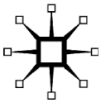
PALGRAVE STUDIES IN CULTURAL AND INTELLECTUAL HISTORY

THE DREAM OF A DEMOCRATIC CULTURE

Mortimer J. Adler and the Great Books Idea

Tim Lacy



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Introduction

Racist, Ignorant, Absurd, Stupid, Sad, "The Belittling Professor," Curmudgeon, Ineloquent, Out of Touch, and Senile. These are some of the insults used and implied, in 1990, to describe Mortimer J. Adler by intellectuals such as James Loewen, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Irving Louis Horowitz, Leon Forrest, Oba T'Shaka, and Michael Bérubé during a hot point in the Culture Wars.

But in the early 1970s another set of highly respected thinkers—Charles Hartshorne, Étienne Gilson, Norman Cousins, John Murray Cuddihy, George Kateb, and William F. Buckley, Jr.—used an entirely different group of terms for Adler and his work: Genius, Distinguished, Formidable, Audacious, "One of the Ablest Men Alive," "Most Worth Taking Seriously," Extraordinary, "A Dogged Philosopher," "A Monument," and, last but not least, "The Great Bookie."

This range of assessment, and emotion, is obviously startling. What do we make of it? Who's right? Who's wrong? Why the polarization? What caused the change? Put another way, and with apologies to Walt Whitman, how does one person contain these multitudes? Finally, on Adler as "The Great Bookie," how does this relate to the so-called "great books"?

The story that answers these questions will satisfy those who care about great books and Mortimer Adler. More importantly and perhaps surprisingly, however, that story will resonate with those who care about larger, pressing topics such as citizenship, democracy, education at all levels, shared or common culture, pluralism, multiculturalism, elitism, anti-intellectualism, literacy, and the life of the mind. This history integrates these points, bringing in a host of significant American intellectuals in the process.

* * *

But what are "great books"? What makes them "great"? Who wrote them? When? Why "books" rather than "works"? What is the difference between "great books" (or "the great books") and "the canon"?

The phrase emerged in the English-speaking world, around the 1880s, to describe a limited set of books that represented the best ever written—that is, excellence in book form. In an environment where

the printed word had rapidly expanded and mass print culture had emerged, the "great books" designation signaled "must read." Book lists often identified the greats; they cordoned the greatest from the hoi polloi. It is no accident that Jane Austen's own great book, *Emma* (1815), contains a reference to the "handsome, clever, and rich" English protagonist Emma Woodhouse drawing up "a great many lists . . . of books that she meant to read . . . well-chosen and very neatly arranged" lists. In general, these lists contained varying, though often even, numbers of works (e.g., 50, 100). And the lists themselves have become objects of discussion and research. Why? As Umberto Eco relates, lists "create order" and "make infinity comprehensible"; they define any "set" of books on hand.[1]

A great book can be a work of fiction or nonfiction, and there are no chronological limitations on its publication date. The term "classics" is sometimes used in conjunction with, or as a substitute for, "great books." That exchange is unproductive, however, because "the classics" often refer to once-famous works from ancient (usually Western) civilizations that hold a static kind of tradition. In his renowned essay, "Battle of the Books" (1698), Jonathan Swift celebrated these texts as more excellent than moderns realized—and he bequeathed a phrase to describe the honey of the ancients that Matthew Arnold would later make infamous: "sweetness and light." Great books might also be confused with another related, problematic phrase: "the classical tradition" (not singular, "classical" is too loose as an analytic term, and the singular "tradition" implies a continuous visibility though we often celebrate what breaks with tradition). Although there is a common association of Western "excellence" between these denotations, and most every formulation of "great books" contains some texts from ancient Greece and Rome, every "great books" list, by contrast, contains works produced after 1000 CE (Common Era) and up to the twentieth century. In addition, sometimes the word "canon" is also used synonymously with great books. But the former most often refers to *imaginative literature* only (e.g., novels, poetry, plays). Even when a formulation of "the canon" includes biography, memoir, philosophy, or history, it almost never includes the works of Freud, Weber, or the American founding documents. Most "great books" lists do. Finally, although the phrase "great books" arose in the English-speaking world, in the beginning it designated both Western and non-Western works.[2]

The phrase "great books idea" arose to capture the evident diversity in thinking about the topic—the who, what, where, when, and how associated with the notion of a great book and great books. The word "idea" allows for the abstraction from material circumstances: lists, institutions, book production, particular debates, people, et cetera.

The "great books idea" becomes, then, a singular theoretical tool for dealing with change over time.[3]

* * *

The topic of this book is the history of the great books idea. That history matters because too few of that idea's fans, and too few of its critics, acknowledge that it has changed over time. Despite those changes in time, form, and context, many see "great books" in a homogeneous fashion. Given that their opinions are split—they conceive of "it" as either a prima facie good or deficient—both use history to justify their views.

To devotees, if the great books idea has any history, it can be nothing but good—or at worst it is something of a cabinet of curiosities. Proponents hold forth sets or lists of great books containing a tradition that is a "foreign country" filled with wonders, mystery, and a sacred venerable tradition. If one is unsettled about the future, comfort can be found in the authentic past through great books, through a communion with classical figures. Other fans see the content of the great books (not the form of each, to be sure) in an almost avant-garde fashion—that is, those works foster the critical faculty (i.e., the liberal arts) that can be turned on the reader and the book at hand. The excellence of each great book rests in its ability to make the reader uneasy with her or his "stock notions"—whether by provoking deep questioning about the past and present, as well as by subverting ideology. To critics, however, that same tradition that gave comfort was synonymous with conscious and unconscious efforts to perpetuate injustices: repress people of color and women, maintain class inequality, and parochialism. To great books' opponents the past represented by those works is a threatening foreign country filled with burdens and backward thinking. Great books are Nietzschean gravediggers of the present, stymieing creativity. As Nathaniel Hawthorne once observed of the numerous ancient objects in the British Museum, the ever-growing number of great books will cause "future ages . . . to stagger under all [their] dead weight." As such, critics tamed the great books idea by making it the object of satire and mocking its pretentiousness.[4] This fan-critic dichotomy, based on competing views of how the great books idea represented history and operated in the present, fueled a few hot points of the late-twentieth-century Culture Wars. And as is usually the case with dichotomies, much is right and wrong with the views of both sides.

