Progressive education and modernist literature: Black Mountain College, 1933-1940
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Discussion of modernist literature's pedagogical legacy in North America has tended to focus on the New Criticism. Gerald Graff discusses three main factors that shaped 'the emergence of the narrower aesthetic and methodological potentialities latent in the New Criticism': institutional pressure to provide a rigorous methodology, resistance to crudely propagandist political theories of art, and 'the hostile academic climate surrounding the modernist revolution in literature for which the New Critics were spokesmen'. In these discussions, modernist literature in higher education is not only allied to, but drives, a conservative pedagogy. In Graff's words, 'the critics reinterpreted and reevaluated earlier literature in the light of a modernist poetics that said poetry is neither rhetorical persuasion nor self-expression but an autonomous discourse that cannot be reduced to its constituent concepts or emotions […]. More often than not, this conception of art caused poets like Spenser, Milton, Wordsworth, and Shelley to be rejected for philosophical or emotional discursiveness, while it elevated the metaphysical poets, who allegedly most resembled the moderns in their imagistic complexity'.[1]

Far less research has been conducted on the role of modernist literature in progressivist pedagogy, despite the progressive education movement's widespread influence during the first half of the twentieth century. That modernism and progressive education were part of the same cultural shift has long been observed. In his classic study, *The Transformation of the School* (1961), Lawrence Cremin listed the following signs of the pre-war 'changes, in the image of Progressivism itself, that were bound to influence the course and meaning of educational reform':

> Freud had first lectured at Clark University in 1909. Harriet Monroe had founded *Poetry* magazine and Max Eastman had taken over *The Masses* in 1912. The year 1913 had witnessed the introduction of modern art to over 100,000 New Yorkers at the now legendary Armory Show. By 1914 the brilliant young journalist Walter Lippmann had already published *A Preface to Politics* and *Drift and Mastery*, and in 1915 Van Wyck Brooks had proclaimed a new declaration of literary independence in *America's Coming-of-Age*. Each of these in its own way symbolized a break with the past, a revolt not only against the traditional verities of conservatives, but against the moralizing of progressives as well.[2]

Though progressivism is particularly associated with elementary and secondary school pedagogy, it profoundly informed a number of institutions of higher education in the nineteen twenties and thirties. In *The Program Era*, Mark McGurl traces the birth of the graduate writing programme to the 'collision' of modernism and educational progressivism, 'one profoundly external, the other profoundly internal to the educational system' but 'alike in rejecting early twentieth-century schools as they knew them, and in envisioning the artist as the highest form of human being'.[3] But what did the literature courses in progressivist institutions of higher education look like, how were they different from those in other institutions, and how did they engage with contemporary, particularly modernist, literature?

[1] Gerald Graff, *Professing Literature; An Institutional History* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 145-46, 198.
[2] Lawrence A. Cremin, *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957* (New York: Knopf, 1962), pp. 179-80.
[3] Mark McGurl, *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 83.

This essay will take as its case study the most well-known example of a progressive and modernist educational institution: Black Mountain College (1933-1957). Much has been written about Black Mountain, and the correlation between its renowned teaching in the creative arts and the progressive movement's commitment to teaching through experience and self-expression is clear even in those studies that are not explicitly concerned with the college's pedagogical contexts. But though the college's published statements emphasised the importance of the creative arts, and it was in those areas that its most well-known teachers and students worked, Black Mountain was a liberal arts college, not an art school.[4] Though students could study textile design with Anni Albers, fine art with Josef Albers, dance with Merce Cunningham, and music with Stefan Wolpe, they could also major in psychology, as Gisela Kronenberg Herwitz did, working with Erwin Straus from 1940 to 1943, or chemistry, as William Treichler did, working with Natasha Goldowski from 1947 to 1949, or mathematics like Trueman MacHenry, who worked with Max Dehn, from 1949 to 1952.[5] A number of contributors to Melvin Lane's collection of memories of the college sought to correct what they saw as an over-emphasis on the arts in later accounts and academic studies: 'One misconception which must be met unequivocally is the belief that BMC was only an art school', wrote Francis ('Faf') Foster, who attended the college between 1941 to 1943, and 1946 to 1948. 'This view was merely cultish and at any time reflected the interest of a small minority of the faculty and students. It was a concept unjust to the philosophy and curriculum of the College. Black Mountain was a Liberal Arts College'. According to Harold Raymond, a student from 1938 to 1942, histories of the college have fostered a 'great man fallacy' that over-emphasised in particular the role of Josef Albers, who taught art at Black Mountain from 1933 to 1949, following the Bauhaus's forced closure: 'Few communities have […] been less inclined to allow their lives of their intellectual development to be dominated by a single "great man" or teacher', wrote Raymond. 'In the years I was at BMC, there was certainly a large Albers influence, and most students recognized his importance and took his courses, but there were also some who gave all their attention to creative writing, history, or the social interpretation of literature'.[6]

A variety of literature courses appeared in the college's course catalogues during its twenty-four year life, from 1933 to 1957, and in its later years the college was strongly associated with late modernist poetry as a result of Charles Olson's joining the college in 1948, initially as a visiting lecturer, but from 1951 as a permanent member of Faculty, and finally Rector of the College from 1954 to its close.[7] At Olson's invitation, Robert Creeley and Robert Duncan taught at the college, and poets who attended as students included Ed Dorn, Joel Oppenheimer, Michael Rumaker, John Wieners, and Jonathan Williams. Between 1954 and 1957 Creeley edited the influential *Black Mountain Review*, which published most of these poets, as well as others who were not associated with the college.[8] But this essay is less interested in the modernist product of the college, than in its modernist source materials and methods. For that reason, it will focus on the early years of Black Mountain College, the

[4] 'A Foreword', in *Black Mountain College [Catalog], 1933-1934*, [p. 3]: 'Dramatics, Music, and the Fine Arts, which often exist precariously on the fringes of the curriculum, are regarded as an integral part of the life of the College and of importance equal to that of the subjects that usually occupy the center of the curriculum'.

[5] Kronenberg Herwitz and Treichler's dates and specializations are derived from the biographies collected by the Black Mountain College Project: http://www.blackmountaincollegeproject.org/Biographies/biographies.htm, MacHenry's from David Silver, 'Trueman MacHenry at Black Mountain College', *Black Mountain College Studies*, 7 (2015) http://www.blackmountainstudiesjournal.org.

[6] Melvin Lane, ed., *Black Mountain College: Sprouted Seeds: An Anthology of Personal Accounts* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), pp. 91-92, 78.

[7] Martin Duberman, *Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community* (New York: Dutton, 1972), pp. 308, 335, 401; Tom Clark, *Charles Olson: The Allegory of a Poet's Life* (New York: Norton, 1991), p. 240.

[8] Duberman, *Black Mountain*, pp. 372-73, 387-78, 393-97, 406-409, Donald Allen, *The New American Poetry, 1945-1960* (New York: Grove, 1960), xii. See Anne Day Dewey, *Beyond Maximus: The Construction of Public Voice in Black Mountain Poetry* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 1-10.

years it was led by John Andrew Rice, and examine the construction of a progressive curriculum at a critical moment for higher education, and for modernism's place within it.

