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The requirements for the doctoral degree in English and the need for college English teachers are discussed. Three possible courses of action are considered--(1) to do nothing, (2) to adopt an intermediate degree, and (3) to transform the Ph.D. into a more suitable degree for contemporary conditions. The value of the intermediate degree is discussed, but emphasis is given to the need for "radically" changing the old Ph.D. degree. (BN)

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THE INTERMEDIATE DEGREE AND THE FUTURE OF THE PH.D.

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It is apparent from Don Cameron Allen's study of the Ph.D. in English and from the most cursory knowledge of the present academic scene that our profession, the teaching of literature, is in a state of crisis. The crisis centers on the profession's lengthy and elaborate baptismal rite, the Ph.D.

In 1855, when Walt Whitman drew up his list of "occupations" in "Song of Myself," he did not mention even college professors, let alone teachers of English or Ph.D.'s. Five years before the first publication of Leaves of Grass there were only eight graduate students in the entire United States. The Ph.D. system in American universities, which started at Johns Hopkins less than a hundred years ago, was an attempt to bring order, discipline, and uniformity into a very limited field of endeavor, where these qualities were sorely lacking. As everyone knows, the graduate system which ensued was constructed on the German model. The imported system of philological scholarship which grew from this small beginning created our profession as we now know it. The Modern Language Association was not founded until 1883; in 1966 it numbered 24,125.[1]

The current crisis must be seen, therefore, in the light of the overwhelming triumph of the system. The enormous growth and development of the study of literature in the past century has created an insatiable demand for its teachers. The solid establishment of literature as a cornerstone of the modern college education and the widespread demand for that education have brought about a problem of gargantuan proportions. We ought -- ironically -- to be thankful that the problem is so large.

The issue that now faces us, as James Squire recently pointed out, is "what the profession will do to ensure an advanced degree in English which will genuinely prepare college instructors for teaching and for leadership in the profession."[2] Paralleling the apparent success of the Ph.D. system of graduate instruction, there has developed over the years a growing uneasiness about its end and purpose. In a modern society beset by war, racism, and the ambiguous benefits of the technological revolution, the isolated pleasures of philological research have seemed an inadequate goal for the training of teachers and scholars. Browning's grammarian, it is remembered, was after all only one man, not the model for a generation. It is hard to forget that the poem was about his funeral. The mountain of dissertations which say more and more about less and less have come to seem an obstacle to the intellectual life rather than a gateway to it. On the more practical side, Don Cameron Allen's report demonstrates statistically what most of us knew already: Ph.D. study regularly exacts too high a toll in human suffering. Reaching the Ph.D. is more like the labor of Sisyphus than like education. The average length of time required for a Ph.D. in English is eleven years. Allen's report also indicates what many of us have suspected: the general inappropriateness of Ph.D. training to

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1 See Rene Wellek, "Literary Scholarship," in American Scholarship in the Twentieth Century, ed. Merle Curti, (Cambridge, 1953), p. 111.

2 James R. Squire, "On Intermediate Degrees and Reform of the Ph.D.," address delivered at the annual meeting of MMLA at Purdue University, fall, 1967.

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the actual professional duties of Ph.D.'s.

What has brought all of these growing anxieties and doubts to a head in the past two or three years is the related crisis in college teaching. The desperate need for college teachers is not being filled by the present system. It is apparent that our graduate programs do not reflect contemporary conditions. The time has come for the profession to adopt a relatively standard three or four year graduate degree for college teaching which can be evaluated according to generally accepted objective criteria. We must, in short, attempt what Johns Hopkins attempted in 1876, to bring order, discipline, and uniformity into a profession which is no longer small, but is still in need of these qualities. We must re-create the profession, however, to have relevance to the conditions of the present rather than those of 1876.

