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It will surprise no one when I say that English studies is a nation divided. While many of us have a stake in conceiving of "English" as consisting of literary or cultural criticism, we know that the majority of our profession teaches writing (even those who earned their degrees in literature). That this division is described as separating literary study from composition teaching accentuates the related divide within literary studies that concerns me here: the split between our work as teachers and our work as scholars.[1] While teaching literature is what faculty get hired to do, it would be merely disingenuous to argue that teaching literature—at least at major research universities—is the primary focus of faculty attention or what most faculty get rewarded for doing or writing about. "My work" usually means research and writing as opposed to work in the classroom or service to department or university. But what is most remarkable about this obvious fact of university life is that despite professional devaluing and recent years of attack on the professoriate for not caring about teaching, "my work" normally waits in second place after dedicated, even passionate commitment to students and teaching. Even those who measure academic success, as most do, by the number of course releases they get and the number of competitive leaves they can win tend on the whole to take teaching very seriously. That's lucky.

Teaching, of course, can be very rewarding, personally and intellectually. But the systemwide incoherence between the work honored (and for many most desirable) and the classroom work for which professors are ostensibly hired reveals itself particularly in the nature of professional academic writing. There, a deep schism emerges between writing about teaching and writing about literature (or now, predominantly, writing about culture). Prestigious professional journals virtually never publish material on the teaching

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of literature. Essays about teaching are often regarded as the academic equivalent of “how-to” literature, not intellectually strenuous, not, somehow, very serious.

Paradoxically, teaching at the university level has never been associated with training for teaching. One studies the subject, not the subject’s pedagogy. My experience is that the best scholars and teachers deeply distrust efforts to make teaching itself a subject of study. For some, teaching remains an art, not to be taught; but even for those who are rather businesslike and unsentimental about it, it has not seemed a subject worthy of their critical and scholarly talents. The much disrespected work of schools of education seems for many to be sufficient evidence, if evidence be needed, that making education a subject produces Mickey Mouse courses and is intellectually trivial and debasing. One doesn’t have to look too far to notice how many university English departments are divided into two nations: the part that teaches writing and is therefore also likely to be concerned with the teaching of teachers, and the part that “does” literature.

Since the great population explosion inside higher education after World War II, the “apprenticeship” available in most large departments for graduate students learning their trade has seemed rather more a service to the university than to graduate students. The “teaching assistantship” has developed into a way for the university to get relatively inexpensive labor for fulfilling its mandate to teach all incoming students the skill of writing. “Assistants,” as everyone knows, usually have full responsibility for their classes, whether or not they have enough training in teaching or writing to conduct them knowledgeably. As programs become more self-conscious about their professional responsibilities and recognize the need to prepare graduate students to have the greatest possible chance on the awful job market, they frequently develop supplementary training in teaching. These efforts have often been very impressive, but the development of teaching assistantships in the great research universities has had to do less with the profession’s belief that training in the classroom is necessary than with the sheer economic value of graduate students’ teaching power.

The simple existence of the large cadre of teaching assistants and part-time writing teachers in English departments intensifies the divisions between the two nations while it does nothing to increase the seriousness with which the university and its full-time faculty regard teaching. Until recently, it was not unusual simply to dump young graduate students into classrooms, departmental syllabi in hand. Now, a newly enforced professionalism is giving some increased prestige to such work. Prestige is normally marked by some rite of passage, in this case explicit training. However, the training is almost universally concerned with teaching "composition," as our teaching assistants serve their "apprenticeships" in writing classrooms. The class divisions between literary people and teaching (usually writing) people remains.

One becomes a star, in the sense that David Shumway (1997) describes in his essay in the recent special "teaching" issue of *PMLA*, not by teaching well—although "stars" are not infrequently good teachers on the side—not by thinking long and brilliantly about teaching, but by working the sexiest areas of cultural or literary study, and in the flashiest way. As teachers, stars can attract attention only by doing the sorts of things in the classroom or with students outside of the classroom that make the academic gossip columns. At one's home university, it is possible to win the local best teacher award or develop a reputation among undergraduates that earns encomia in student evaluations. But almost everyone in academia knows that this is not the path to true stardom and that faculty who win such awards sometimes lose out at tenure time.

