CHAPTER 8. CAN DARTMOUTH REVIVE OLD WISDOM WITHOUT SILENCING NEW VOICES?

Here is my question for this chapter.

As I explained at the beginning of the previous chapter, the English Department of Dartmouth College is now far more diverse than it was in in the fall of 1965. While it was once all male and all white, its white males have shrunk to 14 even as its total number has grown to more than 30, including 0 white women, 3 Black women, one Black man, 3 Asian women, and one Native American woman.

Unfortunately, however, this diversity of gender, color, and ethnicity in the English department faculty has precipitated a major shrinkage in its attention to major authors and its commitment to the great tradition of the humanities, which—whether we like it or not—will always be powerfully inspired by the writing of dead white males. And I am here to argue that now more than ever, we need their enduring wisdom.

Just now across the political landscape of this country spreads a vast toxic tide of contempt for all things old, white, and male—above all for Joe Biden, whose long-accumulated wisdom and whose fifty years of experience in national and international politics count for absolutely nothing against the flaming youth of his orange-haired rival. In his fiery State of the Union speech of March 7, he has gone

far to demolish this gross underestimation of his vitality and sense of purpose. But he has not yet vanquished the contempt for age and ancient wisdom that has usurped our national discourse. On the contrary, it goes hand in hand with a consensus that has been overtaking institutions of higher learning in this country for the past several decades.

Since the list price of a college education is now fast approaching 100K *per year* at colleges like Dartmouth, students can no longer afford to waste their time with abstruse philosophers like Plato or Aristotle or long-winded poets like Homer or Milton or incomprehensible playwrights like Shakespeare or—God forbid!—the verbal cobwebs of James Joyce. Those dead white authors of poetry and philosophy and exhausted mythology have absolutely nothing useful to say to young men and women facing the practical challenges of today's world. What they need are *marketable* skills in data mining, engineering, high tech, and hard science. Above all they must learn the fine arts of quantification: how to *count,* even if they end up knowing—in the words of Oscar Wilde—the price of everything and the value of nothing.

In short, all they need are the skills that will rapidly send them up the ladder of advancement to the penthouse suites from which cozy perch they will soon add some modest fraction of their fresh-earned millions to beating the fund-raising record already achieved by the current campaign, which has reportedly raised 3.377 BILION for dear old Dartmouth.

But has anyone stopped to wonder about the price we have paid at Dartmouth for marginalizing the study of the humanities, for gradually but nonetheless relentlessly ripping out the very heart of what John Dickey once called the "liberal and liberating arts"?

After all, Dartmouth still has a Humanities Division, does it not?

Yes, but did you know that until 1958, *all* first-year students at Dartmouth *took one full year* (then two semesters) of humanities, moving from ancient authors such as Plato and Homer to modern authors such as William Faulkner and Albert Camus? But when semesters gave way to quarters (because our scientific colleagues thought quarters were more efficient), those two semesters shrank to just two quarters—only one of which kept something of the intellectual heft and challenging thrust of its year-long precursor.

During my first few years at Dartmouth in the late sixties, nearly all first-year students read Shakespeare's *King Lear,* Milton's *Paradise Lost,* and Melville's *Moby Dick.* Yes indeed, we force-fed them like Strasbourg geese on the canonical texts of dead white men. We wasted their time with a play about the agonizingly fraught relations between parents and their children (how totally irrelevant is that?), with a gigantic epic poem about a Satan who leads his followers into a doomed rebellion against legitimate authority (wholly irrelevant to our times, right?) and about a couple who come to grief because of an argument involving the woman's quest for independence (still *more* irrelevant, right?). And *Moby*

Dick! Good God. A crazy story about a madman's quest for revenge on the white whale that chomped his leg off? (Whoops! Come to think of it, Trump has just vowed to avenge himself on all those who chopped his second term off, but of course that's irrelevant too.) Anyway, two hours of *Jaws* is surely worth more than the thirty hours it would take to slog through Melville's turgid prose, even if the magnificent soliloquies of Ahab sometimes *do* rival in eloquence and poignancy the poetry of Milton and the mesmerizingly dramatic force of Shakespeare. But who cares? Here at Dartmouth we started getting *efficient,* and we just couldn't afford to waste any more time on the works of dead white men.

