

AMERICAN COUNCIL OF LEARNED SOCIETIES

A MEMBER OF THE INTERNATIONAL UNION OF ACADEMIES



NEWSLETTER

ISSN: 0001-074X

VOLUME XXXIV

WINTER-SPRING 1983

NOS. 1 & 2

Sixty-fourth Annual Meeting of the ACLS

The Charles Homer Haskins Lecture:
The Life of Learning

Maynard Mack

The Scholar and Social Needs

Franklin A. Thomas

Announcements

228 EAST 45TH STREET, NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10017

THE CHARLES HOMER HASKINS LECTURE

Charles Homer Haskins (1870–1937), for whom the ACLS lecture series is named, was the first Chairman of the American Council of Learned Societies, 1920–26. He began his teaching career at the Johns Hopkins University, where he received the BA degree in 1887, and the PhD in 1890. He later taught at the University of Wisconsin and at Harvard, where he was Henry Charles Lea Professor of Medieval History at the time of his retirement in 1931, and Dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences from 1908 to 1924. He served as president of the American Historical Association, 1922, and was a founder and the second president of the Medieval Academy of America, 1926.

A great American teacher, Charles Homer Haskins also did much to establish the reputation of American scholarship abroad. His distinction was recognized in honorary degrees from Strasbourg, Padua, Manchester, Paris, Louvain, Caen, Harvard, Wisconsin, and Allegheny College, where in 1883 he had begun his higher education at the age of thirteen.

The inaugural lecture was given by Maynard Mack, Sterling Professor of English, Emeritus, Yale University. Professor Mack is a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and Corresponding Fellow of the British Academy. He served as President of the Modern Language Association of America in 1970 and was Director of the National Humanities Institute at Yale, 1974–77.

THE LIFE OF LEARNING

i

I am reminded by Professor May's generous introduction of a story about Winston Churchill. After World War II and his stint as prime minister, he was invited back to his old school, Harrow, to give the Commencement address and decided he ought probably to oblige. So he went, weathered an introduction almost as laudatory as the one you've just listened to (except in his case deserved) then got to his feet and said to the graduating class, "Nevah give up!" and sat down.

I think you will agree that this is the most memorable Commencement address you have ever heard as well as perhaps the wisest possible comment on the life that all of us here are engaged in fostering, and that I, alas, on grounds that will be no more apparent to you than they are to me, have been singled out ("fingered" is, I believe, the underworld term) to address: the life of learning. Two explanations have gradually begun to dawn on me. One is that somebody had to fill in tonight, until the big guns could be rolled into place tomorrow at 10:30—or maybe it was just until the bar opened upstairs this evening. The other is that, though I

stand here before my betters, I do not stand here before very many of my elders. I have already drawn down from that mysterious fund with which we all begin three and a half years beyond my Biblical allowance, with the result that on any reasonably quiet afternoon I can hear my brain cells dying so fast they sound like popcorn. And that, I came to realize, is precisely what ACLS had in mind: they wanted to exhibit me, the way the Egyptians used to exhibit a skeleton at the beginning of *their* feasts. “Nothing like a mouldy old professor”, I could hear the Executive Board whispering, “to energize an audience of other professors into taking thought—before they get to be like him.” So do take thought, ladies and gentlemen, golden lads and girls; and as an old gravestone in Exeter churchyard says, “The faults you saw in me, Pray strive to shun; And look at home: There’s something to be done.”

My instructions for this talk urged me to be somewhat personal, even to reminisce. And to tell you the unvarnished truth, I did sit down at first and produce a simply elegant piece of autobiography for this occasion. Very moving, I thought: parts of it would have brought tears to your eyes. But my wife refused to let me give it. She went over it very thoroughly, as she does everything I do. It took her a while, because she paused, dutifully, at all the places where I had written PAUSE FOR APPLAUSE. But when she was finished, she looked up and said, “It won’t go down.” “What won’t go down?” I said, having a certain talent for repartee. “That part about your reading Charles Homer Haskins at 17”, she said. “Nobody’ll believe that. They’ll think you laid it on just for this occasion.” “But I did read Haskins at 17”, I said. “I remember that book of his on the Renaissance of the twelfth century had just come out, and there was a copy of it lying around the house, and I read it—it was my last year in high school. And furthermore, two years later, I even got hold of his *Rise of Universities* and read that. If it hadn’t been for those two books, I might not be in the profession I’m in.”

