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Situating College English

Lessons from an American University

EDITED BY
Evan Carton and Alan W. Friedman

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For Linda Brodkey

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Part I

Introductions

Chapter 1

Standard English at the University of Texas

Alan Warren Friedman

Contemporary U.S. universities increasingly experience competing, and sometimes mutually exclusive, demands and expectations: elitist and democratic, restricted entry and open admissions, producing the country's leadership and addressing basic literacy, serving business and military interests and standing above them, experimenting and preserving. Viewed as both transcending the fads and values of the moment and responsive to their social circumstances, institutions of higher education bear the impossible burden of being different things to different people (or to the same people at different times), and their inevitable failure to enact contradictory agendas has led to assaults on university budgets, and therefore to the self-fulfilling prophecy that such institutions are not worth what they cost.

The main tower on the campus of the University of Texas at Austin (UT) proudly proclaims, "Ye Shall Know the Truth and the Truth Shall Make You Free"; but institutions of higher education have also assiduously sought, and attained, lucrative links to the military-industrial-foundational complex that limit their freedom, this university as much as any. In the 1970s, around the time that Ronnie Dugger's *Our Invaded Universities* was examining this phenomenon at Texas, an "absurdist" student group sought office, successfully as it happens, on a platform that included changing the tower's slogan to "Money Talks." For a time, these students focused some attention on the monetary and political stakes and contexts in which universities pursue students and survival; but the pressure to serve competing gods has only intensified in the intervening decades.

The irony for English departments is that, despite their marginal relationship to big money, they have increasingly become sites and targets of intense controversy—as if big money *were* at stake. Such attention, resulting from the unending negotiation between the "universal" and the "relevant," has inten-

sified as the balance shifted toward including as subjects of study writers and material closer and closer to home. Although, in *The Closing of the American Mind*, Alan Bloom sees "the canon" as having historical, natural, even divine sanction, curricula have always responded to social and political contexts, and there are always temporary compromises between conflicting pressures. For Bloom, the Great Books must be read as an unquestioning, nonskeptical search for Truth: "The claim of 'the classic' loses all legitimacy when the classic cannot be believed to tell the truth" (374).

But, as Terry Eagleton remarks, the literary canon is a construct, fashioned by particular people for particular reasons at particular times. "Literature," an unstable affair, does not exist in the sense that insects do (*Literary Theory* 16). The value judgments by which it is constituted are historically variable, and they have a close relation to social ideologies. As Michael Dobson discusses in *Making of a National Poet*, Shakespeare, for example, was not the most popular writer of his day, and his plays went unpublished during his lifetime. They were unperformed during the mid-seventeenth century because the Puritans closed the theaters; in the eighteenth century Shakespeare's plays were so uncanonized that many were rewritten, and it was the revised versions that were popularly performed.

Literature in eighteenth-century England included philosophy, history, essays, and letters. What made a text "literary" was not whether it was fictional—the eighteenth century viewed with suspicion the upstart form known as the "novel"—but whether it conformed to standards of "polite letters," an ideological concept. "Literature" in our sense arose in the late eighteenth century, when the category was narrowed to creative or imaginative work; and poetry, broadened to mean more than verse, became radically at odds with utilitarian ideology. The modern belief in an unchanging object known as art and an isolatable experience called beauty derived from romanticism, with its alienation of art from social life.

One of the great nineteenth-century academic controversies concerned whether Latin, that late development, could substitute for Greek; Shakespeare was still not taught. For political and ideological reasons, perhaps to replace religion as a force for social order, English literature as a subject was constituted around the turn of this century. George Gordon, one of the first English literature professors at Oxford, said in his inaugural lecture that "England is sick, and . . . English literature must save it. The Churches . . . having failed, and social remedies being slow, English literature has now a triple function: still, I suppose, to delight and instruct us, but also, and above all, to save our souls and heal the State" (Eagleton, *Literary Theory* 23). It was, simultaneously, a source of social and moral solidarity (a fit subject for "the ladies" and lower classes: "the poor man's Classics") and of "national mission and identity" during the run-up to World War I.

