
Editor's Column

Primal Needs, Primary Concerns

FIRST, SOME demystification is in order. The questions put to me once word came out that I had been named to succeed Domna Stanton as the editor of *PMLA* make it apparent that strange notions about this position are afloat. Of the many who spoke to me at the MLA convention in Washington, DC, regarding my appointment, all but one asked, "When do you move to New York?" This query was often tailed by "And what will your salary be?" Then an intense conversation would ensue, in which I would be urged to use my new and unassailable powers as editor to remake *PMLA* in the image of the Ideal Periodical fondly held in my suppliant's imagination.¹

If those are the common assumptions, these are the blunt facts: there is no salary attached to the editorship; there is no rent-free New York pied-à-terre waiting to accommodate the editor's relocation to the base of operations. I earn my living by teaching at the University of California, in far-off Los Angeles, a long commuter hop from Manhattan. As for having the autonomy of a baroque Sun King or a postmodern Huey Long, those are fantasies others may entertain, not I. Indeed, an agreement to assume the duties of the *PMLA* editorship could be read in one of two ways: as the act of a fool or of an idealist (who in some circles is also accounted a fool). Either way, there is a major lapse in logic if this acceptance is interpreted as a shrewdly calculated move of self-interest. The notion of a *PMLA* editor whose cheeks are flushed with power is a misconception I find fascinating, as I try to comprehend how it ever got lodged in the minds of the MLA membership. If the maxim that best suits the occasion is "Man proposes, God disposes," it is the MLA Executive Council that acts as God, ruling on whatever proposals an editor might lay at its feet.

One final fact for your edification. I am the third in the brief line of *PMLA* editors defined in the modern sense, following John Kronik, who held the post for seven years, and Domna Stanton, who recently

completed her fifth year of stewardship. Except during a two-year period, the oversight of *PMLA* was until 1985 but one of the tasks borne by the executive director; English Showalter was the last to shoulder this dual burden. A most necessary division of labor was put into effect in 1985 when Phyllis Franklin was named executive director and John Kronik stepped in as editor of *PMLA*.

When Kronik announced his newly designated position in March of 1986, he underscored the two facts that have yet to penetrate the general consciousness: the editor's location and limitations. In Kronik's words, sent out from his faculty base at Cornell University, "New routines have solved the logistical challenges presented by my geographical separation from *PMLA*'s offices . . .," while what remained unaltered was the policy that whoever fills the editor's chair must adjust to the fact "that *PMLA*, unlike other journals, is the organ of an association that defines the editor's role and places constraints on him or (one day) her" (147).

I have been groping for an analogy that could clarify the strands that link the MLA Executive Council, the *PMLA* editor, and the general membership. Since the MLA comes complete with a charter, a constitution, and an interrelated set of regulatory bodies, it is a political system, one that commits itself (to quote Kronik) to "equal opportunity" and "democratic selection" (147). As a representative government formed to serve the best interests of its constituents, the president of the MLA and the members of its Executive Council are roughly analogous to the persons this nation's citizenry sends to Washington to tend to presidential and congressional affairs, but there is a difference. Those whom the MLA electorate votes into positions of leadership form a body that conflates the duties and powers held separately in the United States government by the executive and the legislative branches. The MLA Executive Council, presided over by the MLA president, directly fills a series of Cabinet posts, as it were, one of which is the editorship of *PMLA*. The editor, together with the others in this "Cabinet," consults regularly with, and is responsible to, the president and council, just as the president and council are accountable in turn to the association's members, who voted them into office.

It is not for me to speak to the problems and pleasures that attend the unceasing efforts of the MLA's president and council to address the needs of an electorate made up of multiple entitlement groups and lobbyists for a dizzying array of causes. Rather, I shall focus on a few of the concerns that give an edge to the relations between *PMLA* and its hydra-headed constituency, a lively mass of minds numbering over 30,000 whose disparate interests will never be fully satisfied by the essays that appear within any single issue or even over the course of any one year.

