

for consumer fraud by attorney Allan Favish, who misled applicants into believing that the university system did not discriminate on the basis of race.

As the affirmative action debate heats up in the coming months, it is likely that the admission practices of many more schools will be made public. In the wake of the disturbing facts revealed in *Hopwood*, is it any wonder why academics, the most vehement defenders of affirmative action, fight tooth and nail to keep admissions data from the public?

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LITERATURE

New Criticism, Old Values

by William Pratt

It was in 1942 that John Crowe Ransom coined the phrase "The New Criticism" by publishing a book under that title, a book about the most respected literary critics of the first half of the century, notably T.S. Eliot, I.A. Richards, William Empson, Yvor Winters, and R.P. Blackmur. But actually, he was criticizing the critics and asking for something better: "Wanted: An Ontological Critic," he declared in his last chapter, as if no critic including himself—and he was one of the great critics—could really satisfy the need to produce a thoroughgoing critique of literature.

In the succeeding decade, Ransom's title became the creed of a critical school, which sought to treat literary works as works of art, not as historical or sociological treatises nor as disguised autobiographies, and the term "New Criticism" became fashionable in the academy and was inevitably abused by those who wanted to seem better critics than they really were. The result was that the "New Criticism" was no longer taken as a call for profounder critics of literature, as Ransom meant it to be (and it should be remembered that Ransom was not only

the originator but the first critic of the New Criticism); it was taken instead as a call for narrower critics who sought only to look at the work itself, disregarding the author and his age. But for a time, at least, chiefly through the textbooks of Robert Penn Warren and Cleanth Brooks, *Understanding Poetry* and *Understanding Fiction*, the teaching of literature in American universities was directed toward art rather than history or biography, and the effect was salutary on a generation of college students (as I ought to know, because I was among them), who learned to read poetry and fiction for their intrinsic value as fine arts, rather than for their extrinsic value as history or biography, the prevalent approaches to literature before the New Critics came into force.

Unfortunately, the new quickly becomes the old, and so the "New Criticism" was increasingly attacked even as it became more fashionable in the academy, until, within a couple of decades, it had become a scapegoat for all the unenlightened criticism which tends to dominate any period of literary history. In short, "new" criticism was soon taken to be old hat, and another school arose to challenge it: the now dominant school of Literary Theory, which goes by other fashionable names such as poststructuralism, deconstruction, feminism, Freudianism, and Marxism. The trouble is that the *new* "new criticism" is worse than the *old* "new criticism," which for all its faults did uphold the value of literature as literature, that is, as belonging to the arts rather than the sciences.

What is now fashionable is not really criticism at all, but a variety of social science which pretends to be philosophy, and takes a subversive approach to literature, subordinating the work to the critic—or would-be critic, since none really deserve the name—who feels free to use literature to serve a social or political cause. The assumption of all literary theorists is that they are superior to their subject, which is literature, and can demolish the values on which it rests, namely, artistic judgment and religious faith, in order to put forward a "higher" set of values, such as social egalitarianism and religious skepticism, or what on today's college campus passes for "political correctness."

The pernicious effect of Literary Theory is much worse than any pernicious effect attributable to New Criticism, since it undermines the very teaching of

literature, long the bedrock of the humanities or liberal arts. It thereby attacks humane values in general, including the value of academic freedom, the lifeblood of a university. As Literary Theory has replaced New Criticism, intolerance has replaced broad-mindedness, indoctrination has replaced intellectual dialogue, racial and sexual favoritism has replaced merit, and, in general, amorality has replaced morality—for example, by what is politely termed the "sexual revolution." The old values have suffered badly, at the hands of those who would attack them in the name of various political and social causes, and suddenly "grade inflation" has become rampant everywhere in our schools, meaning that even grading standards—any kind of grading standards—are denounced as "elitist."

