passes on. Knowledge — or, better, understanding — may emerge as students sustain and deepen their initial encounters and eventually come to grasp something substantial about Sophocles or Beckett. But such understanding is a later arrival, flaring up in the fullness of time from the sparks that good teachers plant in their students' souls.

The fruits of college teaching, therefore, should be judged by the popularity of museums, theaters, classical concerts, book discussion groups, and publications like *Scientific American*, *The New York Review of Books*, *The Economist*, and *The Atlantic*. These are where our students are most likely to reap the benefits of their education. And this benefit is less possession of a commodity and more access to a world of probing thought and creative imagination that helps free students from the commodity values of capitalism.

Capitalism is not entirely averse to this cultural world. Employers often say they want to hire people who think critically and creatively, who can detect tacit but questionable assumptions and develop new ways of understanding issues — all virtues associated with liberal education. But critical and creative attitudes go only so far in the business world. The premium is almost always on ingenuity in adapting standard procedures and established values to make profitable but seldom fundamental changes. In film, for example, you'll usually make more money from sequels than from trying to achieve a new artistic paradigm. The model for what works is not the radical thinking of Thomas Kuhn's revolutionary science but the problem solving of what he called "normal science." Moreover, encouraging revolutionary thinking might lead to embarrassing questions about the capitalist system.

Despite Bell Labs and a few other (increasingly rare) examples, profound conceptual changes typically come from outside the bureaucracies of big corporations or even from entrepreneurs seeking large profits. In general, those seeking relatively short-term practical results are constrained by the demands of standard expectations. It's our intellectual culture — physicists and poets, psychologists and musicians, philosophers and visual artists — that generates significant criticism and creativity. Those not tuned in to this culture lack the primary source for new ways of seeing and thinking. Ezra Pound said, "Literature is news that stays news," and the same is true for all great humanistic and scientific achievements. ■

Judge teaching by the enduring excitement it generates, not by the amount of knowledge it passes on.

Gary Gutting is a professor of philosophy at the University of Notre Dame. This essay is adapted from What Philosophy Can Do, *just out from W.W. Norton & Company.*

Wendy Laura Belcher looks at Ethiopian manuscripts in Princeton's library.

A Broader Notion of African Literature

By JENNIFER HOWARD

FOR MANY AMERICAN CHILDREN of Wendy Laura Belcher's generation, Africa was the land of Babar and of Johnny Weissmuller's Tarzan, yodeling "Ungawa!" and swinging through the jungle in small-screen reruns. For Belcher, Africa was as close and as real as her backyard. In fact, it was her backyard. "My first memories are of Ethiopia," she says. "That's an extraordinary place to be a child, especially if you're a reader, which over time I was."

Belcher, 53, was 4 years old when her father, a doctor, took a job as an assistant professor of medicine at a public-health college in Gondar, once the capital of Ethiopia, and moved the family there. The setting she describes from those early years invokes storybooks and Scripture.

"There were oxen threshing grain like in the Bible, there were monasteries with monks making illuminated manuscripts, there was a castle with a moat in my backyard," Belcher recalls. "It was a kind of enchanted place."

It's also a place with a tradition of written literature that dates back to before the Christian era and persists today. Belcher recalls how on a return trip to the country in 1974, when she was 12, she and her family hiked up to Qwasqwam, a monastery in the country's highlands, and watched the monks writing with ink on fresh parchment pages. "Highland Ethiopians converted to Christianity in the fourth century, adopted monasticism from Egypt, started making bound books by the sixth century, and have a vast original literature in their language," Belcher says.

So she was not prepared for the questions she got when, after three years in Ethiopia, then six in Ghana, her family returned permanently to the United States. "These places that I thought of as intellectually effervescent were seen as blank darkness," she says. "'Oh, did you live in a tree? Did you have lions in your backyard?'"

"It was a very catalyzing experience at the age of 14," she says. "Everything has come from that year of trying to explain to people it's not what you think it is."

As she later found, even literary scholars haven't been immune to naïveté about Africa. Many have been slow to recognize that the continent has a long, diverse history of written as well as oral storytelling and record-keeping, and that African ideas have influenced Western writers, even though African writers' responses to colonialism and its aftermath have gotten the lion's share of the attention.

Her early experience ultimately led Belcher to the work she's doing today, with a joint appointment in Princeton University's comparative-literature department and its Center for African American Studies. In that hybrid position, she is calling attention to the complex history of African literatures, and the longstanding give-and-take between the continent's storytellers and those elsewhere. It's a history of mutual influence that stretches back centuries before the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe published his touchstone novel *Things Fall Apart* in 1958.

BELCHER'S ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL PATH took several turns before it led her back to Africa. She did her undergraduate work at Mount Holyoke College, and went on to write a memoir, *Honey From the Lion: An African Journey* (E.P. Dutton, 1988), about returning to Ghana to work with a literacy group during college. Critics liked it, but one "thought the book was a little politically naïve," Belcher says. "I thought that was true. I was a little too much the English

MARK ABRAMSON FOR THE CHRONICLE

major, which had been my undergraduate degree. I needed a better understanding of how the world worked and how Africa was inserted into the global system."

She worked for a number of years as a freelance journalist and editor, and eventually went to graduate school at the University of California at Los Angeles, where she did a master's degree in African studies and another in urban planning, drawn to that program by work being done there on Africa and globalization. She contributed to the university's African Bibliography Project, and in 2001 went back to earn her doctorate in literature. "That had always been my first love," she says. "I just needed to do it in a way more informed by the political and economic conditions of African literature." She pursued the Ph.D. while holding down a job as the executive editor at the university's Chicano Studies Research Center.

For her Ph.D., Belcher opted to concentrate in 18th-century British literature, motivated partly by a sense that there weren't many jobs to be had in African literature.

Even with her personal experience of Africa, Belcher says, she discovered that she had fallen into the prevailing assumption that African literature really began with *Things Fall Apart*. Like many Westerners, she picked up most readily on how Africans reacted to European ideas rather than how influence ran in the opposite direction. "It's easy to see yourself in the other," she says. "It's harder to see the other in yourself."

Her doctoral program called her attention to earlier writers like Olaudah Equiano, an 18th-century Nigerian author who wrote an English-language autobiography of his life before and after he was sold into slavery. "Once I'd seen Equiano, my brain could open up and I could say 'OK, there must be others. What happens if I go and look for them?"

But it was Samuel Johnson, a mainstay of 18th-century British literary studies, who led Belcher back to her African roots and the study of African literary production. Writing about influences on Johnson, Belcher became intrigued by his interest in Jesuit accounts of their attempts to convert Ethiopians to "true" Christianity.

"He had every book ever published about Ethiopians in his library," she says. "And he thought it would make money, which was not true, to translate one of these travel accounts."

The book he chose to translate was *A Voyage to Abyssinia* by the Portuguese missionary Jeronimo Lobo. Johnson undertook the work during what Belcher calls "a difficult period" of malaise and spiritual uncertainty, which may have made him especially open to Ethiopian concepts recorded in the book.

In her 2012 book, *Abyssinia's Samuel Johnson: Ethiopian Thought in the Making of an English Author* (Oxford University Press), Belcher explores how Johnson's engagement with Ethiopia by way of the Jesuits infiltrated his own work, most obviously *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia* but other works as well.

In her analyses of Johnson and in other writings, Belcher has been developing a concept she calls "discursive possession": how ideas from one culture enter and animate (a verb Belcher particularly likes) the literature of another, in this case African ideas in the Western canon. The idea builds on work done by Simon Gikandi, a professor of English at Princeton; in his 1996 book, *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism* (Columbia University Press), he asked why there hadn't been more work done on how non-Europeans influenced Europe.

In her analysis of Samuel Johnson's work, Belcher noted how the English author picked up on a recurring theme in Ethiopian writing: what she calls the "Ethiopians' magnificent lie that they could control the Nile and ruin Egypt by cutting it off." He incorporated that into the character of the astronomer in *Rasselas* and into shorter fables, and Ethiopians' representations of their land as a place of mountain paradises and mystical wells and rivers "emerged repeatedly in Johnson's fiction," she says. And Ethiopian women who loom large in the Jesuits' accounts — and in the history of Ethiopians' resistance to attempts to be converted to the foreigners' version of Christianity — found a second life in the female characters in *Rasselas*.

