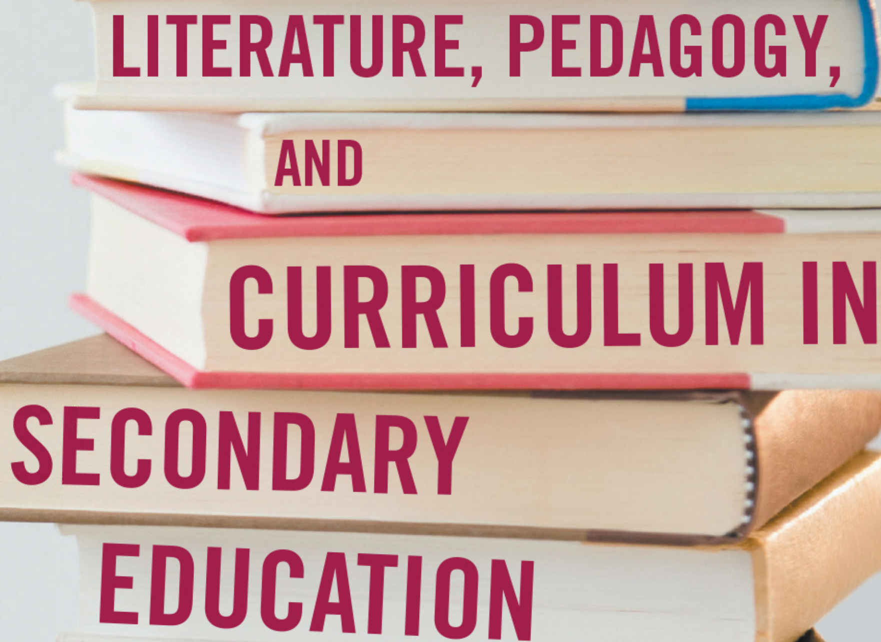

LITERATURE, PEDAGOGY, AND CURRICULUM IN SECONDARY EDUCATION

Examples from France

M. Martin Guiney

Literature, Pedagogy, and Curriculum in Secondary Education

M. Martin Guiney

Literature, Pedagogy, and Curriculum in Secondary Education

Examples from France

palgrave
macmillan

M. Martin Guiney
Department of Modern Languages
and Literatures
Kenyon College
Gambier, Ohio, USA

ISBN 978-3-319-52137-4 ISBN 978-3-319-52138-1 (eBook)
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-52138-1

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017936361

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s) 2017
This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.
The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use.
The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, express or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Cover image © Tetra Images / Alamy Stock Photo

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature
The registered company is Springer International Publishing AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

In memory of Louise Purves Guiney

Acknowledgments

The research for this book was made possible by generous, ongoing support from Kenyon College, and by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Faculty members of the University of Paris III – Sorbonne Nouvelle welcomed me during the 2008–2009 academic year, when I began in earnest to research and reflect on the academic status of literature as a "general education" discipline. I am grateful in particular to Jean Bessière and Stéphane Michaud of the department of Comparative Literature, and to Jean-Louis Chiss, Emmanuel Fraisse, and Dan Savatovsky of the department of *Didactique du Français Langue Etrangère*, for allowing me to sit in on their seminars, meet their students, and spend long hours in discussion with them about the current debates over the literature curriculum in France. Emmanuel Fraisse also played an important role in the genesis of this book by encouraging me to investigate the teaching of literature in American secondary education, and inviting me to publish on the topic in the journals *Revue Internationale d'éducation de Sèvres* and *Revue de l'Association française des acteurs de l'éducation*.

I benefitted from the generous advice, encouragement, and depth of expertise of many other French specialists in the burgeoning field of literary pedagogy, including Pierre Albertini, Anne-Marie Chartier, Violaine Houdart-Merot, Martine Jey, and Isabelle de Peretti. Francis Jacques helped me to clarify the relationship between education and the free-market economy, on which much of my argument depends, and to find an outlet for early speculation on the topic in the *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*.

I have many colleagues in American Universities to thank as well. Gilbert Chaitin has provided support and inspiration, both in person and through his work, as has Dana Lindaman. Ralph Albanese has been a wonderful colleague and collaborator over the years, and I continue to discover new inspiration in his vast and pioneering work on the teaching of classical French literature in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. His generous feedback on an earlier draft of my manuscript was invaluable. I am especially indebted to Leon Sachs, who thoroughly scrutinized each chapter with an unerring critical eye, and made countless suggestions for improvement, both large and small. If this book makes any contribution toward advancing the debate over the value of literature as a required subject in secondary education, it is due to the knowledge, inspiration, and moral support of these many great colleagues and friends, for which I am very thankful.

The *French Review* has published early versions of Chapters Four and Five: "The Literature Problem in the *lycée*: French Education Debates Today" *French Review* 85:4 (March 2012) 642–57; and "How (Not) to Teach French: *Psittacisme* and *Culture de Proximité* in Three Cinematic Representations of School" *French Review* 86:6 (May 2013), 1147–1159. The editor-in-chief, Edward Ousselin, has graciously given permission to incorporate material from these articles.

Finally, I am eternally grateful to my wife, Amy Mock, and to our daughters Zoe and Kate, for their patience, understanding, and the countless other ways in which they have supported me over the years.

Contents

1 Introduction: Literature as Academic Discipline During Hard Times 1

2 Aristocrats or Anarchists: Who Has Power over Literature? 35

3 The *Baccalauréat* Exam and the French Canonical Literary Exercise 61

4 Inventing and Defending the General Education of Literature 89

5 Literature in French Schools After 1968 121

6 How (Not) to Teach: "Parroting" vs "Proximity" in Cinematic Representations of Literary Pedagogy 161

7 Harnessing the Neo-liberal Beast 191

8 Conclusion: The Future of Literary Studies in General Education 233

Bibliography 273

Index 295

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Literature as Academic Discipline During Hard Times

Literary Pedagogy for All?