She was not convinced. “Just the same, they won’t believe it”, she said; “and, besides, I don’t see the point of that long digression you’ve got here on deconstructive criticism and how much it has liberated you and how you owe it all to Swift. You know perfectly well it’s nothing to do with Swift. How many times have you told me it all goes back to Saussure and Levi-Strauss!” “Oh but that’s the theory”, I said. “Swift was the first practitioner. . . . You remember the Three Brothers in his *Tale of a Tub* and how they handle their father’s will? Well—they deconstruct it, and out of that very same text came the Roman Catholic, the Anglican, and the Evangelical churches. If that isn’t liberating, I don’t know what is.” “OK”, she said, with a withering glance, “but a lot of people are going to be shocked to find you’ve gone over to *that* side! Still, I suppose there’s no fool like an old fool. Do as you like; but don’t

forget that what you've already got here is at least an hour and ten minutes too long."

There, I had to admit, was a point. Maybe I *should* try for something a little more astringent, syncopated, compact. Something in couplets maybe, like those of Mr. Pope, of whom I am presently trying to write a biography. A sort of modern-day *Dunciad* perhaps. Alas, it was a dream of glory soon shattered. For almost immediately there leapt to my mind an experience I had had in the far past. I was a sophomore at Yale then, taking a course called English 25, and our instructor assigned us the task of writing a witty couplet in the manner of Mr. Pope, whose poems we were studying. "Just one couplet", he said, for he had given us a great deal of reading to do. "One couplet, and bring it to class next time." So I wrote my couplet and took it to class and showed it to him. He looked at it a very long time—sort of the way I imagine Balboa must have looked at the Pacific. "Well", I finally asked, getting nervous: "How is it?" He didn't answer right away, and when he did, his voice was all choked up. "It's great", he said; "it's absolutely great—if only you could get rid of those first two lines."

At this point, I really began to panic. The 14th of April was closing in, and I had nothing in hand. "Now there's only one thing left you *can* do", I said to myself: "'Look in thy heart and write!' " I had always been a notable phrase-maker. "Yes", I said, "look in the place 'where all the ladders start, In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart' "—coining another phrase. So in the wee small hours of yesterday morning, I had a look around down there, in the rag-and-bone shop, I mean. Very depressing! All I could see was a lifetime's accumulation of clichés, stacked up like garment bags in an attic. I stared at them glumly. Of the three bags nearest me, one, I noticed, was exceptionally small and had a tag on it reading: HUMANITIES: PROSPECTS OF. The next bag was somewhat larger and its tag read: TEACHING: WHAT EVER HAPPENED TO IT? The third bag seemed to be made of some sort of latex. It could obviously expand or shrink. On its tag all I could find was a question mark followed by the words: THE ACADEMY: VERDICT NOT IN. "Well, it'll all have to come from those three", I said to myself. "I haven't got time for any more. And even if they *are* clichés, maybe my audience will remember what an eminent living classicist once said: that it is in the very nature of clichés to be both profoundly true and perpetually forgotten, to the peril of everyone."

So here is a sampling of the contents of those bags, just as they tumbled out. And, first, on the prospects of the humanities. *Not* reas-

surely, the bag said—which, I take it, the agenda of tomorrow’s sessions sufficiently confirms. Still, it is incumbent on at least the humanists among us to take the long view. Have the prospects of the humanities ever been entirely reassuring? I suspect not. We all remember, I dare say, the schoolboy who was asked to write a theme on Socrates, whom many humanists of the past, at least, used to claim as the founder of their sect. (This was in the dear dead days when teachers still asked for themes and read them.) “Socrates was a Greek”, the boy wrote. “He went around giving people advice. They poisoned him.” From the Middle Ages comes a not much more sanguine report. That twelfth-century John of Salisbury, on whom Charles Haskins has so many fascinating pages in the two books I have mentioned, found himself confronted in his own time by attitudes very like those voiced so vociferously during the sixties and seventies in this country, and now not so much voiced as practiced in the nation-wide stampede to vocationalism. “What is the old fool after?” John imagines himself being asked by the vocationalists of *his* day. “Why does he quote the sayings and doings of the ancients to us? We draw knowledge from ourselves. We, the young, do not recognize the ancients.”