BELCHER IS NOT THE ONLY LITERATURE SCHOLAR who has attempted to call greater attention to the interplay among Western and African texts. She and a few other like-minded researchers say that the long history of African literature gets more attention and is taken more seriously in fields like history, anthropology, and folklore than in literary studies. The African Literature Association, founded in 1974 to study and promote African literary and cultural work, rarely features papers on pre-20th-century African literature, Belcher says, adding that few scholars write about it, even though prominent scholars such as Albert S. Gérard, Abena Busia, and Thomas A. Hale have called for more research on the topic.

"She's absolutely right," says Hale, an emeritus professor of African, French, and comparative literature at Pennsylvania State University. He's a founder and past president of the African Literature Association. He recalls that a few years ago, when he wanted to organize a panel on early African literature at the association's annual meeting, Belcher was the only person who responded. "Nobody's interested," he says.

> Even literary scholars haven't been immune to naïveté about Africa.

The debate over how much is being studied, and by whom, extends to contemporary African literature. Last year, Aaron Bady, a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Texas at Austin, took Wai Chee Dimock, a professor of English at Yale University, to task in a *Chronicle* blog post for being surprised by how many recent job candidates had a specialty in African literature. Bady and Dimock, along with Belcher, will appear on a panel about global African literatures at the annual meeting of the Modern Language Association early next year.

Even when scholars and students are interested in broader investigations of African literary history, they don't always have the means to pursue them. Anthonia C. Kalu, a professor of African-American and African studies at Ohio State University and another past president of the African Literature Association, is about to take a job as a professor of comparative literature at the University of California at Riverside. According to Kalu, courses on African literature tend to get shunted into the category of international or global literature, often one of several courses that students can take to satisfy general-education requirements. She says, "When you finish that, there's nothing to move up to"; there are few advanced courses, for instance.

In order to get jobs, then, scholars have had to adopt more marketable specializations. "In the past couple of decades the focus has been on postcolonial theory, and postcolonial theory does not lend itself to ancient African literary anything," Kalu says. The effect "has been to discourage any in-depth discussion of the African condition itself."

Access to older written material can also be a hurdle. The places where scholars might go to look for intriguing literary texts — libraries and mission archives scattered around the continent, for instance — are often vulnerable to wars and political instability or are just difficult to get to, especially for researchers lacking funds or local language skills.

And not enough African literature, particularly the older material that interests Belcher, is available in translation, though there have been anthologies and series published sporadically over the last 30 years or so. Two lingering issues continue to hinder scholarship on African literature, according to Tejumola Olaniyan: What's available

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that scholars can read, and what counts as literature?

Olaniyan, a professor of English at the University of Wisconsin at Madison and current president of the African Literature Association, points to a handful of works that have tried to fill the gap. Those include Gérard's *African Language Literatures: An Introduction to the Literary History of Sub-Saharan Africa* (Longman, 1981), S.E. Ogude's *Genius in Bondage: A Study of the Origins of African Literature in English* (University of Ife Press, 1983), and *The Rienner Anthology of African Literature*, edited by Kalu (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2007).

Belcher "is doing excellent work — in the tradition of Gérard and others — in expanding the narrow definition of what is currently popularly known as 'literature' to include a variety of writings such as sermons, hymns, court chronicles, and so on," Olaniyan says by email. "Many scholars don't yet think of African literature in this way, but the problem is because of the inaccessibility of those materials either in print or in the languages in which they are written," he says. "European languages are, after all, the languages of education and social mobility in much of Africa."

For a scholar like Anthonia Kalu, that complicates Belcher's picture of written literature produced in Africa. "Writing by Africans about African narrative traditions does not take off in the way that we're talking about it here until toward the end of the trans-Atlantic slave trade," Kalu says. Before that, other than writings in Egypt and in the Ethiopian highlands, most of what one finds "is going to be written in Arabic by converts, or in European languages."

Eileen Julien has been thinking about the swirl and scope of African linguistic and literary traditions as part of the editorial team preparing a four-volume history of world literature, under contract to Blackwell. Julien, a professor of comparative literature and African studies at Indiana University at Bloomington, directs the university's Institute for Advanced Study.

She gives a quick tour of some of the historical and geographical hot spots that mark Africa's literary landscape, though their significance isn't always appreciated. For instance, ancient Egypt, with its rich written culture, "has been spirited away from the continent," she says; she'd like to see it re-examined as a major influence on the rest of Africa as well as on the Middle East. "There's also literature on the Swahili coast, and there's an incredible amount of Arabic literature, once the Arabs invade and conquer North Africa," she says.

As Arabs moved further into the continent, Arabic script traveled with them and was widely adapted as a tool for writing down local languages. "Basically we don't know that material because we are all very much invested in and schooled in the postcolonial tradition, and we don't look much beyond that," Julien says. "What really interests us is the moment when Europe conquers Africa."

Julien also mentions Ethiopia and "the incredible body of language in Ge'ez," or Ethiopic, a precursor of modern Amharic. It's still used as liturgical language in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, as the Ethiopian church is usually known, and is the language of the illustrated manuscripts that Belcher first saw as a child and that she's returned to as a scholar.

Belcher's current project, "The Black Queen of Sheba: The Global History of an Idea," examines medieval and early-modern Ethiopian retellings of the story of Solomon and Sheba. According to Belcher, the legend of an African Queen of Sheba ultimately produced a 14th-century novel, the *Kebra Nagast*. "Its African Christian portrayal of the Queen of Sheba differs radically from other versions in depicting a queen wiser, purer, and more powerful than any man, one so strong she could take the Ark of the Covenant from King Solomon," Belcher says. She makes the case that the book stands as one of the most important medieval texts, one whose impact can be seen in the development of Rastafarianism, in the stories of H. Rider Haggard, and in the Indiana Jones movies.

Belcher has also been consumed by Ethiopian hagiographies, written versions of saints' lives that date back as far as the late 1300s and that also feature a number of powerful women. Recently Belcher spent a year in Ethiopia on a Fulbright scholarship, visiting monasteries and examining the texts firsthand. Most are still part of the working life of the religious communities that have housed and preserved them for centuries.

Belcher claims that her Ge'ez skills are "primitive." That's not the kind of admission that a more traditional comparative-literature scholar would be likely to make, but it says something about how the field needs to adapt and become more collaborative as it becomes more global in range and pulls in hitherto understudied languages and literatures. She's built a team of colleagues with whom she works on translations. Her collaborators include Selamawit Mecca, an assistant professor of Ethiopian languages and literature at Addis Ababa University, whose research specialty is female saints.

With Michael Kleiner, a translator who lives in Germany, Belcher has prepared a translation of *The Life and Struggles of Our Mother Walatta Petros: A 17th-Century African Biography of an Ethiopian Woman*, forthcoming this year from Princeton University Press. Walatta Petros (1592-1642) was a member of the Ethiopian nobility who became a nun. She was one of several high-born women who fought the Portuguese Jesuits' attempts to convert Ethiopians to their version of Christianity (the episode in Ethiopian history that fascinated Samuel Johnson). Written by an Ethiopian monk 30 years after her death, the book could be the first biography of an African woman written by an African, according to Belcher.

BEYOND inviting Western scholars to expand their definition of African literature, Belcher's work challenges some Ethiopian cultural assumptions as well. As she

and Kleiner worked on their translation of the Walatta Petros hagiography, for instance, they encountered a scene that puzzled them. The monk-biographer recounts how, in a conversation with her abbot, Walatta Petros describes having seen some nuns making a commotion. The word she uses to describe the action wasn't clear to Belcher and Kleiner. After comparing different versions of the manuscript, they concluded that the word they'd first translated as "shoving" was actually one that means "being lustful." The nuns weren't fighting but being romantic.

That idea is anathema in the Ethiopian church, "which is on record as saying that homosexuality is a Western import and that it doesn't exist in these texts," Belcher says. When she gave a talk about the episode at UCLA, she says, some Ethiopians in the audience approached her. "They were very unhappy. They were polite. But one of them said, 'May God forgive you your blasphemy.'" That's not something most comparative literature scholars ever hear.

Belcher's unusual background and combination of academic interests might have left her without a natural academic home. Instead she's found two at Princeton. Sandra L. Bermann, a professor of comparative literature at Princeton, was the chair of the department when Belcher was hired. "We were looking for someone who would be able to bring African studies into the department," Bermann says. That fits with what she sees as a renewed interest in expanding the field beyond a European focus. The idea goes back to Goethe, "but it got lost in the mix," she says. "There's an attempt not to remain Eurocentric in our teaching and in our scholarship."

