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STEPHEN WATT

## WHAT IS AN "ORGANIZATION LIKE THE MLA"? FROM GENTLEMAN'S CLUB TO PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION

"And what are the obligations of an organization like the MLA both to its members and the field. . .?"

In the "Final Report" of the Modern Language Association's Committee on Professional Employment (CPE), Sandra Gilbert, committee chair and author of the report, poses this good question, which begs what is perhaps an even better one: what is an organization like the MLA? What are its "obligations" both to its members and something called "the field"? For the inaugural issue of a journal like WORKPLACE, these questions seem even more apposite. The CPE, whose formation and undertaking were trumpeted by numerous photographs and accompanying lionization in the *MLA Newsletter*, has been hard at work for some eighteen months now, harder at work than perhaps anyone imagined. Indeed, the *Newsletter* (Winter, 1996) announced that the "Final Report" would be completed in the spring of 1997, when in fact it was released to members in mid-December (although Gilbert read substantial excerpts from the report at the November meeting of the Midwest Modern Language Association in Chicago). I mention this not to impugn the committee for dilatoriness, but rather to commend its industry. There exists, however, a more sobering note in my commendation: precisely because the CPE labored so earnestly at this task, anyone disappointed by its report and seven specific recommendations to ameliorate the generally bleak futures many job seekers face will probably have to remain, well, disappointed. This document represents, in short, the MLA's best efforts. And both the committee's ambition and motivations, the latter of which in particular deserve some scrutiny, have everything to do with the question Professor Gilbert begs: what is an organization "like the MLA?"

Unpacking this question—or, for that matter, offering a critique of the CPE "Final Report," as I intend to do here—requires at least some historical perspective, a claim with which the CPE would surely sympathize as it ties today's job crisis in part to the "revised labor conditions for the professoriat" caused by Cold War "federal funding initiatives" (18). (This section of the report and R.C. Lewontin's *The Cold War and the University* on which some of it is based make for interesting reading, by the way; it shouldn't be skimmed.) But the question prompting this essay calls for a slightly different history, one that takes us back to December 27, 1883, when the MLA began as the dream of some forty "gentlemen-scholars" who convened that winter at Columbia University. In his presidential address of 1965, Howard Mumford Jones re-visited that 1883 meeting, underscoring its regional connection to the "Atlantic seaboard": twelve scholars came from New England and twenty from the "Middle States and Maryland (which meant in fact Johns Hopkins)." Only two hailed from the "Middle West," as it turns out, and only one from the South. "These men," he concluded, "created. . .an informal national club with a simple constitution and by-laws" (3). The following year in 1884 the then Secretary of the newly formed MLA reviewed the most significant points upon which the gentlemen deliberated, one of which revealed a tension still felt today:

namely, that while the group agreed on the imperative to centralize "the modern language forces in this country," it also saw a need to consider "sectional differences in any general scheme of improvement" (Jones 4). How these differences could even be perceived, given the nascent organization's quite regional (and class) inflection, is another matter (one to which I shall return in regard to the composition of the CPE).

The MLA's rapidly expanding membership also concerned Jones, explaining the title of his address, "The Pygmy and the Giant." At the annual meeting the year before in 1964, he reminded his audience, some 213 papers were delivered in 106 sessions, far too many papers for any "serious discussion. . . by the scholars to whom they were theoretically addressed" (4). In her address two years earlier at the 1963 convention, then president Marjorie Hope Nicolson affords us a glimpse of what might be termed the "professional sensibilities" of these scholars, a glimpse that, given the realities of today's graduate education and job market, seems almost incredible: the fact that she spent only three years in graduate school, for instance; or that she regarded "real" standards in the "discipline" of English ("if, indeed, it is a discipline," she remarked [9]) as in peril because Latin was being dropped as a required language; or, most interesting, that during her first academic appointment, her department chair "almost literally dragged us youngsters to MLA meetings and made us deliver the first scholarly papers written under our own steam" (6). I re-visit Nicolson and Jones's presidential addresses from the 1960s merely to make these two points: that, Jones's premonition about the growth of the MLA notwithstanding, in the past thirty years the profession has evolved in ways almost unimaginable then; and that, then and now, many senior professors carry with them an experience of graduate school and early professional life which is as distant from today's realities as Nicolson's lament for the passing of Latin was at the dawn of the Vietnam era. What would past presidents of the MLA, other than the farseeing Jones, think about this year's convention in Toronto which, comparable in size to recent meetings, will feature some 2,060 papers in 745 sessions? And how might Jones redact his characterization of the 1965 Modern Language Association:

The gentlemen's club has grown into an army. By the question of multitudinousness I mean that the MLA is called upon to do an infinitely greater variety of things than its founders ever dreamed of doing. (5)

Jones also predicted that by 1980 this gigantism would continue at a virtually unabated pace, in large part because "unlike some professional societies, the MLA has never restricted its membership" (5). He was, of course, right.

Jones's prescience might help answer our question about the MLA. Given its history as an informal "gentleman's club" and the realities of its membership base, the MLA is not now, nor has it ever been, a professional organization. Unlike the ABA (American Bar Association) and AALS (Association of American Law Schools), for example, which accredit schools of law, the MLA has no comparable professional clout; unlike the AMA (American Medical Association), it does not investigate violations of professional ethics, conduct, or practice, and thus has neither been in a position nor shown much inclination, insofar as I am aware, to administer sanctions for professional misconduct. This is hardly surprising; as the historical sketch above suggests, the MLA was not founded to be a professional organization, and in pursuing such matters as the CPE investigated it was responding to a growing pressure, unacknowledged by the committee, to do something that both its founders and current leadership never, "ever dreamed of doing." This is perhaps the primary reason for the belatedness of this report: not the eighteen months it was in process, but the fact that the MLA only got around to conducting this study in 1996 long after strenuous debate over and analyses of the job crisis had begun (although such MLA publications as *Profession* and the *ADE Bulletin* have played a key role in furthering dialogue on the job crisis, graduate education, and related issues).

What this history tells us, I think, is that one should not have expected too much from those parts of the

report and recommendations that would require the MLA to act in the manner of a professional organization. (And I shall "bracket" for the purposes of this paper Lennard J. Davis's larger, more trenchant questioning of our collective reliance on organizations like the MLA in the first place. For Davis, professional organizations in general are "by and large" not only "traditional" and incredibly "conservative," but also complicitous in the subtle businesses of aiding institutions in the domination and observation of their faculty.) What Davis calls "compulsory bureaucracies" like the MLA are incredibly resistant to change (199), so it is hardly surprising that the committee's sixth recommendation, one that promises an organizational response to cases of unethical or un-professional conduct, falls disappointingly short.

Recommendation six calls for the "Collection and Publication of Problems in Hiring Procedures Confronted by Job-Seekers" and is comprised of two parts: "We recommend that either through the current standing Committee on Academic Freedom or through another body, the MLA act as a clearinghouse for problems in hiring procedures confronted by job-seekers, and that job-seekers who encounter ethical problems report their difficulties to the appropriate MLA committee" (36). Although the committee's motives in making this recommendation are not elaborated upon in detail, Gilbert states that "considerable evidence—much of it, to be sure, anecdotal—[suggests] that the tight job market has sometimes produced situations where job seekers feel in one way or another abused by hiring committees and department administrators" (36). What these abuses might be are never made specific but, all in all, whatever its inherent vagaries, the recommendation sounds good.