Obviously, the time has come to demolish Literary Theory as it once succeeded in demolishing New Criticism. But how? And to what end? Can old values beget an even newer criticism, or must we deride all schools of criticism—as the editor of this respectable magazine recently did—rather than restoring literature to its rightful place of honor as the foremost of the liberal arts?

Let us grant that the New Criticism was never what Ransom hoped it would be, genuinely "ontological," that is, a truly philosophical reading of literature in the manner of Aristotle, the first great critic. Another Aristotle would have to appear for that to happen. But let us also acknowledge that New Criticism served in its time to redirect the attention of readers to the work itself; let us not slight its good effect in decrying its bad effects. On the other hand, let us be blunt about what replaced it: in more than 20 years of dominance, Literary Theory has so far failed to produce any good effects at all, and it has had deleterious effects aplenty. Yet it continues to be popular in humanities departments—language and literature, philosophy and religion—to the detriment of its own subjects and the threat to all subjects, even the scientific subjects which should be immune to subjective personal approaches to knowledge. Attempts to discredit the Literary Theorists have so far failed, but we should not lose heart, for bad ideas eventually fail from their own weaknesses, and good ideas ultimately arise again from good values.

The question is, how do we restore those good values, and reconstitute literary criticism so that it becomes worthy

once more of its subject, which is literature, the heart and soul of any legitimate educational system dedicated to the free exchange of ideas and the furthering of sound knowledge? We cannot go back to the former New Criticism, but we can try to extract from it the principles which enabled it to serve the old values well, and so reestablish literature—great literature, that is, the classics, not minor pieces of writing by negligible writers—as central to the whole academic enterprise and a guide to human culture of any meaningful sort.

The very first principle was the belief that there is a supernatural order of reality, that God is not dead, and that the creation of works of art or literature is really what Simone Weil called “decreation,” derived from the original creative act of God, not self-generated by a human agency. Language is the medium of literature, and words are at best the Word of God, the incarnation of spirit in flesh, whatever may be the profane uses of language, and thus works of literature, which are made of language, regenerate the spirit in man; they are, as Robert Penn Warren put it in *Democracy and Poetry*, “a nourishment of the soul.”

It is a scandal today for anyone to talk of soul, but Aristotle did not refrain from talking about it; why should human beings today, still deriving our literary knowledge and vocabulary from the Greek classics, be embarrassed to speak about souls and bodies, spirit and flesh? The very idea of “metaphysical” poetry which Eliot and other modern poets like Yeats and Pound wrote, and which Eliot celebrated in his criticism of the poetry of Donne and Marvell, depends on “the metaphysical theory of the substantial unity of the soul,” as he put it, quoting Aristotle, in one of the most influential essays of the 20th century, “Tradition and the Individual Talent.” So the first principle of the old New Critics was religious faith, belief in the sovereignty of God and the immortality of the soul. All the other principles derive from this fundamental conviction—anathema to Literary Theorists—that God exists and inspires real works of art.

The second principle of the old New Critics, as Allen Tate put it in another seminal essay, was that of “Literature as Knowledge,” that literature is worth studying in its own right as art, not as a stepchild of politics. Again, Literary Theorists insist that all human knowledge is political in origin, meaning that it

is not an end in itself but that it always serves the selfish human end of power over others. If you believe as they do that God is dead, then of course you will be glad to reduce all human activity to the political realm, and will refuse to acknowledge that human beings may pursue unselfish ends, one of which is the creation of works of art. A work of art is admired for its beauty, not for its utility, and for its truthfulness, not for its hunger for power: to maintain that every work of art, literary or otherwise, has a political motive, is to give it a purely human, therefore physical, source and to deny that the impersonal ideals of beauty or truth have anything to do with it. It was quite otherwise with the old New Critics, for whom the first principle of religious faith begot the second principle of literary knowledge.