Once upon a time, or so it has been claimed, the person of cultivation was interested in everything because capable of knowing everything. Some name John Milton as the last of that breed, although others cite Madame de Staël as the one who marked the moment when the lights

were turned off and the door was closed on the generalist enterprise. Such paragons of expansive knowing appear to have vanished from the earth; nonetheless, when one species becomes extinct, another takes its place. The emergence of the modern specialist scholar has had obvious consequences for *PMLA*'s status as the primary generalist journal answerable to the modern languages and literatures spread wide. Slow at first, this shift accelerated as the years passed, until many a "thankless child" began to cannibalize the parent publication.

As John Hurt Fisher notes in the 1984 centennial issue, the Medieval Academy, a creation of the MLA's Comparative Literature Section, turned aside to launch *Speculum* in 1926. The *Journal of American Folklore* lay in wait to receive essays on the folktale and ballad, although *PMLA* continues to welcome them. Papers on pedagogy of the sort that filled the early issues now have other venues, but *PMLA* is as open as ever to essays on the teaching of literatures and languages, as is made clear by appointments to the journal's Advisory Committee and by the January 1997 special-topic issue, devoted to pedagogical approaches. Scholars in Hispanic and Latin American studies and in the Asian literatures began to seek new homes in specialized journals even though *PMLA* still provides the logical base for work in those areas. There is no question that the decade of social and academic ferment between 1960 and 1970, which witnessed a leap in the MLA's membership from 12,000 to 30,000, simultaneously saw the inception of over two thousand periodicals in fields once largely served by *PMLA* (Fisher 401–02, 406).

Any print periodical, including those nurtured within the academy, is in the business of marketing a product to possible consumers. Not that *PMLA* has to carry the fight into the inner circle of the money market. Since the journal comes as a benefit of association membership, it need not proselytize for subscribers or compete for newsstand sales. Just the same, *PMLA* is unabashedly involved in the competition to capture cultural capital. Compare *PMLA*'s product line to the offerings of boutique journals such as *Representations*, *Style*, *American Literary History*, *Critical Inquiry*, *Callaloo*, or *Signs*—periodicals that speak directly to the needs of distinct groups defined by highly specialized interdisciplinary, theoretical, or ideological commitments. It is not for *PMLA* to be an Armani-style showplace, but neither does it wish to serve as the Kmart of the profession. If I may develop this marketplace image, compare the abundant choices available in any leading emporium to the contents of *PMLA*, with its several floors of high-concept wares punctuated by "islands" that promote special topics and guest columns and with its Forum section operating as customer suggestion box and complaints division. *PMLA* competes by sustaining an intellectual inventory that attracts an extraordinarily diverse spread of readers and contributors. To some this might seem to place the journal at a disadvantage, but I see it differently. In the midst of a welter of contending specialist periodicals, each designed with fairly narrow doorways, there is certainly a place—a

unique place—for an open-access journal like *PMLA*, whose broad entry admits points of view and topics of nearly every kind and scale.

I have been taking a hard look at what an editor of *PMLA* might aspire to accomplish under conditions set externally by the academic culture at large and internally by the association's structure of checks and balances. I have stepped back in time to the originating moments of the association to trace what connections there might be between what the MLA was in the 1880s and what *PMLA* is now, in the final days of the 1990s. We constantly endorse systems (whether social, political, or intellectual) that provide expanded possibilities and inclusion over systems predicated on denials and exclusion. This tendency also motivated founding members of the association, who considered the academic community indifferent or antagonistic to their needs, a situation that soon prompted them to establish a journal in which they could practice the scholarship about which they eloquently preached.

The Modern Language Association was founded in 1883. The openings of the Brooklyn Bridge and the new Metropolitan Opera House and the signing of the Civil Service Reform Bill were the events that resonated in the headlines that year (Stone 325), but the organization's handful of charter members were preoccupied by the lowly status accorded the nonclassical languages and literatures throughout the nation's educational system, public and private, and by their passionate belief in the need to plead the cause of "the living word."² The inaugural volumes of *Transactions of the Modern Language Association of America* contain auroralike moments before volume 4 was designated in 1888 the receptacle for the association's initial selection of scholarly submissions. With this stroke, *PMLA* came into being as the first journal in any English-speaking country devoted single-mindedly to the study of modern literatures and languages, although full acceptance by the mighty of the academy was still to be won (Fisher 398, 399).³