It is positively uncanny how history repeats itself. Here is Jefferson writing in his older years to John Adams, former presidents both, in one of the great correspondences of all time:

Our post-revolutionary youth are born under happier stars than you and I were. They acquire all learning in their mother’s womb, and bring it into the world ready-made. The information of books is no longer necessary; and all knowledge which is not innate is in contempt, or neglect at least. . . . When sobered by experience, I hope our successors will turn their attention to the advantages of education.

Nor is any of this altogether different from that battered sign James Reston once reported he found on the study door of a tired old professor at Coe College, Iowa: “We the willing, led by the unknown, are doing the impossible for the ungrateful. We have done so much for so long with so little, we are now qualified to do anything with nothing.”

Obviously, then, we are not the first followers of the life of learning to feel unloved, or to have to realize that we live in a time and place that doesn’t quite know what to make of us. Nor can I think that we will be the last. There is a fundamental ambiguity about the work of the humanities and social sciences that can easily persuade any society to regard them as a threat. Much of the time we appear to be harmless drudges, tunneling about in archives and libraries or among exotic cultures and landscapes on errands as alien to the interests of the corner pharmacist as the Beach Boys to James Watt. As such we are bound to

be regarded by the doers and shakers of the nation with impatient forbearance or at best with affectionate contempt. It is an attitude I dare say many of you have met with in testifying before Congressional committees. Trouble is, however, that every now and then there comes fountaining up out of our tunnels and far voyages, not necessarily an *Origin of Species* or a *Das Kapital* or a *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, but at least some significantly altered perspective, after which nothing ever looks quite the same. Blake, you will recall, registers one such shift unforgettably:

What, it will be questioned, when the sun rises, do you not see a round disk of fire somewhat like a guinea? O no, no, I see an innumerable company of the Heavenly Host crying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty:" I question not my corporeal or vegetative eye any more than I would question a window concerning a sight. I look through it and not with it.

As Blake's example suggests, disturbances of the status quo are by no means confined to the social sciences. Changes wrought by achievements in the humanities and arts may be more leisurely and indirect, but few, I think, would care to argue that the great geniuses in philosophy, history, literature, and in artistic endeavor generally have toiled in vain. They too clarify and challenge, inform and ask questions. And this double function of the disciplines we severally represent here tonight is surely our badge of honor, even if sometimes, when the chips are down, we have also to wear it as our badge—not, I hope, our red badge—of courage.

iii

When I shook out the second bag entitled TEACHING: WHAT EVER HAPPENED TO IT? I had to be considerably more selective. It was full of little notes to myself; for the life of learning, in my case, has been largely synonymous with teaching. My father was a teacher, a teacher in Oberlin, where I grew up, and even a very great teacher, I was eventually forced to conclude, from the dozens upon dozens of former students who bothered to write notes of appreciation after his death. (Most of the rewards of the life of learning, I have noticed, come after death if they come at all.) I could not hope to match his magic, but I knew I had not taught for 42 years without learning *something*. What had I learned?

One thing I remember learning very early, and sure enough it was recorded on the first three-by-five that fell out on my lap. "Never forget", it began—and instantly I realized I was simply confirming from my own experience what Leo Strauss used to tell every aspiring young

teacher—"Never forget that in your classroom there will always be *at least one* student altogether your superior both in mind and in heart. Never forget, either, that there is, or should be, in that classroom a second teacher far more important than you are: a great text. Try not to get in the way of that traffic. Remember Milton's admonition in *Areopagitica*: A good book is the precious lifeblood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life. Be careful not to say anything so egregiously silly as that a great artist—or a great historian or a great philosopher or any other creator of a great text—endured all that toil, and often all that suffering, to make a work that refers to nothing but itself, that is about itself and not about the follies, grandeurs, and miseries of the human lot. Be even more careful not to show off—either your learning, if you have any, or your latest critical panacea. Remember that the more luminous the work, the deeper the darkness an intervening opaque body casts. Try not to be that body. If you actually believe, cross your heart, that Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* is really 'about' metaphor and metonymy, or that Poe's 'The Purloined Letter' celebrates a phallus, try to get off by yourself somewhere and lie down."

