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The Office of Literature

Maurice Lee

Panels, roundtables, forums, and papers are rightfully at the center of our NeMLA convention, but what do we talk about at conferences when we're not discussing research? What comes to the foreground in our less formal interactions? It seems to me that in addition to talking about our classes and praising (or complaining) about our colleagues, we often talk about the state of the profession, not so much as a scholarly enterprise, but as a habitus constituted by institutional structures and practices. Budgets, policies, enrollments, hiring, the culture of campuses, the decisions of deans and provosts—such shop-talk almost inevitably turns to the crisis in the humanities, which (almost inevitably for an opening address at a convention like ours) is my topic for today.

We know that our enrollments have dropped, that the job market is in freefall, that STEM disciplines are eclipsing the humanities, that liberal education continues to give way to instrumentalism, commercialism, specialization, and professional training. There doesn't seem to be much positive news for language and literary studies, though this evening I'm going to take an idiosyncratic approach to our crisis in the humanities. It's an historical reframing that starts with Nathaniel Hawthorne and ends with William James. Perhaps its pragmatism ultimately concedes too much. Perhaps even slivers of optimism are unwarranted. But my hope and argument are that there's a place for literary studies these days—and by "these days" I mean an information age in which data, science, technology, and corporatism are ascendant.

Let me say at the outset that I'll be construing information broadly—not simply as a kind of epistemological unit or bit existing somewhere between unprocessed data and more rigorously validated knowledge. Rather, I'm treating information as a domain that involves practices, systems, ideologies, and identities. We might call this domain informationalism or the informational, and it includes everything from data-driven enterprises and quantitative methods, to scientific empiricism and bureaucratic protocols, to efforts to organize and manage facts and texts according to categories, indexes, and algorithms. All this may seem marginal or even anathema to our fields. It may grate against our professional identities. But I'll be arguing that literature and literary studies are more entangled with informationalism than we often think and that this entanglement is a good thing for the future of the humanities.

Let me begin where I'm most comfortable—the nineteenth century. Hawthorne has a story titled “The Intelligence Office” (1844), which almost no one ever reads, probably because it's not very good. It's one of those tricky Hawthornian allegories with flat characters, little drama, and a kind of tepid, ironic moralism. The story was published at a time when intelligence offices began appearing in major U.S. cities. Such offices served as visitor centers, advertising hubs, and lost-and-found counters, though their primary function was to facilitate job searches: laborers, especially domestic workers, waited on site or left information with clerks who connected them with postings from potential employers. I'd make a hilarious comparison here to the MLA job list, except that applicants at intelligence offices usually found jobs.

One way to think about intelligence offices is that they collected, organized, and commercialized information, thereby joining a broader information revolution in which the proliferation of data and mass print drove the expansion of quantitative methods,

algorithmic processes, bureaucratic systems, and informational economies. To nod toward a handful of historical coordinates: France's Bureau of Statistics was founded in 1833, followed the next year by the Royal Statistical Society of London, and six years later by the American Statistical Association. In 1846, the Associated Press was founded to help newspapers collect and monetize information. In 1851, the Reuters organization began selling financial data to businesses and banks with the help of telegraphy and carrier pigeons. In the 1840s, applicants to the British Civil Service began taking standardized examinations in English literature, spurring the emergence of the Victorian test preparation industry. Between 1843 and 1847, Ralph Waldo Emerson indexed what would grow to be his 252 journals, creating no less than three overlapping indexes that totaled over seven hundred pages. Other tools for managing information also spread—from lengthening census forms and cataloguing systems in libraries, to vertical filing cabinets and commercial ledgers with pre-printed columns and rows, to speed reading practices and quantitative studies of literacy rates and publishing outputs. During this time, Charles Babbage built the world's first computer, natural philosophy splintered into scientific disciplines, telegraph lines and transatlantic cables spread across land and sea, and the job market for clerks and secretaries boomed. In related news, the term “starving artist” was coined in Victorian period.¹

