

AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION SINCE THE 1960s

POSTMODERN EDUCATION

“Our society and its educational institutions have lost sight of the basic purposes of schooling, and of the high expectations and disciplined effort needed to attain them.... For the first time in the history of our country, the educational skills of one generation will not surpass, will not equal, will not even approach, those of their parents.” (*A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, April 1983: 6, 23, National Commission on Excellence in Education)

“Anti-intellectualism has been...nurtured by the false notion that democracy means that ‘my ignorance is just as good as your knowledge’.” (Issac Asimov)

“HIGHER” EDUCATION

The liberal arts were corrupted, gutted, and repackaged to serve the ideological interests of the postmodern, multicultural Left.” (C. Bradley Thompson, “On the Decline and Fall of the Liberal Arts,” *Academic Questions*, Winter 2015: 28.4)

“When tracked longitudinally in core competencies—analyzing, writing, and reading—students make almost *no* improvement during their years in college.... Because of the supposed right not to be offended, universities have become ‘echo chambers’ of what students want to hear, and of what faculty wish them to imbibe.... Narcissism is off the charts.” (Daniel Asia, review of *The State of the American Mind: 16 Leading Critics on the New Anti-Intellectualism*, 2015, in *Academic Questions*, Winter 2015)

“Educating yourself was something you had to do in spite of school, not because of it.” (David Foster Wallace, a product of American higher education who hanged himself in 2008)

“Post-Modernism opposes the nationalist literary traditions institutionalized by the Academy.” (Charles Newman, *The Post-Modern Aura*, 87)

“Portland State University — Building a Model for Comprehensive Reform: ...What this means is abandoning the university’s traditional mission of discovering and transmitting knowledge.” (Carolyn M. Buan, “The Humanities: Alive, Well, and Breaking New Ground [Wind] on Oregon Campuses,” *Oregon Humanities*, Summer 1997)

“Louis Kampf, who was President of the Modern Language Association in 1971, has charged that ‘the very category of art has become one more instrument of class oppression.’ The concept of culture ‘is rooted in social elitism.’ It can be ‘little else but an instrument of class oppression.’... The logical deduction from Kampf’s argument would be that people should be denied access to great literature and art in the name of their political advancement.” (Louis Kampf, “Notes Toward a Radical Culture,” *The New Left*, ed. Priscilla Long, 1969: 422, 424, 426, 431, quoted by Rene Wellek, *The Attack on Literature*, UNC 1982: 3)

“The American university in the sixties was experiencing the same dismantling of the structure of rational inquiry as had the German university in the thirties [the rise of Nazism].... The major student activity in social science was to identify heretics.... It is the humanities that have suffered the most as a result of the sixties. The lack of student interest...the vanishing of jobs for Ph.D.s, the lack of public sympathy, came from the overturning of the old order, where their place was assured. They have gotten what they deserved, but we have unfortunately all lost.... The professors of humanities are in an impossible situation and do not believe in themselves or what they do.... Humanists ran like lemmings into the sea, thinking they would refresh and revitalize themselves in it. They drowned.” (Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today’s Students* (Simon & Schuster 1987: 313, 355, 352-53)

“If in principle, the danger to liberal education could come from the right, it now (as opposed to thirty years ago) comes primarily from the self-styled left.... Bromwich understands that those who profess and enforce such groupthink ‘want no single person ever to survive as singular...The caring groups are really hard as nails: They want to destroy us, and always for the sake of all...The new fundamentalists who enforce a rigid, left-wing moralism on the university that makes real *thinking* impossible.” (Saul Morson, Review of *Politics by Other Means: Higher Education and Group Thinking* by David Bromwich, Yale 1992, *Heterodoxy* 1992)

