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EPILOGUE

The Literature of Citizenship:

A Humanifesto

> The City is not a fixed and dead law of bronze, it is an *initiation* . . .
>
> Michelet, *The Student*

This book has been concerned to map a set of formative interchanges among political and theological patterns of group affiliation, be they confessional, national, urban, or congregational. It has not been an historical project so much as a conceptual and exegetical one, an inquiry into foundational texts, substantive tropes, and their creative replay in Shakespeare's world and beyond. In these final pages, I will separate the classical discourse of citizenship from its theological entwinings in order to sketch a field of inquiry that might draw scholars towards matters of public interest and consequence without diluting the integrity of what we do. What I am calling the literature of citizenship clears a forum for mediating among universal and particular, canonical and multicultural, national and transnational, debates and methods in the increasingly fractured and uncivil settings of our classrooms, hallways, and meeting places. We know all too well that our internal arguments, usually carried out at a high level of abstraction

and with a great deal of seriousness, often come back to us from public onlookers in the form of cruel and destructive jokes. The crisis in the humanities – in public funding, in public interest, and in support on our own campuses – is *our problem*, not so much in the sense that we have caused it (there are multiple systemic factors at work), as in the sense that no one is going to fix it for us. Work on the literature of citizenship may open an avenue for more constructive dialogue with public audiences who find themselves increasingly disengaged from academic discourse, offering the chance to integrate not only the work of several disciplines (literature, history, and the social sciences), but also the efforts of several institutions, including the university, secondary schools, and community organizations, in innovative collaborations that can help each of us articulate our individual and collective goals and values within a new civic space.[1]

What follows, then, is a "humanifesto," a manifesto for the humanities. It is a public statement of principles that also serves as a call to action, a forcible making-appear of a set of relationships or practices for the purpose of their further realization. And it is concerned to make manifest the humanities, to encourage humanistic inquiry to unfold its work within public spheres of discourse. The conceptual and pragmatic frameworks of citizenship offer not only a theme for such manifestation, but also a genealogy and a set of conditions -- a past with a future -- for developing this work in an intellectually coherent and historically grounded way. The endeavor I am suggesting is actually a modest one – I am certainly not proposing the literature of citizenship as a new major or discipline, but rather as a topic for research and study within the university and as a theme for collaborative projects between the university and other institutions, in the form of public symposia, seminars for teachers, community poetry or oral history projects,

service-learning initiatives, and so on. Precisely by linking work inside the university with work outside of it, however, these modest enterprises could have a dynamizing effect on other aspects of our teaching and scholarship and help us better unfold, open up, render manifest, the range of work we already do in relation to other public discussions and institutions.

The literature of citizenship, it would seem, has always been with us, certainly in the West and probably globally as well. It is a commonplace of humanistic inquiry that a key function of literature has been initiation into the group – what Michael Bernstein called "the tale of the tribe." But is the literature of citizenship a variant of the tale of the tribe, or rather its opposite -- its refusal, its retort, its sublation? In an essay entitled "Myth Interrupted," Jean-Luc Nancy analyses the tale of the tribe as itself a myth whose hold on Western consciousness must be (and indeed repeatedly, constitutively, has been) interrupted: arrested, suspended, rendered visible as fiction so that other forms of less imaginary communion can take place. Nancy begins his essay by evoking the primal scene of socialization through literature: "We know the scene: there is a gathering, and someone is telling a story. We do not know yet whether these people gathering together form an assembly, if they are a horde or a tribe. But we call them brothers and sisters because they are gathered together and because they are listening to the same story" (43).[2] Nancy goes on to critique this tableau as the myth of myth, the fantasy of a "full, original speech, at times revealing, at times founding the intimate being of a community" (48). The interruption of this myth would also entail "the interruption of community," of the dream of the fusion of its members in a single voice or general will (57). Such a suspension, Nancy argues, would reveal the "disjunctive or hidden nature of community,"

the insistent resistance to the collective consolations of the great national stories that runs through and against hegemonic community formations, in turn founding an alternate form of community that takes shape as a forcefield of responsive and passionate yet ever-distinct, uncommon singularities.

