

After New Literary History and Theory? Notes on the MLA Hit Parade and the Currencies of Academic Exchange

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FROM TIME TO TIME the Modern Language Association undertakes to define the breadth and continuity of language and literature studies in the United States. Breadth and continuity in this context, however, have in recent years come to be understood as opposites, allegorized in the culture wars as Diversity against Tradition. Those wishing to ground their interpretations in "hard facts" may take note of the following numbers, covering the years 1981–1992: What was "in" in 1981 and still on the hit parade published in 1992 by the MLA, constitutes only three percent of the new total: forty-three books out of 1,428. We will return to these numbers further on.

Reasons for this massive revision of what's in and what's out are easy enough to identify; more complex is their interaction. The shadow of obsolescence hovers over the name of the field itself, "language and literature studies," prompting speculation as to whether the emergent field of cultural studies, as it cuts more deeply into the market share of literary theory, will revitalize, transform, or evince language and literature studies, the languishing enterprise from which it is emerging. Postmodern hip's makeover of Mr. Chips is thus one of the options the MLA is covering as it works to revise the purview of its cultural action in an attempt to keep an umbrella over what it likes to call "the profession." *The profession?* What does that definite article claim to define, or seek to claim?

On five occasions since 1938 the MLA has redrawn the map of academic language and literature study. The latest map, the *Introduction to Scholarship in Modern Languages and Literatures, Second Edition*,¹ registers intrepid and exuberant expansions into new areas, and charts with more diverse tones and colors the new borders of excolonial cultural spaces, while fixing the tentative boundaries of recently colonized intellectual ones. Among many implications of that expansion, the most arresting derives from a simple bibliographic statistic: seven times more works are cited (1,428 in all) in the new *Introduction to Scholarship* than in the previous edition published in 1981. This is not a minor matter of

bibliography, or wider canons. The remarks that follow sketch as it were a legend or key to reading the new MLA map; they will touch on issues of power (the politics of citation), exchange (the economics of academic publishing), anxiousness (the psychology of responses to information explosion and overload), and strategic planning (the sociology of authorized culture). Framed in more general terms, the question is one of signification: What does it mean to compile a hit parade of "scholarship in language and literature studies"? Who makes it, and how; who buys it, and why?

In 1938 the MLA issued with solemn urgency a statement of "The Aims of Literary Study."² As war loomed, the case for literature was made in language unconsciously echoing the grand eloquence with which Americans hold certain truths to be self-evident: "It is of the utmost importance to clarify for the members of the profession and others the important service which the study of literature can render individuals in a democratic state" (AL 1367). This statement overtly associating literature with politics to meet the "cultural needs of a civilized democracy" was promulgated in December (the customary date for MLA's annual meeting), three months after the Munich Pact; nine months later Hitler invaded Poland.³ Today the MLA's activist ardor remains undiminished, though the organization is more effective now in articulating major issues (or at least in providing the locus for their articulation) in culture and politics, and in the politics of culture (internal politics and internecine warfare notwithstanding).

In 1948 the MLA commissioned a new statement of "The Aims, Methods, and Materials of Research in the Modern Languages and Literatures." Published in 1952, the new statement, now essay length, emphasized the complexity of literary study, eschewed rigidity, encouraged debate and discussion.⁴ By 1962, the essay had developed into a pamphlet. Revised in 1970, it still had the shape of the 1952 version (one section each for linguistics, textual criticism, literary history, literary criticism), but was now addressed "primarily to students" in contrast to the previous versions intent on professional self-definition.⁵ (The 1938 statement was addressed to "members of the profession and others" [AL 1367], and the 1952 essay to "the philological profession" [AM 3].)

By 1981, with the dawning consciousness that literary studies were moving irreversibly in directions of bewildering complexity and diversity, the old agrarian metaphor of "field" all but disappeared from the MLA *Introduction to Scholarship*, along with the tone of confidence and mastery with which previous MLA cartographers had charted the course of "the profession." Literary studies had become "far more complex and wide ranging and far more lacking in unity of purpose than was evident in the decades prior to 1970."⁶ The editor of the volume acknowledged

that it was difficult to find coherence in a discipline that had become "multifarious, complicated, and seemingly lacking in unity," and was compelled to admit that the only factor offsetting "the disunity that seems to mark the present state of scholarship" was the "interdependence between literature and linguistic schools and their diverse fields of study" (*IS* vi).