There are, it seems to me, roughly three possible courses of action: 1) we can insist to one another that changes will only mean the erosion of standards and do nothing; 2) we can adopt an intermediate degree, a differently oriented teaching degree like the Master of Philosophy or Doctor of Arts, or a standardized ABD like the Candidate in Philosophy; 3) we can transform the education of Ph.D.'s into something more suitable for contemporary conditions.

Although I expect our profession will work a good deal at all three solutions, I should like to consider them in more detail. The first solution -- to do nothing -- is advocated by very few, but practiced by almost everybody. The pressures for maintaining the status quo are nearly as great as the pressures for change. As Dicken's Mr. and Mrs. Bagnet put it, "discipline must be maintained." The anxiety of chairmen, deans, and administrators for "visibility," i.e., published research and a large, safe and nationally accepted graduate program, reinforces the system. As the chairman of a middle-rank university English department aspiring to be a "first-rank" one, I myself feel the pinch acutely. It is one thing for the chairman at Harvard or Yale to announce sweeping innovations, but quite another for the chairman at the University of Missouri. There is, moreover, the fairly common assumption that a good Ph.D. in literature is very much like a good bourbon: he needs to be aged in the cask at least eight to ten years -- none of your cheap four-year stuff. Despite these arguments and despite the conventional graduate program over which I -- like many of us -- preside, I feel that doing nothing is, in the face of the contemporary situation, irresponsible at best; at worst, it seems like madness.

Why not the intermediate degree? There seems to be little reason why the many college teachers who have not yet vaulted the final research-oriented hurdle of the Ph.D. should not be fully qualified to teach undergraduate literature courses. The problem, however, has been how to evaluate an ABD. An intermediate degree could be the solution to this problem. As Professor Allen has pointed out, "Some ABD's have only the last sentence of a dissertation to compose; others have one course beyond the M.A. For the security of department heads and deans a degree awarded when only the thesis remains to be done is practical. Such a degree, especially in the case of those who never finish the dissertation, would add a little more dignity to the middle-aged teacher now entitled only to write 'M.A.' after his or her name."[3] Many others agree. Fredson Bowers, in a witty and thoughtful essay, suggested a little over two years ago that we "combat the shortage of college teachers not by further debasing the Ph.D., as we inevitably

3 Don Cameron Allen, "The Intermediate Degree," address delivered at the annual meeting of MMLA at Purdue University, fall, 1967.

shall, but by also awarding a learned but non-research degree, the Doctor of Arts."[4] The verb, debase, seems to me to beg the question somewhat, but I shall return to this later.

On a more philosophical level William Arrowsmith has expressed his dissatisfaction with the present Ph.D. system in a stimulating essay in College English. "Very few men are capable of original scholarship; and the assumption that every future teacher of English at the university level must pass through the needle's eye of the doctorate is wholly destructive. It destroys the candidate himself by requiring him to do work which he lacks the ability or the will to do; it destroys the undergraduates the candidate teaches, since he tends to teach as he has been taught -- i.e., badly -- and finally it destroys graduate education as well, since the morale of the scholars-to-be is adversely affected by the misery of the conscripts."[5]

The possibilities for a workable intermediate degree system to ameliorate our problems break down into two general categories: 1) the Master of Philosophy or Doctor of Arts degree; 2) the Candidate in Philosophy certificate. The Master of Philosophy approach has been described by Dean Spurr of Michigan as a two-year course program "best categorized as a terminal program open to a limited number of students whose immediate objective is a liberal arts degree higher than the A.M. that will qualify them for teaching that subject at the underclass collegiate level, whether in a community college, a four-year college, or a complex university. . . . Courses in teaching techniques and other aspects of professional education may form a minor portion of the program, but the subject-matter orientation will be paramount." This degree is similar to many programs which are developing under such titles as Master of Arts in College Teaching. It would be different from the present Yale M.Phil., which, if I read the Yale bulletin aright, is simply a formalization of the ABD. Although the M.Phil. would be a terminal degree, superior students who earned it might, Dean Spurr believes, be admitted to Ph.D. programs.[6]

A Doctor of Arts degree, such as that advocated by Fredson Bowers, would be in effect the present ABD formalized. A student would move through the course work for a Ph.D., take his examinations and then be awarded the "learned" degree of Doctor of Arts, a teaching degree. The chief omission would be the dissertation, which Professor Bowers feels is inappropriate as a preparation for teaching, as well as being the chief cause for the Ph.D. slow-down. This degree would be terminal.

