

## Modern Language Association

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Presidential Address 2000: She Do the President in Different Voices

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# Presidential Address 2000: She Do the President in Different Voices\*

LINDA HUTCHEON

*[Lights down throughout; slide projector on.  
Linda Hutcheon at podium at the start,  
Nellie McKay and Andrea Lunsford seated at table.]*

## LINDA HUTCHEON:

Long, long ago, in a galaxy (and an MLA convention) far away, a woman said:

I hope this microphone works. If you have to listen to me I hope you can hear me. Once before at a gathering of a learned society, seeing an upright gadget before me, I talked with extreme care directly into it for half an hour, moving neither to the right nor to the left, only to find as I went down from the platform that it was a *lamp*.

The distinguished philologist and folklorist Louise Pound spoke these words in 1955 (seventy-two years after the founding of this organization) to begin the first MLA Presidential Address by a woman (3). I'm not the first to find appealing Pound's wry, self-deprecating irony and intimations of techno-peasantry: I remember Catharine Stimpson quoting these lines in her 1990 address (403). While some of you may be made uneasy by the suggestion of gendered self-denigration in the face of technology, let me explain why

I'm attracted to this admittedly bizarre way to start an official address as the first woman president of the Modern Language Association. Clearly, this opening is not calculated to establish authority or even offer what



Louise Pound

LINDA HUTCHEON is University Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of Toronto. She is the author of numerous studies, including *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (1995), *A Theory of Parody* (1985; rpt. 2001), and most recently, with Michael Hutcheon, *Bodily Charm: Living Opera* (2000).

\*With apologies to T. S. Eliot and Charles Dickens.

Sandra Gilbert, the fourteenth woman president, called “oratorical uplift” (373). It is oddly funny, but mostly it is phatic, in the semiotic sense of the term: it is checking to see that the channels of communication are open. You see, maybe Louise Pound felt she didn’t need to assert authority: as Carolyn Heilbrun told us from this podium, Pound “helped organize a women’s military company when she was in college, was the first woman elected to the Nebraska Sports Hall of Fame, and was the beloved of Willa Cather” (284).<sup>1</sup> But Pound certainly wanted to make sure that those channels of communication were open and ready for her. And that’s not a bad way to start a Presidential Address.



Elaine Marks



Carolyn Heilbrun



Germaine Brée

Why, though, might I be particularly attracted to this introductory move toward communication rather than authority? Personality is one possibility; gender is another. Blame feminism? I recall Elaine Marks speaking movingly about inclusion and exclusion as central issues of our profession and consequently about the influence on her of the social movements that have stressed community—women’s liberation and civil rights prime among them (370). In fact, most of the women presidents of the MLA have chosen to talk about communication and community. Carolyn Heilbrun looked to feminism for the source of her commitment to solidarity and identification with other women (282); Germaine Brée asked us to look beyond

an academic culture of dispute to find a new sense of professional solidarity (364). And listen to the conclusion of Jean Perkins’s address: “I close with a call for solidarity and commitment, not as a way of distinguishing ourselves but rather as a way of integrating ourselves into the ongoing concerns and beliefs of the whole world” (317). Ours is a “collective enterprise,” as Patricia Meyer Spacks reminded us in 1994 (351). Community, commitment, solidarity. At the risk of sounding like Pollyanna, yes, I’ll say you can blame feminism for my comfort with Pound’s bizarre opening call to communication and not authority.

Or maybe you should “blame Canada.” Thanks to my emigrating grandparents’ masochistic predilection for climate extremes, I was



born in Canada (and not in Italy or in California, where the rest of my family ended up). Although educated in all three nations, Canada, the United States, and Italy, I confess to being proudly, if quixotically, Canadian. For most of you, it will not seem that Canada’s national achievements are particularly relevant or useful for being president of the MLA, though four Canadians have held that honor. Nevertheless, I have to say that the long Canadian

#### The Four Canadian Presidents

1932	Milton A. Buchanan
1976	Northrop Frye
1991	Mario J. Valdés
2000	Linda Hutcheon



Lester B. Pearson

tradition of peace-keeping begun decades ago at the United Nations by Lester B. Pearson, then prime minister of Canada, has proved somewhat

useful to me as I've negotiated various (academic) conflicts over the last

year. But many of you, I suspect, think of Canada primarily as a place of export: the export not only of raw materials but also of popular singers

