

Citizens, Soldiers, and Future Selves

On the Democratic Functions of the Literary Imagination
(Notes from a “Pure Civilian”)

Gregory Laski

The literary imagination is an essential part of both the theory and the practice of citizenship.

—Martha C. Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice*

The roles of citizen and soldier are no longer intertwined—a gap has opened between them.

—James Burk, “Theories of Democratic Civil-Military Relations”

Not mixed or adulterated; clean, clear, refined . . . free from contamination or physical impurity; not mixed with anything that corrupts or impairs; untainted, clean.

—*Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. “pure”

“But, sir . . . he’s a *pure civilian*.”

I barely registered the “sir” in my student’s statement; by the start of my second year teaching literature at the U.S. Air Force Academy (USAFA), such designations were routine. But what followed this ritualized rendering of respect struck me as intriguingly irreverent, perhaps in part because it seemed a disenfranchising gesture. Though I also fit the bill, the particular “pure civilian” to whom my student referred was the American novelist Ben Fountain, who the evening before had delivered the academy’s annual lecture

on war, literature, and the arts to an audience of uniformed cadets, young men and women who have chosen to earn their bachelor's degrees while also preparing to commission as second lieutenants in the air force. Taking his topic from his Iraq war novel *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk* (2012), Fountain made a case for the crucial connection between the literary imagination and democratic citizenship from ancient Greece to the contemporary United States. About the latter end of this historical survey, Fountain had little encouraging to say; as he put it, America's most recent military engagement in the Middle East, which we had begun on the "basis of Weapons of Mass Destruction that didn't exist," was "a disaster we'd brought on ourselves" (2013: 2). For Fountain, the fact that so many Americans are untouched in any tangible way by our most recent military actions made it all too easy for the nation's leadership to dupe citizens into agreeing to start (and continue) this war. Rather than reckoning with the physical and psychic costs of battle, the public consumed a delusional and finally damaging "fantasy version" of war in which "lapel flag pins" and exhortations to "Support the Troops" replaced "photos of coffins at Dover Air Force Base" (7).

To my mind, these statements seemed uncontroversial. As I discussed the lecture with the cadets enrolled in my required literature course the following day, however, I realized that many endorsed their colleague's critique. From their vantage point as future military officers who may be charged to fight the very kind of war that Fountain condemned, these assertions were inappropriate, even offensive. As my students saw it, Fountain lacked authenticity and authority; the fact that he was a "pure civilian" (someone who had never served in the military) marked him as naive—and, at least according to the logic of this term, untainted by the martial experience that would have granted him warrant to address cadets.

If, as Mary Douglas has argued in her classic anthropological study *Purity and Danger*, claims about pollution, dirt, and contagion are always "creative endeavors"—efforts to construct a symbolic system of meaning and value ([1966] 2002: 3, 2, 44)—then what precisely was being forged in my classroom at this moment? What particular system of the relationship between self and other, individual and collective, was at stake? And how was I supposed to respond? My personal and professional identities suggested one route. As a "pure civilian" myself, I wanted to defend Fountain's authority to take a position in this important debate. As a scholar and teacher of democracy in American literature and culture, I wanted to resist the implication of ideological consolidation and homogeneity suggested by the *Oxford English Dictionary's* gloss of *pure* as "free from contamination." This is

because almost everything about the texts that compose the literary tradition I teach foreground the political power—indeed, necessity—of mixing: from Walt Whitman’s idea of the transformative possibilities of boundary crossing through W. E. B. Du Bois’s account of the painful yet empowering vista afforded by “second sight” and on to Gloria Anzaldúa’s mestiza consciousness.

In response to the student’s comment, I offered neither an impromptu lecture on the politics of difference nor a compressed survey of American literary history. But “pure civilian” continued to intrigue me, in part because the designation seemed at once to invoke and unsettle a pedagogical desideratum for those concerned with the democratic function of literature: the capacity of the imagination to facilitate the enlargement of vision that is vital to a pluralist polity in which “difference” is the very “condition of political possibility” (Mouffe 1996: 254). Examining the fault lines that the designation *pure civilian* poses for such a pedagogical project, this essay revisits the possibilities and problems of the citizen-forming duties of literature from one of the less examined dimensions of democracy: the military-civilian divide that constitutes the locus of my teaching.

There is surely no dearth of scholarship on the democratic aims of literature. Indeed, one would be hard-pressed to find a treatment of the place of literary study in particular and the humanities in general published over the last few decades that does not in some way draw on *citizenship* and *democracy* as key terms, and for good reason. As Christopher Castiglia (2011: 190) has persuasively argued, “We in the humanities—called on repeatedly to justify our relevance to the ‘real’ world—can answer that call through our practices of hopeful imagination and the democratic skills they undergird.” With his appeal to the democratic force of the imagination to explain what literature has to offer, Castiglia extends a line of thought that perhaps has been articulated most extensively by Martha C. Nussbaum. In her book *Poetic Justice* (1995), Nussbaum makes a case for the “literary imagination as a public imagination” (3), by which she means to designate the mode of deliberation that ought to guide judges and legislators as they consider matters of collective concern. Literature affords its readers the opportunity “to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself, to be an intelligent reader of that person’s story, and to understand the emotions and wishes and desires that someone so placed might have” (Nussbaum 1997: 10–11).¹

But for Nussbaum it is not simply those making public policy for whom the literary imagination is crucial: insofar as literature cultivates in readers the ability to imagine perspectives distinct from one’s own subject

position, it offers one of the critical habits necessary for democratic citizenship. As she explains in *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (2010), because “democracy is built upon respect and concern,” it requires its citizens to see and understand both others and themselves not as “objects” but as “human beings” with emotions and desires, ideas and wants. “When we meet in society, if we have not learned to see both self and other in that way, imagining in one another inner faculties of thought and emotion, democracy is bound to fail” (6). Informing this account is a commitment to inclusiveness, a democratic value that the political theorist Iris Marion Young (1996: 120) argues requires us to see “differences of culture, social perspective, or particularist commitment” not as stumbling blocks to be avoided but rather as “resources to draw on for reaching understanding in democratic discussion.”

That the encounter between my cadets and Ben Fountain hardly approached this sort of deliberative exchange indexes the gap between civilians and soldiers that has widened throughout the twentieth century, most notably with the end of conscription in 1973. In fact, *pure civilian* was not (as I initially thought) a clever cadet neologism; as I discuss below, the designation actually emerged in the early 2000s, in the context of a congressional directive that called for the integration of civilians into the USAFA and the U.S. Military Academy (USMA) as part of a push to diversify what were then nearly all-military enclaves. Hence, this phrase is uniquely tied to a historical moment in which the professionalization of the armed forces has rendered the lives and work of soldiers troublingly private, shut off from the view of the public and even to some extent severed from the meaning of citizenship itself. My students’ assessment of Fountain represented the distressing dynamics of this reality. And yet, if we recall just how few citizens serve in the military—less than one-half of one percent (Pew Research Center 2011: 2)—this imaginative failure begins to make a sort of sense even as it raises difficult questions. How does our conception of the citizen-shaping powers of the literary imagination account for the place of the military, an element that is at once central to our democracy and often veiled from our collective sight? What would it mean to include in Nussbaum’s vision of the literary imagination as a public imagination not just lawmakers and judges but also soldiers?