Yet English, its right to a place in the academy fiercely opposed, remained an upstart, amateurish affair as academic subjects went. Since every English gentleman read such literature in his spare time anyway, why submit it to systematic study? According to Eagleton, the "definition of an academic subject was what could be examined, and since English was no more than idle gossip about literary taste it was difficult to know how to make it unpleasant enough to qualify as a proper academic pursuit. This," he adds, "is one of the few problems associated with the study of English which have since been effectively resolved" (*Literary Theory* 29).

American literature was not accepted as an academic subject until the 1930s, after it, too, followed the path canon formation always takes: preservation, nationalism and historicizing, transcendent excellence, revisionism. When three of America's major poets produced anthologies of American poetry (Bryant, 1870; Emerson, 1874; Whittier, 1875), they agreed that our six greatest poets were themselves plus Longfellow, Lowell, and Holmes. All ranked Poe below minor, forgotten figures; all excluded Whitman and Melville. Stedman's *American Anthology, 1787–1900* (1900) offered a revaluation: For him, the best American poets "did not define or confirm their culture's dominant values but revolted against them," although revolt is one form of acknowledging dominance. Modernist anthologies typically collected poets who proclaimed that they wrote against inherited poetic standards, poets who then became canonized as major modernists: Pound, Eliot, Williams, Marianne Moore, Stevens. Now these figures are themselves undergoing radical scrutiny. T.S. Eliot, whose "Tradition and the Individual Talent" is a central document in early twentieth-century canon formation, argued that "the main current" of literary tradition flows through supposedly minor writers. He preferred the metaphysical poets and Dryden to Spenser and Milton, the Jacobean dramatists to Shakespeare, while rejecting virtually all romantic and Victorian poetry. He later revised his list even as he continued to maintain its universal and unchanging basis.

Literature curricula always reflect the culture (or, rather, culture*s*) in which they are embedded.[1] American literature, upon entering the academy, made this increasingly clear by bringing along such awkward baggage as contemporary writers and previously excluded groups like women, members of ethnic minorities, and writers from what came to be called the Third World. Living artists, like grains of sand that produce pearls, have always been social irritants;[2] the nature and meaning of U.S. culture, of self-definition in a country whose essence preceded its existence, remains a matter of continuing controversy, as do corollary issues of race and gender. Such issues became overt in English departments and their curricula consequent upon the growing overlap between the academy and society: for example, the conscripting of students in the mid-1960s on the basis of their grades. In turn, academics became socially and politically active when, as during the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights movement, pedagogical responsibility seemed to demand not only classroom debate but also participation in the larger sphere of civic discourse. To reject conservative notions of canonicity is not to deny its fundamental importance: The Soweto uprising of 1976 began as a protest against the teaching of courses in Afrikaans;

to burn a people's books (as was done to Jewish writings in Nazi Germany), or to deny them cultural status, is to commit genocide in another form.

Wittingly or unwittingly, the English department at the University of Texas at Austin became a national player in contemporary cultural conflicts during the 1980s and 1990s.[3] It has debated many of the hot issues, received extraordinary media attention, and yet largely failed to tell its own stories or, with rare exceptions, to have them published when it did.[4] The *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New Republic*, *Texas Monthly*, the *Dallas Morning News*, and the *Austin American-Statesman*, among others, never acknowledged, let alone printed, the letters and accounts of the department's curriculum and procedures that challenged the versions they had printed, versions that most of those in situ saw as caricaturing the department's deliberations of complex academic and cultural issues. Similarly, when Lynne Cheney, in *Telling the Truth*, her 1991–1992 annual report as chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities, asserted that what had happened in the English department at the University of Texas was exactly as its most outspokenly self-promoting member had represented it,[5] she neither verified his account nor subsequently acknowledged the less dramatic counternarratives that were sent to her. And the same unqualified version continues to be recounted in books like Richard Bernstein's *Dictatorship of Virtue* (1994).