The second main possibility for an intermediate degree is the Candidate in Philosophy approach. This degree is quite frankly a standardization and recognition of the ABD. The idea behind the C.Phil. certificate is to recognize formally the successful completion of all Ph.D. requirements except the dissertation. The emphasis would thus be placed on the successful completion of a stage of graduate study, rather than on an omission which the "all but" of the ABD implies. The principles underlying a C.Phil. certificate were enunciated in a statement drafted by C.I.C. Graduate Deans in 1966.

4 Fredson Bowers, "Doctor of Arts: A New Graduate Degree," College English, XXVII (November, 1967), 127.

5 William Arrowmith, "Graduate Study and Emulation," College English, XXVIII (May, 1967), 548.

6 Stephen H. Spurr, "Intermediate Graduate Degrees," address delivered at the annual meeting of MMLA at Purdue University, fall, 1967.

A Candidate's Certificate, to be called "Candidate in Philosophy," is proposed for the purpose of recognizing formally the successful attainment of that stage in the doctoral program marked by the passing of a comprehensive examination and the completion of essentially all requirements up to the doctoral dissertation. The certificate is intended to mark an intermediate point in the advance toward the doctorate at a level widely recognized in American graduate schools. The C.Phil. certificate, according to the Deans would not regulate the conditions under which a dissertation might be written later, nor would it confer "candidacy for an intermediate period at the awarding graduate school. Neither does the certificate lapse since it is a statement of prior achievement, not of status in a program."[7]

With the possible exception of the Master of Philosophy, all of these intermediate degree possibilities are very much alike in substance. They provide for a complete Ph.D. program with the omission of the dissertation. If it is true, as many people believe, that it is the dissertation which is chiefly responsible for the time lag as well as being responsible for a research orientation inappropriate for college teachers, an intermediate degree of the type described above seems an obvious solution.

But let us consider some unpleasant realities. Professor Allen in his study of Ph.D. training has discovered that "The graduate professors polled on this question would not be inclined to hire a teacher with one of these degrees or if they hired him at the lowest rank give him tenure." Allen adds amusingly a truth that corresponds only too well with my own experience: "University professors think the intermediate degree invaluable for teaching in any place other than a university." Although a large number of college chairmen might hire an applicant with an intermediate degree, only "50% would promote him from an instructorship or assistant professorship if he were satisfactory." There is then a further problem: what might such a person be promoted <u>to</u>? "To," Allen reports, "about one rank higher than his original appointment and almost never to a professorship." The question of relative salary is another thorny problem which Allen does not mention in his preliminary report, but one which strikes me as being almost insuperable. Allen concludes pessimistically that, "Under these circumstances the intermediate degree seems merely the ABD 'writ large' and its holders will have 'all the rights and privileges' now accorded to the M.A. It should be more highly valued than this, but the mores, prejudices, or perhaps, philosophy of the profession will have to change before it is."[8] At the risk of sounding hopelessly reactionary, I feel constrained to say that we must stop kidding ourselves. Not only am I, as a university chairman, unwilling to hire and promote intermediate degree holders, but I suspect that chairmen in small liberal arts colleges, whose departments are presumably to be manned by the new degree holders, are equally reluctant. I suspect further that the fact that they <u>have</u> hired many non-Ph.D. teachers is dictated far more by the shortage of Ph.D.'s and by economic realities than by a different philosophy regarding teacher training.

