

had “several excellent anthologies, comprehensive and specialized, that introduced us to much of the material then known to only a few people” (367), she omits what I consider three important collections available before the Barksdale and Kinnamon anthology (1972): *From the Roots: Short Stories by Black Americans* (1970), edited by Clarence James; *Black American Literature: Poetry* (1969), edited by Darwin Turner; and *The New Black Poetry* (1969), edited by Clarence Major. In particular, James’s anthology was my most important resource as I attempted to offer African American literature to my students in fall 1970. It provides not only important selections of fiction from 1889 to 1969 but also invaluable historical information in charts at the ends of the five sections in the book. To not mention James’s early contribution to the field and to use the term “Wheatley court” inappropriately may be simple slips in research and writing, but a splendid scholar such as McKay nonetheless should have avoided them.

Finally, I applaud Nellie McKay’s collaboration with Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and others in the editing of *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature* (1996). The work has been needed for years and should prove a valuable cornerstone in the foundation of future African American studies programs.

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To the Editor:

Nellie McKay is absolutely right that the profession should have decisively addressed the challenge of increasing minority enrollment in PhD programs thirty years ago. Had we done so, we would now have a strong cultural tradition to sustain us through the long-term employment crisis in higher education. Unfortunately, the problem will now be much harder to solve, and we will not be successful if we altogether separate the genuine need to encourage minority enrollment from all the economic and social forces working to discourage it.

Several trends may dissuade African American undergraduates from pursuing humanities PhDs: (1) the massive shift from full-time to part-time faculty employment; (2) substantial recent increases in the typical level of graduate student debt; (3) the emergence of a new class of full-time, tenure-track faculty positions at annual salaries of \$25,000 or less; (4) continuing conservative attacks on multiculturalism, on the expanded canon, and on efforts to increase recognition of the historical role of racism in American culture. These forces are combining to degrade the cultural capital, social mobility, and financial rewards associated with college teaching. They are

making teaching English or foreign languages much less attractive career options. Moreover, their combined effect is still worse. High debt and a low salary work together to encourage students to pursue other careers.

Most of the emerging economic forces will also be negative. The explosive growth in distance learning, for example, is exaggerating the shift toward part-time employment. We will not bring more minority students into a profession losing its dignity. The completed work of the MLA Committee on Professional Employment and the ongoing effort of the association’s Graduate Student Caucus to turn the profession’s primary attention toward its complex and massively unfair job system are essential to any effort to achieve McKay’s commendable goals.

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Lacanian Tragedy and the Ethics of *Jouissance*

To the Editor:

In “Lacan and the New Lacanians: Josephine Hart’s *Damage*, Lacanian Tragedy, and the Ethics of *Jouissance*” (113 [1998]: 395–407), James M. Mellard refers to a “paradoxical, perhaps perverse, twist Lacan gives to ethics and traditional tragedy” (395). More specifically locating this idea, Mellard asserts, “In *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan insists that the true ethical position is not that which abides by the desire of the law of one’s culture but that which accords with [and a lot depends on what Mellard means by “accords with”] *jouissance*, with the drive of the other within oneself” (406). But while a shift “from an ethics of desire to one of *jouissance*” may have taken place in history (396), such a shift is not at all evident in Lacan’s *Ethics* seminar, where *jouissance* is by no means privileged over desire.

Mellard’s *PMLA* article drastically simplifies and misrepresents the intricate complexity of Lacan’s argument about the ethics of psychoanalysis. I question Mellard’s damaging idea that the ethics of psychoanalysis is illustrated by a character who causes various forms of horror by superimposing his own death-driven *jouissance* on that of a femme fatale. (Mellard refers to a “horrifying element” in Stephen Fleming’s “drive,” “the horror of this *jouissance*,” “the obscenity of his demand,” and the “obscene kernel of [his] enjoyment” [406].) An underlying concern of this letter is what sort of value psychoanalysis could possibly have in the practical arenas of the clinic and social change were its ethics to be conflated with the death drive.