

Dix, Douglas Shields

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Brno studies in English. 1993, vol. 20, iss. 1, pp. [51]-62

ISBN 80-210-0889-X

ISSN 0231-5351

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/104394>

Access Date: 28. 11. 2024

Version: 20220831

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THE OTHER CANON: LITERARY HISTORY AND MARGINALIZED TEXTS

Douglas Shields Dix

Today I would like to speak about literary canons--how canons are formed, how canons evolve and change, and in particular what kinds of literature remain outside of canons. I want to make clear from the start that the most often cited reason for the existence of canons--that canons exist as a way to discriminate good writing from bad writing, literature from non-literature, quality from lack of quality--is for me at best a misrepresentation of the case, at worst a travesty. To state my case perhaps over-simply, canons exist as apparatuses of inclusion and exclusion disguised as collections of the best that has ever been written or thought within a specific nationality or language. If we consider the origin of the term, this is made quite clear: the process of canonization was developed by the early Christian church as a way to determine the so-called 'true gospels' from the false gospels, and the effective suppression of the gnostic gospels for almost two thousand years is evidence of the effectiveness of this process.

The idea that canonization is as much a process of exclusion as it is a process of inclusion is not a very new insight in itself: Virginia Woolf and Langston Hughes [among others] pointed it out before World War II, but being female and black--and consequently beyond the pale of consideration by academics of that period [themselves all male and white], their voices fell on deaf ears. In the last twenty years or so much has been done in the west to address these issues of exclusion, and much work has been done to both include marginalized writers--women, people of different ethnicities, religions, ideologies, or sexual preferences, as well as theorizing and documenting the process by which canonization occurs. In addition to this expansion of the kinds of voices represented within the canon, there has been an expansion of the kinds of culture open for serious consideration by academics within humanities departments--from popular and folk culture to news and advertising media, and even the practices of everyday life have come under scrutiny. What we see emerging in the United States and Great Britain now is a movement to shift the arena of literary studies towards a wider sphere of cultural studies, and with this shift the very conception of a canon is

being questioned, as virtually every human production is now being seen as worthy of study. At the same time that I wish to give my full-fledged support to this trend, I also wish to return to the issue of the canon from a different perspective--from what I will refer to as the 'outside', or, the 'other canon'.

Looking at anthologies of American or British literature today one is struck by the vast choice confronting a teacher whose task is to impart a survey of American or British literature. The very possibility of imparting a 'general' knowledge of each literature is belied by the fact that there is so much material available that the chance of two teachers choosing the same syllabus is more and more unlikely. For some academics, like Allen Bloom, the author of *The Closing of the American Mind*, this is reason to despair, for his claim is that if we pursue this direction we will remove the very underpinning of common knowledge that holds western civilization together, and give way to a relativism that will destroy the supposedly stable, unchanging human values and verities. For other academics, such as myself, this is reason to celebrate, for it means a kind of opening that may help to transform the restricted tribalisms that have ruled and have threatened to destroy the human race throughout history, fostering what I consider to be the far more important human values of tolerance towards the other and understanding and acceptance of human difference and diversity. For me this gets to the heart of the issue, for it is precisely our fear of the other, and what the other represents to us, which drives our need to form groups, as well as our need to form canons.

From the early Christian idea that a canon was a specific group of texts considered 'sacred' outside of which any writings with pretensions to the same sacredness were heretical, we have moved in the 20th century to the idea that a canon represents a collection of materials that we feel 'must' be imparted if an individual is to be considered educated. While I do not doubt the necessity for people to have an understanding of the history of their own language, ethnicity, religion, region, country or civilization, it is clear to me that part of what passes for this education is really an attempt to induct students into a specific value system, ideology, or religion. A simple exploration of the aesthetic reception and educational use of a writer like Shakespeare makes this point perfectly: while I would never question the fact that Shakespeare's writings are brilliantly written as well as being important cultural documents, it is obvious, as several critics have recently pointed out, that his writings have been used to uphold a 'tradition' that separates the educated from the uneducated, the upper classes from the lower classes, or even the superiority of British culture to other cultures, [or in America, the superiority of Anglo-Saxon culture]. Certainly I would approach the study of Shakespeare differently than I would approach the study of Raymond Chandler, but I would not see a course on Chandler as any less legitimate or important than a course on Shakespeare: I have taught both writers, and I have found value in teaching both writers.