“The point is that when we look at Western civilization critically, we don’t have all that much to be proud of. It’s essentially a long history of murder.” (Prof. Rodger Kamenetz, English Department, LSU, quoted in *Heterodoxy*, September 1992) “The canon of great literature was created by high Anglican assholes to underwrite their social class.” (Prof. Stanley Hauerwas, Theological Ethics, Duke University, quoted by Pam Kelley, “For Duke Profs, the Hot Debate is What to Teach,” *The Charlotte Observer*, 28 September 1990) “An overwhelming proportion of our courses are taught by people who really hate the system.” (Prof. David Littlejohn, Graduate School of Literature, UC Berkeley)

“The public would be horrified if it knew what is happening in college literature programs....The direction that humanist professors have taken seems to negate...every reason that society might have to support their work.... The academy has degenerated so much that it in some respects has become a social liability rather than an asset....Whereas affirmative action ostensibly asks for some admissions and appointments, the race-gender-class transformation wants the entire curriculum. The intellectual catastrophe that has overtaken the humanities is not just a by-product of affirmative action. It *is* affirmative action.... A concern with exceptional minds and excellence is now dismissed as elitism, and many prefer to concern themselves with Madonna videos or gay pornography. Fine writing is no longer valued; English professors now write in a style that they would formerly have denounced as clumsy and full of jargon. Many, it would seem, no longer even like the field that once so delighted them.... Elaine Marks, the 1993 president of the Modern Language Association of America...celebrated in the President’s Column of an *MLA Newsletter* ‘the dominance of the social and political over the ontological and the poetical, the dominance of cultural studies over literary studies’...

Literature professors now denigrate literature and replace it with theory, for that new emphasis shifts the professor from secondary to primary status.... Respect for the essential underpinnings of academic life—knowledge, argument, evidence, logic—is at an astonishingly low level.... The extraordinary degree of reliance on ad hominem rather than logical argument is also in effect a rejection of academic knowledge.... Feminists...now think that they can brush aside objections simply by identifying a critic as sexist or conservative.... Academic feminism drives up the level of hysteria with all kinds of unrealistic fantasies about patriarchal conspiracies against women.... Many have imagined civilization to be the cause of the evil in us, not a restraint on it.” (John M. Ellis, *Literature Lost: Social Agendas and the Corruption of the Humanities*, Yale 1997: 204-05, 213-19, 222)

“We are told, there is no such thing as intrinsic literary greatness, there are only works called great because they serve oppressive elites (not including college professors)...‘Literary text, like other artworks, are neither more nor less important than any other cultural artifact or practice’.... Art is an industrial product like any other and supports the rule of capital no less, but more insidiously, than the futures market.... The public is told that the humanities teach ‘critical analysis,’ but what is meant by this term is the opposite of disinterested examination of facts or the habit of questioning one’s own assumptions. It means the critique of *others*.... Essays are selected not to shed light on different aspects of [a] novel (character, psychology, authorial voice, aesthetic wholeness) but to illustrate schools of criticism: gender criticism, Marxist criticism, cultural criticism, new historicism, and feminist criticism... No wonder college presidents have to defend the humanities! And no wonder enrollments in literature courses decline. If English professors don’t believe in great literature, why should students?” (Saul Morson, Review of *Literary Criticism from Plato to Postmodernism* in *The New Criterion*, October 2014)

“Numerous studies of both the UC system and of higher education nationwide demonstrate that students who graduate from college are increasingly ignorant of history and literature. They are unfamiliar with the principles of American constitutional government. And they are bereft of the skills necessary to

comprehend serious books and effectively marshal evidence and argument in written work.... The hollowing of the curriculum stems from too many professors' preference for promoting a partisan political agenda.... A recent study by UCLA's prestigious Higher Education Research Institute found that more faculty now believe that they should teach their students to be agents of social change than believe that it is important to teach them the classics of Western civilization." (*The Wall Street Journal*, 31 March-1 April 2012: A13)