What else had I learned? Many things, of course, too obvious to be repeated were set down in those little 5 by 8 messages to myself, and some rather saddening to repeat. One of the latter is the remarkable shrinkage, as it seems to me, if not sometimes the total erosion, of the awe, reverence, wonder, and, yes, love with which the best teachers of my youth approached the books they taught. Doubtless they were less sophisticated than many of their successors. Certainly they were less sophistic. They would have laughed out loud at the idea that it was some kind of status symbol to be called a "research" or—even more ineptly—a "distinguished" professor, if it meant being without students to profess to, or teaching only when and what the whim moved. They would have laughed yet louder at the self-delusion of those who imagined they were "above" teaching undergraduates. "Be prepared for the coming of the Stranger", cries a voice in one of Eliot's choruses from *The Rock*. "Be prepared for him who knows how to ask questions." In the life of learning—institutionalized learning, at any rate—it is the undergraduate who fills the role of the Stranger. It is he or she who will ask you, What good is this stuff anyway? or, Why is the king wearing no clothes? and who are all those people pretending they don't notice? Graduate students never ask such questions. They have already settled down in the village. All they want to know is where is the nearest photocopier or how much is the sewage tax.

So I suppose it is fair to say that the teachers who taught my generation *were* unsophisticated. Yet they did have a firm hold on something

that nowadays appears to be in short supply. One of my earliest memories is of my father coming out of his study, where he had been reading Wordsworth in preparation for a class, with tears in his eyes—a startling experience for a child. And I remember, later on, at Yale, how C. B. Tinker would bring very rare books or manuscripts from his own library to class, and urge us to touch them as if we were in a holy place—as indeed we were: the “holy Republic of Letters,” as W. H. Auden would call it later on. And one thinks, too, of Keats discovering Chapman’s translation of the *Odyssey* and feeling like some watcher of the skies when a new planet swims into his ken; and of Pope at his friend Lord Bathurst’s reading aloud in Greek the scene of Priam’s meeting with Achilles, and being unable to go on; and of Flaubert writing to a friend:

The most beautiful works . . . are serene in aspect, unfathomable. . . . They are motionless as cliffs, green and murmurous as forests, forlorn as the desert, blue as the sky. . . . Through small apertures we glimpse abysses whose sombre depths turn us faint. And yet over the whole there hovers an extraordinary tenderness . . . like the smile of the sun. It is calm, calm and strong.

It is easy to make fun of the metaphors and manners of a former age. But I cannot help wondering if Flaubert’s “extraordinary tenderness” and Pope’s unsteady voice and Keats’s conquistadors staring at each other with a wild surmise, and C. B. Tinker’s trembling fingers and my father’s tears do not all add up to an openness, and a kind of humility, of mind and heart that we could learn from. How rarely now, at least in my discipline, are we willing to let the unfathomable come to us on its own terms. How busily we insist, like Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, on plucking out the heart of mysteries of which we cannot even finger the first stops. How often we seem to value the great works primarily as trapezes to show our agility on the upward swing to tenure. And how very often we reduce them to cadavers by our skills in anesthesia.

A gifted poet of our day, himself a professor of literature, attended not long since a session of papers on Swift, delivered at a typical annual meeting of a typical professional association. After it, he wrote a poem. The commentaries it reacts to may have been good, bad, or indifferent—no matter. For the poet, there had been something terribly missing in that room, which his poem undertakes to restore. Later, he sent the poem to a friend named Wayne Burns, also an English professor who had been at the meeting, inscribed in a collection of Swift’s poems. It reads as follows:

I promised once if I got hold of
This book I’d send it on to you.

These are the songs that Roethke told of,
The curious music loved by few.
I think of lanes in Laracor
Where Brinsley MacNamara wrote
His lovely elegy, before
The Yahoos got the Dean by rote.

Only, when Swift-men are all gone
Back to their chosen fields by train
And the drunk Chairman snores alone,
Swift is alive in secret, Wayne:
Singing for Stella's happiest day,
Charming a charming man, John Gay,
And greeting, now their bones are lost,
Pope's beautiful, electric ghost.