That canons are such apparatuses of exclusion is not too difficult to

see: why we need such apparatuses is a little more complex. Certainly the immediate answer is in order to create and maintain group identities--of nationality, religion, ethnicity, gender, ideology, and class. We all form group identities, we all create an 'us' against which we oppose a 'them'. It would be easy to pass this off as a fact of life without giving it further consideration. If we bother to think about the origin of our tendency to form groups at all, we suggest it must stem from the tribalisms of our ancient ancestors, based in the need for self-defence. I don't doubt the veracity of this, but I would suggest there is something else involved--something far more complicated. What I would like to suggest here, and discuss in detail below, is that the real reason we cling to group identities is that such identities shield us from what I will term in this paper the 'outside'. To have a group we can cling to allows us to live a day to day life that is confirmed by the values of those around us, and consequently prevents us from questioning the origin or source--and hence the createdness--of our own values. In this paper I would like to suggest the value of confronting the origin of our values, and in particular the value of confronting our canons and the values they espouse.

What I will refer to as the 'traditional canon' [which was never so fixed as its critics maintain] clearly existed as a site to enplace and maintain values. This does not mean that all the writers contained within this canon were in agreement with or aware of this project, indeed many were probably not. What I will refer to as the 'revised canon' [which, as it should be, is in a continuous process of reevaluation, revision, and expansion], exists as both a site of contestation of the traditional canon, and as an emplacement of new values to in some cases counter the tradition, in other cases expand the tradition. What these two competing visions of the canon share, however, is the desire to advocate a specific more or less known set of values. What I am concerned with is a certain type of literary work that remains outside both the traditional and the revised canons--what I will refer to as the 'other' canon.

The type of work I am speaking about is the work which draws us to the outside of culture and reflects to us both the arbitrary construction of human value as well as the radical contingency of our lives and deaths. Such works are inevitably disturbing--as disturbing as coming upon a dead body. Such works draw us out of our secure, comfortable beliefs into a world where we have to think about our precarious relation to life and death. The obvious question advocates of the first two canons would have is why study such disturbing, difficult works? Why open ourselves to an abyss or void when life itself already offers us too little comfort and security? Why teach works which offer no specific values to help orient us, and which in fact bring into question the values we already hold to? What I will argue below, in arguing for the admission of these works for consideration in university classrooms, is that by bringing us face to face with what I will, term, after Michel Foucault, the 'thought from outside', we will loosen our holds to the same certainties and securities that lead us to live lives reduced to the

currently fashionable ideology, that restrict our own sense of the possibilities open to us in life, that cause us to judge others based on our own sense of racial, social, religious, cultural, national, or gender superiority.

Academics, and particularly classical humanists who espouse the universality of human truth and beauty--ignoring historical and social determinations, can become mired in the belief that the canon of a particular moment is the canon as it is forever, or, aided by the enlightenment belief in the perfectibility of humanity, may further subscribe to the idea that the canon will be permanent but also infinitely perfectible, as we need merely wait for the latest classics to be hailed and processed for canonization. It took the conservative pessimism of a more or less stolid humanist like T. S. Eliot to point out that the canon shifts retrospectively from generation to generation depending on the latest literary modality holding sway--a reflection which still didn't stop Eliot himself from creating his own canon upholding the neoclassicism of the metaphysical poets over the neoromanticism as his stylistic standard of perfection. This is how it went in the United States well through the early 1970s: questioning the canon existed in regard to a generational conflict between neoclassicists and neoromanticists, and opening the canon meant a fight over which of these groups held power, and which exemplars of the modalities of these groups would be taught. As late as 1978 the Ph.D. reading list at the University of Washington [a list of one hundred books compiled as the foundation of one's Ph. D. qualifying exams] contained only seven books by women authors, and none by non-white authors.

While the late 1960s and early 1970s were the turning point in American academe in regard to questioning the canon, not much changed until the mid 1980s, largely as a result of the entrenchment of the early Reagan years with its strong ideological push towards 'traditional values' [read 'white male dominance']. The first major strides in expanding the canon was in regard to women writers, largely as a result of the number of women getting Ph. D.s in the 60s and 70s and entering academia [large when compared to before, but still relatively few when compared to other professions]. A renaissance occurred, involving not only the reassessment of women characters in fiction written by men and the legitimization of the serious study of figures as diverse as Emily Dickinson, the Brontës, Kate Chopin, Virginia Woolf, Getrude Stein, Marianne Moore, and Adrienne Rich, but also the theorizing of a 'female aesthetic' as well as the discovery and rediscovery of writers previously ignored or unheard of--from Charlotte Perkins Gilman to Jane Bowles. With the entrance of women into the academy, and the beginning of affirmative action/equal opportunity legislation, came the entrance of other disenfranchised groups. In the space of a little over a decade anthologies now included the works of black authors such as Frederick Douglass, Countee Cullen, Zora Neale Hurston, Jean Toomer, Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, Gwendolyn Brooks, James Baldwin, Imamu Amiri Baraka, Toni Morrison, and Alice Walker, and the inclusion of works of other minorities soon followed.