1 The progressive education movement and literary study

The decade in which Black Mountain College was founded was a decade of transformation in higher education in general, and literary studies in particular. Student numbers were growing rapidly: in 1920 eight per cent of eighteen to twenty-one year olds were attending higher education. By 1930 the number had risen to twelve per cent, and by the beginning of the Second World War it had reached 18 per cent. The needs and wishes of this more diverse student population and educators' anxiety about the increasing fragmentation of the traditional curriculum into unrelated electives fostered a move towards what was termed 'general education'.[9] In literature departments, this signalled the demise of philological scholarship and literary history in favour of 'criticism': students would encounter texts unimpeded by the views of others, and so develop for themselves the critical skills needed to interpret, evaluate, and judge the competing ideologies of the modern world. Graff writes that 'it is possible to fix 1937-41 as the turning point for the consolidation of criticism in the university'. As evidence, he cites the facts that during this period John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Austin Warren, René Wellek, William K. Wimsatt moved into new university positions (at Kenyon College, Princeton, the University of Iowa, and Yale respectively), Ransom founded the *Kenyon Review*, and the first major examples of New Critical methodology were published: Cleanth Brooks's and Robert Penn Warren's *Understanding Poetry* in 1938, Brooks's *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* in 1939, and Ransom's *The New Criticism* in 1941.[10]

But the New Criticism was not the only form of criticism or general education generating debate and gathering institutional adherents in the 1930s. Robert Hutchins' and Mortimer Adler's Great Books programme had been launched at the University of Chicago in 1930. The Chicago course derived from Adler's experience of the General Honors course introduced at Columbia in 1920 by a member of the English department, John Erskine, 'devoted to the simple principle of reading one great book a week, and discussing it in a weekly meeting which would last two or three hours'.[11] In 1937, the programme was made the centre of a new curriculum at St John's College, Annapolis, by Stringfellow Barr and Scott Buchanan, who had been briefly employed in 1936 by Hutchins at Chicago on Adler's recommendation. Buchanan had taught a version of the Columbia course with Adler in the late twenties at the People's Institute in New York, and he and Barr had attempted to establish it at the University of Virginia before moving to Chicago.[12] The model eschewed lectures in favour of evening seminars, each taught by two instructors, and encouraged students to read the 'great books' the way they read popular novels. 'Why not treat the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and other masterpieces as though they were recent publications, calling for immediate investigation and discussion?', asked Erskine.[13] 'Reading, discussing, and digesting books of such importance would […] serve as preparation for advanced study and

[9] John S. Brubacher and Willis Rudy, *Higher Education in Transition: A History of American Colleges and Universities*, 4th edn (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1997), pp. 257, 271.
[10] Graff, *Professing Literature*, pp. 123, 133, 152-53.
[11] John Erskine, *My Life as a Teacher* (Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott, 1948), pp. 166, 169.
[12] William N. Haarlow, *Great Books, Honors Programs, and Hidden Origins: The Virginia Plan and the University of Virginia in the Liberal Arts Movement* (New York: Routledge Falmer, 2003), pp. 45-67, Tim Lacy, *The Dream of a Democratic Culture: Mortimer J. Adler and the Great Books Idea* (London: Palgrave, 2013), pp. 23-24. See also Alex Beam, *A Great Idea at the Time, The Rise, Fall, and Curious Afterlife of the Great Books* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2008), pp. 14-55.
[13] Erskine, *My Life as a Teacher*, p. 166. The Great Books idea was taken up in different forms in a number of institutions in the 1940s and 1950s, including Saint Mary's College of California, Marquette University, and Notre Dame: see Lacy, *The Dream of a Democratic Culture*, p. 26.

as general education designed to help the student understand the world', wrote Hutchins. 'It will also develop habits of reading and standards of taste and criticism that will enable the adult, after his formal education is over, to think and act intelligently about the thought and movements of contemporary life'.[14]

The 1930s also saw the progressive education movement reach the peak of its influence in higher education. The movement in the United States was closely associated with the pragmatist philosophy of John Dewey, Professor of Philosophy at Columbia, whose *Democracy and Education* (1916), provided 'the clearest, most comprehensive statement of the progressive education movement'.[15] As Katherine Reynolds has discussed, when John Dewey chaired the Conference on Curriculum for the College of Liberal Arts at Rollins College, Florida, in 1931, it was attended by representatives from a number of institutions that had either recently established or revised their curricula in light of his theories of education. These institutions included Antioch, Lehigh University, the New School for Social Research, Sarah Lawrence, and Columbia's Teachers College. In the following few years Bard, Bennington, Black Mountain, Goddard, and Olivet would join their group.[16] Progressivists had a certain amount in common with New Critics and Great Books advocates. Like them, progressivists sought to improve student engagement in the learning process--all three approaches represented a move from the lecture hall to the seminar room. They also shared a distrust of mediating scholarship and the college textbook.[17] Like the Great Books programmes, progressive education aimed to educate the whole person, and both conceived of their pedagogy as democratic in itself, and as a training in democratic citizenship.[18] But progressivists distinguished themselves from the text-based hierarchies of both the New Criticism and Great Books programmes. While the New Critics defined criticism as 'the attempt to define and enjoy the aesthetic or characteristic values of literature' and Great Books programmes taught a predetermined group of 'classics', progressive educators typically followed Dewey in rejecting the idea that aesthetic values or experiences are in any way separate or different from those of ordinary life, and they insisted that the individual student, not the teacher, should determine their own programme of study.[19] In 1936-37, Dewey published three essays reviewing Hutchins' *The Higher Learning in America*, the book of the 1935 Storrs Lectures Hutchins had delivered at Yale. While Dewey praised Hutchins' analysis of the challenges facing higher education, he strongly disagreed with the solutions he offered. In particular, he accused Hutchins' programme of authoritarianism ('any scheme based on the existence of ultimate first principles, with their dependent hierarchy of subsidiary principles, does not escape authoritarianism by calling the principles "truths"'), and escapism ('the remedy proposed rests upon a belief that since evils have come from surrender to shifting currents of public sentiment, the remedy is to be found in the greatest

[14] Robert Maynard Hutchins, *The Higher Learning in America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1936), p. 81.
[15] Cremin, *The Transformation of the School*, p. 120.
[16] *The Curriculum for the Liberal Arts College: Being the Report of the Curriculum Conference Held at Rollins College, January 19-24 1931* (Winter Park, FL: Rollins College, 1931), pp. 7-8, Katherine C. Reynolds, 'Progressive Ideals and Experimental Higher Education: The Example of John Dewey and Black Mountain College', *Education and Culture*, 14.1 (1997), 1-9 (p. 3), Ruth Erickson, 'Progressive Education', in Helen Molesworth, ed., *Leap Before You Look: Black Mountain College, 1933-1957* (Boston and New Haven, CT: Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston/ Yale University Press, 2015), pp. 76-80 (p. 79).
[17] Hutchins, *The Higher Learning in America*, p. 78, John Dewey, *The School and Society: Being Three Lectures* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1899), p. 47, Cleanth Brooks, Jr. and Robert Penn Warren, eds, *Understanding Poetry: An Anthology for College Students* (New York: Holt, 1938), iv-ix. Of course, *Understanding Poetry* is the pre-eminent example of the many textbooks written and edited by critics during the mid-twentieth century, but its 'Letter to the Teacher' makes clear how it is conceived against the model of the traditional textbook.
[18] Hutchins, *The Higher Learning in America*, pp. 66-67. 18-21, 118-119, John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1916), pp. 94-116.
[19] John Crowe Ransom, 'Criticism, Inc.', *Virginia Quarterly Review*, 13.4 (1937), 586-602 (p. 590), John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1934), pp. 3-13. See also Thomas P. Miller, *The Evolution of College English: Literacy Studies from the Puritans to the Postmoderns* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), pp. 159-61.