If these difficulties were only practical obstacles standing in the way of truth, it would still be possible, not to say imperative, to make a concerted effort to remove them. Twenty or thirty first-rank universities, for instance, might sign a solemn pact to hire a certain percentage of intermediate degree holders, and promote them. From such a beginning, it might be possible to change the philosophy of accrediting agencies, thus encouraging four-year and junior colleges to be more receptive to the holders of intermediate degrees on their faculties. Perhaps, as Bowers and others who have written on the subject imply, the degree would be somewhat inferior to the Ph.D., but we would at least begin to have enough teachers.

7 Quoted in Spurr, "Intermediate Graduate Degrees."

8 Address delivered to MMLA, fall, 1967.

But would the removal of the obstacles (a Herculean task at best) lead us into all truth? Does such a course of action really answer the main issue: "what the profession will do to ensure an advanced degree in English which will genuinely prepare college instructors for teaching and for leadership in the profession."?

I should like to consider this question by first quoting from Fredson Bowers, who has written one of the best proposals for a non-research teaching degree, which he would call the Doctor of Arts. In his defense of maintaining the present Ph.D. system untouched for a small minority, Professor Bowers asks if the long-term Ph.D. is worth it.

> I say, yes it is worth it, but only for the very small minority whom this Ph.D. System trains as practicing scholars for the high-powered university jobs, where the competition makes a mock of ivory towers; where one must always not only be writing a book, but also finishing one at regular intervals; where one's teaching is largely confined to graduate seminars, and one's major effort is to make all one's students as much like oneself as possible so that they can go out into the world and do likewise to their students.[9]

The picture of the Ph.D. System and its product is, of course, drawn to life. The shock of recognition is unmistakable. But, to quote the unhappy moppet in a well-known New Yorker cartoon of twenty or thirty years ago, "I still say its spinach, and I say the hell with it." If the summit of the Ph.D.'s intellectual aspirations is to make his students as much like himself as possible "so that they can go out into the world and do likewise to their students," surely the degree should be abolished, root and branch. Of course Professor Bowers was ironic; but his irony has the hard bite of truth. And if there is truth in this description of the ends and purposes of Ph.D. training, then I say it is not worth it. It may be valuable for survival in the often artificial environment of the modern university where shallow administrators count the shallow articles of shallow faculty members in the frenetic search for that academic Eldorado -- visibility. In terms of its value to society, to the intellectual life, and to scholarship, it is not worth it.

Professor Bowers agrees that for most teachers a long Ph.D. program of this type is not worth it. His reason for suggesting a new teaching degree, however, is his fear that the present Ph.D. is being "eroded" or "weakened" by the overwhelming need for more teachers. "As a result of practical necessity, therefore, the universities are weakening the Ph.D. to make it more a teaching degree than the research degree for which it was instituted. Beyond all doubt, the modern doctorate has been eroded."[10] There are two assumptions in this statement that seem to me to be at the heart of our difficulties. They are assumptions that need to be questioned. The first assumption is that "teaching" and "research" ought to be separate endeavors and that to change a course of training from a research emphasis to a teaching emphasis is necessarily to "erode" or to "weaken" it. The second assumption is bound up with the first. I take it to be partially right and partially wrong. It is that the Doctor of Philosophy was "originally instituted" as a research rather than as a teaching degree. It certainly is true that the German model brought into this country and elaborated on by the modern American University has become "research" oriented. On the analogy of late nineteenth-century science (or scientism), we have come to think of the literary scholar much as we think of the research chemist, as a lonely man, discovering small truths in the privacy of his laboratory (or carrel). These small truths

9 College English, XXVII (November, 1965), 123-124.

10 Ibid., p. 125.

are then to be added to the enormous mountain of knowledge being produced by dozens of other isolated scholars. The mountain, of course, is not to be attempted by the layman, but is to be held inviolate for the research specialist, the Sir Edmund Hillary of scholarship, who, presumably, is alone capable of appreciating it. So much is this the case that the dissertation itself, the apprentice work of the literary scholar, is believed to have no relation to the work of the college teacher. The ABD, Professor Bowers writes, "will never become truly secure, or be paid as a first-class citizen, until he goes through the routine of the dissertation which, in fact, is going to have little or no effect on his value as an undergraduate teacher."[11]