This book gets at that historical complexity by, ironically, narrowing the topic's focus to the life and times of Mortimer Adler. Born in

1902 in New York City to parents of German-Jewish descent, Adler attended public school before spending his college days and graduate school at Columbia University. While at Columbia he published his first book in philosophy, completed his dissertation on the psychology of music appreciation, and taught in the Cooper Union's People's Institute. Adler also became acquainted with the great books through John Erskine at Columbia. In 1930, Robert Hutchins brought Adler to the University of Chicago where Adler gained fame, with Hutchins, as an advocate for the great books, education reform, and philosophical study based on Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. Between 1930 and 1952, Adler published popular and obscure books on the philosophy of law, aesthetic and moral-political philosophy, and Thomistic philosophical problems. Adler's most famous book, however, was a bestseller on adult education, *How to Read a Book* (1940), which advocated for great books reading and helped catalyze a Great Books Movement. This culminated in extensive editorial work resulting in the publication, by Encyclopædia Britannica, of the *Great Books of the Western World* in 1952.

After leaving the University of Chicago in 1952, Adler entered the public intellectual phase of his life as the Cold War heated up. That year he founded the Institute for Philosophical Research in San Francisco, serving as its first director and president. There Adler led a 30-member staff in the research and publication of *The Idea of Freedom* (authored by Adler, 1958, 1961), as well as *The Idea of Justice* (Otto Bird, 1967), *The Idea of Progress* (Charles Van Doren, 1967), and other studies. While engaged in that work, Adler maintained great books activities (e.g., leading discussion groups, discussing the "great ideas" on television). In the mid-1960s, Adler brought the Institute back to Chicago and took a new position with Encyclopædia Britannica. Over the next 30 years, he authored 27 books—not including coauthored works and editorial duties. These books covered topics such as education reform (with a great books flavor), capitalism, the history of philosophy, the nature of man, ethics, politics, language theory, angels, religion, and America's founding documents. This work also resulted in a lengthy association with Macmillan, lasting from the 1970s to the publication of his final, solo-authored book in 1995. This second phase of his life culminated in work toward a second edition of Britannica's *Great Books* set, published in 1990. Adler died in 2001.[5]

On top of these relevant topical associations, the Adler focus is fruitful for other reasons. First, the time frame of Adler's life (1902–2001) provides maximal flexibility in incorporating disparate historical feeder themes while still building the Culture Wars political teleology. The Culture Wars brings the contradictions and tensions

inherent in the great books idea into high relief. Adler brings the story to that point. Second, Adler did not act alone. His community of discourse changed over his long life, including figures such as Scott Buchanan, Richard McKeon, Jacques Maritain, Jacques Barzun, Clifton Fadiman, Robert Hutchins, Mark Van Doren, and his sons John and Charles Van Doren.[6] This group agreed on the Great Books' virtues—even while underplaying the idea's weaknesses. Third, this group and Adler believed that a liberal education obtained through great books, organized through Britannica's set as a study of the history of Western ideas, would remedy a widespread American anti-intellectualism that grew out of an excessive educational focus on jobs training, or vocationalism.

Fourth, Adler envisioned a public philosophy, rooted in Aristotelian thought and supplementary to the great books idea, that would aid citizens in thinking about complex topics. Fifth, Adler's unabashed association with Christian philosophers and theologians in the 1940s, such as Thomas Aquinas and Jacques Maritain, even while Adler himself was a secular Jew, fostered the perception that the Great Books and Adler's personal beliefs were always compatible with Christianity. This compatibility existed to some degree, but never to the extent imagined by New Right Christians as the movement developed during the 1970s. Lastly, no other work published on the history of the great books idea has focused on Adler's work over his whole life.

Returning to Adler's contradictions and character defects, as evident in the opening descriptors, thoughtful historians seize moments of disjunction, irony, and paradox as opportunities that promise an interesting story. As such, the most intriguing things to me about those descriptors are both their asymmetry with his personal life and what they reveal about the larger history of the great books idea. Adler's incendiary Culture Wars rhetoric about the canon—what the late Daniel Bell called "the most rancorous cultural war"—that resulted in changed opinions about him contrasted starkly with a life lived, for long stretches, in the liberal tradition.[7] For instance, in the 1940s he and his intellectual community advocated for codified human rights embedded in a world constitution (i.e., world federal government). For this the John Birch Society hounded Adler well into the 1960s. In addition, in the ten years before an infamous 1990 interview, Adler promoted a school reform effort known as the Paideia Program. Intended for both elementary and high school students, Paideia contained a seminar component based only on a recommended readings list. The program was surprisingly attractive to some inner-city public schools populated by minorities. So while nothing about the rest of his life reveals Adler as a racist, his late-life

defensiveness and dogmatism, as well as a shifting cultural environment, created a unique moment for his downfall.

* * *

This book—which is part limited historical biography, part intellectual and cultural history, and part history of American education—explains these inconsistencies, ironies, and paradoxes related to great books, Adler, and his contemporaries. In so doing, a positive assertion becomes apparent: those people, those mid-century intellectuals who promoted the great books idea, shared an implicit, cosmopolitan dream of cultural democratization.

The meaning of this argument is revealed by examining the aspirations and actions of both promoters and reader-consumers. From the promoters' viewpoint, democratization meant redistributing what Pierre Bourdieu called "cultural capital."[8] Through ideas and knowledge contained in great books, promoters hoped to enlighten the American polis and buttress Western democratic societies against malicious political systems, such as communism and fascism. Moving from the social to the singular, supporters held that the steady accumulation of *individual* intellectual progress obtained by studying great books (not to exclude other means) would create empowered, cosmopolitan citizens comfortable with freedom in a century plagued with totalitarianism. Having sound philosophical foundations, each citizen would be a true free agent in the Western marketplace of ideas. They would raise political discourse and cast the best votes possible. And evidence exists that readers were enthusiastic about the great books' potential to supplement their knowledge of the world—to help them process and act on the ambiguities of modern life. Stating the thesis another way, the dream of great books enthusiasts was that all Americans, all Westerners, and all those living in democratic societies would benefit from some connection to great books.