Belcher's courses are popular with undergraduates, Bermann says. And though Belcher downplays her Ge'ez skills, she has organized a Ge'ez class as well as setting an example of the kind of collaborative scholarship that's more and more necessary in the field. "She's encouraged a lot of language learning even if she doesn't present herself as an expert," Bermann says. (She also thinks Belcher's Ge'ez is better than she lets on.)

Eddie Glaude Jr., a professor of religion and African-American studies, directs Princeton's Center for African American Studies, where Belcher also holds an appointment. Ethiopian hagiographies might seem far removed from the center's focus, but Glaude says that African-American studies looks beyond the United States: Diaspora and the interplay of cultures run through it. "We're building in this area, and we think we can create some really wonderful African studies," he says. "Wendy's work is absolutely central to what we do."

From that perspective, Belcher's brand of hybrid scholarship looks not idiosyncratic but like the wave of the future. ■

Jennifer Howard is a senior reporter at The Chronicle.

Gore Vidal

CAMERAPRESS

SOME three decades ago, I spent a sabbatical leave on the Amalfi Coast of Southern Italy. It was an idyllic period for me and my family. Within days of my arrival, I met Gore Vidal, the American writer, who lived nearby. I admired him and his work, and a kind of father-son relationship developed between us that lasted until his death in 2012. We often traveled together, and I would visit him every year in Italy. We talked on the phone every week, sometimes every day. But there was always a certain awkwardness about my academic side. "You must give up teaching," he would say. "It's a terrible distraction."

Writers of his generation rarely found the university an agreeable setting, and many considered it a failure to take a professorial job. Gore noted that most of his contemporaries — Truman Capote, Carson McCullers, Norman Mailer, John Updike, Joan Didion, and William Styron, among others — earned a living by their pens. In that, they emulated the great generation that had gone before: F. Scott Fitzgerald, Willa Cather, Ernest Hemingway, and William Faulkner. Only a few writers had strayed into the world of teachers, among them Saul Bellow and Richard Wilbur (both of whom Gore knew and admired). But they were exceptions.

American writers had rarely been involved with the academic world, especially novelists who could expect to earn a living from their writing. Even poets with academic credentials, such as T.S. Eliot (a doctoral candidate at Harvard who never defended his thesis and so never got his degree), worried about being stifled by teaching, gravitating instead to the worlds of journalism and business when they needed income. If anything, it was journalism that was the school for modern writers. Steinbeck had spent some desultory years at Stanford University, but he was an indifferent student and was able earn a good living from his fiction — the idea of teaching never seemed an option.

Gore's own relationship with higher education was an especially anxious one. He was never gifted in any academic way, squeaking into Phillips Exeter Academy, the fancy prep school in New Hampshire, with help from his wealthy stepfather, an alumnus. His pedigree was fine enough for the elite schools: His grandfather was Sen. Thomas P. Gore, a Democrat who represented Oklahoma for many years. His father, Eugene L. Vidal, served in Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration as director of air commerce. The fact that Gore struggled to get decent grades at Exeter soured him on the idea of college; getting a degree when the war ended seemed to him utterly pointless. Writers needed books and what Gore always called "voluntary readers," a phrase that he used to distinguish his own audience from that of many university-friendly writers whose books were assigned in class.

That attitude masked a deep insecurity. He wondered if he were missing something, and he worked maniacally to overcome any deficiencies by industrial-strength programs in reading. His knowledge of ancient and modern history was superb, and he had read most well-known writers in the English and American literary traditions. That "learning" undergirds his magnificent essays, as in "Novelists and Critics of the 1940s," where he shows off his erudition: "One could invent a most agreeable game of drawing analogies between the fourth century and today. F.R. Leavis and Saint Jerome are perfectly matched, while John Chrysostom and John Crowe Ransom suggest a possibility. The analogy works amusingly on all levels save one: The church fathers had a Christ to provide them with a primary source of revelation, while our own dogmatists must depend either upon private systems or else upon those proposed by such slender reeds as Matthew Arnold and T.S. Eliot, each, despite his genius, a ritual victim as well as a hero of literary fashion."

After graduating from high school in the midst of World War II, Gore enlisted in the army, where he soon became a junior officer on a transport ship in the Aleutians. One night the ship was caught in an ice storm, and Gore suffered severe frostbite, leading to a serious arthritic condition that landed him at

"Teaching has killed more

19 in a military hospital in California. It was during this time as an invalid that he finished his first novel, *Williwaw* (E.P. Dutton & Co., 1946), which tells the story of a young man on a transport ship in the Aleutians. He was obviously following Hemingway's famous injunction to write about what you knew.

The novel was published when Gore was 20, with a decent advance. A formal education seemed to him superfluous, as he was already a voracious reader. Throughout his long life, he remained fiercely dedicated to plunging into heavy tomes, taking notes. It was as if he were always studying for an exam that never quite occurred. Never in my life have I met anyone as deeply focused on his self-education, or as determined to expand his intellectual horizons in whatever ways he could. (I recall staying with him one time in the early 90s, when he was reviewing a new translation of Montaigne's essays for *The New York Review of Books*. He sat for days on end with the French edition of the essays on his lap, rereading them, underlining passages, taking notes, comparing various translations. A dozen studies of Montaigne piled up on his desk. When

vs. Academe

By JAY PARINI

he finished a long day of study, he would want to sit and discuss his ideas.)

Gore knew that, to earn a living as a writer, he must become the consummate salesman of his own work. And so after the war, he traveled about the country to give lectures and readings. "Gore's reputation was beginning to expand in academic circles," Richard Poirier, a well-known literary scholar who met Gore in the early '50s when he came to lecture at Williams College, later told me. "But he never actually liked colleges or universities, and they didn't like him back. As an autodidact, he didn't approve of those who didn't fit that mold." It was obvious to Poirier and others who met him that Gore worried that campus life would somehow suck him into its vortex. "Gore kept his eye on New York, on Broadway, on Hollywood — always looking for what he believed was the main chance," Poirier noted. "He didn't especially like being among 'teachers,' as he called us."

One can't imagine Gore in an English Department in the '50s or early '60s, where polite decorum of a certain kind remained in place. "I didn't want to wear a jacket with elbow patches," he once said to me. "I never smoked a pipe." And he liked to travel freely, on a whim. He also wanted to have lots of sex with men, preferably guys he picked up on the streets for anonymous sex. (Always ambivalent, he would say he liked gay sex, but he was not gay.) His irreverence toward authority would have put him at odds with any college administration, especially before the anti-authoritarian sentiments of the late 1960s and '70s began to take hold. And his irascible temperament would have gone down badly in the faculty lounge, where he would have specialized in insulting colleagues. His own kind of writing — fiction, personal essays without footnotes — would never have earned him tenure. Yet he wanted to be seen as someone who was smart, well-informed, and very much on top of the intellectual world — the equal of Edmund Wilson, whom he admired.

> good writers than alcohol."

IN A SENSE, it was book-reviewing that became Gore's Harvard and Yale. In the mid-'50s, he began writing for a variety of publications, including the New York-based biweekly *The Reporter* and, beginning in the '60s, *The New York Review of Books.* He liked to take on fairly academic subjects, such as the experimental French *Nouveau Roman*, literary theory, or postmodern fiction. Nevertheless he could not conceal his contempt for academic writing. "The Hacks of Academe," a famous essay that appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1976, was ostensibly a review of a collection of essays on the novel by the literary critic John Halperin, but Gore used the occasion to bash academic pretensions and bad writing, sometimes in a decidedly snooty voice: Critics in the volume like Meir Sternberg, Robert Bernard Martin, Irving H. Buchen, Alan Warren Friedman, Max F. Schulz, and Alice R. Kaminsky "have nothing urgent or interesting to say about literature," he declared with undisguised glee, attacking their prose, inelegant phrases, and clumsy writing, damning their reliance on stock phrases and jargon. He wondered why they bothered to write at all, guessing that it was probably because "the ambitious teacher can only rise in the academic bureaucracy by writing at complicated length about writing that has already been much written about."

In 1950, Gore took up residence at Edgewater, a grand Federal-style mansion on the Hudson River, near Rhinebeck, N.Y., where he met one academic who impressed him deeply: F.W. Dupee. Known as Fred, Dupee, a professor of English at Columbia University, had a Ph.D. from Yale. His interests ranged widely and his essays appeared regularly in *The Partisan Review* and *The New York Review of Books.* His genteel manner and easy erudition appealed to Gore, who was always somewhat insecure about his own social and intellectual status, and they quickly became friends.

