

I regret to say that the situation Hutcheon encountered as a young academic, when her colleagues were indifferent or hostile to Canadian literature, is still recognizable, and it is by no means as unusual as she implies for our English students to graduate without taking a course in Canadian literature. If Hutcheon learned that “in Canada *literature* meant British literature first and American literature second,” today’s students might revise that lesson by putting postcolonial literature third (313). For all these reasons, I cannot agree with Hutcheon that it is “churlish” for Canadian academics “to complain about the lack of national representation [in *PMLA*] when the solution to that lack is under our own control” (315). Such voluntarist rhetoric is incongruous with Hutcheon’s earlier analysis of Canadian culture as “trapped” in “economic and cultural” colonialism (312). So I would turn to a politician to the left of Trudeau for a different view of elephants. As the late Tommy Douglas, the socialist premier of Saskatchewan, used to say, “Every man for himself, as the elephant said while dancing among the chickens.”

TRACY WARE
Queen’s University

Reply:

It is a pleasure to respond to Tracy Ware, the member at large of the executive of the Association of Canadian College and University Teachers of English, in part because that position is one I too held (in 1979–81) and one that helped form me as a *Canadian professional* early in my career. My cautious and somewhat ironic endorsing of intellectual free trade between Canada and the United States, therefore, was based on my dual experience on the executives of ACCUTE and the MLA but also on my experience as a teacher and scholar of Canadian literature.

My remarks about the institutionalization of that literature since the 1970s were concerned with the reception and recognition of Canadian writing *as* Canadian inside and outside Canada; they were not intended as comments about the quality of that writing before or after institutionalization in the publishing industry and in the schools and universities. It is a clear fact of literary history that some Canadian writers had “international reputations” before this, but many more do today, and that is a matter not of chance but, at least in part, of institutional support.

Placing early Canadian literature in the context of its settler-colony history in no way denigrates that writing or indicates that I (or my many colleagues who do likewise) do not take it seriously. As I have always argued in my writing on this topic, the literary as well as political experience of empire was manifestly different in each

colony, settler or invaded. National differences obviously do matter. From the start, however, what Canada has shared with other settler colonies is a special and especially fraught relation with imperial literary culture. Cultural nationalism means taking into account the realities of history, not just succumbing to boosterism in the name of patriotism. Ware seems upset at student interest today in postcolonial literature, but surely settler-colony literature like that of Canada can be as fruitfully read within that framework as within any national(ist) one. Indeed, the more comparative focus might make particular sense in our current diasporic world.

I should point out that the twelve hundred Canada-based members of the MLA include many ACCUTE members but also many from modern language and literature disciplines other than English, so it is not at all a matter of there being fewer ACCUTE than MLA members working in Canada. As I acknowledge in my piece, many Canadians choose to belong only to their own national organizations. However, there is more logic than “voluntarist rhetoric” to my remark that those who do not choose to participate in and contribute to *PMLA*, for instance, have little credibility when they then complain about the lack of Canadian representation in that forum. Nonetheless, their electing not to participate is an ideological position I fully respect and understand.

I discovered that writing a piece from a Canadian perspective for both the Canadian and the non-Canadian (United States and international) readership of *PMLA* proved a difficult task, as my self-consciousness about mice and elephants no doubt made evident. However, as the former MLA president Northrop Frye knew well, being part of the broader North American academic context that the MLA represents has never meant giving up one’s Canadian nationality or cultural nationalism. It is as a Canadian that I remain convinced of two things: that in our globalized, transnational world much is to be learned on both sides by intellectual free trade and that elephantine paranoia has never been anything but paralyzing for mice. Informed caution, on the other hand, is essential.

