

leading scholars may have been famous in the profession, but they were almost invisible” (86). The George Lyman Kittredge papers in the Harvard Archives, for instance, feature scrapbooks containing newspaper accounts of Kittredge’s seemingly countless public lectures. Cartoons in the *Harvard Lampoon* routinely caricatured his appearance and pedagogical style. That the play *The Philadelphia Story* (1939)—written by the Harvard-educated Philip Barry—and its film version (1940) feature a character named George Kittredge (albeit one apparently untouched by philology) suggests a notoriety that even Stanley Fish might envy.

Paradoxically, some early-twentieth-century academics possessed a public voice that none of the more recent stars has commanded. Perhaps the most widely and positively received work of literary criticism in this century, for example, was John Livingston Lowes’s *The Road to Xanadu: A Study in the Ways of Imagination* (1927). Lowes’s personal scrapbook on his book’s reception, held in the Harvard Archives, contains approximately 170 reviews and notices, almost unanimously flattering, that appeared in publications ranging from Asian newspapers to domestic serials and indicate a popularity unimaginable for a study of literary sources today. The public had a similar acquaintance with the Chaucerian research of Edith Rickert and John Manly (amply documented in the Special Collections of the University of Chicago). Such scholars lectured to attentive audiences composed primarily not of academics and students but of ordinary citizens, many of them without higher education. On one occasion, the interest in Kittredge’s public lectures was so great that he had to repeat them later in the day. These scholars were prominent figures, but they remained more interested in their research than in their worldly fortunes.

Indeed, Shumway does not stress the disparity of wages between the groups. Although he delicately hints at the inflated salaries of current stars (94), he neglects to observe that the wages of scholars such as Kittredge were low, even when compared to the meager salaries of instructors and assistants. That these scholars continued to labor at their research and teaching for slender compensation may have come in part from the greater respect that literary studies inspired then. But they were also dedicated to conveying what they had learned about literary works to their contemporaries (lay and academic alike), as well as to posterity. It seems worth asking whether current academic celebrities differ most markedly from earlier scholars not in form of notoriety but in depth of commitment to the works of others.

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Reply:

I appreciate Douglas Bruster’s useful emendations to my account of the relative celebrity of early-twentieth-century literary scholars. His evidence suggests that leading scholars were more visible than my essay allows. However, Bruster’s letter does not clarify the meaning and status of that visibility within the discipline. Did other scholars routinely attend Kittredge’s lectures, or were these lectures intended for and attended only by nonspecialists? Did the visibility of Kittredge and Lowes in the public eye contribute to their professional authority?

I am not convinced that the notoriety of earlier scholars was similar to that of today’s stars. I accept Bruster’s claim that Philip Barry borrowed the name George Kittredge from the Harvard scholar because the name of another character in *The Philadelphia Story*, C. K. Dexter Havens, seems to derive from that of Raymond Dexter Havens, editor of *Modern Language Notes* (1925–48) and *ELH* (1945–48). This says something about Philip Barry—what, I’m not sure—but nothing about the fame of Kittredge or Havens.

Bruster supports my argument when he observes that in Kittredge’s era some academics “possessed a public voice that none of the more recent stars has commanded.” As I put it in the essay, the stars’ “celebrity has not made the knowledge that [they] produce any more widely known or given that knowledge greater public authority” (98). But the star system does not provide a complete explanation for the diminished public authority of contemporary literary scholars. For one thing, academic publishing was much less isolated from trade publishing before World War II. Academic books were routinely reviewed in newspapers and general-circulation magazines. After World War II, academic books became too numerous to be routinely reviewed, and print media in general lost the cultural centrality that they previously enjoyed. This explains why later literary scholars had a harder time reaching the public and why the public had less interest in their subject matter. The star system has not helped remedy this situation. It is unlikely that a serious work of literary scholarship, criticism, or theory will ever again command the attention that Lowes’s *The Road to Xanadu* received.

DAVID R. SHUMWAY
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To the Editor:

PMLA’s well-intentioned January 1997 issue tells us something about literature but next to nothing about teaching. It censors teaching much as Roland Barthes

says instruction in France in his time censored literature. No contributor defines teaching. What it is “goes without saying and is never called into question for the purpose of defining, if not its being, at least its social, symbolic, or anthropological functions” (Barthes 73). As a result, the issue is theoretically impoverished.

