Shoppers, Worshippers, Culture Warriors
Reading and the Hermeneutics of Trust

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Reading involves differing qualities of experience. As the American transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson put it in 1841 (in "The Over-Soul"): "There is a difference between one and another hour of life in their authority and their subsequent effect." Some hours are merely "habitual," others have such a "depth" in them that we "ascribe more reality to them than to all other experiences" (1903, II: 267). A more recent term is "quality time," which, since the 1970s, has come to designate a more meaningful engagement with the world than the habitual regimes of "real time." If the "Age of Amazon" still thinks of literature as a site of "virtual quality time" (McGurl 2016, 466), how do readers distinguish between the various levels of quality they encounter in the vast "bookshop" of past and present literary culture? My claim, in this essay, is that people orient themselves in the literary field with the help of public and private selection regimes to which they extend various degrees of trust.

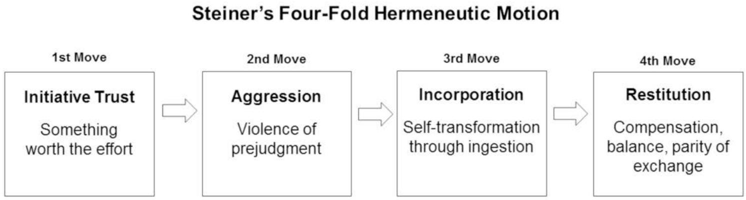
In what follows, I want to explore the different kinds of trust relations in the literary field by looking at the hermeneutics of reading. The first section will set up the perimeters of the discussion with a sketch of George Steiner's account of the "hermeneutic motion" as a four-fold process (involving trust, prejudgment, incorporation, and restoration). The subsequent section extends Steiner's account using Charles Taylor's theory of moral "frameworks." Whereas Steiner ties the donation of trust to a dialectics of submission and dominance that requires interpreters to find a restorative equilibrium (between reader and text or self and other), Taylor's distinction of strong and weak evaluative frameworks allows me to introduce three hermeneutic positions that ignore such an equilibrium by default: Readers as purpose-oriented consumers, as worshippers trusting a higher good, and as culture warriors revolted by a "toxic" kind of sacred. The section "Bad Reading" addresses how these positions jar with received ideals of "critical thinking" in a "procedural republic." The section "Atmospheres of Trust" takes the complex reception history of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *Evangeline* (1847) as a foil for discussing the difficult ontological status of more or less trustworthy artifacts. Using the phenomenological concept of aesthetic "atmospheres," I argue that a fuller understanding of hermeneutic positions requires scholarship that combines event-based descriptions of texts with an ethnography of strong and weak frames of reading. The final section, "Trusting the Canon," addresses how the nexus of trust and public authority shapes the cultural relevance and intrinsic value conflicts of canon-building.

Steiner's Concept of Hermeneutic Balance

Trust is key to Steiner's four-fold model of the hermeneutic process (see Felski 2015, 64). Before any kind of reading practice can begin, he argues, we need to "trust" that "there is 'something there'" worth our time. It can always transpire "that there is nothing there" (Steiner 1975, 296), but without an initial "donation of trust" (297) the act of reading will not take shape. "After trust comes aggression," Steiner continues. Once we have taken the "leap" (296) we encircle and invade the text in an "unavoidable mode of attack" (297). Since interpretation has to begin with what we already know, we "prejudge" the new, in Gadamer's terms (1990), by translating it into familiar categories, a process by definition invasive, appropriative, violent. Incorporating the new, however, might modify our sense of "being," as Heidegger might say. In Steiner's terms: "No language, no traditional symbolic set or cultural ensemble imports without risk of being transformed" (299). The outcome is far from clear: we might dislike our new sense of self or "horizon" of meaning. Hence the fourth move, Steiner explains, requires a politics of interpretation. We assess our losses and gains, and take restorative or protective measures, to ensure that the result of our self-transformation suits our purposes (see fig. 1).

In Steiner's account, the fourth move aims primarily at ensuring the "reciprocity" and "balance" of the exchange. "The a-prioristic movement of trust," he says, "puts us off balance." First we "'lean towards' the confronting text," then "encircle and invade cognitively," until we "come home laden, thus again off-balance, having caused disequilibrium throughout the system by taking away from 'the other' and by adding, though possibly with ambiguous consequence, to our own. The system is now off-tilt." Thus: "The hermeneutic act

Figure 1: Steiner's Four-Fold Hermeneutic Motion



must compensate. If it is to be authentic, it must mediate into exchange and restored parity" (300).

Why this focus on "parity"? Steiner suggests that interpretive authenticity requires a neutral trade balance between the exchanging parties, that is, between the reader negotiating with an unfamiliar text, or the self with an "other." The image of trade balance suggests that the bargaining partners should have equal weight in their attempts at "fusion of horizons" (see Vessey 2009, 534). At the root of Steiner's emphasis on parity of exchange is a political analogy: Readers and texts, self and other, resemble participants in a democracy. Here, a balanced power relation ensures equal representation and reciprocal recognition, preventing structures of domination. In the case of democratic societies, the downsides of domination—social hierarchies and inequalities—are self-evident, but how do relations of dominance affect the hermeneutic process? Steiner thinks that a hermeneutic trade deficit undermines our expressive autonomy. As individuals, we might "be mastered and made lame by what we have imported," when a foreign "voice" will "choke" our own. As a group or a society, similarly, we "can be knocked off balance and made to lose belief in [our] own identity," like colonized minds who respond to the weight of cultural imperialism with self-alienating "mimicry" (299). Mimicry, in this case, indicates a deplorable loss of agency: dominated cultures, the story goes, struggle to express themselves on their own terms.[1]

1 The subaltern, so it is said, cannot speak, unless it manages to "write back" against the imperial center (Ashcroft et al. 1989). Literary theory developed a number of now classic modelings of this thesis. At the individual level, Harold Bloom (1973) invokes the figure of the "strong reader" who manages to overcome the "anxiety of influence" that inheres in the work of powerful predecessors. In accord with Bloom's psychoanalytic terminology, Homi Bhabha (1994, 86) uses Lacanian and Derridean concepts to refig-

Strong and Weak "Frameworks"

