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COMMENTARY

Unread literature

The Nov. 6 letter by Professor Maxine Hairston gets a failing mark. She insists that the English department's proposed use of *Racism and Sexism* by Rothenberg is an instance of "political correctness." To prove this, Hairston quotes a paragraph extracted from Rothenberg's other writings.

When I was a student, my professors often argued with the books assigned to us, often questioned a particular author's assumptions. By doing this, they provoked discussion. My lecturers also knew how to criticize a book. For example, someone who denounces *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as Christian propaganda should be able to prove this without reference to Stowe's religious feelings. Hairston doesn't demean herself by actually referring to the contents of Rothenberg's *Racism and Sexism*, nor does she prove

that Rothenberg's book, whatever its contents, would not have been used critically. Is Hairston a scholar or does she work for the PR department at the University of the Patriotically Correct?

The issue that should concern us is how few books are read. Few students emerge from their college years with a love for literature of any kind — it's back to the TV before the diploma is even cold in the drawer. With or without Rothenberg's book, the great majority of students will never touch novels by Salman Rushdie (winner of the Booker prize), Nadine Gordimer (winner of the Nobel), and Virginia Woolf. These writers, by the way, all had or have leftist political leanings — funny how it hasn't held them back.

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UT course

Mr. Howard F. Rase's recent letter (July 4) states that composition students at UT are ill served by such texts as Rothenberg's *Racism and Sexism*. His letter is, I suspect, politically motivated. There have been literally thousands of writers whose life-long contributions have been immeasurably

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enhanced by their ethical and political passion. Virginia Woolf, Salman Rushdie, Marge Piercy, James Baldwin, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Nadine Gordimer, and June Jordan have enormous power to provoke eloquence in the young. Their writing ability was not diminished by their knowledge of and their contempt for exploitation, racism and sexism.

Of course, Mr. Rase and others like him don't want students to discover the (incontestable evidence) of a class society. Mr. Rase and Professor Gribben are not really concerned with appropriate development of composition skills; they worry that students might gain too much social awareness. Fortunately, the "hard-working Texans" that I know don't want their children to confine their writing abilities to profit and loss statements and company performance plans.

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