I take up these questions in the following pages, offering my perspective as a civilian professing literature to future military officers as a vehicle to think about—and maybe even rethink—some of the ideas that subtend our understanding of the democratic function of literature’s imaginative powers. As Gregory Currie (2007: 17) explains, “imagination” holds at least two

meanings: a way to “engage with things and events which are not (at least not yet) actual,” what we might call a first-person model, and “ways of responding to things in the world . . . from a perspective not our own,” what we might think of as the intersubjective dimensions of imaginative work. As I have noted, treatments of the democratic imperative for literary study tend to draw on the latter orientation, framing the citizen-shaping duties of literary pedagogy in terms of the crucial task of ethically engaging the other. Seeking to supplement these important accounts, I argue that the democratic power of literature resides not simply in the work of imagining the other but also in imagining other versions of one’s self: in using the act of reading to engage in imaginative projections about possible future versions of the self—in short, for something we might call *purity* in the *OED*’s sense of the term that implies refinement and clarity of vision. To be sure, I want my students to identify ethically with the other as they read; this capacity perhaps will be more crucial for them than for their civilian peers. But I also want them to engage in imaginative self-projections: to see in one of Sophocles’s characters a model of power they might accept or reject. Theirs is a profession that is at once public minded and intensely private; it requires the sort of discernment process—the self-making—that literary study can support.²

The term at the center of my inquiry, *purity*, is of course laden with a number of problematic meanings and implications, not the least of which was highlighted by my students’ response to Fountain’s lecture.³ My purpose in retaining rather than rejecting this word is not to divest *purity* from its troubling resonances but to open up other ways of thinking about this term in an effort to sketch out an account of the democratic value of literary study that moves beyond, while still affirming, the long-standing emphasis on the politics of difference. Accordingly, in the pages that follow, I place *purity* and its concomitant concepts in pedagogical, philosophical, and historical contexts. I begin by situating the idea of the “pure civilian” within historical and sociological studies of military-civil relations in the United States. I then turn to the pedagogical implications that the gap between civilians and soldiers holds for the democratic aspirations of literary education. In the final section, I offer an example of a classroom exercise that can engender the sort of self-making process I advocate, assessing the promise and potential problems of such an approach to literature in the contexts of both military and civilian classrooms.

As this précis suggests, in what follows I draw on a range of sources: reflections on the ends of literary study; congressional testimony and national defense authorizations; philosophical meditations on the nature of personal identity; literary works by Sophocles, Franz Kafka, and J. M. Coetzee; and

the voices of the future officers I teach. These are sources (and even fields of study) that do not routinely come into contact and whose claims may rest uneasily with one another. Insofar as this is the case, it is at least partly a function of the mission of this essay, which is written in the spirit of exploration. Most simply put, my hope is to make use of my particular pedagogical situation to revisit a concern that has long been central to the literature classroom writ large.

Periodizing Purity; or, A Very Brief History of the Military-Civilian Divide

Free from anything not properly belonging to it; without any added, extraneous, or unnecessary elements; simple, homogeneous.

—*Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. “pure”

If my students’ response to Fountain’s lecture made clear the stumbling blocks that impede a genuinely democratic exchange of perspectives, the episode also pointed to another dimension of the American political system that in part can explain this failure: the often vexed relationship between soldiers and civilians. As Peter D. Feaver, Richard H. Kohn, and Lindsay P. Cohn put it in the introduction to *Soldiers and Civilians: The Civil-Military Gap and American National Security* (2001), democracy depends on a mutualistic relationship between the military and the civilian sector it serves: a democratic society must “nurture and support an adequate military,” and this military must remain loyal—and subservient—to its civilian leadership (1). While the central principle upon which this relationship turns is civilian control, that standard is also a sort of minimum threshold, far removed from what the historian Russell F. Weigley (2001: 227) has called the more ideal foundation of “faithful obedience based on candid civil-military discussions and on mutual understanding and trust.” This sort of relationship, Weigley notes, rarely has been realized. Indeed, concerns about possible fault lines that would threaten such a balance are nearly as old as the nation itself.

Alexander Hamilton’s comments in *Federalist* 8 on the subject of standing armies are suggestive in this regard. Addressing those who worried about the federal government’s authority over the armed forces as proposed in the new Constitution, Hamilton painted a bleak picture of the scenario that would come to pass were America to remain a confederacy of disunited states, each inevitably forced to raise its own military establishments to defend itself from enemies, including one another. In the context of such constant peril, “the military state becomes elevated above the civil,” he wrote, “and by degrees, the people are brought to consider the soldiery not only as their

protectors, but as their superiors.” Drawing on the trope of servitude that was so familiar in the context of post-Revolutionary America, his next sentence revealed the stakes of the balance: “The transition from this disposition to that of considering them masters, is neither remote, nor difficult: But it is very difficult to prevail upon a people under such impressions, to make a bold, or effectual resistance, to usurpations, supported by the military power” (Cooke 1961: 48). If Hamilton’s rhetoric here is designed to make the case that the Constitution’s schema for military power shared between the executive and legislative branches is much more salutary than the alternative, his emphasis on the fault lines that threaten to divide the civil and military states (the risk of the latter becoming “elevated” over the former, the confusion between soldiers as “protectors” and “masters”) nonetheless suggests what in our contemporary parlance has come to be known as the “gap”: the dividing lines—cultural, political, ideological—between those who serve in the military and those who do not, between, we might say, citizens and soldiers (Feaver, Kohn, and Cohn 2001).

The vision he puts forth in *Federalist* 8 notwithstanding, the separation between these two identities was not as sharply drawn in Hamilton’s America. According to the sociologist David R. Segal (1989: 10), the American Revolution was not only a military and political campaign against King George III but also a “citizenship revolution” insofar as it “emphasized the right of every citizen to bear arms and to belong to the officer corps.” Military service did not simply function as a “path to citizenship”; it also was a demonstration of civic engagement, a way to fulfill one of the obligations of democratic citizenship. It was thus within the context of the Revolution that the term *citizen-soldier* crystallized. Standing in contrast to the professional warrior whose service constitutes a career, the designation emphasizes the amateur and short-term status of an individual’s participation in the armed forces (see also Segal 1989: 6; Burk 2000: 155). Perhaps more significant, however, the phrase underscores a political vision in which there is a crucial link between military service and citizenship. Morris Janowitz (1975: 435) wonderfully captures the dynamic underwriting *citizen-soldier* when he remarks that “military service emerged as a hallmark of citizenship and citizenship as the hallmark of a political democracy.”

As Lauren Berlant (1991: 4–5) has argued, citizenship is not only a juridical or political category but also a symbolic construct. In this regard, it is important to note that the ideal of the citizen-soldier has always been just that: more representation than reality, more fantasy than fact. Even while universal service was the model in the early republic, as Segal notes, in actuality

this particular military was not “broadly representative of society” but instead was “dependent on the lower social strata” (1989: 43). And, of course, the exclusive nature of precisely *whom* was included in the category of citizen—and thus in the actual and symbolic category of “citizen-soldier”—has itself been (and remains) a vexed issue (10–12, 101–24). Still, the phrase serves as a useful heuristic for tracking the changes this designation has undergone since the founding of the nation, particularly insofar as it indexes the trend toward the professionalization of the armed forces.