The absorption of all of these authors into the canon, like the absorption of the new professors who advocated them, was not a particularly smooth process, and indeed the deep conflicts created by these changes deeply affect American academia even today. The white male authors who had populated the canon for so long stood in a different relation to their work than the women and minorities who now were included. In short, the dominant class, gender, and race was able to forget its own class, gender, and race, and write from a perspective that was seen by those men as universal, whereas when the same standards of value were applied to writings by women or blacks, for instance, these writings were claimed to be narrow, confining, and parochial. Of course the sheer blindness of these objections was based on the fact that white males had defined the standard, and couldn't see that their own normative judgments and belief in the possibility of making universal statements actually defined their own visions. As these were the people in power first, and thus the standard-bearers, the new groups made very little headway at first in getting their own claims to legitimacy recognized. The result of this was often women or blacks or Hispanics were [and still are] ghettoized within departments, and were seen as following their own specific interests while white males went on with the 'real' work, forcing the new arrivals to teach white male authors who 'counted', while not feeling compelled in the least to teach black or women authors in their own courses. This was part of the reason why Afro-American studies and women's studies departments were organized: other departments simply would not accept the legitimacy of this new knowledge.

Russell Reising, in his book *The Unusable Past*, has pointed out that even with the changes in the canon, the general tendency has been to expand the canon while expanding even more greatly the representation of the authors included in the traditional canon, so that while the *Norton Anthology of American Literature* does contain much more writing by women and minorities, it has also increased the amount of writing by traditional figures to take up as much as 50% of the text, devoting far more room to them proportionally than ever before. While much has been gained since the 1970s in regard to opening the canon towards new study, in the last few years there has been a major backlash against the new studies that has coincided with increasing censorship in American society at large, and a general move against the academic establishment, which seems to be seen more and more as an enemy by the Bush administration as a way to deflect public attention away from the failing economy.

Clearly there have been problems within the new studies--much of which represents a complete paradigm shift in the humanities. Not only is the question of *what* we teach at stake, but so is the question of *how* we teach, and *why* we teach. Advocates of the new studies realized quickly that trying to fit the new writings into the old framework did not work, for the theories used to study the traditional canon, based deeply

in the aesthetic formalism of the so-called 'New Criticism' [which still held on throughout the 1970s, even though by then it was forty years old], were derived from the same universal perspective that had created the exclusion from the canon to begin with. A myriad of new approaches were developed, coinciding with the entrance of structuralism and post-structuralism from France, which resulted in nothing less than a complete reorientation of approaches towards literature.

Whether the theory was reception aesthetics from Germany, or post-structuralism from France, what was overwhelming about these theories was the fact of their strong basis in an interdisciplinary study of literature. A theorist like Roland Barthes, who would devote an entire book, *S/Z*, to the structuralist close reading of a literary text by Balzac, could also be found just as easily doing a close reading of the covers of women's magazines, or of professional wrestling matches on television. Umberto Eco, the Italian semiotician, might spend part of a one book analyzing Joyce, parts of another analyzing superman comics or Ian Fleming's James Bond series. Michel Foucault, one of the most important influences on literary studies, devoted only one work solely to literature, and spent the rest of his life focusing on the actual textual practices of society itself. This shift from seeing the literary work as a self-enclosed creative object to seeing it as a cultural text gradually opened the canon so far that almost anything became worthy of study. The rise of media studies, film studies, women's studies, ethnic studies, popular culture studies, folk culture studies, and American studies developed out of this shift in paradigm, so that now there is a very powerful movement afoot to shift the humanities curriculum in the United States over to a cultural studies curriculum--a move already an accomplished fact at several American universities. The conception of cultural studies is relatively new, developed only in the last three years or so, most notably in the work of Anthony Easthope, and the large anthology entitled, *Cultural Studies* edited by Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler. It represents the coalescence of the several strands of new studies mentioned above, and has gained its strength in the very fact of its interdisciplinarity--a characteristic which tended to weaken a discipline ten years ago, opening it up to charges of a lack of seriousness [usually from the deeply implanted practitioners of the disciplines it threatened to transform].