But surely this begs an obvious question: Why can we not have a dissertation that does have effect on the value of undergraduate teaching? I would contend, in fact, that the simple and apparently innocent word, research, has a great deal to do with our difficulties. The uncritical acceptance of research as an autonomous endeavor, separate from teaching and the further use of the word scholarship as a synonym for research have brought us to a sorry pass, a position which is logically untenable. In an attempt to make our scholarly efforts seem analogous to the work of the physical or social sciences, we have allowed the part to stand for the whole. Research is of course an honorable pursuit. It is the preliminary spade-work we may need to accomplish before we can fulfill our scholarly work of teaching. It is not synonomous with scholarship. It is not synonomous with scholarly writing. It is only a part of our teaching mission, a mission which includes both speaking and writing about literature and language. Is it not ironic that professors of literature and language should become so entrapped in terminology? May we not acknowledge the nineteenth-century teutonic origins of the Ph.D. without accepting it as the only viable scholarly tradition open to modern education? The original meaning of the Latin word, doctor, is of course teacher. A doctor of the church, or the church's child, the university, was thought of in the middle ages and long after as a teacher. The great doctors of the middle ages, Aquinas and Scotus, were not thought of as researchers, but as teachers of the university and of society. Similarly, John Henry Newman, whose "idea of a university" is surely one of the most compelling for literary scholars, was first of all a teacher. Kittredge is remembered as much today for his teaching as for his research. In fact, it is difficult to think of great scholars -- the select handful whose work really counts -- who have not thought of themselves as teachers.

What I am trying to say is that for our profession there is a category that transcends but includes both classroom teaching and research. That is education. Although we are often shy of the word because of its pre-emption by professional colleges of education, we must admit that if we are not, in a broad sense, educators, we are nothing. William Arrowsmith has put it very well. "Literature occupies a place in the curriculum presumably because it educates. If it does not, then it should not be taught." Aesthetic insistence upon the autonomy of the work of art on the one hand and scholarly insistence on the art work's prime function as a field for research on the other have made us reluctant to admit the educational function of literature and reluctant to see ourselves as educators.[12] We are educators nonetheless and must remain so. There can be no scholars without a school.

[11] Ibid., p. 126.

[12] William Arrowsmith, College English, XXVIII, (May, 1967), 549.

I would not only question, therefore, the assumption that teaching and research are irreconcilable, but I would also question, perhaps less tritely, its corollary: that they are separate endeavors. Our profession has been plagued far too long by the artificial polarities: research vs criticism; research vs teaching; pedagogy vs publication, and the like. Research, criticism, and teaching are all part of the educational function of literature and language. The parts are less than the whole. Surely the chief responsibility of our scholarly profession is education: the education of young people, the education of society, and the education of ourselves. The means we take to this end is the teaching of literature. Our teaching is carried on either by word of mouth in the classroom or by study and writing in the world outside our own institutions. If professors of language and literature are incapable of one of these modes of teaching, they are flawed members of their profession. If they are not educating in either capacity, they should be abolished. We need a broader professional model than the German research specialist. I should think the medieval scholarly tradition could help us here. We could do worse than emulate Chaucer's clerk who was glad both to learn and to teach.

What does all this have to do with the intermediate degree? It brings us to the third possible solution to our problems: changing the course of study for the Ph.D. It should be obvious by now (ponderously so, I fear) that changing the Ph.D. would be my own answer to the problems which face the profession. I do not wish to exclude an intermediate degree. We should have one; it is a fine idea, especially the C.Phil. concept, which can standardize a certain status within the profession and can recognize an intermediate level of achievement. I hope that the C.Phil. or the M.Phil. will soon be accepted everywhere, but accepted for what they are -- lesser degrees. Our problem is not simply to turn out a large number of teachers or scholars, but also to turn out the best educated teachers we know how. The issue is still "what the profession will do to ensure an advanced degree in English which will genuinely prepare college instructors for teaching and for leadership in the profession."