(ranging in style from Leonard Cohen and Celine Dion to K. D. Lang and Shania Twain), of opera singers (from Ben Heppner to Michael Schade and Richard

Margison), of comedians (from Jim Carey to John Candy), of actors (from Donald Sutherland back to Mary Pickford), or even of academics (from Mary Louise Pratt and Wendy Steiner to E. K. Brown before them)—though I feel compelled to add that we have lots of fine homegrown ones in

each of these categories who stay in Canada. I want you to know that being Canadian (and, especially, reading Canadian newspapers) keeps an MLA president humble: daily one is reminded of being in the public

## Canadians clean up at American Music Awards

DION, TWAIN HONOURED

A second straight night of winning for Celine

contemporary artist.

"This is a wonderful honour," said Dion, also a winner the night before at the People's Choice Awards in Pasadena, Calif.

Later, a flustered Dion poured out thanks to her supporters as she accepted the favourite female artist in the pop/rock category.

"Thank you for this magic mo-

## Is writing on the wall for rogue MLA?

B.C. constituents launch recall campaign

BY CRAIG McINNIS  
British Columbia Bureau

## MLAs rebel against unconventional Speaker

BY ADAM KILLICK

He sits with his back to the opposition benches, rolls toothpicks around in his mouth, and reads the newspaper instead of listening to the debate — all things Yukon opposition MLAs were willing to put up with. Until he swore.

When Gary McRobb, deputy Speaker of the Yukon legislature, allegedly swore at a member — twice — and then walked out, members of the Yukon and Liberal parties had enough.

Yukon legislators are to debate a motion this week that would dismiss Mr. McRobb, a New Democrat, for unprofessional conduct.

Doug Phillips, a Yukon Party

member, said that during a raucous debate about the territory's employment rate last week, he suggested to Mr. McRobb that he wasn't properly recognizing non-government MLAs who wished to speak.

In response, he said, Mr. McRobb looked at him and mouthed the words "f---you."

See YUKON on Page A2

eye. Canada, you see, has a number of provinces with what is called a legislative assembly; hence, their elected officials are known as MLAs, or members of the legislative assembly.

On a more serious note, however, growing up in my Italian home as a member of the Bortolotti family in

bilingual Canada had a formative influence on me and likely has something to do with my attraction to Louise Pound's call to communication. In this familial and national context,



The Arms of Canada

I learned the importance of rejecting monolingualism—be it English or French. For Americans, Marjorie Hope Nicolson claimed in her 1963 Presidential Address, the Second World War brought home the not only "practical" but "essential" importance of the modern languages. For Canadians, that lesson came much earlier, with the founding of a bilingual nation. Perhaps this personal and collective history is what has made comparative literature as a discipline and, most recently, the University of Toronto's particularly open and congenial English Department and Centre for Comparative Literature comfortable intellectual and institutional spaces for me.

If so, then this history has also made the MLA a comfortable professional space for me. In the last three years as an officer and for four

The Globe and Mail, Tuesday, January 6, 1998

National News

## B.C. voters hope to remove MLA

If enough signatures are collected, by-election could replace Education Minister Paul Ramsey

BY CRAIG McINNIS  
British Columbia Bureau

For a by-election.

Yesterday, the committee formed to

Mr. Harkonen said volunteers have

discussed a number of discrepancies

time ago."

A representative of Elections B.C.

years before that when I was a member of the Executive Council, I had the honor and pleasure of working with the remarkably professional and able staff of the MLA, as well as with many fine colleagues from across the continent. Since this convention usually gives the latter a chance to gain public recognition, I'd now like to thank instead the former, the MLA staff members who work behind the scenes with such dedication and skill. Without the calm competence and or-



Maribeth Kraus

ganizational wizardry of Maribeth Kraus, the convention director, this complex and vast meeting would never happen every year. But the rest of Phyllis Franklin's staff is just as crucial to the workings of the organization, from the tireless David Laurence (on the left at the front), the creative director of English programs, to