Already in *Federalist* 8 Hamilton noted the challenges that a modern republic confronted with respect to raising and maintaining a military. Invoking the warrior ideal associated with the Greek city-states of antiquity, he noted the impossibility of realizing a “nation of soldiers” in a polity where commercialization and economic advances “have produced an intire revolution in the system of war, and have rendered disciplined armies, distinct from the body of the citizens, the inseparable companion of frequent hostility” (Cooke 1961: 47). It was not until the middle of the nineteenth century that the sort of “distinct” military body that this passage adumbrates truly began to emerge. The founding of the USMA at West Point in 1802, and the installation of the West Point-educated George B. McClellan and Ulysses S. Grant as commanders of the army during the Civil War, marked important moments in the development of a professional military ethos that distinguished itself from the values of civilian society as more “representative of a distinctive kind of discipline, virtue, and responsibility” (Weigley 2001: 223, 224, 215).

But surely no period shaped the relationship between the citizen and the soldier—and altered the notion of citizenship itself—more than the second half of the twentieth century. While a professional military class had clearly emerged in the era of the Civil War, the sheer need for martial personnel during the two world wars kept the notion of the citizen-soldier alive. A decisive and deliberate move away from this model and toward the notion of the military professional occurred, however, when the newly elected Richard Nixon appointed the former Secretary of Defense Thomas Gates to lead the President’s Commission on an All-Volunteer Armed Force. As its name indicates, the commission was tasked with preparing to bring an end to conscription, a goal Nixon himself had announced during the 1968 presidential campaign (Segal 1989: 36). Gates and his colleagues conducted their deliberations at the nexus of a number of complex domestic and geopolitical factors, namely, the divisive Vietnam War, the increasing technological sophistication of combat (including the existence of nuclear weapons), and the economic realities of the United States. This last context loomed large, insofar as the

commission understood its charge was to consider both what it would cost the government to support such a military and what it would take to recruit and retain personnel. As Segal explains, the economic dimension was especially significant because it suggests the way in which the commission viewed the desire to enter the military as an “economic behavior” (38). Put simply, Gates and his colleagues conceived of the work of bearing arms as a job.

The commission’s deliberations ultimately came to fruition in policy in 1973, when the all-volunteer force was formalized. This moment marked a critical shift in the sense and significance of military service: where the citizen-soldier model is rooted in a civic republican tradition that values the citizen’s active participation in public life and contribution to the common good, the concept of the soldier in the context of a volunteer force tends more toward the liberal democratic theory that privileges the protection of individual rights. In the latter orientation, the military requires “professional officers who are expert in the management of violence” and are “willing to swap loyalty to civilian authority in return for professional autonomy” (Burk 2002: 10).⁴

Significantly, then, the era of the all-volunteer force moved the conception of citizenship away from duties and obligations and toward the rights and privileges that this status accords (Segal 1989: 3). To be sure, the notion of the citizen-soldier did not disappear with the advent of the all-volunteer force; it survives today, for example, in the form of reserve units and the National Guard (Burk 2001). In fact, the latter organization actively tried to cultivate this identity in a 2007 recruitment video titled “Citizen/Soldier.” Featuring the band Three Doors Down, the production interweaves shots of current National Guard members with pseudohistorical footage of soldiers dressed in uniforms meant to identify them as members of the Continental Army; the song that provides the musical background for the video expresses in its refrain a decidedly communitarian credo: “On that day when you need your brothers and sisters to care, I’ll be right here.” Still, the reality of military-civil relations at present is better represented without the slash that appears in the title of this song. As Burk (2002: 19) has summarized the state of affairs in the era of the volunteer military, “In general, citizens are now free to decide for themselves whether this is an obligation that they should perform. The roles of citizen and soldier are no longer intertwined—a gap has opened between them.”

It was the history of this gap that the designation “pure civilian” articulated in condensed form the day it was uttered in my classroom. Following Michel Foucault ([1977] 1995: 31), we might say that it is a term that gives voice

to a “history of the present,” a sense of how we got to where we are. Understood in this regard, the designation also pointed toward a local history, one that explained a more immediate present: my presence in the classroom as a civilian faculty member at the USAFA. If the founding of the USMA at West Point signaled the surfacing of a professional military class, the birth of the USAFA, more than a century later and amid the Cold War, contributed decisively to the congealing of that identity. In *A Report and Recommendation to the Secretary of Defense by the Service Academy Board* (Stearns et al. 1950), a committee led by Robert L. Stearns (a World War I veteran and president of the University of Colorado) and Dwight D. Eisenhower (then a general in the army) made the case for the establishment of an undergraduate institution that would produce officers for the recently created air force, much like the USMA and the U.S. Naval Academy did for their branches of the armed forces. Even as the document focused on what would become the USAFA, it devoted many of its pages to clarifying the general purpose of the federal service academies. In a section that discusses the “motivations of young men to enter” institutions of this nature, the committee noted that some students are impelled by a “clearly crystallized desire for a professional career in the services and the idea that entrance via the academy system” is the best route to achieve that end (32, 33). And yet, citing the allure of a “high-grade college education,” among motivating factors, the document states that this is not the case for all students: “For a large number of entrants then, motivation for a lifetime career as an officer of the armed forces remains to be instilled during their undergraduate years” (3). Accordingly, it is the “four-year period” during which students earn their baccalaureate degrees and train to become officers that the initial motivation for a military career is “extended and gradually crystallized into a fixed objective” (33).

When the USAFA welcomed its first class five years later, in 1955, the question of just who would be facilitating this crystallizing process was itself quite clear: a faculty made up almost exclusively of military officers (Keller et al. 2013: 102). Significantly, this was not necessarily as the 1950 Stearns-Eisenhower report would have had it. In a section that addressed the extant service academies, and thereby offered a sort of blueprint for the prospective USAFA, the committee remarked that “improvements can be made in the faculty systems” (Stearns et. al. 1950: 11). Citing the detrimental effects for the work of teaching and learning entailed in the rotational nature of military officership, with its associated limits for specialized educational study, the board recommended that West Point increase the ratio of civilians on the faculty to at least “twenty-five percent” (48). In this, the USMA (and, by

implication, the USAFA) would follow the model of the U.S. Naval Academy, which already enjoyed the “continuity and uniformity” (65), as well as the advanced academic specialization, afforded by a civilian faculty that nearly equaled the number of military instructors on its roster (Keller et al. 2013: 102). “If necessary,” the report explained, these newly hired civilians “should be commissioned in order to place them on a basis of staff equality with other members of the faculty” (Stearns et al. 1950: 48). As this last remark implies, even as the committee made a case for the benefits of employing civilian instructors, it maintained that the mission of a military institution was best achieved by a faculty composed of members of the armed forces who demonstrate “officer-like qualities” (32). From the vantage point of the committee, in short, the desire to become a career military officer was best cultivated by seeing one in front of you.