The Ph.D. need not be "debased" or "eroded." It must be improved. Ph.D. training must be brought into line with the needs of the profession of humane letters, the needs of which are in turn dictated by a society which is in desperate need of the education literature can provide.

One would think, judging from the majority of American Ph.D. programs (including the one I underwent at Chapel Hill and the one I help to administer at Missouri), that such changes are radical and revolutionary. But such is not the case. I cannot lay claim to the discovery of truths hitherto unknown. Rene Wellek, for instance, was calling for a greatly modified Ph.D. fifteen years ago.

Thus, it is clear in what direction the reform of graduate study in English must move. The old Ph.D. degree must be changed radically. Its holder should be not an antiquarian specialist in a period but a "professional man of letters, a man who, in addition to English and American literature, knows literary theory, the modes of scholarship and criticism, who without recourse to impressionism and appreciation, can analyze and discuss books with his classes." The linguistic requirements should be changed by asking for a really advanced, literary knowledge of one or two of the great living languages of Europe. The thesis should be conceived of as flexibly as we can conceive of professional literary distinction. Its possible range should certainly include contemporary literature and allow the use of all the methods of literary criticism. There should be an increasing stress on training in other literatures, in aesthetics, in philosophy rather than

in medieval philology. In short, a Ph.D. in literature rather than in English, French, or German philology is the ideal.[13]

We have come a long way since Professor Wellek wrote these recommendations. In fact, they have almost all been incorporated into the "Recommendations Concerning the Ph.D. In English," PMLA, LXXXII (September, 1967) A-10--A-11, presented by Don Cameron Allen, the Director of the MLA study of the Ph.D. and unanimously concurred in by his Advisory Committee. The points in the "Recommendations" that should attract our especial notice are IV. the four-year Ph.D.; VI. the possibility of a thorough knowledge of one language in place of two or three; IX. supervised teaching as part of the program; XI. a one-year dissertation; XII. the choice between a monograph or group of related essays for the dissertation.

If we can implement these recommendations -- and implement them seriously and thoroughly, we will have taken a giant step towards solving the Ph.D. crisis. With intelligent direction and increased support for graduate students, the four-year Ph.D.could become the rule rather than the speedy exception. And there is no reason I can see why such a course of study could not produce a better teacher, a better scholar, and a better professional than the older system. There need be no division between scholars and "conscript scholars." Is it not clear that all Ph.D.'s (all college teachers for that matter) must be in some sense scholars? All the arguments for replacing the Ph.D. by an intermediate degree center on the dissertation. It is regarded as a practical evil since it has traditionally caused the great delays in earning degrees. It is regarded as being wrong philosophically, since it is often considered a "research" exercise inappropriate to the teacher. But if we will take items XI and XII from the "Recommendations" seriously, both objections will be very largely nullified. It is certainly true, that every student is not suited to the historical or philological research projects so commonly assigned or chosen. But it is equally true that a man who aspires to profess English language and literature should be able to write <u>something</u> which can be completed within twelve months. This is a necessary portion of his role as educator.

Finally then, I would assert -- both as an administrator and as an interested member of the profession -- that I am most sympathetic to an intermdiate degree and hope to see its wide adoption. I am even more committed, however, to a transformation of the Ph.D. degree along the lines suggested by Rene Wellek and Don Cameron Allen. We must be grateful to nineteenth-century German philological scholarship for creating our profession, but it is now time for us to create it anew. We must see our profession not as a chaos of separate and conflicting functions, but as a scholarly community whose function is to educate. We must choose, in the words of Martin Luther King, community rather than chaos.

13 Wellek, p. 125.

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