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## Editor's Note

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# editors' note

Imagine our delight when Dr. J. Hillis Miller accepted our invitation to write the forum prompt for the Winter 2014 issue of *Criterion: A Journal of Literary Criticism*. Once, in admiration for Dr. Miller's intellect, close friend Jacques Derrida publicly wondered "how one can be J. Hillis Miller." As a member of the legendary circle of the Yale School deconstructionists, Dr. Miller has written nearly thirty books and countless articles on literary criticism throughout the course of his career. Now he would like to learn from student writers by asking a short yet deceptively problematic question to the authors, editors, and readers of *Criterion*: "Why Literature?"

Dr. Miller's prompt—which he extracted from an essay published in *Daedalus*—is timely and necessary, addressing with his characteristic mix of depth and clarity a question with profound implications for what we do as students and scholars of English literature. Each of the essays featured in this edition of *Criterion* address the broad topic uniquely, some through a close analysis of individual texts and others through more peripheral examinations of theory and composition. The effect is a heterogeneous defense of literature. One essay argues that proper investigation into Victorian poetry could offer new insight for addressing contemporary ecological issues; another claims that the creative non-fiction genre instigates a special reader-writer partnership, enabling both parties to truthfully explore the limits of memory and representation together, without concealed partiality or disparity of information; and another illustrates the global, humanistic quality of literature by tracing Wordsworth's influence throughout a century of Chinese literary history.

Literature is evolving so quickly that we can hardly anticipate the details of its future; rather, our priority is to continually reexamine and recover its intrinsic value for the present. *Criterion* values the study of literature as an investigation of meaning and truth. Even the imaginary shapes our perceptions of truth. Fiction and poetry helps us to form connections with other people, both real and imaginary. Perhaps no other medium allows us to vicariously experience the thoughts, feelings, and actions of fictional characters so fully. All the books that have ever been written, or will ever be written, cannot possibly contain all that humans are able to imagine, feel, or comprehend; literature will endure as a means of communicating meaning and truth. Our hope is that the student essays published in this issue effectively communicate new insights for both the processes of meaning-making as well as the elucidation of truth.

Italo Calvino, who thought of literature as communication, begins his novel *Invisible Cities* like this: “Kublai Khan does not necessarily believe everything Marco Polo says when he describes the cities visited on his expeditions, but the emperor of the Tartars does continue listening to the young Venetian with greater attention and curiosity than he shows any other messenger or explorer of his.” As students and scholars, perhaps our attention to literature is fueled by a similar curiosity as that ascribed to Kublai Khan, by the feeling that there is truth in fiction.

Maybe that’s why literature.

*Tyler Corbridge and Shane Peterson*