possible aloofness of higher learning from contemporary social life').[20] Hutchins responded that Dewey had misrepresented his argument on these and other points, but while Dewey had exaggerated Hutchins' argument, his critique accurately set out the fundamental differences between these two forms of general education. Those two forms might be said to turn on their different opinions about the relationship between education and experience. Hutchins had taken direct aim at the progressive education movement when he wrote that 'we may leave experience to other institutions and influences and emphasize in education the contribution that it is supremely fitted to make, the intellectual training of the young. The life they lead when they are out of our hands will give them experience enough'.[21] Dewey, by contrast, defined education as 'that reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience'.[22]

According to Graff, 'The campaign for criticism in the university frequently went along with efforts to legitimate modern literature as an object of study'.[23] But, in fact, neither the Great Books proponents nor the New Critics appear to have made a particular effort to legitimate modern literature. Erskine recalled that the motivation for introducing his 'General Honors' programme at Columbia was the general view that his undergraduates 'might do very well in the courses we gave on American and English literature, but they knew very little or nothing, said their critics, about the Bible, or Homer, or Vergil, or Dante, or the other giants whom the world at large has long esteemed'.[24] Hutchins argued that the 'Great Books' course at Chicago should consist of 'those books which have through the centuries attained to the dimensions of classics. Many such books, I am afraid, are in the ancient and medieval period. But even these are contemporary. A classic is a book that is contemporary in every age'.[25] Of the seventy-six authors studied on Erskine's course, only seven had lived to see the twentieth century: Francis Galton, Henrik Ibsen, Leo Tolstoy, Thomas Hardy, William James, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Sigmund Freud. When Hutchins and Adler's programme was turned into the fifty-four volume Great Books of the Western World in 1952, the most recent writers included were Tolstoy, William James and Freud.[26] Though the first edition of the definitive New Critical anthology, Brooks and Penn Warren's *Understanding Poetry* (1938), did include some modern poems--notably five by Robert Frost, four by Yeats, and two by Eliot, H.D., and John Crowe Ransom--it was dominated by early modern and Romantic poetry.[27] Graff's argument that criticism was associated with modern literature is better borne out by the point he goes on to make, that 'the interesting issue in the controversy over the place of modern literature in the university was not whether or how much modern literature should be studied, but what status should be accorded to the modern *view* of literature'.[28] Hutchins and Erskine, as we have seen, advocated reading the classics as if they were contemporary works and, although *Understanding Poetry* contained only two poems by Eliot, its introduction advocated Eliot's poetic values.

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[20] John Dewey, 'President Hutchins' Proposals to Remake Higher Education', *Social Frontier*, 3.22 (1937), 103-104, rpt in John Dewey, *The Later Works, 1925-1953: Volume 11, 1935-1937*, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston and Kathleen E. Poulos (Carbondale and Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), pp. 397-401 (pp. 400, 399). See also 'Rationality in Education, *Social Frontier*, 3.21 (December 1936), 71-73, 'The Higher Learning in America', *Social Frontier*, 3.24 (March 1937), 167-69, and Robert M. Hutchins, 'Grammar, Rhetoric, and Mr. Dewey', *Social Frontier*, 3.23 (1937), 137-39, rpt in Dewey, *The Later Works*, xi: 391-96, 402-407, 592-97.

[21] Hutchins, *The Higher Learning in America*, pp. 68-69.

[22] Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, pp. 89-90.

[23] Graff, *Professing Literature*, p. 124.

[24] Erskine, *My Life as a Teacher*, p. 165.

[25] Hutchins, *The Higher Learning in America*, p. 78.

[26] Lacy, *The Dream of a Democratic Culture*, pp. 229-41.

[27] Brooks and Penn Warren, eds, *Understanding Poetry*. For example, Shakespeare was represented by eighteen texts, Herrick, Milton. Shelley, and Wordsworth each by nine.

[28] Graff, *Professing Literature*, p. 197.

Progressivist teachers of literature also advocated approaching literary texts as contemporary, rather than historical, documents, and they agreed with the argument Brooks and Penn Warren derived from Eliot that 'the poem itself is an experience'.[29] 'What shall we choose for our literature curriculum?', asked W. Wilbur Hatfield, in his introduction to the 1938 report of the Curriculum Commission of the National Council of Teachers of English. 'First, the pupil should be given experiences that have intrinsic worth for *him, now*'.[30] But progressivists not only read literature from a modern perspective, they were also more likely to have modern literature on their curricula. Louise Rosenblatt's influential *Literature as Exploration*, published in the Progressive Education Association's book series, argued that literature courses in schools and colleges were often dominated by literature from earlier periods that presented such difficulties in vocabulary, style and, most importantly, engaging subject matter, that students were discouraged from reading at all. She recommended instead using more familiar materials to 'build up linguistic flexibility'. 'The fact that a book is written by one of our contemporaries is certainly no automatic proof of its value', she acknowledged, but nevertheless, 'in the mass of work produced today, there is much that represents those areas of thought and experience which are the points of growth and change in our own age. May we not be crippling the young person intellectually if we deprive him of an awareness of these contemporary tendencies?'.

Of the twelve works Rosenblatt cites at the beginning of her book to demonstrate that at the heart of literature are 'the experiences of human beings in their diverse personal and social relations', eight were published in the previous forty years, including works by Anton Chekhov, Henry James, Thomas Mann, Marcel Proust, and Edith Wharton. Nevertheless, on modernism Rosenblatt was ambivalent at best. A writer like Gertrude Stein, 'preoccupied with technical innovation', would have lasting value, she warned, only insofar as her work 'suggests to other writers new means of conveying emotions and a sense of the flow of life'. The value of literary work 'that seems most remote, an imagist poem or a whimsical fantasy', should be sought in its potential revelation of 'new notes in the gamut of human experience' or the way it 'derives its quality of escape from its implicit contrast to real life'. As this suggests, Rosenblatt sees modernist literature as bearing less immediate relation to students' experience than most contemporary literature. Indeed, in the course of her argument in favour of including more contemporary literature on college curricula, she refers to modernist literature as an exception:

> *Dombey and Son*, just because it was written at a time when problems of parent-child and husband-wife relations still were drawn in their broadest terms, might be more comprehensible than the treatment of similar problems in a book by Virginia Woolf. The fact that sometimes writers of the present, like James Joyce or T. S. Eliot, are themselves so much the product of a long literary heritage makes them less comprehensible to the young reader than a nineteenth-century writer would be. The student himself needs to go through the experience of literature of the past before he can understand them.
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> Nevertheless, it is true that most contemporary authors offer no such difficulty, but write about a life that the student can understand.[31]