Martha Evans (on Phyllis's left), who runs the publications program so well, drawing on the same scholarly expertise evident in her research. Standing at the back are, on the left, Amilde Hadden and, in the center, Regina Vorbeck, who are rarely visible to most MLA members but are the financial and administrative soul of the organization. Between them is Judy Goulding, the ever-patient and ever-expert managing editor of MLA publications, whom many of you know

personally if you have submitted your work to or assessed manuscripts for *PMLA*. On the right end is my fellow Canadian Terence Ford, the inspired and industrious editor of the *MLA International Bibliography*—without whom no one in this room could do research properly. And next to him is Elizabeth Welles, the dedicated director of foreign language programs of the MLA. But if you've ever sat on an MLA committee or had anything to do with MLA governance or the executive director's office, these two women, Carol Zuses and Claudia Gilchrist, have garnered your sincere appreciation—as they do mine—for their care, good humor, and formidable organizational abilities. But this is only the tip of the iceberg: there are over ninety MLA staff members, and I want to extend my thanks to each and every one, but especially to those I had the pleasure of working directly with over the years.

If, as Edith Kern asserted on this occasion in 1977, "equality of rights and opportunities is at the heart of the humanities we profess" (361), then you should know that it is also at the heart of the organization that brings us all here together tonight. From Phyllis Franklin I have learned the most on this count. By her inspiring example, she has taught me so much about generosity, inclusiveness, tact, and professional integrity that it is hard to know where to start to thank you, Phyllis. And from my fellow officers, past (Elaine Shonwalter and Edward W. Said) and present (Sylvia Molloy and Stephen Greenblatt), and from the Executive



Carol Zuses and Claudia Gilchrist



Phyllis Franklin

### The Executive Council in 2000

David Bartholomae	Robert Scholes
Kirsten M. Christensen	Rosemarie Scullion
Reed Way Dasenbrock	Sidonie Smith
Margaret W. Ferguson	Katie Trumpener
Roland Greene	Virginia Wright Wexman
Françoise Lionnet	Anthony C. Yu
Cary Nelson	George Yúdice

Council members (again past and present), I have also learned about many things, including the value of commitment and passion. For all this and much more, I thank you all. And a final thanks is due to Michael Hutcheon, my patient partner in this balancing act of work and mar-



riage, who put up with my MLA-related absences and preoccupations and accepted the delays in our collaborative work together with his customary good will and fine sense of irony.

It might interest you to know that the 110th president of the MLA was destined to be the sixteenth female president. Why? Well, the three of us who were nominated for the position were all women: myself, Andrea Lunsford, and Nellie

McKay. (If you attended the Presidential Forum last night, you heard Andrea and Nellie speak eloquently and passionately on the topic "Creative Collaboration: Alternatives to the Adversarial Academy.") At hearing the news of our nomination, we thought that we formed a strange triumvirate (or, in a kind of fractured Latin, a strange "triumfeminate"). We are all, in one sense, academic ex-centrics: a Canadian theorist who does interdisciplinary work, an expert in rhetoric and composition who frequently works collaboratively, an African American(ist) who works on women's texts. We knew each other already, for we had served on the Executive Council together earlier. Through our e-mail correspondence, we realized that we were all reacting to our nomination in the same way: with a curious mix of pleasure at being nominated in the company of women we liked and admired, terror at the possibility of being elected, and complete confidence that one of the *other* two would win. The frank and warm communication that we shared before and after the election remains for me one of the most inspiring and moving experiences of my professional life. I came to feel that somehow we should all be president together because, as a group, we represented a number of different parts of the profession rather than just one. Working together, we might have addressed the concerns of more MLA members than is normally possible.

I would like to invite you now to look at—and listen to—their statements of vision for the MLA published with the ballot. First, that of Nellie McKay.

### NELLIE MCKAY:

*[reading with a spotlight on her while still seated at the table]*

*Public responses to The Norton Anthology of African American Literature took the academy by surprise. Sales of thousands of copies in nonacademic venues suggest the need to reconfigure our conception of our profession. Today we stand at unmarked crossroads knowing only that our future depends on creatively re-*

### SECOND VICE PRESIDENT

1

Rank all three candidates\*

Linda Hutcheon

Andrea A. Lunsford

Nellie Y. McKay

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*\*For your vote to count fully, you must write "1" next to your first choice, "2" next to your second choice, and "3" next to your third choice.*

*thinking who we are and what we do. For more than three decades MLA leadership has moved in this direction. We must continue, more daringly than before, to promote changes that will help deal with our internal and external difficulties, seeking to understand the meaning of our work in the present and beyond the millennium.*

#### LINDA HUTCHEON:

And now, here is Andrea Lunsford's statement.