By 1992 coherence was a dead issue. No attempt is made in the introductory remarks of the new *Introduction to Scholarship* to discover or imagine unity and coherence in the activities which, as recently as twenty years ago, could be related in four brief essays promising "a useful introduction and a sound orientation" to a body of knowledge that was still perceived to be manageable (*IS* vii). That this is no longer the case will no doubt be one of the most important points made not only *in* the book (by Jonathan Culler; more on this below), but *by* the book itself, by its sheer numbers. In contrast to the 1981 edition in which each author was asked "simply to supply a brief, selected bibliography, specifically for the nonspecialist student reader" (*IS* vii), in 1992 "the essays presented in this volume . . . conclude with suggestions for further reading and a complete list of works cited" (*IS*, 2nd ed. v); that is, gone is the goal or myth of a "brief, selected bibliography, specifically for the nonspecialist reader." More dramatic are the numbers: works cited in 1981 totaled 213 items; in 1992 the figure had risen to 1,428.

Fourteen hundred twenty-eight is a staggering number when you consider that prior to the 1981 *Introduction to Scholarship*, the earlier MLA statements and essays provided *no* bibliographies. Wondering what had happened between the new version and the previous one, I had the 1981 and 1992 bibliographies optically scanned for sorting.⁷ In tabular form, here is a summary and overview of the data:

	Number of pages	"Fields" or approaches	Works cited
1938	5	not treated	0
1952	35	4 sections	0
1962, 1970 rev.	81	4 chapters	*
1981	143	6 chapters	213
1992	377	15 chapters	1,428

*Only one or two works are cited in three of the four chapters; there are detailed citations in the chapter on textual criticism.

Of the 213 works cited ten years ago, the first thing I wanted to know was how many appeared again among the 1,428 cited in the new edition.

The answer is forty-three. Thus twenty percent of the 1981 citations reappear in 1992, but in the expanded aggregate—1,428 items—they constitute only three percent of the new total. From another perspective, the question arises why eighty percent of the 1981 citations disappeared. Or from yet another angle, where did all those new citations, 1,215 in all, come from between 1981 and 1992?

Do we really need to ask? In 1992 the *Chicago Tribune* reported that United States college professors produced nearly one million articles and three hundred thousand books over a two-year period; that's about 410 books and 1,370 articles a day.⁸ Who prints all those articles? Most of our share are presumably absorbed by the 3,277 journals and series listed (as of 1993) in the MLA *Directory of Periodicals*. The Library of Congress receives 31,000 new books and journals a day, but is becoming selective and only keeps 7,000 a day. (I make no attempt to keep track of statistics like this in any systematic way; like Andy Rooney I note them down at random from time to time, in no particular order.)

Which books were cited most often in the 1992 edition? With all due reservations about hit parades (a term used not without irony by Pierre Bourdieu studying the sociology of academia in France), I will relay without commentary the computer count, which, as it happens, came up with exactly twenty works—a Top Twenty—on the basis of multiple citations. The five cited most frequently were Fredric Jameson's *The Political Unconscious* (in six of the fifteen *Introduction to Scholarship* essays); Jacques Derrida's *Grammatology* and Gerald Graff's *Professing Literature* (in five of the fifteen); and in four of the fifteen, Terry Eagleton's *Literary Theory*, Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*, and Gayatri Spivak's *In Other Worlds*. Fourteen works were cited three times, and seventy-three others by two authors; the mass of the remaining citations—1,122 works—were single citations.⁹

Without descending into excessive detail, it is interesting to observe who among the fifteen authors cites whom. Self-citation and reciprocal citations may suggest lesser and greater degrees of interconnection and disciplinary overlap. In this regard the pattern of self-citation in 1992 (eighty percent of the authors cited works by themselves which were not cited by others in the volume) is not significantly different, taking into account other relevant variables, from the 1981 figure of sixty-six percent. Citation of works by fellow contributors to the volume was thirty-three percent in 1981 (two out of six), and sixty-six percent in 1992 (ten out of fifteen).