"Growing numbers of students are sent to college at increasingly higher costs, but for a large proportion of them the gains in critical thinking, complex reasoning and written communication are either exceedingly small or empirically nonexistent. At least 45 percent of students in our sample did not demonstrate any statistically significant improvement in CLA performance during the first two years of college.... Large numbers of U.S. college students can be accurately described as academically adrift. They might graduate, but they are failing to develop the higher-order cognitive skills that it is widely assumed college students should master." (Richard Arum & Josipa Roksa, *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses*, U Chicago 2011: 120) "The quality of higher education is questionable. Students study fewer hours than prior generations of students, and independent tests show little to no increase in learning after several years of study, even at highly rated private colleges." (Daniel Bonevac, *Academic Questions* 28.3, Fall 2015: 357)

"J. Scott Armstrong, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School and Editor of the *Journal of Forecasting*, conducted his own analysis of academic writing and concluded that professors who wished to be published in the academic press must: '(1) *not* pick an important problem, (2) *not* challenge existing beliefs, (3) *not* obtain surprising results, (4) *not* use simple methods, (5) *not* provide full disclosure of methodology, sources and findings, and (6) *not* write clearly'." (Charles J. Sykes, *ProfScam: Professors and the Demise of Higher Education*, Regnery Gateway 1988: 105-06)

Liberal academics in the humanities claimed that they nearly all belonged to the same political party because they were all "more intelligent" than everybody who disagreed with them. On the contrary: (1) intelligent people are not conformists, they think for themselves; (2) intelligent people consider more than one point of view; (3) intelligent teachers do not preach; (4) intelligent professors are intellectuals, not ideologues; (5) intelligent Americans do not need to rely on decadent Frenchmen to think for them; (6) intelligent people are not dung beetles deluded by a totalitarian economic theory that has failed repeatedly and is destroying Europe; (7) intelligent academics are able to teach their students something, whereas studies including *Academically Adrift* (2011) have shown that most liberal academics have not been able to teach students much of anything; (8) intelligent literature teachers know how to explicate a text objectively; (9) intelligent public servants do not rant, call names and spew contempt for taxpayers and legislators who fund them; (10) intelligent people do not demonize half the human race on the basis of their gender; (11) intelligent Americans do not betray their country; (12) intelligent animals do not foul their own nests. "*Teach – your children well...*" (Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young at the Woodstock Festival, 1969)

"The philosophy of the schoolroom in one generation will be the philosophy of civil government in the next." (Abraham Lincoln)

"SOCIAL JUSTICE"

In the 30 years after 1978, while Feminists were taking over, the cost of a college education rose 1,120 percent. (*Bloomberg Business*, 5 August 2012) Nationally, from 1971 to 2011 bachelor's degrees in English fell from 7.6 percent to 3.1 percent. (U.S. National Digest for Education Statistics) Feminist priorities and political correctness are primarily responsible for the current national trend of eliminating much of the liberal arts and reducing English departments to composition and rhetoric taught by adjuncts.

Liberal professors tried to justify not teaching many traditional subjects anymore by claiming that they had an obligation to change society by promoting "social justice." They pretend to honor Dr. Martin Luther King while practicing the opposite of what he preached, scorning his dream--ignoring character and dividing everyone against each other on the basis of race, gender, class, sexual orientation and beliefs. They have waged cultural warfare against the majority of Americans.

Liberal administrators advanced their careers by raising money and catering to radicals. They increased tuitions as fast as the liberal politicians they supported increased guaranteed federal student loans and grants. They fed on the Fed. Much of that money went to pump up their own enormous salaries and to hire more liberal faculty and more liberal administrators. They “needed” all those extra high-paid liberal administrators to raise still more money, to establish and administer Women’s Studies and all the other new “studies” programs and departments and positions that advocate for liberals, to promote monocultural “diversity” and enforce political correctness. “Colleges now employ more administrators than faculty members...charging more and spending the additional funds on everything but teaching and learning.” (Daniel Bonevac, *Academic Questions* 28.3, Fall 2015: 356-57)

