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Clarence Gohdes
Duke University

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MILESTONES on the PATH of AMERICAN LITERATURE STUDIES

CLARENCE GOHDES

EMERITUS, DUKE UNIVERSITY

The antiquary who girds up his loins to deal with college professors rather than with their brain-children does well to turn for subjects to such as are called scholars in preference to the more numerous breed known as popularizers, categories conventionally but erroneously viewed as polar regions apart. Dullards versus showmen, pedants versus born teachers, professionals versus dabbler specialists versus generalists — a battle is deemed to exist between the two — and spectators outside the academic ring often look upon their altercations as men of old viewed the strife of the poetic frogs and mice. By far the favorites in anecdote or alumni-reunion chatter are the eccentrics of either ilk. Surviving from the youthful epoch of Cornell, for example, are the exploits of an erstwhile actor who taught Shakespeare in the early days at Ithaca, reading the plays aloud and readily adjusting his voice to the melancholy tones of Hamlet, the sotted ruminations of Falstaff, or the pathetic pleas of Desdemona, these last in tremulous falsetto. When a certain student rendered himself obnoxious by persistently coming late to his crowded lecture-room the dear soul flipped the pages of the copy of Shakespeare from which he was reading, quickly turned to the text of King John and intoned like Stentor: “Enter the Bastard.” Among the ample store of yarns cleaving to the memories of Harvard’s “Old Copey” — Charles T. Copeland — there is a well-worn legend dealing with a Radcliffe girl who likewise proved obnoxious by repeated lateness to class. In time patience left its monument and Copey in icily ironic tones addressed her: “And how will you have your tea, young lady?” “Without the lemon, please,” she demurely replied as she calmly took her seat.

Columbia University at one time had a whole saga dealing with the feud between famed critic George E. Woodberry and Brander Matthews, a popular litterateur and anecdotist who often brought along well-known authors to enliven his classes. But more cherished was Woodberry’s involvement with the president of the institution, in the days before the busy hum of men in Bagdad on the Hudson, as O. Henry called it, had utterly depersonalized higher learning in New York City. Woodberry, it seems, was well received by the students who
attended his lectures, immediately after his arrival from Nebraska, but those sitting beyond the first few rows could not hear what he said. When minor evidences of unrest failed to engage his attention some of his auditors staged a loud disturbance the effect of which was simply that the young professor shoved his notes into his green baize bag and retreated to an office not far away. Next day President Seth Low, well acquainted with gossip beneath the local ivy, made a point of dropping by Woodberry’s office and bluntly asked, “What, pray, do you intend to do about the matter?”

“Nothing, sir,” came the measured reply, “the disturbance I consider wholly an administrative problem. And that is your business, not mine.” Taken aback, as well as more than a little exasperated, Low inquired, “And what, my dear fellow, do you propose that I do to the students?”

“Guillotine them, please,” was the answer.

While professors in the humanistic subjects have supplied a most abundant store of anecdotes, the once-upon-a-time slender platoon of instructors in American literature have thus far failed to leave much exciting material for the delectation of posterity. For reasons as yet unplumbed, the pundits of English departments cherished as heroes of anecdote have, for the most part, been, like “Old Copey” or William Lyon Phelps, who nearly made Yale a Browning Club, devotees of Dr. Johnson or Tennyson rather than of Emerson or Longfellow. Even the presently flourishing band of specialists in American humor have failed to provide grounds justifying their disciples in undertaking studies of their own prowess in mirthmaking.

Though backward-glancing at the array of the ancient or honorable academics who once dealt professionally with the national letters may not stir the well-springs of amusement, there is little doubt that even the worthiest of the small coterie of real scholars entailed have quickly passed from the memories of those who have come in their wake. Indeed, historiography treating almost any academic discipline seems, during these latter days, like glimpsing through smoked lenses faint shadows flitting swiftly by in a pea-soup fog. What the computers destined to take over from the bibliographers will do with, or to, the persons who laid down a solid stone or two on the road to present-day knowledge, or whatever is deemed as such, is impossible to speculate upon, as new epicycles in criticism beckon toward a post “post-modern” phase where super-structuralist sciolism rushes into further clouds of unknowing and the semi-idiotic proceeds more than
half way beyond the horizon of common understanding.