Reading the 1992 *Introduction to Scholarship*, I had an eerie reminiscence of remarks made a few years ago by Jeffrey Sammons in an article published in the MLA's annual review *Profession* (sic): "No academic scholar needs to be reminded of the enormous proliferation of knowl-

edge and intellectual subtlety in the world's learning. Some years ago a scientific colleague assured me that according to his calculations, based on the present rate of acceleration, by the year two thousand and something the entire land area of the earth would be covered to a depth of eight feet with physics journals. In the humanities things are a little less spectacular, but not much."¹⁰

Between now and the year two thousand and something, the new *Introduction to Scholarship* will serve not only as an updated synthesis of major issues and perspectives in language and literature study, but also as a bibliographic guide (authoritative, authorized) constituted by the generous lists of "Suggestions for Further Reading" offered at the end of each of its chapters. (In five of the fifteen essays, "Works Cited" and "Suggestions for Further Reading" are combined in the same list.) In registering some of the enormous proliferation alluded to by Sammons, the *Introduction to Scholarship* bibliographies may indeed provoke a certain increase in the level of information anxiety among scholars accustomed to the illusion of manageability.

Certainly the information explosion will continue to destabilize the field (this is not bad, though it is different). But since scholars in languages and literatures do not spend all their time reading, and do spend much of their time *writing*, a volume so densely packed with "Suggestions for Further Reading" might also have included for its implied readers—students and recent Ph.D.s in language and literature—more suggestions for further *writing*. Only one of the fifteen contributors addresses this point specifically, and it is a point that readers of such a book cannot afford to ignore.¹¹ It is true, as the *Introduction to Scholarship* implies, that large amounts of thoughtful and careful reading are expected of the scholar in language and literature. But, since even the most avid academic reader is untenurable unless also adequately accomplished as a writer, we should also consider how the latter role can most usefully be related to the former.

The line of reasoning I am pursuing here assumes a relatively uninitiated reader seeking to understand how academic writing functions in higher education. This turns out to be a dubious supposition. Can we really assume that young people with linguistic and literary aptitudes who are currently drawn to language and literature courses will want, or be able, to apply themselves to understanding how the ideologically loaded term "economics" bears on their academic lives? Do we give them the wherewithal to reflect on how the basic factors that shape the material form of an economic system (supply and demand, production and consumption) relate to what is understood by the terms "scholarship" and "research" in language and literature fields? And how

the beliefs and attitudes that revise the meanings of these terms evolve over time? In approaching these questions we must acknowledge the powerful biases that have traditionally operated to idealize the realm of scholarly inquiry and isolate it from the world of "economics."

Indeed the ideology formerly dominant in academe sought to banish vulgar considerations of the marketplace to the less noble confines of business. To say "formerly dominant" is to register the fact that such views today are associated with what are called conservative values. Conservatives in and around education militate—or quietly yearn—for a return to common culture and core curriculum, a return to a time when education was not indoctrination, when teaching was not subordinated to politics and ideology, when the business of professors in the humanities was to transmit the great tradition of Western civilization rather than pursue narrow specialization and minority issues. However illusory the historical basis of these ideas, it is more important that they be seen as part of a larger tendency to idealize education and detach it from the concrete realities of economic and political life. Underlying clichéd notions of objectivity, disinterested search for truth, and intellectual detachment, is the desire that education not interfere in issues of power, or the desire that power not be an issue at all. Antimaterialists who fostered and embodied the ideal of the "scholar" and "intellectual," with the intellectual's disdain for crass issues of cash and trade, were not malevolent or malicious in their idealism, not always misguided or misinformed, merely informed otherwise, informed differently from the inchoate majority that would coalesce—from the then disaggregated if not always segregated minorities—to outvote, now, the informal oligarchy that by supposing them imposed its affects and attitudes of privilege on students less able to afford them. In particular, the readers of the 1992 *Introduction to Scholarship* unquestionably constitute a demographic group more likely to recognize that any time we participate in any system of exchange (material, symbolic, or any combination of these), we choose, consciously or not, either to adjust ideology to economics, or economics to ideology.

I will need to assume at this point that the reader agrees that it is useful to be conscious of such choices. Students and young scholars have available new choices about what is valuable or tenable for them as individuals in the overlapping material and symbolic markets of academia, as they negotiate terms, meanings, and value. But due to the exponential growth of a now unmasterable body of texts whose appeal and suspected importance hopelessly outstrip the student's (and scholar's) resources of time to read everything of perceived value, the need for clearer criteria for choice has become more acute. Not only in the

choice of suggested readings, but also, and more decisively, every time the student or young scholar sits down to *write*.