The democratic equality model of hermeneutics has its uses, but it obscures a range of self-other relationships for which the analogy to political autonomy and democratic equality does not work. What if a literary text strikes me as embodying a "higher good" similar to the experience of moral or religious meaning?[2] In Charles Taylor's broad definition of moral experience (one that cuts across moral-aesthetic and religious-secular divides), people orient themselves towards notions of higher good with the help of identity-defining "frameworks" of "strong evaluation" (1989, 19–20). Strong frameworks "involve discriminations of right or wrong, better or worse, higher or lower" whose validity does not follow from "our own desires, inclinations, or choices, but rather stand independent of these and offer standards by which these can be judged" (4). Thus: "To think, feel, judge within such a framework is to function with the sense that some action, or mode of life, or mode of feeling is incomparably higher than the others which are more readily available to us" (19). Taylor uses the spatial qualifier "high/low" in generic terms that can be expressed with a range of different distinctions. "One form of life may be seen as fuller, another way of feeling and acting as purer, a mode of feeling or living as deeper, a style of life more admirable, a given demand as making an absolute claim against merely relative ones, and so on" (20). Of course, in theory, we can point to the deconstructability of absolute standpoints (always made rather than found) and, in the spirit of late-twentieth-century theoretical skepticism, dismiss them as irrelevant. In *lived practice*, however, relevance is performative and hinges on the affective intensity with which we feel "placed" in relation to a perceived "higher good." Taylor's point is that in the performative sense all cultures have strong-valued frameworks, even though these can be hard to recognize, as they largely sit at the "background" (1989, 21) of actions, as tacit knowledge or a practical sense rather than a fully articulated account. While modern social imaginaries always pose a plurality of frameworks—we can be "moved" by many higher goods, and torn between incommensurable ones—they tend to come to us "ranked" (62) in an order of importance.[3] At the top of our hierarchical order of strong-value frameworks

ure cultural "mimicry" as a defense mechanism by which the colonized estrange and thus destabilize the colonizer's identity.

2 The following section draws from Leypoldt 2020.

3 "Thus, within certain religious traditions, 'contact' is understood as a relation to God and may be understood in sacramental terms or in those of prayer or devotion. For

lies the sphere of "hypergoods," that is, "higher-order goods" that strike us not only as "incomparably more important" than other goods of strong value, but also as providing "the standpoint from which these must be weighed, judged, decided about" (63).[4]

Not every evaluative activity, to be sure, is of identity-defining intensity. There is a large domain of practice—the domain of "weak valuation" (Taylor 1985, 16)—in which the ranking of frameworks seems less urgent. People can be passionate about their favorite ice-cream flavor, but they would hardly start a culture war about such issues. Weak valuation makes hierarchical scales feel less imperative, allowing us to be more tolerant of disagreement ("I like strawberry and you vanilla," *chacun à son goût* [Taylor, 2011, 297]). The further we move towards strong value issues that are more closely connected to our hypergoods—fair trade, abortion, Brexit, human rights violations, or the like—the harder it becomes to adopt a relativist tolerance of dissent. In practice, weak and strong values tend to be bundled together, as when your favorite food seems all the more enjoyable if it embodies the moral authority of "fair trade." The analytical distinction remains significant, however. Whereas weak frameworks concern our everyday desires, strong ones are linked to the hierarchical imaginaries with which we classify our desires into higher or lower kinds—"more and less fulfilling, more and less refined, profound and

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those who espouse the honor ethic, the issue concerns their place in the space of fame and infamy. The aspiration is to glory, or at least to avoid shame and dishonour, which would make life unbearable and non-existence seem preferable. For those who define the good as self-mastery through reason, the aspiration is to be able to order their lives, and the unbearable threat is of being engulfed and degraded by the irresistible craving for lower things. For those moved by one of the modern forms of the affirmation of ordinary life, it is above all important to see oneself as moved by and furthering this life, in one's work for instance, and one's family. People for whom meaning is given to life by expression must see themselves as bringing their potential to expression, if not in one of the recognized artistic or intellectual media, then perhaps in the shape of their lives themselves. And so on" (1989, 44).

4 "For those with a strong commitment to such a [hyper]good, what it means is that this above all others provides the landmarks for what they judge to be the direction of their lives. While they recognize a whole range of qualitative distinctions, while all of these involve strong evaluation, so that they judge themselves and others by the degree they attain the goods concerned and admire or look down on people in function of this, nevertheless the one highest good has a special place. It is orientation to this which comes closest to defining my identity, and therefore my direction to this good is of unique importance to me" (62–3).

superficial, noble and base" (Taylor 1985, 16; Joas 2000, 129). Whereas weak values emerge in the situated rationalities of our personal lifeworld, strong ones seem to transcend our subjective moves. We experience them as appealing to us from the *outside* of our mundane purpose-rational selves (as in Max Weber's "Außeralltäglichkeit," something "outside [Außen]" "everdayness [Alltäglichkeit]" [1972, 140]).

If we move from moral to literary practice, Taylor's argument helps us to see that literary experience can involve two essentially different kinds of "trust devices" (Karpik 2010): one "calculative," the other "relational."[5] Consider how this distinction affects the meaning of the literary prize system. If we approach the system of literary prizes with "calculative trust" in the delivery of personal satisfaction, the Nobel, the Booker, or the World Fantasy Award become tools to reduce the opacity of the market, similar to Amazon's "people-who-bought-this-also-looked-at-that" algorithm. If, on the other hand, we become attuned to "relational" trust in how a text is "placed" in relation to cultural authority, award rankings do not just facilitate personal uses but sustain a hierarchical landscape that divides the "pleasure of reading" into higher and lower kinds ("serious" vs. "guilty pleasure") and puts the prize system itself in vertical tension, suggesting that some prizes outrank the others.

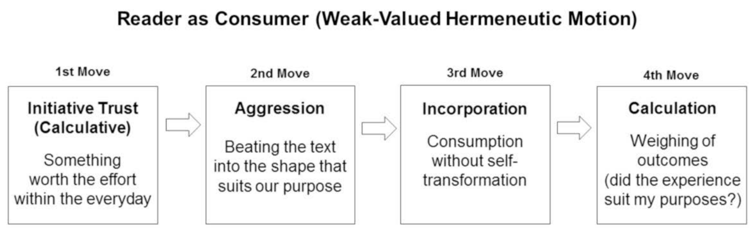
Calculative Trust: Readers as Consumers

Whether we attune ourselves to weaker or stronger frameworks matters to the balance of hermeneutic exchange. As weak evaluators, we tend to conduct the hermeneutic attack with a degree of self-centered carelessness. Subordinating the other to our situated concerns, we become Bloomian "strong readers" who (in Richard Rorty's apt phrase) "beat the text into a shape which will serve [their] own purpose" (1982, 151). Theorists of interpretation like to point to the integrity of the text or authorial intention to dismiss strong reading as a mere "playing" with texts (Fish 1994, 185). Others rejoin that rigid distinctions between interpreting and playing never hold up to deconstructive scrutiny.[6] Both positions in this longstanding quarrel tend to overlook the relevance of evaluative frameworks. Weak evaluation *welcomes* readerly

5 For a fuller discussion of this distinction, see Leypoldt 2017.
6 For this older debate about interpretation, see the dispute between Umberto Eco and Richard Rorty in Stefan Collini's *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* (1992).

play. Unlike professional interpreters, who are bound to peer-review-based notions of higher good, leisure readers focused on pragmatic outcomes resemble shoppers browsing in a supermarket aisle: they are perfectly entitled to carry home whatever they desire, and would be astonished if they were expected to worry about the integrity of the wares or the shop owner's intentions. Coming home "laden" with their spoils, moreover, need not put them "off-balance," as Steiner's image of equal trade balance assumes. For it is not clear how weak-valued goods affect our sense of being. If we read for no other reason than the enjoyment of instantly forgettable pleasures, the "risk" of "being transformed" by what we "import" seems minimal. In the sphere of weak valuation, our fourth hermeneutic move—a "politics" that weighs our losses and gains—boils down to measuring pragmatic outcomes: Did I enjoy the experience? Did I make the most of the material at hand? Was it good for my mental and bodily well-being? Did I choose well among conflicting pragmatic goods, or has my consumption practice perhaps prevented other desirable activities (see fig. 2)?