LINDA HUTCHEON
University of Toronto

Regeneration in the Humanities

To the Editor:

I hope that Elaine Showalter’s Presidential Address of 1998, “Regeneration” (114 [1999]: 318–28), will launch a serious debate about the crisis in our profession. While I

agree with her basic assessment of the crisis that faces us, I find myself, as an assistant professor about to pass through the tenure process, much less optimistic than the former president of the Modern Language Association. The majority of the initiatives for change praised in Showalter's address come from the top: Robert Weisbuch, the president of the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, is commended for his determination, while Mark Kelley, leader of the Graduate Student Caucus, is quoted a paragraph later "complain[ing]" (319). I think that Showalter's attitude is not at all uncommon: there is a profound generational conflict in our profession, one that goes unacknowledged and unanalyzed for the most part. Showalter seems to think that graduate students merely want the formula for success. Borrowing from Cary Nelson's collection *Will Teach for Food: Academic Labor in Crisis*, the address quotes a Yale graduate student who longs for someone to show her the ropes (323). To this ostensible demand for a formula for success, Showalter responds that she and her colleagues are prepared to supply all the answers. This representation of graduate student demands obfuscates the real issues: discontentment is construed as merely frustrated ambition. Showalter imagines that the problem can be resolved by the institution of new program initiatives and reforms. What is really at stake is the degenerating conditions of academic labor and the ossification of power structures in institutions. No "How to Make It in and outside Academia with a PhD" is going to lead to an improvement in these areas.

The general discontentment of graduate students has to do with the radical failure of mentorship in our profession. This failure can be beneficial in the long run, because if the older generation did have all the answers, there would be only one crippling attitude left to us, the younger ones: grateful inheritance of privilege. Those in power in academia came to their power in less technologized, less media-saturated, less competitive times. If knowledge and power could be transmitted from older generation to younger generation in recipe form, there would be no possibility of regeneration; there could only be assimilation, replication, and reproduction.

While Showalter criticizes the time requirements of the humanities PhD, she fails to address the working conditions of the untenured assistant professor, and this omission is significant. Reforming tenure is the unspeakable topic in academia today: the pressure to change the tenure system has so far come from outside forces (this is true of the University of Minnesota, where I am employed), and there has been no real internal dissension with regard to reorganization of academic hierarchies. A genuine reform of tenure could lead to the empowerment of untenured faculty members, and this development

could in turn lead to positive changes on all levels of academic administration and evaluation.

I arrived at the University of Minnesota at a time when little hiring in the humanities was being done. I believe that generally most assistant professors hired during the nineties found themselves in similar situations. Although we were supposed to bring our youth and energy to various academic departments, our isolation, budgetary constraints, and the increasing pressures around tenure have made my generation one of great conformity, individualism, and quietism. My situation is not by any means worse or better than any other assistant professor's: the University of Minnesota offers probably better conditions for untenured faculty members than most research universities, and with the increased hiring in the past two years, the climate of the institution has improved dramatically. However, a state budgetary windfall is no guarantee of real change in structures of power. (One could also say that the relative health of my work environment has permitted me to question the structure of authority, out loud and now in public.)

As long as the present tenure system is in place, young, untenured faculty members will be effectively paralyzed as a potential regenerative force in the profession. As long as senior faculty members can evaluate and judge with relative impunity the work of their younger colleagues who came of age under extremely different circumstances, our profession will remain mired in a kind of hypocrisy where democratic rhetoric is a cover-up for the operative principle *Might makes right*. It used to be that one entered this profession believing that the lower pay was compensated for by a higher degree of working autonomy. This autonomy is being undermined by many forces in our working world: two of them are unreflective pragmatism that restricts theoretical speculation and unmitigated competition that breeds fear and intellectual timidity.

The optimism of people in the higher administrative ranks of academic organizations and institutions is a sign that they have not fully assessed the seriousness of the crisis that confronts us, nor have they fully understood that it is only with a certain loss of authority on their part that real reform in the humanities can take place. While I agree with some of Showalter's descriptions and proposed measures against the crisis in our profession, I believe that her suggestions for resolution of the crisis are designed to secure more power for those already at the top. Showalter's proposals leave the questions of hierarchy, judgment, and generational conflict untouched and unchanged. She feels safe, but we are not.

CATHERINE LIU

University of Minnesota, Twin Cities