We begin with two questions. Should literature be a subject taught in school to a general population? If so, how should it be taught?

Only in the last century has secondary education become universal in developed countries, with the increase in the length of compulsory schooling and in the rate of completion of secondary education. Literature has been part of the secondary curriculum for centuries, but now that it is being taught to virtually everybody instead of to a privileged minority, it must justify its "general education" status. Teachers of literature, whatever part of the world in which they operate, have yet to find definitive answers to our opening questions. Soon, they may find that the responsibility for answering those questions is no longer theirs and has been taken over by businesspersons, politicians, and even students. Never before has the world seen as much access to general education, nor has there ever been as much pressure on general education to serve the material needs of society over spiritual ones. From primary education to the university, teachers around the globe face challenges from government agencies, families, and private enterprises, based on the perceived need for practical and economic benefits. As a result of this challenge, new centers of power in the educational landscape seek to hold teachers accountable for supporting economic growth and are eager to suggest ways they can be more effective. The European Union, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation are just some

© The Author(s) 2017

M.M. Guiney, *Literature, Pedagogy, and Curriculum in Secondary Education*, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-52138-1_1

of the transnational organizations that have recently declared themselves to be in the business of education reform, often with a surprising degree of success.

What hope is there for literature, one of the few disciplines in the arts and humanities that is (still) required as part of general education in most countries, under the new regime of economic accountability? Literature will no doubt survive as an area of scholarly research, just as literature itself will continue to have a market presence as a commodity, as the economist Robert Topel suggested in his contribution to a conference on "Education and Economic Development" organized by the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland in 2004: "[E]ducation is itself often a consumption good, which, in turn, enables the consumption and enjoyment of human capital goods such as information, literature, and ideas" (48). To define literature as merely one "human capital good" among others does not, by itself, justify its status in general education. The domination of such economic definitions of value leads to a crisis of legitimacy for literary pedagogy, which fails to make a strong enough economic case for its continued support, not only by parents and students, but by taxpayers. If the crisis continues, such support as there is will gradually disappear, and the study of literature will become the academic equivalent of a niche market.

What are the consequences, if the crisis continues? How different, or worse, is a society in which literature is a high-end commodity and an esoteric field of research, rather than a general education discipline required of all students at the secondary and sometimes tertiary levels? Such questions are relatively new in the United States and much of the Anglophone world, but have occupied French debates over education since the nineteenth century, to a degree that is difficult for citizens of almost any other modern nation to comprehend. In part because literature has played an important role in the successful emergence of French secular nationhood from the shadow of Catholicism,[1] it has a much more secure status in general education than elsewhere. Arguments in justification of this status, like French literary culture more generally, are far more visible and consensual than in the United States. But literary pedagogy in France is not immune to the same market forces and calls for accountability that operate in the rest of the developed world, and the responses to such challenges have dominated academic and journalistic debate. If a solution to the crisis of literature in general education is to be found, it therefore requires a detour through the "crisis of French", a term that has stood for deeply entrenched conflicts over the purposes and methodologies of

literary pedagogy in France for more than a century. In order to understand the relevance of the perennial "crisis" to the general education of literature today, one must begin with the history of the challenge to the educational institution posed by quantifiable standards of evaluation, a challenge that intensifies in periods of economic insecurity. We now turn to the specific place of literature in relation to the dominance of economic definitions of value, before returning to a discussion of the conditions that make the French experience exemplary.

Literary Pedagogy and the Marketplace

If one has ever taught a literature course that students are required to take, in order to receive a secondary school diploma, for example, or as part of an undergraduate core curriculum, one has encountered resistance. So do teachers in other general education disciplines and, to some degree, such is to be expected. It is natural that people should chafe at limits to their freedom of choice, whether in education or any other aspect of their lives. In the case of literature, however, the resistance is intensified by a widely shared sense of injustice, based on literature's lack of obvious market value. Students ask: "What is the use of this class? How will it help me get a job?"[2] These are not questions to be dismissed lightly. Simply put, it is hard to teach literature when the people who pay to make education possible are worried about the future. Instead of "learning for its own sake", they want learning for the sake of reassurance. In September 2015, for example, President Obama unveiled the "college scorecard", a website designed to give prospective students statistical information on "college *opportunity, cost, and value*; and supports for students and families as they search for and select a college suitable to their academic, *career and financial goals*" (White House). I added italics to those words that most clearly address the anxious concerns of the contemporary consumer of higher education, who wants above all to graduate in a timely fashion, unburdened by excessive debt, and prepared for a well-paid and secure professional career.

These are reasonable demands. But where does literature fit in? Are there any objectively measurable "outcomes" of the study of literature that justify the time and money that it requires? These questions do not apply only to higher education. In secondary education, literature and other liberal arts subjects are not only taught, they are mandatory. All school districts in the United States continue to require students to take years of English classes in

which literature still plays an important part. At the same time, every educational level (K-12 and higher) is expected to demonstrate cost-effectiveness, measurable outcomes, and attention to the financial "needs" and "goals" of the general population that increasingly are defined by students, parents, and public and private agencies, rather than by education providers themselves.