Clichés abound, each an emblem of some essentialist or foundational narrative. Barthes equates teaching with “the transmission of knowledge” (74). Melville B. Anderson says teaching is “acquainting” (82). For Frank F. Madden it’s helping students have a meaningful experience (104). Lawrence Buell reflects on “how young minds should be fed” (77). David R. Shumway opines that “good teaching often depends on dramatic performance” (92). As if puzzling over Martin W. Sampson’s question “[J]ust how shall we concern ourselves” with literature? (79), Pamela L. Caughie and Carrie Noland explore what teachers should say to students and to one another. Adopting at a postmodern remove Sampson’s assumption that a teacher “makes his students” approach, love, and understand literature (79), Ross Chambers asks, “Who is doing what to whom . . . in whose interests?” (106).

Throughout this issue of *PMLA*, contributors evade the central question: What should a literary academic do in a classroom? Only Madden’s ingenuous job interviewees articulate what most literary academics tacitly believe they should do there: “My students don’t know about literature, so I have to tell them about it” (102). Illustrations on pages 22, 23, and 78 show literature teachers doing just that, with effects that can be read in the ironically polite faces of the students watching Houston A. Baker, Jr., talk (23).

Only Betsy Keller sketches an alternative (not illustrated). She describes it as “departing from the lecture-and-discussion format with interactive techniques . . . ask[ing] students, working in small groups, to think about” sets of questions (57, 59). Domna C. Stanton and Joseph Oran Aimone cautiously sanction this alternative because, Aimone suggests, small groups “remove the pressure of an audience” (105).

Keller, Stanton, and Aimone do not seem aware of how small-group work affects a classroom. Collaborative learning doesn’t remove the pressure of an audience. It changes the size, composition, and social status of the audience, consequently displacing the locus of intellectual authority and transforming the way students and teacher construct knowledge and authority. Collaborative learning institutionalizes poststructuralist thought in college and university education without, as Biddy Martin puts it, “paralyz[ing] students with compulsive reminders about the absence of ultimate foundations” (13). My *Collaborative Learning: Higher Education, Interdependence,*

and the Authority of Knowledge (Johns Hopkins UP, 1993) offers an account of the process.

Shumway describes the social construction of intellectual authority as the “authorization of knowledge by personality” (97), but he does not discuss this phenomenon in the context of the classroom. Thus he does not identify the root cause of “the academic star system” that long preceded cheap air transportation—the classroom authority structure in which literature is normally taught.

We fans of academic stars are academics ourselves. Stars and fans alike have learned to do superlatively what students are doing in the photographs on pages 23 and 78: sitting still and listening with rapt attention. Schooled as fans, we aspire to stardom. Most of us have to content ourselves with local stardom and student fans. But we celebrate the game of fans and stars ritually in the traditional classroom protocol that our professional conventions mirror—both the mores we expect colleagues to conform to and our public bouts of paper reading. The goal of both, indisputably, is cultural reproduction.

Keller alone alludes fleetingly to some of the “social, symbolic, or anthropological functions” of teaching. Its purpose is “not to ‘make students see’ everything that interests the teacher but to invite them to engage the text as a community . . .” (61). Rather than cultural reproduction the goal of teaching understood in this way is reacculturation, which requires collaboration.

The profession at large has already declared obsolete the heavily censored, antique understanding of teaching that informs the January issue of *PMLA*. Academic deans at a dozen independent institutions in Pennsylvania that constitute the Commonwealth Partnership write in “What You Should Know: An Open Letter to New PhDs” that from each crop of aspiring young scholars devoted to “research and creative activity” they intend to select those who can “help build communities . . . in which diversity, responsibility, and cooperation thrive” and who can help students learn “the skills needed to cooperate and collaborate” (*Profession 1996* [MLA, 1996] 80). *PMLA* has done little to help the Pennsylvanians achieve their goal.

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To the Editor:

Atypical of *PMLA* in focusing on the teaching of literature, the January 1997 issue is stimulating and replete with engaging and interesting observations. It is also unrepresentative of literature teachers, many of whom do not share the view of Joseph T. Skerrett, Jr., that “what