

Because *inquiry* means the search for new knowledge, *Critical Inquiry* must mean the search for new knowledge about literature. Assuming that the name of the journal adequately represents its goals, a definition of its future tasks would amount to an agreement on what kind of new knowledge about literature the journal intends to seek. Given that *Critical Inquiry* has proudly been at the avant-garde of literary criticism, one should add that the new knowledge to be sought should be cutting edge knowledge.

If this is the question, it seems to me that, after almost a century of good work on literary form and literary context, these topics are quite well known. Good new work in these areas will certainly be produced, but I think it is time for literary critics to explore the content of literature more seriously. Contemporary literary criticism neglects precisely those aspects of literary works that interest readers most: human ideals, human imperfections, freedom, norms, fate, moral perplexities, emotions and decisions. These topics are tricky because it is so easy to handle them in a trivial, uninformative way. My sense is that in order to avoid the temptation of triviality, the critical exploration of these topics should be achieved through cooperation with philosophy, in particular with philosophical anthropology and moral philosophy. The work done by Robert Pippin, Charles Larmore, and Martha Nussbaum could serve as examples. Since philosophical anthropology and moral philosophy are difficult disciplines whose notions are not always familiar to literary specialists, a considerable effort would be necessary for this kind of cooperation to be successful. I am hopeful but not 100 percent optimistic.

If literary criticism in America were just the search for new knowledge, I would end my remarks here. But, in fact, criticism is very often used as a vehicle for moral, social, or political advocacy—in short, for preaching. Therefore, the question of the future of *Critical Inquiry* does not simply concern the new kind of *knowledge* about literature that it should pursue, but also the kind of *preaching* it should encourage. In the call for statements, W. J. T. Mitchell suggests that literary theory has backed off from its revolutionary engagement to become more therapeutic and individualistic. Searching for utopia, in other words, has been replaced by the care of the self. Pathetic as this change may sound, it captures the zeitgeist quite well. But, in my view, the main problem with recent literary preaching is not so much *what* it preaches (be it revolution or care of the self) as the fact that the voice of the preacher often silences the voice of the literary text used as the basis for the sermon. In the name of “rewriting” and creative interpretation, the critic speaks louder than the text. *Critical Inquiry* would do a considerable service to the profession if, in addition to this style of criticism, it could encourage interpretive approaches that are less narcissistic and closer to the text. Literary works have a lot to preach. We should be courageous enough to take the risk to let them speak.

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