The activities and writings of Adler and his community of discourse support this book's revisionary thesis. Adler, Hutchins, Fadiman, Barzun, and other mid- and late-century intellectuals hoped—to the point of fantasy—that the broad accessibility and reading of great books would result in liberal education for all that would bring about a democratized culture. In their idealistic view, the citizens of an American polity, enlightened by the liberal arts through great books, would neutralize the acids of modernity, resist totalitarianism, avoid the hive mentality (e.g., communism), conquer suburban boredom, prevent the fragmentation of multiculturalism and pluralism, and transcend political ideologies. They dreamed that a liberal education would result from joining what Hutchins called the "Great

Conversation" about the "Great Ideas" as promoted in Britannica's set. This would liberate liberal education from the elites, broadly disseminating the cultural capital of great books. Indeed, the association of great books with elite culture had helped perpetuate the myth of the great books as elitist and "high culture" (setting up, furthermore, the myth of middlebrow denigration).

* * *

The capacious framework of "democratic culture" provides opportunities to think multidimensionally about the historical evidence of the great books idea. Other theoretical and topical approaches, such as those based on cultural hierarchies (i.e., high-, middle-, and lowbrow), leave litte room for exploring the full range of behavior exhibited by great books supporters. The goal here is to avoid a rigid theoretical framework that results in an unjust historical narrative, or one that facilitates condescension, false dichotomy, and ad hominem. Democratic culture, I believe, allows for fair play and agency in relation to the hopes, criticisms, failings, and dreams of promoters and user-readers. This paradigm helps readers understand how the great books idea endures, or has a mythical nine lives (depending on your viewpoint), in the face of seemingly withering criticism. Several themes and topics emerge in this work under the umbrella of democratic culture: cultural capital, common or shared culture (past and present), common sense, public philosophy, politics (i.e., liberalism, conservatism), citizenship, education (schools, colleges, adult), anti-intellectualism (and anti-anti-intellectualism), pluralism, multiculturalism, and the Culture Wars.[9]

Speaking generally, what do I mean by democratic culture? Is it merely a mid-twentieth-century, Cold War construct set against communism? Or is it a late-twentieth-century academic construct imposed on mid-century culture? Digital technology hints at answers to both questions. According to Google's "Ngram Viewer," which has the ability to quantify phrases in works catalogued by Google Books, citations of "democratic culture" began a steady increase in books published after 1900. Those citations first peaked around 1930, then doubled during World War II, and doubled again from roughly 1990 to the present.[10] Given this ubiquity one cannot hope to provide an authoritative definition of the phrase in a short introduction. What follows, then, covers the concept only as used *in this text*.

The great books idea is often accompanied by discussions of "culture," defined ages ago, as related to the development of one's speech tendencies, manners, and taste. And those associations still exist and matter, in certain circles, in discussions about excellence in texts. In that realm "democratization" is synonymous with "the masses,"

kitsch, vulgarization, and degradation. But, in relation to "democratic culture" as a philosophical concept used in this story, the primary meaning of culture is anthropological. It begins with Clifford Geertz, who, in *Interpretation of Cultures* (1973), defined culture as follows: "an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which [people] communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life."[11] That definition has been particularly useful in relation to education. Indeed, both Adler and Britannica's *Great Books* are material bodies and symbols embedded in the US education system—from schools to universities and adult education programs.

Adding nuance to Geertz, Pierre Bourdieu's idea of "cultural capital" provides a means to address the value of great books beyond formal education institutions (i.e., those that provide credentials). Bourdieu seems to have never discussed great books, but cultural capital helps explain the stakes in that, through great books (an "objectified" form of cultural capital), one might acquire the appearance and reality of valuable education outside the formal system of education—in a way that exceeds one's formal place, via credentials, within that "institutionalized" system. The existence of this other, less-than-transparent system helps us understand how the great books idea endures even when its popularity waxes and wanes within the formal system of schooling. It also helps explain the enduring interest in great books by groups outside the mainstream (i.e., the informal system offers some of the cultural capital required to move up the cultural hierarchy). Bourdieu helps keep the historian as philosopher, as the interrogator of evidence, from falsely separating culture and capitalism in Western societies. The latter is about profit, but it is also a system within which one gains access to ideas and power: readers are consumers, and consumers are readers. In short, Bourdieu and cultural observers inspired by him (e.g., John Guillory) help bridge the gap between Geertz and older, taste-related definitions of culture.[12]

Another gap in the concept map of democratic culture is filled by Daniel Boorstin's contemporaneous idea of "consumption communities," as well as Albert Muniz and Thomas O'Guinn's more recent notion of a "brand community." Both types of communities aid our understandings of shared and common community in relation to the great books idea. Picking up on Adler's connection between the Great Books and the liberal arts, Boorstin, Bourdieu, Muniz, and O'Guinn help one think about *from what* consumption and brand communities liberate us? Is it provincialism or parochialism, as Boorstin asserts? Or does the consumer's integration, by choice, into larger mass communities ironically tie the person to new and larger bonds

of conformity, or create new forms of class stratification? And what of authenticity, or the authenticity of consumer choices in relation to marketing manipulation?[13] This study cannot definitively answer those questions, but it provides another interesting angle (i.e., great books idea as liberator or jailor?) from which one can think about the problems of liberty, choice, and community in the context of a democracy.

The term "community" also matters in a special theoretical way, particular to the historiography of intellectual history, in this story. To understand intellectuals apart from their biographies and individual writings, this book relies heavily on David Hollinger's notion of "communities of discourse." First forwarded at the 1977 Wingspread Conference, he emphasized this mechanism as a way to wrest the focus from singular individuals (great men) identified as intellectuals and situate them among specific social and cultural contexts. Hollinger's trope anchors books and ideas in a human cultural context while acknowledging that "shared questions" and objects of thought can, and do, transcend individual intellectuals.[14] Adler's community of discourse is a crucial part of this story about the great books idea.

What of the "democratic" portion of democratic culture? That modifier stresses the relationship of US culture to its particular political system, ideologies, and rights. Herein is a concern for democracy in relation to what Jürgen Habermas called the "unfinished project" of modernity.[15] Fostered by liberal democracies and constitutional republics in the modern West, democratic culture enables the understanding, access, and distribution of civil and human rights. In nominally free societies, that culture is both common and shared, existing in public and private spheres. That shared entity is something more inspired and individually effective than mere "mass culture." Democratic culture inspires good citizenship, virtue, and a sense of common cause (e.g., "men of good will") for the good of the polis. This "way of life" may be inherited, but it fosters individual and collective agency—what critical theorists call "human emancipation."[16] By acknowledging individuals, a democratic culture respects difference. As a collective lived experience, it distributes cultural capital to those individuals via educational institutions (broadly conceived, public, and private). Being a product of education and therefore an "art," democratic culture is always at risk. It requires an engaged citizenry full of informed, critical voters. It is a responsibility that also urges responsibility; its denizens use it, self-consciously and otherwise, to renew and argue for its existence. Because a democratic culture engages diverse beliefs, meanings, and symbols, political ideology is a part of its orbit. This includes now familiar discourse between American citizens about liberalism, conservatism, individualism, and

communitarianism. Democratic culture is always at risk because it involves arguments, consensus, and compromises.