As the print historian Robert Darnton has argued, “every age was an information age” (23); and so the nineteenth century should not be regarded as some epistemic rupture in informational discourse. That said, the period witnessed an unprecedented expansion of data, texts, and efforts to manage such information. And commentators were self-conscious about such developments, as suggested by an 1853 article in the *London Times*, which called its current moment “an age of information.”²

As we might expect, the rise of informationalism made some nineteenth-century literary figures uneasy. There's Melville's "Bartleby, the Scrivener" (1853), where writing is reduced to soulless informational work in a bureaucratic cubicle. There's Dickens's *Hard Times* (1854), where the pleasures of imaginative performance are disciplined by a standardized education system driven by statistics and instrumental logic. There's George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1872), where a humanist scholar wastes his life gathering a surfeit of information on artworks that he is unable to order in a meaningful way.

And there's Hawthorne's "Intelligence Office," which also finds in his era's informationalism a crisis in the humanities. With the windows of the intelligence office papered over by advertisements, and with the cries of a newsboy drifting in from the street, we meet the main character of the story: a spectacled clerk with a pen behind his ear sitting at a counter with an immense ledger, all in a "business-like style" (873). A young man comes in seeking a "place," which seems appropriate enough, until we learn that by "place" he doesn't mean a job but rather a space where he feels useful and at home in the world (875). The clerk of the intelligence office offers no solutions, nor can he help a series of other customers who we might think of as humanists in crisis: a man seeking truth; a man looking for his lost soul; and yet another man hoping to trade his heart for one less tortured by passion.

The obvious point is that the intelligence office cannot service these vital human needs. Hearts and souls, truth and a sense of belonging: these are not the purview of ledger-bearing clerks working in instrumental informational systems. They are more the stuff of literature and literary people who keep a very different set of books. Hawthorne at the time was in the midst of his own vocational crisis, struggling to make a living as an

author in an age of data, science, technology, and clerks. In “The Intelligence Office,” he defines the humanities over and against informationalism, even as he laments social conditions under which devotees of literature find no place.

The situation may feel painfully familiar, particularly to graduate students and part-time instructors. And the literature/information dualism that Hawthorne sketches remains generally recognizable today. Let’s say for the sake of argument that the literary is subjective and emotional, while the informational is objective and rational. One seeks meaning and aesthetic pleasure; the other is concerned with instrumental facts. Let’s say that the literary values words in unified narratives, while the informational finds power in reconfigurable numbers; and that the literary honors ambiguity, interpretation, and the mysteries of human experience, while the informational privileges classification, transparency, and rule-bound logic. These domains are not internally coherent or mutually exclusive. But generally speaking, the offices of literature can seem incommensurate with or opposed to the offices of information.

Cultural stereotypes offer cognate dualisms that entail—among other things—race, class, and gender. The calculating financier with his hair slicked back. The poet guided by her feelings. The fashion-challenged coder and boring accountant. The fabulous artist unbounded by rules and regulations. The twenty-something tech bro in a Tesla. The literature major as barista. The white male titans of the technology and information sector. People of certain colors, women, and the elderly who are supposedly unfit for informational enterprises but possess intuitive folk wisdom.

And since I’m generalizing about our generalizations, let me add a middle-aged rant. As I remember it, the humanities used to be the coolest game on campus—creative, passionate, rebellious, fun, simultaneously ironic and idealistic. But then the digital

economy made it possible to be cool and get paid—to be, like some literary romantic or modernist—disruptive, innovative, imaginative, idealistic, all without having to answer the question, “so what are you going to do with your degree.” Suddenly, the visionary in the black turtleneck wasn’t a beat poet but Steve Jobs or Elizabeth Holmes. Add to this the skyrocketing costs of higher education, the widening chasm between rich and poor, the more obvious returns on investment in the STEM fields, and the increasing corporatization of higher education, and from the perspective of a marginalized humanist, the information/literature divide feels less like the space between incommensurate domains and more like a wall between metropole and colony. I don’t think the recent tech backlash has significantly changed these dynamics.