Looming large in the national mythos of the UT English department is the story of its attempt to revise freshman composition during 1989–1990. The Liberal Arts Catalogue describes English 306, "Composition and Rhetoric," as "A composition course that provides basic instruction in the writing and analysis of expository prose: includes an introduction to logic and the principles of rhetoric." Each semester a large cadre of graduate students plus a few faculty members teach about 55 sections of the course. Required of all undergraduates (approximately 60%) who do not place out or take the equivalent elsewhere, the course was administered by a departmental committee—the Lower Division English Policy Committee (LDEPC), with its chair the director of lower-division English—that set policy and revised its syllabus as it saw fit. The department retained the right to overrule the LDEPC.

Over the years, the LDEPC had often determined that the then-current version of E.306 was unsuccessful, and so would devise a different approach. In 1989, the LDEPC—acting in accord with precedent, within its delegated responsibility, and under a director, Linda Brodkey, who was specifically hired for the purpose—reached such a conclusion (based in part on declining student evaluations), developed a new syllabus, and presented it at a department meeting.[6] According to the committee the revised syllabus would stimulate learning and writing better than the current version; the curricular goals of E.306 would not be altered; a support system would assist the course's instructors (who were mostly graduate students); faculty teaching it could, as always, devise their own versions; and graduate students, having taught the course once, could propose

variations on the standard syllabus. After extensive discussion, the department accepted the LDEPC's recommendation.

Retaining the course's commitment to improving students' writing, the revision focused on argumentation over the concept of *difference*, which has complex social and political, as well as theoretical and literary, meanings. The new curriculum did not position itself on the issues that were being hotly contested—"students would have summarized and analyzed the arguments in court opinions and essays by examining claims and grounds and then asking whether their use is warranted"[7]—but it seemed to many that it did so; and some supporters unwittingly encouraged such a reading by blurring the line between presentation and advocacy. An early draft of the proposed revision included Paula Rothenberg's collection *Racism and Sexism* as a required text. The book was deleted from the syllabus shortly after the departmental discussion, but neither its original inclusion nor its deletion was effectively explained. For months afterward the course, mockingly labeled "Racism and Sexism" (or "Marxism 306"), was denounced for including this "openly ideological text": only occasionally did opponents acknowledge that the book had been dropped, but supposedly because of pressure and, its trace remaining, the book was said to represent the true, if now concealed, agenda of the LDEPC.

Shortly after that department meeting several faculty opponents of the revision, having lost (or refused to make) the argument within the academic forum, launched a media and letter-writing campaign (aimed at students, parents, and influential alumnae, among others) attacking the departmental consensus. Proponents of the new syllabus were assailed in articles, advertisements, and media appearances as radical, ideological, biased, propagandistic, intolerant of alternative viewpoints, and antithetical to academic freedom and free inquiry. Its antagonists represented themselves as dispassionate, unbiased, politically neutral, principled upholders of objective standards. Further, those who had gone outside the academy maintained that "the entire episode was tainted by evasions of departmental procedures and unheard of secrecy by its proponents"[8]—which was news to the department. The most outspoken antagonist, who publicly assailed the department's "radical literary theorists" for politicizing courses, urged that: (1) "the English department should be placed in receivership indefinitely"; (2) it should be split into two entities (one for "the radical theorists," one for "the remaining traditional scholars [who] would [then have] the freedom to offer a true literature and writing program"); (3) "barring the accomplishment of these steps, the two University-wide required English courses [both writing and literature] should be abolished, thus ending the necessity of hiring additional English professors at the rate they have been recruited from the most radicalized (but prestigious) graduate programs across the nation"; and (4) the Dean of Liberal Arts should be replaced by one "with nerve and determination to oversee the recruiting policies and decisions of the English department."[9]

The dean of Liberal Arts (who lasted only from 1989–1991) had expressed enthusiasm for the proposed revision. In July 1990, however, he informed the

faculty that the new version of E.306, which was scheduled to begin that fall, would be postponed for a year. The dean wrote in part: "I will continue to support strongly, as I have during the past months, the concept of English 306 as a writing and rhetoric course with a unified curriculum centered on the themes of diversity and difference, an idea which I believe to be imaginative and exciting." The dean's decision, then, was represented as a tactical retreat to "ensure the best course possible."[10]

