Readers' Forum Introduction Pro/Con/fessionals: (Re)defining Ourselves and the Profession

Kit Dobson Mount Royal University

> Jason Haslam Dalhousie University

MOVING BETWEEN ANALYSIS AND CONFESSION (and, really, can we have one without the other?), this readers' forum builds on the themes of the panels organized by the ACCUTE Committee for Professional Concerns (CPC) at Congress 2010 in Montreal. The first panels offered by the recently resurrected CPC, the papers presented on them were aimed, as our title here suggests, at addressing the various pros and cons of the academic profession and our relationships to it.

The forum that arose from these panels examines the ways in which the profession has been defined—either explicitly or through its often-unspoken assumptions and expectations—and queries how it is being redefined in our current moment. The pieces here are particularly interested in the ways in which forces supposedly outside of the profession—economic, social, political, and, yes, even personal—interact with our lives and careers as academics and professionals. How might we best respond to the challenges facing our profession today? How, for instance, do we address the ongoing and systematic challenges faced by contingent faculty members, most recently addressed by ACCUTE President Heather Murray in her report "The Sessional Situation: Sessional/Stipendiary Workers in Canadian Departments of English, 2009–11"? How do we address merit

KIT DOBSON is an Assistant Professor of Canadian Literature at Calgary's Mount Royal University. His first book, Transnational Canadas: Anglo-Canadian Literature and Globalization, was published by Wilfrid Laurier UP in 2009.

JASON HASLAM is an Associate Professor of English at Dalhousie University and currently President of the Canadian Association for American Studies. He has published books and articles on prison writing and on the representation of gender and race in science fiction (including a recent scholarly edition of Tarzan of the Apes for Oxford World's Classics). and systemic inequalities and the realities of budget shortfalls? How, in other words, do we proceed ethically as a profession?

The contributions to this readers' forum offer, if not answers, then meditations on and complications to these and other questions. The contributors most often drew from their papers for the three CPC panels, which addressed the topics "Defining the Profession," "Professional Transitions," and "Labour and the Profession" (organized by the CPC collectively but especially through the individual efforts of Doug Thorpe, Kit Dobson, and Clint Burnham, respectively). The present forum thus touches on these topics, but in each instance we see how the boundaries between them break down. From Len Findlay's history of the modern university and its implications for today's academic labour force to Kel Morin-Parsons's pragmatic—and hopeful!—paper on moving one's doctoral degree beyond the narrow confines of the academy; from Erin Wunker's critical performance of the political position of the contract faculty member to Dave Gaertner's analysis of academic labour as a gift economy (and the power differentials involved therein); from Chris Keep's consideration of the long-term impacts of increased graduate enrolments to Nicholas Bradley's reckoning with the need for mindful mentorship of students wishing to pursue academic careers in a time of constraint and to Margery Fee's questioning of the biases that may inhere in our teaching of writing: all of these discussions of these and other topics, both conceptual and applied, offer often surprising takes on the pros and cons of professional academic work today, making us all fess up to our own positions in the profession.

Where is our profession headed? Without invoking any of the apocalyptic discourses that seem to be so prevalent in forums like the *Chronicle* of Higher Education, it is clear that life in universities is changing. Universities are—or at least can be—responsive sites of innovation and change, and yet many of the current challenges and changes do not seem, to us, to be offering improvements upon the academic world; it is quite the reverse. The challenge, for those of us invested in this profession in one way or another, then, is to make the university's responsive capacity work for us all. How might such ends be achieved? We want neither to prescribe the problematics nor describe potential solutions; the contributors to this forum do so with more force and eloquence than we can possibly manage here.