

that the theorem is “substantially more complicated” than the liar paradox (250)—suggests a zeal to find something wrong. And when Sokol speaks finally of “the desire, puzzling to Thomas, to create further mathematical proofs,” I am puzzled, indeed, but not in the way he implies. His page reference seems to indicate my discussion of logicians and their characteristic indifference to questions such as “Why is proof desirable?” I stand by my comments there. Logical investigations rarely make an issue of psychological motivations, whereas literary-critical theorists are often preoccupied by them. I do not mean thereby to discount the intellectual worthiness of logic or logicians, just as I do not condemn a construction-site engineer for failing to reflect on Robert Frost’s poem “Mending Fences.” Some matters are simply remote enough from each other that there is no irresponsibility in broaching only one and not the other.

Sokol claims to “honor intellectual bridge building,” but his letter betrays no eagerness to see this particular bridge built. It is little trouble to identify shortcuts and simplifications in any short explanation of Gödel’s work—indeed, I announce their presence myself (249)—but if Sokol wishes to discredit my “illusively explanatory” treatment of Gödel’s thinking, it would seem incumbent on him, as I felt it incumbent on me as a writer, to attend to where and how those simplifications might matter. His letter does not do that. Any bridge between Gödel’s theorems and postmodern literary-critical work must necessarily throw weight on either side of the gulf it hopes to span, so discussion cannot proceed when the weight of sympathies is grossly unequal. Simply extolling Gödel’s “brilliant” work and then dismissing (without argument) the “seemingly subtle convolutions” of postmodern theorists does little service to this project.

I thank Sokol nonetheless for correcting, in his penultimate paragraph, my misguided formulation about sets of odd and even numbers. I now recall revising that passage for economy and style, and I failed to realize my introduction of the imprecision.

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## Remembering K-12

To the Editor:

I have long admired Wayne Booth’s down-to-earth, jargon-lite writings on teaching, literature, and teaching literature, and it was therefore with great pleasure that I sat down to read his reflections on his career (“Where

Have I Been, and Where Are ‘We’ Now, in This Profession?” 109 [1994]: 941–50). I was pleased in particular by his sensitivity to the contrast between the privileged conditions that existed when he was coming up through the ranks and the rather different and strained conditions that graduate students and young teachers and scholars face today.

However, I was at the same time disappointed that nowhere does Booth connect “we” in “this profession,” so-called higher education, and the catastrophic state of secondary education. Germaine Brée mentions high school briefly in her reflections (“The Making of a University Professor, USA—1936–84,” 109 [1994]: 935–40), when she says that she left a high school position to teach at a university (936). Booth’s avoidance of secondary education and Brée’s abandonment of it, however justified in her case, seem to me symptomatic of an increasingly common attitude: whatever you do, stay away from the high schools and junior high schools.

I take Booth seriously when he says, “We need to ensure that there will be future generations who deal with literature and ideas because they love what they are doing, not because they have learned that pursuing this or that intellectual style, radical or reactionary, pays off. . . . [I]f we don’t teach people how to engage with the subtleties and intricacies of novels, plays, and poems (along with the challenges of talking about them), who will?” Even with all the love and best intentions in the world, how will novels, plays, and poems be taught if the teachers in this profession are more and more “people who have first encountered the joys of reading” at age eighteen or twenty-two? (948). How much longer can we afford to ignore K-12? When will we acknowledge that *saving the text and the fate of reading and the rhetoric of fiction* concern all of us? Until we are willing to treat our colleagues in primary and secondary education with the respect they deserve, all that we do will be just so much whistling in the dark.

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## Reply:

I want to thank C. Jon Delogu for pointing out my curious oversight; I’m as shocked by it as he is. In the past I’ve made something like his case again and again, yet here for once I allowed myself to imply a “we” in “this profession” that excludes the very teachers I value most. Was I disoriented because the invitation came from the Modern Language Association and not from the Na-

tional Council of Teachers of English, say, or the CCCC or the NEA?

The good news for Delogu and the rest of us, though, is that the MLA itself, under the leadership of Phyllis Franklin and others, has been working vigorously to break down the gap he rightly deplores. From the English Coalition Conference in 1987 to recent efforts like the MLA's project to develop exemplary programs for the preparation of secondary school teachers of English and foreign languages, many have been redefining "the profession" in ways that dramatize our shared problems and purposes.

Even so, Delogu is right in hinting that a proper answer to the question of my title, "Where are 'we' now, in

this profession?," might go something like this: "We are still at a historical moment when someone like Wayne Booth, who professes to care deeply about pre-college teachers and teaching, can still blandly exclude them from an account of where 'we' are."

Would it be possible for *PMLA* to devote some pages every year, or perhaps even every issue, to the problem Delogu raises, including brief personal testimonials to how elementary and secondary teachers tempted "us" into the profession and continue, in spite of "our" neglect of "them," to keep the profession alive?

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