It was this logic that the USAFA employed when the issue of the composition of the faculty surfaced again, in a more volatile context, in the final decade of the twentieth century.⁵ In 1993, ongoing concerns about the lack of instructors holding terminal degrees in their fields of specialization and related worries about institutional accreditation prompted Congress to take action. Included in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1993 was a mandate that the secretary of defense prepare and submit a plan for increasing the number of civilians on the faculties of the USMA and USAFA so that both of these institutions would have roughly equal numbers of military and civilian instructors (Keller et al. 2013: 107). Leaders at the USMA in particular resisted this move, and when the bill was passed, a markedly different provision appeared: the final National Defense Authorization Act specified that both the USAFA and USMA could employ as “many civilians as professors, instructors, and lecturers” as the leadership of each institution “considers necessary” (U.S. House of Representatives 1992: sec. 523). The contest between Congress and military leadership embedded in this bill’s legislative history offers a vista into what Weigley (2001) has identified as the strained civil-military relations that marked the nation in the early 1990s, at the conclusion of the Cold War.⁶

This particular agon hardly developed into a standoff between the military and civilian worlds: the result of the 1993 legislation, even in its attenuated form, did impel the USAFA to increase the number of nonmilitary instructors. By 2004, civilians made up 25 percent of the faculty (Keller et al. 2013: 108). And yet, just who these “civilians” were—and, more fascinating, just what constituted the meaning of *civilian* in the era of the all-volunteer force—would be the central issue when the question of faculty composition

resurfaced, with the release of the *Study and Report Related to Permanent Professors at the United States Air Force Academy*.

Conducted by Charles R. Larson, a former superintendent of the U.S. Naval Academy, the 2004 study was the result of Congress's (ongoing) concerns about the faculty makeup of the service academies and the USAFA in particular. Larson's report focused on the question of "permanent professors" (congressionally approved professorships for high-ranking military members), but it was the question of civilian presence in the academy that generated most attention. Addressing the USAFA's faculty hiring practices, the study announced in no uncertain terms that the academy resisted the "spirit and intent" of Congress's legislation in selecting instructors (Executive Summary 1). As Larson noted, USAFA leadership appeared to evade the mandate by hiring retired military personnel for civilian faculty positions instead of what he called "pure academicians," a term he deployed to "differentiate" "civilian professors who are military retirees" from those who never served (Executive Summary 1: sec. 2, 14n46). Indeed, he noted, former military members made up 30 percent of the academy's civilian instructors—a number that itself amounted to only 24 percent of the total faculty (Executive Summary 1). Such a scenario did not meet the aim of Congress's directive, which was to add to these institutions instructors who would bring a "fresh and often provocative world view not bounded by military culture," as well as "doctoral-level currency and depth in their academic disciplines" (sec. 2, 14). In this regard, the USAFA did not follow the lead of the sister school that served as its model in the 1950s. The USMA, Larson noted, "seeks to hire only pure civilian academicians"; indeed, the report acclaimed in a footnote, "at West Point, there are only two exceptions to the desire to hire true civilian professors" (sec. 2, 15).

From "pure academician" to "pure civilian academician" and then "true civilian"—the slippage among these seemingly synonymous appellations that mark the pages of Larson's report is itself worthy of a classroom close reading exercise. In one sense, the use of *pure* throughout the document calls upon a usual distinction in academic discourse between pure and applied research. This is the meaning that Brigadier General Dana H. Born, the dean of the faculty at the USAFA at the time of the study, appeared to invoke in her official response to Larson's findings. Citing the "fundamental requirement for maintaining the essential military character of the institution," Born (2004: 6–7) explained that although civilian faculty have "academic expertise," they do not possess the "career military knowledge" required

to occupy the position of, say, department chair or a dean-level administrative post. Accordingly, “the challenge,” as she put it, “is to give [civilians] a strong, active voice in curriculum issues”—what she referred to as “purely academic matters”—“while maintaining order, discipline, and a clear military chain-of-command.”

In its demarcation of the academic role of the civilian faculty and the military and leadership capacity of officers, this statement is more than a description of a division of labor. It also performs the classifying work of “systematic ordering,” of “rejecting inappropriate elements,” that Mary Douglas has argued underwrites claims about purity and impurity ([1966] 2002: 44). If, as Douglas has it, prohibitions against dirt and related rituals of purification are efforts to manage “ambiguity or anomaly” (5–6), then in the attempt to separate the functions of academic and military spheres, the task of designing curricula and the work of modeling leadership, Born engaged in a sort of symbolic containment. By classifying and ordering it, she sought to reduce the threat that the civilian presented to the USAFA’s “essential military character.”

This local debate over the meaning of *civilian* also pointed to the more public change that, as we have seen, characterized military-civilian relations in the era of the all-volunteer force. Perhaps the stakes became most apparent when Born testified in July 2009 before Congress as part of a hearing to investigate the preparation the nation’s junior military officers were receiving. Invoking Larson’s 2004 study early in the hearing, Representative Vic Snyder, the chair of the House’s Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, asked Born to respond to “criticism” that “in your civilian [faculty], significant numbers of them are actually retired military” (Committee on Armed Services 2009: 24). In her initial reply, Born noted that the USAFA seeks to “select the best qualified,” but at the same time “we try not to, in our processes, advantage military or disadvantage military,” including “retired military.” Snyder retorted that he did not understand why candidates should *not* be “disadvantaged by being former military.” As he explained, the “pure civilian” candidate might be someone who, for example, is “a retired physician who worked in third-world countries,” but not someone who is a former officer. To his mind, the “pure civilian” was to serve the purpose of diversifying the faculty, that is, to introduce the very irregularity that Born tried to neaten in her response to Larson’s report. For Born, however, the “military character” of the institution was itself what needed to be preserved. As she noted in her reply to Snyder, in light of the rotational nature of the USAFA’s

military faculty, it is crucial to have a “core of our civilian faculty as retired military,” for they “have a balance of both their military experiences as well as their advanced scholarship” (25).

Significantly, as this last comment implies, Born effectively transvalued the meaning of *pure*. In Douglas’s schema, the designation *dirt* is applied to any “object or idea likely to confuse or contradict cherished classifications” ([1966] 2002: 45)—“dirt” is that which must be expelled and expunged. By contrast, in Born’s usage, it was the “purity” of the civilian who never held a military rank that was the pollutant threatening to muddy the “military character” of the academy.⁷ Understood in this way, *pure* came to signify something closer to what the *OED* defines as “taken by itself, with nothing added”—a gloss synonymous with *mere* or *simple*. Where the civilian faculty member without a military background could offer “academic expertise,” her or his retired military counterpart had something more to give: an enriching mix of intellectual and tactical wisdom. In her response to the Larson study, Born (2004: 4) articulated this idea in no uncertain terms, noting that “nothing at this point suggests any major benefit to be accrued by increasing civilian presence on the faculty. . . . The question, ‘What is the appropriate mix of faculty [required] to educate potential combat officers of courage and character for the US Air Force?’ can be definitively answered”: “Warriors best produce warriors.”