Following Nancy, though in a path leading back to liberalism and classical politics, I would submit that the literature of citizenship is precisely *not* the tale of the tribe, even when it appears as a neighbor at work in the same social fields. If literature is *that which breaks from myth* (as, say, writing rather than speech, as univocal rather than collective expression, or as irony rather than confirmation), and citizenship is *that which breaks from tribalism*, (above all in those rites of naturalization that sacrifice ancient kinship bonds to new civic ones), then the literature of citizenship must tell a story and do a work other than that of assembling a tribe in the mesmerizing circle of its performance.[3] This is why, in the Western tradition, we would do better marking the origins of the literature of citizenship in tragedy than in epic, in Sophocles rather than in Homer. Classical tragedy, as recent critics have argued, bears witness to the destruction of the great aristocratic houses and their epic myths within the arena of the new polis. The tragic pattern of tragedy, in which "the destruction of the royal household end[s] in benefit for the polis" (Seaford 342) reflected the conditions of tragic performance as a civic ritual. Seating in the Theatre of Dionysus was divided into ten wedges or *kekrides,* for each of the ten "tribes" or *phyloi* [CHK] instituted under Cleisthenes' reforms of 507. But these regroupings, unlike the four kinship divisions that preceded them, were drawn from a precise combination of coastal, inland, and urban districts, creating new citizen groups united by neither blood nor regional ties. [4] And it was these new civic tribes that

"competed among themselves for honors in serving the people, particularly in the choral competitions at the festival of the City of Dionysia" -- that is, in the annual civic ritual that produced Greek tragedy (Tyrrell and Bennett, *Athenian Myths* 134). Greek tragedies, with their *mythoi* of imploded kinship, were submitted to public judgment by civic "tribes" whose political affiliations had themselves been created through radical acts of de-affiliation and re-zoning.

A social instance, a public sphere, is called forth in the literature of citizenship, but the modes of equality and participation it promises remain formal and artificial, a function of legal and institutional definition, irreducible to either the first nature of kinship or the second nature of culture (myth being the structural mediation between nature and culture). We could say that citizenship, unlike the community imagined by myth, is *never enough*, and hence always requires supplementation by other forms of communal life, including the rites of religion and family, *oikos* and cult, which nonetheless remain distinct from the forms of citizenship they variously support, reflect, or negate.[5] The insufficiency of civic discourse – its choral platitudes, its public cheerfulness, its pomp and circumstance – is part of what the literature of citizenship thematizes, and not only to parody or critique it, but also to find in its very normativity opportunities for new drama and lyricism as well as new irony.

By insisting on the salutary insufficiency of citizenship, the formality of its forms, I break from the tradition of civic republicanism, which posits that human being is most fully realized in civic activity: in the words of J. G. A. Pocock, one of the tradition's most articulate and learned contemporary spokesmen, "Citizenship is not just a means to being free; it is the way of being free itself" (34). Pocock goes on to oppose this positive

political definition of citizenship, derived from the Greek experience, to the negative legal definitions that date from the Roman period, when "a 'citizen' came to mean someone free to act by law, free to ask and expect the law's protection, a citizen of such and such a legal community" (37).[6] Although civic republicanism offers a rich vision of political life that certainly motivates much of my thinking in this book, it achieves actuality most effectively in local arenas involving groups unified by a shared set of values and interests. Jürgen Habermas has critiqued both the liberal investment in negative rights and the republican emphasis on positive liberties in favor of what he calls "deliberative democracy," a model that relocates the republican ideal of human self-realization through public speech and action within a juridical framework whose procedures facilitate and enforce the compromises that are required by complex and diverse societies: "The political interests and values that stand in conflict with each other without prospects of consensus are in need of a balancing that cannot be achieved through ethical discourses – even if the outcomes of bargaining processes are subject to the proviso that they must not violate a culture's agreed-upon basic values" (25). In Habermas's view, citizenship in modernity represents not the fullest flowering of a unique and unified political community, but rather a means of mediating among competing cultures and communities via norms that establish the rules of deliberation for its participants.

Put bluntly, citizenship is not culture; indeed, its norms represent an alternative to culture, whether in the form of a pre-political national community or in the form of particularized minority positions excluded or marginalized by that national vision. In the assessment of Seyla Benhabib, one of Habermas's most original students, "deliberative-