By 1970, therefore, the English Department stopped requiring that all sections of first-year English read *Paradise Lost*, and from there it was just a short step to section instructor's choice. Students could read anything at all chosen by the instructor, which meant of course that first-year English was no longer a common rite of initiation into the company of the humanistically educated—no longer the kind of transformative experience that stretched young minds as they *must* be stretched if they are ever to grow beyond the mental playpens of adolescence.

Yet strangely enough, even the oldest of epics sometimes speak directly to the greatest crises of our own time. Take for instance Homer's *Iliad,* which ends up with one of the most powerful scenes of wartime grief ever written. After Achilles kills Hector, the very last of Priam's sons to die at the hands of the

Greeks, the old king goes to Achilles, kneels at his feet, kisses "his terrible, man-killing hands," and begs him for the body of his son. "Revere the gods, Achilles!" he says. "Pity me in my own right, remember your own father!" (*Iliad,* trans. Robert Fagles 24. 561, 588-89). Priam thus prompts Achilles to remember not only his own father but also his beloved friend Patroclus, whom Hector had previously killed:

> And overpowered by memory
> both men gave way to grief. Priam wept freely
> for man-killing Hector, throbbing, crouching
> before Achilles' feet as Achilles wept himself,
> now for his father, now for Patroclus once again,
> and their sobbing rose and fell throughout the house.
>
> (*Iliad,* trans. Fagles 24. 594-99)

Sobbing for a beloved father, a beloved son, and a beloved friend, sobbing for all the pain that each has suffered from the merciless cycle of killing and retaliation, **these two men weep also for us.** At this very moment in our own history, when grief for the many thousands of Palestinian civilians killed by the Israeli bombing of Gaza clamors to drown out grief for the hundreds of Israelis killed by Hamas, could any Israeli ever weep with a Palestinian as Achilles did with Priam? Or are the two sides doomed forever to attack and revenge, to kill and

retaliate, to relieve their desperation—as Milton's Satan does in *Paradise Lost* —"only in destroying"?

Questions like these can make the oldest of epics burn with fresh fire in the heart of today's students. But if the prospect of a year long course on the works of mainly dead white males still seems deadly to the sacred cause of *diversity* and deaf to the voices of ethnic minorities, to men and women of color, or of African ancestry. And the sheer folly of making *diversity* a zero-sum game —where every white male must be simply *replaced* by a non-white author of any other gender or ethnicity—becomes obvious once we really dive into great works of literature.

I have taught and studied and written about literature throughout my adult life for the simple reason that I love it. One big bad reason why the humanities are shedding so many students right now is that too many of its professors—especially professors of literature—don't love it. They strive instead to enlist it in wars against racism, misogyny, homophobia, capitalism, power in all forms, and every kind of foundational assumption which they believe literature is ordained to deconstruct. Though generally familiar with such landmark studies as Roland Barthes' *The Pleasure of the Text* (1975), they stigmatize reading for pleasure: if you savor so much as a single well-wrought sentence, they believe, you sacrifice the political value of a text—especially its deconstructive energy—to a purely

aesthetic *frisson* that can feed only the jaded appetites of the elite, not the hungry mouths of the politically oppressed.

If that sounds both reductive and reactionary, let me give you a good example of exactly what I mean.

Almost fifty years ago, in an article published by the *Massachusetts Review* in 1977, the Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe threw a rhetorical bomb. He lobbed it at Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness (*1899), the story of a would-be emissary of European light whose lust for ivory among natives of the Belgian Congo drives him into madness and human sacrifice. But in *Things Fall Apart* (1958), his first novel, Achebe implicitly challenged Conrad's version of Africa by re-creating the pre-colonial life of southeastern Nigeria and its European invasion in the late nineteenth century. In 1977, his article made the challenge explicit. Meticulously analyzing Conrad's novel, he clearly showed how much it is driven by ignorance of native customs and the natives themselves, who barely qualify as human beings: they are simply "not inhuman." And from this analysis Achebe concluded that "Joseph Conrad was a thoroughgoing racist."