The White House is not only responding to public demand for accountability and access to a financially secure future, it is echoing what the business community has been saying for years. Forbes released its list of the top 50 colleges and universities in August 2015 with the following introduction:

> While the cost of U.S. higher education escalates, there's a genuine silver lining in play. A growing number of colleges and universities are now focusing on student-consumer value over marketing prestige, making this a new age of return-on-investment education. This pivot is the result of intense public scrutiny on the substantial cost of a degree vs. long tail worth.... (Howard)

The public has been focusing more than ever, Forbes tells us, on the ratio of cost to "long tail worth" (business jargon for long-term returns), and why not? Rational consumer behavior is rare enough that it should be encouraged whenever it occurs. Education is not an industry like most others, however, and we should not be surprised if it has so much trouble behaving like one. The contradiction between the outside pressure on the education establishment to behave like a commercial service provider, and its own claim to be exempt from market forces, is the subject of this book.

But where does this sudden "intense public scrutiny" on the "long tail worth" of education come from? To those of us who provide education, especially in literature, it feels as if a profession that has evolved over the centuries into an autonomous and ostensibly disinterested enterprise faces an unprecedented challenge. People who are not educators, but rather students, parents, and members of government agencies and business interests are influencing the future of education, not just in the United States but around the world. Among many causes of this change, one of the biggest is fear of economic uncertainty. In order to discuss where the general education of literature has been, where it is now, and where it might be headed in the future, it is first necessary to explore the sources

of this fear that has caused a worldwide revolution in education, for better and for worse.

Citizens of economically developed countries suffer today from a range of collective anxieties that have roots in the previous century. Following the traumas of the Great Depression and World Wars, it is understandable that a strong yearning for economic security and political stability took hold, which led to the successful creation of transnational organizations such as the United Nations (UN) (chartered in 1945), the World Bank (created at the Bretton Woods Conference in 1944), the World Trade Organization (based on the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, first signed in 1948), and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development or OECD (which has its roots in the Marshall Plan of 1948). The birth of these institutions during the four-year period that immediately followed the darkest chapter in modern history has certainly contributed to global economic growth and even reduced the frequency and severity of armed conflicts.[3] Alas, effective cures often have unwanted side effects. The anxieties that organizations, like the UN and the OECD, were designed to repress, have returned under a different form. The new fears include the clash between local, rooted cultures and a free-roaming global, commercial culture, frequently identified as American[4]; the ideology of the unregulated free market or "neo-liberalism", also viewed as a tool of American expansion; and environmental decline fed by global warming, species extinction, and more.

The strategy of global economic growth as a bulwark against crisis is, it seems, itself a crisis. When the oil embargo of 1973–1974 revealed the limits of postwar prosperity, it became harder to ignore the killjoys who had always been skeptical of the new world order, and their nagging questions: Is the standard of living enjoyed by most of the citizens of industrialized nations, and growing percentages of those of developing nations, viable in the long term? Was Marx right to claim that market economies always privilege the few at the expense of the many? And finally, will the ultimate result of global economic growth be the extinction of the human species through environmental pollution and climate change? People have always feared poverty and war, but now they also fear the unintended consequences of the postwar strategy against poverty and war, as economist Mary Wrenn argued in her path-breaking article "The Social Ontology of Fear and Neoliberalism" (2014).

Compared to issues of such consequence, the future of literary studies in our society seems unworthy of attention. And yet, the future of "humanity"

and the future of "the humanities" are related, and even interdependent. The relationship of literary study to economic and ecological forces has always existed. It has often been a symbiotic relationship, as when rising middle-class prosperity increased the demand for literary studies by democratizing the privilege of engaging in the disinterested life of the mind. According to classical tradition, one can say that broad-based economic growth increases the percentage of those who have access to the "liberal arts", in their original definition of education suitable for a free citizen. Conversely, when the middle class shrinks and economic inequality grows, as is the case today in many parts of the world, there is a corresponding increase in utilitarian demands upon the educational supply, and students flee from subject areas that do not lead to employment opportunities.

"General education", on the other hand, is in principle immune to the shifts in demand on the part of students, since it is required. Students cannot act as consumers when they have no choice. Virtually, all of primary education is "general", and in the United States, most of secondary education and at least some of higher education is as well. Literature is a general education discipline like math or history, which means that at various times during their careers students must try to learn it, whether they want to or not. Literature as general education can take many forms, from a tool for acquiring literacy in primary education, to a full-fledged academic discipline in its own right in secondary and tertiary education. While the decentralized structure of American education makes generalizations difficult, we can tell from high school English textbooks that there is a widespread expectation that students become familiar with literature from a young age and have to study it in high school in order to graduate. But why?

Part of literature's importance in education is that it provides shelter from the harsh laws of social exchange. That certainly has been the case in France, where contemporary novelist Pierre Bergounioux has provided an exemplary definition of literature as "counter-discourse" to the quantifiable values currently dominating the field of education:

> La littérature française fut l'effort de cinq siècles pour porter au jour la nature des hommes et des choses.... C'est pour être restés à l'écart de l'échange généralisé, de l'évaluation strictement monétaire que les êtres, les objets, les heures se sont présentés comme autant de mystères enivrants ou terribles....
>
> [French literature has been a 500-year effort to bring to light the nature of humans and things. Because they remained separate from generalized

> exchange, from strict monetary valuation, living beings, objects, and time were presented as so many intoxicating and awe-inspiring mysteries] (171).

To Bergounioux and others, “humans and things”, or at least their authentic value, exist only “separate from generalized exchange”. To put it differently: the dynamics of the market substitute relative value for absolute value, thereby making the “nature” of all phenomena inaccessible to human consciousness. The world of exchange (which covers not only markets, but a wide range of human interactions) is a labyrinth of mirrors, and literature has the potential to save us from getting lost.