While calling their institutions “non-profit,” fat cat liberal administrators and tenured faculty have enriched themselves at the expense of students. They pushed up the average cost of tuition at more than 4 times the rate of inflation. They are monopoly capitalists who drove out the competition of ideas and kept raising their prices. Obsessed with getting money rather than educating and preparing students for the future, they duped young people about their prospects. As a result, 50 percent of college graduates aged 25 or younger are today (2016) unemployed or holding down jobs that don’t require a college degree. Of those who cannot find jobs, 85% of college graduates move back in with their parents after they graduate. The ramp-up in student loans has driven up costs, undermined the value of a college degree, and held back economic recovery, especially the housing and auto markets. 7 of 10 graduates from public and nonprofit colleges in 2015 had college loan debts averaging \$30,100 (Institute for College Access and Success).

English department faculty in particular are inclined to posture as anti-capitalist advocates of the common people, even Marxists. Yet they are notorious for avoiding student advising and advance their careers by avoiding teaching. Today about 70% of instruction in higher education is by adjuncts, most of whom are exploited in every way and avoided by the tenured faculty. English departments are feudal: Tenured faculty are the nobility, adjuncts are the serfs. “Everyone wonders why Marxist thought has permeated literature departments while Marxist regimes are collapsing everywhere, and the puzzle is only increased by the fact that these literature professors do not behave like Marxists in their daily lives.... This anti-bourgeois sentiment...has more in common with its origin in aristocratic disdain for the lower orders than with egalitarianism.” (John M. Ellis, *Literature Lost: Social Agendas and the Corruption of the Humanities*, Yale 1997: 210)

“Real ‘60s radicals rarely went to grad school and never became big-wheel humanities professors, with their fat salaries and perks. The proof of the vacuity of academic leftism for the past forty years is the complete silence of leftist professors about the rise of the corporate structure of the contemporary university—their total failure to denounce the gross expansion of the administrator class and the obscene rise in tuition costs. The leading academic leftists are such frauds—they’ve played the system and are retiring as millionaires!” (Camille Paglia, *Salon*, 30 July 2015)

POLITICAL CORRECTNESS

Marxists have always divided people against each other based on class. After the 1960s a liberal elite monopolized higher education, rejected the traditional ideal of the “melting pot” and divided Americans against each other based on class, gender, race, and sexual orientation. They divided in order to conquer. For decades they have enforced a nationwide regime of “Political Correctness”—sexist, racist, and fascist. Identity trumps merit. Liberals lowered academic standards through the floor. They harass dissenters and demonize scapegoats—white males, conservatives, Christians, dissenters of any kind. Their radicalism has accelerated their defunding and demise. PC bullying by liberal faculties produced crybully students who are now bullying them back. Live by radicalism, die by radicalism.

PC liberals enforce “seven types of suppression of free speech”: “*Ostracize* those who dissent from political orthodoxy; *usurp* the curriculum; *train* students to be activists; *repress* topics that are ruled unfit for discussion; *aggress* against anyone and any custom that embodies the old order; *group* people by race, sex, and ethnicity into categories stigmatized as privileged or celebrated as oppressed; and *exalt* certain ideas and beliefs so that they are exempt from questioning or critical examination, while expressions of

dissent can be suppressed as acts of malignity.” (Peter Wood, President, National Association of Scholars, *The New Criterion* 35.5, January 2017: 19)

Feminists set an example of absolute narcissism. They impose strict rules against “hate speech” by others while routinely using hate speech in their own classrooms. While claiming to oppose stereotypes, they stereotype everyone different from themselves. They suppress free speech by everyone and deprive males of due process. Liberal academics institutionalized evils they claimed to oppose and have fostered a nationwide pandemic of grievance, entitlement, envy, hatred, greed, and violence. Feminists and male “theorists” have taught students that *truth* is relative, that absolute truth does not exist, and that *objectivity* is a myth—even a patriarchal ideology. Yet they claim to be speaking the truth. Their denial that objectivity is possible disqualifies them from grading students. They are not fired for incompetence because administrators are just as corrupt as the faculties.