### **An Ethical Response?**

But that's the point: it's supposed to sound good. And, equally obvious, a number of faculty and graduate students have been relaying these "anecdotes" (what else could they be until investigated, documented, and proven?) for some time now. Cary Nelson related the details of a particularly egregious on-campus interview in an article in *Social Text* over two years ago (this has been reprinted in his *Manifesto of a Tenured Radical*, 161- 62); and in *On the Market: Surviving the Academic Job Market* published earlier this year, Elisabeth Rose Gruner reiterates the "lowlights" of several sexist, clearly unethical, and perhaps even illegally conducted interviews women have endured both at the convention and during on-campus recruitment trips. Gruner asks, "To whom might a candidate report such questions? A lawyer? The MLA?" More to the point, "what are the sanctions against illegal questions, and what can we do about them?" (97). And, to add even a few more interrogatives to the list, what in the CPE's opinion constitutes an abuse in the first place? Departmental culpability in the incidents Nelson and Gruner report would seem more or less transparent, but other practices may be less clear and open to debate. Requiring applicants to send writing samples by Federal Express or overnight mail? The practice, refined by the East Carolina University English department in 1995, of posting a job notice that promised one lucky Victorianist the "opportunity" to "bypass the traditional MLA 'rite of passage' interviews" by accepting ECU's job offer in November, thereby foregoing any alternative employment possibility that might arise at the convention (Palumbo and Taylor, "Letter")? The posting of job notices when a committee already knows who it intends to hire—or that it is not interested in candidates of a certain gender or ethnicity? Let's not be naive about this last matter, a delicate one to be sure: it happens.

Indeed, it was apparently happening at the 1997 convention in Toronto while the CPE Report was being discussed by the Delegate Assembly if two of the "anecdotes" I heard there are true. I shall provide only the contours of these stories here to protect the victims of this sort of "abuse," but if the MLA wants to investigate and, after sufficient corroboration, publish these stories (which of course it really doesn't), I'd be pleased to provide more details. The first begins with the phone call on December 29th that every job candidate, after interviewing earlier at the convention, wants to receive: we liked your answers yesterday, and we want to speak with you further. "Great," the candidate said, "I'd be very eager to visit your campus." "No, you misunderstand," the voice gently corrected, "we want to speak with you again

tomorrow morning before the convention is over. I hope you can arrange your return flight accordingly." It doesn't take a labor negotiator or CPE member to infer the extortive nature of this phone call: if you want a job at our school—and the odds are now more in your favor of securing one, because you've made the "next cut"—you'll spend whatever it takes and re-organize your life for the opportunity to speak with us again. The second story concerns a prestigious West Coast research institution that has lost a distinguished professor to another school and wants him/her back. So, remarkably, it runs a national search for a junior position and winds up with a short list that just happens to include the senior professor's significant other, turning the longstanding spousal hire dilemma in a direction that effectively rips off every other candidate who paid to have dossiers and writing samples mailed to the department (not to mention the time and emotional investment involved in applying for academic positions, and the mockery of law and ethical conduct inscribed in the department's job announcement with its perfunctory statement about equal opportunity).

But even if mitigating circumstances existed to explain both instances—I am, however, pressed a bit to imagine what these might be—can the MLA really operate as a "clearinghouse" to disseminate such information? That is to say, can it simply publish the name of any department (or individual) against which someone levels an accusation? Of course such charges cannot be published without careful investigation—and published where?

The topics of abusive, or just plain thoughtless, recruitment practices and MLA waffling in responding to them are, admittedly, hobbyhorses of mine. I intimated as much in a letter to the *MLA Newsletter* (Spring 1996) protesting the practice of departments ordering expensive materials from candidates—dossiers and writing samples—at the beginning of the recruitment process for an initial screening. If a committee wants to order these expensive documents after reading a letter, vita, and dissertation abstract, as Nelson had argued as well in an earlier issue of the *Newsletter*, fine. Before my letter could appear, however, it had to be revised several times and, as I learned in a phone call from an MLA official, vetted by some anonymous legal staff. You see, I had the temerity to respond to a department chair who defended the practice of a committee ordering everything "up front," and who also expressed his dismay that the MLA would dare tell him how to conduct a search. Using the example of the several hundred applications I had received as chair of a search committee in *Twentieth-century Literature* in 1994, I maintained that it was impossible for a committee to read this many writing samples with any degree of attention. This line had to be dropped. Because no evidence existed that the committee did not read all the essays it received, my supposition could not appear in the letter—at least not in any letter the *MLA Newsletter* and its legal counsel deemed safe to print.