Here are some songs he lived in, kept
Secret from almost everyone
And laid away, while Stella slept,
Before he slept, and died, alone.
Gently, listen, the great shade passes,
Magnificent, who still can bear,
Beyond the range of horses' asses,
Nobilities, light, light and air.

iv

From the pathology of some—not all, but all too many—of our professional meetings, it is an easy step to the pathology of the academy as a whole. (I have reached Bag No. 3.) How long can we safely assume that Congresses, legislatures, foundations, and generous men and women generally will continue to support what we do? Into eternity, we like to think, or at least into its nuclear equivalent, whichever comes first. Yet surely the signs of trouble are multiplying, at least for the humanities and literature, and, so far as I am competent to judge, for some of the social sciences as well. When one reads thoughtfully in the works by Darwin, Marx, and Freud cited earlier, or any of their other works, what one finds most impressive is not the competence they show in the studies we associate them with, though that *is* of course impressive, but the range of what they knew, the staggering breadth of the reading which they had made their own and without which, one comes to understand, they could never have achieved the insights in their own areas that we honor them for. Today, it seems to me, we are still moving mostly in the opposite direction, despite here and there a reassuring revolt. We are narrowing, not enlarging our horizons. We are shucking, not assuming our respon-

sibilities. And we communicate with fewer and fewer because it is easier to jabber in a jargon than to explain a complicated matter in the real language of men. How long can a democratic nation afford to support a narcissistic minority so transfixed by its own image?

A splendid report by John Gerber, published a few years back but as pertinent today as it was then, exposes this flank of our irresponsibility unforgettably. In the word “our” I include only his field and mine, English literature; but I have the strong impression that the shoe fits others too. Though some of you will have seen the essay, I hope you will forgive me if I summarize it briefly for the rest. This time an English professor encounters Socrates in a Greek pub and introduces himself. Socrates makes the predictable comment that now he’ll have to watch his English grammar. The professor makes the predictable reply that English grammar is not his concern—he’s a humanist, he says. “As a matter of fact”, he adds, “we like to think of our English departments as bastions of the humanities.” Upon that cue, Socrates begins. He inquires about the great religious thinkers. “Well, no. We don’t teach them nowadays: the trustees might object.” What about the great philosophers? “Alas, a little too hard for *our* students to follow.” The rhetoricians then: Cicero, Longinus, Boileau, Burke? “No, the speech departments have them.” The ancients? “No, Classics has them.” What about the moderns—the Europeans, the Asians, the Africans? “To tell you the honest truth, Socrates, the people interested in those things have gone off and established departments of Comp. Lit.” “You must have stoutly resisted that move,” says Socrates innocently. “Not at all”, says the professor, “we encouraged it. They wanted their students to read texts in the original!” “But surely”, says Socrates, “you’re interested in language: what do you do about linguistics?” “Not very much, I’m afraid. The study of language has got so scientific we don’t understand it any more.”

After the conversation has run through several further areas of humanistic learning—all of which it turns out, those bastions of the humanities exclude—Socrates interrupts.

Socrates: Do I understand that you English teachers, after giving up the great works of religion, philosophy, and rhetoric, after limiting your literary interests substantially to writings in English, and after jettisoning linguistics, comparative literature, creative writing, speech, journalism, American Studies, the theatre, and oral performance—that after eliminating all these valuable studies from your English curriculum, you are now in the process of eliminating training in writing as well?

Professor: You put it too sweepingly, Socrates, but I guess what you say is more or less true.

Socrates: My only conclusion is that you English teachers have developed the most oversized death-wish that I have seen in the last twenty-four centuries!—Will you join me in a drink?

Professor: Why, yes, Socrates. That's very nice of you. What shall we drink?

Socrates: Hemlock.

Whatever qualifications we might wish to make in Gerber's account, and plainly we are entitled to make a few, his main thesis stands. During my lifetime, we have very considerably lowered our sights on what the life of learning in almost any field entails; and not only our sights but our standards. During the recent unpleasantness, we permitted, or abetted, on most campuses the dissolution of almost every aspect of educational structure—not only distributional requirements, but philosophical, historical, mathematical, scientific, and literary requirements as well—all the while pretending to ourselves and the public that this was some sort of triumph of academic statesmanship rather than the penalty of having so lost our own bearings that we could not agree on what a liberal education should contain. One can only remark with sorrow the similar paralysis in the current *Rockefeller Report of the Commission on the Humanities*. As the *New York Times* reviewer points out, nowhere in that report is it made clear what, exactly, the humanities are, or why, explicitly, they are worth pursuing; and though we all know that in a scattering of institutions some portion of this lost consensus is in process of being regained, much remains to do.