democratic politics in its strong proceduralist form … immunizes politics against the forces of cultural and ethical life" (9).[7] Many academics will react with horror or at least skepticism at the very term citizen, which may at first glance appear to be the watchword of a conservative agenda. For many of us, the term evokes the policing of territorial borders, the enforcement of a nationalist mentality, and the prescription of a narrow set of social behaviors. Yet, read from the democratic perspectives opened up by Habermas and Benhabib, citizenship can offer a provisional ground of equivalence and a forum for deliberation and compromise for persons from diverse groups without equating politics with particular religious, cultural, or sexual identities. Part of the task of a literary study of citizenship is to reclaim the idea of the citizen from its functionalizations and instrumentalizations, but also from its devaluations and dimunitions. This includes investigating models of multiple citizenship, of informal or extralegal forms of citizenship, and of what Etienne Balibar has called "citizens without citizenship," which means breaking "the sacrosanct equation of citizenship and nationality" (1988: 728). In this, Balibar echoes Habermas's claim that "citizenship was never conceptually tied to national identity," even if national feeling and republican politics were fused at the revolutionary origin of the modern nation-state (*Between Facts and Norms* 495). The literature of citizenship must address the practical exigencies and imaginative worlds of non-citizens or para-citizens – whether legally disenfranchised (as aliens, prisoners, detainees, or minors) or excluded de facto from large parts of civic life by economic and educational inequity, inner migration, and the general dissociation of faculties that attends the rising disfunctionality of the public sphere. Rather than dismissing citizenship as a concept, humanists can research and foster forms of civic participation that might

temper some of the exclusionary and oppressive functions of the nation-state by drawing new actors, new texts, and new approaches into civic life and discourse. Such discussion can occur around key moments of foundation, revision, and response to citizenship ideals, recoverable in strong instances of the political tradition from Sophocles and Aristotle to Mandela and Havel, Balibar and Habermas. This approach links the classic liberal emphasis on education as a means of access to full citizenship (which implies that citizenship itself is a given) to an open discussion about the histories, limits, and futures of citizenship as part of the evolving content of that education, and of citizenship itself.

Citizenship, I submit, represents a limited public alternative to the cultural identifications, whether local or national, that otherwise sustain us, instituting a break with or mediation of tribal tales, above all in a diverse society such as the United States. There were already signs and symptoms of such diversity in the Athenian laboratory where citizenship as we recognize it first took shape. Early in the *Politics*, Aristotle defines the state in terms of its origins and its end:

> When several villages are united in a single complete community, large enough to be nearly or quite self-sufficing, the state comes into existence, originating in the bare needs of life, and continuing in existence for the sake of a good life. (1252b)

Here and elsewhere, Aristotle emphasizes the plurality that constitutes the community: *several villages* are required to make a single complete community. Aristotle, of course, presumed a certain base-line homogeneity among the villages that make up a community and become a polis. Yet the reference to plural villages may recall the inland, coastal, and urban zoning of the Athenian *phyloi*, and hence to a constitutional as well as an organic linking of communal forms. Himself a *metic* or foreigner in Athens, Aristotle's treatise is

filled with defenses of the mixed and plural nature of the polis and with constitutional rather than nativist definitions of citizenship.[8] Note as well the unmarked yet crucial transition in the passage from "community" to "state": at some point, a loose civil alliance becomes a more articulated civic body. This process of coalescence and articulation occurs via the concrete activities required to meet "the bare needs of life," activities that of necessity involve social interaction and cooperation. At a certain point, this sociality becomes an end rather than a means – it points toward the idea of "the good life," towards a more universal ideal that grows up out of local engagement with material needs as both its shelter and its fruit. It is at this same logical point, we might imagine, that the "community" becomes a "state," requiring some higher form of organization -- a body of laws, a system of magistracies, a set of civil procedures. And, finally, it is at this point that the two senses of *politeia* meet and divide. *Politea*, which can be translated as "constitution," "commonwealth," or "polity," has its origins in *polites* or citizen, and originally bore the meaning "citizenship."[9] *Politeia* flips between the *objective* structures of government and the *subjective* modes of participation in them, naming the dialectic between "constitution" as legal structure and "constituency" as a body of human actors who derive their social being from institutions that will survive their individual participation.

Moreover, students of the *Politics* have long noted that *politea* refers to both constitutions in general and to the constitution of which democracy in Aristotle's critical view represents a degeneration.[10] The term gives unity to a range of phenomena – the available types of government – and also derives a norm from them, that of constitutional rule by citizens. The word citizen itself similarly travels between a typology of

differences and a single definition. Thus Aristotle admits that citizenship must be defined in relation to specific constitutional forms ("He who is a citizen in a democracy will often not be a citizen in an oligarchy"), but then goes on to give a procedural definition of the citizen that crosses these contexts: the citizen "in the strict sense" is he who "shares in the administration of justice, and in offices" (1275a). Citizenship as a category is both rooted in local practice, in the life of a polis or city with its own institutions, and embodies a standard that breaks away from its particular instantiations in part because its formal definition does not gather into its reach all aspects of social life.