Perhaps fortunately, no one knows who was the first college teacher to be named officially "Professor of American Literature." Willard Thorp, who elbowed his way into the American fold at long-reluctant Princeton, once headed an investigation charged with searching out the primitive saint who deserved the honor, but the graduate student surrogated the task of leafing through old college catalogs patriotically, and perhaps thriftily, came up with a doubtful wight hailing from the New Jersey headquarters itself. But most informed bibliographers would probably agree that Moses Coit Tyler was the earliest progenitor of lucubrations still ranked as valuable contributions to the knowledge of experts in literary Americana. His title in 1868 at the University of Michigan was the then not uncommon one of Professor of Rhetoric and English, and when his distinguished survey of our colonial writers moved him up the ladder in 1881 to Cornell he was denominated Professor of History and Literature. Tyler's identification with the former of these mighty fields was clinched when, three years later, the American Historical Association was planted as an offshoot of the American Social Science Association and he was one of the planters. Anecdotes about him are few and far between, though he was judged to have been of a jolly sort and readily found a place for humor both in his classroom and among his colonial worthies. The reader of his biography nowadays is perhaps more impressed by Tyler's spiritual qualities, his early career as a clergyman, and possibly even by his activities as a journalist associated with the press menage of Henry Ward Beecher. Annalists of Cornell have not done well by mentioning his extraordinary piety as a foible perhaps worthy of anecdote, for as a mystic, which certainly he was, he was no more humorously eccentric than Ralph Waldo Emerson or Jonathan Edwards. Though chipped here and there, chiefly because of newly-discovered documents, Tyler's general account of the colonials and his subsequent masterpiece dealing with figures of the Revolutionary period are monuments on the scarcely discerned path of the early historiography of American literature. Assuredly they have not been inundated in seas of rival ink.

Though the paucity of scholars subsequently working in the early field of literary Americana may have some bearing on his enduring eminence, Tyler's volume looms great in the comparison when one glances, for example, over the list of authorities cited by Barrett Wendell in his Literary History of America, published by Scribner's in
1901. Wendell, if remembered at all today, is likely to be recalled as a dyed-in-crimson Harvard teacher who spoke with a phony accent resembling that of a stage Englishman and urged his pupils to adore the Victorians as he frenetically twirled his Phi Beta Kappa key. When he undertook to pay his respects to the national letters his choices were usually bounded by Harvard Square. W. P. Trent’s biography of William Gilmore Simms, he opined, would “suffice” for a treatment of all the Southern authors, and “the West” escaped his hands utterly except for a brief mention of a few humorists. Other than Tyler, Wendell mentions as the chief authorities: John Nichol, H. S. Pancoast, C. F. Richardson, E. C. Stedman, Greenough White, G. R. Carpenter, E. H. and G. L. Duyckinck, R. W. Griswold, P. K. Foley, and S. L. Whitcomb. One could dredge up a few other names to add to Wendell’s selection of “general authorities,” but the Harvard librarians who helped him to muster his crew did not miss very many. At any rate, Wendell clearly recognized Tyler’s surveys as outstanding.

The years following the publication of the Harvard professor’s book were marked by the emergence of a whole flock of new “authorities,” for the study of American literature was greatly enhanced, in the public schools especially, as part of a renewed wave of nationalism propelled by the Spanish-American War of 1898, and textbooks, outlines, biographies, library sets, etc. were in demand. Consequential, too, was the first international copyright act passed in 1891, which in time opened the way for books by Americans to compete economically with reprints of works from abroad, and another factor was the steady inclusion of “dead authors,” like Longfellow and Emerson, to swell the supply of “classics” judged worthy of study. Normal schools for teachers and the liberal arts divisions of the new colleges began to feel the pressure, and publishers located in Boston, New York, Chicago, Cincinnati, and elsewhere found profit in providing the tools. Moreover, the ever-increasing supply of magazines and city newspapers that reviewed new publications and the sudden rise to prominence of certain periodicals especially devoted to literary criticism and chatter about new books likewise were not without effect. Native authors became popular grist for the mills of magazine “copy.” But the English departments, especially in the established universities, nowhere possessed of a lengthy tradition, were slow to react. In fact, they had their hands full in coping with the assimilation of remnants of instruction in rhetoric along with the ever-increasing demands for classes in composition and the newly insistent claims of Anglo-Saxon and so-
called philology. In most institutions of higher learning the national
literature trickled into English departments by way of inclusion
among the Victorians who dominated offerings in sporadic courses
labeled “modern.” Even William Lyon Phelps briefly took a flyer in
that direction at Yale. But kudos in the eminent academic realm was
usually attached to such pundits as taught Anglo-Saxon and the
medieval authors. They fitted in best with the novel Ph. D. system
imported from Germany. The father of comparative literature in the
U.S.A., George Woodberry, started his career in 1880 at Lincoln,
Nebraska, as a professor of “Anglo-Saxon and Rhetoric.” It was the
proud boast of Randolph-Macon Woman’s College in the 1890’s that
its bright Virginia damsels could translate English into Anglo-Saxon.
And picayune Trinity College in North Carolina even celebrated the
thousandth birthday of King Alfred in 1901.