Recommendation six, therefore, cannot possibly work as stated. The MLA cannot serve as a "clearinghouse" by collecting and disseminating every accusation it hears, and it knows it. It is obliged to investigate before it publishes anything, even so innocuous a letter as I just described. And, presumably, the threat of being "outed" by the association in some unspecified publication constitutes the element of sanction Elisabeth Gruner calls for and Nelson ponders in *Manifesto*. As Nelson observes, however, "Professional organizations are very reluctant to police either members or member departments. Even those that have accepted such responsibilities—like the American Medical Association—do not have a very impressive record of results" (162). Still, he contends, the publication of a "censure list" of offending departments comparable to that published by the AAUP might persuade departments to "clean up their acts" (how is it that this recommendation so closely parallels Nelson's without any citation, I wonder?). Recommendation six, in sum, implies that the "gentlemen's club" will "boldly go" where no MLA official has taken it before: near the ambit of a professional organization. Recommendation six also clearly marks a change in the MLA's view both of itself and of its capacity to intervene in its members' conduct. It wasn't that long ago when, after irritating a number of members with an ill-advised "President's Column" in the *MLA Newsletter*, then president Patricia Meyer Spacks claimed, "MLA action does not issue from a mysterious monolith, nor does the MLA possess the power to make administrators, department chairs, or

individual faculty members do its will. (Guidelines are only guidelines; there are always many who will ignore them)" ("Voices" 3). We'll simply have to wait and see how "abuses" in the hiring process relate to violated "guidelines"—and see if the MLA can fulfill the promise of the CPE's strategically ambiguous recommendation by doing what it never "dreamed of doing" before.

### **Whose Recommendations?**

The difficulty with this particular recommendation for improving our collective hiring practices, however, is far from the most significant failing—or achievement—of the CPE report. Before discussing some of these failings, let me also urge every member of the MLA to read the CPE's report and suggest that every Director of Graduate Studies implement the kind of self-study the committee outlines: surely such a departmental and programmatic introspection will produce positive results. That said, the most significant failing of the report is the committee's inability to provide, especially in the last phrase of the following, what Gilbert advocates in the report's preface: a "nuanced understanding of the way the [higher education] system now functions, the way it has failed, and the ways it can be adjusted" (4). This "nuanced understanding," Gilbert offered earlier in the report, "reflect[s] long term developments that have shaped our complex system of higher education since the second world war, a system to which the patterns of academic employment that we study here are inextricably linked" (2). As we learn later when she quotes the historical reflections of John Guillory and David Laurence,<sup>1</sup> this system has produced a contradictory, highly determinative imperative in academia: an increasingly diverse student body's need, on the one hand, for instruction in the "basics"; and research institutions' equally prevalent need, on the other, for faculty to engage in "advanced" research to supplement an ever-dwindling pool of funds (19). There can be little disagreement, I think, with this articulation of the problem insofar as public research institutions are concerned. But what sort of solutions does this "nuanced understanding" of the larger political and economic contexts of the crisis in higher education generate?

The answers, I think, are inseparable from the very regional, institutional, and "professional" biases that have defined the MLA from its beginnings as an "informal national club" for forty "gentlemen-scholars." That is to say, two-thirds of the committee work at nationally prominent research institutions. Nearly half come from the Northeast; only one is a faculty member at a community college; and, most telling, the majority of the committee members are literary and cultural scholars, not first and foremost teachers of the very basic courses in literature and composition the CPE envisions as constituting the profession of the future. These biases, coupled with an extremely defensive posture about the MLA's role in professional matters in the past, lead in some cases to almost utopian recommendations and, in others, to paradoxical and even offensive suggestions.