The *polites* mediates between the particular example and the universal norm, the communitarian vision and the compromises of due process, the individual participant and the institutions that regulate public exchange. Each of these transitions – from particular identities to universal ideals, from the life of the community to the laws of the state, from citizenry to constitution -- requires an act of abstraction, reflection, and formalization. Here the humanities have played a constitutive role. In the *Politics,* Aristotle writes that "there is a science for the master and a science for the slave" – areas of technical expertise covalent with what have become management and engineering on the one hand and vocational training on the other. He goes on to distinguish these from "philosophy and politics," reserved for those "in a position which places them above toil" (1255b). Although it is easy to mock Aristotle here for his rationalization of the slave economy and his defense of the leisure of the theory class, it is more important at the present moment to foreground Aristotle's demarcation of the liberal arts as a space of freedom from the very forms of mastery upon which that freedom is so fragiley based. Now as then, the sciences of management and the labor they organized pay for the leisure of the

arts and the humanities, but in that leisure lies the chance of rethinking social relations. Should we undermine the liberty of the liberal arts (whether by cutting its funding from above, or berating it as ideology from below), or rather open up the leisure of thought – the promise of the humanities -- to masters and slaves, bureaucrats and workers alike, with the hopes of transforming, modifying, or redistributing their debilitating dialectic? To change, shift, or alter the technocratic thrust of education and to reclaim leisure from its commodifications are no small tasks. If they require strategic alliances and compromises – in short, all the resources of deliberative democracy -- citizenship as topic and structure, as matter and form, as a once and future idea for pragmatic and speculative experiment, may provide one ground on which to begin the negotiations.

Sceptics further to my left will counter that the mediating and reflective functions of the humanities simply serve to render capital immanent to the state. In this view, what Aristotle called the good life is merely *a life of goods*, of economic instrumentalizations and subjective colonization.[11] To this analysis I would like to counter that the transitional moment between exigency and reflection, between labor and thought, or, in liberal terms, between the protection of property and the pursuit of happiness, has and can be a moment of subjective and intersubjective emancipation. Of course the university is never really external to the social field, but this truism need not lure us into believing that the kind of thought supported by the university is a mere fiction, an ideological trick. Reflection describes a bend or fold on a surface of relations that contains yet is distinct from it, drawing a new line, a new topology, on its continuous planes. The university functions not only as an organic development of the public sphere – the factory of its normative reproduction – but also as a possible break or cut in the social fabric, the laboratory or

studio in which new thought about the social can arise.It is this possibility that can engage us when we think about humanities in the public sphere. The thankless task of "publicizing the humanities," often delegated to development officers and the support staff of humanities centers, needs to be drawn away from the demands of marketing and image spin – the ever-popular Film Series, or the perennially under-attended Public Forum -- and towards the goal of rendering visible the twinned conditions of sociality and thought through concrete acts of engagement that are also acts of collaborative reflection. The creative cuts of critical reflection may be the most important phenomena, beyond any archive of objects or ideas (or perhaps as the essence of that archive), that the humanities have to share with "the public." More ambitiously, the humanities need to recover these interventions in the forms of public life that flourish outside our walls. The mediation of the particular and the universal can take many shapes (from the contestatory to the prescriptive) within many different forms of discourse that describe both the object and the forms of public partnerships in the humanities (creative expression and performance, critical analysis, documentary witnessing, public debate, archiving and recording, and so on). That is, the reflective moment can itself become the basis for action and interaction with our counterparts in the public sphere.

Although I began with Greek tragedy and philosophy, it would be a mistake to identify the literature of citizenship exclusively with any one set of literary works or genres, or to tie it to a political or literary history stretching from ancient to modern times. The literature of citizenship assembles not only a group of texts that take their themes and modes of production from civic life, but also a way of approaching texts, of reading them for the styles of deliberation and debate, of address and redress, of

bargaining and compromise, that they depict or instantiate. The literature of citizenship encompasses then, not only such classically literary works as Greek tragedy, but also various forms of para- or subliterary works, including law codes and legal cases; oratory and rhetoric; open letters and occasional writing; prison notebooks and *samizdat*; and those forms of journalism and public discourse that engage constituencies in debate or reflect on that debate in ways designed to promote further discussion and action. It is worth noting that these non-fictional genres are increasingly an official part of high school language arts training, though often within a narrowly pragmatic mandate of technical mastery (the business letter, the public document, the information manual) that misses key opportunities for critique, comparison, and new creation.[12] The literature of citizenship offers a means of gathering together diverse genres, modes of comprehension, and writing skills in an intellectually rigorous format that can draw its methods and models from the established discourses of rhetoric, civics, and literature. And such work can occur both in and between universities (where future teachers are trained) and secondary schools (which aim to send their students on to university classrooms). Developing an approach to the literature of citizenship would provide one means of linking the kinds of materials that are currently animating interdisciplinarity and innovation among humanities faculty (historical documents, works of rhetoric and argument, nonverbal artifacts, theory and criticism, new media, and cross-cultural texts that fall outside traditional genres) to the real needs, interests, and mandates of teachers and students in the public schools.