#### ANDREA LUNSFORD:

*[reading from the table, with a spotlight on her]*

*On the cusp of a new century, those professing the study of languages and literatures face great opportunities and challenges. Dramatic shifts—in textuality, in genres of literature, in transcultural and translinguistic dimensions of discourse, in technologies of reading and writing, in the nature of graduate education, and in the academy's relationship to the various economies of exchange—all call for ongoing and rigorous examination of the past, critical engagement with the present, and, above all, active participation in the invention of the future of our disciplinary arts and practices. As our professional organization, the MLA must move boldly on all these fronts.*

#### LINDA HUTCHEON:

Yes, what you heard were the real voices of the authors of those statements, and you can well imagine how either of these inspiring scholars and teachers would have led the MLA singly or as part of a “triumfeminate”—and you'll hear more from them in a moment. All I want to say for the record is that we would have worked well together; we *have* worked well together.

My own statement written to accompany the ballot had two parts to it. One involved both an acceptance of limitation and a call to action nonetheless:

The MLA cannot change the general economy and thus the employment situation, but it can help in reconsidering the consequences of the

escalating demands we are making on those already in the profession and especially on those trying to enter it.

I'm happy to report that, in response to this issue of escalating professional demands, this year the MLA Executive Council set up an ad hoc committee on the professionalization of PhDs to study actual practices in hiring departments and what graduate students find educationally and professionally useful as professionalizing exercises. The committee's aim is not only to reduce the high level of anxiety felt by graduate students about what is needed to secure a position (in part by demystifying rumor) but also to offer possible standards for the entire professionalization process.

The other half of my statement was a more general but no less sincerely felt call to community despite diversity:

As the voice of graduate students and teachers in small and large, public and private institutions, the MLA can assist in finding a way to return to *all* its members a sense of intellectual community and professional common cause—especially in the face of both internal and external challenges to the serious study of literature as a complex and diverse cultural force.

David Damrosch writes, in his book *We Scholars: Changing the Culture of the University*, that genuine community cannot exist when our profession attracts those who deal well with solitude, alienation, or aggression (86–87) and therefore turns out scholars who are more concerned to upstage one another than to work together (104). It's not that I think his description is not accurate; it's that I think it *should not* be accurate; but if it *is*, we should all be actively doing something to change the situation. That's one reason I organized the Presidential Forum last night on alternatives to this adversarial vision of the academy—so that you could hear six colleagues enact as well as talk about a different model of academic work, a collaborative one. Outside the rhetoric and composition world—where collaborative *pedagogy*, at least, has

Wednesday, 27 December  
7:00 p.m.

**27. Creative Collaboration: Alternatives to the Adversarial Academy**

7:00–8:45 p.m., Salon 1, Marriott

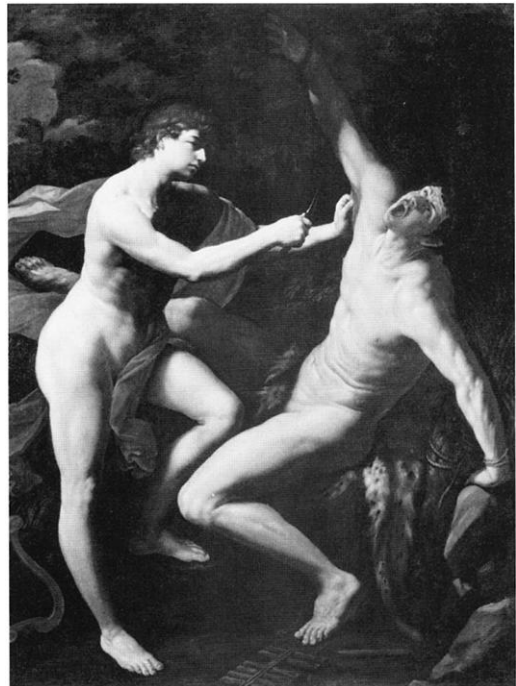
The Presidential Forum. *Presiding:* Linda Hutcheon, Univ. of Toronto

