

To the Editor:

In her 1998 Presidential Address, Elaine Showalter recognized the exhilaration of teaching graduate students, who, in turn, are perceived as wanting only jobs as “rewarding” and “prestigious” as those of their teachers in research universities (323). While suggesting that graduates seek high-powered jobs in foundations, government, or the media, Showalter gives little attention to teaching careers at liberal arts colleges, state colleges, and community colleges throughout the country; in fact, she doesn’t mention the thousands of jobs in community colleges at all. As a faculty member at Community College of Philadelphia since 1975 and as a member of the MLA’s new Committee on Community Colleges, I believe that teaching at community colleges can be not only worthwhile but also a source of the professional and intellectual exhilaration Showalter so rightly wants graduate students to discover.

Of course it is worthwhile to teach introductory courses. Students’ first college teachers are the profession’s connection to American society as a whole. To adapt Martha Nussbaum’s defense of higher education, community college humanities faculty members develop adults’ capacity to examine their own beliefs and traditions critically, to recognize in imaginative literature their ties of concern to human beings throughout the world. Students are drawn to teaching careers not just with hopes of winning title, salary, and fame but also with idealistic and realistic goals of bringing change, pleasure, and understanding to the diversity of adults who seek out higher education.

For many full-time faculty members, the material rewards at community colleges are comparable to those at other colleges. But I admire the graduate students at the 1998 MLA meeting who wanted to unite with other MLA members to ensure that altruism does not lead to the lifestyle of a monk. It is deeply frustrating to be one of the numerous teaching assistants and part-time instructors teaching freshman English courses, both at research universities and at community colleges, when tenure-track positions are relatively scarce. Elaine Showalter acknowledges the problem of applicants’ accepting “any working conditions in order to stay in the academy” (325), but she dismisses unionization too lightly. I did not relish the way I acquired leadership skills by organizing an adjunct bargaining unit for eight years after getting my PhD in English from the University of Pennsylvania. But organizing picket lines and striking were the only effective ways to gain the creation of more full-time tenured positions. And it was only after union organizing that my job security allowed me to

complement teaching with the variety of work available at one community college: coordinating a teaching center, chairing the English department, directing the college’s accreditation review, and now designing and leading grant projects in international studies.

Besides unionization, we need all the alliances the MLA has been forming with other professional organizations (as Phyllis Franklin summarizes in the Report of the Executive Director, 114 [1999]: 398, 404). For positions at community colleges to renew us intellectually, reward us, and let us participate in activities that can shape our country and the world, the work of existing organizations needs to be supported and extended. The MLA’s own ADE and ADFL have provided models of four-day national seminars where department chairs at all types of institutions, including community colleges, share research and ideas; these gatherings help experienced faculty members (not new PhDs) become administrators with national impact. The National Endowment for the Humanities and the East-West Center in Hawaii have been vital in bringing professors together from every type of college to conduct research and develop curricula and interdisciplinary courses. In recent years the United States Department of Education has also become a resource for the transformation of community college curricula by including languages and literatures of Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America. The NEH, the East-West Center, and the Department of Education all recognize the significant role community college faculty members can have in shaping public opinion and policy.

Research universities have been crucial to our faculty development projects. Some, such as the University of Chicago, Columbia University, and the University of Hawaii, have long been creative in reaching out to community college professors by providing scholars for seminars and consultants to grant projects. Alliances among colleges are growing. After four years of support from grants for over fifty English professors at Community College of Philadelphia, both tenured and adjunct, we have developed camaraderie while discovering alternatives to specialist research and publication.

We need the help of our academic leadership to continue to make college teaching attractive. Elaine Showalter should not have used the word “herded” when she talked about encouraging students to take teaching positions in the variety of our country’s colleges (323). At Princeton she participated in one of the best faculty development programs in the country, the Mid-Career Fellowship Program for Community College Faculty. She has been part of a group that for over twenty years has invited community college faculty members to revel in the

worldly pleasures of Princeton's architecture, libraries, and academic debate. Using released time to attend classes at Princeton enabled me to return to my community college and create a course on women in literature and also to pair Jane Eyre with her rebellious contemporary Frederick Douglass in world literature, interdisciplinary humanities, and even remedial writing courses.