It is axiomatic that the universal medium of exchange in professional academia is writing. This is because all other tokens of exchange in that world (teaching, conferences, salary, rank, prestige) are either represented by, convertible into, or evaluated against this medium, the gold standard of academe. To the extent this observation seems obvious is precisely the extent to which it would seem appropriate for the *Introduction to Scholarship* to have accorded it more consideration. Why these particular suggestions for further reading, 782 in all? How and why did they come to be suggested, as a subset of the total 1,428 works cited? I am in no position to answer these questions; the remarks that follow and the "suggestions for further *writing*" that accompany them are intended to help situate those questions, and are offered along the lines of an open letter to student readers of the *Introduction to Scholarship*, and to those of us, their teachers, who take seriously the new challenges that they and we must face or avoid.

Students are accustomed to write for teachers. Students training to become teachers of language and literature (or theory, or cultural studies) must get used to writing for other teachers, and, beyond that (to the extent feasible), for an ever more general readership. I could try to state the situation more elegantly, but the reality is so elementally crude that to euphemize would be to denature the brute fact that (precept number one), *in professional academia, who you read matters less than who reads you*.

Getting oneself read presumably has something to do with the quality of one's writing. Or does it? In academic writing, the definitions of quality (or their signifieds if you prefer) are unstable; the meanings of "quality" are constantly being renegotiated. Since standards do not remain standard, obsolescence is no less a permanent factor in the market of ideas than in other spheres of production. Does this mean that no matter how current your approach and how brilliant your writing, an inexorable law of the market dictates that for every new book (or Ph.D. thesis) of general appeal in language and literature there will be a dozen, or fifty, of such narrow scope that they will be lucky to find a dozen readers, or fifty? Jonathan Culler confronts this question in his chapter on "Literary Theory" (*JS*, 2nd ed. 201–35), where he shows how the notion of "general" (or broadly significant), as applied to literary studies, relates to the notion of "theory." That relation turns out to be one of synonymy. Since the 1970s, writes Culler, "increasingly, for a piece of critical writing to appear generally significant, it has to seem theoretically significant," and therefore, as a corollary, "points of general

interest are taken to be theoretical positions even if they do not rely on anything like theoretical argument" (*IS*, 2nd ed. 201–2). This latest turn in the semantic drift of the term "theory" (originally "visual observation, contemplation") and its current function as an honorific may have posed a philological question of general interest once upon a time; more interesting at the moment, however, in the equation "theoretical" = "generally significant," is that the meaning of the latter is different enough today from what it was in the 1940s or the 1960s to render many "high quality" specimens of literary scholarship from 1940 and 1990 mutually unintelligible to their respective authors and readers, so widely have their assumptions diverged.¹²

Saying something "generally significant" is fundamentally different from mastering a field. Earlier versions of the *Introduction to Scholarship* reflect the assumption that literary scholarship entailed mastery of a field. Whatever else that phrase might have meant, graduate students were told, as recently as the 1970s, that to "master a field" meant that you had read everything in it. It was soon enough apparent that in reality mastery in those terms meant one of two things: a field too small to be of much interest, or a good deal of bluffing. But it is only recently that literary academics, with our epistemological and affective lag vis-à-vis the sciences, have come to admit openly that we have not read everything in our field, and have no intention of trying.¹³ Though exceptions exist (an article on Harold Bloom has him reading "perhaps 500 pages an hour, Bloom says, with almost complete retention"),¹⁴ the cult of encyclopedism possible in a once-manageable database has gone the way of typewriters and V8 cars with fins. Indeed in 1993 any student who took it into his or her head to read everything in the bibliographies of the fifteen essays in the *Introduction to Scholarship*, or merely the abbreviated list of 782 works graciously proposed in the "Suggestions for Further Reading," would still be reading by the time the next decennial revision appeared.