As I mentioned above, to me this expansion of the canon, this paradigm shift in the nature of literary study, seems not 'the closing of the American mind' or 'the end of western civilization as we know it' that older academics claim it is, but rather a renaissance within the former humanities that assures a far brighter future to the disciplines involved. However, while I do not wish to take anything away from what I feel are the genuine and vitally important contributions of this new study, I do want to suggest something in the nature of a corrective or internal check to these studies by way of speaking about what still remains on the outside--even given the vast expansion of the canon. However, before

examining the nature of this other canon, I would first like to speak about what I believe are causes for the exclusion of these works from the traditional and revised canon.

The French writer Georges Bataille locates at the heart of every human a 'principle of insufficiency'. He locates this insufficiency deep in the physical nature of the sexually reproductive beings we are--beings that live an individualized life, and die an individualized death. It is from this same principle of insufficiency that our impulse to form groups arises; however, not, as might be expected, so that the communion of the group might create sufficiency in the place of this primordial insufficiency. The fusion borne of our sexuality may bond human beings, but this bonding emerges from out of a promise of our future annihilation, and the act itself in some way mimics this annihilation, merging the two partners while simultaneously driving them apart, shattering the foundation of their consciousness through and through. Bataille reverses the humanist's and rationalist's belief in unions and communions based on stable identities, seeing within our existence a fundamental loss or absence that will never be breached. We are drawn into contact with others as a way to realize ourselves in our separatenesses--in what Maurice Blanchot terms the 'impossibility of being ourselves'. This is a difficult thought to hold, for it unsettles the more obvious belief that we form groups simply in order to create a sense of belonging and a stable identity. The real problem arises when we begin to intuit the truth--that the groups we adhere to will not save us from the awesome, awful fact of our own mortality. Our response is often to displace and repress the inevitable tensions within our group, believing falsely we have a solidarity, and then we turn outward towards some common enemy as a way to displace our vision of the real 'outside'.

Bataille states, 'A man alive, who sees a fellow man die, can survive only *beside himself*'. The death of the other most radically calls us into question, for in that death we come to share the solitude that separates as it binds us. Community is founded on this fact, and Bataille points to the early versions of sacrifice within primitive communities as examples of the literal working out of this foundation within the ritual and yet actual enactment of our own deaths. This turns around our common notion that we live on because the community we are part of lives on after our death. In fact, it is the exact opposite: the community we are a part of goes on *because* we die--because it is based on the death of the individual.

This rather circuitous route brings me back to my topic: within our need to form canons we have both the same beneficial impulses of inclusion that link us in our humanity, and also the same destructive impulses of exclusion that link us in our inhumanity. I do not wish to suggest advocates of the canon are fascists, but rather the 'opening' of canons to an outside that brings us back to an awareness of the reasons for these inclusions and exclusions, and that tempers the negative exclusionary functions [the microfascisms] for the sake of a greater tolerance, compassion, and humanity.

What I refer to as the 'other' canon is a wide variety of literary works that bring us face to face with this outside--with the radical contingency of our lives that hang in a precarious balance between two darknesses. I would suggest that the lack of consideration given these works in universities is not because they are not 'great' or 'important' works, as some would maintain, nor is it because they are 'unteachable', as others would maintain, but because these works function to bring us face to face with the outside in such a way that whatever values we hold, whatever methodologies we adopt--humanist, rationalist, Marxist, Freudian, Christian, formalist, new historicist, or whatever--cannot be used to bring the text under our powers of explanation. A short list of certain personal favorites of mine among these authors would contain Kathy Acker, Antonin Artaud, Georges Bataille, Djuna Barnes, the later Samuel Beckett, Maurice Blanchot, Jane and Paul Bowles, William Burroughs, Paul Celan, Chantal Chawaf, Marguerite Duras, Jean Genet, Juan Goytisolo, Edmund Jabes, Clarice Lispector, Jack Spicer, and Marguerite Young.