The utopian category doesn't bother me too much: it indeed would be terrific if every graduate student employee had "primary responsibility for teaching "no more than one course per term." Similarly, a five-year funding package for all full-time doctoral students "with the first and last years having fellowship support" is something most Directors of Graduate Studies would love to provide and cannot (31). Not surprisingly, directors of graduate study are acutely aware of the importance of fellowships to a student's success. A survey I conducted of twenty-seven Ph.D.-granting English departments and reported at the MLA convention in 1991, however, clearly indicated that very few public institutions could come close to following either recommendation (and certainly such a study should be repeated to provide more recent data). Advanced graduate students at almost all the institutions that responded to my questions about funding—Alabama, Arizona, Colorado, Houston, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas State, Iowa State, Mississippi, North Carolina-Chapel Hill, Texas, Washington State, and others—taught more than one course/term. Maybe things have improved markedly since 1991; maybe there's nothing so terribly wrong with such collective fantasizing.

## Blaming Victims and Mentors

But some of the CPE's rhetoric and suggestions are not so innocent. For example, although the report's conclusion calls for an end to "finger-pointing, name calling," and "political posturing" (28)—obviously the reason Nelson's often contentious work and other work like it are not cited in the report—the CPE nonetheless does its share of finger-pointing. And the finger gets pointed fairly often at graduate programs, which have failed students in a myriad of ways and which, therefore, need the eight-step program for departmental self-study of doctoral programs appended to the report. In what ways have graduate departments failed? Fostering in their students a "precocious professionalism based on research-oriented models" (23), many are guilty of "misleading" graduate students "as they enter the job market" (23). These programs ought to have heeded Guillory's and Spacks's warnings about "preprofessionalism," the CPE observes:<sup>2</sup> "Even though the MLA's own handbook for job-seekers offers crucial cautionary advice [about the long odds of finding a position at a research institution]. . . most graduate programs fail to convey this message to their students" (23). The MLA, from its Dunsinane-like "pleasant seat" of professional centrality in 1883, knew what was best for literary study in the growing republic—and it has known all along what was best for graduate students entering the "market," such as it is, as well.

This tension between center and periphery, metropolis and frontier, is "hard-wired" into the founding of the MLA. But, at the very least, the MLA ought to know that precocious professionalism is not a choice for graduate students. As evidence, I can only recite the following job announcement posted at the Job Information Center at the 1996 MLA Convention in Washington. It was so remarkable I had to copy it:

The English Department at Pace University, New York, has a full-time tenure-track Assistant Professorship for a specialist in Dramatic Literature. The person appointed to this position must hold a Ph.D. and have demonstrated scholarship in the field *through the publication of books and/or articles in refereed journals*. In addition to major courses in drama and literature, the appointee will be expected to teach freshman composition and sophomore literature. Salary commensurate with experience. Fall, 199 (my emphasis)

Until we can have a "nuanced" discussion with the Paces of our profession, until we can collectively induce restraint on the part of those departments that would exploit their buyers' advantage, the CPE's advice for graduate students to prepare for employment at non-research institutions by learning more about teaching and becoming less concerned about their own writing—and that is the implicit, if not explicit, message of this report—will not resonate with much authority. And a larger question exists as well: do we, as a profession, really want to abandon our research and return to the days Marjorie Hope Nicolson described in which the prospect of presenting a conference paper filled young faculty with dread? What dangers exist in this regressive, irreducibly nostalgic "politics of underdevelopment"?

This division of teaching vs. scholarship, of the roles of "educational service worker" versus "intellectual knowledge worker," informs the weakest, most offensive part of this document (20). For it strongly implies that teaching undergraduates—or that theorizing the pedagogy involved—is not a significant intellectual labor, in essence denigrating everyone who teaches them along with one entire field of our discipline: rhetoric and composition. So long as teaching is thought of as divorced from, totally separate from, the production of knowledge, then we are indeed in trouble: the hiring of part-time faculty at obscenely low wages already indicates that administrators (who largely escape criticism or attention in this report, by the way) have concretized this opposition in their own corporate logic. It is not in our best interest to replicate it.