From this follows precept two: *Just because it's good doesn't mean it'll be read*. In every area of literary study vast amounts of fine writing (writing of "quality") are accumulating which no one reads, or that few people read anymore. (Thus the "Suggestions for Further Reading" in the *Introduction to Scholarship* date mostly from the 1980s and 90s.) Much has been written about the information explosion and the anxieties it has fostered. But the chorus of alarm, bewilderment, and despair may be exaggerated. The other side of the coin is that (in accordance with the economics of academe) more people are reading, and will be reading, more in some areas of your field than ever before. So when you sit down to write and ask yourself "why should anyone read this," your purpose

should be not to acknowledge improbability but to gauge possibility, and focus accordingly.

Graduate students contemplating dissertation topics used to be told, "If your work is good it will gain recognition." This remains partly true, and probably as partly untrue as it has always been.¹⁵ Technology has not altered the basic economic dynamic ("quality" is necessary but not sufficient), merely intensified it, now that information is cheap and books are likened to locusts. It has always been true that much good work does not get recognized, or is undervalued; the only difference today is that the proportions have increased. This may seem confusing in the light of the inverse phenomenon, that fame or notoriety often accrue to less than stellar quality. This has to do with the rules of regulated markets, and periodic deregulations. Does that mean that regulation of ideas as commodities is not essentially different from controlling the flow of apples, white wine, or computer chips? We can turn now to that topic.

If technology has not significantly altered the basic workings of the economic system of academic exchange but only increased the flow through the system, major economic changes since the publication of the last *Introduction to Scholarship* have indeed significantly altered the *ideology* of "scholarship" with respect to economics. As noted above, it was conventional for earlier scholars to affect scorn for the vulgar considerations of the marketplace. But as publishing costs continue to rise while subsidies continue to fall, the marketplace of ideas has become increasingly hard put to pass itself off as different in kind from other markets. Again, in the more genteel academia of yore, to speak this way about markets would have been seen as only slightly less vulgar than to delve into the other formerly taboo realities that receive, now, ample coverage both in the *Introduction to Scholarship* and throughout literary studies in general. But students and beginning professors who still prefer to ignore the question of markets should know that no publisher today will ignore them.¹⁶

When scholarly publishing was better subsidized, it could afford to define its mission as being the diffusion of knowledge, truth, ideas. Thus a scholarly press did not send out "ads," it provided "announcements" of new works forthcoming. Its business was not to "sell" books (though it did accept money for them), it "made available" new work for the benefit of scholars and researchers; it made "contributions" to knowledge. Nowadays the distinction between a university press and a commercial publisher has dwindled to a nuance: The commercial press says bluntly, "We exist to sell books," while the university press hedges: "We don't exist to sell books, but if we didn't sell books we wouldn't exist."

The same goes for journals, on a proportionally smaller scale. Scholarly publishers still make allowances that commercial presses cannot make, but fewer than before. The questions they ask are therefore not so different from the ones sketched above for people who write: Who are we printing this for? Why would they want to read it? Just because it's good doesn't mean it'll sell. To see how this impacts on you, let us look now, in conclusion, at how the academic bookselling economy and the academic bookwriting economy interrelate.

Money is decisive in the publishing world; in academia what's decisive is said to be (again) "quality"—or, more precisely (as we have seen), perceived quality, or, more precisely still, prestige, the outcome of perceived quality. Coded in euphemism, prestige is the common semantic denominator of the decisive criteria that prevail in hiring and retaining professors, and in diffusing their writing: reputation, visibility, the authoritative judgment of recognized experts in the field.¹⁷ What defines these criteria of prestige (or perceived quality) according to which we assess and evaluate, are assessed and evaluated? Again, the analogy with other markets is illuminating. As in other currency markets, other markets of paper and metal, there is no fixed rate of exchange between the symbolic currencies mediated by writing; historically they have been allowed to float, subject to market conditions and investor confidence,¹⁸ both of which are at times artificially propped up by the Fed.¹⁹

These reflections are intended to draw attention to some of the underrepresented realities of your field and to divert you from some of the overrepresented myths underwriting bad investment strategies of the past. I use the term "bad" here in the functional sense, bad because these strategies *overwrote*, fostered overproduction of writing that was unrealistically (idealistically) out of proportion to demand. But overproduction and surplus devalue and depress any currency that mediates entities of exchange, just as they devalue and depress those who accumulate and spend them. As you look ahead to the balance sheets compiled by individuals and committees who count up your production and evaluate your contribution, you would do well to pay more attention—more than previous academics paid, or had to pay—to what it will take, in a changing market with a floating currency, to make your writing count, countable, counted. As nonacademic brokers say, adjust your investment decisions to your goals, or you'll be forced to do the opposite. It's your responsibility to decide how to construct your portfolio and how much to diversify. Whatever you do—linguistics, theory, feminism, cultural studies—ask yourself these questions (but not necessarily in these terms if you find them distasteful; the market analogy here may be considered merely an allegory): What are today's