All this may be, and probably is, too dramatic, but the separation between what I’m calling the literary and the informational seems to me damaging and deeply ingrained. Some work in literary studies is challenging the dualism—from scholarship at the intersections of science and literature, to media studies that engage information technology, to the digital humanities and administrative efforts to make language and literature degrees more vocationally relevant. And yet the resistance that such work sometimes encounters indicates the recalcitrance of the literature/information divide. Think, for instance, about some responses to distant reading or literary scholarship using scientific methods. Think about some attitudes toward studying video games or Twitter or toward quantitative learning assessments and computer-generated narratives. I’m not championing such things, but in talks and meetings, and especially in lobbies and restaurants, I’ve seen otherwise broad-minded and adventurous scholars dismiss and sometimes fiercely reject informational projects out-of-hand. For some, the informational is not just a topic or methodology or set of practices that, like all topics and

methodologies and sets of practices, has affordances and limits. It is something that challenges the basic identity of language and literary scholars.

Some time ago, I went to dinner with a group of scientists, and when it came time to divvy up the bill, I said, “I’m an English professor—someone else do the math.” There was some polite chuckling, but why did I say this? I’m perfectly capable of adding and dividing. I think the literature/information divide is pernicious. And yet it’s so easy to accede to its prejudices. I went home filled with shame.

But on further reflection, I prefer to blame others. I blame some brilliant scholars—Lev Manovich, Mary Poovey, Friedrich Kittler—for setting literature and information at odds. I blame poststructuralists who follow Nietzsche in discounting objectivity and empiricism, as well as Frankfurt School thinkers for supercharging Weber when pitting aesthetics against calculation and bureaucracy. I blame Heidegger and Wittgenstein for helping literary critics make arguments against scientism. And also New Critics like Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, who defined poetry against what they called “mere information” (180). I blame related aestheticians like F.R. Leavis, who once wrote that “[life] cannot be aggregated or equated or dealt with quantitatively in any way” (65-66). In my historical period, I blame Carlyle, who took science to “destroy Wonder, and in its stead substitute Mensuration and Numeration” (53). I blame Coleridge, who used the metaphor of a shattered mirror to lament the division of experience and knowledge into disarticulated bits. I blame Hawthorne, Dickens, Melville, Eliot, Thoreau, Dickinson, Frederick Douglass, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and Anthony Trollope who mocked their era’s efforts to understand the world through information. Maybe I blame the entire nineteenth century, which witnessed the expansion of data, mass print, science, quantification, and information management and the concomitant spread of a romantic,

proto-modernist ideology that sets the literary against these developments and remains in force today.

You can surely think of other writers who resist the encroachments of informationalism, but we might also consider alternative examples, for there's a counternarrative, at least in nineteenth-century U.S. and British literature, that challenges the literary/information divide. "Bartleby, the Scrivener" critiques informationalism, but *Moby-Dick* (1851) glories in information overload. Thoreau mocks quantitative scientists who count the cats in Zanzibar, but he also measured Walden Pond and was a committed collector of scientific data. Trollope satirizes government bureaucracy in his novel *Three Clerks* (1857), but he kept strict accounts of his literary output and was a high-ranking bureaucrat in the British Postal Service, a pillar of his era's information revolution. Charlotte Brontë privileges affective aesthetics but also acknowledges that art requires a basis in facts. Ida B. Wells and W.E.B. Du Bois recognize the limits of quantitative sociology but also deploy the power of data. If Emily Dickinson believed that literature and information were at odds, then why did she number her poems? Okay, we numbered her poems—but Dickinson is fascinated by classification, organization, and algorithm.

