

系別：英文學系 A 組

科目：英 文 (含英美文學議題)

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The following passage is from Harold Bloom's *The Western Canon* ("An Elegy of the Canon"). Please briefly summarize Bloom's argument in the quoted passage. How would you respond to Bloom's argument? Do you agree with him or not? Why? Write down your response and your own reflections upon the issue of "canon" in British and American literature. You are free to choose one literary work among British and American literature to elaborate how you contemplate the issue of canon, but be specific.

Unfortunately, nothing ever will be the same because the art and passion of reading well and deeply, which was the foundation of our enterprise, depended upon people who were fanatical readers when they were still small children. Even devoted and solitary readers are now necessarily beleaguered, because they cannot be certain that fresh generations will rise up to prefer Shakespeare and Dante to all other writers. The shadows lengthen in our evening land, and we approach the second millennium expecting further shadowing.

I do not deplore these matters; the aesthetic is, in my view, an individual rather than a societal concern. In any case there are no culprits, though some of us would appreciate not being told that we lack the free, generous, and open societal vision of those who come after us. Literary criticism is an ancient art; its inventor, according to Bruno Snell, was Aristophanes, and I tend to agree with Heinrich Heine that "There is a God, and his name is Aristophanes." Cultural criticism is another dismal social science, but literary criticism, as an art, always was and always will be an elitist phenomenon. It was a mistake to believe that literary criticism could become a basis for democratic education or for societal improvement. When our English and other literature departments shrink to the dimensions of our current Classics departments, ceding their grosser functions to the legions of Cultural Studies, we will perhaps be able to return to the study of the inescapable, to Shakespeare and his few peers, who after all, invented all of us.

The Canon, once we view it as the relation of an individual reader and writer to what has been preserved out of what has been written, and forget the canon as a list of books for required study, will be seen as identical with the literary Art of Memory, not with the religious sense of canon. Memory is always an art, even when it works involuntarily. Emerson opposed the party of Memory to the party of Hope, but that was in a very different America. Now the party of Memory *is* the party of Hope, though the hope is diminished. But it has always been dangerous to institutionalize hope, and we no longer live in a society in which we will be allowed to institutionalize memory. We need to teach more selectively, searching for the few who have the capacity to become highly individual readers and writers. The others, who are amenable to a politicized curriculum, can be abandoned to it. Pragmatically, aesthetic value can be recognized or experienced, but it cannot be conveyed to those who are incapable of grasping its sensations and perceptions. To quarrel on its behalf is always a blunder.

本試題雙面印製

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What interests me more is the flight from the aesthetic among so many in my profession, some of whom at least began with the ability to experience aesthetic value. In Freud, flight is the metaphor for repression, for unconscious yet purposeful forgetting. The purpose is clear enough in my profession's flight: to assuage displaced guilt. Forgetting, in an aesthetic context, is ruinous, for cognition, in criticism, always relies on memory. Longinus would have said that pleasure is what the resisters have forgotten. Nietzsche would have called it pain; but they would have been thinking of the same experience upon the heights. Those who descend from there, lemminglike, chant the litany that literature is best explained as a mystification promoted by bourgeois institutions.

This reduces the aesthetic to ideology, or at best to metaphysics. A poem cannot be read *as a poem*, because it is primarily a social document or, rarely yet possibly, an attempt to overcome philosophy. Against this approach I urge a stubborn resistance whose single aim is to preserve poetry as fully and purely as possible. Our legions who have deserted represent a strand in our traditions that has always been in flight from the aesthetic: Platonic moralism and Aristotelian social science. The attack on poetry either exiles it for being destructive of social well-being or allows it sufferance if it will assume the work of social catharsis under the banners of the new multiculturalism. Beneath the surfaces of academic Marxism, Feminism, and New Historicism, the ancient polemic of Platonism and the equally archaic Aristotelian social medicine continue to course on. I suppose that the conflict between these strains and the always beleaguered supporters of the aesthetic can never end. We are losing now, and doubtless we will go on losing, and there is a sorrow in that, because many of the best students will abandon us for other disciplines and professions, an abandonment already well under way. They are justified in doing so, because we could not protect them against our profession's loss of intellectual and aesthetic standards of accomplishment and value. All that we can do now is maintain some continuity with the aesthetic and not yield to the lie that what we oppose is adventure and new interpretations.