But was he really a *thoroughgoing racist*? Could that epithet fairly describe a writer whose novella—whatever its blind spots—had ruthlessly undermined the assumption that white men are inherently superior to blacks? Years after publishing his charge, Achebe himself in my hearing came close to retracting it. In

the winter of 1990, when he visited Dartmouth as a Montgomery Fellow, I had the pleasure of meeting him at a seminar for Dartmouth faculty, and we could hardly resist asking him about *The Heart of Darkness.* His response was telling. Besides admitting that he had overstated his case against Conrad, he also stated that *Heart of Darkness* still deserves to be taught and read, just as he read it himself at the age of 14. And he clearly implied that it had played an important part—positive as well as negative—in his own literary education. In short, even though Achebe may be best known for biting the hand that fed him, Conrad's novella undoubtedly fed the 14-year-old mind of the boy who grew up to write *Things Fall Apart.*

Heart of Darkness has much to teach any aspiring writer. Consider just this single sentence about the River Congo:

> Going up that river was like traveling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted upon the earth and the big trees were kings.

This one sentence could easily generate a whole class if not a whole course in the art of writing. First of all, the parallel structure of its opening clause neatly brackets voyaging through space with traveling through time. Though I have co-authored several textbooks on grammar and rhetoric, I have belatedly realized something never mentioned by any of them: one very good way of learning to write well is quite simply *listening to the body* and reviving its earliest moves. Long before we learn to talk, let alone to write, we learn coordination, including parallel structure. Instinctively we start to crawl by reaching forward first

with one hand and the opposite leg, then with the other hand and the other leg, and so on. Essentially, Conrad's sentence re-enacts our very first moves. It starts by crawling along with parallel phrases about space and time.

But that's just for a start. Consider what Conrad does with metaphor in what comes next, when "vegetation *rioted* upon the earth." Could anything be more startling than this way of picturing vegetation, which we commonly visualize as just sitting there and vegging out? In a poem called "To His Coy Mistress," Andrew Marvell once compared his love to a huge, sluggish vegetable that would grow "vaster than empires, and more slow." But if you've ever traveled in a tropical country, as I have, you can see how fast the roads can be overtaken by roadside shrubs, which in the Yucatan (for instance) have to be cut back almost every day. Whether or not you've ever seen such runaway growth, Conrad's metaphor ignites in your imagination a whole new picture of vegetation as something not just alive but running wild.

No charge of racism, however justified, can erase that verbal picture—or the picture of big trees as kings. To study a sentence such as this is to learn what I have long believed. As teachers of literature, nothing we do is more important—*more important*—than cultivating within our students a profound and lasting admiration for the *beauty as well as power* of the English language as deployed in works of literature that have stood the test of time. At their best, they radiate a kind of beauty that transcends the humanities, that permeates the sciences as much

as the arts. In mathematics and physics as well as in literature, Marilynne Robinson has recently dared to read configurations of beauty as the nothing less than "the signature of God."

So I don't for a moment underestimate or overlook the power of literature: its power to unmask hypocrisy, self-delusion, cruelty, and all of the ways in which we may blind ourselves to our own complicity in oppressing the powerless. But I firmly maintain that literature works quite as much by means of beauty *as well as power*, and that great literature embodies both.

So the question now commonly, anxiously, and repeatedly asked—"Why do we need the humanities?"—is exactly the question I have tried to answer in my final book—*Diving into Literature*—by telling my own story just before the metastatic prostate cancer that has been slowly usurping my skeleton for the past six years finally does its worst.

