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Alexander Search with Suman Gupta, Fabio Akcelrud Durão and Terrence McDonough. *Entrepreneurial Literary Theory: A Debate on Research and the Future of Academia*. London: Shot in the Dark, 2017. (Open Access.) Pp 271. ISBN 978-1-5272-1118-6.

This book is an academic debate, an argumentative dialogue concerning the vexed relationship between academia, particularly literary studies, and entrepreneurship. The authors/ participants are scholars who have a stake in this debate, whether they are managers or economists (Alexander Search and Terrence McDonough writing as “Dismal Scientist,” respectively) or literature professors (Suman Gupta, Fabio Akcelrud Durão, and, although not credited on the cover, Leandro Pasini). Dealing with the highly divisive matter of whether and how literary studies can serve the practical purpose of profit-making, *Entrepreneurial Literary Theory* is a dialogue in which speakers give their opinions and contradict each other, without insisting on reaching some kind of agreement. Entrepreneurship is broadly defined as the single-minded pursuit of “profits from whatever productive activity they [organisations or individuals] are concerned with” (1). As the authors point out in the Introduction, in the context of Higher Education and the research sector, it is increasingly “considered that all such institutions should ideally be profit making. . . . Their entrepreneurialism has an upbeat psychological dimension and is grounded in the naturalisation of neoliberal language in academia. Entrepreneurialism thus becomes imbued in the very language through which the university functions and presents itself” (3). In this context, the researcher is assumed to be an entrepreneur, i.e., a person who produces profit for an institution. Nonetheless, the humanities resist this representation of themselves, and of these, literary studies have put themselves in an extremely vulnerable position by insisting on sharp distinctions between the respective roles of researcher and functionary and by clinging to the former as their function.

Entrepreneurial Literary Theory is made up of four sections, each comprising a variable number of chapters written either by one or several debaters. The authors are always carefully identified at the beginning of

each segment and they engage openly with each other's rhetoric, points and positions. The first part, titled "Panoptic," proposes to clarify the terminology with which the rest of the chapters will operate. The second, as the title suggests, is concerned with the practicalities of "Knowledge Production" in the university as well as the corporate sector and the ways in which knowledge is put to good use towards the production not only of benefits but also profits. The third focuses on "Scholarly Publishing," taking the case of the monograph as a prototype and discussing the position of the author within the scholarly publishing rationale. The very short final section, authored almost exclusively by Alexander Search, analyses the concept of leadership in academia. The book does not end with conclusions but with an appendix written by Suman Gupta in 2015, describing the "Seven Phases" "in engineering the relationship between academic work and conditions for that work in the context of liberal economies," the keyword here being "engineering" (253).

Alexander Search, the leading investigator of the problematic of entrepreneurialism in academia, opens the first part by proposing bluntly that all literary research should produce profit. Embracing a neoliberal perspective which approves of current practices in western society, he points out that politically conscientious literary research, which is the dominant approach in the humanities, is premised on the assumption that all other approaches, no matter how high-minded, contribute to preserving the *status quo*. Although coming from the opposite end of the political spectrum, the neoliberal argument for profit-making literary scholarship is, thus, equally involved with the relationship between literature and society, and, Search pleads, less hypocritical about this relationship. More importantly, literary studies is bound up with the conditions of its status as a profession, from work hours and wages to institutional affiliation and the commercial aspects of publishing etc. (10). Entrepreneurialism, according to his logic, is an inescapable part of our condition.

While Search takes this kind of discourse for granted, the other three authors take issue with various assumptions. Search insists, in good neoliberal fashion, that his position is not consistently or programmatically political; rather, he has the public good at heart. According to him, the public good is best served when corporate and academic research collaborate constantly in order to produce public (and corporate) benefits. Yet for that collaboration to be viable, academic

research needs to be both freely available and sustainable (98). Thus, for instance, he explains in the third part, academic authors produce monographs without expecting financial gain, while the academic publisher cashes in the profits. This is in keeping with his understanding of the entrepreneur as someone who produces profits for a corporation, while the researcher is rewarded in other ways, which are regulated by the ministry and university and which may include pecuniary advantages but which more often than not involve only professional recognition or prestige. The role of Dismal Scientist is to clarify the economic premises of this representation of academic research.

As Fabio Durão points out, Search's position derives much of its persuasiveness from the fact that things have already been moving in that direction in Western Europe and North America. I must confess I share with Durão, a Brazilian literary scholar, a habit of thinking of socialism, capitalism and neoliberalism as political – rather than merely economic or social – stances, and a suspicion of Search's claim to political neutrality. Both Durão and Gupta object to normalising the kind of discourse deployed by Search from positions that can be described broadly as democratic socialism, although they differ in the method of their reading and locate the problem with Search's assumptions differently. Gupta questions both Search's motivation and good faith, and the rhetorical means he deploys to persuade his readers, from the use of "aggressive value-laden terms" (such as "*democratisation* of the university,' *robust* methods,' *proactive*,' *innovative*,' and so on") to "intralingual translations" (e.g., "the public good of research is quickly translated into a discourse of benefits and profits") (46). More openly Marxist in his approach, Durão starts from the premise that the world is immensely rich and it is a matter of a more equitable distribution of resources that research, and literary research in particular, should not be required to produce profits; that the benefits it produces should not be required to be (also) of a material or monetary nature.

This is a book one does not so much want to review as participate in, as this is a debate with extremely high stakes. When Search points out repeatedly that higher education and literary research are already variously involved with economics, he occludes the crucial distinction between being involved in the production of cultural capital, which may also result in money changing hands, and the turning of professors into

project managers, forcing them to compete for the funding which sustains their research. It is the latter understanding of entrepreneurialism that humanities scholars continue to resist, although Search glosses over the distinction between this resistance and the refusal to become what he calls, with a typical value-laden term, “academic leaders,” by proposing instead the “*universalisation of academic leadership in the university*” (41, italics in the original). When he nonchalantly announces the death of the research monograph and of its author, the “lone wolf” (235), as when he points out the tenuousness of leadership education only to then propose ways in which literary research can contribute to it, he seems borderline cynical. But then, as Gupta quips in the last chapter, “Neoliberals make the claims, use the claims, but that does not mean they take them seriously” (251).

The book is immensely shareable as well as engaging. It is therefore fortunate that .pdf copies are available free of charge from the publisher’s web page. And while it paints a lucid picture of realities we are already all too familiar with, it also hints at where the neoliberal logic currently dominant in universities will take us in the not too distant future.

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