Recognize the genre tradition represented by the papers in volumes 1 and 2, since they share many of the traits found today in annual MLA presidential addresses, editorial comments printed in the *MLA Newsletter*, and reports on Delegate Assembly business. Except for occasional papers devoted to little philological dramas such as the genitive in Old French, the collective singular in Spanish, or "the methods of Wilhelm Scherer as a critic of *Faust*," these essays express an urgency indicating that the early MLA gatherings convened in New York, Boston, and Baltimore served the new organization as opportunities for its members to argue for their cause and to challenge those who would deny their pursuits academic legitimacy.⁴

The material in these inaugural volumes is not entirely overlooked today. On celebratory occasions such as the MLA's diamond jubilee or centennial, commemorators casting benign glances back on the old days often rifle the journal's earliest pages for the pleasure of quaint quotations. Other scholars excavate these volumes for proof of their charges

that the MLA has a long history as an unreconstructed sexist, jingoist, racist, and elitist organization and that *PMLA* is its partner in crime.⁵ I can see myself being prompted by either motive for checking through volumes 1 and 2; all manner of textual evidence lies there for the taking, awaiting whatever exploitative uses scholars will on it. At this time, however, I choose (not, of course, claiming innocence of intent) to survey certain statements from the first two volumes that expose (not, of course, with full transparency) the circumstances that provided *PMLA* its reason for coming into existence.

The 1990s may take exception to the specifics of positions upheld in the 1880s. These early arguments may seem calcified because they appear to have nothing to say to our vital concerns or because the issues involved are all too alive but must now be argued from ideological bases located far from the values voiced by long-dead white men who constituted an intellectual elite even if they chose to see themselves as the excluded rather than the excluders. But unless you (to use Thomas Hobbes's biting phrase) take "sudden glory" in the discomfiture of others, let yourself experience a little of the hurt felt by those who once labored to justify their scholarly endeavors, for that hurt is still at large within the academic world. Our concerns may find their origin in the MLA's primal scene.

Volumes 1 and 2 of *Transactions of the Modern Language Association of America* lay out the tangled strings of the cultural DNA that programmed the divisive issues that rent the academy and the nation's intellectual life throughout the 1880s. Here are three of the central debates that emerge from the pages of these yellowing volumes, together with a sense of the aggrieved feelings out of which the new association shaped its rhetoric of self-justification and aspiration.

First, debates over the merits of the scientific method set the "hard" scholars at loggerheads with "the generalists." The former were usually philologists, priding themselves on rigorous research, strict mental discipline, specialist concerns, whom Gerald Graff calls "the investigators" (55); the latter favored "field studies," which detractors labeled the soft impressionistic musings of belletristic dilettantes.⁶

Second, the Battle of the Books continued to elevate the Classics (the learned dead corpora) over the Mods (the mundane living literatures), long after Swift had been lowered into his grave. This grand-scale war imperfectly masked splits within various sectors of the modern languages: rancor between the "vernacular" (English) and the "foreign" (German and French as the privileged pair, Italian and Spanish two paces to the rear) and anger within the vernacular ranks as practitioners of American English began to rebel against the domination of British English.⁷

Third, the role the academy was expected to take in the world and on the plane of contemporary American affairs was debated. There was no consensus on whether the university should define itself as a training ground for utilitarian skills rather than let itself be seen as an enclave

cossetting literary ditherers or whether it should resist the crass materialism of a degraded society by the cultivation of taste and by contemplation. These controversies subsumed still further tensions: gender-edged attacks against feminized academic subjects and methodologies said to be out of touch with the interests of the “robust personage,” that public citizen responsible for the productive “masculine” work exacted by the nation’s ever-accelerating commercial and international needs, and class-based antipathies that associated the teaching of modern languages and literatures either with the training of moral judgments and aesthetic values that delighted the leisure hours of the gentlemanly class or with the proper schooling of “everystudent,” member of the sturdy cohort en route to careers as the nation’s agronomists, engineers, merchants, and political leaders.⁸