Although this vision of a democratic culture is rooted in the ideas of US intellectuals, many great books promoters wrote about a larger, more inclusive and worldly cosmopolitanism based on normative, universal goods and a global sense of the common good. That cosmopolitanism could both reject and embrace convention in culture and morals. For instance, several of Mortimer Adler's colleagues and friends believed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to be normative. They thought and published on subjects such as common culture, common sense, and other philosophical topics (e.g., does common sense foster democracy?). This necessarily involved engagements with pluralism, diversity, and multiculturalism. The topics of public philosophy and public intellectuals are bridges into issues such as anti-intellectualism and education (the latter in its general and liberal forms). If this, considered altogether, seems high-minded and utopian, it could be. Notions such as the common good, common sense, and common culture could sometimes cause as many problems as they purported to solve. The historical agents in this story, moreover, did not often write about the messiness of the democratic process. That lacuna would leave them unprepared for the cultural politics of the Culture Wars.[17]

Apart from cultural politics and the utopian high-mindedness of this community of intellectuals, other factors complicate our understanding of the democratization of culture. For instance, some cultural democratization occurred on the plane of the *unconscious*. These attended the growth in popularity of cultural forms such as amusement parks, dance, film, music, and even simply using the streets for entertainment. Even the increased demand for mass consumer products aided this change in culture. Few historical agents sought to promote these activities, explicitly and consciously, as the democratization of culture. Rather they simply hoped for popularity among—or consumption and profit from—diverse audiences. Other cultural forms were *consciously democratized*. Literature and education, for instance, fall into this category. Active historical agents hoped to make these cultural forms accessible to the masses.[18] The topic of this story, great books, falls under the "conscious democratization" purview.

What caused the "democratization of culture" in literature and books in general? According to Gerald Graff, the nineteenth-century professionalization of higher education helped move literature away from the cultural elites and "the normal upbringing of gentlefolk" (Habermas called books "the bourgeois means of education par excellence").[19] Alongside that movement the number of books

printed increased over the same century. On the one hand, this increase placed books in more people's hands, effecting a democratization of book ownership. On the other hand, the proliferation was such that the average person could not, without intense study, monitor the quality or quantity of new books published—estimated by one 1881 source at 25,000 annually. Even if incorrect, the estimate conveys a sense of despair felt about keeping up.[20] This proliferation necessitated guidance, effecting the creation of agents who could help select books for the overwhelmed communities of consumer-readers. In the United States with its pluralistic culture, the array of mediators included librarians, book critics, publishers (i.e., of magazines and books), public intellectuals, and educators, such as Graff's professors of literature.

Democratic culture necessarily involves a consideration of education, conceived positively, negatively, formally, and informally. Positively and formally, this means education in relation to curricula, teaching, schooling, higher education, and credential requirements. In relation to curricula, great books fall under rubrics like liberal education, liberal arts, and humanism. A paradox exists, however, in relation to formal education and the ideal of equality that is essential to a democratized culture. Teaching necessarily involves some level of hierarchy and paternalism; teachers pass on knowledge and skills to another group lacking both. This fact corresponds with some elitism, and even esoteric mysticism, among great books educator-advocates (and opponents of great books-style education). Other, more charitable great books educator-advocates act as guides by the side, sharing and encouraging full participation in the "Great Conversation." The paradox of haves, have-nots, and states in-between within the realm of great books education points to cultural democratization as a sometimes contentious process. Contentiousness means that sometimes educators and professors are portrayed as elite intellectuals. Advocating for the great books idea, then, could mean fighting against anti-intellectualism, antirationalism (i.e., the reliance on ideology), and "agnotology." Working against anti-intellectualism could also mean thinking about philosophy as a public endeavor, fostering a "public philosophy" in the face of extreme ideology.[21] Indeed, many mid-century great books promoters saw those works as weapons in the extrainstitutional public struggle against ignorance.

To understand elitism in relation to the great books idea, one must consider the meaning and existence of cultural hierarchies in literature. The predominant way of thinking about cultural hierarchy, in the historical literature of and on the 1880s through the 1940s, came to be in terms of the phrenologic, "pejorative" brow distinctions:

lowbrow (i.e., unrefined), highbrow (i.e., refined, highly cultivated), and middlebrow (i.e., betwixt and between). Lawrence Levine and Joan Shelley Rubin have documented how these "permeable and shifting" categories changed in that period, but the concern here is with mid-twentieth-century cultural critics. These critics, such as New York intellectuals Clement Greenberg and Dwight Macdonald, as well as members of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theorists, argued the following: although "mass produced" can sometimes mean widely accessible and therefore equal opportunity in mass culture, reproduction could also mean something banal, conformist (i.e., falsely standardized), and degraded —"kitsch" and "ersatz culture" in Greenberg's words—in terms of the original avant-garde art produced. Human dignity and freedom were subverted with these reproductions, leaving behind mere conformity, the perverted twin of democratic equality. Louis Menand summarized the mid-century situation and Macdonald's thinking as follows: "There was a major middle-class culture of earnest aspiration in the 1950s, the product of a strange alliance of the democratic (culture for everyone) and the elitist (culture can make you better than other people). Macdonald understood how this culture was contrived and which buttons of vanity and insecurity it pushed so successfully." Menand added that, courtesy of Macdonald, middlebrow has become a term of "disapprobation" today.[22]

Joan Shelley Rubin made a sincere attempt to avoid that condemnation, as well as "disregard and oversimplification," in her formidable 1992 study, *The Making of Middlebrow Culture*. She discussed middlebrow culture as based, essentially, on the popularization of books and reading. But she still utilizes Greenberg's and Macdonald's sensibilities of cultural corruption when she describes some great books promoters, particularly Adler and Hutchins, as purveyors of a "prefabricated culture."[23] Rubin does point out the positives of certain middlebrow culture advocates, such as John Erskine and Clifton Fadiman. And positives were possible for, as Janice Radway argued in relation to the Book-of-the-Month Club, middlebrow culture functioned as a space for working out alternative criteria for excellence in books. Yet, to Rubin, some great books promoters worked this out better than others. Fadiman, for instance, "personified middlebrow culture" by balancing low and high exemplars. On the low end, however, was Adler: the rigid, abrasive, dogmatic, rules-laden, and philosophy-centered promoter. To Rubin, he overshadowed and corrupted Erskine's high-end, flexible, literature-centered approach to making great books a viable middlebrow enterprise. And Hutchins carried Adler's stain—that is, the commodification of both reading rules and great books.[24] In the grand scheme of both the theory and

historiography of the great books idea, Rubin's intervention is brief, yet powerful and provocative.