Such an assertion provides unmistakable evidence of the consequences that the all-volunteer armed force has held for the meaning of citizenship in the United States. The like-produces-like logic on display in the claim that “warriors best produce warriors” confirms what Janowitz (1975: 432) predicted would be one effect of a volunteer military: an “increased emphasis” on “organizational boundaries and distinctive values” that would weaken its “linkages with civilian society.” Recalling the rhetoric of authenticity that marks the debates discussed in the foregoing paragraphs, we might even deem Janowitz’s claim an understatement. The appearance of *true civilian* in Larson’s report, as well as Congressman Snyder’s claim that the civilian faculty are “*actually* retired military,” indexes the congealing of the identity of “civilian” in such a way that the designation seems to exclude, almost by definition, the possibility of military experience. In fact, as we have seen, evidence of the latter raised the question of just how appropriate the term *civilian* is—as if to suggest that a former soldier would have to resort to subterfuge or masquerade to claim the status “civilian” at present. For thirty years after the end of conscription, it would seem, the “true civilian” *was* the “pure civilian.”

Imagining Future Selves

Free from moral corruption; of unblemished character or nature; morally untainted; guiltless, innocent, guileless.

—*Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. “pure”

“Warriors best produce warriors”: when I first came across this statement, I felt compelled to apologize to the students I was teaching that semester, to explain that their experience in my class, as opposed to a (former) military colleague’s, would be somehow lacking. The space between “*pure* civilian” and “*mere* civilian” seemed short indeed. But if the synonymous status of these adjectives stings, this is because it bespeaks a hard truth about modern civil-military relations. The hyphen that connects the terms in that phrase signals a differential burden—differing degrees of sacrifice, both material and psychological—attending civilians and soldiers in a nation where a small fraction of the citizens do its fighting.

Reflecting on his experience leading a faculty seminar at the USAFA, Geoffrey Galt Harpham, then president of the National Humanities Center, captured a crucial consequence that follows from this reality. “In a democracy with a volunteer military,” those individuals who join the armed forces accept a serious “burden,” Harpham writes: they are charged “with the conscience-testing task of sanctioned killing” (2008: 82), a phrase that indicates not just the acts that soldiers commit in the context of war but the psychological haunting that necessarily attends their duties. Accordingly, for Harpham, the humanities come to hold a special, if unanticipated, significance for the profession of arms. Insofar as the aim of humanistic education includes “the cultivation of an informed conscience”—“a habit of reflection in which the flow of thoughtless action and means-end calculation is interrupted by an examination of historical contexts and ethical considerations, by an imaginative awareness of the character and consequences of action”—then the sort of insight (indeed, we might say the sort of sight) the humanities offer is not democratically distributed (81). Whereas “professors, students, or the culture-loving population” are generally free to enjoy the “manifold pleasures and benefits” of the humanities, those in the profession of arms must feel the weight of the “moral imagination” in a way that few other citizens do (82).⁸

Of course, as Harpham himself notes, not all members of the armed forces, let alone all civilians, accept the burden of the moral imagination as described here; the “must” in that last sentence gives voice to a pedagogical challenge—one that assumes a special form for me. Having lived my entire adult life on the latter side of the military-civilian divide, I have nothing in the

way of martial wisdom to share with my students, and perhaps little more to offer in terms of imagining the vocations for which they are preparing. This latter limitation became clear to me while attending my first USAFA commencement ceremony: in his address to the graduates, the secretary of the air force honored academy alumni who were recently killed in the line of duty, reminding the newly commissioned second lieutenants in the audience that they were embarking on a career that might ultimately result in their deaths. The difference between this exhortation and the one I heard at my own college graduation was palpable.

But if I cannot serve as the model of military leadership that the 1950 Stearns-Eisenhower report cited as one of the motivational factors that would shape cadets in their journey into the profession of arms, this reality presents not only a problem but also a possibility. The fact that the cadets in my classroom cannot see in me their future officer identities forces them to look elsewhere for potential and prospective selves, namely, to the works we read together, to their characters and conceits, their projects and personae. Under the tutelage of a “pure civilian,” my students must engage in the project of self-shaping and self-making, entering—often unaided by me—into the imaginative terrain that literature offers.

Proffering the imaginative powers of literary study as the unique insight afforded by my particular professional context may seem less than a revelation. After all, as I noted at the outset of this essay, the citizen-making capacity of the literary imagination is regularly invoked in accounts of the place of English departments and the humanities more broadly in higher education. But amid all the crucial attention to boundary crossing, to identifications across lines of gender, race, class, and nation—in short, to the work of forging the common life that is critical to a healthy democratic polity—it is easy to lose track of the possibilities that the literary imagination holds for the cultivation of that most basic of democratic units: the individual self. Indeed, even Nussbaum—one of the most eloquent spokespersons for the capacity of literature to cultivate the relational and empathic qualities democracy demands—makes clear that this political form requires its citizens to see both self *and* other as fully human beings with emotions and problems, needs and desires (2010: 6). Insofar as a democracy is composed of individuals and committed to their equal status, that is, the work of citizen making is also necessarily in part the work of self-making.⁹

And this is something that literature, too, can support—though perhaps it is an end of literary study to which we have been less attentive. Providing an important corrective to this tendency, Abram Van Engen (2005: 17)

argues that in teaching literature we ultimately should aim to show students “*how* to listen, *how* to hear with open ears the literature that they read.” To be sure, this task often and necessarily involves the act of listening and hearing about others different from ourselves—in a sense every act of reading is by definition a confrontation with “some other position” (Appiah 2005: 257). But literary study also entails (and no less necessarily) attending to the ways in which literature is saying something about—indeed, *to*—our students. To draw on Van Engen’s (2005: 17) compelling formulation, reading is a process in which texts “sit up and point their fingers at the lives of the students . . . demanding a response.” In every work they read, that is, students face an encounter not just with another, or even the Other, but with themselves. Indeed, this encounter may even be with future versions of themselves.

This possibility first became clear to me a few years ago while reading the first round of essays for my introductory literature course, a general education requirement for all sophomore cadets that surveys works from Shakespeare, Sophocles, and Whitman to Toni Morrison, Franz Kafka, and J. M. Coetzee. Banally titled “close reading essay,” the assignment asked students to make an argument about a work on our syllabus. In his essay on *Antigone*, one of my students did this, focusing on an excerpt in which Creon mocks the suggestion that it was the gods who buried the body of the traitor Polynices. (“Tell me, was it for meritorious service / They proceeded to bury him, prized him so?” he asks disingenuously [Sophocles 1984: ll. 321–22].) But my student also did something else, something more. Moving from his close reading of this fragment—which revealed, in his rendering, that Creon, like “most poor leaders,” refuses to “broaden his view to include those views which are as virtuous and meritorious as his own”—my student ended his paper with this:

As officers of character, we are expected to innately know what is right and to trust in that sense of self-righteousness in the face of adversity and injustice on the battlefield. . . . However, forcing that much responsibility on a single person can be dangerous, just as we see in *Antigone*. Creon . . . believes that to lead he must be immovable in faith and, of course, morally just. While it is important for a leader to have strong convictions to be effective, an open mind serves the leader just as well. Especially at the Air Force Academy, our sense of honor is something we are supposed to have at our disposal. We are educated and then expected to immediately apply these characteristics as we commission into officership. This burden . . . many times forces us to only ask ourselves what is right and to disregard the opinions around us. The problem with being steadfast to that degree is inherent

within that thought process. We become blind to better solutions and locked within the way we view the world. . . . This fact is not lost on war which heartlessly exploits mistakes and inefficiency in the form of lives. As observed in *Antigone*, having only the strength to lead without the capacity for understanding is a formula for disaster because that strength becomes that which leads us to poor decisions. Without the ability to sympathize, the ability to think as a collective rather than a single unit, leaders are as fallible as the people which they are supposed to attend.