Rosenblatt's book is a notably thoughtful and balanced intervention in the debate about the teaching of literature in higher education at a time when opposing positions had

[29] Brooks and Penn Warren, eds, *Understanding Poetry*, p. 32; see Eliot, 'The Metaphysical Poets', *Times Literary Supplement*, 20 October 1921, 669-70 (p. 669).
[30] W. Wilbur Hatfield, *An Experience Curriculum in English: A Report of the Curriculum of the National Council of Teachers of English* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1935), pp. 17-18.
[31] Louise M. Rosenblatt, *Literature as Exploration* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1938), pp. 255-57, 262, 6, 7, 259.

become deeply entrenched. Her remarks about modernist literature should be understood not as any kind of philistinism, but rather the logical result of a progressivist commitment to constructing a curriculum that begins with the students' current experience. It reveals a very different pedagogy from that betrayed by Lionel Trilling's famous account of the attitude of Columbia's faculty when they introduced a course in modern literature at Columbia at the students' request: 'We shall give the course, but we shall give it on the highest level, and if they think, as students do, that the modern will naturally meet them in a genial way, let them have their gay and easy time with Yeats and Eliot, with Joyce and Proust and Kafka, with Lawrence, Mann and Gide'. [32] As Thomas P. Miller has remarked, 'the Progressive movement is significant because it posed a historical alternative to the disciplinary professionalism that would come to define college English studies. The distinctive methods and values of Progressivism were founded not on the mastery of an autonomous body of knowledge, but on the collaborative work of learning and teaching'.[33]

It was in this context of pedagogical debate that Black Mountain College was founded in 1933. It came about, as is well known, after John Andrew Rice, who taught Classics at Rollins College, was sacked in acrimonious circumstances in April that year. The charges included bullying students and faculty and inadequate teaching, and Rice had been incautious in his criticism of the college President's policies. Several further members of faculty were sacked or resigned during the crisis, including four who would join Black Mountain: Theodore (Ted) Dreier, who taught physics, Frederick Georgia, who taught chemistry, Ralph Lounsbury, who taught political science, and Robert (Bob) Wunsch, who taught drama. Wunsch found the site for the new college the dissidents had begun imagining: a campus near Asheville, North Carolina, used in the summer by the educational program of the YMCA Graduate School, but empty during the rest of the year. By September a teaching staff of nine had been put together, and during the term several more staff joined, including Anni and Josef Albers, suggested by Dreier's family contacts at the Museum of Modern Art. The college began with twenty-one students, of which thirteen had come from Rollins in support of Rice. Georgia was named Rector, head of the College, a position Rice assumed the following year and held until 1938.[34]

Rice's background had given him experience of several different systems of education. He had gained his BA under the electives system at Tulane University in 1911, and in 1914 was awarded a second BA, in jurisprudence, as a Rhodes Scholar at The Queen's College, University of Oxford, where he encountered the tutorial system. He had then taught for two years at the Webb School, the Tennessee preparatory school he had attended himself and described in his autobiography as ahead of its time in its progressivist approach.[35] In 1916 he began studying for a doctorate in Classics at the University of Chicago, a university committed to advanced scholarship on the German model (Hutchins did not arrive until 1929). [36] Though he never wrote his dissertation nor obtained the doctorate, Rice was appointed to teach Classics at the University of Nebraska in 1919, where he began to develop the Socratic seminar teaching style that became the bedrock of his teaching philosophy at Black Mountain. After eight happy and successful years in Nebraska, and two unhappy and unsuccessful years as Head of the Department of Classical Languages at the New Jersey College for Women (now Douglass Residential College), Rice spent a year in London on a

[32] Lionel Trilling, *Beyond Culture: Essays on Literature and Learning* (New York: Viking, 1965), p. 8.
[33] Miller, *The Evolution of College English*, p. 160. See also Oscar James Campbell, ed., *The Teaching of College English* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1934), pp. 78-79.
[34] Katherine Chaddock Reynolds, *Visions and Vanities: John Andrew Rice of Black Mountain College* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1998), pp. 77-91, 105-109, 120-121, 95-97, 122-23, 125, 138, 170.
[35] Reynolds, *Visions and Vanities*, pp. 29-38, 24-29, 42-45, John Andrew Rice, *I Came Out of the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Harper's, 1942), pp. 225-27, 242-52, 205.
[36] Reynolds, *Visions and Vanities*, pp. 45-47, John W. Boyer, *The University of Chicago: A History* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2015), pp. 91-98.

Guggenheim Fellowship researching the work of Jonathan Swift.[37] Though the year was reportedly a pleasant one, it nevertheless had the effect of confirming Rice in his animus towards research. 'Research is the report of what one has found out rather than of what one knows', he later wrote. 'The area of exploration is outside oneself, and, if not already dead, must be deadened; for, just as the herbalist cannot recognize a living specimen but must have it first pressed and dried, so the psychologist, who might, of all the scientists, report what he knows inside himself, prepares his specimen by expressing life. I knew, at the end of my stay in England, that, whatever I should do, I could not spend my life apart from life'.[38]

When Rice had arrived at Rollins College in 1930 it was one of the small group of colleges importing progressivist ideas into higher education. As we saw earlier, in 1931 Rollins had hosted the Conference on Curriculum for the College of Liberal Arts, chaired by Dewey and attended by representatives from a number of progressivist colleges. Rice was not a contributor to the conference, but he attended and met the delegates, including Dewey, who he admired.[39] Dewey was a family friend of Dreier's, and in the next few years he would visit Black Mountain several times, become a member of the advisory board, and donate a substantial number of books to the college library.[40] 'The work and life of the College (and it is impossible in its case to separate the two) is a living example of democracy in action', he wrote to Dreier in 1940.[41] Though Rice disliked the label, Black Mountain was immediately understood by the press (general and educational) to be a progressivist institution: the New York *Evening Post* announced the opening of the college with the headline 'Progressive Education Becomes Collegiate', and the Progressive Education Association's journal ran articles discussing the college, including one by Rice.[42] Faculty members attended Progressive Education Association meetings: in his autobiography Rice describes a trip to a regional meeting of the Association with Dewey and some students, and the college's newsletter records that Dreier and Wunsch attended the 1939 national convention in Detroit.[43] The college was visited by students and faculty from other experimental institutions, including Sarah Lawrence and Antioch, and though it explicitly distinguished itself from Hutchins' Great Books programme, Scott Buchanan and Jacob Klein from St. John's College both gave seminars in the spring of 1941.[44]

2 Literature at Black Mountain College

How progressive was Black Mountain's teaching? Its methods came to national attention in 1936 through Louis Adamic's article for *Harper's Magazine* 'Education on a Mountain'. Adamic had stayed at the college for two and a half months the previous autumn, initially planning a brief visit, but after three days realising that he had 'stumbled on what might eventually prove one of them most fascinating--and probably important--stories developing in America to-day'. The college, he wrote, 'challenges the existing chaos and the methods of fascism and communism. It goes beyond all three and has the method to get there. It has the