Whatever the positives of utilizing a brow-based hierarchical paradigm for assessing the great books idea, this study revises that approach both theoretically and empirically. This intervention moves beyond the middlebrow by extending Rubin's concern for "democratic values," reworking the Critical Theory that correlated with Macdonald's thinking, and pushing the analysis far past the 1950s. By prioritizing a full longitudinal approach to Adler's life, his intellectual circle, and iterations of the great books idea, one can the see human weaknesses of great books advocates even while acknowledging their dreams, goals, and motivations. Those larger goals highlighted education for good citizenship; to them great books were more of an antidote than a contributor to that bland, conformist mass culture feared by mid-century critics (left and liberal and conservative) and described by cultural historians. With that, the successes and failures of great books promoters will be judged here in relation to the ever-changing historical context of developing a culture that supported democracy. This means that the reception of intellectuals and regular readers will be assessed whenever possible. Overall, this alternate criteria of assessment (in relation to Rubin) is indeed tenable because, as Menand noted, by the mid-1960s "the whole high-low paradigm" would "end up in the dustbin of history," replaced by a "culture of sophisticated entertainment."[25]

* * *

Apart from Rubin's provocative, abbreviated contribution to the historiography of the great books idea, only a few books, articles, and dissertations have attempted to cover all or significant chunks of that same ground. Most of the dissertations on great books have originated in education departments. The best of them were written by Hugh S. Moorhead and Amy Apfel Kass, but both were published in 1964 and 1973, respectively. Kass covered only the 1925–1950 period and her title, "Radical Conservatives for a Liberal Education," reveals her agenda. Even though Moorhead's chronological coverage is extensive, it does not integrate the great books idea into America's larger historical context. Despite their reliance on archived documents, both are also severely limited in relation to this study by their publication dates.[26]

Two articles, by W. B. Carnochan and Katherine Elise Chaddock, published in 1999 and 2002, respectively, provide noteworthy contributions to the historiography. Carnochan's piece focuses on the British origins of the great books idea, arguing useful smaller points and one

larger point in relation to the trans-Atlantic Victorian cultural context. On the smaller he relayed, for instance, that "by the late nineteenth century the habit of drawing up lists of books became a mania—or a parlour game . . . with manic overtones." In covering common British touchstones such as Matthew Arnold, Sir John Lubbock, and Frederic Harrison, Carnochan asserted that the Dean of Canterbury, Frederick William Farrar, "may be said to have brought the category of "Great Books," capitals and all, into being." Going larger, Carnochan's work provides an endpoint for David Lowenthal's assertion that "many Americans come to Europe to feel at home in time"—to discover their heritage. Carnochan helps us understand how the great books idea infiltrated the trans-Atlantic consciousness, as well as the minds of Gilded Age and Progressive Era American Victorians ranging from Charles Francis Richardson, Elizabeth Harrison, Henry van Dyke, and Charles Sprague Smith, to Emanuel Haldeman-Julius, Charles Gayley, Charles W. Eliot, and George Woodberry. It is Woodberry who brings us to Columbia University and John Erskine.[27]

Although Chaddock's article focused on Scott Buchanan's and Stringfellow Barr's refounding of St. John's College in Annapolis, Maryland, on an all-great books-based curriculum, she offered a broad interpretation of mid-century great books promoters that mirrors the argument of this book. Chaddock argued: "Proponents of the great books of Western literature . . . would be surprised by the stridency of [recent] interpretations. There is ample evidence that . . . they sought to democratize education . . . Not only would the realm of "haves" be expanded in terms of who was conversant with important literature, but also liberal education itself might become increasingly appealing and available across the socioeconomic classes."[28] Indeed.

Chaddock recently expanded on that work by authoring a book-length study on George Woodberry's great student, John Erskine. In *The Multi-Talented Mr. Erskine: Shaping Mass Culture through Great Books and Fine Music* (2012), she debunks myths and clarifies the story around the creation of General Honors at Columbia University and related great books curricula at other institutions. While providing an entertaining, informative, and full narrative of Erskine's life as a "celebrity professor," Chaddock also outlines Erskine's connections to his dynamic students, especially Mortimer Adler. She argued that Erskine bridged Victorian and modern American conceptions of great books, even while he embodied a paradox of the era's American intellectual elites, namely, an ability to uphold elitist thinking (i.e., fear of vulgarization) while possessing democratic intentions and valuing access. Erskine was a paragon of that "duality." He was willing to see great texts in the hands of the middle classes and as mass culture products.[29]

In addition to Chaddock's and Rubin's chapter-length coverage of the great books idea, there are other older books addressing the topic with chapters and chapter portions that focus, in varying fashion, on Erskine, Adler, and Robert Hutchins. These include James Sloan Allen's *The Romance of Commerce and Culture* (1983), Gerald Graff's *Professing Literature* (1987), and Lawrence Levine's *The Opening of the American Mind* (1996). Levine's Culture Wars intervention is part history and part polemic, as evident in the title's refutation of Allan Bloom's 1987 sensation. Levine defended the evolution of multicultural college curricula and was also concerned with the "larger struggle over how our past should be conserved, how our memory should function, and where the focus of our attention should be."[30] Despite these larger themes, Levine's work is focused on higher education, then and now.

