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Title: Pleasure, Change, and the Evolving Taste in What's Worth Knowing

Abstract: Questions concerning canonicity still drive debate among literary theorists as opposed to cultural theorists for whom the idea of a canon is largely redundant. A canon is meant to be timeless and the opposite of biased or idiosyncratic, yet most commenting on literature and the arts today insist that any such canon harbours biases of one sort or another so better not to pretend otherwise. A canon might have been seen as timeless once and in so doing became touchstones for ways of talking, thinking and feeling. But it has been argued [Nanay 2017] that the close study of the canon foisted upon students led to the reinforcement of the forms and values of that canon rather than evidenced its neutrality. In any case, even those who believe in the point of a canon today see that it is not unchanging: that the need for new perceptions, getting rid of clichéd ways of thinking and responding, to changing social conditions, demand new touchstones and so a canon will always be contentious and in principle, in a state of change. This paper does not comment on the role of the idea of a canon as such (except perhaps in passing) but rather on the reason “pleasure” or more specifically “literary pleasure” became irrelevant to how a literary work was evaluated. There are those literary theorists who still would champion the relevance of pleasure but they are in a minority. I will discuss why the idea of pleasure has been so much maligned in the field, provide a philosophical antidote and suggest how this antidote addresses what John Guillory (Professor of English, NYU) refers to as the troubled nature of the discipline of literary theory (Guillory commenting in Kermode [2004]).

Bio: Jennifer A. McMahon is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Adelaide, Australia. She is editor of *Social Aesthetics and Moral Judgment: Pleasure, Reflection, and Accountability* forthcoming in 2018 with Routledge; and recently edited the inaugural issue of the *Australasian Philosophical Review* 1.1 (March) 2017 on “The Pleasure of Art”. She is the author of *Art and Ethics in a Material World: Kant's Pragmatist Legacy* (Routledge 2014) and *Aesthetics and Material Beauty: Aesthetics Naturalized* (Routledge 2007).