What had moved the dean from his commitment to immediate implementation? No one outside his immediate circle can speak with certitude; but the only relevant event widely known to have occurred between the dean's last public pronouncement of support and his memo to the department was a hastily called weekend meeting to which the dean and chair were summoned by the university's president and provost, presumably in response to hostility directed toward the new English 306 from both outside and within the university. So far as is known, neither the president nor the provost ever spoke to any member of the LDEPC or saw either the draft syllabus or any of the new materials.

The internal hostility came, it seems, largely (though not entirely) from the professional schools, whose vision of basic literacy (and of higher education) differs markedly from the department's. The president (who had been dean of the Business School), the provost (a professor of chemistry), and the dean of Engineering (apparently a major backscene player in the controversy) seemed agreed on a version of freshman English that served business and professional interests rather than something as nebulous and self-indulgent as liberal or humanistic education. Hence, though the department was unaware of this at the time, the question of whether the then-current version of E.306 was a success or failure, and of whether the proposed revision would be an improvement or a disaster, would be answered not by the disciplinary professionals but by more powerful figures who wanted freshman composition to be about grammar, punctuation, and basic communication rather than critical thinking and writing. It was also unclear to the revisionists that these positions were irreconcilable, that no mutually satisfactory solution was possible, and that the sheer exercise of authority would determine the outcome.

The immediate consequences of the "postponement" (a euphemism for cancellation) were the withdrawal from the course of the eight to ten departmental faculty members who, excited by the proposed revision, had volunteered to teach it; the scrapping of a week-long orientation for its teachers that had been arranged for August 1990; the continuation of a version of E.306 that the department had rejected; and the department's growing sense that the faculty had lost what the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) calls its "primary responsibility for such fundamental areas as curriculum, subject matter and methods of instruction."[11]

In September 1990, both the department and its graduate students overwhelmingly affirmed the LDEPC's actions. The votes made no difference to the opponents of the revised course or to the university's administration. Despite repeated requests, no assurances were forthcoming that the department could determine the content of its courses; no administrator would meet with departmental representatives; the department was denied permission to field-test sections of the course; and the president and provost reiterated that the department had to satisfy the deans of those colleges (such as Engineering and Natural Sciences) who seemed to have acquired veto power over the content of first-year English. In January 1991, the dean of Liberal Arts announced his resignation as of the end of the semester, less than two years after taking office. Though he cited personal reasons, lack of support from the administration for what he had tried to accomplish, especially the E.306 revision, seemed a major factor. Subsequently, the director of lower-division English filed a formal grievance with the AAUP claiming that both academic freedom and faculty authority had been abrogated, and requesting an investigation. The LDEPC, citing the administration's refusal to allow it to fulfill its professional responsibility (i.e., to prepare and implement the new syllabus), resigned en bloc in February 1991, and the director, thwarted in the job for which she had been hired, resigned from the university shortly thereafter. In consequence of all that had occurred, the department seemed stuck with teaching a course it had found wanting. Seeking to break the deadlock, it created a new committee, one that began by affirming the principles that had guided the old one; remarkably, it managed to write a syllabus that was unanimously approved by the department and then accepted beyond it. It was an extraordinary achievement under circumstances in which it seemed that many constituencies, within and outside the university, had a voice in determining freshman English—everyone except the professionals in the field and those who teach it.[12]

Missing from this account of what sometimes seemed a unique occurrence is the fact that curricula, like literary canons, *always* represent a temporary truce among competing values and forces. Opponents of the proposed change were variously motivated: Some spoke out against the politicization of higher education while denying their own ideological agenda; some objected to having *any* content for freshman writing, whose concerns should be formal and grammatical. Still others seemed driven by a romanticized nostalgia for what never existed: a prelapsarian freshman course that embodied an unquestioning commitment to Western values, "traditional" standards of aesthetics and literacy, prescriptive grammar, and the authority of teachers who promulgate, rather than interrogate, received "truth." As an indicator of how much was at stake, Linda Brodkey writes, "That the negative publicity increased rather than decreased after the syllabus was postponed may explain how a college composition course in Texas could have become a national fetish for what ails America" ("Making a Federal Case" 250).