When Elaine Showalter asked me to read my feminist satire on *The Island of Dr. Moreau* to her class on the fin de siècle, she invited me to share in the pleasures of challenging old canons and older gender perceptions that used to separate, stratify, stigmatize. Research universities are like the old literary canon—other genres of colleges need recognition, analysis, and connection. At Princeton I saw her practice what she has preached; now, with her well-deserved prestige, she should lead us all to preach what she has practiced.

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To the Editor:

Thanks to Elaine Showalter for her favorable mention in her Presidential Address of the Master of Arts Program in the Humanities at the University of Chicago (324). For the record it should be added that Lawrence Rothfield has been codirector of this program along with me and has contributed greatly to its success.

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## De Quincey and Kant

To the Editor:

I found much food for thought in Paul Youngquist's "De Quincey's Crazy Body" (114 [1999]: 346–58). Unfortunately, Youngquist's primary source of evidence, "The Last Days of Immanuel Kant," is not De Quincey's original composition but a translation of Ehregott Andreas Christoph Wasianski's *Immanuel Kant in seinen letzten Lebensjahren* (1804; *Immanuel Kant, ein Lebensbild*, ed. Alfons Hoffmann [Halle: Peter, 1902]). This fact invalidates much of Youngquist's argument, since nearly every feature of "The Last Days of Immanuel Kant" that Youngquist cites as evidence of De Quincey's attitude toward Kant is taken directly and without substantial alteration from this memoir written by Kant's former student.

Thus, the decision to ignore "the intellectual achievements that made Kant's name famous," as Youngquist puts it, is not De Quincey's but Wasianski's, as is the "audacity" of this "account of Kant's senescence, illness, and death" (347). It is Wasianski, not De Quincey, who "describes the great philosopher's preparations for bed" "[i]n tender detail" (347; Wasianski 301–05), who emphasizes "the severe regularity of Kant's habits," who notes the contribution that "the uniformity of [Kant's] diet" made to "lengthen[ing] his life," who is "especially fascinated by that diet," if anyone is, and who describes in circumstantial detail Kant's popular dinner parties (348–49; Wasianski 293–99).

It is Wasianski, not De Quincey, who, in Youngquist's words, "takes more than a little delight in describing Kant's most striking physiological trait. He did not sweat. Seventy-five degrees Fahrenheit was the customary temperature of his rooms, and he was never known to perspire" (349). "Weder in der Nacht noch bei Tage transpirierte Kant," writes Wasianski. "Auffallend war es aber, dass er in seinem Wohnzimmer eine beträchtliche Wärme ertragen konnte und sich unglücklich fühlte, wenn nur ein Grad daran fehlte. 75 Grad nach Fahrenheit musste der unverrückte Stand seines Thermometers in diesem Zimmer sein, und fehlte dieser im Juli und August, so liess er seine Stube bis zu dem erforderlichen Standpunkte des Thermometers erwärmen" (305). Here is De Quincey's translation: "Kant never perspired, night or day. Yet it was astonishing how much heat he supported habitually in his study, and, in fact, was not easy if it wanted but one degree of this heat. Seventy-five degrees of Fahrenheit was the invariable temperature of this room in which he chiefly lived; and, if it fell below that point, no matter at what season of the year, he had it raised artificially to the usual standard" (*The Collected Writings of Thomas De Quincey*, ed. David Masson, vol. 4 [Edinburgh: Black, 1897], 14 vols., 339–40). This sample is characteristic of De Quincey's method throughout: except for rhetorical flourishes, transpositions, and paraphrase, he adheres faithfully to Wasianski's narrative.

The following three passages from De Quincey, quoted by Youngquist on pages 349 and 350, are direct translations from *Immanuel Kant in seinen letzten Lebensjahren*:

De Quincey: "As the winter of 1802–03 approached, he complained more than ever of an affection of the stomach, which no medical man had been able to mitigate, or even to explain" (357).

Wasianski: "Bei herannahendem Winter klagte er mehr als sonst über jenes Übel, das er die Blähung auf dem Magenmunde nannte, und das kein Arzt erklären, vielweniger heilen konnte" (370).