All three of those books contribute to the dialogue about the great books idea, but as of 2013 only one book has been published focused *solely* on its history: Alex Beam's *A Great Idea at the Time: The Rise, Fall, and Curious Afterlife of the Great Books* (2008). Beam's generally well-received survey is an important, if flawed, contribution to the historical literature. Beam's goal was to be fun and entertaining, and he succeeds. The book holds forth a present-oriented argument that is, I believe, embedded in both the title and the final chapter of what he called "a brief, engaging, and undidactic history of the Great Books." Beam sees virtues and many vices in the history of the great books idea and shows that a surprising number of past users, consumers, and producers have gainfully participated in the Great Books Movement. Despite the substantial dose of history in the first three-quarters of his project, Beam, as a journalist, becomes a participant-researcher in the last quarter of his book. The book translates Beam's personal journey, wherein he reconciles himself to what he calls an "abstruse, fundamentally Midwestern topic."[31]

Beam's pithy, 200-page story gained reviews in the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, and *Chicago Tribune*. Encyclopædia Britannica's very active weblog dedicated a week-long forum to Beam's book. The *Times* declared it one of 2008's "100 Notable Books." Even so, Beam's work is highly subjective. Indeed, Beam himself wrote that "when it comes to the Great Books, no one is without an opinion." While it is conceded that all histories are subjective, some are more and less so. On the latter, when fairness and objectivity suffer, history becomes caricature. As has been the case in many prior histories of the great books idea, Beam admires the witty, charismatic Hutchins, and Erskine is treated sympathetically. However, numerous passages throughout the text demonstrate that Beam, also like many others before him, developed a strong distaste for Adler's style and personality ("Hobbit-like," "perennial showman

and egomaniac").[32] The book, then, despite being entertaining and well researched, falls into some familiar ruts.

This book, in contrast to Beam and in spite of Adler's known flaws, is revisionary in that it rescues Adler from what E. P. Thompson called "the enormous condescension of posterity."[33] One person's provocative jerk is another person's champion. This work aims for a happy medium. And by making Adler the focus, *The Dream of a Democratic Culture* is unique in the historiography of the great books idea.

* * *

Any project more than ten years in the making will result in numerous debts to family, friends, and colleagues. The acknowledgments given, then, will necessarily be partial and incomplete. I take full responsibility for any important omissions.

Conceived and nurtured at Loyola University Chicago, this book began as a graduate seminar paper and evolved into a dissertation. The dissertation committee consisted of Lewis Erenberg (director), Susan Hirsch, and Michael Perko. I thank them all for their support, but Lew and Susan deserve special mention for advice and professional support ranging far beyond dissertation construction and program navigation. At Loyola, I received some financial assistance from the Arthur J. Schmitt Foundation and Loyola's Graduate School, as well as a graduate assistantship with Mundelein College and a summer research grant from the Ann Ida Gannon Center for Women and Leadership.

This book rests on research conducted in numerous libraries and archives in Chicago and beyond. First thanks go to Loyola's Cudahy Library, particularly staff in its Inter-Library Loan Department, the Women and Leadership Archives, and University Archives. The University of Chicago's Regenstein Library Special Collections Research Center became a second home to me from late 2003 and most of 2004. Alice Schreyer started me on the right track with the Mortimer J. Adler Papers (149 total record boxes!) and Robert Hutchins' Presidential Records. Later on Barbara Gilbert, Daniel Meyer, Jay Satterfield, and eventually Christine Colburn assisted me with box after box after box of Adler's papers on Saturday mornings, and then with images and permissions in 2012. I also received two timely assists on reports and images from Lars Mahinske and Jeannine Deubel at Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., during the last year of this project. Outside Chicago, I received help from staff and archivists working for the following institutions: Syracuse University's E. S. Bird Library's Special Collections; the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Love Library Archives and Special Collections; the Harry Ransom

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Living and working in Chicago for most of the life of this project afforded me with numerous outlets for support, tips, stimulation, and helpful conversation. Members of the Newberry Library Urban History Dissertation Group offered critiques of chapters. Staff at the Great Books Foundation (particularly Daniel Born) offered helpful advice and tips, as did colleagues at the University of Illinois-Chicago (particularly Fred Beuttler, David Veenstra, Kevin Schultz, Eric Arnesen, Gerald Graff, and the now deceased Robert Remini). Gerald Graff provided critical help at a key moment when I rethought my book proposal. Thank you all.

As my project progressed I became involved in an effort to revive and organize the field of US intellectual history. That work resulted in a first-rate blog, an ongoing conference, and, eventually, the Society for US Intellectual History. I cannot understate the importance of this community, in person and virtual, as a support group and informal post-doc/finishing school. My S-USIH friends and colleagues include: Andrew Hartman, Paul Murphy, Ben Alpers, Lora Burnett, Ray Haberski, Lauren Kientz Anderson, Mike O'Connor, David Sehat, Julian Nemeth, James Levy, Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen, Dan Wickberg, Matthew Cotter, Martin J. Burke, Ethan Schrum, Neil Jumonville, James Livingston, George Cotkin, Elisabeth Lasch-Quinn, Bill McClay, and Michael Kramer.

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Thank you, Jodi, for everything.

Adler's pugnacious arguments aroused" among his opponents, at the University and beyond.[4] It was with these contrasting styles that both offered the public, ironically, a singular, unachievable paradigm for discussing great books. Both in the classroom and their Orchestra Hall event, it was a performance and a lesson in critical thinking. On the latter, despite their singularity and personality, their subsequent writings point to something larger: they hoped the applicable aspects of their model for vigorous discussion would be emulated across America. It was a vision of democratized culture that consisted of challenging oneself with reading and thinking about great books. They wanted an educational movement, and their models were limited, but there is no indication that they wanted ideological purity or philosophical tidiness.[5]

Kennelly's fete for the Great Books Foundation likely seemed old news for the few Chicagoans who were up-to-date on the city's intellectual scene. By 1948, the Great Books Foundation had been in operation in Chicago for almost a year. The University of Chicago's "University College," in cooperation with Chicago's Public Library, had already experimented with free great books classes around the city since 1944. The success of that program had led to extensions in Cleveland, Indianapolis, and Detroit in 1946. By the next year, the program had spread to 17 cities, necessitating the formation of the Foundation.[6]

During the period from the 1920s to the 1940s, the great books idea began as an experiment in New York City and ended as a national phenomenon based in Chicago. Promoters transformed the idea from a small-scale educational novelty housed in a few elite universities to an adult education movement concerned with democratizing the larger culture through great books. Although Hutchins was important to this, it was Mortimer Adler (Figure 1.2) who enabled the transition. Adler first came into contact with the great books idea when he took John Erskine's General Honors course at Columbia University in 1920. The People's Institute, which operated in the mid-1920s, proved to be an influence for Adler in the long term. But it was *How to Read a Book*, published in 1940, that promoted the General Honors strain within the Great Books Movement. Thereafter Adler and his intellectual community would come to purposely promote a high-level, less-formal educational program of uplift not bounded by rules of higher education institutions. While this community began its discourse over the merits of the great books idea in New York, Chicago became the accidental, if happy, launching ground for the Great Books Movement.