I have only time to speak specifically about one of these works here, and of a few of the critics and theorists who have dealt with these authors. There is quite a range represented by simply this short list, from the best-selling French author and acclaimed film director Marguerite Duras, who has had three of her works directed by other film directors in both French and English, to the almost unknown American author Marguerite Young, whose magnum opus, *Miss Macintosh, My Darling*, has been out of print now for twenty seven years; from the world renowned Rumanian poet of the holocaust Paul Celan, to the almost unheard of collected writings of the American poet Jack Spicer, who was eclipsed by the more ebullient egos of his friends the beat poets. So, it is not simply a matter of these writers being known or unknown, important or unimportant, greater or lesser--it is rather a matter of the nature of these writers' works, which do not yield easily to any forms of thematic, ideological, or psychological interpretation, linguistic or narrative analysis, or historical and cultural exegesis.

If we look at a text such as *Nightwood*, by Djuna Barnes, we are immediately confronted with a densely metaphoric prose detailing the intense and bizarre encounters of a series of characters all searching for the meaning of the 'night'. The text veers between the poles of an intense verbal density verging at times on glossolalia, and an almost deafening silence--the former pole embodied in the ravings of a character named Dr. Matthew O'Connor, the latter embodied by a 'woman becoming animal', the character Robin Vote. Robin moves through the text as almost an embodiment of the 'outside', refusing to explain or be explained, and heading inevitably towards her own silent apotheosis as a human reverting to her own animality. Her actions drive her lovers to an almost frantic obsession to understand her, and this obsession leads them to the 'Doctor', who attempts with his perverse hermeneutics to explain her, to explain the night. I will cite one example of the doctor's speech here, to give an example of the kind of difficulty the reader faces in what is, actually, one of the more readable passages:

To think of the acorn it is necessary to become the tree. And the tree of the night is the hardest tree to mount, the dourest tree to scale, the most difficult of branch, the most feeble to touch, and sweats a resin and drips a pitch against the palm that computation has not gambled. Gurus, who, I trust you know, are Indian teachers, expect you to contemplate the acorn ten years at a stretch, and if, in that time, you are no wiser about the nut, you are not very bright, and that may be the only certainty with which you will come away, which is a post-graduate melancholy--for no man can find a greater truth than his kidney will allow. So I, Dr. Matthew Mighty O'Connor, ask you to think of the night the day long, and of the day the night through, or at some reprieve of the brain it will come upon you heavily--an engine stalling itself upon your chest, halting its wheels against your heart; unless you have made a roadway for it.

When we follow this speech, as well as many others in the text, we find passages of astonishing beauty, and even fragments which yield a kind of passionate sense, but the text as a whole seems to continuously suffer a kind of internal emigration, getting farther and farther from the point at precisely the same time the Doctor claims to be coming closer and closer to his 'real' meaning. And yet I would suggest here is the essence of what the text is communicating: we read it with the same need to know, understand, define, and pin down what has happened, what is happening, and what it all means. In a certain sense the text mimics the same hermeneutic rush to interpretation of the serious literary critic, who wishes to crack the hard acorn of the text in order to obtain the sweet meat of its meaning. This is what I am suggesting about the whole endeavor of literary criticism, literary study, and the need to create canons as containers of cultural value: as in the text, so it is in life--in the end there is nothing but the silence and mystery of the night.

Indeed, it is precisely this inability to resolve itself into a meaning on both the level of the signifier and the signified that cause the unease of literary critics when they confront such a text. *Nightwood* cannot be adapted to any conventional critical perspective without making the critic look somewhat foolish. The 'outside' cannot be reduced to an ideology, or even to a dialectical negativity against which we posit rational or positive knowledge. Michel Foucault, in his description of the works of the French writer Maurice Blanchot, describes the difficulty in both philosophy and literature of writing the 'outside' in the following way:

It is extremely difficult to find a language faithful to this thought. Any purely reflexive discourse runs the risk of leading the experience of the outside back to the dimension of interiority; reflection tends irresistably to repatriate it to the side of consciousness and to develop it into a description of living that deplets the 'outside' as the experience of the body, space, the limits of the will, and the ineffaceable presence of the other. The vocabulary of fiction is equally perilous: due to the thickness of its images, sometimes merely by virtue of the transparency of the most neutral or hastiest figures, it risks setting down ready-made meanings that stitch the old fabric of interiority back together in the form of an imagined outside.

