

Editorial

It would seem legitimate today to wonder about the place of literature in our life. The world having shifted, under the pressure of market economy, into new conceptions of man and the environment, human value is measured against consumerist criteria both at the physical and moral levels. The change has affected not only our conceptions of ourselves and the world around us, but in so doing has necessarily impacted our vision of education and culture. For, in the past thirty years, the academy has witnessed a gradual marginalization of the humanities, in favor of the more useful and practical disciplines that the culture of globalization has imposed, thus reducing education to qualifying students for the job market.

In such an atmosphere, the ideal of humanity, of good citizenship lies in drinking in the fountain of common sense so as to perpetuate it and function within an established design. Thinking and conceiving have become superfluous, if not undesirable, or even dangerous sometimes, because they are often misconstrued as opposition and troublemaking. Consumption, on the other hand, is raised to the status of absolute value and so mass education is geared towards the production of executives who become part of often short-sighted plans that turn out to be action plans for problem solving and crisis resolution.

The new face of progress and development has shrunk for the individual to simple contentment that results from satisfaction of basic needs, ones that keep changing due to the work of the media in programming life and defining its priorities. Even knowledge and research have been transmogrified to fit in the new era of mass consumption. Instead of thinking and researching that are knowledge production activities through synthesizing information, today's education often relies on learning as much as possible so as to become 'knowledgeable'. From a scientific, qualitative approach we have moved to a cultural, quantitative one that often amounts to celebrating the past and its figures, instead of understanding their contributions and utilizing them in the present. This change partly explains young students' inability to distinguish research from copy-pasting and plagiarism – activities that reinforce the already inculcated beliefs, their lack of self-confidence and self-reliance.

In a world that praises action, functionalism, and efficiency, it is useful to wonder about the status of literature. In this 'new world order,' which equates the humanities with uselessness, should we still read books and poems, and even scholarly articles written about them, or should we assign them to an irrecoverable past? Should we still teach literature today when it is believed to cultivate laziness and joblessness?

The answer is definitely yes. For literature is not a useful field in the sense, say, geography, medicine, or political science are. It is rather part of a field of knowledge, not a discipline, together with religion, philosophy, and art, whose object of study is the human condition. Unlike other fields and disciplines that are useful and utilitarian, literature is concerned with the ontological status of humanity and its gradual shift to the margin is symptomatic of a gradual dehumanizing process in which consumerism, both physical and moral, is a pillar.

Part of this concern with ontology is a strategy that was theorized by Jacques Derrida and which consists in *deconstructing* establishments of different kinds. In spite of the many meanings given to the term, I am using it here in a strictly simple sense – that of dismantling, or bringing down a standing edifice. In a world of discursive competition whose target is the Truth that would set the agenda of human life, acquiring the habit of deconstructing is a human duty that guarantees survival.

In this framework one can consider most of the articles in the 2015 AWEJ special issue on literature. They, in different ways, try to deconstruct established views, received opinion, and critical assumptions about different works. They start from the assumption that a work of literature, of art, is like an empty space which you can conceive in different ways and suggest different ways of approaching their subject of study. While some articles in this issue deal with philosophical issues and the way they are tackled through presumably pure technical procedures or stylistic devices, others are concerned with the way discourse constructs truths that often pass for absolute ones.

While perusing them, let us remember that the merit of these article lies not in whether they are right or wrong, truth being always postponed, but in that they offer alternative ways of approaching literary texts, thus asserting the freedom that is part of the meaning production activity and which undermines the myth of the one final meaning of things.

I would finally like to thank all those who have contributed to this issue with their articles, the reviewers, whose task is always tough and time-consuming, and AWEJ for providing a platform of communication and dialogue between different researchers in the humanities.

Mohamed Benzidan, PhD

Professor of English at Hassan II. Mohammedia, Casablanca University, Benmsik,
Casablanca, Morocco

<http://asels.org/prof-dr-mohamed-benzidan-2/>