Freshman English at the University of Texas has long been a site of colliding social and political visions. In an incident eerily prophetic of the Rothenberg controversy, the university's regents in 1943 denounced the English department's teaching of John Dos Passos's *U.S.A.* because of what one regent called

its "indecent, vulgar and filthy" subject matter,[13] and proscribed it from all university courses. Although the department hastened to comply, the regents continued to use the book as a weapon against the president, Homer Rainey, whom they fired in 1944 for insubordinate promulgation, both private and public, of academic freedom.[14]

Also relevant to the definition and status of freshman English at the university was the local version of the national debate over temporary faculty who, along with graduate students, had taught most of the department's lower-division courses until 1985, when virtually all such positions (about 70 individuals) were summarily terminated. The department's controversy over lecturers involved the same issues that were, and are, at stake elsewhere: standards for hiring and reviewing such faculty, de facto tenure, opposition to a two-tiered department, worry that graduate assistants would be replaced by temporary faculty, a concern that English was becoming primarily a service department. In this case, the controversy was most intense *within* the department, where some feared that, as the graduate program shrank for lack of support and the focus became remediation, it would become, as one faculty member put it, "the world's largest junior college." Yet the dismissal of the lecturers also had unfortunate, if different, consequences: the elimination of the university-wide, upper-division English requirement, the teaching of both sophomore literature and upper-division courses increasingly in large lecture sections, and the segregation of students into "major" and "nonmajor" classes.

The public controversy over faculty responsibility for determining curricula largely obscured the fact that freshman composition, like canon formation and the issue of temporary faculty, has *long* been a matter of debate within the profession. Is freshman composition a remedial course that students should satisfy in high school? Should it be considered a deficiency to be made up on campuses but not for credit? Should it have a uniform syllabus? Should a version be available for nonnative speakers of English? Should *all* entering students be required to take a writing course at their appropriate level? Should its *content* be writing itself? or discursive prose? or literature?[15] or something else? How should it be taught? Should its teachers be regular departmental faculty, graduate student apprentices, or specialists in composition and rhetoric? By whom and how should it be administered? Contrary to analyses offered in the popular media, the answers to these questions are neither easy nor obvious.

Except that E.306 has never been a literature or multicultural course (the popular myth to the contrary notwithstanding), the university's English department has discussed and variously resolved all of these questions over the years, though to no one's enduring satisfaction. In one extraordinary variant in the mid-1960s, I "taught" basic literacy to an auditorium full of freshmen: lecturing on the virtues of the semicolon was one of the more vivid, and useless, experiences of my academic career. That extreme authoritarian version of both pedagogical structure and prescriptive grammar, however, differed only in degree

rather than kind from standard models, and for many it justified, and perhaps necessitated, the subsequent attempts to find better alternatives.

In a sense, then, the revision proposed in 1989 repeated others that had preceded it. Why did this one become a matter of extramural, and national, controversy? Partly, it was a matter of unfortunate timing. The committee's initial proposal appeared shortly after several racist incidents had occurred on the campus. The timing was coincidental (the committee had been at work since the previous year), but some saw the new curriculum as an attempt to make freshman composition something it had no business being: sensitivity training in social issues. Further, the proposed revision also became entangled with controversial issues—like multiculturalism, "political correctness," postcolonialism and ethnicity, bilingual education, gender criticism, and sexual identity—in part because they were being debated both in the department and in the profession at large, and also because, at the same time, the campus began to address an unrelated proposal for an undergraduate multicultural requirement.