*Speakers:* Andrea A. W. Lunsford, Stanford Univ., and Lisa Susan Ede, Oregon State Univ.; Nellie McKay, Univ. of Wisconsin, Madison, and Frances Smith Foster, Emory Univ.; J. Edward Chamberlin, Univ. of Toronto, and Levi Namaseb, Univ. of Namibia

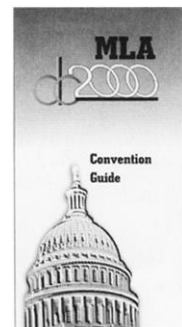
become a norm—we have lacked such a model.<sup>2</sup> As a profession, we have developed instead a model of the humanities researcher as, to cite Jonathan Arac, “the figure of the creator, treated as a distinctive, single, isolated individual,” not unlike the Romantic genius (118). (It is not accidental that the MacArthur Foundation awards are known as the genius awards.) Does this image have something to do with our strong sense of personal proprietorship about our work and thus with our desire to defend it at all costs?

I’m told that, thanks to Aristotle, one of the historical predecessors of the modern academy is the Greek Lyceum. Derived from the name of Apollo Lukeios (“the wolfish Apollo”), the word *Lyceum* could be translated (appropriately, many would say) as “the place of wolves.” An even more appropriate Apollonian image for at least some of our collegial interactions might be the musical competition that led to this scene in which the loser, the satyr Marsyas, was flayed alive by the victor, Apollo, a most wolfish Apollo. How did the academy get to be such a wolfish place? At some point in the last century, for better or worse, we lost the sense of being part of a “novitiate culture,” what Don Goellnicht calls “a kind of priesthood presiding over the dissemination of Truth and Beauty” (475).

To link this loss to the expansion of market economies, as Goellnicht does, is not as far-fetched as it may at first seem. The increased competition today in and among institutions follows the model of corporate capitalism; the pecking-order evaluation methods of business are easily translated into the status hierarchy of higher education. This competition is not only



felt at an institutional level, however. Academic conferences—even the MLA convention—are often sites of combat and one-upmanship, where a clever and articulate speaker can savage a fellow scholar with razor-sharp wit and be lauded (and applauded) for it.<sup>3</sup> We are a profession that values critical thinking—as we should—but we’re also a profession that increasingly defines that quality as the wolfish belittling and even demolishing of opposing positions.





Deborah Tannen calls this concept “critique scholarship,” a mode that entails “systematically inculcating an attitude of contempt towards others” (248). However, combative oral performance, as Walter J. Ong pointed out in his book *Fighting for Life*, is hardly news; our “agonistic heritage” is an old one (Tannen 261). Attack has become the way to make one’s mark. As Tannen

and many others have shown, the “argument culture” exists not only in the media, politics, and the law; it is also at home in the academy. You may recall Elaine Showalter’s strong statement that



“invective and personal attack are the American way” (“Regeneration” 319).<sup>4</sup> If so, we must face the fact that this adversarial culture has human and intellectual costs. The loss of civility that Showalter has mourned (in “Taming”) is matched by the loss of intellectual connections. After outlining the scholarly quarrels that have occurred over the centuries in French cultural history, Jean Perkins told her 1979 MLA audience, “The obvious lesson to be learned from this woeful series of cultural quarrels over the rights of certain groups and attitudes to be represented in the intellectual world is that such disputes are wasteful and destructive” (316). So too are the disputes that have separated teachers of language from teachers of literature from teachers of creative writing. According to another former president, Florence Howe, the gulf between these groups in our ranks “measures the ill-health of the profession” (436). Seven years later, President Helen Vendler echoed this belief.<sup>5</sup> To these divisions in our adversarial academic culture, we should add the kinds of exclusions and demotion described by Barbara Herrnstein Smith,

those that result from rigid divisions of professional roles and responsibilities, archaic hierarchies of academic caste and privilege, and the signs of distinction that mark and maintain both. The last include extraneous clubbiness and exhibitions of arrogance that add insult to injury for a considerable body of *internal* “outsiders,” that is, people in the academy who lose in the related status wars (291)

—adjuncts and part-timers among them.

So what are our options? Must we continue to work in this culture of exclusion and demolition? If we wanted to try to change the culture, where would we start? Here I pass the word to another member of the fantasy triumfeminate, Andrea Lunsford.

[Linda steps away; Andrea moves to the podium and speaks.]