Indeed, Gore quickly became Dupee's informal student, later recalling to me, "Fred had written on Henry James, and he had read everything worth reading. Nobody else could talk about literature in quite the same way, with such passion and clarity. He had been a Marxist in the '30s, a fan of Trotsky, but then had settled into a clear-eyed humanism, somewhat apolitical, very shrewd. He edited *The Partisan Review* for a period when it was actually readable — not a long period."

Gore also associated with such notable figures as Arthur Schlesinger Jr., and John Kenneth Galbraith — scholars who had advised presidents and had positions of leverage in the "real" world of American politics. With the examples of his grandfather and father before him, Gore was never sure whether he could live up to the family name. Being among "important" people reassured him. One evening in 1960, he accepted an invitation to Schlesinger's house in Cambridge, Mass. As Schlesinger recalled in his letters, Gore behaved badly. The other guests at dinner included Reinhold Niebuhr, Edmund Wilson, and the British economist and Labour politician John Strachey — three of the most eminent thinkers in their respective fields. According to Schlesinger, a drunken Gore "dominated the evening, instructing Niebuhr in theology, Wilson in literary criticism, and Strachey in economics and strategy. Next morning he called up and apologized for being tight."

A turning point came when Harvard invited him to give the William E. Massey Sr., Lectures in the History of American Civilization in 1992. That prestigious series had previously featured Eudora Welty, Irving Howe, Conor Cruise O'Brien, and Toni Morrison, so Gore felt in good company. He told me that, after the war, he had given a reading from his first novel at Harvard, and that stayed in his memory as a glorious event, as several of his former classmates from Exeter had attended. Now he felt ready for a return to Cambridge, and his lectures became *Screening History* (Harvard University Press, 1992), a wonderfully unorthodox blend of gossip, personal history, film criticism, and reflection on what he considered the primary art of the time. "Today the public seldom mentions a book," he told the standing-room-only audience in Memorial Hall on the first night, "though people will chatter about screened versions of unread novels."

The invitation to give the lectures had been the handiwork of the historian David Herbert Donald, who had advised Gore about his bestselling novel *Lincoln* (Random House, 1984). I remember going to the Harvard Faculty Club on Gore's first day in Cambridge, for lunch with Donald and Galbraith. Gore seemed quite excited to take his place among those luminaries: "They're really the two most important professors in this school," he told me. "I met Ken during the 1960 election, in Los Angeles. He was running the brains trust for Jack."

My diary captured the moment:

As we approach the stairs of the red brick building, he grows somber: "My friends from Exeter came here right after graduation. I preferred the army, real life, war. They invited me to give a reading after the war. I wasn't yet 24. I think I was the only person of my generation to speak at Harvard who had never gone to Harvard, never spent a day in any college."

"Do you wish you'd gone to college?"

"No, but you do. You're like the rest of them. They think it's only possible to think if you've been properly trained. But I trained myself. I read everything. The classics, history, literature, politics. I didn't need professors like yourself telling me what to do."

"When did I ever tell you what to do?" It's a rhetorical question, and he ignores me.

"Gore!" says Galbraith, waiting for us, an absurdly tall man with thick white hair, a baritone voice. He exudes professorial gravitas. "You're lecturing tonight. I can't make it. But my emissaries will take notes. Break a leg."

Gore frowns. Donald, the most genial man in the world, comes into view, smiling. He welcomed us warmly. Gore seemed in heaven in the oak-paneled dining room.

"Gore is talking about the movies tonight," says Donald to Galbraith. "His own experience of the movies. Is that right, Gore?"

"It's the history of my times. And your times, Ken."

Galbraith responds: "We miss you around here."

"Miss me? I'm here."

"You live in Italy. You ran away from home, lit out for the territory."

"So did you. Aren't you a Canadian?"

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As ever, Gore has done his homework. And remembers it.

"Gore is our national historian — among novelists," says Donald.

"I've read one or two of your novels," says Galbraith. "It's the essays that interest me."

I wonder if Gore is going to like his time at Harvard. Somehow I don't think so.

In fact, I think Gore did like Harvard, and he would be invited back a few years later to give another lecture.

In the fall term of 1993, he came to visit me at Oxford University, where I was a visiting fellow at Christ Church College. He had seemed eager to be there, and I did my best to provide social occasions that might interest him. One night, I invited Isaiah Berlin — the great historian of ideas — to join us, as I knew Gore liked meeting people with a reputation for intelligence and wit. Again, my diaries captured the moment:

After a long dinner at high table at Christ Church — roast beef, Yorkshire pudding, and string beans followed by lemon tart — Gore and I sit with Isaiah Berlin in the hushed Senior Common Room under a portrait of John Locke, one of the most illustrious of former students of the college.

In the tradition of Oxford, I get a bottle of port from the drinks table, although Gore wonders if there is any Scotch. There is, of course. Berlin looks at him sternly.

"That's John Locke," I say, nodding to the picture. "He was here in the middle of the 17th century. They pray to him every night after dinner."

Berlin has intimidated Gore throughout the evening: I've never seen that before. He wore a look of childlike amazement on his face throughout the meal. Of course everyone in Oxford considers Berlin the best talker in the university, possibly in Britain. His lectures are flawless performances, without notes, full of quotations that he has memorized verbatim. He seems to have read everything, exuding a wisdom and calm that Gore has rarely encountered.

"I'm sure you know, Gore, that Locke influenced Jefferson," says Berlin. "Called him the most important man in history, with Bacon and Newton his closest rivals."

Gore shuffles through memory, looking for the correct notecard. "I think he quoted Locke in the Declaration of Independence," he says.

"Indeed," says Berlin. "He was among the first to see that the separation of Church and State was essential in a sane republic."

"I would get rid of the Church altogether," Gore says.

"No! We need the Church. I'm a Jew, but I like the fact that people pray. It opens them to an experience beyond the self."

"Do you believe in God?" Gore wonders.

"That depends, as always, on one's definition. We'd be very small in this universe without the idea of God."

"Locke argued for tolerance," I put in. "He's the father of tolerance, when it comes to religious belief."

Berlin nods eagerly. "We're all liberals, aren't we? We owe that to our man here."

"Me?" Gore teases.

"Of course we mean you," says Berlin. "You're our guest tonight."

BOTH of those extracts highlight the way Gore simultaneously wanted to compete with scholars on their own ground, showing off his knowledge of whatever field spread out before him, and wished to remain aloof, someone who didn't need to teach to earn a living. But he was, in many ways, made for the high table or faculty club, being a sharp wit, full of wry asides and memorable aphorisms, able to quote passages from favorite authors at length, eager to debate ideas. And he was, I think, a compulsive teacher: I listened to the equivalent of long lectures from him on many occasions. He would, as any good tutor might, cross-examine me, testing my theories, insisting that I support my arguments with appropriate references and sound logic.

That's part of the reason Gore would seek out academic settings, giving lectures in his later years at the University of California at Berkeley and other universities, where he enjoyed playing the role of professor — a role he took on, quite literally, in 1994, when he played a Harvard professor in *With Honors*, a minor part in a minor film about a student who loses his thesis in vaguely amusing circumstances. Around the same time, Gore had a brief residence at Dartmouth College, which he hugely enjoyed. Nevertheless, his many fans (and surely his family) were stunned when, soon after his death, they discovered that he had left his entire fortune, estimated at $37 million, to Harvard, which would house his papers. My guess is that, in a strange way, the gesture was his attempt to associate in perpetuity with academe at what he considered its highest level.