By denying that objectivity is possible PC liberal academics give themselves permission to lie and propagandize. Insofar as they are successful, they disqualify their students from serving on a jury or entering the medical profession or the military as well as many other professions that require objectivity. Since the justice system depends on objectivity, PC liberals foster social *injustice* rather than social justice. Inevitably their journalism schools have produced propagandists for their corrupt Big Government political party rather than reporters, their law schools have produced judges who have ruled according to prejudices rather than the law, their schools of education have produced indoctrinators, and their “climate scientists” falsified data to get federal grants and are now demanding federal prosecution of the real scientists who are disproving their lies. “Over half of psychology studies fail reproducibility tests... Two thirds...should probably be distrusted.” (Monya Baker, *nature.com*, 27 August 2015) “The overwhelming amount of current sociology is simply nonsense... Agreement is more akin to the beliefs that bind the members of a religion.” (Steven Goldberg, Chair, Sociology Dept., City College, CUNY, November 2009) Anthropology is a religion worshipping the goddess Margaret Mead, whose fanciful doctrines were founded on a hoax by two Samoan girls. Anthropologists are such subjective liberals they cannot distinguish fiction from fact, most notably in the cases of Mead and Carlos Castaneda.

Politically Correct liberals are often shocked by election losses because their liberal pollsters are just as dishonest as they are and tell them what they want to hear. In 2012 their political party took over the U.S. government through massive fraud in the presidential election and use of the IRS to suppress the other party. Currently the platform of their party is virtually the same as that of the Communist Party.

ANTI-AMERICANISM

The Feminist editors of school textbooks who monopolize the industry are sexist, racist, and anti-American according to Diane Ravitch in *The Language Police* (2003): “Truth and historical accuracy...are not important... ‘Everything written before 1970 was either gender biased or racially biased’.... Women... must be depicted only in a positive light... Women should not be portrayed as wives and mothers.... Guidelines express barely concealed rage against people of European ancestry.... European Americans, the guidelines suggest, were uniquely responsible for bigotry and exploitation in all human history.... The texts treat the Black Panthers as a beneficent social service organization.... Some texts present Mao as a friendly inclusive leader.... While admitting that he was responsible for the deaths of millions of people, they...[point] to the great progress that China made during his reign.... Test developers are told to avoid value judgments that favor the society in which we live.... Every world culture is wonderful except for the United States.... None of the textbooks written in the 1990s expresses... appreciation for American institutions, values, and ideals.... Textbooks like Democratic presidents; textbooks don’t like Republican presidents.”

FEMINAZISM

In 2014 the Modern Language Association (MLA) got compared to the Nazi Party in the national press when it banned a journalist from the conservative *Daily Caller* from covering its annual convention while admitting Communist journalists. Communists are estimated to have murdered over 110 million people in the 20th century. Communists have been identified with Nazism since Stalin’s pact with Hitler in 1939. Feminists have been called Feminazis since the 1980s. One of the elite literary critics most often cited by

members of the MLA in their publications is Paul de Mann of Yale, who wrote propaganda for the Nazis during World War II. His biographers have revealed that he was also an amoral bigamist, embezzler, and deadbeat who got one of his students pregnant—a liberal exemplar in the pursuit of social justice.