Figure 2: Reader as Consumer (Weak-Valued Hermeneutic Motion)



Vertical Resonance, Relational Trust: Readers as Worshippers

Once a text is perceived as embodying a higher good, it acquires a "vertical resonance" (Rosa 2019, 284) that unbalances the exchange between self and other in the opposite direction. Strong-valued works have a way of looking down upon us as if from a higher position. "You have to change your life," Rilke hears a Greek sculpture calling down to him in the Paris Louvre, suggesting he should make a greater effort to lift himself up to the elevated region within the cultural landscape.[7] This sense of "being spoken to from above" (Sloterdijk 2013, 22–3) tilts the hermeneutic relationship towards deference, even worship. If comprehension is always violent, because we force the foreign text into familiar categories, the felt presence of higher goods disarms our prejudgment at least by a degree. Our trust in something larger can turn the unfamiliar text into a "strong" agent (to adapt Bloom's image) that imposes *its* purpose upon *us*. In Paul Valéry's phrase, an artifact with overwhelming presence can make us feel "that we are in some profound sense transforming ourselves, in order to become the person whose sensitivity is capable of such fullness of delight and immediate apprehension" (1937, 965; see Rosa 2019, 284). Vertical resonance, then, turns us into reverent readers: we tread with care, anxious not to presume, with patience and a willing suspension of skeptical questioning, embarrassed if the text provides no everyday use for us, ready to attribute our inability to find "something there" to our own rather than the text's inadequacy. Worshipping interpreters are not entirely different from mystics "speaking in tongues": they power down their individual voice to make room for a higher language, which they want to transmit as truly as possible, engaging in voluntary "mimicry" that feels perfectly empowering. Here, being "knocked off balance" seems uplifting rather than oppressive, since the pull of being called upon from above justifies the imbalance of the exchange. Max Weber explains this voluntary self-surrender by distinguishing "power" from "authority." Where power *tout court* concerns a person's ability to impose their "will" upon us despite our "resistance," authority represents power that strikes us as "legitimate" because it accords with our sense of higher good (Weber 1972, 28, 122). The difference between authority and power decides whether we experience our self-surrender as a welcome connection to something larger or as the result of illegitimate domination (see fig. 3).

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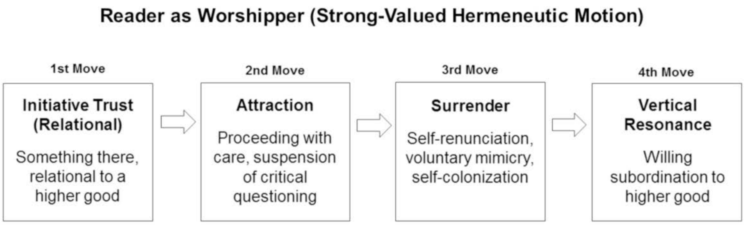
7 In his 1908 poem "Archaic Torso of Apollo" (1995, 66–7), which possibly refers to the Louvre's torso of a standing nude youth, *Kouros from Miletus*, ca. 490–480 BC (Louvre MND, 2792).

Figure 3: Reader as Worshipper (Strong-Valued Hermeneutic Motion)



Mundane Trash, Toxic Presence: Indifferent Readers vs. Culture Warriors

Strong valuation has two negative slopes. The first concerns a process of trivialization or “de-singularization” (Kopytoff 1986), when the loss of authority renders a formerly consecrated artifact mundane. The circulation and visibility of mundane things depends on whether people trust that they have a quotidian use for them. Think of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, the most prestigious mid- to late-nineteenth-century US poet, who, after 1940, dropped out of the transatlantic literary canon. No longer capable of “breaking the envelope of the mundane” (Alexander et al. 2013, 10), his poems became ordinary commodities that, after a brief life on the coffee tables of an aging generation, sank into the oblivion of minor heritage archives (the sphere of “uninhabited” cultural memory, in Aleida Assmann’s terms [1999, 133]). Commodities without use or authority recall the phenomenology of trash: we see them only when they get in our way. This aspect of no-longer-consecrated artifacts encourages the misconception that museums or canons are mere “mausoleums” or “sepulchers” of once living things (see Marinetti 1909, Valéry 1923, Adorno 1953, Negrin 1993). However, while shutting things up in “priceless” or “inalienable” collections may sever them from their “living” uses, their real death occurs only when their disconnection from authority results in a loss of “presence” (Gumbrecht 2003), “charisma” (Shils 1982), “iconic aura” (Alexander/Bartmański 2012), “enrichment” (Boltanski/Esquerre 2020), or “singularity” (Kopytoff 1986, Leypoldt 2014, Reckwitz 2020).

A second negative slope of strong valuation concerns the “darkening” or “polluting” of artifacts that in the course of their de-authorization become powerfully offensive as opposed to merely mundane.[8] Darkened or polluted artifacts retain the visibility of sacred things, yet with a stigmatized presence that inspires negative affects: revulsion, disgust, hatred. Such "toxic" sacrality typically emerges when an artifact begins to embody mutually exclusive strong values, prompting a conflict between negative and positive perceptions that divides audiences and/or consecrating authorities. Such a conflict can emerge as a stain in a thing's sacred fabric, as when the stigma of racism entered the civil-religious iconicity of Thomas Jefferson in the recent flare-up of the Sally Hemings affair (after a widely publicized DNA analysis in 1998 proved an old rumor that he fathered several children with one of his slaves). The darker symbolism—a powerful white plantation owner abuses his teenage slave—is now part of the official "authorized heritage discourse,"[9] but it arguably has not polluted the site of memory as a whole: Jefferson's bright founding-father presence has—so far, at least—kept the implications of the Hemings affair at a level of minor blemish.[10] Compare this to how the recent #RhodesMustFall initiative finalized an already latent symbolic "narrowing" of Cecil Rhodes to an embodiment of exploitative "colonial heritage" that contemporary Britain struggles to commemorate with pride. Another, more divisive example is the "Confederate Monuments" debate: The narrowing of the Confederacy's icons to symbols of racism and oppression has been salient in civil-sphere discourse on US democracy for quite some time. But a national consensus is blocked by a polarized political scene that overdetermines disagreements about statues with the "hot-button-issues" of the US culture war. Whether people are sickened by a "toxic" statue of Robert E. Lee, or by the "toxic" attempt to tear this statue down, depends on their affiliation with increasingly separate social networks, lifeforms, party politics, regions, and group identities.[11]

8 On the idea of "dark heritage," see Thomas et al. 2019, on symbolic pollution, see Douglas 1966.

9 See, for example, "Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings: A Brief Account" on the website of the Jefferson museum at Monticello (2020). On the concept of "authorized heritage discourse," see Smith 2006.