Volumes 1 and 2 are filled with further divisive issues: generational ones, wherein hot words are exchanged over whether the academic curriculum should stay under the control of those who uphold the remembrance of past glories or whether it should be radically reformed to the satisfaction of young men in a hurry to take charge of the future;⁹ geopolitical ones, in which lines are drawn between institutions that define their mission as the elevation of nationalistic ideals and those whose more cosmopolitan vision questions the nation’s growing love affair with imperialist policies;¹⁰ pedagogical ones, setting the ability to deal with written texts against the acquisition of conversational skills;¹¹ curricular ones, concerning the historical point at which nonclassical literatures ought to be introduced into the classroom (with Chaucer or “back there” with the Anglo-Saxon writers?) and the point at which to leave off (with Samuel Johnson or with Tennyson?).¹²

It may come as a surprise that some attention was given to the influence of Native American and black dialects on mainstream vocabularies, pronunciations, and sentence structures¹³—too little notice, of course, since non-European language forms had not gained the recognition needed to bring them into the center of the academic debates of the 1880s. On the other hand, thoughtful consideration was being paid to a related matter that acknowledged the shape changing of all “living” languages. Unlike the law-abiding stability associated with the “dead” classics, modern languages are creatures of flux, forever undergoing transformation by the unruly touch of unexpected linguistic forms. The indeterminacy of languages whose future functions it is impossible to predict made even their champions nervous in the 1880s. In 1890 William James’s *The Principles of Psychology* introduced to the intellectual scene still further evidence of the uncertainty factor, through the book’s exhilarating discussion of streams of consciousness. Over the next two decades the “new” philosophers, scientists, and legal minds advanced other eloquent arguments about the merits of fluidity over fixity. In 1885, however, Franklin Carter expressed an underlying ambivalence over the fact that “Latin and Greek are like the Venus of Melos, not without some loss from the original,

more highly organized type, but still with the calm majesty of antiquity," whereas the modern languages are "these very marbles, broken and pulverized, remade into vessels of use, vehicles of modern thought . . ." (9).

The graffiti recording the anxieties and surges of hope that led to the founding of the Modern Language Association are still traceable on the walls of the academy. Although today's debates are inscribed in different characters—as battles over high and low cultures, tensions between canonized and marginal literatures, struggles by new areas of study to gain recognition, slash-and-burn wars between contending theoretical schools and between theorists and antitheorists—the conflicts of the 1880s are strikingly like those now. To make the likenesses between past and present psychologies of academic exchange even clearer, I conclude with comments from volumes 1 and 2 that take up two further areas of grievance.

Thomas W. Hunt predicted that segregation could be the result of the struggle by vernacular literatures to survive at the fringes of the dominant culture. He recognized that "a persistent denial of the reasonable demands of English may lead to the organization of special schools where it can be taught with sufficient fullness." This, Hunt pointed out, was what the sciences had done when refused access inside "the general sphere of college studies," what French and German studies were currently urging, what "teachers of historical, political, and social science" were advocating when barred from "the general department of philosophical study" at Columbia and the University of Pennsylvania (122–23). Is there not in his projection an anticipation of the programs and centers for the study of the literatures of women, gays, and minorities founded in the 1980s and 1990s to offset the "denial" of these groups' "reasonable demands"? Is not Hunt's portrayal of the redlining of English studies the American version of the debilitating debates held in Great Britain throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in which Oxford was reluctant until 1907 and Cambridge until after 1926 to grant English studies the same recognition accorded to Greats (Doyle; Palmer)?

A charge that continues to perturb those who teach English composition and literature came from yet another sector. Francis B. Gummere asked, Should not the teaching of English be taken seriously at every level; should it not flow in an unbroken line from the secondary school to the college and university? In objecting to the two-tiered, class-ridden system of instruction he found typical of his times, Gummere criticized the universities' arrogant assumption of their scholarly superiority, which caused the children of "the average citizen" to be left in the inept hands of untrained teachers. Gummere argued that instructors of languages should be encouraged to be true scholars at every level, lest they be "like those guides who stand at the entrance of the Louvre in Paris, ready to show one in an hour or two everything worth seeing" (171).¹⁴