POLITICIZED LITERARY CRITICISM

Literary criticism first became intensely political during the 1930s when Communists harassed major American writers for not being Communists. Marxist political correctness became an expanding coalition in higher education, informing “Theory,” Feminist, Afro-American, and “Queer” criticism in particular. The topics of Political Correctness and the Feminist Period (1970-present) are discussed elsewhere on this website. By the 1980s, when Feminists took over higher education, virtually all academic literary criticism had to be Politically Correct. An example illustrating male Political Correctness is *American Fictions 1940-1980* (1983) by Frederick R. Karl, a professor of English at New York University:

Professor Karl exhibits the major characteristics of academic Political Correctness: (1) He has a political agenda, the victory of politically correct liberalism over traditional values: “The political liberalism of most novelists does not vitiate their attraction to agrarian ideals, which are reactionary, even paranoid, certainly anti-intellectual (in the urban sense), and anti-twentieth century.” Karl sees literary history as “progressive” politics led by urban liberals like himself. This professor seems never to have ventured outside the city limits of New York, whereas (2) a majority of the American population was rural until 1919. Karl in effect dismisses the canon of traditional American literature by rejecting “agrarian ideals,” accommodating the agenda of Feminists. “We might as well omit to study Nature because she is old.” (Thoreau) (3) Karl panders to mediocre Feminist writers while ignoring major traditionalist writers such as Wallace Stegner and Marilynne Robinson. (4) He defends the sadistic Nurse Ratched in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (1962) by Ken Kesey and accuses Kesey of hating women. (5) He disapproves of John Irving’s satire of Feminist excesses in *The World According to Garp* (1978), is too biased to recognize the obvious satire, sees nothing funny in the book and sounds like Pooh Percy.

(6) Agrarian ideals express the values of the heart, whereas Karl the urbanite is all dissociated head, with no respect for Jefferson, Thoreau, Twain, Dickinson, Frost, Cather, or Faulkner. (7) As a secular Postmodernist, he does not understand spirituality, reducing it disparagingly to “mysticism” and “pastoral fantasies.” (8) Karl is also philistine in reducing T. S. Eliot to an “esthete.” (9) He smears Hemingway with the lie that he was a “racist.” (10) Karl is a bigot who accuses innocent people of bigotry. (11) He accommodates Black critics in their unjust attack on William Styron for his novel *The Confessions of Nat Turner* (1967). (12) He hates the 1950s, loves the 1960s; (13) he really *really* hates Richard Nixon; (14) and he has contempt for all Republicans, especially Senator Joe McCarthy: “What occurred in the fifties was a reversal of values so that those who were perceived as ‘saving’ us—McCarthy, Nixon, MacArthur, a cabinet of car dealers, even Eisenhower... a semiliterate folk hero as President.”

(15) Karl is a propagandist for the Left, most obviously in demonizing Senator McCarthy, who exposed Communist spies hired by liberals like Karl in the U.S. government, claiming falsely that McCarthy “created an imaginary world of names and lists, induced not by drugs but by alcohol.” Liberal defamation of McCarthy was entirely discredited in the 1990s when hundreds of secret Soviet cables were translated proving that McCarthy was right all along and that he underestimated liberal treason. (16) Incredibly, Karl does not even admit that Communists were a threat to the United States: “America may or may not have been betrayed by Communists and their sympathizers in the fifties.” (17) Karl is surprisingly adolescent for a professor, as in praising Robert Coover’s puerile satire of Nixon, *The Public Burning* (1977): “‘Uncle Sam gives his approval to Nixon by screwing him in the ass, pushing in his seemingly endless weapon until Nixon is writhing in agony.’ For once Nixon has ingested Uncle Sam’s prick and jism, he has been knighted...” (18) In his comprehensive 2-volume survey of American fictions from 1940 to 2000, Karl devotes many pages of discussion to Politically Correct minor writers and to unpopular cerebral academic novels by Barth and others while ignoring the two major novelists in the West after Cormac McCarthy—Wallace Stegner and Marilynne Robinson.

Likewise another Politically Correct liberal critic, Lawrence Buell in *The Dream of the Great American Novel* (2014): “He tends to equate novels’ strategies with their political valences, to evaluate novels either

as contributions or impediments to a multicultural society, to gender equality and to a society accepting of alternative sexualities.” (Review by Michael Kimmage, *New Republic*, 22 February 2014) “Buell’s book tells us a good great deal about American fiction. What it also tells us, in its every line, is what is wrong with academic criticism.... The one kind of standard that Buell will not permit himself is an aesthetic one.” (Review by William Deresiewicz, *theatlantic.com*, June 2014) As contenders for the “Great American Novel,” Buell puts *Gone with the Wind* alongside *Moby-Dick*.