It is easy to be seduced by this idealistic notion according to which literature, and art in general, promises of a kind of secular salvation. Many defenses of the humanities rely on the argument that economic criteria are incapable of accounting for the “higher” values that legitimize general education, such as Martha Nussbaum’s aptly titled book *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (2010). The argument derives from money’s power to reduce almost any object or action to a numerical value, including even human beings. Why should the absolute, nonmarket value that we ascribe to individuals not also characterize the products of human creativity?

The argument of literature’s immunity from market forces is persuasive but encounters stiff resistance in the pedagogical context. Even if our education system were not constantly being challenged to produce measurable results in the form of higher test scores or more successful job applicants, a major source of resistance to the belief in its “higher value” would remain. Such stubborn resistance arises precisely because we are dealing here with a belief, rather than a fact. “Learning for the sake of learning” is a beautiful motto, but it is not as popular as many of us in the education profession might think. This is especially true when the learning in question is in a discipline that has little obvious purpose outside of itself, and even less relevance to a student’s future career, as is the case with literature. Most people, I argue, do not accept “disinterested learning” at face value, especially when the subject being learned is the gratuitous, ostensibly priceless universe of artistic creation. As a result, those who want to make literature or art classes required for all students are met with a “faith gap”. Many people accept that such disciplines are of universal importance, but most do not. Hence, arts programs are the first to be considered for elimination when high school budgets are cut, and the content of English classes tends to be advertised as “communication” or

"composition" rather than literature. To what extent, if any, should society be concerned about the "faith gap" that separates part of the educational establishment from the rest of the population?

Answers to the question of whether to close the "faith gap" and more importantly, how to do so, will help determine the future of general education. Underlying the attempt to find answers, over the following chapters, is the assumption that preaching the absolute and universal value of literature, *à la* Bergounioux, is not enough. General education is not about converting people to a creed nor is it purely a matter of classical economics, by which one persuades students that it is in their material self-interest to study certain subjects. I intend to break with the litany of defenses of the "unquantifiable" value of literature and other humanities, by exploring a specific set of questions: why is literature considered a general education discipline, historically and in the present? What relationship does teaching literature have to the economy? What factors, in addition to economic anxiety, explain the resistance to studying literature on the part of students? Can and should society continue to require its members to study literature, just as it requires them to study history, science, and other core subjects? What is the connection between "literariness", the elusive distinguishing characteristic of literary discourse, and the teaching of literature as general education? Finally, are there methods of teaching literature as general education, that do not apply when it is taught as an elective field of specialization, and that may therefore justify literature's privileged status as a subject that every educated person needs to have studied? In other words, how does it embody propaedeutic, foundational knowledge, on the model of medieval higher learning, in which the *trivium* must be studied prior to more specialized knowledge, the *quadrivium*?[5] To begin, we need to look in more detail at the two extremes that define the "faith gap" afflicting the discipline of literature: between the pragmatic, market-based approach to general education, and its antieconomic, idealist "liberal arts" counterpart.

Economics, Education, and the Resistance to Literature

In hard times, often under parental pressure, not only do students gravitate toward educational offerings that promise economic security, such as applied sciences, business, and information technology, they push back

against general education requirements in humanities disciplines and thus contribute to their relative decline. Simply put: why do I need to study Shakespeare when all I want is secure employment? It is no small irony that, when the humanities are in least demand in the free market of education, they are, in a sense, most needed, since they are the source of many of the most effective alternatives to an otherwise unchallenged economic standard of value.[6] "Man shall not live by bread alone" is scripture that can refer to the need for art and literature as well as for God and reminds us that these activities are not an escape from the world, but rather a critical engagement with it, a rebuttal to the ideologies of materialism and positivism that feed the demand for utilitarian education. The best known of the recent briefs in defense of the humanities, such as Anthony T. Kronman's *Education's End: Why Our Colleges and Universities have Given Up on the Meaning of Life* (2007), are very good at justifying the need for categories other than the measurable and the quantifiable. This book is different, not because I take issue with Kronman, Nussbaum, et al (I do not), but because I explore the possibility that there is a path to general literary pedagogy that recognizes rather than dismisses economic concerns and even uses them as a means to achieve an education that is as universally inclusive as the term "general" implies. Nobody has yet found a way to resolve the contradiction between "literary" and "general" in the discipline of "literary general education", and few have tried, at least outside of France. The solution may not yet be at hand, but recognizing the contradiction, and analyzing its history in the French school, is a necessary first step.

There are, of course, many ways in which literature and economics overlap. The subversive and even revolutionary role of art as the embodiment of an alternative conception of value that is not determined by supply and demand, and therefore resists commodification, does not liberate it from the tyranny of the market. The literary field itself has many of the characteristics of a market, and the form of literary consumption that occurs in the school is itself a captive market, subject to a high degree of regulation. The school accepts literary pedagogy's claim on resources such as class time, classroom space, and teaching staff; in return, the professionals responsible for the discipline of literature are not entirely free to determine its goals and methodologies. Like artistic production itself, literary pedagogy costs money, and those who control public or private funding demand a return on their investment. Under such conditions, even literary pedagogy, especially when it is mandatory, must

account for its contribution to the material conditions (schools, staffing) that make education possible, by showing that it helps train better workers, who then become taxpayers and philanthropists. This is the economic vicious circle from which humanists have always fought to escape, with mixed results.

Certainly, there have been times when it looked as if the humanist fight to escape from the market had succeeded. For most of the second half of the twentieth century, financial capital provided ample support to cultural capital, by ensuring that a portion of the resources for education be reserved for “disinterested” academic pursuits such as literature and the arts. Capitalism has subsidized the general education of literature, just as it subsidizes museums, theaters, and musical ensembles that would languish at best if they had to compete in the open market. One does not send tax-deductible gifts to multinational “wealth creators” like Unilever or General Motors, since they are expected to take care of themselves (various forms of corporate welfare and trade protectionism notwithstanding). Similarly, public and private agencies that allocate funds to education do so on the understanding, still widely shared, that much worthwhile and even necessary educational activity is noncommercial in the sense that it does not have and should never have any direct bearing on economic growth. More and more, however, the belief that education should be protected from unregulated market forces is eroding, and not just in the United States.