The man who may have established a second milestone in the
annals of American literary studies amid such an environment was
Fred Louis Pattee, offspring of sturdy New Hampshire yeomanry and
a graduate of Dartmouth College, where he had been briefly instructed
in the national letters by C. F. Richardson, an outstanding authority
of the day. When Tyler, in 1865, conceived his “capital plan to write six
or eight elaborate lectures on ‘A History of American Literature’ — for
a purely literary audience and with a view to publication,” Pattee was
about two years old. Like many another aspiring poet, he perforce
turned journalist and school master before being appointed in 1894
Assistant Professor of English and Rhetoric, at the fledgling Penn
State College. It was not until 1920 that his title specified American
literature. Refusing a tempting offer to succeed Stuart Sherman at the
University of Illinois, he remained at Penn State until 1928, at which
date he moved to Florida and soon became a part-time participant in
the “retired professors’ paradise” at Rollins College, meanwhile con-
tinuing to bring forth a bountiful crop of books and articles. Although
he eventually ranged over almost the entire gamut of American liter-
ary production, his continuing reputation centers principally upon A
History of American Literature since 1870, first published by the
Century Company in 1915, and upon The Development of the Ameri-
can Short Story, issued by Harpers in 1923. The former work is the
earliest substantial treatise on the belles-lettres produced in the gener-
ation that came to the fore just after the Civil War. The other study,
likewise a result of pioneer plowing of tough soil, has not as yet been
displaced as a comprehensive view of the most outstanding genre in
our literary history, ranging from the tales of Washington Irving to those of O. Henry. Of subsidiary, but not negligible, consequence were Pattee’s efforts as an anthologist, for his _Century Readings in American Literature_ (first edition, 1919) set a pattern whose critical and remunerative success influenced many rival textbooks aimed at the same rising enrollments in college survey courses.

Like Tyler, Pattee was a devout Christian — indeed, quite an expert in religious pedagogy, a field in which he published and practiced both as a long-time Methodist Sunday-school teacher and as the acting chaplain of his college. His tenure in this latter post was not exactly canonical, for he struggled too many years before succeeding in getting required attendance at Penn State chapel services abolished and regularly admonished visiting clergymen that no student in the institution was known to have been converted after more than twenty minutes of exhortation. Both men were eager to write novels, though Tyler never carried out his intention to produce one, on Bacon’s Rebellion. Pattee actually published three. Both briefly studied abroad in deference to the new respect for the Ph. D. but never attained one. They shared the blessings of a lively style that enabled them to command no little standing as magazine journalists. In spite of his age, Henry L. Mencken wooed Pattee as a contributor to his _American Mercury_, the rallying sheet of so many of the young iconoclasts of the 1920s. And when Stuart Sherman abandoned the professor’s chair for the chief seat in the _Herald-Tribune’s_ book-reviewing office the New York literary satraps likewise called upon him for screeds. Tyler’s surprising emergence from the then rustic seclusion of Ann Arbor was somewhat like Pattee’s star rising from a remote nook in the Seven Mountains of central Pennsylvania. But the latter made more of an impress on his colleagues. Perhaps he was a bit more gregarious and liked to joke. “When I hear a student say a certain custom in the college comes down from antiquity,” he observed, “I recognize that he means it is more than four years old.” Writing to Jay B. Hubbell in 1931, he quipped: “There have been in the whole history of the world just four who have held the title of Professor of American Literature: Bronson of Brown, Davison of Middlebury, Cairns of Wisconsin, and Pattee of Penn State. It has killed them all except me.” When in 1928 the savants of the American Literature Group of the Modern Language Association made him a member of the first editorial board of their research journal, R. L. Rusk, never given to superlatives, called Pattee “the best-known man in the field.” And W. B. Cairns spoke of
him as "the dean of us all."