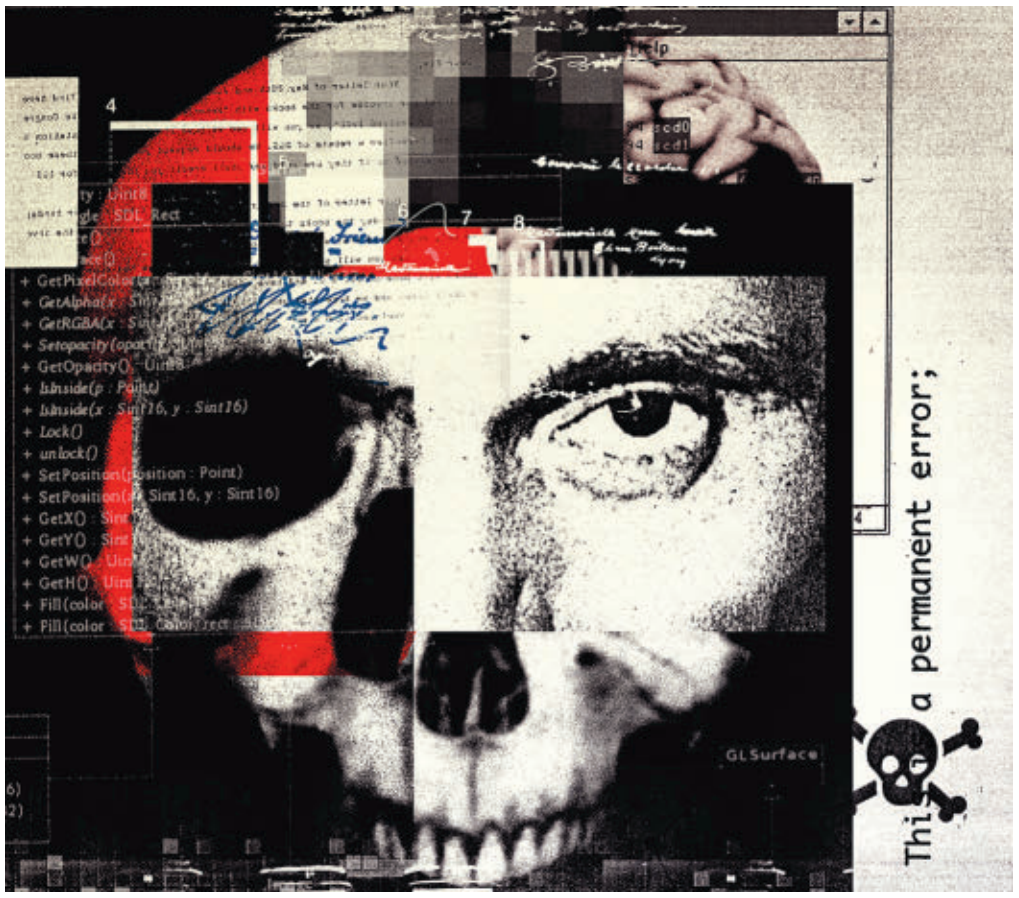
Gore's complex, even troubled, relations with the academic world weren't atypical of his generation of writers, but by the 1960s it had become commonplace for serious writers to take up residence on campuses, where they would teach their craft to aspiring authors. That, I know Gore believed, rightly or wrongly, represented an incredibly dark turn for American literature, and he found little to interest him in fiction by writers in creative-writing programs.

"Teaching has killed more good writers than alcohol," he once said to me. I found it a chilling thought. ■

Jay Parini is a novelist, poet, and professor of English at Middlebury College. His book Empire of Self: A Life of Gore Vidal *will be published by Doubleday in October.*

The Digital Apocalypse Is Now

By J.C. HALLMAN



ALEX WILLIAMSON FOR THE CHRONICLE REVIEW

TO BEGIN with a wild assertion: Our current glut of apocalypses — arriving via climate catastrophe or nuclear war or aliens or plague or zombies or vampires (I'm thinking of Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven*, Colson Whitehead's *Zone One*, Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, not to mention films ranging from *Independence Day* to *The Day After Tomorrow*) — comes in response to the collective cravings of a global audience that has taken a good long look at the modern world and grumbled something along the lines of, "Oh, well, just screw it."

Armageddons entertain by affirming cynicism. If this is correct, then we would all do well, every once in a while, to remind ourselves that despite the litany of death-wish fantasies, the world is not actually ending. We're not all about to be tossed back to the Pleistocene, and thus there's something better to do with our reading lives than thrill at authors preoccupied with how it's all going to end. Rather, we should carefully attend to those writers who accept that it's going to go on whether we like it or not. Writers like Sven Birkerts.

An essayist and critic who runs the much-vaunted low-residency M.F.A. program at Bennington College, Birkerts is the author of the now 20-year-old *The Gutenberg Elegies*, a volume widely regarded as the most elegant articulation of the angst we all felt as the digital invasion began its assault on literature. As such, *The Gutenberg Elegies*, it must be admitted, is itself a kind of doomsday narrative. Now, Birkerts offers a follow-up, *Changing the Subject*, a finely wrought and well-titled companion volume that fears the same dreadful end, but tacks from literature to consciousness, knowledge, data, and information. This is an unlikely cast of characters for a doomsday narrative, to be sure, but nevertheless the book becomes a necessary guide for surviving the ongoing e-pocalypse.

Changing the Subject is about the digital invasion, yes, but the core of the problem is that we have transitioned from trafficking in information to trafficking in data. "Data without context are inert," Birkerts writes, but data within contexts become information, knowledge. Anxiety over "the information age," then, isn't really about information, but contextless data points. For Birkerts, "the essential human premise of context" has been besieged, the result being that the "idea of authorship" is threatened. The ideals of the Enlightenment are at stake, and he wonders whether "the very sources of artistic imagination might not be endangered, depleted."

In short: Inert data create inert people. Hence, AMC's latest spinoff: *The Texting Dead*.

BIRKERTS FRETS not only over the fact that we're staring beguiled at an approaching extinction-level-event meteor. No, he's also flabbergasted at the "cyberinsiders" who have embraced the end-times siege, who have shinnied down the castle walls and can be glimpsed at a distance, loading boulders into the catapults. If that seems a bit histrionic, credit the surprising effects of Birkerts's understated tone. He writes that he wants "to understand what it is that we are collectively doing as we embrace e-culture." He wonders why we have accepted the shift "without any extended dialogue about whether there are trade-offs involved."

He's striving to remain calm, I think, because he realizes that he's a sheriff confronting a lynch mob of cybersector techpreneurs desperate to lynch, well, themselves. You can't six-shoot your way through a mob — you have to try to reason with them. And this mob, full of irrational cranks, is beyond reason. "The reader has to adjust to the author, not vice versa," Birkerts pleads. Alas, that's not going to go down well with zombie hordes dying to read about zombie hordes.

Birkerts might be said to have traveled this less trodden path once before. So you might be thinking that you can just read a review of *Changing the Subject* — this review, say — instead of reading the book. But what Birkerts writes about reading in general — that plots don't matter, that to read is to be neuroplastically impressed by an "author's language world" — establishes why *Changing the Subject* is a must-read. For a review can offer only a description of an approximation of an experience. Even worse, it can reduce a book to data.

To say, for example that *Changing the Subject* is a collection of essays that includes riffs on *Jeopardy!*, GPS devices, Seamus Heaney, literary envy, and the unexpected joys of stationary bicycles is to say something that is true — but it is also to be guilty of what the book warns against, reducing an experience to contextless data points.

To go the other way is a little better. To say, for example, that Birkerts sometimes strikes the tone of one of those billionaire conservationists with a population of endangered horses and zebras protected out on a ranch somewhere, but who watches the worldwide extinctions happening anyway, powerless despite his riches; or to say that Birkerts sometimes sounds like an old sailor too weary for a last voyage on a sparkling new ship, and so stands at the end of the pier, waving at the liner cruising into iceberg-infested waters — these are better. These are context. But *Changing the Subject* is really both, data in context, and a responsible reviewer can't tell you anything more than this: The information and the experience they provide are both essential, and not easily represented by hasty approximations of either.

Nor is it entirely fair to suggest that *The Gutenberg Elegies* and *Changing the Subject* are doomsday books, as I've been doing. For the latter, at least, includes a number of pieces not entirely absorbed with extended dialogues about apocalyptic trade-offs. When Birkerts writes, of Shirley Hazzard's *The Transit of Venus*, that he was reminded anew of "how much pressure artistic language, held in a narrative shape, could exert on consciousness," we heave a sigh of relief as our own consciousness settles into the warm bath of elegant praise. When he claims that when the illusion of books "is felt strongly enough, at full intensity, it trumps the sensations of living," we rejoice with an intense recognition that confirms that very claim. Ditto when Birkerts describes mind-melding his way into the works of Joseph O'Neill and Roberto Bolaño. It's in these moments that he affirms for us, all evidence aside, that the world will go on, survive. Hence, the true subject of *Changing the Subject* is hope, a hope that spites all those cynics pining for Judgment Day.

