

Response to Julia Lupton

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I have two points to make in response to this marvelous essay.

Point one: In relocating virtue as the heart of 'literary education' Julia helpfully brings the public dimension of our labor, of the work of humanists into view. Beaten down, perhaps, by decades of hand wringing over "ivory tower" mystification, humanists might welcome this reminder that we not concede our claim to the public sphere. We don't need to be featured on the Op Ed pages of major newspapers, receiving large advances from commercial publishers, or regularly endorsed by hundreds and thousands of the twitterati, to stake a claim on the work of the "public" intellectual. In marking "virtue" as the "aims and affordances of literary education as a capacity-building enterprise," this paper remind us that the public sphere is to be found in every classroom; our offices, seminar tables, meeting rooms, and lecture halls are precisely the locales in which we contribute to the public weal, via "the techniques of our pedagogies" as well as through the "wisdom manifested in the texts appropriated through our acts of curation and judgement."

Second observation: this virtue, is a particular practice of multi-temporal enactment, one neither exactly historical nor thematic, and (I would add) not adequately described as either *historicist* or *presentist*. The outlines of this practice emerge as a skill, or capacity for recognizing collocations, repetitions and patternings of resonant vulnerabilities; it includes recapitulations capable of meeting the standard for the 'ecological view of virtue' associated here with the work of Martha Nussbaum. Julia describes this multi-temporal mode as a kind of, and here's an amazing phrase, "virtuous scansion." I'd like to pause at the collision of this *noun*, proper to assessing the rhythms of poetry and music, with virtue in its adjectival form. Here is the full sentence,

which occurs at the culmination of her discussion of Viola and Sebastian as emblems for courage and hope: “Orphan, refugee, apprentice, or gender outlier: the point is not to determine one scenario as more fitting than another, but instead to locate rhythms of duress, capacity, and repair across a range of situations and epochs: not a thematic or historical reading so much as a virtuous scansion, an essay in pattern recognition.”

Interpretation stands here as mode of evaluation (assessing rhythms of duress or capacities scanned across diverse epochs) and reparation (an attention to new, possibly consoling insights or possibilities). This brand of scansion – like poetic scansion – balances difference with similarity; but it also attends to specificities of time and place with a sensitivity to the fact that the repetitions that mark traumatic recurrence are also those that make poetry or music possible. In broadening ‘scansion,’ we lose a bit of the term’s literary specificity or precision; yet we gain a sense of the transferability of poetic reading *for* making sense of the world and one another, and in the service of contrapuntal articulations of as yet unspoken convergences in textual or classroom environment. This virtue harbors hope for epiphanies that are neither fixed to a particular historical moment nor entirely set free from one.

These practices may well be enacted with particular intensity in the variety of dramatic or musical performances, the iterations of stagings that update a play for new contexts. Yet in no small way, it also inheres in the practice of reading old texts with new people, attentive to the line that repeats, or the ethical, political, or environmental patterns that suture then with now, the unexpected response that emerges when an older story meets issues of immediate concern. When, for instance, the Wife of Bath confronts the #metoo movement; or Shakespeare speaks for the refugee. I’m grateful to Julia for this account of patched *virtu* in the participatory force of what we do.