How did I come to know and love language, literature, and the art of writing? When all three seem almost eclipsed by the wizardry of Artificial Intelligence and ChatGPT, which promise to do all our reading *and* writing for us, can my story be anything more than a dead letter? I hope not. And just as strongly, I hope to explain how an academic writer learned to practitioner throughout his life the art of writing—which I have never presumed to master—even as the professoriat rose, like figures basketed under a vast balloon, to the almost

unbreathable air of high theory, leaving far behind them what Yeats once called "the foul rag and boneshop of the heart."

The notion that we have to jettison poets such as Yeats in quest of high theory or the Great God Diversity is just plain nuts. If you really want to be up to date with ground-breakingly original contemporary fiction about Black American life, why not teach the very latest novel by a Black writer named Percival Everett? Best known now as the author of a novel called *Erasure* (2001), which has just become one of the most astoundingly original movies ever made (*American* Fiction), Everett has also written a brand new novel called *James* (2024), which brilliantly re-writes *Huckleberry Finn* from the viewpoint of Huck's companion, the enslaved boy named N_____ Jim.

Is it not obvious that any student—or any*one*, for that matter—who wants to understand this new novel would need to know at least *something* about *Huckleberry Finn* first? And is it not equally obvious that killing off dead white male authors to make way for "diverse" replacements is an act of reckless folly—on a par with killing off your own parents because you don't think they'll ever have anything useful to tell you?

And if you're willing to grant my point about Black male authors but still insist that Black woman authors can safely cut all *their* ties to dead white men, consider Toni Morrison's *Beloved.*

As you probably know, *Beloved* is the story of a formerly enslaved woman who lives in Cincinnati in 1873 along with ghosts—with haunting memories of a double infanticide. Sethe can never forget that twenty years earlier in ante-bellum Kentucky, she killed her own two children to save them from a life of slavery and sexual exploitation.

Clearly this is the kind of story that no white male—dead *or* alive—could ever tell. Right? No: dead wrong.

Let's see what Toni Morrison brought to the writing of *Beloved,* which appeared in 1987, when she was 56 and had already published four other novels starting with *The Bluest Eye* (1970).

As the second of four children from a working class Black family in Lorain, Ohio, she grew up knowing racism in its most virulent forms—partly from stories told by her father, who at age 15 had witnessed the lynching of two Black businessmen living on his street, and partly from her own experience: when she was about two years old, their landlord set fire to the family house while they were in it because they couldn't afford to pay the rent. But instead of feeling crushed by

this episode, they laughed at the landlord—showing the kind of resilience that would sustain Morrison for the rest of her life.

And by the age of 18 she had decided that her life would also be driven by literature.

Enrolling in Howard University in 1949, she studied drama, earned a BA in English in 1953, and then a Master of Arts from Cornell in 1955 with a thesis on "Virginia Woolf's and William Faulkner's Treatment of the Alienated." Remarkably enough, she actually thought she could learn something from the fiction of a dead white woman and a still living white man.

Then, after teaching literature at Howard for seven years, she went to work for Random House, where in 1967 (age 36) she became the first Black woman senior editor in the fiction department. So by the time she sat down to write *Beloved* in the mid-1980s, she brought to the task a mind steeped in the history of literature as well as her personal memories of growing up Black in a segregated and often racist America.

Since she studied drama at Howard, the plays she read there surely included *Medea,* written in 431 BC. Its author was a dead white male playwright known as Euripides. But he was also the most radical feminist in the history of western literature, and anyone who knows something of that history can see how his play prefigures Morrison's novel.

To avenge herself against her faithless husband Jason, who marries another woman after Medea has sacrificed everything for him, Medea kills her own children. Still more shocking, she literally gets away with the murder by means of a dragon-drawn chariot sent by her grandfather Helios, god of the sun. To spare her from being punished on earth for her deed, the chariot bears her up into the sky—as if in triumph over all beneath her.

And you're telling me, Professor Heffernan, that a dead white male wrote *that* in 431 BC? Yes indeed, I am, and I'm also telling you that if you really want to understand Morrison's novel, you'd better know that it grapples with just the kind of horrific question that great literature never shrinks from: what on earth could ever drive a woman to murder her own children? To kill these holy innocents—her own flesh and blood? *And* leave us not so much horrified by her deed as gasping in amazement at the sheer jaw-dropping audacity of her move?