Hence the necessity of converting reflexive language. It must be directed not toward any inner confirmation--not toward a kind of central, unshakable certitude--but toward an outer bound where it must continually contest itself. When language arrives at its own age, what it finds is not a positivity that contradicts it, but the void that will efface it. Into

that void it must go, consenting to come undone in the rumbling, in the immediate negation of what it says, in a silence that is not the intimacy of a secret but a pure outside where words endlessly unravel.

From this quotation it can be seen that writing about the literature of the outside demands a theory of the outside--a theory that continuously contests itself and its own certitudes, rather than constantly trying to prove or refine its own sense of correctness. There have been other critics besides Foucault who have also attempted to create this kind of theory, including Blanchot himself in his critical writings, Georges Bataille, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Steven Shaviro, Julia Kristeva, and Allen Weiss. These critics use theory not to reduce texts to a set of principles, but rather to extend the texts, drawing out further implications, or setting up parallel examples, moving between theory and text without giving primacy to one or the other, as so many other literary critics tend to do.

So what is the value of texts and theories that call into question or destroy value? Why do I advocate the study of such texts? Paradoxically, I believe there does emerge a specific kind of value from the study of these texts, which is not to say a specific set of values. Looking again briefly at **Nightwood**, we can see that those who have come into contact with the Doctor and Robin have been changed by the experience: they have become more uncertain of themselves, have let go of their certainty in the truth of their own value systems, and while this has caused them considerable suffering, this has also made them more compassionate, accepting people. Rather than forcing their values onto others, they realize how they have been deluding themselves into believing they could somehow save themselves from the basic facts of their own existence. One character, Felix, who previously saw his son as nothing but a way to gain his own immortality through patriarchal lineage, suddenly realizes that this immortality is impossible, that he and his son will both die, his son probably before him, and in this realization he comes to love his son for himself, not for what he would supposedly bring to the father. In the same way I am suggesting that these texts and theories as a whole call into question the tendency for humans to cling too strongly to truths, values, ideologies, and beliefs, reminding us that everything is a mystery, and that all we know for certain is that we know nothing for certain, and that we will one day die. The result is not that we lose our values, but that we hold on to our values much more actively, much more as a fluid process, and this encounter with the outside means we gain a greater tolerance and acceptance of the other.

Consequently, I am not advocating that this canon replace the other canons, or that these theories become the central theories of a university department. I am resigned to the fact that such works, such theories, will always remain marginal, as they destroy any aspirations to truth, which, as Foucault would say, means they destroy any aspirations to power. The will to power seems a relatively constant fact of human exist-

tence, and universities seem to me institutions not particularly free from this will to power, which tends to reside there disguised as a will to truth, whether that university be in pre or post 1989 Czechoslovakia, or the United States in the 1990s. What teaching such works can accomplish is an opening of the canon to what has variously been termed by theorists otherness, the other night, alterity, heterogeneity, excess, the remainder, and in this paper the outside. It takes a certain degree of courage to do this, for it means that professors have to give up their own pretensions to mastery, and work with students as fellow travelers and explorers, rather than as shepherds leading sheep, or in some cases lambs to the slaughter.

Such an opening would not simply result in the inclusion of a few strange works on the syllabus, but would transform those works already contained within the traditional and the revised canon, for nothing can remain the same when we accept these works as being worthy of study. Suddenly we discover what was there within the canon all along, or perhaps we may rediscover it. Gone are the days when we suggest to a student that they do their thesis on some lesser known author because somehow the more important authors have 'already been covered'. And also the days *should* be gone when we expect a student to cover a 'complete' specified list of 'classics', as if those were the only works worthy of serious consideration. Perhaps even more important than all of this, this sensitivity to 'otherness' may transfer to our sense of ourselves in the world, and our relation to other cultures. The unstated assumption about the superiority of western culture is deeply manifest within the British and American canons, and indeed within all of European culture. The time has come, as the world works its difficult way towards a deeply particular and yet global culture, for us to reconsider the 'outside' as represented by other cultures, so that we don't replace the east/west conflict with simply another projected enemy on a north/south axis.

As Jean François Lyotard has suggested, the postmodern condition, if it means anything, means the end of metanarratives. We are now in a very different world from the one inhabited by those critics who thought we might reach some kind of final synthesis. The new cultural studies, and the study of the 'outside' I advocate in this paper, leads us to realize that opening the canon does not mean simply to consider texts for inclusion within a static canon, but rather it means everything within the canon, and outside of it, is endlessly worthy of study, and that the process of exploring texts is, in Blanchot's words, 'incessant, interminable'.

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