Again, you can find other examples in your field of writers who cross the literature/information divide, for the rise of information and the development of literature have a long and entangled history marked not only by antagonism but also by accommodation and synthesis. As Umberto Eco has discussed, Homer, the Bible, and Renaissance texts are fascinated with lists and catalogs. As Anne Blair has detailed, Medieval readers and writers struggled to manage information as such. When Don Quixote is parodically sworn in as a knight, he pledges his allegiance on an inn-keeper's ledger that contains accounts of barley and straw. *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) is enchanted

by information management, as is much adventure fiction, detective fiction, science fiction, and techno-modernism across a range of media.

And here I can't resist mentioning a scene from Roberto Bolaño *2666* (2004)—a novel whose very title smudges the line between information and literature. The first section of the book involves four literary scholars obsessed with a reclusive German novelist who brings tenuous order to their otherwise purposeless lives. In one scene, two of them talk on the phone about the failed marriage of Liz Norton, their fellow scholar and mutual lover. This is a longish quote:

Pelletier made the first call, which lasted an hour and fifteen minutes. The second was made three days later by Espinoza and lasted two hours and fifteen minutes....The first twenty minutes were tragic in tone, with the word *fate* used ten times and the word *friendship* twenty-four times. Liz Norton's name was spoken fifty times, nine of them in vain. The word *Paris* was said seven times, *Madrid*, eight. The word *love* was spoken twice, once by each man. The word *horror* was spoken six times and the word *happiness* once (by Espinoza). The word *solution* was said twelve times. The word *solipsism* seven times. The word *euphemism* ten times. The word *category*, in the singular and the plural, nine times. (40-41)

And the passage continues on in this way: "*structuralism*" (1 time); "*American literature*" (3 times); "*dinner*," "*eating*," "*breakfast*," and "*sandwich*" (19 times total); "*eyes*," "*hands*," and "*hair*" (14 times). Like a critique of statistical literary analysis, the obvious joke is that mere information cannot dramatize the complex unfoldings of interiority that we might expect from a novel. But the irony, heightened by the impotence of the literature professors,

is that the Bolaño's data actually charts the characters' thoughts and feelings well enough to convey meaning and invite interpretation. In a novel that contains numerous catalogues and lists, including the chilling, numbing information given in over one hundred police reports on murdered women, Bolaño's data feels simultaneously foreign and appropriate to his larger aesthetic designs, both a replacement for and a mode of what we might call the literary.

All of which is to suggest that the relationship between literature and information is not as antagonistic and overdetermined as it's sometimes taken to be. There are excellent reasons to be skeptical of scientific methods, the digital humanities, quantitative assessments, bureaucratic systems, commercialism, the corporate university, Big Data, Big Tech, and our information revolution in general. But we should not simply dismiss or reject such enterprises by recurring to some monolithic narrative in which the literary and the informational are essentially, historically, and forever unrelated or at odds. We might even wonder if the literary has a place in informational domains—if people trained in language and literature and who possess interpretive and aesthetic sensibilities might play a special role in an age of information.

Here Hawthorne can help elaborate this hope and register its deeper history. Hawthorne had worked briefly as a custom house official in Boston before he wrote "The Intelligence Office"; but he didn't write in earnest about informational labor until he spent three years at the Salem custom house. *The Scarlet Letter*, we may or may not recall, doesn't start with Hester Prynne emerging from prison in colonial Boston with an infant and scarlet badge on her chest, for prior to the proper beginning of his novel, Hawthorne indulges in some lengthy shop-talk in a preface titled "The Custom-House." Here he relates his experience as an office-bound bureaucrat measuring imports, making

records, and calculating fees. Basically, he's an information worker who remains an artist at heart. Some teachers don't assign "The Custom-House" when they assign *The Scarlet Letter*. It's boring and doesn't seem necessary to the novel. Or when they do discuss the preface, they usually do so under a dualistic logic, contrasting Hawthorne's mundane informational labors with the passionate significance of Hester's life.