So, for as long as I have been in the profession, there has been an obviously internal division, often even in the work of individual faculty, between dedication to teaching (which may in some instances impede professional success) and dedication to research and criticism (which is the preliminary condition for stardom). The effect has been to produce something like an intraprofessional class war: the new elite may not be genteel, may write about popular culture in its seediest moments and get down and dirty about sex and dress, but they are definitely not the proletariat of the professoriate. While they may sometimes involve themselves, even strenuously, in teaching-related work and writing, even preside over committees that train young teachers in the department, they do this in addition to the work that gains them stardom. The point is not that faculty do not work at teaching or value it, but that the profession systematically divides the two activities and rewards one half much more than it does the other, even when both activities are done by the same faculty member. Only after a faculty member has made a name in research can he or she feel free to write about teaching.

While the outlines of the combat have fluctuated, particularly in recent years when universities, under siege, have begun to put strong pressure on their faculty to increase and improve teaching, it is still virtually impossible to win tenure or significant raises at major research universities on the strength of great teaching without "significant" publication. The Modern Language Association (MLA) is the predominant organization of scholars, researchers, and students of literature; the National Council of Teachers of English is the organization of "teachers." Although, of course, there is probably much overlap in membership in those organizations, the highest salaries surely go to those who write about literature rather than to those who write about teaching. Moreover, insofar as there have been serious efforts to think through questions of teaching, they have been largely about the teaching of composition. Ironically, in the dwindling job market there has been an increase in jobs available in composition, but this has not, to my knowledge, significantly shifted the career paths, the rewards structure, or the shape of graduate education. The question of pedagogy gets attached, in most instances, to the teaching of writing, and the institution as a whole remains doggedly loyal to the patterns of literary training.

At a time when the very nature of the discipline is being called into question, when what is to be taught and how it should be taught are in dispute, when the graduate programs that, in fact, are sustained by the writing programs are failing to find jobs for their students and are forced to rethink their work, it is simply an anomaly that teaching is not often a serious subject of the kind of research that gets the highest rewards. Recently, stimulated by the collapse of the job market and by the theoretically driven destabilization of the work and even of the subject of literary departments, the crisis of professional identity has led to a spate of well-respected histories of English as an academic subject. As the subject of literary departments shifts from "literature" to "culture," teaching, as a manifestation of culture, might well become fair game for critical inquiry. Thus far, even that hasn't happened very much.

The fact that the profession is beginning to recognize that literary scholarship can no longer be disentangled from teaching in the way the current reward system encourages was marked by the decision of the editorial board of *PMLA* to publish an issue on the teaching of literature. I will be taking *PMLA*'s decision as representative in order to focus on the ways in which the current system is too deeply engrained in the profession to be remedied by good intentions. This may entail dwelling on it rather more than, perhaps, the product of that decision itself intrinsically deserves. The editorial board's decision, which led to the *PMLA* teaching issue of January 1997, was deeply well intentioned—a potentially important response to the crisis of disciplinary structure and commitment that I have been describing. But the result was interestingly symptomatic of the culture of the two nations: an unfortunately, but probably predictably heterogeneous collection of essays that failed entirely to address the fundamental problems that the current state of teaching in the university produces. While universities, often under the pressure of state legislatures, have been enjoined to pay more attention to undergraduates and occasionally, as my university did, embarrassingly declare a "year of the undergraduate," the traditional hierarchy of the two nations remains in place: teaching and writing about teaching don't get one far toward promotion in large research universities where most graduate students are trained and most stars shine.