10 This may change in the near future: see Truscott 2020.

11 To understand the conflicts around consecrated heritage, it is useful to consider Philip Smith's (2012, 172) distinction between *two kinds* of iconicity. Type 1 concerns the transformation of ordinary events, persons, or things into widely recognizable visual images, when pictorial representations of Thomas Jefferson, Cecil Rhodes, or Robert E. Lee acquire presence and visibility in the culture's visual field. This is the domain of Peirce-inspired iconography and the so-called "visual" or "pictorial turn" (Boehm 1994,

In literary or intellectual culture, conflicts about incommensurate hypergoods are often restricted to field-specific quarrels, as when the consecrating authorities within a literary establishment are divided over whether a new paradigm is artistic excellence or barbarism parading as art (think of how even pre-modernist convention-breakers such as Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* [1855] revolted large parts of the literary establishments before becoming canonical). Longfellow, too, went through a brief phase of literary-field-specific darkening, when, between 1900 and 1940, he struck a younger generation of writers as a poster boy for what, in 1911, George Santayana called the "genteel tradition" (1968, 86) —a cultural elite that was accused of furthering a dissociation of sensibility that threatened the nation's cultural fiber.[12]

Toxicity circulates more widely when struggles over symbolic meanings spill over into the larger public sphere. The classic scenario is a standoff

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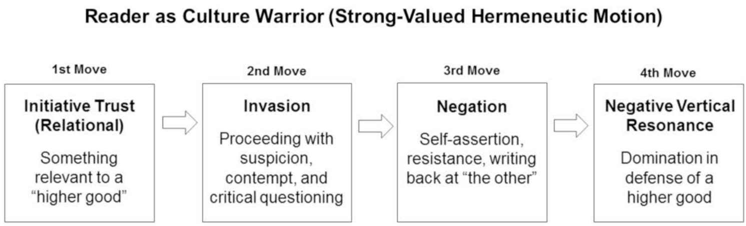
Mitchell 1986). Type 2 iconicity, in contrast, has more to do with Roland Barthes' analysis of symbolic "mythologies," when icons are charged with a moral depth that their material surface puts—performatively—in sensuous manifestation. Type 2 iconicity concerns the strong values that the public iconographies of Jefferson, Rhodes, or Lee can embody for specific audiences. Smith suggests that dissent about type 2 iconicity—"emotive disputes" over whether an icon represents "the triumph or the degradation of the social" —heightens an icon's "charismatic energy." I would think the opposite is also true: to produce a sense of toxicity, an icon needs to have already been charged with charismatic energy. A polluted *mundane* thing is more likely to strike us with a contempt we typically feel about objects that "are noticed only sufficiently so as to know that they are not noticeworthy" (Miller 1997, 215). To the degree that polluted things have charismatic energy, they provoke the more powerful "agonistic emotion" of "disgust" (Ngai 2005, 335).

12 As Van Wyck Brooks complained in 1915, writers like Longfellow had helped America to break into "two publics," an effete "cultured public" that "reads Maeterlinck," and a "largely masculine" "business public" that "accumulates money" (1934, 78–9). The claim that Longfellow's work was detrimental to the growth of the American Mind emerged relatively early (see Willis 2006), with a number of hostile reviews (by Edgar Allan Poe and Margaret Fuller, among others), though the critical success of *Evangeline* (1847) and *Hiawatha* (1855) kept this at the level of a minor stigma in Longfellow's iconicity, until about 1900, when the weight of the Whitmanian paradigm made this stigma grow, and his work was narrowed to an embodiment of the "genteel" that crystalized the disgust of modernist avant-gardes. Once the modernist aesthetics came to dominate the literary establishment in the 1930s and 1940s, Longfellow's work sank to the level of mundane harmlessness ("grandmotherly" poetry of the "schoolroom" and the "fireside"), and ceased to elicit strong negative responses (in later editions, Brooks even apologized for having been too "harsh" at a time "[w]hen we were tired of hearing Longfellow called 'The Just'" [1934, 10–11]).

between curational judgments about strong-valued artistry and civil-sphere perceptions of strong-valued democratic virtue or human decency (see Alexander 2006). Does Woody Allen embody a distinguished arthouse-film career or an offensive culture of misogyny and abuse? Should Lord Byron be "cancelled" because his private sexual transgression rendered his poetry dangerous (as Harriet Beecher Stowe claimed in 1869)? Is the high-canonical materiality of Richard Wagner's music ruined by his anti-Semitic beliefs? Should Heidegger's work be seen in the light of his ground-breaking philosophical idiom or his Nazi collaboration? And how should Peter Handke's stances on the Yugoslavian Civil War relate to his high-canonical literary status? Traditional philosophies of art like to attribute these conflicts to an intrinsic tension between artistic and moral-political "logics," "genres," or "intellectual spheres" (as Kant's influential separation of disinterested beauty from conceptual and moral truth-claims suggests). I would prefer to speak of tensions between social fields disagreeing on *which* genres and formal logics can constitute a higher good. Toxicity is an aesthetic quality (in the sense of *aisthesis*, perception), but one that can happen to all kinds of materialities, artistic or not. There is only a difference of degree, I think, between the felt disgust with polluted art objects—when Whitman's poetry feels like "hexameters […] trying to bubble through sewage" (Wendell 1900, 473)—and polluted civil-sacred heritage sites—when Woodrow Wilson's legacy became so tarnished within the Black Lives Matter context that Princeton University felt compelled to remove his name from its public policy school and residential college (see Pietsch, 2020).

With regard to the hermeneutic motion, the presence of darkened sacrality turns interpreters into culture warriors with a deep distrust of the other. Repelled by toxic presence, we become "suspicious minds" (Felski 2015), entering the text with the force of a police raid, eager to disarm and expose, confident that forced confessions will justify a higher good. The need to purge the self of an identity-polluting influence renders our prejudgment as relentless as a 1930s show trial: We shut down all "imports," silencing the other with the zeal of former colonials wishing to "write back against" an exploitative center so as to "decolonize" their "minds." Since true disgust perceives the object as harmful and infectious, it makes us draw others into the effort of radical expulsion, furthering the aggressive conviviality of "cancel culture" (Bromwich 2018, Asmelash 2019).[13] (See fig. 4)

Figure 4: Reader as Culture Warrior (Strong-Valued Hermeneutic Motion)



Bad Reading

Needless to say, my portrait of the reader as a mistrustful culture warrior, reverent worshipper, or self-involved consumer, jars with received notions of what it takes to be a good reader. A common objection draws from a cognitive model of the "open mind" as one that allows us to assess the text separately from strong-valued commitments (see Fish 1999, 247), in contrast to the "closed minds" of prejudiced or emotionally involved ("sentimental") readers. Traditional philosophies of art have connected the cognitive model of the "open mind" to a notion of literary-artistic "free play" that emancipates readers from political, moral, economic, and religious biases.[14] This "demo-

13 As Miller points out, disgust typically makes us not only want to "exclude" the polluted thing but also seek the "concurrence" of others in its exclusion. Disgust has "powerful communalizing capacities and is especially useful and necessary as a builder of moral and social community. It performs this function obviously by helping define and locate the boundary separating our group from their group, purity from pollution, the violable from the inviolable" (1997, 194–5).