No single person can be isolated as most responsible for a third monument in the historiography of the national letters, namely, the Cambridge History of American Literature, which issued its first volume in 1917 and its last in 1921. George Haven Putnam initiated the project on behalf of his family's publishing firm, William P. Trent as editor-in-chief outlined the general plan, and Carl Van Doren served as managing editor. Acting with Trent and Van Doren was John Erskine, a third member of the Columbia English Department. They chose as another associate editor Stuart P. Sherman, a friend of Van Doren's then at the University of Illinois in Urbana. Except for making a few suggestions, securing the cooperation of Paul Elmer More and Paul Shorey, and writing a perfunctory foreword, Sherman did little for the history beyond preparing a couple chapters. He later professed to having no antiquarian talents. Erskine early in World War I went off to France as a Y.M.C.A. representative and in time became the academic director of the A.E.F. university started at Beaune, in the midst of a noted wine region. The war not only disrupted work on the multi-authored history but almost killed it, and before the last proofs were read the services of a whole galaxy of Columbia teachers and their pupils had been levied upon.

The Columbia connection was graced with a degree of poetic justice in that the university had previously harbored more interest in the national literature than perhaps any other university in the world. The star of its teachers of belles-lettres, George E. Woodberry, had felt no condescension in turning to Poe, Emerson, and Hawthorne as subjects fit for judicious appraisal. His colleagues, until he left Columbia in 1904, George R. Carpenter and Brander Matthews had offered courses solely devoted to the subject, the former turning out books on Whittier (1903) and Whitman (1908). Matthews's lectures, offered two hours per week throughout the academic year, were favorites in the early 1890's. Trent's reputation as an authority on the South was already recognized even before he was made a professor in Barnard College, in 1900. Shortly thereafter he became a mainstay of graduate instruction in which he encouraged young men like Van Doren in both British and American studies, impressing them all with his courtly manners as well as his extensive knowledge. The first regular classes in the national letters conducted in the Columbia Graduate Department came about 1914-15 when Erskine directed studies in the influence of Poe, Emerson, Hawthorne, Thoreau, and Whitman abroad,
and Carl Van Doren advised neophytes in the investigation of more varied topics, especially in the area of prose fiction. The revival of Melville's reputation in the 1920s, for example, was due to Trent's interest passed on to Van Doren, who in turn encouraged Raymond Weaver to attempt a biography of that author. Columbia's warmth toward the national letters as an academic discipline, however, was chilled by the squelching of Erskine's effort to have Stuart Sherman appointed as a colleague; and not long thereafter both Erskine and Van Doren diminished activities in the university and eventually ceased teaching there altogether.

While the school market for textbooks, handbooks, and a variety of surveys or histories had induced not a few publishers to venture into the American field, G. P. Putnam's Sons, with headquarters in New York and a branch office in London, was more especially involved. It had brought out the works of several classic authors, had sponsored a magazine of considerable literary reputation, and had been identified with the subject since the paternal days when the firm was called Wiley and Putnam. George Haven Putnam, head of the company since 1872, was himself an author, a pillar of the New York Authors Club and the Copyright League, husband of the first dean of Barnard College, and brother of a foremost librarian who presided over the Library of Congress. One of the books handled by the house in 1909 was the American edition of A Manual of American Literature which Baron Tauchnitz had sponsored in recognition of the very considerable American element in his world-famous series of "British Authors." About one third of the book was a rehash of Tyler's account of colonial and Revolutionary writers prepared by T. S. Stanton, a son of the noted feminist, who free-lanced in Paris after serving as Berlin correspondent of the New York Tribune. Stanton was listed as editor, the remainder of the manual being the product of young teachers at Cornell, of which university he was an alumnus and master of arts. Tauchnitz's publication might as well have been called the Cornell Manual. Lane Cooper and Clark S. Northup were among the collaborators.