In finding in Creon's failures of leadership a (negative) model through which to shape his own officer identity, this student committed what Mark Edmundson has aptly characterized as no minor sin in literary studies: the act of identification, or "seeing oneself in a literary character" (2004: 66). It was with this professional commitment to objectivity—what we might designate as literary criticism's own investment in "purity"—that I first reacted to this paper's concluding paragraph. This was, after all, a close reading assignment—one that called for textual evidence and formal analysis (which the earlier parts of the essay successfully displayed), but no personal reflection, no individualized involvement. As Edmundson notes, however, such a prohibition against identification tends to overlook the process of "analysis" that must necessarily follow it (67). That is, if our worry about identification is that it too easily allows for narcissism, we forget that this process is tempered by the sort of critical reflection—the close reading, the analysis—that we in literature classrooms more comfortably and regularly profess.¹⁰ To be sure, I would like to have seen my student flesh out some of his key claims; the statement about "war" and the phrase "officers of character" (a mantra invoked with such regularity at the academy that it risks losing significance) suggest that the work of analysis might have carried over a bit more to this final paragraph.

From another vantage point, however, the essay's concluding movement was not so bereft of the sort of intellectual work that I wanted. Indeed, philosophers who study the narrative dimensions of personal identity—the idea that the "self is narrative in form" (Schechtman 2011: 394)—offer a perhaps suppler vocabulary to understand the analytical dimensions of such acts of identification.¹¹ When we draw on the language of literature to represent and conceive our sense of self, we tend to think of characters, for instance, my student seeing in Creon a model of poor leadership. But as the philosopher Marya Schechtman points out, there are also a number of other relevant positions to consider, namely, author and critic. Whereas identifying on the "level of a character" forces us to realize "that we are constrained by the facts about

the social and natural world,” Schechtman (2011: 413–14) explains, taking on the perspective of an author teaches us that, even as we are not in full control of our lives, we nonetheless must “make decisions and these must involve reasons or purposes.” While the perspective of character and author raises the issue of agency and its limits, the position of critic privileges the sort of reflection—the meditation and analysis—that is crucially important to the issues of deliberation and agency exemplified at the levels of character and author. Schechtman elaborates: “As critics we interpret what has happened so far in a way that impacts the future authorship of our lives, and as characters we enact those choices and have the experiences that generate the significance we appreciate as critics” (414).

Of course, as Schechtman notes, in our actual existence, the roles of character, author, and critic cannot be neatly delineated—and in this way, literature differs fundamentally from life.¹² But this gap also reveals a reason that literary study is valuable. For in his meditation on leadership in *Antigone*, my student had an occasion not just to consider Creon and his shortcomings. He also found the space to read as an author—to see in this tragedy an opportunity to realize that, as a military officer, he surely will have to deliberate and decide in contexts over which he rarely will exercise complete control. In this, then, my student also did the work of the critic, not just of Sophocles’s play but of his own life. As Schechtman (2011: 414) suggests, the critical sense interprets with an eye toward future action, toward “future authorship of our lives.”

With this point in mind, we might say that in this essay on *Antigone* my cadet had an encounter with his future self. Using Creon as his point of departure, he engaged in the sort of imaginative projection that the philosopher Catriona Mackenzie (2000: 139) notes “plays an important role in practical reflection and deliberation about the self, and hence in self-definition.” In short, his paper on *Antigone* became for him an *essay* in the sense of the word that suggests trial and experimentation: an occasion to try to out, in the space of the imagination, aspects of his future identity as a military leader.

Practices, Problems, and Prospects

That is the thing itself, not something else; true, real, genuine.

—*Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. “pure”

Certainly, this sort of imaginative work has its problems. Perhaps foremost among them, as Mackenzie herself acknowledges, is the fact that we simply may not be able to envision adequately the given scenario into which we are

attempting to project ourselves. That is, if the value of imagining a potential future self is necessarily informed by one's existing "self-knowledge"—and indeed "constrained" by it, so as to keep the process from turning into a delusional fantasy (Mackenzie 2008: 140)—it may be that the kind of knowledge of the self that is required to make this exercise useful simply is not attainable precisely because we have not known ourselves in that situation.

This surely would be the case with respect to the future combat that my student invoked in his paper. To even approximate imagining himself in battle, this cadet would need to draw on resources other than *Antigone*: actual accounts of combat, military history, the law of war—sources that he cannot access in my classroom, at least in part because of my own identity. But this is not to say that Sophocles's play is insignificant. To the contrary, as his writing suggested, in meditating on *Antigone*, my cadet engaged in what Mackenzie (2000: 139) characterizes as the deliberative processes associated with the self-shaping work of imagining: he isolated "certain aspects" of his identity—namely, his understanding of the place of confidence and humility in military leadership—subjecting them to "reflection and deliberation."

Inspired by this student's engagement with *Antigone*, I have constructed an exercise for my sections of the USAFA's required literature course that attempts to formalize the sort of imaginative work on display in that paper and also seeks to foster the author- and especially critic-level engagement with literature that Schechtman delineates. In the penultimate session of my course, on a day devoted to a review of the syllabus, I ask students to identify two works we have read: (1) the text they most liked and (2) the text they most disliked, even despised. After reflecting on this question and recording their answers, I issue this follow-up query, again in two parts: using the texts you've identified a moment ago, consider (1) a strength or admirable characteristic (intellectual, personal, and/or military) that your selections reveal, and (2) a flaw (again, this can be an intellectual, personal, and/or military shortcoming) to which your selections point.¹³ Students ruminate on the questions and then record their responses.

As with any assignment, the results of this one have been mixed. Perhaps because of time constraints or simply end-of-semester fatigue, some cadets offered very brief replies that displayed little in the way of the deliberate personal reflection the exercise sought to cultivate. As one student put it, the fact that she or he disliked Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself" revealed that "I am not good at close reading." Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, another student simply wrote, "was very weird."