You could of course say these are two different women: while Medea seeks revenge against her faithless husband, Sethe aims to *spare* her children. But in each case the deed is the same. So most of all, the originality of *Beloved* springs from its dazzling oscillation between Sethe's "present" life in postwar Cincinnati and the flashbacks to her agonizing past as a woman enslaved in ante-bellum Kentucky. But the crucial point here is what Toni Morrison *learned* from Euripides: it's *possible* for a female character to win some measure of our sympathy even while performing the most horrific deed imaginable.

Literature is not a dissectable corpse. It's a living body that can be mutilated just as surely by amputating its past as by aborting ts future. To begin to grasp its whole body, we must begin to grasp the *continuity* that makes it a truly living tradition—not an inert line of dead while males with nothing to say to the carefree children of diversity. Remember the words of Mark Twain:

> When I was a boy of 14, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be 21, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in seven years.

Can Dartmouth find a way to accelerate this kind of discovery as its students work their way through the first year?

And when the MAGA millions in this country are now caught up in blind devotion to Trump, is it not obvious that more than ever before, we need leaders deeply versed in all the lessons that the humanities have to teach us about our history and about ourselves?

And if you ask me whether or not these lessons would serve only the children of the rich and over-privileged, let me tell you about a remarkable Black teacher named Bill Cook, who joined the Dartmouth English Department in 1969 after teaching English and Drama to high school students in Princeton, New Jersey. In the summer of 1969 he came up to help run a "bridge" program for newly

enrolled Black students. To prepare them for our normal English 1 class, whose reading list then included all of Milton's *Paradise Lost,* he spent the summer leading them through the first five "books" of the poem—a little less than half of it. If you wonder how on earth these students—or any other students new to Milton's Latinate syntax and densely allusive texture—could possibly find their way through even part of this great English epic, you simply had to see how Bill could *dramatize* it for his students. He was not only a poet himself but also a fount of rhetorical resonance and a brilliant amateur actor who eventually played—among other roles—a captivating Falstaff in a production of Shakespeare's *Merry Wives* at Hopkins Center. All of these talents helped him to make students hear and *feel* the power of Milton's rhetoric—especially in the speeches of Satan when he dares to defy what he calls the "tyranny" of God.

Bill did so well with these students that in 1973 he became a regular member of the department even though his professional training stopped well short of the normally requisite PhD. But even with only a Masters degree in English from the University of Chicago, where he won the admiration of his mentors, he was a remarkably versatile pedagogue. Though he twice chaired the African and Afro-American Studies Program and mentored scores of Black students who now remember him as a "legend," he was an astonishingly versatile lecturer who could explain the plays of Eugene O'Neill or the poetry of Emily Dickinson just as

readily as he could illuminate the writings of James Baldwin or the sermons of Martin Luther King, Jr. In retirement, furthermore, he collaborated with a Dartmouth Professor of Classics named James Tatum to produce a landmark study of classical influences on Black writers from Phyllis Wheatley to Rita Dove: *African American Writers and Classical Tradition*, published by the University of Chicago in 2010.

Let me say one more thing to those who may still believe that reviving the humanities at Dartmouth would be a waste of time for any student bent on a career in business.

For a start, consider ***why business needs the humanities*** just as much as the humanities need business and the funds it provides. A brand new essay on the topic, **which has just appeared in *The Globe and Mail* for January 27** comes not from any management consultant or tech wizard but from Ira Wells, Professor of *Literature* at Victoria College, University of Toronto**, b**ut he repeatedly quotes from business leaders who argue with overwhelming evidence that the best preparation for success in business is s solid education in the liberal arts and above all in the humanities.

Wells concludes as follows:

"The humanities provide students with space to contemplate their own ends, their

life's purpose, which is not to be undervalued in the midst of a mental-health crisis, and is not reducible to educational or career outcomes. A human being is not to be 'usurped by his profession,' wrote John Henry Newman in his book, *The Idea of the University* – advice we are still learning to heed.