Like the E.306 revision, the multicultural proposal was a historical and cultural document and compromise. It defined multiculturalism as "an approach to teaching and learning that acknowledges the need for people to exist interdependently in a culturally pluralistic world, and accordingly, seeks to foster understanding of the differences and similarities of diverse groups and various cultures in the United States and throughout the world" (Danielson, "Definitions" 1). It proposed the phasing in of a six-hour multicultural requirement for undergraduates, that no single standard or definition of multiculturalism be imposed, and that decisions about which courses would satisfy this requirement be determined by the departmental faculty offering them. The debate over this proposal, which became heated, again raised fundamental questions about the definition and purpose of a university. Many faculty from business, science, and the professional schools assailed the requirement as ideological, "local," or "soft," a distraction or interference with higher education's real purpose, and it was ultimately rejected by a vote of the general faculty.[16] Though very different in content, the proposed E.306 revision was often attacked, for its supposed multicultural orientation, in the same terms and by the same people.

The revised syllabus was also seen as both politically motivated and unprofessional because it proposed Supreme Court cases concerning difference as its primary texts. They were assailed as too difficult for freshmen and as better taught in Sociology or Government rather than by graduate students of literature: The ideologues in English, untrained in the pedagogy and analysis of social issues, were bound to teach them ideologically. The new focus troubled many of the department's own faculty, who saw some truth in the charges, but the press of events and the sense of being besieged preempted an internal debate on the proposed curriculum's substance. As Brodkey writes, "Serious intellectual disagreements among the faculty members in the English department at Texas were repressed, not resolved, by the relentless negative publicity about the course" ("Making a Federal Case" 243). In the end, most supported the

changes on procedural grounds, shrugged over a revision that seemed unlikely to do either more good or harm than had previous versions, and assumed it would again be reconsidered, perhaps under less frenzied circumstances, three years hence.[17] Such an assumption, like the proposed revision itself, proved naive in the extreme.

The Texas controversy crystallized contemporary social turmoil over issues like civil rights, apartheid, homophobia, women's rights and studies. Graduate students have inspired and embraced new subjects and theories where the opportunity existed—like the graduate concentration in "Ethnic and Third-World Literatures" that the English department established in 1987—because they have found them stimulating, challenging, and often relevant to their own lives, and their choices have been validated even by market criteria: Graduates of such programs are among today's most successful academic job seekers.

Graduate students in English lead a bifurcated existence as both apprentice scholars and apprentice teachers. They have long taught the bulk of freshman composition, for the recurring cries that the permanent faculty should be the instructors are rarely accompanied by the necessary funding. Inadequate support both for graduate fellowships and for staffing basic courses with permanent faculty have inspired institutions to devise a solution from two distinct problems: Pay graduate students (at relatively low levels) to teach them, while claiming—as is sometimes true—that the teaching is part of their training. Unlike fellowships, teaching assistantships provide a good return on the money an institution expends on its graduate students; and graduate students are, in any event, closer in age and thinking to undergraduates than are regular faculty—advantages that may compensate for their relative inexperience.

Today's social tensions have exacerbated this bifurcation: Graduate students believe that their work must be on the "cutting edge" of literary criticism and theory if they are to publish and get jobs, a situation that accords with their desires, since the excitement generated by cultural, postcolonial, gender, and other such studies is what first attracted many of them to the profession. At the same time, however, their initiation into the profession, and what they will mostly do once they arrive, requires them to devote much time and energy to labor-intensive and repetitive work like correcting freshman writing, which substantially retards progress toward the degree, even as universities press them to finish sooner.

Thus, most graduate students juggle original research and pedagogy, complex theoretical work, and basic literacy. Some private institutions and small programs have literature as the content of the freshman course; in most, however, no direct linkage exists between the Ph.D. and freshman extremes of the higher-education experience. Yet the last decade has witnessed a serious effort to extrapolate from theory to practice, from abstruse research to the freshman classroom. This rarely means, though some have maintained otherwise, that teachers seek to impose their advanced research on freshman English. Nor does it mean political inculcation of the captive and unwitting inhabitants of writing

courses: Teachers who wish to indulge in brainwashing find few students who conform to the model of the *tabula rasa* on which anything they like can be written.