“Core curriculum” and “general education requirements” are practices in public and private education that disproportionately benefit those disciplines that students are generally disinclined to choose of their own free will. In a free educational market, students enroll in subjects that they like (which could be anything, depending on the individual), or ones they think they need. Literature as an academic discipline would lose market share, if students who neither enjoy it nor consider it useful were not required to study it. Whatever power literature still has to attract students beyond its small natural constituency depends on two factors: the ability of the discipline to market itself in order to increase its consumer base, and society’s willingness to subsidize the discipline by allocating the resources needed to impose it on students, sometimes against their will. Each factor, not surprisingly, comes with a long list of problems.

We now have defined three types of closely related links between the academic discipline of literary studies and financial capital. The first is

antithetical: the ideal of "disinterested" education, which is a reflection of the perceived incompatibility of art with the law of supply and demand.[7] The second is sociological: cultural and financial capital are mutually dependent, since the production of wealth leads to its unequal distribution. The need to reproduce the conditions of production that benefit a particular social class, described in Chapter 23 of *Das Kapital*,[8] generates a kind of social hierarchy of taste, which literary study helps to perpetuate. The third is the most basic: education costs money, and those academic disciplines that make no obvious contribution to economic growth survive, and sometimes thrive, according to the size of the subsidy that public or private entities are willing to allocate. The subsidy, in turn, exerts a power over "unproductive" disciplines that pushes them toward proving their value as economic stimulants, that is, toward becoming productive. An example of this insidious *quid pro quo* on a global scale is the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) test that I discuss in Chapter 7: transnational nongovernmental organizations (the OECD, in this case) advocate for a greater role of education in promoting economic growth. Through various means, including testing of students on a massive scale, that lead to immensely powerful and controversial rankings of national education systems, they acquire authority over the classroom. In order for a country to improve its ranking on the reading comprehension portion of PISA, it must conform to its standards. Interestingly, as we shall see, PISA does include literature as part of reading competency. The question is whether literature according to the OECD, an organization designed to solve economic problems, is significantly different from literature according to humanistic tradition in which it has been taught up until now.

Those who allocate public or private wealth subsidize a range of academic disciplines that otherwise would decline in importance, or even disappear.[9] The danger of subsidies is that they depend on the good graces of the underwriters, just as revenues of a private enterprise depend on the demand for its goods or services. Even though education tends to be publicly funded through taxes, rather than privately funded through profits, any belief that public education is better protected from market influences than private education has to confront the inconvenient fact that private schools and colleges in the United States generally do a better job of promoting the general education of arts and humanities than do public ones. Of course, one reason is that private secondary and higher education on the Eton-Oxbridge model plays a bigger role than public

education in the reproduction of the conditions of wealth production mentioned earlier. The issue is not to recognize the obvious fact that the liberal arts continue to serve as a marker of class, but rather to debate the claim that their dissemination in *all* of society is a universal good that must be pursued, even at a great cost.

In the United States as well as other industrialized nations, the merging of private interests with the ostensibly universal mission of the educational enterprise has a long history, symbolized by auto executive Charles E. Wilson's claim that "what [is] good for General Motors [is] good for the country".[10] When members of the liberal arts establishment complain today about the "corporatization" of higher education, or the transformation of their schools into vocational centers, they often claim that private interests, allied with government agencies, wield illegitimate power over what are supposed to be autonomous, self-governing institutions. Local school boards in the United States, for example, are under pressure from government initiatives such as the *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001 and the *Common Core State Standards Initiative*, combined with the *Race to the Top* federal grants, of 2009. In response to such pressure, often in the form of mandated testing that determines the allocation of funds, such as the linking of *Race to the Top* grants with adoption of the *Common Core* standards, the fear is that schools may overemphasize "STEM" disciplines[11] at the expense of the humanities and fine arts, or define reading comprehension purely as a practical rather than literary skill, reinforcing the belief that the main purpose of education is to promote economic growth.

The Elitist Origins and Democratic Past of Literary Pedagogy

The tension between "useful" disciplines that contribute to economic growth over "disinterested" ones that do not, has existed since long before our time. The disciplines of "*belles lettres*" and "*beaux arts*" have frequently come under attack as privileges of wealth and class, in contrast to the (relatively) more democratic science fields, and pre-professional disciplines such as law and business. Perhaps because of the elitist tradition according to which instruction in those areas was reserved for the free citizens of classical antiquity, European aristocrats, and members of the *grande bourgeoisie*, its position in universal public education has always been a defensive one. Why,

ask the challengers, should the general population be required to pursue an education that throughout history has been mostly a matter of privilege? Is literary study, since that is the specific discipline in question here, a general education requirement simply as compensation, even revenge, for those many centuries during which most people did not have access to it?