So things stay in place in the "Teaching of Literature" issue. Virtually nobody, it seems, has figured out how to meet the reasonable and rigorous scholarly demands that are built into the procedures of *PMLA* and at the same time talk about teaching. Such failure simply reproduces the condition of the current system. Certainly, it is neither a mark of bad faith nor the fault of the MLA; it is, rather, an indication of a discipline-wide, thoroughly systemic failure to engage with pedagogy, and particularly with pedagogy of junior-division courses. The tenuous connection between "my work" and teaching leads to what feels in one's professional day-to-day life like a standoff: literary scholarship and scholarship of pedagogy are at odds, and the MLA editorial board could not find, in a large submission of manuscripts on teaching that were evoked by the announcement of the teaching issue, more than two that were up to the standards of *PMLA* scholarship. Literary scholarship and pedagogy are exposed again as at odds.

For years now, Gerald Graff has been pushing a solution to a pedagogical problem that is also a problem of criticism—how to handle the diversity of ways people engage texts or employ theory. "Teach the conflicts," Graff has insistently argued. That, at least, is a serious idea about pedagogy that is linked to questions of literary study, and it points to a possible way to make the teaching of lower-level courses an intellectually satisfying occasion for aspiring "stars." But there is very little critical or empirically based writing that works out in some detail what teaching the conflicts—however theoretically attractive on the surface—might entail. Even here, the theoretical possibilities remain more interesting to the profession than the problems of day-to-day engagement in the classroom, or at least more interesting than any discussion of what those problems might be. "Teaching the conflicts" works more effectively as a theoretical answer to a set of questions forced on us by "theory" than it does, so far at least, as a pedagogy enacted daily in classrooms and reflected on in writing by teachers and critics.

The teaching/research split then remains firm. As I read the *PMLA* effort, it has done, with the best of intentions, more harm than good, demonstrating the weakness of the profession's commitment to teaching in the very act of emphasizing that commitment. And the teaching/research split continues to hurt the profession in the eyes of an uncomprehending lay public;

equally important, it sustains an artificial and potentially demoralizing division in the work of the professoriate. It has, among other things, pretty much forced upon the world of composition a professionalization at least as intense as the professionalization of literary study, and one that increases the balkanization of the work of English departments (to the point, of course, where it has become in many places a question whether English departments ought to be the home of writing programs).

In research universities the argument in defense of a heavy emphasis on research is often that one cannot be a good teacher without being a good researcher. Nobody, however, claims that you cannot be a good researcher without being a good teacher. But in our professional literary studies journals, there is surprisingly little literature about the way research and teaching interact, and virtually none that could in any serious way be taken as a "contribution to knowledge," as a significant piece of research or analysis of the sort routinely accepted in the pages of *PMLA*, *Critical Inquiry*, or *Representations*. The profession badly needs a whole new orientation toward the question of the relation between teaching and scholarship, and a whole new genre that would make it possible to see discussions of teaching as integral to the development of knowledge.

The teaching of literature issue of *PMLA* forces to the surface the question of whether, within the profession's standards of publication as they are presently conceived, it is possible for scholars and scholarly journals to contribute significantly to the sorts of reconsiderations and reevaluations of teaching necessary now. The profession's more or less "official" publication might not be the place to do it. But of course, if not there, where? The profession needs, for symbolic and quite practical reasons, to develop a genre or genres and a language that would make publication of essays about the teaching of literature the norm, not the exception.

The question is not the local one of whether such a new kind of writing might meet the standards of *PMLA*. The question is whether the profession can ever see itself as intensely committed to its responsibility to teaching as it is to research. John Guillory has been at work for several years now on a study of the institution of the teaching of English and, on the MLA Committee on Professional Employment, his ideas were extremely important. Much that I say here has been influenced by discussion with Guillory. As I understand him, Guillory believes that the question is really whether the profession and the institutions in which it professes can sufficiently reimagine themselves so that teaching courses at the freshman and sophomore level might be intellectually interesting to faculty, and might even be coherent with "my work." We agree that the institution of the teaching of English must be understood as a complex system, each part of which is dependent on the others — so, for example, the writing program depends on the graduate program, since graduate students staff a significant proportion of the classes. The system — the two nations — entails two "tiers," and it is a condition of success at universities that one does not teach at the lower levels. But this two-tier system is both intellectually incoherent and a self-perpetuating machine for producing too many Ph.D.'s for too few jobs in upper-division and graduate work. Only a change in valuing work in lower-division courses (and the change would entail things like tenure and higher salaries and the usual academic rewards) would conduce toward a change in the system and a breakdown of the two tiers.