About the same time, Putnam had become involved with the Cambridge University Press in handling the many-volumed History of English Literature (1907-1916). The British university of course had nothing to do with it, but the Cambridge History of American Literature was patterned after the English counterpart. It was natural enough that Putnam should turn to Trent at the outset of his Ameri-
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can project, for the Columbia professor was not only a friend and fellow stalwart of the Authors Club and an associate of Henry E. Huntington, John Quinn, Henry S. Folger, and other rich collectors of the Hobby Club but probably the most prolific academic authority on the authors of the United States, an experienced editor in both the American and British fields, and himself a contributor to the *Cambridge History of English Literature*. Moreover, a series of biographical studies of Americans that Trent had edited for the publisher Holt seemed to be doing especially well. Erskine and Van Doren were disciples as well as colleagues of Trent's and, before joining him as associates, had apparently been mulling over plans for a substantial literary history. All of the editors, it appears, worked for fees rather than royalties.

When the first volume of the *Cambridge History of American Literature* saw the light of day in 1917 part of its impact was inevitably lost amid the turmoil of the times, and the delays in completing it rendered its contents partially out of date by the time the last volume was published four years later. With Erskine off in France, Trent almost smothered by his various projects, along with an onrush of graduate students following the war, and Sherman riding the horse of journalism as well as the kicking donkey of handling the English department at Illinois, the burden fell on Carl Van Doren. And before long he withdrew from teaching in favor of chores like editing *The Nation* or managing the affairs of the prosperous "book club" called the Literary Guild. All of the original editors of the cooperative history save Trent eventually abandoned teaching and scholarship for other pursuits, and Trent's age and poor health inevitably took their toll of him. Loyal efforts on the part of Van Doren's friends and family, along with the contributions of Columbia's staff and graduate alumni, brought the task to a finish. Certain of its chapters are today scarcely more outmoded than are those of its chief successor; and elements in its bibliographies, once considered prodigally generous, are not without value to present-day researchers who, smothered by the prodigious clutter of critical chaff, look to the computers in vain and send out Macedonian cries for a winnowing of the grain. The *Cambridge History of American Literature*, coming as it did with the sanction of one of our greatest universities and the collaboration of respected scholars in various fields, helped to provide status for the new province of academic research.

Such status, however, was not evident in the early proceedings of
the Modern Language Association of America, though there was among its philological members a lively interest in the provincial speech of the States; and, shortly after its birth in 1883, a sprinkling of litterateurs joined the society. In 1889 James Russell Lowell served as president, from his presiding chair venturing to correct Professor C. H. Grandgent’s statements respecting the pronunciation of the word “whole” in Massachusetts — very politely of course. In 1920 the hit-or-miss pattern of the annual programs was drastically overhauled “with a view to greater specialization, and greater stimulus to research,” as John M. Manly, president that year, put it, and the English Division was segmented into ten “Groups.” American literature was tacked on as English XI, after Killis Campbell, a professor in the University of Texas, reminded Manly that there were members, like himself, more interested in Poe or Whitman than in any British author. In 1923 the American Literature Group became English XII, in order to squeeze in a “Contemporary Literature” addition to the English Division.

Manly’s inclusion in the annual program of the MLA of the literature of the United States as an area of specialization and research marked a major step forward in the progress of formal study of the subject. A much-needed focus was provided for the efforts of the few scattered scholars working in the field, and graduate instruction was grounded on a more substantial basis. Although English XII, like the parent organization, suffered from constantly changing leadership and the occasional manipulations of the politically-minded, it readily undertook a listing of dissertations, completed or in progress, an inventory of pertinent manuscripts, and other bibliographical aids; and before a decade passed it sponsored a successful journal concerned solely with the American field. Such ancillary activities and semi-independent organization eventually led other coteries affiliated with the MLA to follow suit. Less formally, the members of Group XII discussed such relevant matters as separation from English department control, alliance at the national level with kindred elements among the historians, and the securing of funds independently of the hierarchy of the Association. Efforts in the last-mentioned direction came to grief during the Great Depression following 1929, and the chief monetary support rested on the “Group assessment” paid by the faithful, at first one dollar per year.