“*The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism* is a pointer to the abysmal state of mind that prevails in so many of our universities. In another unconsciously funny entry, on the Kenyan Marxist Ngugi Wa Thiong’o, Nicholas Brown appears to praise his subject for a postcolonial essay entitled ‘On the Abolition of the English Department.’... The prospect of such an abolition, at least in the United States, becomes more appetizing by the minute.” (Christopher Hitchens, “Literary Scholars Embrace an Elite Language, yet Imagine Themselves Subversives,” Review, *NYT*, 22 May 2005: 18-19)

For detailed examples of how since 1970 Politically Correct interpretations—mostly by Feminists--have falsified literature, see the review of *Hawthorne: Calvin’s Ironic Stepchild*; analysis of *The Blithedale Romance*; how Feminists revised *Little Women*; analysis of Cather’s *The Professor’s House*; analysis of Hemingway’s “The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife”; analysis of O’Connor’s *The Violent Bear It Away*; how Feminists censored Hemingway’s last novel; analysis of DeLillo’s *White Noise*; and Feminist misreading of *White Noise* debunked.

NAZIS AT YALE

“Late in 1987 an extraordinary literary, intellectual and political scandal broke in a place we would least expect it: among the solemn deconstructionists of the humanities faculty at Yale University, the Sorbonne of Connecticut. One of the leading deconstructionists, the former Sterling Professor of the Humanities, Paul de Man, who died four years before, proved to have pulled the curtain on a dark stage in his wartime history. As a young man in his native Belgium, influenced by a powerful uncle who became a leading supporter of the Nazis, de Man had contributed some 170 articles to collaborationist newspapers. Though largely literary, they celebrated the historical justice and destiny of Nazism and, to put it at its least, colluded with its anti-Semitic philosophies....

[de Man] was made a member of the Society of Fellows at Harvard. He became a distinguished teacher at Cornell, Johns Hopkins and the University of Zurich...He joined Yale, to become what a standard textbook describes as ‘the most powerful and profound mind in the group of critics who, inspired in part by the work of Jacques Derrida, made Yale a center of deconstruction in the 1970’s’.... Above all, he stood for a new age of literary theory.... In his most famous essay, ‘The Resistance to Theory,’ he argued that the age of esthetic and ethical criticism [objective New Criticism] was over and that new rhetorical criticism gave the basis for a universal theory... In a time his own theory defined as the Age of the Death of the Author, de Man was an authority.

Deconstruction, crudely; is a paradox about a paradox: It assumes that all discourse, even all historical narrative, is essentially rhetoric. Rhetoric slips and is ‘undecidable,’ has no fixed meaning, so when we read, we invariably misread. It came out of Paris and, for all its claim to universality, has an evident history. It was born in the aftermath of existential anxieties about presence and absence, the there and the not-there. It developed via structuralism and its emphasis on linguistics and semiotics. From these sources it derived its fundamental premise: the endless slippage of the referent, the unfixity of our attempt to name existence. It grew from two major collapses in late 20th-century European thought: the metaphysical decline of humanism and the dialectical decline of Marxism. For all that, it found its own best home in the United States, that...postculture of multiplied signs and random meanings. (‘America is deconstruction,’ said the leading proponent, Jacques Deridda... In the 60’s and 70’s, deconstruction filled—perhaps better, emptied—the gap left in the American humanities by the demise of the Old New Criticism....