And yet I think "The Custom-House" preface actually challenges the literature/information divide. Hawthorne begins by lightly satirizing his lazy days in the office. There's a sleepy co-worker playing out the string of his appointment. There's a stickler for neat ledgers, protocols, and policies. The work itself doesn't seem particularly meaningful. Hawthorne is bored, and yet he has some affection for the place. It's like Dunder-Mifflin in the American sitcom, *The Office*, with Hawthorne playing the role of the smirking Jim Halpert. Like Jim, Hawthorne's irony does not keep him from being, in the end, a pretty good employee. Indeed, Hawthorne wants his readers to know that he responsibly performed his duties as a custom house official—that dreamy, ironic, literary romantics can also be adequate bureaucrats. To those of you serving as departmental officers, Hawthorne and I salute you.

And perhaps your service is not merely one of sacrifice—of deferring aesthetic and critical callings to more instrumental, corporatist duties. We might even push the limits of cognitive dissonance to argue that working with data, deans, and committees might help one understand constructions of the literary. And reciprocally, what if informational enterprises benefit from humanist capacities? What if the slippery epistemologies and unaccountable soft-skills of the literary perform significant work?

The Salem custom house, as Hawthorne describes it, is a bureaucracy overflowing with informational documents. One day Hawthorne finds barrels of records and receipts

stowed away in the attic of the office, and he begins “[p]oking and burrowing into the heaped-up rubbish...unfolding one and another document” (143). It’s a non-algorithmic, unsystematic mode of reading that continues when Hawthorne rummages the drawers of a desk. It’s during this desultory skimming of texts, which we might think of as a kind of surface reading, that Hawthorne comes across a parchment envelope to which he is drawn by what he calls “an instinctive curiosity” (144). Inside is an “ancient yellow parchment” with information about Hester Prynne’s history written by a custom house official from a century before (144). The envelope also contains the beautifully embroidered but faded scarlet letter itself. Hawthorne instinctively places the letter on his chest and feels a heat that he calls a “sensation not altogether physical”—as if combining the etymological root of aesthetics in sensation with romantic notions of the artist’s supersensible intuition (146). For some reason that is “beyond the analysis of mind,” Hawthorne regards the scarlet letter as an object “most worthy of interpretation” (145-46). And he begins to elaborate the story of Hester’s passion, heart, soul, and search for a place in the world.

We might call the heat-seeking sensibilities of Hawthorne in “The Custom-House” a literary aesthetic re-tooled for an information age. Having served as an information worker in a government bureaucracy, Hawthorne reminds his fellow citizens and neighbors how seriously he handled his paperwork—not simply as an adequate bureaucrat, but also as an artist uniquely capable of recovering a story about the most vital human needs. In his “Custom-House” preface, Hawthorne vindicates himself as a lover of literature in an information age.

As language and literary scholars, we might feel similarly defensive and self-important when we justify our work to our skeptical townsfolk. We teach reading, writing, speaking, research, and critical thinking skills necessary in a modern information

economy. Look at the longitudinal data on the salaries of humanities majors (they're not as bad as everyone thinks)! Witness CEOs calling for the creativity of humanists and artists (but seldom earmarking donations for humanities departments)! Democracy needs sympathetic, pluralistic citizens aware of history and trained in rational deliberation (hopefully they live in Wisconsin, Michigan, Ohio, or Pennsylvania). Literature, that is, has instrumental uses in a democratic, capitalist society. Oh, and by the way, people who take literature seriously may have access to certain human feeling and values beyond the reach of ledgers and data. They may be able to impart some order and meaning to a modernity overwhelmed with information. It's pretty to think so, and sometimes I do, but like Hawthorne, we should probably also acknowledge that literary wonders are always entangled with informational discourses. Just as the source of Hester's story is an informational document recovered and embellished by an artist and a bureaucrat, the difference between literary and informational work is not as clear as we might think.