Figure 1.2 Mortimer J. Adler, very young, undated.
Source: University of Chicago, Special Collections Research Center, Photographic Archive.

How to Read a Book: The inspiration

When Adler left Columbia University for the University of Chicago in 1930, at the invitation of Robert Maynard Hutchins, he went from relative obscurity to basking in Hutchins' afterglow as a minor Chicago celebrity. Hutchins and his wife Maude had become members, according to Mary Ann Dzuback, of the city's "intellectual aristocracy" as soon as Hutchins was inaugurated as the University of Chicago's president, in November 1929. Dzuback noted that Maude was attractive, and that "men and women alike found Robert's good looks and sharp wit irresistible." Although less charismatic and attractive than Hutchins, Adler was grafted into that aristocracy.[7] Adler built on Hutchins' afterglow to become a public figure in his own right.

When he came, Adler brought the great books idea with him. While introduced to great books in Erskine's aforementioned General

Honors course, it was Adler's experience at the People's Institute that instigated and reinforced his—and his friends'—belief that great books could be accessible to all readers. Formed during the Progressive Era, in 1897, by Columbia University professor Charles Sprague Smith, it was an offshoot of the Cooper Union mechanics school. The People's Institute existed under the assumption that all deserved, or needed, educational and cultural uplift. As Leon Fink wrote of that period, "education ranked . . . high on the agenda" of Progressive intellectuals and reformers. Considering the logic of reformers he added: "If the people were to seize their democratic birthright for the greater good . . . they must engage their higher faculties of reason" and be "schooled in sense of civic duty." This would make them a "democratic public."[8]

The great books idea became a part of the Institute's story during the directorship of Everett Dean Martin. He became director in 1921 and shortly thereafter articulated his view of the Institute's educational philosophy. In his 1926 work, *The Meaning of a Liberal Education*, he argued that education's task is to "reorient the individual, to enable him to take a richer and more significant view of his experiences, to place him above and not within the system of his beliefs and ideals." To Martin a liberal education meant "the kind of education which sets the mind free from the servitude of the crowd and from vulgar self-interests." He added, "Education is simply philosophy at work. It is the search for the 'good life.'" The structure that would mix Martin's liberal arts program with the great books idea was an Institute subsidiary called "The School of the People's Institute," or simply "The School." Its mission included teaching philosophy, psychology, biology, and literary criticism. A grant from the Carnegie Foundation, given around 1925, enabled the hiring of Scott Buchanan, a Harvard-trained philosopher and Rhodes Scholar, to run The School.[9]

Buchanan's work as a teaching assistant at Columbia, in turn, brought him in contact with Mortimer Adler and other Columbia graduate students, whom Buchanan eventually solicited as lecturers for The School. At one point, the book enthusiast Clifton "Kip" Fadiman served as secretary for the staff of lecturers. Mark Van Doren, already a Columbia professor, taught during the first year of the experiment. Recruited by Buchanan, The School also hired the Aristotelian philosopher Richard McKeon. He had studied under the historian-philosopher Étienne Gilson at the Sorbonne in France. But, most importantly, the Columbia connection also involved educational ideas. To wit, sometime in The School's first year Buchanan and Adler proposed to Martin the idea of conducting General Honors-style classes. Martin agreed and the Institute's School began its great books experiment in 1926 with a series of seminars.[10]

The Institute's School formed 13 total discussion groups averaging 15 working-class New Yorkers per group, each with one discussion leader. The groups were explicitly organized "to represent a cross-section of educational and social level, age, and race." Six of the 13 groups studied "general interest," great books-like programs—involving about 90 of the 150 total participants. Little is available, from the working-class reader's perspective, on the effectiveness of these groups. Adler and Whittaker Chambers taught the "Renaissance and Modern Thought" seminar. For a November 1926 report, Adler relayed that their group was "lively in discussion," "likely to read," and "shockable"—but "untrained intellectually" and "full of prejudices and 'ideas.'" After another December session, Adler reported that the "discussion of Descartes was better than I expected." The discussion of Shakespeare, in another meeting, resulted in Adler's highest praise: the worker readers were "as good as my Columbia groups."[11] Aside from Adler's word, the great books' effectiveness in the Institute's School can be inferred from the continuation of the democratic experiment another year through 1928.

Even after moving on to new ventures nearly all of this cohort—Adler, Buchanan, Fadiman, Van Doren—cited their experiences with the Institute's great books program in two ways. First, as proof that the great books could in fact be taught and learned outside the academy. And second, as their source of optimism about the possibilities of great books-style reading groups.[12] Their experience at the Institute's School caused them to believe in the accessibility of great books among unschooled but enthusiastic readers. The experiment with ethnically diverse working-class New Yorkers seeded a movement based on fostering a more unified, shared, and democratic life of thought.

Returning to Chicago, Hutchins welcomed Adler's transmission of the great books idea. Prior to his arrival, internal studies by the university had concluded that the same highly specialized professors who ran successful and powerful graduate programs were not translating that success into a good undergraduate college. Hutchins had been hired, in part, to change this. After discussions with Adler, he became convinced that bringing a General Honors-like program to the undergraduate college would fix the problem. Indeed, in his history of the Hutchins years at the University of Chicago, William McNeill asserted that "Adler did more than anyone else to shape Hutchins' mature ideas about education." Adler was Hutchins' most important advisor during this period, articulating for Hutchins a philosophy of education. Hutchins compiled those ideas in a few books, most notably *Higher Learning in America* (1936). Despite Adler's influence, at the time Hutchins himself received much of the credit and blame

for great books-related changes at the university. Hutchins' charismas overshadowed his staff and the University itself during his tenure.[13] If Hutchins provided the style, Adler helped give the administration its substance.