[37] Reynolds, *Visions and Vanities*, pp. 47-59, Rice, *I Came Out of the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 269-96.
[38] Rice, *I Came Out of the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 296-97.
[39] Reynolds, *Visions and Vanities*, p. 74,
[40] Erickson, 'Progressive Education', p. 79, Reynolds, *Visions and Vanities*, p. 143, Reynolds, 'Progressive Ideals and Experimental Higher Education', p. 5, Jonathan Fisher, 'The Life and Work of an Institution of Progressive Higher Education: Towards a History of Black Mountain College, 1933-1949', *Black Mountain College Studies*, 6 (2014), http://www.blackmountainstudiesjournal.org.
[41] John Dewey to Theodore Dreier, 18 July 1940, in Duberman, *Black Mountain*, p. 446.
[42] Reynolds, *Visions and Vanities*, p. 146, David Gow, 'Progressive Education Becomes Collegiate', *Evening Post* (New York), 30 September 1933, p. 3; John A. Rice, 'Black Mountain College', *Progressive Education*, 11 (1934), 271-74.
[43] Rice, *I Came Out of the Eighteenth Century*, p. 332, *Black Mountain College Newsletter*, 1.4 (March 1939), [p. 4].
[44] Reynolds, *Visions and Vanities*, p. 144, Duberman, *Black Mountain*, pp. 96, 434, John A. Rice, 'Fundamentalism and the Higher Learning', *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, 174 (May 1937), 587-96, 'Visiting Speakers Provoke Discussions', *Black Mountain College Newsletter*, 12 (1941), [pp. 1-2], 'Greek Mathematics', *Black Mountain College Newsletter*, 13 (1941), [pp. 6-7].

chance of becoming deeply attractive to millions of Americans who are sick of themselves, their own corruption about them, and the stench of dissolution now filling the world'.[45]

The College's 'method' was described in considerable detail. Quoting from notes made from his discussions with Rice, Adamic recorded that 'the job of a college is to bring your people to intellectual *and emotional* maturity', that 'co-education is essential', that 'it is only through imagination that education can reach and develop the whole human being', and that 'our central and consistent effort now is to teach method, not content; to emphasize process, not results; to invite the student to the realization that the way of handling facts and himself amid the facts is more important than facts themselves'. Adamic also reported on his experience of courses run by three members of the teaching staff. Rice's renowned 'Plato' class had 'little to do with Plato', Adamic remarked, and was better named 'Thought in Action'. Rice 'starts it going with some such question as "How does individuality differ from individualism?" and then, by a deft Socratic handling of students, too complex to describe, galvanizes them into a unit bent on arriving at some answer'. Attending Albers' drawing, colour and Werklehre courses, Adamic wrote, 'is very definitely to *experience* art as a process which is also life. "To us," [Albers] said, "the *act* of drawing is more important than the graphic product; a color correctly seen and understood is more important than a mediocre still-life"'. Wunsch's teaching of drama also focused on process and experience rather than product. Though Adamic described the two plays he saw performed as 'exceptionally well done', he wrote that 'to Wunsch the play is *not* "the thing"'. It is a means to develop not actors, but people.[46]

However, the college's course catalogues during its first years present a more conventional programme than Adamic's article suggested. Though, as Adamic had reported, the catalogues stated that 'there are no required courses', and no particular number of courses appears to have been required to progress to the Senior Division, there was nevertheless a clear expectation that a standard range of subjects would be covered.[47] The subject areas listed in the first catalogue were Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics, Psychology, Economics, History, Fine Arts, Music, English, French, Spanish, Italian, German, Greek, Latin, augmented by Biology, Linguistics, and Philosophy in the next two years. Of the sixty-one courses offered in the first year, only six were in the creative arts: Drawing, Color, Werklehre, Weaving (in Fine Arts), Elementary Harmony and Music Dictation (in Music), and Dramatics (in English). Over the next three years, the number of courses rose**,** but the creative arts were generally restricted to the courses run by Anni Albers, Josef Albers, and Bob Wunsch, who taught creative writing as well as drama--and to a lesser extent, John Evarts, who taught music.[48]

Mary Emma Harris has remarked that 'by far the most conventional of the arts during the 1930s was literature'.[49] Beyond the 'Dramatics' course, the English courses listed in the first catalogue were 'Chaucer, Elizabethan Drama, Milton, Seminar in the Eighteenth Century, Nineteenth Century Literature, Elementary Composition, Seminar in Writing'. Under the headings of French and Italian, the literature courses available were Studies in

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[45] Louis Adamic, 'Education on a Mountain: The Story of Black Mountain College', *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, 172 (April 1936), 516-30 (pp. 516, 530). Duberman states that Adamic arrived at Black Mountain in January 1936, but this is not borne out either by Adamic's article nor archival evidence: see Duberman, *Black Mountain*, p. 121.

[46] Adamic, 'Education on a Mountain', pp. 518-19, 526-27. Albers' Werklehre course was glossed in the course catalogue as 'The development of the feeling for material and space': see *Black Mountain College [Catalog], 1933-1934*, [p. 22].

[47] *Black Mountain College [Catalog], 1933-1934*, n. pag. [pp. 6, 19], *Black Mountain College [Catalog], 1934-1935*, n. pag. [p. 10], *Black Mountain College [Catalog], 1935-1936*, n. pag. [p. 10], *Black Mountain College [Catalog], 1936-1937*, pp. 9-10. The first catalogue in fact suggested more freedom: 'The student is free to choose whatever courses he pleases' [p. 6].

[48] *Black Mountain College [Catalog], 1933-1934*, n. pag. [pp. 22-24], *Black Mountain College [Catalog], 1934-1935*, n. pag. [pp. 12-14], *Black Mountain College [Catalog], 1935-1936*, n. pag. [pp. 12-14], *Black Mountain College [Catalog], 1936-1937*, pp. 13-34.

[49] Mary Emma Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), p. 46.

Medieval [French] Literature, Studies in French Literature of the Seventeenth Century, Seminar in Rousseau and his Works, and the Works of Dante. The first catalogue also provided information about the proposed Senior Division examination for students specializing in English. It would consist of seven three-hour exams, some of which could be taken as oral exams, in the areas of: 1. English Civilization, 2. (i) History of English Literature (compulsory questions on History of the English Language, Medieval English Literature, Elizabethan Literature, Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century, Nineteenth Century), (ii) 'the broader aspects of the history of English literature, […] the development of a literary form such as blank verse or the novel, or […] the intellectual content of various literary works and the philosophical questions they raise', 3. Texts (i) exams on three different authors of the students' choice, for example such 'classic English authors' as 'Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Donne, Milton, Dryden, Swift, Pope, Dr. Johnson, Fielding, Sterne, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, Keats, Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, Tennyson, and Browning', (ii) 'a subject of special study', which 'may take the form of either an investigation of some special literary problem connected with one of the student's three major authors, or it may concern itself with entirely different material which happens to be of unusual interest to the candidate'. The latter examination could be replaced by a piece of creative writing.[50]

