**LETTER OF APPLICATION**

October 30, 20XX

Professor Charles Jones

Chair of the Search Committee

Department of English

University of Illinois

Chicago, IL 60606

Dear Professor Jones:

I am writing to apply for the position in eighteenth-century literature advertised by your department in the October MLA *Job Information List*. I expect to receive my Ph.D. this spring from the department of English at the University of Chicago; a copy of my CV is enclosed for your review.

My dissertation, “The Character of Commerce: Writing and Credit in Eighteenth-Century Britain,” demonstrates how the discourses of philosophy, literature, and aesthetics ordered the domain of authority and value that we now call the “economy.” Each chapter situates a text from eighteenth-century Britain--John Locke’s An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690), Daniel Defoe’s Colonel Jack (1722) and The Fortunate Mistress (1724), Eliza Haywood’s Memoirs of a Certain Island Adjacent to the Kingdom of Utopia (1725), and Edmund Burke’s A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of the Idea of the Sublime and the Beautiful (1757)--in relation to historical developments in money, law, property, and representation more generally.

Drawing on the work of theorists such as Jean-Joseph Goux, Michel Foucault, and J.G.A. Pocock, I historicize how terms like “credit,” “exchange,” and the “sublime” emerged to become privileged concepts that helped transform Britain into a commercial society. To use the period’s own idiom, the problematic I trace can be imagined as the relationship between “character” and “credit,” both of which are key words unlocking contemporary discourses addressing personality, writing, and economics.

The story my dissertation tells is how individual “character,” like the political-economic system in general, was increasingly imagined as depending on “credit,” so that a social order legislated by the “invisible hand” becomes naturalized, its fictionality forgotten.

Last year, I was awarded a teaching fellowship with the English department for a position as an instructor for a course called “Methods and Issues in Textual Studies,” an introductory course in critical theory now required of undergraduate English majors at the University of Chicago. I was a member of a five-person staff of faculty and graduate students who designed and taught the course, which included texts intended to represent a number of critical methods--deconstruction, historicism, psychoanalysis, formalism--as well as literary texts--canonical (Hawthorne’s short stories, Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*), contemporary (Morrison’s *Beloved*), and various popular works that stretch the limits of the definition of “text.” The goal of the course as we designed it was not simply to introduce a number of critical methods but to use such methods to help make students more conscious that reading literary and other texts is a conscious and critical activity. Last spring, I taught a course of my own design entitled “Grub Street: From the Literary to the Literatory in Eighteenth-Century Britain”; I used the institution of the emergent publishing industry to examine the construction of high and low cultures in the course of eighteenth-century Britain. “Grub Street” takes a cultural studies approach, focusing on topics like the development of copyright law, the growth of printing and distributing networks, and the emergence of professionally-produced literary criticism. From there, students read works such as Pope’s *The Dunciad*, Defoe’s *Moll Flanders*, and Haywood’s *Fantomina* as historical products, mediated by and sometimes commenting on an emergent institution that made possible the development of literary studies itself. I enjoy teaching undergraduate courses in literature as well as composition, and expect that my teaching and research will complement one another in the years to come.

I will be attending the MLA Convention in New York in December and would welcome the opportunity to meet with you at that time. Please let me know if you would like to review my dossier or a sample of my writing. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

John Smith