Making lower-level teaching interesting to faculty whose careers depend on criticism, research, and theory is not at all impossible. It only seems so because the current system, dating back to post–World War II expansion of the universities, has so persistently removed senior faculty from lower-division courses. This is not to suggest that there was some golden age of harmony between teaching and research, but it is to emphasize both the intense professionalization of literary study and the increasing corporatization of the university (a development that, in its determination to economize, ironically strengthens the two-tier system by devaluing lower-level work with underpaid part-timers and graduate students). Professionalization of what had been a rather more genteel occupation entails efforts to justify the specialness of the work to a grudging public and to find ways to get jobs for an oversized graduate student population.

It is, of course, too late to resist professionalization: it is necessary and it is not a sin or symptom of the refusal of the professoriate to face its dependence on institutions that are paid for by a public not too happy with its theoretical and political leanings. But the more intense the professionalization within the overwhelmingly competitive research market, the further away "my work" gets from teaching literature and writing, especially at the lower levels. Why are rewards distributed that way? And why aren't the kinds of substantive literary and pedagogical problems that arise in, say, a sophomore survey intellectually engaging and rewarding? Might it not be the case that the experience of actually trying out the ideas of "my work" for undergraduates at any level could tell us something important about what the problems with the ideas might be? Isn't it the case that virtually every teacher has those moments in classes where they might be least expected, when a recalcitrant idea suddenly takes shape freshly and usefully? And isn't it professionally useful and intellectually important to teach things "not in my specialty"?

Surely, some attention to what it means to help the uninitiated understand ideas new to them and more difficult than they are used to is a prerequisite, or ought to be, of becoming a university teacher. The two-tier system encourages a theoretical hermeticism for which literary intellectuals have been chastised mercilessly during these "culture wars," not always undeservedly. It is a commonplace that within the scholarly universe of the profession, knowledge about teaching does not for the most part count as "knowledge." This is not a "policy," of course, and I don't mean these remarks to minimize the overt commitments of thousands of professors and of the MLA itself to the importance of teaching. I am talking about a system that cannot be revised by means of individual, voluntary acts of goodwill. There are many books devoted to teaching particular literary works or even to teaching theories or particular critical orientations. But everyone seems to know that such books don't count in the advancement of careers, particularly at research institutions.

Teaching literature is a subject, and a difficult one. Doing it well requires scholarly and critical sophistication, but it also requires a clear idea of what literature is, of what is entailed in reading and criticizing it. It requires, in fact, some very self-conscious theorizing. But beyond the questions that ought to feed any serious critic's sense of what doing literature might mean, there are questions about the relation between such sophistication and the necessities of the classroom: what, how, and when are students most likely to learn? The reality of engagement with students makes the already difficult questions about the nature of literature and literary study even more difficult than they seem at the level of high theory, in graduate seminars, at international conferences.

These considerations lead me to a preliminary but inescapable question. I put it first, rather crudely, in my own terms: without a belief in the reality and importance of literature as a subject for study and a corresponding willingness to attend to things "literary," isn't it difficult to justify both to the public and to ourselves the existence of departments of "literature"? Is it possible to be clear about teaching, to get much beyond the "how-to," if one does not know what one is supposed to be teaching and for what purposes? Again, I frame the question not as a covert call to some mythical good old days but to raise a problem that, in the muddiness of quotidian classroom work, departmental politics, and disciplinary conflict is not sufficiently foregrounded.

