

In this paper, I will discuss Great Books curricula as they are practiced within two different pedagogical contexts: St. John's College, where the Western Canon is the sole program of study on offer; and the University of California, Santa Cruz, where that same canon is deconstructed, problematized and interrogated as a matter of course. Having been an undergraduate at the latter and being a graduate student at the former, I have an outside / inside perspective through which I have realized that Great Books programs produce the best *classical* students yet the worst *Classicists*.

I begin my discussion of St. John's by looking at the college's motto, *Facio liberos ex liberis libris libraque*, "I make free citizens from out of children by means of books and a balance." While announcing the college's philosophic and functional goals, the motto also betrays its practical shortcomings and ideological contradictions: St. John's does not teach any Latin, so therefore none of its students can read the motto. As it turns out, the college's Great Books curriculum also marginalizes Latin texts to make room for a surfeit of Greek texts; at St. John's, Great Books comes to mean Greek books. Latin, however, is not one language among many, and to omit the singular tongue of Western intellectual production highlights the ideological dimensions of canon formation, but in some unlikely ways. All Great Books programs are part of the story of European exceptionalism and colonialism, but the St. John's iteration—which developed through many transformations before, during and after World War II—must be viewed as a reaction *against* conflict, conquest and colonialism. When St. John's teaches no Latin and eschews Roman texts, it rejects Rome but also the standard, German approaches to the study of the science of antiquity, from which most all other schools model their approaches to classical texts. St. John's, I argue, suppresses empire by extirpating its language, and re-locates the origin of the West out of Aeneas's conquests and migrations, and into Socrates' contemplative conversations in an ideal Athenian agora: from "arms and a man" to "books and a balance."

I conclude my discussion by turning to UC Santa Cruz's cheeky, unofficial motto, *Fiat slug*, "Let there be slug," which combines a pun on the UC-wide motto, *Fiat lux*, "Let there be light," with Santa Cruz's mascot, the indigenous banana slug. Surprisingly, Great Books thrive at UCSC because the school's academic climate is so intellectually *avant-garde* that studying the canon has become radical. I argue that in this pedagogical context, the act of teaching the Great Books is not only a necessary responsibility, but is also egalitarian in its own way, rather than an act of elitism, as was often charged in the 1990s. Few students, at either St. John's or Santa Cruz, come to college having read the canon, and even fewer, at least at Santa Cruz, will go on to read it in graduate school. To defer teaching the canon presumes too much about a student's leisure time or the inevitability of graduate study. If these undergrads do not read Great Books during college, when else will they?