

Read the two excerpts carefully and respond in an argumentative manner (excluding the personal or affective mode). Sixty percent of the grade will be based on how you relate one excerpt to the other in a common framework and explain the shared exigencies giving rise to these two writings, how you fairly summarize the points and how you critically analyze the arguments. Forty percent of the grade will be based on how you respond logically and coherently to these two passages. The minimum length requirement is 600 words and the language should be in a formal academic style.

**Excerpt # 1**

The predicament of literature in multicultural societies is only one of the difficult and delicate challenges confronting literary historians today. Equally pressing are the sometimes intersecting demands imposed by rapid changes in the technologies of inscription, which are, as Derrida insisted in *Archive Fever* (1996), transforming the means by which literary history, and cultural memory more generally, is created, preserved, and erased (15–17, 27–28, 33). How will literary historians respond to the age of the World Wide Web, which is, as Derrida noted, “transforming the entire public and private space of humanity” (17)? Giving this question a more pointedly literary and legal focus, he went on to ask, in a 2001 interview about anti-Semitism, “who will decide whether some enunciation on the Web is a literary work or a tract” (Derrida and Roudinesco 31)? Or, to revisit D. F. McKenzie’s different but connected question, how ought literary and book historians to answer calls for more-selective library acquisition and retention policies, particularly major national repositories like the British Library and the Library of Congress? Imposing “our textual definition” of the archive on the future in this way looks disturbingly like a “new” form of cultural “imperialism” (*Making Meaning* 276; see 276–81). If literary historiography is to engage with these testing questions, it will have to find answerable resources of its own, equal to the challenges it confronts. While resisting any efforts to reify theory or book history, it needs to address the question of literature in new interdisciplinary, perhaps ultradisciplinary, ways by making the most of the concepts, protocols, and sources both enterprises have opened up. What it cannot afford to do is endorse dubious narratives of the after-theory kind or remain trapped in the sterile polemics of the past.

**Excerpt # 2**

Texts, I am suggesting, give meaning even to the contingent and fleeting events of our ordinary lives, and that is one reason why we value them. But the conditions of our being come to us already scripted, textualized, shaped in patterns into which we fall, almost like actors given a script that they must follow. The human condition is a condition of textuality. What I hope to accomplish here is to follow this trail for a bit, looking at instances of textualization and varieties of textual reality, and then conclude by considering the pedagogical implications of our textual condition.

Textuality runs deep, since all human beings can be seen as textual animals in more than one sense. First of all, like every other living thing, we replicate ourselves through the transmission of genetic information coded in the nucleonic acids, DNA and RNA. We are, biologically, the result of a textual process. We have been scripted. Beyond that, of course, human beings are born into linguistic and cultural heritages that are themselves powerful texts, shaping our possibilities and impossibilities, and we function amid webs of information carried by various audible, visual, and verbal media that shape the ways we live and die. We never escape textuality, and if we live after death, it will be textually, in signs — memories, photographs, words in pixels or on a page or cut into stone.