(and tomorrow's) blue-chip issues? How much can I afford to put into them? How much do I want to trade off risk and security, high-yield and socially-responsible issues? And what is the best bottom-line balance attainable between the economics of academia and the other cost-benefit economies of my life? The economic metaphors used here can be pushed too far, but you cannot afford to ignore the forces and practices that define the currencies of academic exchange; markets will continue to operate whether or not you choose to be conscious of their operations. The more you know about the rules that regulate these markets, the better informed will be your own choices and suggestions for further writing. Reading the MLA *Introduction to Scholarship* from this perspective, the scholarly hit parade may gain rather than lose in value for the academic invest(igat)or in language and literature.²⁰

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NOTES

- 1 *Introduction to Scholarship in Modern Languages and Literatures*, 2nd ed., ed. Joseph Gibaldi (New York, 1992); hereafter cited in text as *IS*, 2d ed.
- 2 "The Aims of Literary Study," *PMLA* 53 (1938), 1367-71; hereafter cited in text as *AL*.
- 3 Along with civilized/civilization, the words democracy/democratic resound throughout the essay (seven times in five pages); their collocation in "civilized democracy" encapsulates the deeper message of the essay, and their association in quasi synonymy its ideal and ideology.
- 4 "The Aims, Methods, and Materials of Research in the Modern Languages and Literatures," *PMLA* 67 (1948), 3-37; hereafter cited in text as *AM*.
- 5 "The Aims and Methods of Scholarship in Modern Languages and Literatures," 2nd ed., ed. James Thorp (New York, 1970).
- 6 *Introduction to Scholarship in Modern Languages and Literatures*, ed. Joseph Gibaldi (New York 1981); hereafter cited in text as *IS*.
- 7 For the computer scanning I am grateful to Chris Johnson, Director of the Language Research Center in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Arizona, and to his assistant Kathy Mosher.
- 8 Cited by Daniel Cheever in *Harvard Magazine* (November-December 1992), 46.
- 9 Limitations of space preclude offering these lists here; interested readers may contact me for a copy. For Pierre Bourdieu's account of the French hit parade, see his *Homo Academicus*, tr. Peter Collier (Stanford, 1988), pp. 256-70. For a recent tally of *PMLA* citations, see John W. Kronik's "Editor's Column," in *PMLA* 106 (1991), 200-204 (with references also to previous counts in 1985 and 1980).
- 10 Jeffrey L. Sammons, "Squaring the Circle: Observations on Core Curriculum and the Plight of the Humanities," *Profession* 86 (1986), p. 15.
- 11 Gerald Graff notes that "the graduate student who in 1945 might have written a dissertation on the topic Certain Aspects of Robert Southey's Juvenilia would be likely in 1990 to write one on Robert Southey and the Construction of Gender in the Discourse of Romanticism, in which a claim might be made about the roots of our present views about sexuality" (*IS*, 2nd ed. p. 353).
- 12 Culler puts it this way: "In the field of English in the 1940s through the 1960s, for

example, the general interest and import of a critical study was likely to come from some contribution to raising or lowering the estimation of a major literary figure or from claims about the shape of English literary history: what belongs to the 'great tradition,' whether Romantic poetry is central to English literature or a detour from the main line that connects the metaphysicals to the moderns, for instance. In the 1980s arguments of this sort were less likely to be the goal of studies aspiring to general significance than were theoretical points about the operation of language, the relation between text and reader, or the political complicities and resistances of literary discourses" (*IS*, 2nd ed. p. 202). Referring to Culler's essay, Gerald Graff in his "Epilogue" to the *Introduction to Scholarship* adds useful remarks on what constitutes—today—"general" vs. narrowly specialized research in the humanities.