Of far greater interest and far more common are those who, taking literally the challenge of integrating teaching and research that universities espouse, perform a version of what Gerald Graff proposes in *Beyond the Culture Wars*: neither suppressing nor advocating either side in the cultural wars, but welcoming and teaching the conflicts, making them the subject of serious academic inquiry. Yet as the prominent theme of self-awareness and self-projection in recent literary criticism and theory has it, one always chooses, or is perceived as having chosen, or embodies a choice. A teacher, like a literary critic, necessarily represents a particular cultural moment and situation rather than an abstract, impersonal, and objective one—and it is best to acknowledge that reality. Teaching assistants, for example, are a different class from their students. They are not only poorer, since most undergraduates are supported by parents, but they are more likely to be female, members of an ethnic minority, or gay, so that they often embody the contemporary cultural issues that they find professionally compelling. As the chapters in this book emphasize, teachers of English have become not only reflective but also self-reflective in their thinking and practice of teaching—and they find it valuable to incorporate that process of pedagogical and personal interrogation in the classroom. Interestingly, this approach accords well with one conventional criterion for good composition instruction: that writers do best when they interrogate their own ideas, values, and assumptions.

Contemporary theory and practice question not only traditional subject matter but also authoritarian models of teaching. Pedagogical analogues and applications of critical studies include greater use of seminars, group projects, peer critiquing, the writing of journals (often autobiographical); cooperative thinking rather than imposed interpretation; broadened concepts of "texts," "reading," and meaning; the increasing substitution of "cultural" for "literary" studies; computer classrooms that replace the hierarchical structure of traditional teaching with collaborative learning. Graduate and undergraduate students discover in such encounters that they have much to learn from each other; and the classroom experience both infuses the teacher's approach to professional writing and then often becomes its subject matter as well.

Unsurprisingly, this dynamic makes some people nervous. Traditional standards of civilization, like reason, decency, and morality, as well as aesthetic criteria, seem in danger of subversion—as in many ways they are—and in the very place, supposedly sheltered from the winds of change, where the culture at large had expected them to be sustained. It is one thing, it seems, for "the real world" to be confused, frustrated, and rent by partisanship; it is quite another for the academy, supposedly privileged in its role as bastion of traditional verities, to replicate rather than mediate or stand aloof from the conflict.

The *latest* cultural sea change, underway even as this book has been con-

structed, is reflected in its chapters. Even as the assaults on rarefied literary theory were reaching a climax in the media, it was also being interrogated, and waning, within the academy. Increasingly, graduate programs have incorporated material studies—whether cultural, new historicist, feminist, postcolonial, or ethnic—because of a renewed interest in how literary texts and social and institutional contexts express and produce one another. This is not to say that a few faculty members have succeeded in imposing radical agendas upon the discipline and its graduate students: That is not how the process works. The process is largely driven by graduate students themselves, voting with their feet, their bodies, and their minds for what they find compelling. A chord has been struck, one that resonates for *some* faculty, *some* graduate students, and even *some* undergraduates. It will sound for a while, and then, doubtless, will be replaced as an issue by whatever controversy comes next. But it will continue to have a place for *some*, just as more traditional modes and subjects of discourse and research have remained available.

This book emerges from and engages the concatenation of circumstances outlined here. The chapters were originally delivered at a colloquium on "Pedagogy and Values," presented by and about the Department of English at the University of Texas at Austin in the spring of 1992. This particular occasion, which is discussed in Evan Carton's Introduction, addressed the professional and national contexts that were germane to the local example that, in Graff's sense, can and should be taught. These chapters also address the wider academic and social issues of pedagogical authority and knowledge; canonicity; cultural and multicultural definitions and conflicts; race, gender, and sexual orientation—for the academic and national debates are inevitably, if unsettlingly, implicated in mutual interrogation. Roger Wilkins writes that

> The great American struggle of the last half of the twentieth century has been to throw off the self-satisfied hegemony of narrowness and ignorance that has crippled our nation for so long. Change is rarely smooth or free of rancor. Some stridency and moral rigidity can be expected from those long denied their voices, but those excesses can soon be corrected by the ordinary processes of rational discussion and debate. ("A Modern Story" 13)

Or they could be if "rational discussion and debate" are allowed, for higher education has done best when questioning received wisdom: *That* is its nature and responsibility. For all the pressures upon it from its inception, it has never succeeded as a closed system; the discipline changes, canons change, students change, faculty and their critical and pedagogical methods change—and they have always done so.