There is a third principle deriving from the first two, and it is that new works of art can be created in any age, even in our own degenerate times, but that we only recognize such genuine new masterpieces by comparison with older masterpieces, the classics, and so we need standards of aesthetic judgment which come from studying the great literature of the past. Ransom said of his fellow Fugitive poets, who created classics of their own earlier in the century, that they knew the classics, and so could compare their work with the very best. The whole basis of the liberal arts, of the education of free citizens, which descends to us from the Greeks and was renewed in the Renaissance, is the study of literary masterpieces. But this study is not limited to a fixed canon of works, because it changes over time, because we must “Make it New” as Pound insisted, because the order of classics is altered by “the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art” as Eliot maintained in “Tradition and the Individual Talent.”

To renew the principles of New Criticism, then, we would have to restore at least three of the old values of the past that are scoffed at by literary theorists of the present: 1) belief in God and the immortality of the soul; 2) belief in art and literature as forms of knowledge that are intrinsically valid; and 3) belief in a historical tradition of masterpieces to be studied for their own value as works of art, as well as for developing the aesthetic judgment necessary to recognize and incorporate new masterpieces in the living tradition.

I could stop there, but I must add one

more principle which I think derives from the basic three that governed the New Critics at their best: they not only recognized new masterpieces but gave those works the critical examination they deserved, enabling other readers to understand and take pleasure in the best literature, whether it was old or new. The interpretation of new works follows the recognition that they are worthy of interpretation, and so the study of literature has to include the formation of taste, which is indispensable to any civilization worthy of the name. All literary study being comparative—the term “comparative literature” is a tautology—elucidation is as essential as evaluation in the process of understanding literary classics. Insofar as the New Criticism came to mean “close reading” of literary works—detailed exegesis of a particular poem, story, or play, the sort of careful interpretation which the French have long called *exposition du texte*, or what in theological language goes by the name of hermeneutics—it is a discipline of the mind in the translation of language into meaning. As Allen Tate put it, “All reading is translation, even in the mother tongue,” and there is no such thing as a purely literal interpretation of any piece of writing, including the Bible.

To restore the values of the old New Critics, then, we would have to be willing to submit our judgment to the test of past classics and potentially new classics, never resting satisfied with any existing canon but constantly reexamining the masterpieces we have inherited for their humane content, their wisdom, their artistry, and keeping our minds open to the possibility that even now, today and tomorrow as well as yesterday, a new work might come our way which would have as much artistic merit as the great works we have come to know and revere. As Ezra Pound once put it, in his typically irascible way: “Damn your taste! Only let me sharpen your perceptions for a while and your taste will take care of itself.”

The sort of new critic I am positing, who might replace the now regnant Literary Theorist, will not betray any of these four principles derived from the old New Critics, but will reevaluate the masterpieces of the past and recognize and interpret the masterpieces of the present and future, both for self-illumination and for the benefit of other readers. He (or she, if she is not a feminist) will approach literature as our common

heritage, the main repository of humane wisdom, and be ready to learn all that can be learned from it for the good of mankind, himself or herself included. I do not know what we will call this new breed of critics, but I hope we will not forget that what once was called New Criticism upheld old values, and that we forsake these values at our peril, for they are the basic values of civilization, and they are threatened today, as much as at any time in history, with being discarded and forgotten. I am an optimist, and so I believe these old values can and will be renewed, but it will take the most exacting kind of criticism to renew them. I know that such criticism, which takes literature seriously as literature and tries to learn all that can be learned about human values from it, is not currently fashionable, nor is the religious faith that undergirds it, but I also know that both were once respected and they could be respected again, just as they were in the time of the old New Critics—which, after all, was not so very long ago.

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MUSIC

Remembering Casals

by Ralph de Toledano

Talking to musicians or composers has its values, but it seldom adds much to what we know of music. Mozart's letters to his father give you a few insights into the creative process, but Beethoven's are merely a peep into his psyche. Of all the composers who have written about their work and that of others, only Berlioz, and perhaps Stravinsky, could impart with any penetration an internal sense of music—and Berlioz's best commentary was on the art of conducting. So I was not particularly stirred when *Newsweek's* music editor, a busy Texan whose idea of criticism was to shout obscenities over the phone at the Met's Rudolf Bing, said to me, "If you

can take time out when you're in San Juan from the story you're doing on Puerto Rico, why don't you go talk to Pablo Casals? He's giving a concert down there." The "concert" was the *Festival Casals*—after the Prades Festival, his second major break of a long self-exile from public performance.