Going beyond these types of reflections, many cadets focused on

character-level identification, often citing *Antigone* as the work they were most drawn to because the titular character is “family oriented.” A number of students remarked similarly about *Beloved*, showing their ability to find a point of commonality—Sethe’s radical commitment to protecting her children—even as this work challenged the worldview of many students. Perhaps less surprising, multiple cadets were drawn to the narrator and protagonist of J. M. Coetzee’s novel *Waiting for the Barbarians*, a magistrate who struggles in his attempts to rebel against the acts of torture conducted by Colonel Joll, a representative of the empire of which the magistrate himself is a part. One student noted that his or her dislike of this novel stemmed from an aversion to “injustice and laziness”: “The torturing and beating of the so-called ‘Barbarians’ disturbed me, as well as the Colonel’s motives for war with the Barbarians.” Another wrote about how the novel reveals the “consequences of not speaking up to the truth and/or allowing for something wrong to continue for too long.” “Issues such as these occur in the military,” the cadet continued, “and I think that in order to be a good officer/airman a person needs to be able to confront them. This is a trait that I try to hold myself to and is important that others should as well.” Some of these responses tend toward a perhaps too easy celebration of virtue; indeed, as Mackenzie (2000: 138) notes, a risk of imaginative projection is that it often can function in the “service of desire” rather than genuine deliberation and self-definition. But many other responses did not fit this trend. As one student remarked, his or her dislike for “Song of Myself” suggested that “I am uncomfortable with things foreign to me, such as the homosexuality Whitman displays.” This self-identified “flaw” (the student’s term) is vitally important for a future officer to address, for as military leaders, cadets will be charged to treat equally and with respect all members of the armed forces; and in light of the repeal of the “don’t ask don’t tell” policy, sexual identities have become a more explicit part of the military command structure.

While that last statement just begins to draw on the sorts of analytical capacities associated with author- and critic-level reflection, many of the most complex responses operated squarely in these registers. For example, citing Franz Kafka’s “In the Penal Colony” as a favorite text, one student made the following comment about the work’s conclusion, in which an officer decides to subject himself to the torture he has advocated as “perfect justice”: “I hold loyalty (of sorts) in high esteem. The officer may have been absolutely insane, but damned if he wasn’t willing to sacrifice everything for what he believed in. Going down with the ship, I guess. I suppose that could end up being stubbornness eventually, but it’s also integrity.” Much remains to be defined

here, in terms of both the meaning of “integrity” and this student’s relationship to it. But in its equivocation—the use of the parenthetical “of sorts,” the gesture toward the limits of commitment to an ideal or project, the use of “also” to link stubbornness and steadfastness—the statement also records, almost in process, the cultivation of the very sort of self-conscious sophistication that will be critical to this cadet in the future.

To be sure, there are many reasons instructors might want to distance themselves from the sort of pedagogical practice that this exercise exemplifies and from the treatment of the literary imagination I have advanced more broadly in this essay. In addition to the limitations already noted, one might worry that such an approach runs the risk of entreating students to focus too much on the self, as if to suggest that the individual develops in isolation from other selves. My institutional context makes this concern particularly complicated. On the one hand, my approach purposefully seeks to unsettle the military cultural ethos that subsumes the self in the collective (Weigley 2001: 218). “Service before self,” declares one of the USAFA’s core values, but in order to live this mantra my cadets must have a sense of just who that *self* is.¹⁴ To paraphrase Charles Taylor (1989), they must know who they are becoming as officers in order to know where they will stand on the difficult issues that will confront them.¹⁵ On the other hand, in using literature to help my students shape their military selves, I risk encouraging too close an analogy between my cadets’ identities as citizens and their identities as soldiers (Burk 2000: 151), perhaps implying that the only self that matters is their professional officer identity. From this perspective, my method might reify the less salutary senses of *purity* underwriting the contemporary military-civilian divide.

These are real challenges. Without attempting to offer a ready reply, I simply emphasize that my belief that we should use literature for the project of self-making does not mean that we should neglect the social dimensions of identity, the other selves that make up the democratic polity. Indeed, if it is important that my students learn to see themselves as future military leaders, it is also crucial that they envision the civilians in whose name (and under whose authority) they serve.¹⁶ Democracy demands that my cadets engage in both sorts of imagining; “pure civilian” cannot stand as a way of silencing others. In short, the strategy I have described here constitutes just one dimension of a literary pedagogy for democracy—a political form, we might note, that itself is plagued by an irreducible tension between self and other, individual and collective.

Indeed, insofar as postsecondary education serves a democratic mis-

sion, the work of negotiating between these poles can never be absent from the classroom. As Andrew Delbanco notes in *College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be* (2012: 177), the aim of higher education is to cultivate citizens who have a sense of themselves as individuals but not at the expense of the crucial communities—the social, political, and global contexts—in which they exist. In this regard, Delbanco offers a suggestive anecdote when early in his history of higher education he cites an 1850 journal entry from a student enrolled at Emory and Henry College. Having returned from a sermon delivered by the president of the college, the student wrote: “Oh that the Lord show me how to think and how to choose” (15). While the religious dimension of this plea no longer represents the aim of most educational institutions, Delbanco remarks, the aspiration recorded here—“show me how to think and how to choose”—offers a powerful account of what we should expect a college to be: a place where “young people fight out among and within themselves contending ideas of the meaningful life, and where they discover that self-interest need not be at odds with concern for one another” (177).

That the “fight” in this statement about college as a place where students choose among contending claims can only be read metaphorically captures the change in relations between civilians and soldiers that I have traced in this essay. As Delbanco himself notes, whereas earlier generations of young people learned the habits of citizenship—and the meaning of civic duty—through military service, at present the “test of war” is an examination few take. “Perhaps the deepest divide in our country today runs between those for whom war is a relentless threat and those for whom it’s an occasional television show,” he writes: “At our most prestigious colleges, the former is now the most underrepresented minority group” (2012: 128). Teaching at an institution where the military representation in the student body is the opposite of that which Delbanco describes has made me acutely aware of the stakes of the self-making powers of the literary imagination. But if I have focused on the significance of this practice from my particular perspective, I would suggest, by way of conclusion, that the capacity of literature to cultivate the self-reflexive deliberation that Delbanco defines as vital to the formation of citizens is no less central to civilian students.

Indeed, perhaps we would do well to accord a more prominent place to this dimension of reading in our accounts of the democratic aims of literary education. For while *College* does not forge an explicit connection between the literary imagination and the cultivation of the self, we professors of literature have in our own educational contexts an important opportunity to support students in the process of learning “how to think and how to choose.”

We have an occasion, that is, to help our students move toward the authentic, reasoned, complex sense of self suggested in what the *OED* records as an obsolete meaning of *pure*: “true,” “real,” “genuine.” Its more problematic interpretations notwithstanding, this is one sense of the word that is worth resurrecting.

Notes

Julia Stern first inspired me to consider my idiosyncratic institutional context from a pedagogical point of view, and Jay Grossman encouraged me to translate my reflections into writing sooner rather than later. I thank them both for their continuing mentorship. I am grateful as well to the many faculty and staff at the U.S. Air Force Academy who helped me with this essay: Kathleen Harrington alerted me to the backstory behind “pure civilian”; Karin DeAngelis introduced me to the scholarly resources to illuminate that history; Wilson Brissett helped me to frame my inquiry and intervention; Katie Plichta brought to life the questions I consider here; the staff of the McDermott Library Special Collections located many crucial sources; and Sam Sloan and Tim Thornburg assisted with citations. (This support notwithstanding, I must mention that the views and conclusions expressed here are my own and do not necessarily reflect those of the USAFA, the Department of the Air Force, or the Department of Defense.) I also benefited from the generosity of many farther afield: Abram Van Engen offered valuable feedback on this essay’s earliest iteration; Laura Davies propelled me through the drafting process with her clarifying questions; and Leslie Lewis of Duquesne University’s Gumberg Library offered research assistance at a critical time. I am grateful for her hospitality, and to Henry Laski and Janice Laski for their support during the research process. My thanks go as well to Wanalee Romero, Sarah Lahey, and Brenda Sanfilippo for their helpful comments, and to Jeff Dolven for a conversation that set me on this course and for his incisive comments on the ultimate draft. It was Maxwell Lai’s *Antigone* essay that helped me to realize the practice at the center of this article; I happily recognize him and all the USAFA students who have talked with me about the issues I wrestle with in this piece. With characteristic good humor and insight, they have done much to make a pure civilian feel at home.