14 The connection of art to mental "free play" derives from romantic theories of aesthetic *bildung* that in the Anglophone world became current through Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* (1869). We can become "disinterested," Arnold said, if we habitualize "the free spontaneous play of consciousness" that helps "to float our stock habits of thinking and acting" (1993, 178). The objections against Arnold are too well known to require rehearsing here, but it is worth recalling the afterlife of the notion of "free

cratic emancipation" model of literature and art continues to shape the idea of "independent critical thinking" as an asset of the humanities or liberal-arts education (see Nussbaum 2016). Cultural historiographers like to frame the democratic free-play concept with a *bildungsroman* narrative of progressive autonomy: literature and the arts march through the periods in a series of incremental breakthroughs culminating in a postmodernist "incredulity towards metanarratives" (Lyotard 1984, xxiv). The view that skepticism liberates us from bias draws from a tacit secularization narrative that "exoticizes" the experience of religious higher goods as categorically different from secular ones (Joas 2019). Though simple secularization models have not aged well in the social sciences (Connolly 2000, Berger 2014), in literary scholarship they still flourish at the background of an influential "rise of modern literature" framework that explains modernity's supposed "loss of aura" (Benjamin 1968) as a fortunate fall: Since the modern condition stripped things of their sacred "halo," the story goes, artists and audiences have had to learn to see the real in the "cold light of day" (Levine 1981, 165, see Berman 1982, 116), graduating on to the tougher but also more authentic reality beyond pseudo-sacred fantasies.

The factuality/fantasy distinction helps to join the idea of open minds in free play to classic liberalism's procedural notions of democratic tolerance. The ideal of a "procedural republic" (Sandel 1998) suggests that one can combine justice with tolerance with the help of content-blind mechanisms of elimination that exclude from the "public square" what is merely private or lacks reasonable common sense (religion, affects, and other forms of irrationality). More recently, this view underlies a public misconception that open societies can defend themselves against illiberal threats by rejecting "populists" or "racists" on the grounds of their flawed or irrational "logic" rather than their political claims.[15] The "procedural" view allows Steiner to define the politics of interpretation as *internal* to the hermeneutic motion, as if we could ensure

play" (see Young 1995, 55–7), a phrase that appears in English translations of the deconstructive "play" ("le jeu") that Jacques Derrida first proposed in his "La structure, le signe et le jeu dans le discours des sciences humaines" (1966), his contribution to the Johns Hopkins symposium that produced the "structuralist controversy" (the proceedings translate "jeu" as "freeplay" [Derrida 1970]).

15 See, for example, Jan-Werner Müller's claim that populism has an "inner logic" based on a deceptive "illusion" (2016, 10–1), in contrast to Mudde/Kaltwasser (2017), who argue that a populist logic can have good or bad political effects, and Mouffe (2018), who in the spirit of Laclau (2005) interprets populism as a specific form of democratic dissent.

a good outcome to the potentially violent dialectics of prejudgment and incorporation by adding a fourth stage of restored balance. Steiner's suggestion that a successful hermeneutic motion rests on parity of exchange is logically similar to the humanist claim that society's democratic health rests on people's ability to engage in "independent critical thinking." Balance is offered as a content-blind criterion that allows us to dismiss hermeneutic culture warriors, worshippers, or consumers as "bad readers" (Emre 2017) regardless of their moral frames.

Let us pause for a moment to look at how the question of bad reading sits with present literary theories. Event-centered approaches would solve the problem of readerly bias by grounding the hermeneutic motion in objective text-context structures, often with a scientistic sense that an artifact's ontology precedes its "social lives." Scholarship in this vein requests proof that the perception of sacred, mundane, or toxic qualities are rooted in the literary event itself, rather than being mere reception phenomena that tell us less about "the text" than the history of its appropriations (or "fetishizations"). The ambition is, for example, to excavate the real Longfellow from his avatars by trying to separate the meaning of *Evangeline* from the social materialities that are "thrust upon" *Evangeline* after it has been propelled into social space. The misconception is that markets and institutions "transformed" *Evangeline*'s originary structure into a social construct by turning it into a bestselling commodity, a canonical work, a polluted symbol of the genteel, or a mundane piece of minor heritage.

The attempt to find the real *Evangeline* behind the social fetishes is obvious in "formalist" methodologies that reduce the literary event to its analyzable "architecture." But it also shapes the now more common "anti-formalist" enterprise of ideology critique that reads texts "symptomatically" (Best/Marcus 2009), as expressive speech acts which reveal a society's "political unconscious" (Jameson 1981) or "the way a culture thinks about itself" (Tompkins 1985, xi). Treating the work as a window on social causes extends the status of "bad readers" virtually to all lay audiences. For to excavate a text's "political unconscious" requires the penetrating eye of professional analysts who can expose the hidden "investments" behind their patients' muddled tales and conflicting emotions. Psychoanalytic criticism has become unfashionable, but the legacy of psychosocial concepts of readerly "desire" or the "pleasures" of ambivalent attraction still widely pass as implicit explanations of why lay readers would want to bother consuming symptomatic texts. We find a work attractive, the argument goes, if it provides *literary-artistic displacements* of political issues we are not yet able to work through on our own, either because we do not dare to face them in the cold light of day or because we have not yet acquired a language to bring them to terms. While the hermeneutic penetration of the real falls to the expert-analyst, the reader's felt sense of trust—the question whether *Evangeline* strikes us as sacred, toxic, or mundane—is relegated to the level of "mere" affective response (the ugly feelings a patient experiences on the therapeutic couch).