As more students during the 1920s elected to write dissertations dealing with American authors, requirements for the Ph.D. degree
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became a demanding concern of the leading spirits in the Group. Under the best of circumstances the problem is always one of the touchiest faced by the university world, for practical demands and the claims of conscience and standards are ever at odds and at best the conflict ends in a draw. The requirements, as was the case with most matters of consequence facing Group XII, were relegated to its elected Advisory Committee (originally called an Executive Committee with a separate chairman), whose report was presented at the meeting held in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1926. Following considerable discussion and revision, this report was returned to the Committee for further revamping and in 1927 during the convention held in Louisville, Kentucky, emanated as a “statement of principles” not meant to provoke “an immediate or sweeping revision of present programs.” When, on 25 January 1928, the report was sent out to those who had paid their dollar assessment, an accompanying letter, signed by Kenneth B. Murdock as chairman of the Group, and Robert Spiller as secretary, less gingerly stated: “The importance of something like a unanimity upon this subject will be apparent. Among the problems dependent upon such agreement are those of the foundation of a national quarterly of American literature, the relationship of the study of American literature to the graduate departments of history, philosophy, and English in our universities, and ultimately the place of American literature in the curricula of our liberal arts colleges and secondary schools.” The report read as follows:

SUGGESTIONS TOWARD A PROGRAM FOR THE DOCTORATE IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

The present lack of uniformity in requirements for the doctorate in American literature is the result of differences of opinion as to the exact and distinguishing characteristics of our subject. Sometimes the candidate is expected to know the whole of American literature but little else, on the assumption that ours has sufficient of those unifying racial, linguistic, and other elements which make the literatures of England, France, Germany, etc. national in character. Sometimes he is expected to know the whole of both English and American literature on the assumption that our literature, as well as our language, is descended chiefly in the English tradition. When it is seen that the latter requirement is impractical, the candidate is often encouraged to do his more concentrated work in English rather than in American literature.

Neither of these extreme attitudes furnishes a satisfactory definition of American literature or establishes its relationships
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with other branches of learning. American literature is more than a reflection or derivative of English literature, and yet cannot be rigidly defined in terms of nationality. The study of comparative literature and of social and philosophical backgrounds, important to all literary study, has an increased importance in the case of American literature. Our attention should therefore be directed primarily to the consideration of the following problems: (1) In what senses is our literature distinctively American? (2) In what ways is it related to the literatures of England and of other countries? (3) What conditions of life and thought in America have produced these results?

It is obvious that, in order to be directed toward a scientific consideration of these questions, the student will need a large background of related knowledge. The following are proposed as the essential grounds for his training:

1. American history, with emphasis upon social and economic principles and backgrounds.
2. Modern European history, especially the history of England since the death of Elizabeth and of the revolutionary movement in France and elsewhere.
3. The history of modern philosophy and religion, notably of such movements as Puritanism and Rationalism in seventeenth and eighteenth century England and of Puritanism, Transcendentalism, etc. in America.
4. English literature, its content and history, at least from the Renaissance to 1880, with special attention to such movements as neo-classicism, romanticism, etc., and to forms for which parallels may be found in related periods of American literature.
5. American literature, its content and history, from 1607 to the present.

In view of the object and scope of this training, it would seem neither relevant nor practicable to add to the program much detailed study of Germanic and Romance philology. Such subjects are primarily for the student of language, and the study of "the American language" is obviously an aspect of English philology. The student of American literature must have, of course, a reasonable command of German and French, and, wherever possible, Latin or Greek, or both — more than this if his dissertation involves the study of foreign literatures.

A one-year Master's degree would be rarely feasible in so broad and so exacting a field of study as this program represents. Ordinarily, prospective candidates for the doctorate should be advised either wholly to omit the Master's degree or to take it in those fields of English literature which, by parallel or influence, have had the most direct bearing upon American thought. Students who do not propose to proceed to the doctorate should be accepted as candidates for the Master's degree only when they have already had a sound undergraduate training in all or in most
Today, in the post-television era, these “suggestions” appear to be impossibly antediluvian. The report indicates, however, that the students of the national literature were already feeling their way, if not their oats, in the conduct of graduate studies in the English departments. It is well to remember that, at the time, an aspirant for the Ph.D. at Harvard running the gauntlet of its English department was expected to bear up through Gothic and Old French no matter if he was foolish enough to wish to write a dissertation on Hawthorne. It might be of interest also to be reminded that Manly was a Harvard-trained medieval philologist, an eminent one to boot, and Killis Campbell, who triggered his admitting American literature to the English canon of the MLA program, was likewise fully trained in medieval studies at Johns Hopkins, his own dissertation having to do with the Middle English versions of “The Seven Sages of Rome.” The study of American literature in 1928 was still in its infancy, but perhaps the baby has come a long way since.