If you're already a data-fied zombie, pass this book by. You've got better things to do, infection to spread, brains to eat. But if you've got a pulse, then find this book and immerse yourself in it. It will remind you that other souls remain, scattered thin through the waste. ■

J.C. Hallman is a visiting professor of creative writing at Colby College and the author, most recently, of B & Me: A True Story of Literary Arousal *(Simon & Schuster).*

REVIEW

Changing the Subject
By Sven Birkerts
(Graywolf Press)

New Scholarly Books

COMPILED BY NINA C. AYOUB

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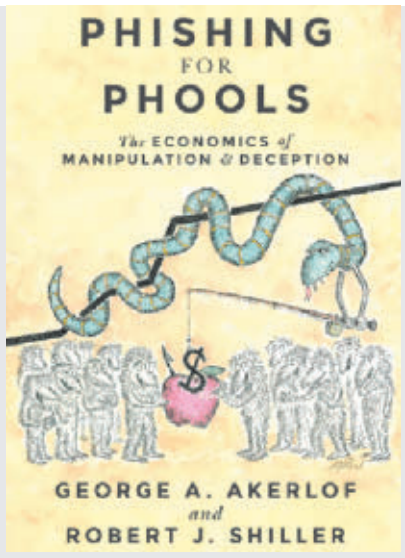
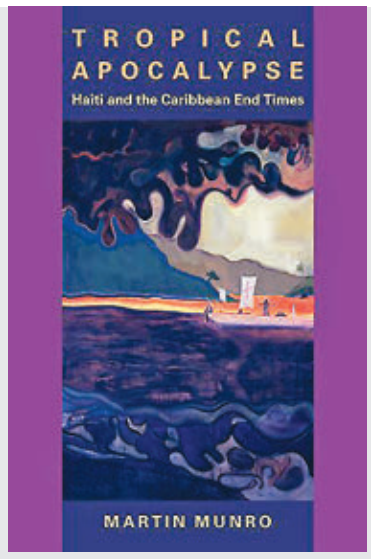
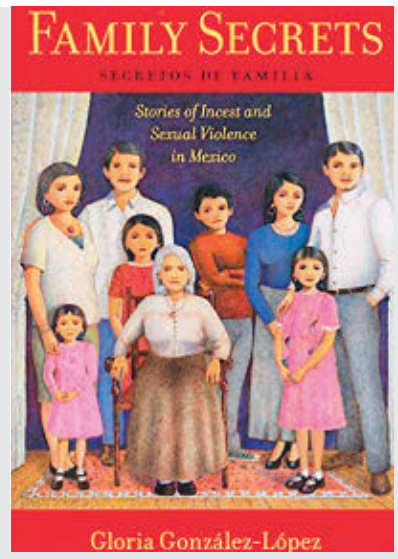


Economics

History



Literature



Sociology

The following list has been compiled from information provided by the publishers. Prices and number of pages are sometimes approximate. Some publishers offer discounts to scholars and to people who order in bulk. Publishers' addresses are available online at http://chronicle.com/books

AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDIES

NECESSARILY BLACK: CAPE VERDEAN YOUTH, HIP HOP CULTURE, AND A CRITIQUE OF IDENTITY, by P. Khalil Saucier (Michigan State University Press; 120 pages; $24.95). Draws on fieldwork in the greater Boston area in a study of hip-hop as an influence on identity for American-born Cape Verdean youth as well as those brought as small children from the West African archipelago.

SHAPESHIFTERS: BLACK GIRLS AND THE CHOREOGRAPHY OF CITIZENSHIP, by Aimee Meredith Cox (Duke University Press; 280 pages; $94.95 hardcover, $25.95 paperback). A study of how young black women in a Detroit homeless shelter contest the stereotypes and narratives that marginalize them.

AMERICAN STUDIES

PEACE CORPS FANTASIES: HOW DEVELOPMENT SHAPED THE GLOBAL SIXTIES, by Molly Geidel (University of Minnesota Press; 319 pages; $105 hardcover, $30 paperback). Topics include how the 1960s Corps promoted a masculinist ideology of development and modernization that justified the American exercise of power around the world and thwarted indigenous struggles.

ANTHROPOLOGY

POLITICS OF MORALITY: THE CHURCH, THE STATE, AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS IN POSTSOCIALIST POLAND, by Joanna Mishtal (Ohio University Press; 272 pages; $75 hardcover, $28.95 paperback). Offers an anthropological perspective on how women have resisted the expanded power of the Catholic Church in postsocialist Poland, where abortion was outlawed in virtually all cases after decades of legalization.

ARCHAEOLOGY

COREY VILLAGE AND THE CAYUGA WORLD: IMPLICATIONS FROM ARCHAEOLOGY AND BEYOND, edited by Jack Rossen (Syracuse University Press; 288 pages; $39.95). A study of the pre-contact Cayuga, a nation of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy whose people were displaced after 1779; draws on data from the site of a 16th-century village in what is now King Ferry, N.Y.

ART AND ARCHITECTURE

AMERICAN ARTISTS AGAINST WAR, 1935-2010, by David McCarthy (University of California Press; 264 pages; $49.95). A study of antiwar art and activism by such figures as Philip Evergood, David Smith, H. C. Westermann, Ed Kienholz, Nancy Spero, and Leon Golub.

CLASSICAL STUDIES

TRANSLATION AS MUSE: POETIC TRANSLATION IN CATULLUS'S ROME, by Elizabeth Marie Young (University of Chicago Press; 257 pages; $50). Discusses translation as a source of poetic invention for the Roman writer.

ECONOMICS

PHISHING FOR PHOOLS: THE ECONOMICS OF MANIPULATION AND DECEPTION, by George A. Akerlof and Robert J. Shiller (Princeton University Press; 272 pages; $24.95). Identifies economic trickery in realms from financial markets to health care to everyday consumption.

FILM STUDIES

STILL IN THE SADDLE: THE HOLLYWOOD WESTERN, 1969–1980, by Andrew Patrick Nelson (University of Oklahoma Press; 264 pages; $19.95). Documents continuities between 1970s westerns and their predecessors in the genre, despite the reputation of the decade's cinema for revisionism.

GEOGRAPHY

RETROFITTING SPRAWL: ADDRESSING SEVENTY YEARS OF FAILED URBAN FORM, edited by Emily Talen (University of Georgia Press; 263 pages; $79.95 hardcover, $29.95 paperback). Writings by scholars and practitioners on ways to address the damage done by sprawl; draws on research in such sites as Atlanta, Phoenix, Seattle, and Washington, D.C.

HISTORY

ASHOKA IN ANCIENT INDIA, by Nayanjot Lahiri (Harvard University Press; 408 pages; $35). Traces the life of an Indian emperor of the third century BC, who embraced Buddhism after his victory in the Battle of Kalinga.

CARNIVAL IN THE COUNTRYSIDE: THE HISTORY OF THE IOWA STATE FAIR, by Chris Rasmussen (University of Iowa Press; 240 pages; $27.50). Traces tensions between agriculture and entertainment since the fair's founding in the mid-20th century.

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND ARGENTINA'S DIRTY WAR, by Gustavo Morello (Oxford University Press; 221 pages; $74). Examines the military regime's use of Catholicism to justify its actions, and the church's silence in the face of political violence, including against its own; pays particular attention to the La Salette case in which a priest and five seminarians were abducted, jailed, and tortured.

CONFEDERATE SABOTEURS: BUILDING THE "HUNLEY" AND OTHER SECRET WEAPONS OF THE CIVIL WAR, by Mark K. Ragan (Texas A&M University Press; 249 pages; $35). Discusses the work of a group of engineers, machinists, and others led by Edgar Collins Singer who built the Confederate submarine, the H.L. Hunley, torpedoes, and other weapons and vessels for the South.

PIVOTAL TUESDAYS: FOUR ELECTIONS THAT SHAPED THE 20TH CENTURY, by Margaret O'Mara (University of Pennsylvania Press; 246 pages; $34.95). Discusses the four-way race won by Theodore Roosevelt in 1912, FDR's win over Hoover in 1932, Nixon's defeat of Humphrey in the turbulence of 1968, and the three-way race that led to Clinton's victory in 1992.

SLAVES OF ONE MASTER: GLOBALIZATION AND SLAVERY IN ARABIA IN THE AGE OF EMPIRE, by Matthew S. Hopper (Yale University Press; 302 pages; $85). Discusses African slave labor in the export-driven date-farming and pearl-fishing industries of Arabia; disputes notions of the British Royal Navy's role in ending the slave trade.

SPAIN, CHINA, AND JAPAN IN MANILA, 1571-1644: LOCAL COMPARISONS AND GLOBAL CONNECTIONS, by Birgit Tremml-Werner (Amsterdam University Press, distributed by University of Chicago Press; 365 pages; $149). Explores the interwoven trade and wider history of the three nations after Manila became the capital of the Spanish Philippines.