#### ANDREA LUNSFORD:

Where would we start? In part by recognizing the full extent to which we think and work *with* rather than *against* others. Might not such a recognition lead first to reflection and then to a change in thinking about our scholarly and professional relationships? A close look at your citation practices will almost certainly reveal some patterns of sharing, borrowing, and building on

“This article, which anatomizes, celebrates, and strives to theorize our collaboration, is indebted in its final articulation to a wider collaborative effort that, as feminist scholars, we have learned over the years to value. Friends, colleagues, external reviewers, and editors have extended and enriched our collaboration, and we wish here to acknowledge their contribution. Thanks, then, to Lisa Alther, Eve Raimon, Gayle Greene, Coppélia Kahn; to our copanelists at the 1991 Modern Language Association panel, ‘Feminist Collaboration’—Diane P. Freedman, Eileen Razzari Elrod, Debra Teachman, Pamela Demory, Sondra Reid, Carol Singley, and Elizabeth Sweeney—to the anonymous external reviewers for the *National Women’s Studies Association Journal* and *Signs*, to Kate Tyler at *Signs*, and above all, to Valerie Miner” (Kaplan and Rose 547).

the good work of others. After all, even those citations that register strong disagreement mark a dialogic relationship to the work criticized. And as you have probably noted of late, acknowledgments seem to be growing almost beyond bounds, as scholars attempt to account for all those who have, directly or indirectly, collaborated in their work. In online scholarship, these collaborative relationships are even more pronounced, as links take readers directly to related works—and back again. All these practices are signs (in the Aristotelian sense) that the scholarly work we do is social, dialogic, highly collaborative—even when we appear to be flying solo.

Throughout her address, as you've perhaps noticed, Linda (deliberately and symbolically)

or Native American rhetorical traditions a new aim for our discussions: to enlighten an inquirer, not to overwhelm an opponent (see Tannen 257). But let me pass the word to Nellie McKay for her thoughts on this topic.

[*Nellie comes to the podium; Andrea joins Linda nearby.*]

#### NELLIE MCKAY:

Almost twenty years ago, by way of making pleasant conversation, an eminent scholar I met

"I don't care who's right or who's wrong. There has to be a better way to live" (Amy in *High Noon*, qtd. in Tompkins 585).

#### THEN AND NOW

BY LOUISE POUND, *President of the Association*

has been citing from the Presidential Addresses of other women as a way of illustrating this kind of thinking with others. If we could recognize Linda's strategy of thinking with as a common practice—perhaps as common as thinking against others—then maybe we could encourage collaborative rather than competitive ways of not only thinking but working. The model can be as simple as that of the dialogue. As Wolfgang Iser has noted,

[T]he hallmark of the humanities is dialogue which happens on various levels: between past and present, between the voices of common concerns, between the conceptualizations of theory, between the standards of valorization. The space between these differences—and there are many more—generates a dialogue in the course of which the other is given its due, and the ensuing interchange is bound to transform the issue debated. (736)

Mediation and negotiation could replace opposition and confrontation—both personal and intellectual. We could learn from ancient Chinese

at an MLA meeting asked me to identify some of the professors with whom I had worked as a graduate student. When I mentioned one professor's name among others, his face registered a change that alerted me that something was wrong. A few moments later he explained. The story he told me has stayed with me, not just because it made me uncomfortable then but mostly because the scenario is one with which I have become familiar, and that familiarity has not decreased my initial discomfiture. It went like this: At an MLA meeting perhaps twenty-five years earlier, the scholar to whom I was speaking was on a panel for which the scholar whose name had made him uncomfortable was the respondent to his paper. As he told it to me that day, my mentor savagely attacked his paper, and he had not forgotten the episode. Not only did he recall the encounter, but as these things go, it obviously still caused him sharp pain. It mattered not whether the respondent to his paper had intended it so, but he understood the attack as one not on his paper but on his person, an impugning of his qualifications as a scholar. The perceived attack had inflicted a wound to some vital part of him, and in spite of his subsequent illustrious career, a quarter of a century later that wound had not healed.

There has to be a better way for people to live together!