1. For a similar approach to the democratic work of literature, see Ammons 2010. Andrew Delbanco, himself an English professor, has identified this characteristic as one of the fundamental aims of higher education. “A willingness to imagine experience from perspectives other than one’s own,” he writes, is among the central “qualities of mind and heart requisite for reflective citizenship” (2012: 3).
2. On this topic, see *Soldier’s Heart* (2007), Elizabeth D. Samet’s wonderful account of her career teaching literature to future officers in the U.S. Army. See also Trocha-Van Nort 2010.
3. Indeed, according to Nussbaum (2010: 35), this rhetoric indexes the perilous political logic that would seek to effect a “bifurcation of the world into the ‘pure’ and the ‘impure,’” a “construction of a ‘we’ who are without flaw and a ‘they’ who are dirty, evil, and contaminating.” In the particular context of the military, such a logic can

- assume not just ideological forms but also racial, sexual, and gendered dimensions. On the former, see Feaver, Kohn, and Cohn 2001; on the latter, see Segal 1989: 102–25.
4. As James Burk explains, these contrasting models of civil-military relations were explored by two of the founding works in the field: Samuel P. Huntington's 1957 study *The Soldier and the State* and Morris Janowitz's 1960 book *The Professional Soldier*. Where Huntington focused on the need for "objective civilian control," whereby "civilians would dictate military security policy, but would leave the military free to determine what military operations were required to secure the policy objectives," Janowitz was committed to the soldier's imbrication in public life (Burk 2002: 10). In his book *The Reconstruction of Patriotism: Education for Civic Consciousness* (1983), Janowitz expressed concern that an all-volunteer force would sever the key "linkage between the military and larger society" and advanced the idea of a national service program that might cultivate habits of democratic citizenship in an era where a mass armed force was no longer needed (197).
 5. The issue was also examined at other intervening moments, for instance, in a series of studies in the 1970s, including two conducted in 1975 by the Comptroller General: *Academic and Military Programs of the Five Service Academies* and *Financial Operations of the Five Service Academies*. Both reports made distinctions between military and civilian personnel—the former focused on the superior academic training of civilian instructors, and the latter noted the cost-saving potential represented by replacing military personnel with civilians—but neither drew the kinds of distinctions between military and civilian society that would emerge in the early 2000s when the term *pure civilian* appeared. For further information on the 1970s investigations and their findings, see Keller et al. 2003: 102–5.
 6. As Weigley (2001: 218) argues, historically, two significant factors have managed to narrow the civilian-military gap in the United States: the "peripheral position of the military" with respect to civilian society and government or the pressure exerted by "national crises." Whereas the former condition obtained through the early years of the republic and into the nineteenth century, and the latter obtained in the twentieth century in such conflicts as the world wars, neither of these states held at the conclusion of the Cold War. The clashes that occurred between the recently elected President Bill Clinton (himself a Vietnam War protestor) and the Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman General Colin Powell over the issue of gay and lesbian soldiers exemplified just one form this tension would take (Weigley 2001: 243).
 7. Interestingly, looking at the term *pure* from an opposite direction, we might note a similar logic of pollution at work in the views some in academe hold about military institutions. For example, Melissa Matthes (2011), a civilian professor at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy, remarks that comments from colleagues who teach at civilian schools often suggest that one in a position such as hers "needs to be somehow inoculated to work in these martially contaminated environments. Service-academy faculties are deemed polluted, guilty until proven innocent." Such comments reflect the reality that the civil-military divide is especially pronounced in academia, a phenomenon that is in key ways a product of the Vietnam War (see Higbee 2010). But these views also suggest one of the more alluring (and problematic) functions of *pure civilian* insofar as they make legible a sense of "purity" that registers "exemption"—a

fantasy of noncomplicity that would allow citizens to extricate themselves from the contamination that characterizes the political path toward (and aftermath of) war in a democratic nation. My gratitude to Jeff Dolven for offering me this possibility, and for giving me the language to articulate it.

8. Harpham takes as his point of departure the idea of the “reluctant killer” as developed by Thomas G. McGuire, a career military officer and longtime USAFA English professor. As McGuire (2008: 24–25) explains, the humanities help to train “*reluctant killers who nonetheless are willing to kill for a just cause*. We train our cadets, basic enlisted, and young officers to do some things that will haunt them for the rest of their lives. We ask them to do things they’d never do if the nation didn’t ask it of them. And even though the nation asks it, and no matter how disciplined they are, they’ll still be haunted by what they’ve done. And they have to be. If they aren’t, then we’ve only trained . . . killers or potential killers or accomplices of killers, all without a conscience.”
9. I am influenced here by what the philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah (2005: 164) refers to as “soul making”: “the project of intervening in the process of interpretation through which each citizen develops an identity—and doing so with the aim of increasing her chances of living an ethically successful life.” Where Appiah’s interest is in the political import of this project—the proper role of the state in “soul making”—mine is in what it would mean to consider this concept as a pedagogical project.
10. Recounting his experience teaching a group of military students on the day after September 11, 2001, Roger Thompson (2002) reflects on the ways a pedagogical emphasis on certain reading practices—in his example, historicism—can impede the useful process of identification.
11. As Schechtman (2011) makes clear, the work in this area is diverse, and there is no agreement on just what it means to fashion the self in narrative form. I summarize here only a subset of this scholarship. It is also important to note that while scholars in this field regularly deploy the language of literary studies (e.g., stories, imagination, and narrative), they do not necessarily take these terms to signify in their standard literary senses. In other words, someone might imagine the “story” of her or his life without necessarily drawing on any actual literary text or abiding by certain generic strictures or conventions.
12. On this point, Peter Lamarque (2007) claims that collapsing what are for him crucial distinctions between literature and life makes us not simply bad readers of literature but also individuals who are ill-suited to live our actual lives. For an opposing position, see Newman 2009.
13. I took my cue for this activity from Mark Edmundson, who in *Why Read?* (2004: 9) recounts the strategy that one Columbia University professor used to impress on his literature students the “stakes” of their “intellectual work.” At the end of the course, this professor issued a two-pronged question: “Part one: What book in the course did you most dislike? Part two: What flaws of intellect or character does that dislike point up in you?”
14. I am indebted to Thomas Vargish for this point.
15. In Taylor’s (1989: 27) schema, “To know who I am is a species of knowing where I

stand. My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose.” In adapting this statement to the context of my students’ emergent officer selves, I make a weaker claim about the relationship between identity and its enabling frame than does Taylor, for whom the connection is quite definitive and determining.

16. Making this point from the opposite institutional perspective, William G. Durden (2013), the former president of Dickinson College, argues that it is incumbent upon leaders and professors at civilian colleges and universities to give students a greater awareness of the military’s role in democracy.

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