The answer to the last question is a qualified "yes". Before the advent of universal secondary education, literature, especially of the canonical, that is, classical (Greek and Latin) variety, was a luxury product, a status it has not entirely shed in the intervening years. But what explains its importance in the first place? In order to be in danger of being dropped from the general education curriculum, it had to be added at some previous point in time. In fact, not only had literary pedagogy always been considered a luxury reserved for an elite, so had education in general. High schools, colleges, and universities were until the last century exclusive institutions. Between 1900 and 1940, the percentage of the American population to graduate from high school by the age of 18 rose from a mere 7 percent to 49 percent, and to 75 percent by the end of the twentieth century (Lassonde). In 1940, barely 5 percent of the population completed at least four years of college, whereas today, approximately one-third of all Americans earn a bachelor's degree before the age of 30 (Snyder 8). The point is, while the secondary and tertiary curricula changed dramatically along with huge enrollment increases over the course of the twentieth century, certain parts of them did not. The idea that literature should be a required subject for the top 5 or 7 percent of the population made sense, even if only as a means of social, cultural, and economic reproduction. Surprisingly, as access to secondary and tertiary education improved, the principle that literature should be a required subject did not disappear. Since the nineteenth century, in France, the United States, and much of the developed world, *the "privilege" of studying literature in school gradually became a "right"*. One of the aims in the coming chapters is to explore how and why literature became a "right", and whether such a status can survive the contemporary demand that education help lower unemployment. As Senator Marco Rubio said to the TV cameras while campaigning for the 2016 Republican nomination, we need "less philosophers and more welders".

The status of literature as general education has many explanations. One needs to identify those explanations and determine which of them, if any, are valid. One explanation is simply that literature has been taught to the greatest possible numbers because modern, industrialized nations

could afford it. For much of the previous century, literature teachers successfully resisted challenges to their legitimacy thanks to economic growth and the consequent prosperity of high schools and universities. Even as returning soldiers flocked to higher education under the G.I. Bill, badly needing to start peacetime careers and to receive an education consistent with their material needs and ambitions, colleges and universities could afford to subsidize liberal arts disciplines that did not directly answer those needs, funneling veterans into "great books" programs and other subjects once regarded as irrelevant to a general population. Painful as it is to admit, most teachers of literature have been living on a type of welfare for the last 70 years, and the public tolerance for all forms of public subsidy is running out.

Now that the era of relative abundance is over, many institutions are reducing and even eliminating programs, while emphasizing the material rewards of a secondary diploma or college degree over immaterial ones. University language and literature departments in the United States, for example, face a double threat: of being reduced on the one hand to academic niche disciplines that cater only to the tiny number of students who desire to become experts, and on the other hand, to a "service" role of providing marketable linguistic and cultural skills to enhance the employability of future professionals. The defenders of literature, in a panic, argue for the practical value of such fields for general education, that is to say their "relevance" in the broadest sense, as the Modern Language Association did in its 2009 *Report to the Teagle Foundation* that gave a long list of practical reasons for increasing the numbers of majors in language and literature.

If literature classes were not required as part of general education, it is likely that far fewer students would enroll. After all, 100 percent of high school graduates have studied literature, but less than 5 percent of college students choose it as a major (MLA *Report to the Teagle Foundation* 16). Even taking into account the fact that the number of majors available in college is far higher than the number of subjects taught in high school, this suggests that literature classes would be fewer and further between, if secondary education operated more like a free market. Other general education subjects such as math are not exactly popular, and no doubt would also have far fewer students if they had to compete for enrollments, but it does not follow that they suffer from the same crisis of legitimacy that literature does. In fact, math has the unusual handicap of being the first academic discipline associated with a debilitating mental condition,

"math anxiety", identified in 1972 (Richardson and Suinn). In spite of the irrational fear it elicits in a large segment of the population, however, most people accept that math helps to develop cognitive skills and has myriad practical applications in society, while they do not extend the same credit to literature.

The fact that literacy rates today are at a historic high does not have much effect on literary education. When it comes to reading literature outside the school, there is statistical evidence that it is in decline. A recent (2012) British survey on reading among school-age children states that "[w]hat was initially believed to be a phenomenon of reading migration from print to digital, has in fact turned out to be an increasing trend to consume information in ways that do not involve reading or writing text in any way, and to embrace instead video/image-based communication" (quoted in Lirca 1). The *National Endowment for the Arts* report called *Reading at Risk* (2004) reached similar conclusions, although the follow-up report, *Reading on the Rise* (2009), provided a more optimistic assessment. Literature's decline becomes a rallying cry in polemical works such as Mark Bauerlein's *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future* (2008). Since most students read less, do not recognize the study of literature as a useful form of cognitive development like math, nor see it as producing benefits transferrable to other disciplines or to professional opportunities, there is little public support for its continued "gen ed" status, or much probability that students would chose it as an elective. It is not enough to make a philosophical or practical argument for the value of literature as a pillar of general education if its consumers, the students themselves, are not on board.

The issue is simple: student resistance to the general education of literature would diminish if they believed that the requirement is justified. In a demand-based environment, lack of student commitment threatens to further marginalize our profession, since administrators are less likely to protect curricular requirements that students openly resist. In a "pure" competitive market, such as the one for carbonated soft drinks, the nature of the product is determined by consumer demand, or what consumers can be persuaded to demand (which raises the vexed question of whether markets respond to a demand or create it, an economic conundrum to which we will return). Less pure is the market for classical music or Shakespearean theater, both of which depend on public subsidies or "protectionism" and therefore face their own existential threat. Quite a few people are predisposed against

protectionism or anything that smacks of commerce regulation, no matter the intrinsic value of the product. It is just such interference in the dynamics of the free market that angered opponents of the Affordable Care Act, including Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia who compared the "individual mandate" to purchase health insurance to a legal obligation to purchase broccoli.[12] If one does not believe that health care deserves protection from pure market forces, then one is unlikely to believe that literary study does.

In this book, I will address directly the problem of "demand" as applied to education, instead of denying any relevance to the term by hiding behind the veil of education's "disinterestedness", or of its inviolability by materialistic, market-based values. Now that we have reached the point of public resistance, both against the financial costs of education, and against the ideology of its purported immunity from market forces, the slogan that it is "not for profit" can only go so far.

