Introduction

EVELYN J. HINZ

At no time, it would seem, has the issue of education attracted more public attention than recently, when the instances of violence in schools have reached both deadly and near epidemic proportions. Similarly, judging by the various "calls" made by leaders of scholarly organizations, at few times have academics been more concerned with the need for educational reforms. Of course, debates about the need for government control of firearms would seem to be very remote from the curricular debates taking place in university forums. Indeed, some have argued that the "freshman" year needs to be devoted to teaching the difference between high school and university.

From another perspective, however, one could argue that the gap between the ivory tower and what goes on "outside" and "down there" is closing. On the positive side, one might note that not only does the current academic call for reform include an emphasis on the need for universities to take more responsibility for the education of those who will become teachers at the secondary level, but there is also a sense that this involves becoming more knowledgeable about the problems and challenges faced by such educators. On the negative side, one should bear in mind that violence is not foreign to the university setting itself, as the 6 December 1989 massacre of women

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students at the *École Polytechnique* in Montreal attests. Given this continuity, then, it might be profitable to use the student killings to raise some questions that might be mutually illuminating to all concerned.

At the broadest level, one might note that one of the key factors motivating the student violence is thought to be television and/or computer games, an issue that could be related to academic theorizing about the differing impact and relation to violence of various modes of representation. Insofar as the killings have generated speculation whether a sense of otherness played a key role, one might also wonder whether academics have anything to offer with respect to where and how one recognizes difference, and deals with it.

It is, however, in the area of pedagogy that this student violence and the responses it has occasioned become most illuminating, especially to the extent that the philosophy of education today at all levels seems to stress the priority of "how" over "what." While in academic circles it is called "methodology," one might suggest that for a teacher to carry firearms is as much a statement about "critical" approach as is opting for this or that "disciplinary" model. In both areas, moreover, the question of "approach" is often closely related to questions of the instructor's "approachability," and here what the shootings put to a practical test is the belief that the educator should be the "guide on the side" rather than the "sage on the stage." Bringing the students themselves into the picture also requires a serious rethinking of the emphasis today on the need to translate intellectual matters—teaching or reading—into "performance." To what extent, that is, were the students who resorted to violence "acting out" what they had been taught—or thought they had been taught? Even more sobering is the possibility that such violence might be a response on the part of such adolescents to what they "had not been taught."

Significantly, while none of the essays in the present issue was chosen because of its bearing on such matters, each in its own way touches upon topics that are closely related. For example, the opening essay (Tsomondo) examines the way that "otherness" is politically distanced by recourse to telling in *Othello*, going on to discuss how the canonization of Shakespeare and the way that he is taught serves to perpetuate the colonizing racism that the play could be used to address. Similarly, another essay (Brill) explores the way that "telling" in oral cultures operates differently from that in Euro-American text-oriented traditions, and how the failure to recognize this difference has not only misled Western anthropologists in their dealings with Native American "informants" but has also prevented them from recognizing the educative purpose of the stories they were told.

Otherness, of course, is central to the concept of multiculturalism, and another essay (Brodey) explicitly relates such issues to teaching strategies and the question of canon formation in the context of showing how such a seemingly unlikely poet/dramatist/critic as T.S. Eliot has much in common with recent anthropological theorizing. Also addressing the question of how insights from other disciplines can enable us to become better interpreters/readers are two other essays, one of which (Gantar) discusses the way that Bergson's early 20th-century explorations of what makes us laugh anticipates current research in chaos theory, while another (C. Jason Smith) shows how quantum mechanics informs Fowles's experiment with alternative endings/universes in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. Similarly, focusing directly on the topic of violence, another essay (Jacobson) discusses the ways that Frank Norris's attempt to dramatize abnormal psychology/pathology have as many affinities with current theorizing about obsessive/compulsive behavior as they have with 19th-century Naturalism.

The composite nature of cinema is, in turn, the focus of another essay (Alan K. Smith), which explores the way that Truffaut incorporated posters as a way of dealing with a traumatic historical event and how his practice can be related to the emblematic depiction of death. Similarly, another essay (Pearce) addresses the way that David Mamet used theatrical illusion to raise questions about the stability of identity and as a way of conducting a kind of Platonic exploration of the nature of reality.

A last set of essays, finally, discuss the way that our minds function, both stressing the physical basis and related constraints that inform our thinking and enable us to communicate with those from other cultures. Thus one (Crane & Richardson) surveys the work of cognitive researchers with a view to suggesting that current knowledge about information processing needs to become part of literary hermeneutics, while another (Miall) critiques the liberationist claims made by hypertext advocates and argues that nothing will easily replace the educative and affective value of reading.

Collectively, then, the essays in the present issue give practical and renewed force to Kenneth Burke's view that what literature provides is "equipment for living," thereby also perhaps identifying a necessary component in the art of self-defence. Giving added—albeit ironic—relevance is the extent to which current world leaders engaged in military action have responded to the recent student violence by rhetorically arguing that children need to be taught to fight with words rather than with weapons.