"We can recommit to the reciprocal relationship between the two – or embrace the economic and spiritual immiseration that is our only alternative."
So I turn at last to our brand new dynamic president, Sian Beilock--with an urgent answer to the question she herself has posed in her very first interview with Abigail Jones of the *Dartmouth Alumni Magazine*.

Rather than dwelling on her past triumphs or even her present standing as the first woman president of Dartmouth and the youngest president in the ivy league, Beilock said:

> I don't feel there's a time in my life I wish I could go back to. . . . If anything, I wish I'd taken more time to enjoy instead of always looking at what's next, which is a common theme in my life: What am I going to do next? How am I going to achieve?

Since you have already laid out five specific ways in which you plan to answer this question for Dartmouth, may I suggest you consider a sixth? If you truly believe that Dartmouth must become a place of "brave spaces," are you brave

enough to revive the study of humanities at Dartmouth by *restoring* the one full year of humanities courses that were required of all first-year students until 1958? Are you brave enough to make Dartmouth once again a fountain of essential education, a deep well of the truly liberal and liberating arts?

During the sixty years that I have spent in Hanover since arriving in 1965, Dartmouth has never been led by a humanist. Its presidents have included a diplomat (John Dickey), two mathematicians (John Kemeny and Phil Hanlon), a businessman (David McLaughin) a specialist in the financing of health care (Jim Yong Kim), a lawyer (Jim Freedman), and an historian (Jim Wright). Among these seven, John Dickey was the great champion of the liberal arts and James Freedman was a true lover of literature who shared my fascination with Joyce's *Ulysses* and even sat in on one of my seminar sessions on it. So it seems to me quite possible that a brilliant, young, dynamic neuroscientist might be capable of truly recognizing the value of the humanities and willing to do whatever it takes to re-establish a full year of humanities for all first year students as the indispensable foundation of an educated life. And if she does this, I believe that the overwhelming majority of students who take this course will remember and cherish it as the single most intellectually transformative experience of their lives—especially because they would all be reading the same list of major works *together*—and thus forming bonds of communication that would be intellectual as well as social.

Since first year students in he Class of 2027 now number 1209, I envision a course taught in at least 60 sections of 20 students each, which would require a new team of 30 young humanists who would each teach two sections per quarter. But since they would be teaching two courses extra each year (beyond the normal four), they would receive one full year free of teaching for each two years of six-course teaching. And to replace them during their year off from teaching, Dartmouth would need an additional 15 humanists—making a total of 45 new hires, plus a steering committee of three senior humanists (one for each major period of the course) who would devise the curriculum and give at least one plenary lecture each week to supplement the thrice-weekly discussion sections.

If you wonder how Dartmouth could possibly afford to hire 45 young humanists and three senior humanists, my answer is that a few of them might come from the existing faculty. But even if they were all new hires at an average starting salary of $100,000 per year for the juniors, plus $150,000 for the three seniors, the total cost would not exceed five million dollars a year against an endowment that stood at $7.9 billion as of June 30, 2023, and promises to hit well over 10 billion once the present campaign is over—since it has already raised in gifts and pledges 3,777 billion. By my calculation, therefore, this new venture would require 2% of the endowment each year—a bit less than half of Dartmouth's endowment income if held down to 5% per annum, and for

less than one million a year, you could launch a pilot program for 100 applicants from a given first year class, with numbers rising each year until all 1209 students could take the course. So just tell me this: there anything else that could better serve the future of Dartmouth or the post-graduate lives of its students?

That ‘s the question I now put before Dartmouth and its loyal alumni.

As for the cost, I’m repeatedly amazed at how money Dartmouth can readily find its coffers to settle embarrassing lawsuits. In 2022, Dartmouth (along with 17 other prominent colleges and universities) was sued under U.S. antitrust law for violating a pledge to ignore students’ finances in making admissions decisions, giving wealthy students an edge.