Atmospheres of Trust (Longfellow's *Evangeline*)

Wanting to separate structure from affect, however, ignores the relevance of an artifact's "atmosphere," as it is being theorized by recent phenomenology and affect studies (Böhme 2017, Zhang 2018, Bille et al. 2015, Griffero/Tedescini 2019). An atmosphere might be said to be a spatially extended quality of feeling that readers absorb into their "bodily state of being" during the process of perception (Böhme 2017, 15). Reducible neither to reader-independent structure or structure-independent interiority, aesthetic atmospheres emerge in the contact between people and things, in lived moments of *resonance* between a work's sensible features and the subjective sensitivity of the person immersed in these features. Due to their relational nature, atmospheres are hard to grasp with the toolkits of event-based criticism. They seem independent of our inner selves, a bit like weather systems, in Böhme's metaphor, that impose their "spatially extended quality of feeling" (2017, 15) on us as if from the outside (we can "happen upon" an atmosphere, feel "assailed," "enveloped," or "caught up" in it as something "quasi-objective," the existence of which we can "communicate with others" [11; 25]). Yet since such "attuned spaces [gestimmte Räume]" only exist in moments of experiential immersion, their materiality is performative, a structure of feeling that cannot be deduced from abstract text-context structures.[16]

16 Viewing atmospheres as "attuned spaces [gestimmte Räume]" recalls Heidegger's concept of "Stimmung" (German for "attunement" and "mood") that fundamentally shapes a person's "Da-sein [being-there]" (in his 1929 *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, Heidegger argues that *Stimmungen* "are *not side effects*" but something that "in advance determine[s] our being with one another." A *Stimmung* precedes "cognition and volition" because it is "already there, so to speak, like an atmosphere" in which we would "immerse ourselves" and which would then "attun[e] us through and through [von der wir dann durchstimmt würden]" [1995, 66–7, 2004, 100]). Some critics distinguish at-

Whether our contact with a thing leads to a sacred, mundane, or toxic atmosphere arguably hinges on the dialectics of acquired perceptive "schemes" and "conceptual models" that differ in time and place. Scholars wishing to determine the meaning of a work therefore need to combine the analysis of text-context structures with an ethnographic inquiry into the *affective quality* with which text-context structures are experienced by empirical reader collectives. How did it feel to be immersed in *Evangeline*, in 1847, 1900, or 1950, within differing spaces of practice? If we wish to take atmospheric experience seriously, knowing about the poem's abstract affordances (an epic, in unrhymed dactylic hexameters, on the expulsion of French Acadians, with a tragic love plot, involving heroic renunciation and moral fortitude, with picturesque descriptions of American wilderness, etc.) is a first step, but one that needs to be followed up with evidence about what sort of trust relations these affordances sustain, and how they are placed in the shifting high-low differentials of strong-valued cultural space. Does Longfellow's revival of Latin hexameters in English feel dignified or banal? Have readers found his embrace of a Walter Scott-inspired national-historical epic trite or ennobling? Does his use of simile come across as "natural" or "contrived"? Do his nature descriptions strike people as worthy or demeaning of the "American Sublime"?

Nineteenth-century reviewers liked to answer such questions with musical images that invoke the elusive quality—the *je ne sais quoi*—of aesthetic atmospheres. In *Evangeline*, Longfellow describes his heroine's "ethereal beauty"

mospheres and moods (Fuchs [2000, 215] defines *Stimmung* as closer to interiority than atmosphere: "we feel an atmosphere in a space and participate with it but are ourselves attuned [gestimmt]"; thus with atmospheres "the induction" runs "from the outside inwards, while with *Stimmungen* rather from the inside outwards"). But often these terms are used interchangeably (as are "affects," "feelings, and "emotions" [see Zhang 2018, 124–5]). Jonathan Flatley distinguishes Heidegger's *Stimmung* (which he calls "affective atmosphere," "mood," or "attunement") from Raymond Williams' notion of "structures of feeling": "Where *Stimmung* as a concept focuses attention on what kinds of affect and actions are possible within an overall environment, structures of feeling are more discrete, less total, and they orient one toward a specific social class or context. For example, depression is a mood, not a structure of feeling; however, we might describe the particular depression of the Russian peasant in the steppe in the 1920s as a structure of feeling, or the depression of the residents of a decimated New Orleans after Katrina as a structure of feeling, or [...] we might talk about the structure of feeling created by the civil rights movements and the Black Panthers, structures of feeling that were mobilized within the *Stimmung* that allowed the 1967 rebellion against the police in Detroit to happen" (2008, 26–7).

(1853, 5) in terms of sound in motion—"When she had passed, it seemed like the ceasing of exquisite music" (6). One rave reviewer quipped that this "elevating and hallowing" effect also pertains to reading Longfellow's poem: "When the perusal is finished, it seems, indeed, 'like the ceasing of exquisite music'" (anon. 1848, 108). Another reviewer, by contrast, thought that Longfellow ruined his poem's intended musicality by his stylistic choices ("the measure jars upon us; it is as though we were reading intense prose before a slowly nodding China mandarin" [Peck 1948, 7]). Of course, such statements require a propositional rationalization of atmospheric perception. Whether *Evangeline*'s "music" strikes us with positive or negative atmospheric feelings (or the absence of feeling, when it "leaves us cold") hinges on our perceptional schemes. But to experience this music as higher or lower (ennobling or base) requires a musical "program" that allows us to make sense of our atmospheric feelings. A "program" provides the conceptual model that crystalizes vague aesthetic atmospheres into communicable meaning.[17]

17 We need a conceptual model to determine, for example, whether or not the Italianate-Beethovenesque compositions of the "log cabin" composer Anthony Heinrich (1781–1861) strike us as expressing an American atmosphere (as the programmatic title of his 1823 Opus 3 suggests: *The Sylviad, Or Minstrelsy of Nature in the Wilds of North America*). Or, in a metaphorical sense: our musical "program" decides whether we think the "lawless music" of Whitmanian free-verse accords with the lifeforms of American democracy or rather with the anarchic traditions of Europe (as Barrett Wendell thought [1900, 467]) or even the archaic world of primal societies (as Edmund Stedman believed [1885, 371], referring to Whitman's parallels with Biblical rhetoric). This dialectics of perceptive schemes and conceptual models concerns all kinds of atmospheric sense-making. Take, for example, the shifting discourse of mental wellbeing. A person's embodied sensibility might determine whether they experience recurring atmospheres of anxiety or sadness. How to explain and live with such atmospheres, depends on a limited number of conceptual models of shifting cultural centrality and authority. One popular "program" is the "burnout" metaphor (you have worked too hard, depleted you batteries, but the problem can be solved if you take some time out to recharge, or develop more mindful forms of life); another one is the image of trauma (you repressed a hurt that happened to you some time ago, and to heal it you must learn to bring it to terms, "working through" rather than "acting out" the trauma, to reach "closure" and "move on"); a third one is the idea of physiological imbalance (you tend towards a minor neurological dysfunction, around serotonin or similar neurotransmitters, which can be helped with specific medications). We might say with William James (1981, 92) that "truth *happens*" to a causal explanation of atmospheres if it is good to believe (if it helps people to "cope"). But while perceptive schemes depend on people's acquired habitus, "what is good to believe" is regulated by public authorities.