In the 1930s, the English literature courses were taught by Kenneth Kurtz (1938-45), Peggy Loram (1933-35, 38-39), Joseph (Joe) Walford Martin (1933-38), and Wunsch (1935-45).[51] The courses were revised to an extent from year to year. In 1934-35, courses were added on 'Spenser and other Sixteenth Century Non-Dramatic Literature', 'Seventeenth Century Literature' 'English Drama from Sheridan to the Present Day', and 'the Modern Short Story' (the latter two probably in anticipation of Wunsch's arrival); in 1935-36 the 'Seminar in the Eighteenth Century' was replaced with courses on 'The Restoration and the Augustans', and 'The Romantic Poets', and the more modern part of the curriculum was expanded: there were new courses in 'The Rise of American Literature', 'Contemporary American Literature', 'Development of the Drama', and the 'Development of the Novel'.[52] Ascertaining the specific content of these courses is difficult, and mainly dependent on student memoirs. Emil Willimertz (1937-40) recalled studying a course on 'Form in Literature' with Rice and the teacher of Romance languages, Fred Mangold, in which the students studied ten writers during the year, including 'Thomas Browne, Dickens, Hardy, Hemingway, Proust, and Gertrude Stein'.[53] Stein's name also appears in the reminiscences of Jane Mayhall (1937-40, 1944), who recalled that Rice 'was highly admiring of the work of Gertrude Stein and gave one a mystic feeling about her direction'.[54] Harris records that Stein's *The Making of Americans* was included in 'Mangold's course in problems of the novel', which may be the same course as that mentioned by Willimetz, and that Kurtz taught semester-long explanations of Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*.[55] The detailed catalogue of the remnant of the college's library now held at North Carolina Wesleyan College is of limited assistance in ascertaining which modernist texts were taught in the 1930s. It does show that the library was given copies of Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, Ford's *No More Parades*, and Yeats's *Early Poems and Stories* in 1935, 1936, and 1937, respectively. Works by Hart Crane, Dos Passos, Eliot, Faulkner, Joyce, Wyndham Lewis, Mansfield, Pound, Stein, Stevens, Williams, Woolf, and Richard Wright are listed, but their dates of purchase or gift, if provided, begin in the mid-

[50] *Black Mountain College [Catalog], 1933-1934*, n. pag. [pp. 24, 20-22].
[51] Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College*, pp. 265, 268, 270, Duberman, *Black Mountain*, pp. 32, 36, 97, 150, 225-27.
[52] *Black Mountain College [Catalog], 1934-1935*, [pp. 12-13], *Black Mountain College [Catalog], 1935-1936*, [p. 13].
[53] Emil Willimetz, *Gringo: Making of a Rebel* (Portsmouth, NH: Randall, 2003), pp. 157-58.
[54] http://blackmountaincollegeproject.org/Features/SUNLEY/SUNLEYpartII/PersonalitiesofFacultyJOHNRICE.htm
[55] Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College*, p. 46.

1940s. However, many of these works, including Faulkner's *Doctor Martino and Other Stories*, *Pylon*, and *These Thirteen*; Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, *Winner Take Nothing*, Lewis's *The Wild Body*; Mansfield's *In a German Pension* and *The Little Girl and Other Stories*; Stein's *Lectures in America*, and Woolf's *The Waves*, are dated as Wunsch's gift in 1945, the year he left. Depending on when he obtained them, they would have been available during his employment at the college, since, as Robert Sunley recalled, 'his study was generally open for anyone to come in and browse when he was not there'. Furthermore, it is likely that early editions of modernist works were amongst the many in the collection sold by its current owners before the catalogue was made--*The Magic Mountain*, for instance, does not appear.[56]

The extent to which the course delivery was progressive clearly depended on the teacher. Courses usually involved 'extensive reading, papers, and class discussions'; lectures were rare.[57] Class sizes were usually small--'from one (tutorial) to about twelve in Werklehre', remembered Robert Bliss.[58] Doughten Cramer was the only student in Joe Martin's 'Elementary Composition' class in the college's first year, and never experienced a class larger than seven.[59] Classes often mixed junior and more advanced students, and faculty attended some classes as students too--Robert Sunley remembers faculty in Rice's Plato class, Peggy Loram and the woodworking teacher Mary Gregory took Albers' classes, M. C. Richards, who taught English and creative writing from 1945 to 1952, took woodworking with Gregory, dance with Elizabeth Jennerjahn, and ceramics with Robert Turner.[60] In Mangold's and Rice's 'Form in Literature' course students studied 'how words were put together for effect--vocabulary, sentence structure, and book format', and were required to write a short story in the style the ten authors studied on the course'. For Emil Willimetz it was 'without doubt, the most exciting and fulfilling course I've ever taken. In fact, I didn't think of it as a course, but as a life experience'.[61] When May Sarton visited the College for a week during a lecture tour in the autumn of 1940, she wrote that she had 'attended the best, most disciplined English class I have ever seen […]. Everyone had his say, and yet the class had a focus and an end and go there (it was a discussion of themes). I gave a lecture on Yeats and as a result one girl spent a whole week studying the Yeats books I had'.[62]

The aims of the English courses were first described in the 1936-37 catalogue. Students were informed that 'the courses in the history of English Literature have as their primary aim the development of critical insight: the ability to recognize a thing for what it is, both in its own terms and in relationship to other parts of human experience'. Teaching valued experience over scholarship, and therefore would involve 'the examination of the greater literary works in their own immediate terms', facilitated by 'reading poetry aloud and reading plays dramatically'. 'The elucidation of textual obscurities, the tracing of literary forms, and the investigation of the personal lives of authors', if conducted at all, would be done with some scepticism: students were reminded that such procedures were 'merely tools of criticism and not ends in themselves'. Historical context was, however, important: 'individual works are examined as offsprings of the age and society which produced them,

[56] 'Black Mountain College Title List', Black Mountain College Collection, Elizabeth Braswell Pearsall Library, North Carolina Wesleyan College; http://blackmountaincollegeproject.org/Features/SUNLEY/SUNLEYpartII/OutsidetheClassroomINFORMALEXCH.htm
[57] http://blackmountaincollegeproject.org/Features/SUNLEY/SUNLEYpartII/MethodsofTeachingGENERAL.htm
[58] http://blackmountaincollegeproject.org/Features/SUNLEY/SUNLEYpartII/FormalAspectsCLASSSIZE.htm
[59] Duberman, *Black Mountain*, p. 51.
[60] http://blackmountaincollegeproject.org/Features/SUNLEY/SUNLEYpartII/MethodsofTeachingINTRO.htm, Lane, ed., *Black Mountain*, pp. 35, 44, 99, 172-4).
[61] Willimetz, *Gringo*, p. 158.
[62] Lane, ed., *Black Mountain*, p. 81.

contemporary parallels in other fields often cited and possible modern analogues suggested'.[63]

The extant descriptions of teaching methods bear these statements out. Joe Martin told Mary Emma Harris that in his classes he had been concerned less with what happened between the student and the teacher than with what happened between the student and the literature.[64] The 'Seminar in the Eighteenth Century' course was one of three experimental courses conceived by Rice, in which four teachers in different specialisms attended each class, taking responsibility for literary history, political and social history, fine arts, and the classical background in order to grasp the period more fully than any single discipline could. The seminar put on a performance of William Congreve's *The Way of the World*--'an integral part' of the seminar, Rice wrote to Ethel and Malcolm Forbes, though he was reportedly the one member of the cast who did not learn his lines.[65]

'To read a play is good, to see a play is better, but to act in a play however awkwardly is to realize a subtle relationship between sound and movement', Rice wrote in 1936. The remark appears in his most important statement of pedagogy, 'Fundamentalism and the Higher Learning', written in response to Hutchins' description of his Great Books programme in *The Higher Learning in America*. Despite his own training, Rice argued that English Literature should replace the study of Classics. It offers, he wrote,

> a store as rich and more intelligible. Whatever one's judgment otherwise, Homer, in translation, is inferior to Chaucer; Sophocles and Terence to Shakespeare; Horace and Catullus to Keats; Vergil to Milton. No writer of closely packed prose has ever equalled Sir Thomas Browne, nor any pen cut deeper than Swift's. There is no ancient Boswell. These are fairly well seasoned. If you can stand a little bootleg stuff, Gertrude Stein's *Lectures in America* is headier than Aristotle's *Poetics* or Horace's *Ars Poetica*. And, if that will make it more palatable, harder reading.