We have likewise lost face, in my opinion, by fostering a vast deal of solemn nonsense about “published scholarship.” To study, to keep learning, to read widely and reflectively: these pursuits are essential to our profession, it goes without saying. I believe, too, that it is crucial to one's intellectual vitality to try to write (when one has something to write worth writing), partly for the same reason that hard physical exercise is important for physical health, partly because there is truth in the old chestnut: how do I know what I mean till I see what I say?

But the qualifying clause is essential: one is to write when one has something to write worth writing. As a contemporary poet once happily put it: “In poetry everything is permitted. With this one condition, of course: you have to improve on the blank page.” For much too long, I think, we have committed the lives of our young people to an idol of our

own manufacture which rewards those who can persuade themselves to go numbly or cynically through the humbug it requires; penalizes those, often our very best, who are unable or unwilling to measure out their minds in three-year book-length sections; and encourages even the most seasoned scholars to blow up into mediocre treatises what might have made acceptable essays. Meantime, how many of us take the pains to share our learning, and the delight and wonder of the work to which we devote our lives, with a wider public? Surely that is an activity that would peculiarly become us as “humanists”? And yet when we practice it, how many of our colleagues can be counted on not to turn up their noses at us for “popularizing”?

I omit the extenuations for lack of time. Obviously, we are not the sole begetters of this unedifying scene. Administrators, legislators, students, the state of the economy, and a certain easy-going dislike of hard choices embedded deep in the American grain have all collaborated with us. So has a rancid fag end romanticism currently infecting our lives, which identifies the self with tender shapeless breathings from some sort of psychic flower within and so recoils from all tasks “not personally fulfilling”—a phrase which frequently turns out to mean any task that is hard. We are not notably to blame either, I think, for what in some ways may be the most ominous single feature of our present environments. I mean the mistrust of people by people that turns almost every aspect of decision-making—institutional, professional, even pedagogical—into an adversary situation. An educational world that for all its flaws was once intensely humanistic because it was intensely personal and interpersonal on the order of the family is in the process of being depersonalized and routinized, on the model of the corporation, into contract hours, grievance committees, employer regulations, union work rules, and systematic resort to litigation by teachers, students, and administrations alike. The old situation may have been patriarchal or matriarchal, and sometimes, as in families, injustice was done. The new situation is an institutionalized cold war, in which mutual trust, without which no educational endeavor can thrive long, is already becoming on some campuses the first casualty. Though I would be the first to admit that there is no idyllic solution for the problem of governance in colleges and universities, as there is not for the governance of peoples, it cannot be beyond human ingenuity, one thinks, to moderate the confusions of authority into which, in the academy, we have allowed ourselves to drift since World War II.

v

It is the habit of old men, as Horace says, to be praisers of time past: *laudatores temporis acti*. You will forgive that, I hope. It is similarly

their habit to go about giving people advice. Still, I cannot help thinking that during the next ten years all of us face a rather pressing agenda if we are to be again what we have always claimed to be and if we are to be perceived by either the public or the private sectors as worthy of the privileges we receive. Let me, in conclusion, put the points that I would place at the top of that agenda, if it were mine to make, in the form of three questions:

ONE. Can we not discover ways to communicate with a far larger public than most of us do now? I was gratified to discover in a current newsletter a plea from Professor Edmund Morgan, whose credentials as a scholar are impeccable, for his colleagues in history to give over addressing minute groups of their peers, while meantime there exists a huge American public that hungers and thirsts after, and buys, hundreds of books by the so-called “popular” historians, who may often be less well informed but do know how to combine instruction with pleasure. “We have all but surrendered”, Professor Morgan writes, “the custody of the past to outsiders” (a term I secretly wish he had forborne to use). “It is time now to take it back, to stop sneering at popular historians and become, like them, professional writers.” This is, in my view, so important an objective for all our disciplines at this time that if I were a graduate dean I would insist that every student be able to produce not only a dissertation acceptable to his instructors but an essay on the same subject of sufficient popular interest to find its way into a journal of general circulation. And I would try to make an arrangement with the local radio or television station to carry one such half-hour, live, each week. This has been done by a few in our profession. It should be done by many. The Edmund Wilsons and Malcolm Cowleys of this world do not spring full-armed from the head of Zeus. It takes much harder work to write for the public than to write for one’s colleagues. And it has a cleansing effect on one’s vocabulary. Pompous gibberish rapidly disappears.