The point of distinguishing between perceptive and conceptual levels of atmospheric experience is to pay attention to their shifting relations to a higher good. To feel enveloped in positive or negative atmospheres hinges largely on schemes we acquire in the everyday, during our social "trajectory" in which we pick up the more personalized habits of our "sensibility." Yet to feel that a positive or negative atmosphere brings us closer or further away from something larger—as the relational terms "sacred," "mundane," and "toxic" suggest—concerns a more public level of our habitus; one that involves truth-claims and causal narratives (a "creed" or "doctrine") subject to public authorization. Taylor's distinction between strong and weak frameworks helps us to understand how the public and personal levels of experience interact with one another. The contact between people and things can produce a variety of atmospheres, and in the mode of weak valuation, we are more willing to embrace the full plurality of human experience. Like ice-cream connoisseurs contemplating the multiplicity of tastes in the world, weak evaluators can live with the claim that *Evangeline*'s music has whatever atmospheric quality my personal sensibility produces, and that this atmospheric quality means—*to me*—whatever my preferred conceptual program defines. Once we switch to strong-valued frames, however, our perception of *Evangeline* becomes more closely tied to hypergoods, which is to say, the atmosphere that results from our contact with the poem will likely produce more powerful affective intensities, ranging from disgust with the toxic to love of the sacred. As we have seen, such affective intensities are more likely to make us take a public stand and seek community-building concurrence (Miller 1997, 194–5). While in theory individualized hypergoods would be thinkable, in lived practice clashing hypergoods make relativist compromises unsustainable, and so the plurality of possible conceptual programs is limited to a smaller number that inscribe themselves into the public sphere. Within the professionalizing nineteenth-century literary establishment, the increasing symbolic inequality between "experts" and "lay readers" led to a disconnect between people's atmospheric perceptions and the conceptual programs with which they feel obliged to make sense of their perceptions.[18] *Evangeline* became a classic after the 1850s

18 The symbolic inequality between lay and expert readers has little purchase for weak-valued literary experience. But in more strong-valued domains (traditionally associated with "serious reading"), the control over literary standards never rested with a general reading public, since the rise of popular literary markets coincided with the simultaneous rise of market-sheltered gate-keeping structures similar to those of the "liberal" or "learned professions" (the ministry, law, medicine)—credentialing systems

not because of its popularity but because it resonated with the best authorized "experts" in the literary field—critics who were in a numerical minority position but due to their institutional weight could make their embodied experience and conceptual program dominate the public accounts about what *Evangeline* is.

We can simplify a complex reception history (McFarland 2010) by saying that in 1847 *Evangeline* produced at least three relevant aesthetic atmospheres. In the first, some of the most prestigious experts in the literary field were convinced that *Evangeline* was on a par with the best poetry of the age ("greater" than some of Tennyson's epics [Devey 1873, 363]). This charismatic atmosphere connected Longfellow's writing to a literary-artistic higher good, turning readers into hermeneutic worshipper who prejudge with care. Relational trust in *Evangeline*'s connection to the higher poetic life encouraged readers to suspend their critical questioning, to embrace the poem's affordances with maximal good will, and to dismiss subjectively jarring aspects as minor blemishes irrelevant to the larger whole (an attitude taken by multiple reviewers who quibbled with some of the poem's formal micro-levels while praising its higher "radiance").[19] This atmosphere convinced readers of *Evangeline*'s relevance as a "higher pleasure" that transcends mundane and merely personal uses.

A second atmosphere shaped the verdict of a smaller group of experts who experienced Longfellow's "music" as second-rate and programmatically inter-

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that restrict the right to define what counts as higher good by peer review. The literary field may lack the high levels of "institutional certainty" (Chong 2020, 147) that pertain to more "scientific" spheres of professional gatekeeping, but it does shape a public economy of prestige. Moreover, Longfellow's rise and fall coincided with an increase in institutional certainty in the literary field: Whereas in the 1850s and 1860s his authority rested on a culture of experts dominated by well-educated gentlemen who read in their free time, the thickening literary-artistic networks of literary modernism entrusted the literary peer review process to academic scholar-connoisseurs. By the time modernism was institutionalized in post-1945 mass higher education, *Evangeline* had become too simple to be taken seriously ("Who, except wretched schoolchildren, now reads Longfellow?," Ludwig Lewisohn asked in 1932 [65]).

19 As Edmund C. Stedman put it 1885: "There are flaws and petty fancies and homely passages in 'Evangeline'; but this one poem, thus far the flower of American idyls, known in all lands, I will not approach in a critical spirit. There are rooms in every house where one treads with softened footfall. Accept it as the poet left it, the mark of our advance at that time in the art of song—his own favorite, of which he justly might be fond, since his people loved it with him, and him always for its sake" (201).

preted this deficiency as a result of its derivative relation to European conventions (Edward Dowden portrayed *Evangeline* as a "European idyl of American life, [Goethe's] Hermann and Dorothea having emigrated to Acadie" [1871, 34]). This atmosphere kept *Evangeline* on the level of mundane artifacts whose merits hinged on specific uses. Reviewers in this vein argued that while the poem was not in the upper league, it provided pretty enough scenes and an uplifting story, with beauties accessible to uninitiated readers. Such accounts often excused Longfellow's *literary* mundanity by pointing to a sense of the "civil sacred" (Alexander 2019, 108), the moral-political strong value he embodied as a writer who improved the American scene (as someone who could "laugh the philistine to scorn," according to Stedman, and bring Arnoldian "sweetness and light" to a pervading "atmosphere" of "rudeness, ignorance, and asceticism" [1885, 51]).

The third atmosphere concerned the large segment of lay readers for whom *Evangeline* served as pleasurable entertainment. The poem's binge-readable combination of love story and romantic wilderness scenery (including a picturesque boat ride down the Mississippi) attracted audiences that normally preferred novel reading to epic poetry—a fact that explains *Evangeline's* unusual commercial success (which enabled Longfellow to resign his Harvard professorship in 1854 [Charvat 1968, 117]).

These three atmospheres (call them "high-artistic," "civil-sacred," and "pleasure-bingeing") differed widely in their cultural authority. Since the high-artistic program dominated the public square, it motivated binge-readers to redescribe their use as a higher pleasure, and urged audiences who had not yet found a use for *Evangeline*'s specific musicality to work on their musical sense. If *Evangeline* did not strike you as a pleasurable read, your relational trust in its authority could urge you to "change your life" in Rilke's sense, to become an aspirational reader willing to invest in the hard work of acquiring an ear for the poem's as yet unusable sounds. Of course, the aspirational desire to "get" a high-artistic atmosphere can be motivated by calculative trust in tangible assets (good grades, Bourdeusian "social distinction"), but consecrated atmospheres also promise a purpose-transcending connection to the "higher life of the culture."

Trusting the Canon

The "higher life of the culture" can sound odd in our pluralist age, and critics routinely question the reality of canons produced by "the so-called authorities." The idea that institutionalized canons are oppressive because they disenfranchise part of the demos continues to attract Foucauldian vocabularies about how "discourse/power" excludes the "unsayable" or (in Jacques Rancière's more recent formulation) "polices" the "distribution of the sensible" (2004, 3–4).[20] Such imagery suggests that democratic societies had better abolish their canons to help "redistribute" the "sensible" on equal terms.