Encounters like this one continue to occur among us and to inflict wounds that do not easily heal on hapless victims. We seem to take it for granted that we stand taller, feel stronger, and are more brilliant when we make others feel smaller, weaker, and less intelligent than ourselves. We might feel differently if we understood ourselves as living *together* in a community of seekers and dispensers of knowledge rather than as combatants, at war with those with whom we disagree and with whom we can settle our differences only violently. Then our words are instruments of intellectual violence.

"[V]iolence is killing or beating up on other people" (Tompkins 585).

For some of us, the stories of violence have always been extremely troubling because they strike at the heart of what it means for us to do the work we do. When women entered the academy in the 1970s and 1980s in greater numbers, they criticized the behavior of the men who engaged in this violence. Now women and men are equally guilty of this crime.

"[A] woman is giving a paper. It is an attack on another woman's recent book; the entire paper is devoted to demolishing it, and the speaker is doing a superb job [. . .] witty, elegant, pellucid, and razor sharp; [the audience] appreciate[s] the deftness, the brilliance, the grace, with which the assassination is being conducted; the speaker's intelligence flatters their intelligence [. . .]" (Tompkins 587).

What do we have in mind when we call ourselves critics and humanists? Is it possible to reconcile those terms without compromising one or

the other? Is it necessary for us to wound our colleagues and to claim we are more knowing than they are? Must we always be in competition with one another? And if there is another way, one in which working together promotes positive critical expression that helps instead of seeking to shame, how and where do we find it? These, I would suggest, are crucial questions for literary scholars to ponder as we move forward into this millennium.

We are great wordsmiths. We can make words heal, not hurt, and reap dividends. We can disagree with one another, and indeed at times we must, but we need not be violent or disagreeable.

I pass the word back now to Linda.

[*Nellie steps back with Andrea but stays nearby; Linda moves to the podium.*]

#### LINDA HUTCHEON:

What, then, if we were to redefine critical humanistic thinking to include more of the creative and the integrative, as Nellie and Andrea have suggested? Destructive critique is too easy and too often an excuse for evading positive engagement and action. This kind of negative critical thinking is what Martha Nussbaum claims "produces a democracy in which people talk at one another but never have a genuine dialogue. In such an atmosphere bad arguments pass for good arguments, and prejudice can all too easily masquerade as reason" (21). Gerald Graff has argued that we should "teach the conflicts" as a way of showing our students that one can live with differences in a dialogic community. Certainly, we too (and not just our students) need to learn to live with differences (of all kinds) and in other than oppositional ways of exclusion and rejection. The idealistic and powerful conclusion to Catharine Stimpson's Presidential Address is worth citing in this context, in part because Stimpson casts it in the form of a hopeful historical inscription for her times . . . and ours, an inscription we must try to live up to daily:

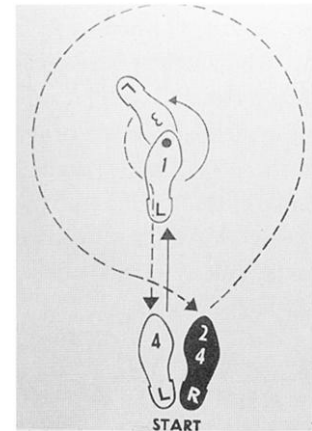
[W]e erred, grumbled, had our conflicts. We were neither gods nor heroes. We were men and women of different races, sexualities, nations, and groups who all cared for culture. If we were greedy, we were greedy for knowledge, insight, imagination, irony, complexities, texts, verbal structures, textures. We had the freedom, wit, generosity, and courage to see the differences among texts and among ourselves. We erased the damaging differences. We typed out the differences that promised to renew us. We refused to destroy one another. (410)

Our challenge is to live and work as if she were prophetic. To do that, we must come up with a way to avoid destructive critique without sacrificing critical thought. We need a concept of creative and constructive critique that involves a reflective and deliberate response to another's position, a response that can occur only after both a careful listening to that position and an equally careful analysis of its validity.<sup>6</sup> We need another way of interacting professionally and personally that will enable us to find common ground despite disagreement and thus to move forward together, whether it is in our institutions, our classrooms, or the MLA.