TWO. How can we best lend a hand to our fellow-workers in once the vineyard, now the ravaged landscape of the secondary school? They, as you don’t need me to tell you, are in desperate straits. Even in abstract intellectual terms, the situation is bleak enough—I borrow now from the commission report mentioned earlier: “The rate of illiteracy in this age group has been estimated at over ten percent and as high as twenty.” This is at the end of high school! Consider the social loss in those figures and the future costs. Consider also that the abler teachers, those who can leave, are leaving, leaving now in their hundreds, and if you wonder why, visit their turf, smell the fear in the washrooms, watch grown men and women look helplessly on as overgrown boys, having checked in for roll-call, spit on the teacher’s desk and check out for the day. It is almost

as if Yeats had had an American inner-city high school in mind when he wrote *The Second Coming*. For there, indeed, in these fallen days, the falcon does not hear the falconer, mere anarchy *is* loosed upon the world, the ceremony of innocence is drowned, the best lack all conviction, and the worst are full of passionate intensity.

About some of this there is nothing we can do except as private citizens. But as groups of faculty on our respective campuses, there is much we can do for local secondary-school morale and for the improvement at that crucial level of the subject-matters we teach, by creating opportunities for interchange. We need to provide occasions when those teachers can meet with us and we with them in a common intellectual setting for a common intellectual purpose. Though I don't wish to puff my own university, I do believe it is now supporting the best program I know of for accomplishing this end. It is called the Yale/New Haven Teachers Institute and has lately gained sufficient national attention to bring presidents, deans, and school superintendents to New Haven to learn about it. I won't bore you with the details. Suffice it to say that it annually attracts 50 to 65 teachers from the New Haven area, gives them the stimulus that comes from small-group and person-to-person discussion, and guides the development by each participant of a teaching "unit" of about a semester's length in his or her chosen field. The teachers choose the unit, choose with the help of an advisory group the professors they wish to work with, and the learning process, as I have been told by more than one participating faculty member, soon becomes a two-way street. An important dividend for the faculty participant has proved to be the necessity of thinking very hard about ways of treating a complex problem with clarity and force while avoiding vulgarization. An equally important dividend for the schoolteacher, if I may judge from those I have talked to, is a deep sense of renewal, partly from the intellectual excitement of wrestling with a professional problem in the company of other adults, partly from the reassurance that they and their work matter, that somebody cares about what they are trying to do. They are as proud of their stack-cards to Sterling Library as any young lawyer of the announcement that he has made the firm.

THREE. My third question, though brief, is the one that matters most, and, if answered with the self-knowledge and the generosity that we sometimes show elsewhere, would take care of all the rest. Can we not be less self-important? posture less? swagger less? strut less? Can we not recognize that the three most dangerous giants-in-residence in every scholar/teacher's House of Pride are the temptation to view a younger colleague's excellence as a threat, the temptation to feed on the adulation that attends a cult, and the temptation to prostitute one's inde-

pendence to some Establishment, academical, governmental, corporate, or—and now I will use the word for the first and last time in my life—hermeneutical? Above all, can we not try harder to remember that what happens when we see that unmistakable moment of excited revelation in a pair of eyes in the classroom where we teach—the moment that makes hours of drudgery fall away like the Ancient Mariner’s albatross—has only a very little to do with *us*. We are catalysts at best. We can sometimes help, with tact, to dissipate the clouds that obstruct a vision. But we do not make that vision. It comes from elsewhere—through the text, through the student’s DNA perhaps, and perhaps through mysteries of which we still know little. On the morning when William Blake died, we know from a friend’s testimony, “he composed songs to his Maker, so sweetly to the ear of his Catherine [that was his wife’s name] that, when she stood to hear him, he, looking upon her most affectionately, said: ‘My beloved! they are *not mine*. No! They are *not mine*.’ ”

When we remember, as we often have reason to do, those wry amusing words on the professor’s door at Coe College, must we not also be careful to remember these?