## Does Size Matter?

I might also suggest that the CPE's long outline of recommendations for graduate programs both within

the report (21- 25) and the attachment, "Evaluating the Mission, Size, and Composition of Your Doctoral Program: A Guide," might be refined in several ways. The section on "The Job Crisis and Graduate Studies" begins with a thoughtful discussion of size to which I would add this: downsizing graduate programs has many goals, one of which is to dry up what once was, at least at Indiana University where I teach, a large pool of unemployed or under- employed doctoral candidates (and holders). Now, after seven years of downsizing in English which began in 1990, the local pool is indeed almost dry, leading to an imminent crisis: Who is going to teach our undergraduates? How much will the university have to pay to staff these classes? I don't know all the answers, but one answer to this last question would appear to be "more money, perhaps much more money, than it has in the past." What a novel idea—actually paying people a living wage to work.

The CPE's recommendation in this section to establish "exchange programs or cooperative programs with smaller, heavy teaching colleges in the area" so as to provide students with experience at such institutions is a good one (24). But it is by no means a new one. Preparing Future Faculty (PFF) programs across the country have been contemplating—and implementing— such exchanges for the past several years. Locally at Bloomington, department and recruitment chairs from smaller colleges and multi-purpose institutions have been visiting the English department to conduct sessions with job seekers, reviewing their cover letters and vitae, and describing more fully such institutions' expectations of new faculty. The Graduate School through a PFF grant is organizing exchange programs between IU's Bloomington campus and branch campuses, placing advanced graduate students in departments for one semester or an entire academic year. There's no question that the current climate of "precocious professionalism" has led departments away from the realities of professional life at liberal arts institutions, community colleges, and high schools. Large research-oriented departments need to restore their bonds— or forge new ones— with such institutions, and PFF programs across the country are attempting to do just that.

There is also little question that we're living through a kind of ideological battle in humanities departments and that graduate students are suffering because of it. The report, echoing committee member George Levine, describes it this way: "some graduate programs may—without repudiating intellectual innovation or advanced theory—have to take into consideration 'the more traditional curricula likely to be in place at non- elite institutions'" (24). Or, for that matter, at elite institutions. When William E. Cain, a professor at Wellesley, complains about the "non-literary approach favored in most English classrooms today," or asserts that the "swerve toward cultural studies" has incapacitated today's graduate students to the extent they can no longer "teach close reading" (B4), we are no longer identifying an ideological divide that can be designated elite/non-elite. We're talking about ideological battles in many humanities departments that may be insoluble, but that also deserve immediate "professional" attention.<sup>3</sup> How many departments actually feel the way Cain does? What role do such politics—and I think that's what were talking about— play in the hiring practices of such departments? How might these politics be juxtaposed to and weighed against the thrust of the Pace University job announcement adverted to above? How might a dialogue on this topic be facilitated and the results be translated into revisions of graduate programs?

Such questions approach a topic much in evidence in recent *Job Information Lists*: namely, the uneven quality of the "job crisis." By "uneven" I mean this: in the past few years—and, yes, this is merely anecdotal evidence—job seekers in some areas have found the going much tougher than those seeking work in other areas. This is one implication of Levine's point, and we need to discuss it as a profession: quite sound arguments urging the contrary notwithstanding, many departments more or less utilize a "replacement model" in their hiring.<sup>4</sup> In so doing, they are recruiting in more traditional fields—and in "service" fields like rhetoric—while too many of today's students want to work in the twentieth century and in emergent fields. This is precisely why students specializing in twentieth-century American culture, among other things, are competing with as many as 700 applicants, while other job seekers are competing against one- third, one-quarter, or significantly fewer candidates in their searches. What can we do about this as a profession? What are we going to do about the disjunction in many graduate programs between

the study of past print cultures ("literature") and the facilitating of contemporary print culture ("composition")?