It should go without saying that civil institutions and civil life are strengthened through active collaboration among different constituencies. There are many forms of

rule, many types of competency: to Aristotle's limited sciences of the slave and the master, we can add the science of the administrator, the teacher, the scholar, the curator, the tutor, the grant-writer. A *politea*, on the other hand, treats as equal the masters of different zones of expertise, even when those zones are themselves not "equal" (in status, say, or in pay). According to Aristotle, the citizen is *the one who rules and is ruled in turn;* no one is permanently a master within its framework of reciprocal governance. The *politeia* depends on the technical knowledges of its citizens – their mastery of specific skills, indeed, their mastery of mastery (what is called "leadership") -- *but the politea itself is not a scene of mastery.* In practical terms, this means creating structures that recognize different competencies as the basis for the rotation of offices. It also means learning how to suspend the certainties of those competencies, so that the teacher can become a student or an administrator, the scholar can become a mentor or apprentice, the student can become a tutor, an author, or an artist. In the process of exchanging roles, all participants can become *citizens*, within the bounds of the particular community formed by the union of several institutions, and in widening spheres of action and reflection in local, regional, national, and global spheres.

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[1] This Epilogue draws on my work in the public sphere, especially Humanities Out There, an educational partnership between the School of Humanities and the Santa Ana Unified School District, which I founded in 1997; but also my experience with a number of kindred projects, including UCI's California History-Social Science Project; the Teachers as Scholars program sponsored by the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship

Foundation; UCI's Summer Masters program for high school teachers; the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute; and Imagining America: Artists and Scholars in Public Life.

[2] Myth, Nancy writes further, is "the poeticity of the political and the politicality of the poetic" (56).

[3] On literature as the break from myth, see again Nancy: "But the share of myth and the share of literature are not two separable and opposable parts at the heart of the work. Rather, they are shares in the sense that community divides up or shares out work in different ways: now by way of myth, now by way of literature. The second is the interruption of the first" (63).

[4] See Tyrrell and Bennett, *Athenian Myths and Institutions* 134-35; Seaford, *Ritual and Reciprocity* 113. For a public application of this zoning experiment, see Ralph Rosen, "Classical Studies and the Search for Community," 177.

[6] For a helpful summary of the civic humanism debate in relation to current classroom practice in the humanities, see Bushnell, *A Culture of Teaching*, 196.

[7] Habermas states his position on citizenship and culture as follows: "Democratic citizenship need not be rooted in the national identity of a people. However, regardless of the diversity of different cultural forms of life, it does require that every citizen be socialized into a common political culture" (*Between Facts and Norms* 500).

[8] Aristotle defends, for example, the reform of Cleisthenes, which included enrolling in tribes "many metics, both strangers and slaves." Since a citizen is "defined by the fact of his holding some kind of rule or office" (and not, Aristotle insists throughout the treatise, by a natural tie to the land or to a family or culture), these newly-created citizens must indeed be recognized as legitimate participants in the polis since they meet this minimal formal definition (1275b-1276a).

[9]See Fredrick Miller, *Nature, Justice, and Rights in Aristotle's* Politics: "Historically the term *politeia* (constitution) derived from *polites* (citizen) and originally had the meaning of 'citizenship' (see Herodotus IX.34.1), a connotation it also has in Aristotle (Pol. VII.9.1329a14)" (149).

[10] On Aristotle as critic of democracy, and on the productive relation between Athenian democracy and the literature of its critique, see Ober, *Athenian Revolution,* 140-60.

[11] See for example Michael Ryan: "To accept academic freedom as a rallying cry is tantamount to accepting a definition of the academy as a separable realm from the social world … Instead of emphasizing the fact that the social world is constructed and that therefore it could be constructed in a different form, the liberal philosophy of academic freedom would make that world appear natural" ("Deconstruction and Pedegogy" 58; cited Bushnell, *A Culture of Teaching* 192).

[12] See, for example, *Reading/Language Arts Framework for California Public Schools,* which spells out the content standards mandated for language arts classrooms throughout California. A major strand is reading comprehension of "informational materials," which

includes at various points in the educational pipeline "technical documents," "historically significant speeches," and "public documents."