A Weberian response would be to stress that people submit willingly to a dominant order if it fills them with relational trust. The relevance of trust is obvious for aspirational schoolroom readers, who learn to recognize the authority of atmospheres for which they have not yet acquired a taste by following the gaze of trustworthy authorities: teachers selecting a literary canon, curation cultures structuring the museum's white cubes or sites of civil-sacred memory. Relational trust in this case can mean to accept the authority view of Longfellow's greatness even though one is as yet unable to feel his greatness or make a coherent argumentative case for it. The ethos of "independent critical thinking" suggests, of course, that people should learn to form a more "self-reliant" verdict (trust "thyself" rather than a consecrated canon). But it is hard to see how strong evaluators can ever "grow out" of authorized trust relations, since the sheer size of literary heritage condemns the most erudite experts to fall back on trustworthy evaluation regimes. The nineteenth-century critics who thought *Evangeline* was better than *Enoch Arden* (1864) and on a par with *Hermann and Dorothea* (1797) already knew that Tennyson and Goethe stood in the upper regions of laureate space. They acquired this knowledge in the virtual schoolroom of legitimized "tradition;" that is, by following the gaze of preceding authorities whose verdicts they happened to trust. If canonization involves constant reevaluation (forging a "living tradition" from the totality of inherited tradition), this process can only begin after a preliminary donation of trust in previous foundations.[21]

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20 By "distribution of the sensible" Rancière means an aesthetic-political order imposed upon the demos by an organizational system that he significantly labels "the police" (2004, 3–4), while "politics" is defined as an emancipatory counter-power.

21 Alexis de Tocqueville already makes this case in the second volume of *Democracy in America* (1840), in relation to the authority of knowledge foundations: "If a man were forced to prove all the truths he makes use of every day, he would never finish; he

The contentious nature of canonization has therefore less to do with the undemocratic nature of peer-oriented hierarchies than with a conflict between two incommensurable hypergoods. Our relational trust seems torn between a strong-valued desire to rank better over worse lifeforms and the equally strong-valued desire to exempt all human lifeforms from the indignity of hierarchical ranking. A traditional attempt to solve this tension is to relativize the act of ranking by framing competing artifacts as "different-but-of-equal-dignity." This move first emerged in the romantic period, when Johann Gottfried Herder defended the literature of Germany against the dominance of French writers by emphasizing their incommensurable expressive sources (a German vs. a French national spirit). The relativist culture model initiated by Herder (and further developed by twentieth-century anthropologists like Ruth Benedict [see Kuper, 1999, 66] and cultural pluralists like Horace Kallen [see Sollors, 1986, 97]) helped to unsettle rigid universalisms, but it also explains away the uncompromising force of strong evaluation. The "Herder effect" (Casanova 2004, 77) that continues to shape proliferating notions of literary identity (national, cultural, ethnic, racial, etc.) treats the varied cultures in the world like independent nations under the UN: different-but-equal political collectives that should be cosmopolitan (willing to engage with other collectives, open to a mutually benefiting exchange), but own a right to protect their autonomy and integrity against more dominant players (cultural imperialists who, in Steiner's terms, cause smaller nations to "be knocked off balance and made to lose belief in their own identity" [1975, 299]). But this model of the world as a patchwork of autonomous cultures ignores rather than solves the intrinsic tension between the higher good of equal recognition and the necessity to rank *some* moral goods *higher* than others (equal dignity itself being part of a strong hierarchy with which democratic discourse distinguishes "civil" from "uncivil" lifeforms [Alexander 2006, 57–9], thus withholding the status of "equal dignity" from those whom society considers to pollute its moral core).

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would exhaust himself in preliminary demonstrations without advancing; as he does not have the time because of the short span of life, nor the ability because of the limits of his mind, to act that way, he is reduced to accepting as given a host of facts and opinions that he has neither the leisure nor the power to examine and verify by himself, but that the more able have found or the crowd adopts. It is on this first foundation that he himself builds the edifice of his own thoughts [...]. There is no philosopher in the world so great that he does not believe a million things on faith in others or does not suppose many more truths than he establishes" (2000, 407-8).

In the literary field, moreover, the trouble with the "different-but-equal" figure is that it requires an expressivist concept of literary production: it only makes sense if we treat literary artifacts as speech acts by which cultural identities represent themselves. Of course, if texts are first and foremost representations of autonomous cultures, canon-building looks like a dubious attempt at ranking identities into better or worse kinds. But literary texts are also often seen as strong-valued acts of "world-disclosure" that we can experience as higher achievements rather than as representations of specific groups. The models we choose will affect how we judge the problem of canon-building: If we apply the expressivist concept of literature as a representative speech act, the "canon wars" in US literature departments since the 1970s look like an emancipatory politics of recognition by which underrepresented identities (sexual, ethnic, racial, or social minorities) struggle for democratic parity. If we view literary practice as the realization of higher goods, by contrast, the ranking of texts with no regard to their representativeness seems not only legitimate but indispensable.

How to solve this dilemma? Debates about prize winners (another white-male Nobel laureate from Europe!) can sound as if hierarchical ranking were unproblematic so long as each section of the demos received proportional representation. But it is hard to see how such a proceduralism could work (should Nobel committees devise a system of rotating recognition in which each identity in the world could enjoy Warhol's fifteen minutes of fame?). In practice, rotating recognition proceduralisms only work when the stakes are low (when each ice-cream flavor, say, gets a turn on the national menu). Since no-one expects a prize committee to rotate sacred and toxic moral positions ("This year's award will have to go to the proponents of fascism"), strong-valued notions of literary excellence remain hard to square with democratic demands that "the next laureate should be an X" or "the canon needs more Ys." This clash between hypergoods can easily be overlooked whenever the prize system happens to settle on laureates that are lucky enough to satisfy both demands. A Nobel Prize winner like Toni Morrison, for example, seems at once a transcultural literary heavyweight and a representative of a specifically African-American kind of literariness. Morrison's particular iconicity can also make us overlook another crucial tension that plagues the battles around heritage: between our trust in the peer-oriented (professionalized) credentialing networks of strictly literary-artistic institutions, and the more generalist court of opinion that Morrison accessed a few years after her Nobel through the televised mediation of Oprah Winfrey. The public atmospheres of Morrison as author's author, Oprah Winfrey-enhanced bestseller, and icon of diversity and African-American liberation, harmonize literary prestige and democratic virtue so well that one can forget how rarely literature's curation cultures attune with a larger public consensus. But Morrison's ability to balance out all demands strikes me as sheer "moral luck" (Williams 1981, Rorty 2007); a happy alignment of incommensurable goods that detracts from the normality of conflict. For less lucky seekers of strong value—ordinary readers and writers in various states of worship, culture-warriordom, or indifference—the often smug conviction that virtue and literary excellence naturally follow from open-minded human decency should not be an option. The restorative act of balance that Steiner locates as the fourth "piston-stroke" is better described as a political move that comes *after* the hermeneutic motion is complete, a weighing of the *consequences* of our trust relations that we perform as citizens rather than hermeneuts.

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