Even so, Rice is quick to state that he would never set these authors as required reading: like Rosenblatt, Rice advocates waiting 'until the moment comes when a book can have meaning for a student, until the author can speak directly to him through the text'.[66] That ethos ensured that the most highly valued encounters with literature at Black Mountain were not only experienced in the literature faculty's seminars. The composer and music teacher Thomas Whitney Surette 'put Blake on the map', according to Rice, 'He read Blake aloud all the time. Everybody started reading Blake'. When William Morse Cole, Professor Emeritus of Accounting at Harvard Business School, came to audit the college's accounts each winter, he held evening Shakespeare-reading groups, which Ted Dreier remembered 'had everyone reading the plays'.[67] Writers who visited the college and gave readings during this early stage of its existence included Gerald Heard, Aldous Huxley, Henry Miller, Clifford Odets, and Thornton Wilder.[68]

3 Creative writing

The teaching of creative writing was a natural extension of this progressivist attitude towards studying literature through experience. The second of Rice's three experimental courses with

[63] *Black Mountain College [Catalog], 1936-1937*, pp. 22-23.
[64] Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College*, p. 46.
[65] John Rice, letter to Ethel and Malcolm Forbes, reprinted as [*Black Mountain College*] *Bulletin*, 1 (November 1933), p. 2, Duberman, *Black Mountain*, p. 52.
[66] Rice, 'Fundamentalism and the Higher Learning', pp. 588, 590-91.
[67] Quoted in Reynolds, *Visions and Vanities*, p. 143.
[68] Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College*, pp. 38, 46;
http://blackmountaincollegeproject.org/Features/SUNLEY/SUNLEYpartII/OutsidetheClassroomVISITORS.htm

four teachers was 'Seminar in Writing' (the other was 'Philosophies of Social Reconstruction'). 'There is no requirement as to who shall write, or what is being written, but at each session there is a call for volunteers from faculty or students, and after the reading of a story or essay or anything else, the crowd cheerfully pitches in, and the result is sometimes considerable warmth in the room', Rice wrote to the Forbeses in the course's first year.[69] The course seems to have changed a little in subsequent years: by the time Willimetz took the course in 1937, Rice appears to have been the only teacher, and submission of work was required to attend. The class 'started at 8 p. m. and was supposed to end at 10, but frequently it didn't', remembered Willimetz. 'Occasionally the discussions were so animated and creative (or so we thought) that we kept on until midnight. That writing class was the core of my Black Mountain experience'.[70] Robert Sunley, who took the class in the same period, also described the seminar as 'the outstanding class for me […]. While his conduct of the class was perhaps not greatly innovative, [Rice] made it an exciting experience with his gift of perception into each piece submitted […]. He made no effort, as I recall, to bring in the history of literature, specific techniques, schools of criticism. As in other subjects, here Rice seemed to be aiming at helping each person develop his or her own style and mode of writing'.[71]

Bob Wunsch also taught creative writing, as well as a course in journalism, which took the form of 'practical work in writing articles for local newspapers'.[72] While at Rollins, he had co-authored with Mary Reade Smith *Studies in Creative Writing*, one of the manuals for teachers of writing that began to proliferate in the nineteen thirties. Its chapters set out ideas for classes around the topics of words, impressions, dialogue, action and conflict, suggestion and recall, feeling and mood, comparison, reflection and thought, imagination, and finally style. Each chapter concluded with exercises and suggested reading, mainly drawn from the anthologies *Verse of Our Day* (1923) edited by Margery Gordon and Marie B. King, and *Readings in Description and Narration* (1930), edited by R. A. Beals, M. E. Barnicle, and J. S. Terry. Some modernist writers were suggested as models: for example, in the chapter on 'Words', Wunsch and Smith recommend two extracts from *Youth* by Conrad, the beginning of Lawrence's 'Market Day' from *Mornings in Mexico*, and a passage from the second volume of Sacheverell Sitwell's *The Gothick North*; and in the chapter on 'Impressions', they recommend sections from Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness', Mansfield's 'At the Bay', Proust's *Swann's Way*, and Woolf's *Orlando*, all from *Readings in Description and Narration*. It would be misleading to suggest that modernist writing dominates, however: texts by J. M. Barrie, Walter de la Mare, Richard Jefferies and Rudyard Kipling are recommended as frequently.[73]

The recommended poetry, in particular, was not markedly experimental: Gordon and King's popular *Verse of Our Day* contained few modernist authors. Though three imagists were represented--John Gould Fletcher, Ford Madox Hueffer (i.e. Ford), and Amy Lowell--the anthology included far more poems by, for example, Bliss Carman, Francis Ledwidge, Alfred Noyes, and Sara Teasdale. Yet, as Leonard Diepeveen has argued, *Verse of Our Day* was modern in its critical approach, simply in its focus on 'our day'. Unlike nineteenth-century anthologies of literary 'gems', 'whose poems were collected on vague aesthetic principles, and whose structure was unhistoricized', twentieth-century anthologies began to 'conceptualize a set of chronological/ ideological conditions that guided the selection of

[69] Rice, letter to Ethel and Malcolm Forbes, p. 2.
[70] Willimetz, *Gringo*, pp. 158-59.
[71] http://www.blackmountaincollegeproject.org/Features/SUNLEY/SUNLEYpartII/MethodsofTeachingJOHNRICE.htm
[72] *Black Mountain College [Catalog], 1936-1937*, pp. 21-22.
[73] William Robert Wunsch and Mary Reade Smith, *Studies in Creative Writing* (New York: Holt, 1933), pp. 15, 29, 30, 32, R. A. Beals, M. E. Barnicle, J. S. Terry, eds, *Readings in Description and Narration* (Cambridge, MA: Houghton Miffln, 1930), pp. 85-86, 41-42, 106-107, 84, 127-30, 74, 82.

poems from a single literary period'.[74] Indeed, Gordon's and King's description of modern verse is instructive. 'The most distinctive contribution of our modern poets is', they write,

> their realism in recording all sense impressions. Whether it be a person, an animal, a flower, or a city street, the color, form, sound, is recorded, not by generalisations, but in specific terms […]. And in making their reflections on life and its experiences the poets of to-day strike a personal note. We do not feel that they are aloof from the world of men, observing and recording mere type-experiences. We feel, rather, that they are in the market-place, part and parcel of its turmoil.[75]