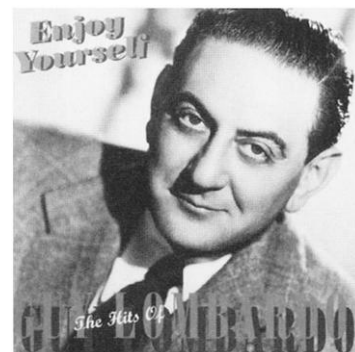
When Peter Demetz offered, as an image for this goal of combining strengths rather than stressing weakness or difference, Francis Bacon's idea that learned discourse should bear grapes and olives, not the thorns and briars of discord (317), he suggested another way to work toward an alternative to the adversarial culture of the academy: a change of metaphor. What if we replaced the dominant academic imagery—of war, combat, attack, and aggression—with something different? As members of this profession, we all believe in the power of language and discourse to create new ways of conceiving and perceiving—and even acting. Why not start at home, then? Tannen has suggested using various images—of building, guiding, cooking, and conversing—for what we do (161). Mary Ann Caws has offered a series of related images: of enabling networks of similar-

ities and differences (312); of “an interconnective support system” (315); of “healing counterstories of involvement in the enlivening issues of our epoch” (318).

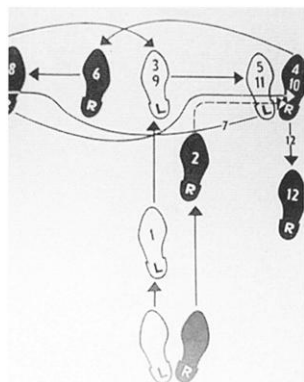
Personally, I like another image, suggested by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in *Metaphors We Live By*: that of the dance. How different our scholarly life would be if we could think of critical debate as a dance in which we participated and one of the goals were to “perform in a balanced and aesthetically pleasing way” (4). I'm particularly attracted to



this image of the dance for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that, like most (but, I'm sure, not all) of you, I prefer dancing to fighting, graceful action to violence. But there's another reason. And here we come back to “Blame Canada.” Like many Americans as well as Canadians, I grew up watching television on New Year's Eve to the music of Guy Lombardo and his Royal Canadians. As the real millennial New Year's Eve approaches, it seems a good time to think about the message encoded in these performances of my fellow Italian Canadian. I didn't realize until years later what had made this band so



popular, though I always suspected it wasn't only its strangely mournful renditions of "Auld Lang Syne" at midnight. Evidently, the band was popular because it played quietly so that people could talk as they danced. No shouting was needed, just companionable talking: a dancing dialogue, the possibility of communication. Surely that's as



much what we believe in and stand for as combat and destructive critique. Coming full circle back, then, to Louise Pound and her opening invocation of communication rather than authority, I (or

rather we) want to leave you with another version of this dance image, articulated poetically by Marge Piercy in "I Saw Her Dancing."

[*Nellie and Andrea join Linda at podium.*]

#### ANDREA LUNSFORD:

Nothing living moves in straight lines  
but in arcs, in epicycles, in spirals, in gyres.

#### NELLIE McKAY:

Nothing living grows in cubes or cones or  
rhomboids  
but we take a little here and give a little here  
and we change.

#### LINDA HUTCHEON:

and the wind blows right through us and knocks  
the apples  
from the tree and hangs a red kite suddenly there  
and a fox comes to bite the apple curiously

#### ANDREA LUNSFORD:

and we change  
or die  
and then change.

#### NELLIE McKAY:

It is many as drops  
it is one as rain  
and we are in it, in it, of it.

#### LINDA HUTCHEON:

We eat it and it eats us  
and fullness is never and now.

We thank you.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Heilbrun refers readers to O'Brien.

<sup>2</sup> See the various articles in Forman for examples and theorizings of collaborative pedagogy.

<sup>3</sup> See Tompkins's description of this common event—and of her discomfort with the audience's and her own response (587–88). Nellie McKay returns to this moment in her remarks later in this address.

<sup>4</sup> She went on to say, "I reject the politics of boycott, punishment, censure, and sanctions, and I believe that we can rebuild the university together out of good will, intelligence, and a shared desire that the humanities should endure" (327).

<sup>5</sup> In her 1980 Presidential Address, she asserted, "The divorce of composition from the reading of powerful imaginative writing is our greatest barrier to creating an American public who understands what we love" (345).

<sup>6</sup> Tannen explains, "Critiquing relieves you of the responsibility of doing integrative thinking. It also has the advantage of making the critics feel smart, smarter than the ill-fated author whose work is being picked apart like carion" (273–74).

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