UNLIKELY DISSENTERS: WHITE SOUTHERN WOMEN IN THE FIGHT FOR RACIAL JUSTICE, 1920-1970, by Anne Stefani (University Press of Florida; 334 pages; $74.95). Uses the 1954 *Brown* decision as a pivotal point in a study of the activism of white women who rejected white supremacy without rejecting their Southern identity.

LITERATURE

ADAPTING SHAHRAZAD'S ODYSSEY: THE FEMALE WANDERER AND STORYTELLER IN VICTORIAN AND CONTEMPORARY MIDDLE EASTERN LITERATURE, by Eda Dedebas Dundar (Peter Lang Publishing; 144 pages; $75.95). Focuses on Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm*, Christina Rossetti's *Speaking Likenesses*, Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love*, and Güneli Gün's *On the Road to Baghdad*.

THE ASIAN AMERICAN AVANT-GARDE: UNIVERSALIST ASPIRATIONS IN MODERNIST LITERATURE AND ART, by Audrey Wu Clark (Temple University Press; 222 pages; $84.50 hardcover, $27.95 paperback). Examines the work of such writers and artists as Sui Sin Far, Carlos Bulosan, Isamu Noguchi, and Yun Gee.

BECKETT'S WORDS: THE PROMISE OF HAPPINESS IN A TIME OF MOURNING, by David Kleinberg-Levin (Bloomsbury Academic; 313 pages; $120 hardcover, $29.95 paperback). Draws on Adorno and Benjamin in a philosophical exploration of elements of hope in the Irish writer's works.

THE COLLECTED LETTERS OF ROBINSON JEFFERS, WITH SELECTED LETTERS OF UNA JEFFERS, VOLUME THREE, 1940-1962, edited by James Karman (Stanford University Press; 998 pages; $95). Completes a three-volume of letters by the American poet, along with selected letters written by his wife in the decade before her death.

EPIC AND EXILE: NOVELS OF THE GERMAN POPULAR FRONT, 1933-1945, by Hunter Bivens (Northwestern University Press; 344

pages; $45). Traces a shift away from Weimar-era experimentation and toward realism in the work of exiled leftist writers.

THE HEART AND THE ISLAND: A CRITICAL STUDY OF SICILIAN AMERICAN LITERATURE, by Chiara Mazzucchelli (State University of New York Press; 197 pages; $85). Focuses on works by Jerre Mangione, Rose Romano, Ben Morreale, and Gioia Timpanelli in a study that explores Sicilian-American expressions of *sicilianità* or distinctive identity.

THE MARTYRDOM OF MAEV AND OTHER IRISH STORIES, by Harold Frederic, edited by Jack Morgan (Catholic University of America Press; 153 pages; $22.50). Edition of stories about Ireland by Frederic (1856-98), an upstate New York regional realist writer of German background.

NOVEL NOSTALGIAS: THE AESTHETICS OF ANTAGONISM IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY U.S. LITERATURE, by John Funchion (Ohio State University Press; 252 pages; $62.95). Documents how literature figured in "antagonistic nostalgias" that drove sectionalist, abolitionist, populist, anarchist, and other movements of the period.

OPENING ACTS: NARRATIVE BEGINNINGS IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY FEMINIST FICTION, by Catherine Romagnolo (University of Nebraska Press; 155 pages; $55). Explores the subversive potential of narrative beginnings through a study of the openings of works by Edith Wharton, H.D., Toni Morrison, Júlia Alvarez, and Amy Tan.

PLANETARY MODERNISMS: PROVOCATIONS ON MODERNITY ACROSS TIME, by Susan Stanford Friedman (Columbia University Press; 451 pages; $50). Combines historical and literary perspectives in a discussion of modernity as a planetary, multiple, polycentric, and recurrent phenomenon with manifestations before Europe's rise in the 16th century.

THE REFORMATION OF EMOTIONS IN THE AGE OF SHAKESPEARE, by Steven Mullaney (University of Chicago Press; 231 pages; $35). Examines how works by Shakespeare, Kyd, and others engaged the emotional faultlines of Elizabethan Protestant England.

TROPICAL APOCALYPSE: HAITI AND THE CARIBBEAN END TIMES, by Martin Munro (University of Virginia Press; 248 pages; $69.50 hardcover, $29.50 paperback). Topics include apocalyptic thought in the work of such writers as Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, Antonio Benítez-Rojo, Édouard Glissant, Michael Dash, and David Scott.

MUSIC

PRODUCING EXCELLENCE: THE MAKING OF VIRTUOSOS, by Izabela Wagner (Rutgers University Press; 296 pages; $90 hardcover, $34.95 paperback). Offers an ethnographic perspective on the path to soloist for nearly 100 young violinists; topics include how family culture, as well as training regimes, figure in their success.

PHILOSOPHY

AGAINST FACTS, by Arianna Betti (MIT Press; 296 pages; $40). A work in analytic metaphysics that criticizes both compositional and propositional theories of facts.

DOING AESTHETICS WITH ARENDT: HOW TO SEE THINGS, by Cecilia Sjöholm (Columbia University Press; 219 pages; $55). Uses Hannah Arendt's fragmentary remarks on art and aesthetics in letters, notebooks, and other materials to construct an Arendtian theory of same.

MACHIAVELLI'S SECRET: THE SOUL OF THE STATESMAN, by Raymond Angelo Belliotti (State University of New York Press; 219 pages; $80). Uses clues in Machiavelli's writings to reconstruct the inner moral reflections of his statesman hero who "uses evil well."

POLITICAL SCIENCE

THE DICTATOR'S ARMY: BATTLEFIELD EFFECTIVENESS IN AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES, by Caitlin Talmadge (Cornell University Press; 320 pages; $79.95 hardcover, $26.95 paperback). Considers how coup threats, training, command arrangements, and other factors influence the performance of authoritarian militaries; includes case studies of the wars between North and South Vietnam and Iran and Iraq.

GOVERNORS, GRANTS, AND ELECTIONS: FISCAL FEDERALISM IN THE AMERICAN STATES, by Sean Nicholson-Crotty (Johns Hopkins University Press; 185 pages; $44.95). Draws on three decades of data from all 50 states in a study of how governors strategically use hundreds of billions of dollars in grants in aid from the federal government.

PURCHASE FOR PROFIT: PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS AND CANADA'S PUBLIC HEALTH CARE SYSTEM, by Heather Whiteside (University of Toronto Press; 224 pages; US$70 hardcover, US$29.95 paperback). Focuses on four hospital projects in a critique of the trend toward public-private partnerships in large infrastructure endeavors in Canadian provinces.

RELIGION

WAS THERE A WISDOM TRADITION? NEW PROSPECTS IN ISRAELITE WISDOM STUDIES, edited by Mark R. Sneed (Society of Biblical Literature; 325 pages; $55.95 hardcover, $40.95 paperback). Topics include how wisdom texts became part of the canon of the Hebrew Bible.

SOCIOLOGY

FAMILY SECRETS: STORIES OF INCEST AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN MEXICO, by Gloria González-López (New York University Press; 320 pages; $89 hardcover, $28 paperback). A feminist sociological study of incest in Mexico that identifies factors that enable the practice and its concealment; draws on interviews with 50 women and men in four cities who recall their childhood abuse.

LEFT TO CHANCE: HURRICANE KATRINA AND THE STORY OF TWO NEW ORLEANS NEIGHBORHOODS, by Steve Kroll-Smith, Vern Baxter, and Pam Jenkins (University of Texas Press; 210 pages; $75 hardcover, $24.95 paperback). Examines recovery and rebuilding for two African-American neighborhoods: working-class Hollygrove and middle-class Pontchartrain Park.

URBAN STUDIES

TOO HIGH AND TOO STEEP: RESHAPING SEATTLE'S TOPOGRAPHY, by David B. Williams (University of Washington Press; 239 pages; $29.95). Documents the engineering projects that reshaped the city, including the filling in of the Duwamish tideflats and the regrading of Denny Hill.

WOMEN'S STUDIES

LETTING GO: FEMINIST AND SOCIAL JUSTICE INSIGHT AND ACTIVISM, edited by Donna King and Catherine G. Valentine (Vanderbilt University Press; 245 pages; $59.95 hardcover, $24.95 paperback). Offers essays in critique of the neoliberal feminism espoused by Sheryl Sandberg's *Lean In*.