Is the project enacted in this book hopelessly ideological, naive, or perverse? I think not. It is, rather, to take seriously both critical theory and the teaching of writing. The essays included here express and explore the changes occurring in our culture and in cultural study in order to ratify openness to the possibility

of such change as fundamental to what free inquiry is and should be in the academy most worthy of that name—and in the society that, ideally, it both represents and challenges. They also offer a way of being optimistic in troubled and troubling times.

NOTES

1. In *Beyond the Culture Wars*, Gerald Graff traces the process of canon transformation/expansion as follows: Greek > Latin > English literature > American literature > modern literature > popular culture.
2. The University of Texas's treatment of J. Frank Dobie—fired as a faculty member but, his library subsequently purchased, honored after his death—is paradigmatic (see Dugger, *Our Invaded Universities*, pp. 53–57).
3. The word "culture" used to be linked primarily with anthropology, but since it acquired the prefix "multi-" it has fallen increasingly under the provenance of literary studies, where diverse voices compete to define both the material treated and the discipline. Today, of course, cultural studies is also a discipline unto itself.
4. Julius Getman's *In the Company of Scholars* (pp. 136–50) offers that rare thing: a reasonably accurate and judicious account. See also Molly Ivins, "For Crying Out Loud, It's Only an English Course." Linda Brodkey, Director of Freshman English at the University of Texas in the early 1990s, tells her version of the composition controversy in "Making a Federal Case out of Difference" and "Writing Permitted in Designated Areas Only."
5. See Cheney, *Telling the Truth*, pp. 30–35.
6. See Brodkey's summary of this process, "Writing Permitted," pp. 225–28.
7. Brodkey, "Making a Federal Case," p. 239.
8. "NAS Impact: Texas," *National Association of Scholars Newsletter* 1.2 (Fall 1990): 3. See also the Spring 1991 issue, p. 3.
9. Alan Gribben, "Letter to Anne Blakeney, 9 July 1990." A copy of this letter, which was written to a member of the university's powerful Liberal Arts Foundation Council, was subsequently obtained by reporters through the Texas Open Records Act and published in the student newspaper, *The Daily Texan*.
10. Memorandum from Standish Meacham, Dean of Liberal Arts, to the Department of English, July 1990.
11. American Association of University Professors, "Joint Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities," p. 123.
12. For a more detailed account, see Friedman, "English 306 at the University of Texas."
13. Rainey, *The Tower and the Dome*, p. 65; see also pp. 43, 72, 74, 105–6. As often happens, the banned book became the most popular seller in Texas and could not be found in any bookstore (92).
14. Nor was the Rainey incident the first of its kind in the university's history. Many of the newspaper accounts used phrases like "once more," "again," and "the centuries-old struggle for academic freedom" in reporting the conflict (reprinted in Rainey 110–14). See Dugger's account of the Pa and Ma Ferguson years in the early decades of this century, "The First Takeover," in *Our Invaded Universities*, pp. 14–18, as well as his version of the Rainey years (36–47).

15. An analogous debate currently rages concerning the nature of literature, literary studies, texts appropriate to critical analysis, "the canon," and so on. As Eagleton argues, "There is no 'essence' of literature whatsoever. Any bit of writing may be read 'non-pragmatically', if that is what reading a text as literature means, just as any writing may be read 'poetically' " (*Literary Theory* 9).

16. See Friedman, "Multiculturalism," for a fuller account.

17. Ivins reflects this attitude in "For Crying Out Loud, It's Only an English Course."