13 Who am I writing this for? Why would they want to read it? Why indeed, given that we always have a backlog of "must-read" books and articles that (a) you can't possibly read, and (b) you *can't* not have read. In this connection, Culler relates the feature "general significance" to the feature "unmasterable" in his discussion of "theory": "The unmasterability of theory is a major cause of resistance to it. No matter how well versed you may think yourself, you can never be sure whether you 'have to read' Jean Baudrillard, Mikhail Bakhtin, Walter Benjamin, Wayne Booth, Hélène Cixous, C. L. R. James, Jürgen Habermas, Melanie Klein, Julia Kristeva, and I. A. Richards or whether you can 'safely' forget them. (The answer, of course, depends on who 'you' are and who you want to be.) A good deal of the hostility to theory no doubt comes from the fact that to admit the importance of theory is to make an open-ended commitment, to leave oneself in a position where there are always important things one doesn't know. But this is very much the condition of life itself, especially in the realm of literature—though one function of a literary canon is to conceal this" (*IS*, 2nd ed. pp. 206–7).

14 Chris Goodrich, "The Bloom Factory," *Lingua Franca* (June/July 1992), 31.

15 I discuss this in "Salvaging Literature, Savaging Theory," *Diacritics*, 21 (Spring 1991), 76–90.

16 In an op-ed piece in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, the executive editor for Humanities at Cambridge University Press attempts with kindly condescension to scale down these realities (speaking to academics about economic issues is like talking to children): "Academic readers make up a relatively small market, as opposed to the mass market for trade books. A BMW costs more than a Subaru. . . . Book publishing operates on the same principle. . . . For scholarly presses, the quickest route to bankruptcy is believing their authors' theories about the potential readership of their books. . . . We at least need to acknowledge that books, including those by academics, are commodities subject to economic forces." Terence W. Moore, "Believe it or not, academic books are a bargain," *Chronicle of Higher Education* (9 December 1992), A44.

17 Here again the opposition quality/quantity deconstructs in the semantic field of colleague-epithets: "influential" is not coextensive with "respected," though we often pretend it is. Likewise with other apparent or near-synonyms, such as visibility and reputation, expert and authoritative, and the like.

18 As the *Introduction to Scholarship* makes plain, there have been some spectacular growth markets in academia in the last twenty years, though on the whole decliners have led risers by some analyses, and vice versa by others. For a recent illustration, see the contested interpretation (by Lynne Cheney and others) of statistics gathered by the MLA on literary canon revisions ("MLA Survey Casts Light on Canon Debate," *MLA Newsletter*, 23, no. 3 [Winter 1991], 12–14).

19 The most spectacular example of this in language and literature fields was the NDEA program of the 1960s, which raised supply of Ph.D.s so far beyond the capacity of demand to absorb the glut that the job market of the 1990s has still not totally adjusted. In 1993 the

announcement in the *MLA Job Information List* for an assistant professorship in the English department at my own institution elicited over 900 applications. Publications such as *MLA Profession*, *Lingua Franca*, and the *Chronicle of Higher Education* continue to receive and to publish the perspectives on this issue from nonaffiliated, or independent scholars trying valiantly not to succumb to frustrated expectations, but justifiably angry or disaffected by the crash of an artificially inflated market that wiped out their investments (time, energy, money) to the advantage of others, whose stock, perhaps unexpectedly but not without logic, did rise, and sometimes rose spectacularly.

20 So pervasive are the economic metaphors, and so pervasive our confusion and ambivalence about "materialism," that we hardly notice some uses of market talk but bristle at others. Surely no one took offense in 1952 when the MLA statement of "Aims, Methods, and Materials of Research" averred that it was "motivated by the desire to survey the assets and liabilities of humanistic studies" at the time (AM 3). On the other hand, how do we explain, if not as a reflex of the antimaterialist stance, the ambivalence of nonmajority cultural critics who denounce "commodification" of race and gender by university administrators while at the same time benefitting from the push for multicultural diversity? It is easy enough to make "commodification" look bad by an implicit appeal to the antimaterialist disdain for the marketplace; but it seems less vile (and I find nothing wrong with it, this is my point) when these commodities explicitly market themselves, for jobs, book sales, lectures (market shares), in which nonmajority experience and identity are assumed to endow them with a privileged perspective on race and gender. If commodities are entities of value that circulate in a given system of exchange—no less, no more—why not rather take control of the process than blame it for doing what it does?