These are but a few of the needful issues that occupied the founding members of the Modern Language Association, concerns that spilled over into the pages of the infant *PMLA* after 1888. What is an editor of

PMLA to do now that it is 110 years later and like concerns continue to disturb all who are committed to making the academic life better than it is? Big policy questions are the business of the parent organization, while *PMLA* functions as the site where the scholarly mind continues to have its say, as the journal has ever since 1888. The president and Executive Council of the MLA look after the association's needs in the manner sanctioned by its charter and constitution. The editor of *PMLA* has other obligations to attend to; many of them, although the necessary dogsbody tasks that regularly move the journal into the academic world, pale before the urgency of the editor's role in the selection process by which essay submissions receive full and fair appraisals.¹⁵

Have I any special projects in mind besides continuing to make *PMLA* the meeting place for the open "discussion and sociability" called for by Daniel C. Gilman, president of Johns Hopkins University, as he welcomed those attending the 1886 Baltimore convention (iv)? But of course—else why would I have taken on this assignment? For one thing, I hope to cut into the calumny that *PMLA* scholarship is fusty. (Where *did* that come from, unless from those who have not bothered to read the journal in recent years?) For another, I hope to put a halt to the belief that *PMLA*'s essays are too trendy, by making it clear that the journal seeks out essays that take the lead and spurns interpretative approaches with brief intellectual shelf lives nearing expiration. As for the tensions within the academy over the goods and evils of literary history, let it be known that *PMLA* wishes to print only the best examples of these fields, putting aside whatever sucks blood from any legitimate scholarly pursuit.

I have changes in mind, but it would be premature to announce them since they have not yet received the thoughtful consideration due them by the *PMLA* Editorial Board and the MLA Executive Council. One thing I can promise: despite the constraints placed on any *PMLA* editor, I shall try to act in the most positive sense, as does Isabel Archer in defining her fate. (I am not of the Isabel-as-victim school of interpretation.) Recall the passage from *The Portrait of a Lady* in which Isabel announces to Mrs. Touchett, "I always want to know the things one shouldn't do." After Mrs. Touchett retorts, "So as to do them?" Isabel responds, "So as to choose" (James 93).

MARTHA BANTA

Notes

I wish to thank the Department of English of Brandeis University for inviting me to speak about the concerns, past and present, that have linked the MLA and *PMLA* over the decades; the lively discussion that attended that occasion, in March 1997, helped me prepare this introductory column.

¹In one of those coincidences that confirm one's thoughts, after I had composed this paragraph an MLA member approached me at the Huntington Library and asked if I was back for a while from New York. Puzzled, I said, "Why back from New York?" before I was once again walked through the familiar set of questions about what it means to be an editor of *PMLA*.

²No membership figures for 1883 appear under "Conventions and Membership, 1883–1983" in the centennial issue of *PMLA*. The section cites 126 members for 1884, 184 for 1885, and 234 for 1886. When *PMLA* went into publication in 1888 it had 280 potential readers and contributors. The appendixes to the proceedings of the 1886 convention give the names of all the members and list the persons who attended the meeting ("Members" and "List"). These compilations indicate that the MLA already represented a fair diversity of educational institutions. Although Johns Hopkins University was the leader in the association's founding, the MLA had to attend to other matters than those Johns Hopkins and similar prestigious East Coast institutions had in mind. Besides the members from numerous small southern and eastern schools, others represented a cluster of colleges from the West (in Missouri, Kansas, Iowa, Nebraska), the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the National Deaf-Mute College, and West Point and Annapolis; there was a strong contingent from Wellesley, Smith, and Bryn Mawr; and a noticeable number came from secondary schools.

³The tradition of scholarly publication had been established by the Royal Society in 1665, but Fisher concurs with the crucial distinction that allowed O. F. Emerson in 1908 to call the MLA's journal an innovation (Fisher 398).

⁴The New York gatherings in 1883 and 1884 were attended by 40 and 53 members, 85 went to the Boston convention in 1885, and 198 assembled in Baltimore in 1886 ("Conventions").