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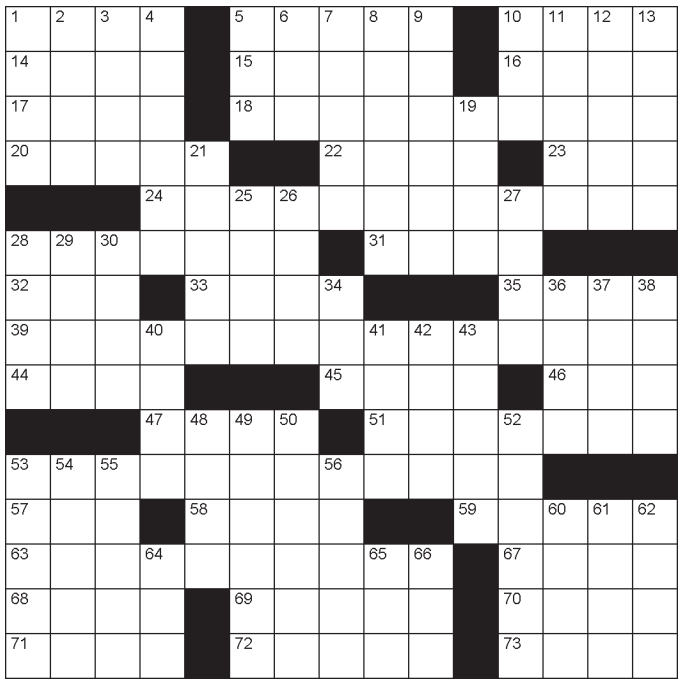
THE CHRONICLE CROSSWORD

Insect Bytes

By MICHAEL WIESENBERG | Edited by BRAD WILBER



ACROSS

1. Prevents from running, in a way
5. Gift to Della in "The Gift of the Magi"
10. Red-hot outpouring
14. Olympic event with automated scoring
15. Marshy hollow
16. "Gotcha," to a beatnik
17. Repeated services
18. Home to Deception Island
20. "The Sacrifice of ___" (Caravaggio painting in the Uffizi)
22. Echelon
23. Chow down
24. Indignant margarine taster of 1970s TV
28. Site of Italy's largest opera house
31. ___ lily (Utah's state flower)
32. "My lips ___ sealed!"
33. Adrenaline-release trigger
35. Degrees on Wall St. wall hangings
39. Cautionary feedback given to programmers ... or what test solvers of this puzzle said about 18, 24, 53, and 63 Across?
44. Pt. of GNP
45. Mud in an urn
46. Weirdo
47. Sounds elicited by docs with tongue depressors
51. Papal envoys
53. Cubes for oxtail soup, perhaps
57. Original London Bridge construction material
58. Troubadour
59. One who says "Uncle"?
63. Predecessor of parade confetti
67. Stretched to the max
68. "... arms against ___ of troubles": *Hamlet*
69. Singer Brightman or McLachlan
70. Little League World Series airer
71. Detected
72. Corner-office claimers, briefly
73. What a lookout might climb in a western

DOWN

1. Where many takeout containers are weighed
2. Goodall subjects
3. Self-referential on several levels
4. Keyword for Ali Baba
5. Gen. J.E.B. Stuart's org.
6. Part of MYOB
7. Photo-paper option
8. Britain's first family of 1997-2007
9. Unruffled
10. Nobel category for Golding and Grass: Abbr.
11. It may be bid sadly
12. Bishop's subordinate
13. Tiny font
19. Ibex perch
21. Birthplace of Prince Philip
25. Feds fighting counterfeiting
26. Lew who won three of the four tennis majors in 1956
27. Target of a Lara Croft raid
28. Expendable chess piece
29. Field
30. Remaining
34. Government opposed by Gandhi
36. Start of a squeeze play
37. Malarial fit
38. They disappeared from runways in '03
40. Patron saint of Norway
41. Tumble
42. First name in awe-inspiring jumps
43. Kiddie four-wheeler
48. French religious title
49. Raspy
50. Onerous extra levy
52. Romantically linked
53. Some software releases
54. Dedicatee of a Beethoven bagatelle
55. Ed Sullivan, for one
56. Challenge opener
60. Alleviate
61. Tarot suit
62. Mountain on the skyline above Taormina
64. Neighbor of Okla.
65. ___-12 Conference
66. Quizzical reactions

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ANSWER TO PREVIOUS PUZZLE

RANDY ENOS FOR THE CHRONICLE REVIEW

What's Your Pronoun?

By MELVIN JULES BUKIET

IT'S SEPTEMBER, and a new year is beginning. Of course, trouble awaits. For college students, that can mean getting caught in a dorm room with a candle or a substance that can be lit by that candle. For faculty members, it can mean using the wrong pronoun to refer to a student.

About six years ago, I was speaking to a new first-year who said that she — or so I assumed from the student's flowery sundress — had a single room. Knowing that other students had been tripled up in rooms meant for two, I said, "Wow, how'd you manage that?"

"Well," replied Leslie (not a real name), "my roommate demanded another room when I told her that I was really a boy." Index-finger tap to forehead. "Up here."

Decades ago, before the term existed, I knew a few transgendered people, but they tended to look the part. Some women had crew cuts and wore men's clothing. Some men feminized their appearances. But Leslie dressed in the girly-girliest apparel. No problem. Nonetheless, when it was time for me to write an evaluation that would become part of a transcript, I adhered to his pronoun preference.

Perhaps inappropriately, I pondered Leslie's romantic prospects. As a born girl identifying as a boy who chose to look like a girl, she/he seemed to foreclose most avenues of hetero or homosexual experience, and I felt sad about that. Maybe Leslie, too, was saddened by the end of the year, because when I asked if I should still use the male pronoun for the final evaluation, her/his response was a sigh: "Whatever." Given permission, I used the female pronoun.

Respect is the first principle of modern college culture. We must respect the right to free speech of students who would prohibit a campus visit from a speaker who might disagree with them. We must respect a vegan's right to sneer at the mention of barbecue. Above all, we must respect the right of students to sexually self-identify in any way they wish.

Flexible pronouns were only the start of today's complex self-identification process. Soon came an entirely new pronoun, "zhe," meant to be universal. To me, this was less mystifying than the she/he conundrum, perhaps because I was sympathetic to its purpose. Take the following sentence: "She went to the store, where she purchased a hammer to fix a broken shelf." There is no reason that this tale of domestic repair needs to be filtered through the protagonist's sex. But if a sentence began, "Zhe walked into the room and unzipped my pants and tenderly …," it might be important to know zhe's sex or gender or identification. A good writer could figure out how to show that.

Now, having learned to adapt to unexpected or previously unknown pronouns, I am confronted by a new wrinkle in the language of identification. As one of the staff members at the college where I teach recently informed the faculty, "Some of the students will prefer to be referred to as 'they.'"

REALLY? Or rather, no, because here my problem is practical. Specifically, it's what verb to use in those pesky evaluations. I cannot bring myself to write, "They is a good student." Nor can I write, "They are a good student." And I simply won't write about an individual, "They are good students," because "they" are not Walt Whitman. "They" do not contain multitudes. They are entitled to their own identity, but not to their own grammar. Therefore, in lieu of any pronoun, I will use whatever name a student provides. This will lead to a stilted paragraph, but it won't be wrong.

> Students are entitled to their own identity, but not to their own grammar.

Asked by faculty members how to deal with this violation of basic subject-verb agreement, administrators don't know how to respond, maybe because they secretly hope that this is a matter of linguistic bell-bottom trousers. Just wait and they will go away.

In the meantime, I believe that many students are tired of the burdens of identity. Last year I told a gay black male who wrote a story about a gay black male that I didn't care about race or gender, and the class gasped. Even though I explained that I cared more about what happened to the character and about the elegance of the prose, my comment could have been a signal to erect a guillotine on the campus lawn. Nonetheless, the student thanked me after class. He said, "No one looks at my stories. They just look at me."

All of this comes back to the widely held assumption that my imperative as a college professor is to avoid giving offense and to make students feel "safe," when I'd rather tell them: "Someone in this class will die before the age of 30. Many of you will have miserable jobs, unhappy marriages. Even those of you who succeed may suffer from gnawing fears that you don't deserve your success." Serving up comfort on marshmallow fluff is a disservice to students who will have to enter a world likely to be less accommodating than a college campus.

Ironically, any failure to support a student's identity by using language of the student's devising may create an "unsafe" environment for professors. If we don't bow to the latest linguistic fad, we're liable to be accused of a terrible and potentially job-terminating ism. Yet those who insist that the taint of our grammar makes us racist or sexist or classist or … whatever … are themselves guilty of istism. There, I said it. They're istists. Yet I, too, am subject to sin. Stretch me on the rack of contemporary academic dogma and I'll confess. I'm a pluralist. ■

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