doing and who we are. This makes the process of explaining ourselves and what we do to the general public, university administrations, and students even more difficult.

In addition, the lack of an agreed-on title makes it difficult to write about the people who make up the English department. All studies that seek to examine the history of English and literature studies must tiptoe around the subject. As a result, it is difficult to speak about the practitioners of the subject directly and specifically. Awkwardly, we refer to English educators, English teachers, and professors of English.

How did we get into this situation? Are we too new a profession to have acquired a defining word? Bear in mind that *scientist* only goes back to the 1830s. In contrast, references to *composition* as the act of putting ideas into a written form go back to the 1600s. The first chair of English literature was established at the University of Edinburgh in 1762. A lack of tradition does not seem to be the problem.

It is possible that a generic term for the English or literature scholar or teacher was not developed because of a historical resistance to professionalism. Certainly, a run through the words grouped around the dictionary entries for *composition*, *bibliography*, *grammar*, *literature*, and *English* presents few options for a name, except perhaps *philologist*.

The more I look at it, the more promising this word becomes. While *philology* was eventually rerouted to the more narrow study of comparative linguistics, it once included the study of culture, a usage closer to the modern emphasis of the profession. The *OED* gives the now rare general sense of *philology* as "the study of literature, in a wide sense, including grammar, literary criticism and interpretation, the relation of literature and written records to history, etc." According to Gerald Graff's *Professing Literature: An Institutional History* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987), the narrowing of this word's meaning was possibly due to the "positivist temper of early professionalism, which worked against broad cultural generalization" (74). The older, more general usage still remains, however, in the titles of some scholarly journals.

While I find myself invoking the older, broader definition of philology, my purpose is not to define what or how we study but rather to give an identity to the scholars who pursue such questions, to suggest a professional title, and, I hope, to offer at least a start toward self-respect. *Philologist* does have some negative connotations, since it is closely identified with the language-literature split recognized by Albert S. Cook in his 1897 Presidential Address (Graff 80); however, perhaps enough time has passed that the word might be viewed as neutral. If I am wrong and my proposal strikes others as too modest in the Swiftian sense of the word, I leave it to them to suggest an alternative that will include members of the entire English department.

Of course, what I am discussing here is merely the lack of a word, but if we agree on anything in English, it is that language is important. And scholars who are not sure of the validity of their professional identity will suffer the vagaries of the job market the most.

LILA M. HARPER
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To the Editor:

In response to Hannah Berliner Fischthal's request for a title for "literature persons," let me offer the following with a wry smile. Given the staggering advances in computer technology, interactive television, and other pictorial communications media and given the nearly wholehearted embrace of these technologies in education in this point-and-click world, where language becomes a nuisance, the so-called experts in literature, those who maintain a quaint interest in the archaic skills of reading and writing, could simply be known as they once were: the literates.

KEITH FYNAARDT
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To the Editor:

Hannah Berliner Fischthal launches a search for an appellative for "literature persons."

Sifting the models she offers, we could generate the following:

literet (like *poet*)
literatist (like *linguist*, *dramatist*)
literatician (like *rhetorician*)
literatographer (like *historiographer*)

None of these strikes my ear euphoniously. The problem lies in the sound of *-iterat-*. It's a phonetic element that doesn't combine well with any element except *-ure*. I say scrap it and start over.

Curiously, Fischthal omits a plausible model: *philosopher*. This suggests *philologist*, an honorable appellative tightly bound to the early years of the profession but perhaps associated, fairly or unfairly, with "old-fashioned" methods of scholarship. So I nominate a cognate: *philologer*. It has the advantage of sounding fresh while in fact being well-established. *The Random House Dictionary* defines the etymon of both *philologist* and