The CPE's "Final Report," then, which promises illumination of the "job system," not the job "market," generates only minimal explanatory light on the former—the kind one might expect from an organization like the MLA. And, to return to my title, what kind of organization is this (a question that should in no way be taken to ignore or diminish the generosity and laudable motives of some of the CPE members)? Too self-protective and overly insulated from dissent, too self-congratulatory; like the gentlemen in 1883, still too unaware of professional practices out there on the frontier and too concerned with the "etiquette" of professional life (this term appears three times on p. 7 of the appendix in reference to the training of graduate students for conference participation and the like); and, thus, too slow to evolve from an elitist gentlemen's club into a professional association.

But since, in these uncivil times, the CPE's gentlemanly and gentlewomanly inclinations lead it to urge graduate programs to acquaint students with the "etiquette of serving as a participant or presider for a conference panel," the "etiquette of conducting correspondence with journals and editors," and the "etiquette of departmental discussion and debate" ("Evaluating the Mission" 7), I thought I might conclude by asking the committee a question about professional comportment. What would the CPE think about the following: Villanova University's English department posts an advertisement in the October, 1997 *Job Information List* for an assistant professor of Contemporary American Poetry/Creative Writing. Candidates are required to forward just about everything—letters of application, dossiers, samples of both creative and scholarly work—at the beginning of the process, and the department conducts interviews at the Toronto convention. Then, in early January, Villanova, well, invents a new professional genre: the form rejection e-mail memo. This hybrid form combines, electronically, the rejection letter with the traditional form letter by notifying several of the candidates interviewed that their applications were no longer in consideration. To accomplish this simultaneous and wonderfully efficient mass rejection, of course, each recipient of the bad news is made aware of every other person receiving it, because all their names are posted at the top of the memo (and could be forwarded just about anywhere, to people like me for instance). No right of privacy for the rejected applicant—Is this violation of privacy even legal?—and, from Villanova's perspective, no need even for a book of thirty-two cent stamps and a half-dozen envelopes. Sure, these candidates mailed expensive materials to the school; and sure, they probably spent hours researching the English department. And, yes, they did spend hundreds of dollars flying to Toronto and attending the convention. But, hey, that doesn't mean they each deserve their own rejection letter, does it? I don't know the answer, so I am addressing this matter to the CPE, whose knowledge of the protocols of professional courtesy exceeds my own.

The last word on the CPE and MLA, however, goes to Howard Mumford Jones who, writing about the crisis of gigantism thirty years ago, put it like this: "Either we believe that the MLA means greatly and means well, or we do not" (6). Sadly, I do not.

#### NOTES

1. Davis regards the MLA as an "advanced bureaucracy," an imaginary formation that exists alongside a real state which plays a crucial "normalizing role in the dispersal and distribution of information, the creation of hierarchies within disciplines. . . and the lubrication of gate-keeping functions in the peer review process." It also promotes "star academics" (200) on one end of the professional spectrum and compels younger academics on the other end to endure its sundry dominations, including that "most exquisite moment of domination—the job interview." (199) In asking the MLA to behave even more "professionally" than it does at present, I do mean to ignore neither Davis's critique nor his vision of what "new" professional organizations might look like and how they might function.

2. The inclusion in the report of so many comments by John Guillory and David Laurence, head of the ADE, is somewhat surprising, as Laurence's name does not appear on the cover of the report in a listing of CPE members, nor is he mentioned in a similar listing of committee members on pp. 8-9 of the report. To be sure, other MLA officials are quoted in the body of this document, but not with such frequency so as to imply an unannounced membership on the committee.
3. Here the CPE refers to Guillory's "Preprofessionalism: What Graduate Students Want," and Spacks's "The Academic Marketplace: Who Pays Its Costs?". The latter of these essays, one might recall, was especially controversial as Spacks argued that the profession itself, not graduate students or job seekers, pays the highest cost for this "pre" or "precocious" professionalism.
4. Cain's thesis should not be taken as eccentric. Indeed, at last year's MLA convention in Washington, I appeared on a panel on the future of the profession in which one of Cain's colleagues expressed similar opinions. When asked what issue today posed the gravest threat to the profession, she responded quickly, "Graduate students don't know enough about literature."

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## AFFILIATIONS

*Steve Watt*  
*Indiana University*