For many, the return-to-literature movement is a movement of reaction back to the National Association of Scholars and to the conservative forces that, during the hottest years of the culture wars, were finding daily ways to mock recent developments in criticism and theory. The idea that literature has lost its traditional value in a newly multicultural and technological society is taken as a good thing by many who see the study of literature as an engaged and heavily politicized study of culture; to conservative critics, the idea that literature might be reduced to "cultural capital" from its position as the bearer of universal values is simply unacceptable. Thus, the movement in literature departments toward cultural studies seems incompatible with the recent explosion of confessions from within academia that, after all, "I love literature." Frank Lentricchia's (1996) notorious confession in *Lingua Franca* that he is unhappy with his role in the propagation of theoretical and political approaches to literature and culture is not—despite the fact that, yes, I, too, love literature—where I want to go. I welcomed his determination to teach literature, but I was shocked by his mystification of it, his refusal to talk for a second about the implications of his decision, about what literature might be to deserve such erotically charged privacy and reverence. Going back to literature—as though it has ever been left—requires an expansive sense of it; not an unqualified and unhistorical affirmation of its universal and private value, but a considered reflection on why it matters and what its social value might be. After all, literature is a kind of cultural capital. The existence of a profession devoted to it entails some public justification of its social value.

Cultural studies, probably the most potent critical force of the moment (although moments go fast in academia, and lots of people dismiss them as merely "fashionable"), attracts extremely interesting graduate students and many of the most interesting jobs; that's where the humanities are tending to invest in these years of brutal underemployment. It is to the credit of cultural studies that because of its theoretically justified cultural egalitarianism, it makes teaching a legitimate subject of scholarship. But there are several ironies that attend this possibility: while it can make teaching a subject, it does so in part by finding of only minor interest the nature of the texts themselves; and, in addition, cultural studies has its "stars" with course release and an aversion to teaching lower-level courses, too. That is, cultural studies are as much a part of the system I have been discussing as traditional literary study. Its practitioners would rather publish in *Critical Inquiry* than in *College English*.

It is an irony of the culture wars that one of the strong charges against current work in the humanities is that it no longer teaches values. Obviously, the problem, if there is one, is the reverse—that it does tend to teach values, not secondarily but primarily. The subject of literature is not and cannot be "values," as the rhetoric of the current reaction to horrors like that of the high school slaughter at Littleton, Colorado, painfully insists. Values are obviously and inevitably part of the subject of literature and of the way readers connect to texts. But the teaching of literature is not the teaching of values; it is far more the teaching of how to read, how to understand the relation of language and genre to history, how to work with fictions, symbols, metaphors, how to think about the relation of texts to culture. This view gets me in trouble with William J. Bennett of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and *The Book of Virtues*, with Lynne V. Cheney of the NEH, with the conservative commentators appalled by the idea of cultural capital, but also with the many who are committed to cultural studies as a means to political change.

In the end, what happens to the profession and to the teaching we are supposed to be doing in it is likely to be largely decided by forces well beyond the control of even the strongest energies inside higher education. The present crisis has been shaped primarily by a quarter century of decline in the ability of higher education to employ the people it trains. In more recent years, we have been witnessing transformations in the economy that have led to the imposition of corporate models on the university. We have been witnessing as well, though perhaps too immersed in it to notice very much, a change in the nature of our professionalization. The hierarchy within the profession seems yet more, not less hierarchical, despite the unlamented demise of the old boys' network and the ostensible democratization of the profession by its serious opening to women and minorities. The assumption of most new university hires is that they will have little to do with lower-level undergraduate education as soon as their "work" gets national notice. The star system has structural implications. Big stars get big fees to come and lecture. Part-timers get small fees and no health benefits for hundreds of hours of teaching and grading papers. At the same time, we cannot avoid noticing that classes are getting bigger and the professoriate is shrinking despite wholesale retirements. States, even in the midst of Clintonian prosperity, are feeling overdrawn by university budgets, and a broad public is increasingly eager to tell us how to do our jobs.

That is, these are difficult times, and we have to expect that, at least in state institutions, the professoriate will be defined increasingly by teaching. Necessity might make us do what we should have been doing for better reasons a long time ago, the first time, say, that we noticed that no tenured faculty were teaching at the freshman level, that freshman composition was actually supporting the graduate program by giving students jobs, that former tenure-track lines were being filled by part-timers. The injustices and irrationalities of the system predate the local crisis.