⁵Gerald Graff cautions against the hasty appropriation of statements by nineteenth-century academics as examples of ideological wrongdoings, arguing that it "not only reduces a tangled and contradictory complex of ideologies to a single one, but ignores the ways in which an ideology can be deflected or subverted in the process of being institutionalized" (71). Elizabeth Renker, however, points to the sexism that plagued the teaching of the English curriculum in the last decades of the nineteenth century; she is particularly astute on gender imbalances that influenced instruction in American literature ("Resistance" and "Where").

⁶James Morgan Hart, of the University of Cincinnati, was highly sensitive to the possible damage caused to literary studies by the disciplines of logic and rhetoric. Hart hoped that logic's "drift towards mathematics and the experimental sciences" would eliminate its threat, but with rhetoric "the course is not so clear. There are still only too many persons of influence and culture who persist in looking upon the instructor of English literature as necessarily the instructor of rhetoric." In Hart's view, "[l]iterature is thought," whereas rhetoric is "little more than verbal jugglery. . . . Rhetorical exercises are, of course, useful. So are the parallel bars and dumb-bells of a gymnasium. Need I push the comparison farther?" (84–85).

⁷H. C. G. Brandt, of Hamilton College, defied the classical philologists who claimed "that the study of Modern Languages is hardly worthy of the serious pursuit of students and investigators." In his counterattack, Brandt urged his colleagues to desist from teaching the French and German languages "as if they were accomplishments like dancing, fencing, or final touches to be put on (to) young ladies in their seminaries at an extra charge, and on (to) young gentlemen, who have not brains enough to get into college. . . ." Brandt's challenge is characteristic of the times in faulting the feminine and the dilettantish, viewed as much the same (58, 61).

⁸If the European and British languages and literatures had to fight to win respect from the classics, the attention paid to the contributions of American-born writers was almost nonexistent. In asking what "our colleges" are doing "for American Prose and Poetry," Thomas W. Hunt, of the College of New Jersey, lamented the common fallacy "that the mission of America is not literary but industrial; that we are to expect an inferior order of literary art and a sluggish popular interest therein" (129). Francis B. Gummere, principal of the Swain Free School, in New Bedford, Massachusetts, tried to counter the calumny

that university studies are "intellectual luxuries" of little interest to "that robust personage, the 'average citizen,' impatient as he is of all that is recondite and out of touch with the practical" (170). Franklin Carter, president of Williams College, attacked the same problem from another angle. He wished modern languages to be studied "not mainly for form" but for content; such an approach would convince young men preparing for careers in "scientific research or in philanthropic conflict with modern evils, 'men who have no time to waste,'" of the importance of the modern languages. Earnest students given this training would banish the degrading associations between French instruction and "lingual, pedal and manual gymnastics" or "pronunciation, dancing, and chirography" and between the title "Italian professor" and the teaching of "the language of Dante and the music of the banjo" (9, 12).

⁹John G. R. McElroy, of the University of Pennsylvania, itemized the differences a few years of age could make in how instructors responded to bringing English studies into the curriculum: "The advance marked by these concessions is viewed by middle-aged men among us with either keen satisfaction or pronounced disfavor; young men who know the American school and college of thirty years ago only by hearsay, can hardly comprehend it; while certain worthy, but long-antiquated souls will never realize it, however deeply the conviction is borne in upon them that the world does move, and that a new history of man has been written since they were awarded their diplomas" (196).

¹⁰Rejecting the notion that humanistic studies might be shunted aside in a complex period of transition, F. V. N. Painter, of Roanoke College, and W. T. Hewett, of Cornell University, predicted that "the study of the modern languages is to occupy a larger place in education in this country than ever before," because of "the enlarged intercourse of nations" (Painter 84; Hewett 25). Reliance on "the living thought of each nation" encourages the "arbitration of differences, and friendly consultation in questions of disputed rights," bringing into "a union of sympathy and genial interest states which have hitherto stood apart" (Hewett 25). This benign view of America's global expansion and of the missionary role to be played by modern language studies requires heavy revision today, but the world of forces and movements that obliges the scholar to beware of becoming "an anachronism," described in the 1880s, continues to pose questions of reciprocity between international affairs and "the aims and methods of collegiate instruction" (Painter 90; Hewett 25).