So is this good news or bad news for our crisis in the humanities? What kind of conviction, if any, might it bring? A final point on *The Scarlet Letter* before leaving Hawthorne behind. There's a key moment in the middle of the book when Hester decides to defend her ex-lover, Arthur Dimmesdale, from the vengeance of her estranged husband. The moment resolves an existential crisis for Hester and reveals that she will unrepentantly resist the highly-regulated Puritan patriarchy that surrounds her. She will not divulge the novel's most crucial piece of information—the identity of the father of her daughter, Pearl. Hester will soon ask Dimmesdale to return with her to Europe or to flee to Nipmuck or Wampanoag territory not far from the Pequot land we're occupying

today. Dimmesdale will refuse, but Hawthorne writes at the moment of Hester's defiance: "The Scarlet Letter had not done its office" (261).

Sacvan Bercovitch wrote a whole book around this line, which he took to represent, among other things, the power of dominant ideology to re-inscribe but not eradicate dissent. This is borne out at the end of the novel when Hester, after spending some years in Europe, returns to her cottage on the margins of colonial Boston and chooses to affix the scarlet letter to her chest. Her good deeds and wisdom eventually earn her respect, if not acceptance, in the larger Puritan community. Suffering people, particularly women, visit her cottage, where she "comfort[s] and counsel[s] them...as best she might" (344). We don't know precisely what this comfort and counsel look like; Hawthorne describes it from afar. But it is clear that, unlike the clerk of "The Intelligence Office," Hester helps people with their desperate human needs.

If we take her as a figure of the literary, which we should, and if we take the impersonal, rule-bound, transparency-seeking Puritans around her as an informational regime, which we can, then Hester's place in the dominant order attests to the resilient power and ongoing marginalization of the humanities in an information age. The conclusion of *The Scarlet Letter* mentions that Hester receives beautiful, useless presents from the aesthetically-gifted Pearl, who is apparently living in some better, distant land. Maybe it's a world with no crisis in the humanities—a world where the literary flourishes beyond the informational. But Hawthorne, for better or worse, returns Hester to the margins of a real and severely constrained world. How we feel about this ending may relate to how we see our place in an information age.

So here comes the pragmatic and—I fear—unsatisfying concluding section to this talk. It’s that moment when historical narrative and literary interpretation move toward something like advocacy or advice. If we think back to our statements of purpose when we applied to graduate school, many of us began by professing our love: for a favorite book or author, or a class or topic that inspired us, for the pleasure and mystery words can bring, or the power of language and literature to change lives and communities. Some of us may have expressed interest in science and technology, or even quantitative methods, but more often than not, we defined—and continue to define—our deepest and most cherished literary identities outside of, or in opposition to, informationalism. No one in my experience writes in their statement of purpose that they aspire to sit on a curriculum committee charged with arresting enrollment declines, or to remove a novel or poem from their syllabus to make room for a lesson in informational literacy, or to participate in data-driven assessment protocols to make the value of the humanities more visible in the corporate university, or to forge connections in the technology and information sector so as to provide career paths for majors, or to re-tool their aesthetic and political commitments to better serve the ends of neoliberalism.

Perhaps this is why we’re marginalized, and maybe that’s as it should be. Part of what literature does is attend to values and meanings beyond the purview of intelligence offices. Part of what we do is critique and resistance, even if that relegates us to a cottage industry outside the centers of power. There are good reasons to defend liberal education, even if the tide is against it. There are good reasons to challenge informationalism, even in the midst of its ascendance.

But as I’ve been arguing, such reasons do not include an overdetermined historical narrative in which the literary and the informational are essentially, historically, and

forever incommensurate or at odds. Our reasons for resisting informationalism should not simply be: “That’s not what literature is about” or “That’s not what we do.” To recognize the long and entangled histories of literature and information is to open up space, not only for interpretation and critique, but also for negotiation, accommodation, and collaboration, which does not, I hope, amount to capitulation. Such possibilities should impel us to ask: What is negotiable? What can be accommodated? On what grounds might we work—or not work—with the informational? Which is to return to a long-deferred question: What is the office of literature?