A quick example will illustrate our profession's dependence upon student support for general education requirements. At my alma mater, the University of Massachusetts, students for decades have had to take a minimum number of credits in the Humanities division, including one literature class. Though my professors referred to the "gen ed" classes they taught to a classroom or auditorium full of mostly pre-professional majors as "service courses", they also enjoyed the challenge of reaching out to a general student population and realized that such courses allowed their departments to thrive, creating demand for discussion sections led by their graduate students. Without exception, they took these "service courses" very seriously, first as a way of convincing a broad segment of society of the value of literary study, secondly as a way of securing their departments' status in the university. How many other institutions, especially public ones, continue to value literature enough to make it a requirement? Not SUNY, Albany, which has only a broad humanities requirement and is notorious for having eliminated several literature majors in recent years, including French (though to their credit, they maintain an undergraduate language requirement, while Massachusetts does not).[13] Unless a case can be made that most students should experience literature and that even majoring in literary studies is not an upper-class privilege but a reasonable and useful option for any student, the warnings will come true: fewer students will study our disciplines, and many of them, having read the writing on the wall, will do so primarily for pragmatic reasons, such as acquiring communicative proficiency (in their own language as well as others) in order to increase their marketability.

Indeed, the trend is to enlist economic arguments in defense of the humanities. In 2009, a conference, "Meeting the Current Challenges: the Humanities and Employability, Entrepreneurship and Employer Engagement" took place in London under the auspices of the Centre for Languages, Linguistics, and Area Studies for the purpose of "[d]emonstrating that the study of the humanities creates economic, social and cultural value has particular poignancy in the present economic climate". This strategy of adopting the vocabulary of neo-liberalism in defense of humanities subjects may backfire, however. Already, we see the following scenario being played out: administrations demand linguistic proficiency at the expense of cultural knowledge (as if the two were unrelated), under the assumption that it has measurable benefits in today's globalized economy, and will consider courses in literature (as opposed to ones in composition and language, filled with literature though such courses may be) ripe for elimination when forced to make cuts to their instructional budgets. Defending the "market value" of the humanities by arguing that the interpretive and communicative skills they require will help students become more successful entrepreneurs, executives, and employees is no doubt important. One must be careful, however, not to present secondary outcomes of humanistic education as primary outcomes: we must not confuse the tangible economic benefits of humanistic disciplines with the *raison d'être* of those disciplines, which is to be found within them, and not in the world of economics. But how do we convince the world and that most important constituency of all, our students, of this non-relative "value" that exists separately from any market?

There is no shortage of attempts to do exactly that. Eloquent defenses of the humanities, not only of their ability to foster economic growth (the "Humanities and Entrepreneurship" conference mentioned earlier), but to provide such growth with an ultimate goal outside of itself, abound in the pages of the *New York Review of Books* and its ilk, and in polemical essays accessible mainly to people who already have benefitted from liberal arts education (in addition to the aforementioned titles by Martha Nussbaum and Anthony Kronman, recent contributions to this genre include works by Fareed Zakaria and Paul Jay). Such essays, along with documents such as the American Association of Colleges and Universities reports: *College Learning for the New Global Century* (2007) and *Making the Case for Liberal Education: Responding to the Challenges* (2006) are major statements, fraught with a sense of urgency and should be read by all those who care about the future of our profession. Just like the 2009 London Conference, however, there

is one respect in which these efforts fall short: their intended audience includes policy makers, business leaders, academics, and other groups, but there is one vital constituency to which the above-mentioned essays are not addressed: students and parents. Those for whose benefit education exists in the first place generally do not read about the crisis of the Humanities in books, or the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, or even the *New York Times*. Yet it is the choices students make, and the experiences they have in the classroom, that will ultimately decide our future. We must now turn our attention away from the altar and attend to members of the congregation, many of whom are in attendance only because they have no choice.

The classroom is one of the most important spaces in which the attack on and defense of non-market-based value is acted out. The failure of literary theorists to agree on a definition of literariness has unintentionally contributed to a recurring malaise in the teaching profession. Symptoms of the malaise fall into two main categories: literature attracts a smaller percentage of university students than in the past, and professors are also more divided concerning the content and methodologies that are appropriate to our discipline. In 1966, according to the Modern Language Association, 7.47 percent of bachelor degrees awarded by American universities were in the discipline of English, and 2.94 percent were in foreign languages (which at the time was almost exclusively a "foreign literature" major). In 2004, the numbers were 3.74 and 1.05, respectively (United States Department of Education survey statistics, quoted in MLA, *Report to the Teagle Foundation on the Undergraduate Major in Language and Literature*, 17). Within living memory, therefore, literature accounted for more than 10 percent of the majors in higher education, compared to well under 5 percent more recently. Some of the decline, of course, is demographic: a far higher percentage of the overall population attends college today than in 1966, and the new student populations tend to be more focused on career training than on the liberal arts (the actual *number* of students specializing in literature and languages has declined only slightly over the same period). Our profession cannot help blaming itself for its failure to benefit from the increase in numbers of students, however, and justifiably so. Given the fact that literature is a required subject for all high school students, should not college professors be more successful in attracting them to our classes? In short: what is it about our discipline that turns people off?