This conception of modern poetry reflects the success of imagism in the United States, but it also draws attention to the progressivist understanding of literature as experience rather than technical achievement that underpins this anthology, Wunsch's and Smith's textbook, and Wunsch's Black Mountain creative writing course.[76] It is striking that *Studies in Creative Writing* includes no instruction in poetic technique--no introduction to rhythm or metre, nor any literary devices we might typically associate with the writing of poetry. Even 'style' is relegated to the final chapter. Like Gordon and King, Wunsch and Smith highlight the importance of the impression in creative writing--their chapter on 'Impressions' is their longest by some way, with sixteen different sets of exercises. Their introduction describes the book's purpose in explicitly non-technical terms that highlight fostering experience rather than product: 'the object of this text is not to teach form, but to develop keenness of perception, freshness of expression, and fullness of intellectual and emotional enjoyment'.[77] Wunsch's course description draws directly on this introduction:

> The main purpose of this course is the development of a keenness of perception, of a freshness of expression, of a capacity for intellectual and emotional enjoyment. The student is encouraged to dip his nets where he is and find material in his unique experience and in the everyday life about him. Beginning with simple exercises in the use of words, the work proceeds through the recording of sense impressions and brief analyses of character to the expression of observed episodes and truthfully imagined episodes.[78]

Conclusion

The high value placed on the 'impression' in these sources underlines the correspondence between Black Mountain's conception of pedagogy and the aesthetics of early modernism. Albers' 'stubborn insistence that his pupils "learn to see"' recalls numerous modernist statements, most famously Conrad's 'Author's Note' to *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*.[79] Wunsch and Smith hold up the 'close looking' of the biologist Louis Agassiz as a model for writers, as Ezra Pound would do a year later in *ABC of Reading*.[80] In 'Fundamentalism and the Higher Learning', Rice describes his pedagogy in terms of a linguistic scepticism that is

[74] Leonard Diepeveen, 'When Did Modernism Begin? Formulating Boundaries in the Modern Anthology', *English Studies in Canada*, 30.1 (2004), 137-56 (pp. 139 ,141).
[75] Margery Gordon and Marie B. King, eds, *Verse of Our Day: An Anthology of Modern American and British Poetry* (New York: Appleton, 1923), pp. xi-xii.
[76] Imagism and progressivism can both be viewed as products of the same source, the high value American culture had long placed on experience: see Martin Jay, *Songs of Experience: Modern American and European Variations on a Universal Theme* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2005).
[77] William Robert Wunsch and Mary Reade Smith, *Studies in Creative Writing* (New York: Holt, 1933), p. [iii].
[78] *Black Mountain College [Catalog], 1936-1937*, pp. 21-22.
[79] http://blackmountaincollegeproject.org/Features/SUNLEY/SunleyFeature1/IndividualActive.htm, Joseph Conrad, 'The Nigger of the "Narcissus": A Tale of the Forecastle, VIII. Author's Note', *New Review*, 17 (1897), 628-31 (p. 630).
[80] Wunsch and Smith, *Studies in Creative Writing*, pp. 16-17, Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading* (London: Routledge, 1934), pp. 1-2.

as central to symbolist poetry as it is to pragmatism and progressivism. Learning, Rice argues, must be based on experience, not the decontextualised 'printed language' of the Great Books programmes, with their unwarranted faith that thought can 'break through the crust of language to the consciousness of the reader'.[81]

There is clearly much more that could be explored in discussion of Black Mountain, progressivism and modernism, not least the pedagogy of the college's later, more renowned teachers of literature, writing, and drama: Eric Bentley (1942-44), M. C. Richards (1945-52), and Charles Olson (1948-57). But for all the individuality, even idiosyncrasy, of these later teachers, they continued to practise the distinctive pedagogy established in in the college's first years, which remained distinctive in the context of competing approaches in higher education. In one of his early course descriptions, for example, Olson described his course in 'Writing' as 'The work is the exercise and practice of language by its two means, verse and prose, with the end that the individual learn to see, hear, feel directly, to speak and think likewise (which is to write)'.[82] Francine du Plessix Gray recalled that in the college's last years the 'favorite mottoes were Ezra Pound's "Make it New" and William Carlos Williams's "No ideas but in things"'. These reference points are hardly surprising in a community led by Olson, but this essay has aimed to show how closely they align with the progressivist values on which the college was founded, too.[83]

I began this essay by suggesting that analysis of modernism's relation to progressive education might reveal a counter-narrative to the story of modernism's pedagogical legacy with which we are most familiar, that is, the influence of modernism on the New Criticism, particularly on its promotion of aesthetic autonomy, and its absorption into Cold War ideology. Modernist literature was valued by progressivists for its contemporaneity and its interest in representing experience--that is, for its superior connection to the world of the student, not its autonomy. Defamiliarization, learning 'to see', was at the heart of Black Mountain's progressivism. But one might see the progressivist counter-narrative as simply an early stage of the story Mark McGurl has told, in which 'the modernist imperative to "make it new" was institutionalized as another form of original research sponsored by the booming, science-oriented universities of the Cold War era' in the form of the graduate creative writing programme. Just as the New Criticism's insistence on the autonomy of the literary artefact contributed to modernism's rebranding as an assertion of American individualism in the face of Fascist and Soviet totalitarianism, so too did the progressivist promotion of creative writing lead to creative writing programmes McGurl describes as 'shrines to American individualism' during the Cold War.[84] Indeed, the potential for this development can be seen clearly in Rice's statements about Black Mountain's aims. In 1936, he wrote, 'we ought to begin to consider education as a thing concerned at least in part with how people feel. If we do not, somebody else will, and all our structure of thought will disappear as quickly as it has in Nazi Germany'. In 1942, he wrote in more general terms:

> The center of the curriculum, we said, would be art. The democratic man, we said, must be an artist. The integrity, we said, of the democratic man was the integrity of the artist, an integrity of relationship. The history of man had been the struggle between man and his environment, that is, the corporation of his fellows; sometimes one was winner, sometimes the other. When the individual won, he found himself the individualist, when the corporation, a polyp. That was the struggle then on in Europe,

[81] Rice, 'Fundamentalism and the Higher Learning', pp. 588-89.
[82] Ralph Maud, *Charles Olson's Reading: A Biography* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), p. 79.
[83] Lane, ed., *Black Mountain College*, p. 304.
[84] McGurl, *The Program Era*, pp. 4, 265; Greg Barnhisel, *Cold War Modernists: Art, Literature, and American Cultural Diplomacy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), p. 38.

> now in the whole world. Sometimes, however, the corporation won without great struggle, by persuasion. Would not man become like his fellows? That would make it easier all round. Many accepted that easy way, and became "adjusted." But still they were not satisfied. Still they did not have integrity.[85]

The hindsight of institutional studies like those by Graff and McGurl has enabled us to see how even the most, perhaps precisely the most, optimistic and idealistic ventures in education have been co-opted and neutralized by the corporation and the state. But it is nonetheless worthwhile to register the aims and experience of those ventures in their earlier phase. If progressive education teaches us anything, it teaches us to value experience and process over product, just as modernism teaches us to value the immediacy of the impression. As progressivists and modernists knew well, the micro-narrative of experience informs but also resists the macro-narrative of what we think is achieved knowledge.

[85] Rice, *I Came Out of the Eighteenth Century*, p. 328.