We are teachers. When people outside the university ask us what we do, we say, I teach English, or I teach literature. Only to colleagues do we talk about our "own work." We ought to believe that teaching sophomores and freshman is as good as teaching graduate students, though of course we know that it is much harder. The difficulty of it probably has a lot to do with why we don't in fact believe it and why we were trained not to believe it. We were trained to live in two nations: the pedagogues, who occasionally also write about teaching, and the literary scholars, who don't. If those scholars don't want the language of pedagogy to fall into the wrong hands they need to find ways to make the teaching of all students interesting as well.

At this point I ought to be making specific recommendations. I have discovered that virtually all specific recommendations look merely utopian the moment one thinks about ways to implement them. To decrease the number of part-time teachers and increase the number of tenure-track teachers in the university, for example, ought not to be an unreasonable suggestion. To make that happen, one needs to involve everyone from the dean to the president to the state legislature. Easy enough to say, extraordinarily difficult, if important, to do. So all I can do now is point in directions that I recognize are indeed utopian. They entail a radical transformation in the whole system of graduate training, undergraduate teaching, and professional employment. They are utopian, too, because they entail not merely structural differences but changes of attitudes that run deep into our imaginations of ourselves as professors.

Utopian as that dream is, the most utopian of my recommendations is that the reward system must be changed. Changing the system will require a professionwide commitment to the seriousness of teaching. This means not only the sort of voluntary passion that most faculty have for teaching, but a built-in, systemic commitment. Such a commitment requires a different system of rewards, which must be made commensurate with rewards for research. For this to happen, writing about teaching must become as central to professional life as writing about Renaissance poetry, Derrida, Hegel, or popular culture. The work of teaching and thinking about teaching need to be folded into the most serious critical, theoretical, and scholarly thinking of the university faculty member's "work." Only such changes will make it possible for us to get beyond what is currently unthinkable: that a faculty member might get tenure on the strength of good teaching. Yet most people already know that the idea that people who teach without a record of research accomplishments will inevitably dry up and fail to communicate the most important new ideas to their students is a canard. If good teaching is not systematically rewarded in the university, as it is not, there is something very peculiar about the university.

The change in rewards and writing emphases must, of course, be accompanied by a new attention to teaching as a subject of the graduate work that has always claimed to be training students for careers in teaching in higher education. While it is obvious that the model should not be schools of education, there are already in place many programs that demonstrate that teaching pedagogy to graduate students is both possible and interesting. All graduate programs should include a teaching component as part of the requirements for students. In addition, all departments should make it a requisite that all faculty at all ranks regularly teach lower-division courses. I don't, of course, mean that all lower-division courses should be taught by tenured and tenure-track faculty. Not only is that idea, at large institutions, quite literally impossible, but the interests of faculty in literary research ought not to be lost in a new emphasis on teaching. Indeed, part of what is necessary for the kind of change I am imagining is that faculty see teaching at the lower level as compatible with serious research, and in fact useful to it.

Such changes might help bring about a necessary change in the ethos of departments. Imagine persuading a "star" to come to your university in order to teach the introduction-to-literature course. Imagine the big events of the academic year centered around teaching. Only a change in the reward system might make such things possible. And I am aware that local changes, changes in one department or one group of departments, would inevitably fail. If the profession as a whole continues its system of rewards as it is, any given department that doesn't distribute rewards that way will necessarily suffer.

In the end, it may not be necessary to worry about any of this because the system may collapse from its own incoherence and inefficiency. But it would be nice if, as a profession, we could resolve some of those incoherences ourselves and, on our own hook, bring about change by imagining ways to integrate the full range of teaching into our ways of thinking about literature and culture. I am not sanguine about the prospects, not least because the reward system that has made my own career so pleasant would have to go. It would probably mean more work, even more difficult work, for me. Yet it would in the end be a mark of our success if each of us could say about teaching, that's "my own work."

Note

1. Since the writing of this essay, a large literature has appeared that addresses issues of the kind that I discuss here. For recent important thinking about the divisions in and the prospects for departments of English see, for example, Bérubé 1998, Goodheart 1999, Nelson and Watt 1999, and Woodring 1999.

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