¹¹Brandt disparages "the utilitarians taking the 'bread and butter view' of our study. Even if they are the devotees of another science, they do not hesitate to put themselves on a level with the merchant and the traveller, who want a little French and German, 'just enough to get along, you know.'" The "trouble with our teaching of modern languages is, that it is loose, random, unsystematic. This trouble is partly due to the fact, that our students come to us with such various objects in view. One wants to *speak* French only, the other to *read* it only, and only Prose at that, so that he can read French scientific books and journals. The third wants to study it thoroughly, the fourth wants its literature and its philology. . . . The student who wants only to speak French, that is, to acquire a couple hundred phrases and a vocabulary to talk about the weather and all kinds of 'small talk,' has little claim upon the instructor in a high-school, college or university" (58, 59).

¹²Before getting the chance to determine which temporal boundaries to place around the humanities curriculum, the English faculty had first to win from the college administration the right to offer two courses in the "vernacular" during any academic year. Should this right be won, instructors next had to determine whether to commence with Spencer, pause at Milton, and then close out with Johnson. Were they so fortunate as to be given the luxury of teaching three consecutive courses, they had to ask whether Wordsworth should lead off the final stretch and, if Wordsworth, where they were to conclude if not with "the idyllic school of Tennyson." As Hart observed in 1885, in terms still familiar in the 1990s, "[We] are at this moment living in a new [literary] period, which has just begun and which is slowly and unconsciously evolving something, the precise shape of which no one foresees. For this reason, I should be loath to undertake any work later than Tennyson's *Idylls*, or to undertake Browning at all in the class-room. Although Swinburne and Morris are attractive, they will lead me, neither they nor I know whither" (90). If Hart was undecided

about which moment would best conclude his survey, he was equally unsure about where to commence. "I must confess that everything anterior to the Conquest is as foreign to our way of thinking as if it had been expressed in a foreign tongue. It is more foreign even than the thought of the Greeks and Romans. I do not see what literary *culture* our undergraduates can possibly derive from any English writings anterior to Chaucer's" (86). Hart's admission that even Chaucer is "not wholly one of us" and that post-Tennysonian writers are unknown quantities points toward the instructor who still worries about pushing the curriculum of American literature back to Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca or forward to Derek Walcott.

¹³Alcée Fortier, of Tulane University, offends by his racist condescension toward the Delta blacks, while A. Marshall Elliott, of Johns Hopkins University, is far more objective in the value he gives to the exchanges taking place between the French Canadian idiom and Huron-Iroquois language patterns. Elliott urges scholars "to move on to a treatment of those special linguistic phenomena which were the natural resultant of a fusion of the complex, varied and heterogeneous ingredients of speech which were brought together in this new civilisation. . . . The superposition of so many different speech varieties, the crossing and re-crossing of this language trait with that other of tradition, the squeezing of old material into a new dress, and refitting of the same to it, the warping of well established laws of development, the requiring of certain grammar categories to perform new functions, the mingling of the old with the new and of the new with the old in language and dialect, sometimes the one predominating, sometimes the other,—these are natural results and offer only a few points of view from which the investigator has to scan a material that is still so plastic, so fraught with the element of change that before he is done handling it, he is conscious of the possibility of conditions arising other than those in which he has just considered it" (160–61).

¹⁴Faulty instruction during the early years contaminates instruction at the advanced stage. One irate Harvard professor complained that every year since his institution started testing English skills in 1871, students turned in essays that "would disgrace a boy of twelve; and yet the college cannot be blamed, for she can hardly be expected to conduct an infant school for adults." These observations, by A. S. Hill in an article first published in *Harper's Magazine* (June 1885), are quoted by McElroy (199).

¹⁵At the micromanagement level, the editor attends to a flow of correspondence, writes up reports, arranges the three annual Editorial Board meetings and tends to their aftermath, hosts a series of sessions at the MLA conventions that spread the word about what *PMLA* has to offer, contributes the Editor's Columns, and implements the journal's other regular features (the Forum, the special-topics issues, guest columns, the Criticism in Translation series, and pieces occasionally teased out of honorary members and fellows).

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