Throughout the 70’s the seminar rooms on American campuses—and then campuses worldwide—became workshops in deconstructionist practice. Junior misreaders worked away, becoming ever more like C.I.A. operatives, decoding false signals sent by a distant enemy, the writer. Deconstruction lifted itself with ever higher pretensions. As Jonathan Culler of Cornell exulted, ‘The history of literature is part of the

history of criticism.' Deconstruction transformed everything into a text ready to be studied (deconstructed, if you will)...and so easily made affinities with radical Feminism and latter-day Marxism, two other philosophies that also seek to challenge the sanctity of the text.....

If deconstruction encountered resistance, that was often seen as censorious ignorance. Gangs of neo-deconstructionists would now come to town with their critical services and descend on the library. One would demythologize, another decanonize, another dephallicize, another dehegemonize, another defame.... Soon all that would be left would be a few bare bones of undecidable discourse and some tattered leather bindings. This would be called a conference of the Modern Language Association.... [After he was exposed as a former Nazi], from a great variety of reasons...[including] the need to sustain the critical enterprise, but perhaps above all dependence on the intellectual mindset formed by deconstruction itself--many of [the deconstructionists] set to work to reconstruct Paul de Man.

The ironies grew clear. The discourse...of deconstruction was put to use to canonize and re-fame the master of deconstruction. More significantly, the vacancies of his theory—it is avowedly not esthetic, moral or ethical [BEING A NAZI DOES NOT MATTER!], and submits creation to the eternal condition of pure discourse—became a way to pronounce de Man's early writings [advocating Nazism] undecidable, slipping away from their apparent meaning and their crucial historical location. Since a text has no existential author, no absolute historical occasion, the 170 articles [advocating Nazism] could become texts in the construction of the discourse called Paul de Man.... This is surely the contemporary meaning of the story of Paul de Man; it calls neither for the simple exultation some might take from [his being exposed as a former Nazi] nor for the arcane circularity of Mr. Derrida's recent defenses. You might say it calls for reconstruction—or the Birth of the Author.” (Malcolm Bradbury, Review of *Deconstruction and the Fall of Paul de Man* by David Lehman, *NYTBR*, 24 February 1991)

POSTMODERNIST “THEORY”

“Vast sectors of the humanities and social sciences seem to have adopted a philosophy that we shall call, for want of a better term, ‘Postmodernism’: an intellectual current characterized by the more-or-less explicit rejection of the rationalist tradition of the Enlightenment, by theoretical discourses disconnected from any empirical test, and by a cognitive and cultural relativism that regards science as nothing more than a ‘narration,’ a ‘myth’ or a social construction among many others.... Our goal is precisely to say that the king is naked (and the queen too)....

We show that famous intellectuals such as Lacan, Kristeva, Irigaray, Baudrillard, and Deleuze have repeatedly abused scientific concepts and terminology: either using scientific ideas totally out of context, without giving the slightest justification...or throwing around scientific jargon in front of their non-scientist readers without any regard for its relevance or even its meaning.... (1) ...The most common tactic is to use scientific (or pseudo-scientific) terminology without bothering much about what the words actually *mean*. (2) Importing concepts from the natural sciences into the humanities or social sciences without giving the slightest conceptual or empirical justification.... We learn from Lacan that the structure of the neurotic subject is exactly the torus (it is no less than reality itself...), from Kristeva that poetic language can be theorized in terms of the cardinality of the continuum, and from Baudrillard that modern war takes place in a non-Euclidean space—all without explanation. (3) Displaying a superficial erudition by shamelessly throwing around technical terms in a context where they are completely irrelevant. The goal is, no doubt, to impress and, above all, to intimidate the non-scientist reader.... (4) Manipulating phrases and sentences that are, in fact, meaningless. Some of these authors exhibit a veritable intoxication with words, combined with a superb indifference to their meaning.... Many people are simply irritated by the arrogance and empty verbiage of Postmodernist discourse and by the spectacle of an intellectual community where everyone repeats sentences that no one understands.” (Alan Sokal & Jean Bricmont, *Fashionable Nonsense: Postmodern Intellectuals' Abuse of Science*, Picador 1998: x, 1, 4-5, 204)

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