That question has received a lot of attention over the years. When theorists of literature turn their attention from problems of reading to

problems of teaching, it is often in order to address a "crisis". More than 25 years ago, Harvard University Press published an anthology titled *Teaching Literature: What is Needed Now*, implying the existence of a problem (the teaching of literature "needs" something), and its urgency (it must be solved "now"). The problem has not gone away. "General education" in the Humanities suffers the same fate as "basic research" in the sciences. People have become increasingly skeptical of the claim that society is best served by supporting scientific inquiry in a purely disinterested way, through public rather than private financing. Private funds are invested in order to produce immediate returns, which is why Big Pharma, for example, may be more interested in developing marketable drugs that treat the symptoms of cancer than in finding a cure for the disease, a far riskier and longer-term gamble. Is a similar short-sightedness squeezing literature out of general education to make room for linguistic skills demanded by "job creators"? But while one can point to the long-term benefits of basic scientific research and argue that such benefits are ultimately greater than the more commercial, short-term applications discovered by privately funded research, what are the equivalent benefits of the similarly disinterested study of literature? Reading poems and novels will never lead to the discovery of a cure for cancer or even of a palliative treatment, so why should we continue to support such activities with ever-decreasing household incomes and public treasure? If even basic research and its many proven, measurable contributions to society are under threat, can there be any hope at all for the survival of literary pedagogy? To find out, one needs to return to the fundamental question behind the very notion of teaching literature. The first question is not whether literary pedagogy inhibits social mobility by preserving an unequal distribution of cultural capital, or encourages mobility by providing more students with better professional skills, but simply: what is literature, and what distinguishes it as an object of study from other types of discourse?

Literariness, the Indispensable Foundation of Literary Pedagogy

The Russian formalists first produced a definition of "literariness" as a function of language that is separate from goal-oriented communication. One consequence of this distinction is that most linguistic functions can be objectively evaluated according to the degree of success they attain, whereas literariness cannot. In other words, the metaphor of language as a system of exchanges among people, on the model of economics, falls short

as a way to describe literary texts, which seem to exist independently from the mundane concerns of what Stéphane Mallarmé called “the language of the tribe”.[14] Of course, such a definition of literariness risks falling into the trap of essentialism, an ideological tool that promotes the belief that truth exists outside the confines of history. Such an exalted definition of art, like religion itself, reassures the bourgeoisie that its particular class interests are universal, and many have indeed accused those who believe in artistic autonomy of political naïveté or bad faith. That being said, the idea that art and commerce are antithetical is powerful, especially as it developed in France during the nineteenth century. When Pierre Bourdieu discussed the autonomy of literature (e.g., in *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, 1992), the idea of its immunity to economic concerns was crucial. I argue that it is also one of the reasons why there is so much opposition, especially in France, to linking literary pedagogy to nonliterary concerns, such as developing communication skills that might have practical and even commercial applications.

The history of the concept of literariness, and the difficulty of relating it to an economic model, will play a major role in this book. Indeed, while the term “literariness” has eluded attempts at definition in spite of the groundbreaking efforts of Roman Jakobson and his colleagues, the division between practical and literary language continues to be fundamental to any discussion of literary pedagogy. That is because, as we will see repeatedly in the following chapters, the unending controversy over literary pedagogy can almost always be described as an argument about whether the literary function of discourse can be *useful*, in a specific way that other functions of discourse cannot. To put in its simplest form, the debate pits “literarians” against “utilitarians”. The neologism “literarian” applies to those who subscribe to Roman Jakobson’s theory, in his famous essay “Linguistics and Poetics” (1960), of a poetic function of language that cannot be reduced to practical considerations:

> [T]he message as such, focus on the message for its own sake, is the POETIC function of language. This function cannot be productively studied out of touch with the general problems of language, and, on the other hand, the scrutiny of language requires a thorough consideration of its poetic function. Any attempt to reduce the sphere of the poetic function to poetry or to confine poetry to the poetic function would be a delusive oversimplification. The poetic function is not the sole function of verbal art but only its dominant, determining function, whereas in all other verbal

> activities it acts as a subsidiary, accessory constituent. This function, by promoting the palpability of signs, deepens the fundamental dichotomy of signs and objects. Hence, when dealing with the poetic function, linguistics cannot limit itself to the field of poetry. (69–70)

Jakobson describes two very important characteristics of literariness, or what he calls the poetic function, as distinct from the five other linguistic functions he identified: referential, emotive, conative, phatic, and metalingual (66–9). The first is that the poetic, which is also the literary, focuses on "the message for its own sake". There is no *exchange*, or social relationship that pertains exclusively to the poetic function, while there is for all other linguistic functions. That is another way of saying that literature as such functions in relation to itself and not to the world, a scientific expression of the "art for art's sake" credo. Putting literature in relationship to the world is therefore to deemphasize the poetic function, the "dominant" characteristic of a literary text, and to risk a fatal betrayal of the legitimate foundation of the discipline. However, the poetic function is a "subsidiary, accessory constituent" of *all* verbal activities. From this, one can conclude that according to Jakobson there is no such thing as a "pure" literary text, since the poetic function is a dominant, but not an exclusive, characteristic of literature (and some literary texts are more poetic than others). Conversely, there is no such thing as verbal activity that is utterly devoid of literariness, since one cannot produce an utterance that does not display some degree of the poetic function; that would be as absurd as to say that one can produce an utterance devoid of form. In fact, there are many utterances that are not literary because of the context in which they occur but that are very literary in their use of some aspect or aspects of the poetic function, such as the campaign slogan "I like Ike" (70).

Whether Jakobson's essay approaches the goal of a scientific definition of literariness is a fascinating question but goes beyond the confines of this study. For us, its importance lies in the ability to define literariness as a separate characteristic of human discourse, and yet one that is not exclusive to literature *per se*. It opens the way toward a reconciliation between: the "literarians", those who believe it is a violation to teach literary reading as a skill applicable to other human activities, such as getting a job, or to consider literary texts as commensurable with nonliterary texts, such as office memos or sales agreements; and the "utilitarians", who by and large do not share such inhibitions. In his insistence that linguists must deal