

A BEGINNING

One's first experience editing a journal is frightening. How many typos did I miss? Is the typing clear enough? Is it centered properly? And what is more important, will the readers like the articles?

But, how can we miss, with such scholars as Harriet Sheridan, Edward P. J. Corbett, and Stephen Dunning? The Editorial Board decided that this first issue should focus on last spring's conference. Harriet Sheridan was the keynote speaker, Edward Corbett spoke to the college section, and Stephen Dunning, who has furnished us some of his poetry, was the luncheon speaker.

Our themes for the next two journals have also been selected by the Editorial Board: the winter journal will focus on Politics and the English Teacher, a theme which can include the pros and cons of issues such as standardized tests, a state-wide testing program, a state-mandated curriculum, grantsmanship, teacher evaluation and tenure. The spring journal will focus on teaching reading.

So send MEJ your thoughts -- in an article, a letter, a poem. We do not want to resort to using the esoteric articles of college and university professors from all over the country and the world -- yes, we have one from Teheran -- who are harassed to publish or perish. Although we welcome down-to-earth articles from anywhere, this is a Minnesota journal. So I would repeat the words of Elmer Suderman in his last issue last spring: "Force the new editor to edit, not to print whatever is sent...The new editor will enjoy that."

THE STATE OF THE LANGUAGE ARTS: WHERE ARE WE,
WHERE ARE WE GOING?

Delivered at MCTE Annual Conference - April 22, 1977

Harriet Sheridan
Carleton College
Northfield, Minnesota

How are the language arts? What is their state? The answer is simply given: The state of the language arts is parlous. Why so? Let me take up the questions of whence, where now, and whither. To lend some credibility to my claim to speak about literacy past, present and future, I'll begin with a literary allusion to Robert Frost's poem "The Ovenbird." Ovenbirds do not usually congregate in large numbers such as attend MCTE conferences, if Frost's account of their habits is to be trusted. Yet, choice of accommodations notwithstanding, I think that we, in this location, are talking about an ovenbird's problem.

The question that he frames in all but words
Is what to make of a diminished thing.

This phrase, "what to make of a diminished thing," is the ~~text~~ that I now advance to match the text adopted by a proliferating race of critics who have chosen the line that precedes, using it to describe the achievements of today's English students, whose thoughts and passions are said to be framed in all but words.

You have read the indictments in Newsweek, Change, The Chronicle, Harper's, the Yale Alumni News, the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, and other such whimsical publications. The uproar is