But on February 26, 2024, the *Insurance Journal* reported that while denying any wrongdoing, Dartmouth had agreed to pay $33.75 million to settle its part on this lawsuit. That amount of money would easily cover the cost of launching a Humanities Initiative for all first year Dartmouth students.

Ever since I joined the Dartmouth English Department in the fall of 1965, I have had the great experience of continuing my own education as well as teaching others, for I firmly believe that a teacher must never stop

learning. Thanks to Dartmouth and especially to a teaching load that allowed me nearly six months a year for my own research and writing, I have spread the wings of my curiosity far beyond the original boundaries of my dissertation (and first book) on Wordsworth's theory of poetry. Besides immersing myself in the works of great authors ranging from Homer to Joyce, I have been free to study the fascinating relations between literature and art as well as between literature and history. And as a small token of my thanks, I offer this final testament to the humanities—and a dying wish that Dartmouth College may not only revive them but also re-integrate them with every new work of literature that represents our present selves in all our diversities —whether in income, race, gender, or ethnic category. Let us henceforth live, learn, study, and grow by the undying words of Terence; "Humanus sum; nihil humanus puto alienenum a me." I am human; I consider nothing that is human alien from me.

MY BLUEPRINT FOR THE FUTURE OF HUMANITIES AT DARTMOUTH

Brashly casting myself as a one-man Committee on the Future of the Humanities at Dartmouth (CFHD, here specifically is what I recommend **for all first-year students with no exceptions:**

1. A three-term course in the humanities ranging all the way from classical

philosophy and the classical epic to modern works of literature such as Joyce's *Ulysses* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved.*

2. To offer this course to 1000-plus first-years in sections of no more than 20 students each, establish a new division (the **First Year Humanities Division**) and hire 25-30 new humanists—mainly teachers of literature and philosophy—to staff it. If that sounds like a lot of hiring, just remember that the present campaign has already raised **3.77 billion dollars,** so a small fraction of that would pay their salaries—with plenty left for staff, office, and even a new humanities building if you can find a place to put it.

3. Each year, a steering committee of the FYHD will set the curriculum, which may include *excerpts* from major works such as *Paradise Lost,* but all sections of this three-term long humanities course will read *the same set of works*. This will ensure that every first-year student can share his or her first-year reading experience with *any* other student in the class. It will also ensure that *all* Dartmouth students who advance to the sophomore level are steeped in the same rich tradition of humanistic literature—as the soil in which their minds will continue to grow.

4. By 8:00 AM on each day of class, every student will submit to his or her instructor 1-2 pages of informal commentary—anything at all —on any brief passage that he or she finds provocative in the reading assigned for that day. This

will ensure that every student will be ready to say something about the reading—and also that the teacher will know exactly whom to call on for comment on particular passages. (I used this method for years in my Joyce seminar and it really works!)

5. Once a week during X hour, all first years gather for a lecture by a visiting star such as Mary Beard of SPQR fame. No laptops, cell phones, or even notebooks allowed for this: just supremely attentive eyes and ears. But within 24 hours, every student will get a link to a videotape of this lecture plus a transcript of its words. So *nobody ever misses a lecture.*

6. Papers: 500 words on the week's reading due at the Friday class, 2500 word term paper due at the final class. 5000 word term paper due at final class for spring term.

7. Informal commentaries will not be graded at all, but will get comments from the instructor. Weekly papers and all term papers will be meticulously analyzed for clarity, concision, continuity, and cogency, because **this will be a writing course as much as a reading course. And students will be encouraged to revise their work and re-submit for a higher grade.**

Sian, if you take this step, I guarantee you that every single Dartmouth student who takes this year long course will remember it ever after as the single most transformative experience of his/ her life. It will also bond the class more

profoundly than I think even you can imagine.

So that's it, Sian. That's the truly radical proposal of a dying old man. After everything that Dartmouth has done for me over the past sixty years, it's really all I have to offer in return. Take it or leave it. But why not take it, Sian? Why not swing for the fences? What have you got to lose?

James A.W. Heffernan

Hanover, NH

March 8, 2024