The history of modern literary studies, as I understand it, does not render a single answer or set of essential traits. Our methods and objects of study have always been shifting, and internal debates over central purposes and practices make literary studies—compared to other disciplines I know—especially diverse, malleable, incoherent, and rich.

Which brings me finally to the pragmatist William James, who dedicated his book *Pragmatism* to John Stuart Mill, and defined truth as what he called the “cash-value” of experience (200). We might think of James as an informational philosopher who in his day and our own has been criticized for being too empirical, scientific, instrumental, and adaptable to free market ideology. For the most part, James cheerfully accepted such descriptions, presenting his thought as practical, pluralistic, and opportunistically assembled from a hodge-podge of existing ideas. He compared pragmatism to a raft: lacking systematic construction, not headed in any teleological direction, but also difficult to sink.

This is how I see literary studies, and why I’m advocating a pragmatic comportment toward our crisis in the humanities during an information age. My sense—and it can only

be a kind of intuition—is that literature will survive as long as there are humans, and that the study of literature will survive the end of literary studies, if it comes, insofar as people who take literature seriously will join together to talk about it, whether they have official offices or not. Less clear to me is the fate of our profession, whose tendency to define itself against the informational may be constraining efforts to address our crisis in the humanities.

Which is strange, since we're already doing informational work. In our scholarship and teaching, we deal with facts and logic, with classification, organization, searching, pattern, and system. At some level, we're all digital humanists, and many of us work within corporate bureaucracies. In lobbies, cafes, restaurants, and bars, we talk about budgets, enrollments, and job market statistics. Like everyone else, we complain about committee meetings and bosses, but we also talk shop because the office of literary studies is not only to engage with aesthetics, meanings, and values, but also to do bureaucratic, instrumental, informational work.

It's the cost of being in a profession. The MLA was founded in 1883 in the midst of a long and ongoing information revolution. The first *Transactions of the Modern Language Association of America* was published in 1885, and it included comments on how the humanities and sciences, though distinct, were engaged in a shared enterprise. It also included articles on how to teach language and literature in secondary schools and on the need to include literature in college curricula. Language and literary scholars were fighting to be included on committees, to have a place in the bureaucracy, to have equal standing with the sciences, to be a profession and participate in informational domains.

In our current struggle for legitimacy, I can imagine all kinds of practical measures to address our crisis in the humanities, and some of these measures will benefit by

eschewing the urge to categorically define the literary against the informational. I'm sure many people here are already undertaking their own measures in their scholarship, teaching, and service. We don't need to get into specifics right now, which—for better or worse—might lead to a kind of massive departmental meeting.

Instead, I look forward to your questions and comments and will end more generally with this: to resist the literature/information divide and recognize that the literary has for centuries been entangled with the informational may help us to reorient attitudes toward possible engagements with our information age. It may cause us to revisit and perhaps reconfigure our professional identities and to imagine and enact new ways to make a difference in our long information revolution. To reiterate, such engagement does not necessarily mean capitulation, compromise, or even accommodation, but it does mean avoiding narrow assumptions about what we do and who we are. Like a raft, language and literary studies include a diversity of offices. As we face our long crisis in the humanities, I hope that we continue to be hard to sink.

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¹ See, for instance, Henry D. Inglis, *The New Gil Blas, Vol. III* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green, and Longman, 1832), 221; [Catherine Gore], "Abednego the Money-Lender," *Museum of Foreign Literature, Science, and Art, Volume 17* (Philadelphia: May, 1842), 782; and James Ballantine, *The Miller of Deanhaugh* (Edinburgh: John Menzies, 1844), 98.

² n.a., "Daily Increasing Distress," *The Times* (Dec. 5, 1853), 6.