My lack of enthusiasm had nothing to do with what I felt about Pablo Casals as a musician. The cello is a cruel and inhuman instrument, and as a boy I had watched a friend's father—a cellist for the Philharmonic—at practice, his face a reflection of both pain—"the torment," Casals called practicing—and patience. Casals was then, and in my judgment always will be, Mr. Cello, and in listening to him play it is difficult to separate the man from the instrument. Perhaps, I thought, he might say something memorable, though hardly what might excite *Newsweek's* music editor. But getting to see him, once I was in San Juan, seemed like an impossibility. He had categorically refused to talk to anyone from the press. He changed his mind when he was told that I was a friend of Luis Muñoz Marín, the first elected governor of Puerto Rico, who had invited Casals to the island and treated him with respect and generosity. "If Toledano is a friend of Don Luis," Casals said, "I will speak to him."

When Spain fell to the forces of Francisco Franco, Casals had vowed never to play in public until the Nationalist regime was overthrown. But a dozen or so years later, he had agreed to perform once more—and those of us who loved music were joyed by his decision. He was approaching 80, and though a man of iron constitution, he was not impervious to the treason of time. New recording techniques offered him the opportunity to put on vinyl his own great brand of musicianship and his superlative mastery, both technically and interpretively, of his instrument. He could bring warmth and vitality and empathy to scores that frequently defeated others—the proof to be found in his interpretation of the six Bach Suites for Cello Unaccompanied. These suites are demanding—taxing instrument, performer, and audience. But if it is not *lèse majesté* to say it, they can sometimes be great room-emptiers. Casals could triumph over this Baroque obstacle course—perhaps because Catalans and Germans have much more in common than either would care to admit.

Casals was living in a small house off the beach at Punta las Arenas, neighbor to San Juan—as a guest of Muñoz and the Puerto Rican government. He was playing the piano as I knocked on his door—a passage from *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, a daily exercise, he told me, to "refresh the spirit"—and he called out to me in Spanish to enter. But he insisted on speaking to me in English, though he commented on my Spanish name and asked if my family came from Toledo. I was struck by how much this stocky, balding man with a small pot belly, eyes shining through rimless glasses, reminded me of one of my cousins. I asked him, my first question, what had brought about a change of heart—why he was performing once more. "It is always a sacrifice for an artist not to play," Casals said. Then he looked at the small yellow-and-red Catalan flag on his upright piano and added, "But there are more important things in the world. What right did I have to prosper while my people were persecuted in Spain? And when the war ended, the Spanish people could not understand why they should not be masters of their own destiny. I said this to whoever I thought would listen, even to the King of England. No one listened." What was more important to Casals, or had been, was his passionate opposition to Francisco Franco and the Nationalists in Spain, and his sorrow that the United States had recognized their government.

Sounding like a character out of Hemingway's *For Whom The Bell Tolls*, he said, "The United States should have more dignity. These dictators do terrible things. They kill. And to kill has no dignity." Though he was full of admiration for what the British and their government had done during the war to keep alive what he called the "flame of civilization," he could not forgive Churchill or the Labour government which followed him for not bringing about the fall of Franco—and even speaking well of *El Caudillo*. "What became of Churchill's great promises to put an end of fascism everywhere—or to your President Roosevelt's?" I wanted to talk about music, for I had my own personal and family feelings about Spain which might not accord with his. I respected his assertion that "I possess a moral independence, I am no politician, but an artist who tries to keep faith with his human principles." But I ventured somewhat into the political when I asked him about Wilhelm