A great deal of descriptive and analytical scholarship exists on the controversy, known as "The Chicago Fight," that surrounded the curricular changes proposed and implemented by Hutchins and Adler at the University of Chicago. Those internal changes matter less here, however, than the external perception of them, that is, what those changes meant for the reputation of the great books idea. Those perceptions were manipulated by Adler and Hutchins in that, as coteachers of the General Honors course, they regularly invited prominent observers, guest examiners, and guest discussion leaders. These also included author-philosopher Gertrude Stein; actresses Katharine Cornell, Lillian Gish (twice), and Ethel Barrymore; the actor-director Orson Welles; and Eugene Meyer (publisher of the *Washington Post*) and his wife, Agnes. These staged appearances resulted in newspaper coverage through the 1930s.[14]

During the Chicago Fight, Adler worked to develop a philosophy that grew out of his 1920s explorations of great books, particularly Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*. Adler's affinity for the philosophy of Aquinas (i.e., "Thomism") proceeded such that Adler would become one of the best-known neoscholastic philosophers in the United States by the 1940s. That relationship also afforded Adler opportunities to promote the great books idea at Catholic colleges. Later he would call this his "Thomistic Period." Despite the earlier introduction to Aquinas, Adler claims that it was only after the Chicago Fight that he developed a "dissatisfaction with modern philosophy." Fueled in part by the lack of an intellectual connection with his Chicago colleagues, Adler looked elsewhere for community. Beginning in 1932 he found it with the American Catholic Philosophical Association (ACPA). He would eventually deliver addresses at ACPA conferences in 1934 and 1937. This period resulted in at least two books aimed at neoscholastics, as well as many articles published in *The Thomist*, *Thought*, and *Commonweal*. Adler also first encountered the philosophical writings of the French Thomist, Jacques Maritain, in the 1930s. After some correspondence Maritain would become a long-distance member of Adler's community of discourse in the 1940s and 1950s. Many years later, in 1976, all of this work resulted in Adler being presented with the ACPA's "Aquinas Medal" for outstanding contributions to Thomism.[15]

Adler's interest in Thomism corresponded with what Lewis Perry described as a "renewed interest among intellectuals in traditional Christianity." Adler's actions paralleled Catholic intellectuals who

skill as a popularizer," as well as "on his ability to make lofty subjects accessible to people who lacked his education and acuity." Adler later wrote, of both Fadiman and Jacques Barzun, that "I cannot recount all the ways in which [my] friendship with them has influenced my life and my work." Only Adler's more "brief" friendship with Hutchins, which lasted over 40 years, exceeded his affinity for Fadiman.[21]

Adler first wrote to Fadiman with the idea for *How to Read a Book* late in February 1939. At the time Fadiman worked for Simon and Schuster. By the first week of March, Adler had already predicted to him, tongue-in-cheek, that his idea might be a "best seller."[22] In the same letter, which was also meant for other staff at Simon and Schuster, Adler wrote,

> I have talked to you frequently about doing a book on liberal arts which would explain to the public what Hutchins is driving at in his attack on American education, and what St. John's scheme really means. I think I have at last found the ideal way of writing a sound popular book on the subject, a book that will appeal both to that large audience already excited by the controversies [surrounding] Hutchins and St. John's, and also to that even larger audience of Americans who are interested in their own further improvement, who want to better themselves. The key to the whole matter is contained in the single word "reading." I have discovered from years of popular lecturing that everybody wants to know what to read, and even more how to read.[23]

A few weeks later M. Lincoln Schuster approved Adler's idea with an advance and a contract.

The contract letter revealed that *How to Read a Book* would be a team project. Schuster mentioned that he had fantasized about just such a book as early as 1932, and had a number of suggestions related to the title, tone, and even potential coauthors. He also had suggestions on the dangers of "over-reading," as well as on topics such as taking notes, using a library, classifying books, and skipping around in books.[24] Further emphasizing the team nature of Adler's project, Adler received a warning from Fadiman, on May 16, about problems with early drafts of the manuscript:

> I want to emphasize . . . that the writing will have to be considerably more interesting . . . All the material has been carefully read by the entire S & S staff and while they all respect the aim of the book, they are unanimous in feeling that your stylistic approach is pretty dull . . . Remember: Short paragraphs, shorter sentences, . . . [and the] absence of polysyllables . . . Introduce humor

> wherever possible . . . [And] have more and shorter chapters, rather than fewer and longer ones.[25]

Adler heeded Kip's advice. Indeed, for this and every future book he wrote for larger, popular audiences he would increasingly follow Fadiman's prescriptions.

Even so, Adler had difficulty learning to write in a popular idiom. Although nearly all of his community of discourse read *How to Read a Book*'s early drafts, including Hutchins, Arthur Rubin, and Van Doren, Adler made a special effort to save comments from Fadiman and his wife, Polly. He clearly valued their advice. In August 1939, Polly offered the following: "One of the most irritating, though minor, faults in this book is the barrage of unnecessary rhetorical phrases of formal logic. They often make the text seem heavy." She continued, "Sometimes Mort's tone is needlessly contentious"; "Most of the references seem to be to 'Summa Theologica' and Aristotle's 'Ethics' and 'Poetica' etc. The general effect is unattractive." Her final analysis was that "[i]n spite of [my] carping, I enjoyed reading this book enormously . . . But if it is a *popular* book as it now stands, then I'm—just mistaken." Adler did not find Polly's criticisms easy to take, and said so in a letter to Kip.[26]

Whether or not it was the result of an impulse to defend his spouse, Fadiman was also blunt. His own salty comments on Adler's text were more pointed: "Tone a little insulting"; "Your reader doesn't give a damn about your distinguished friends"; "Don't be so fucking *moral*"; "Please throw out *all* cute Latin or French phrases"; "To hell with all of these distinctions"; "Gets wearisome"; and "The effect is schoolmasterish."[27] After some reflection Adler replied with some sweetness and a confession. He wrote: "Please, please apologize to Polly for me. When I finished revising, I found that I had made all the corrections and revision[s] which she originally suggested. She was right on almost every point. I'm a dope for not having seen it at once." Then Adler offered a startling admission: "Worse than a dope, I'm guilty of needing you to reinforce Polly's criticisms before I was willing to see their soundness. I am really contrite, and I want Polly to know it."[28] This is one of the only confessions of sexism evident in Adler's letters. Returning the manuscript, the first lesson was hard for Adler. But if any ill will was felt by the Fadimans, it seems short-lived. Fadiman would continue reviewing drafts of Adler's books for another 40 years. Fadiman helped Adler be a better popularizer.

After publication in February 1940, *How to Read a Book* propelled Adler to the forefront of the Great Books Movement and into a position now referred to as a "public intellectual." The book's publication provided Adler with a tidy vehicle for broadening the appeal of great

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