nonindustrial production, and their organic origin. They also connect high-status food to personalities, famous chefs, or well-known families in the food business—although the writers quite consistently leave unnamed the cooks they discover in quaint huts or roadside stands in the developing world. Historical tradition is also important, such as noting that the ancestors of the roasted whole goats in Monterrey, Mexico, have grazed nearby since the 1700s. Exoticism is conveyed by unusualness and rarity. A cheese called Flixer, for example, is eulogized as a "nutty number made only from the milk of 12 very talented Swiss ewes."

The omnivorousness trend makes lowbrow food worthy of highbrow interest, but only certain lowbrow fare. Many of the authentic foods that are exalted under the new "democratic" standard of food writers are extremely expensive and difficult to acquire in the mainstream commercial supermarkets and restaurants most Americans patronize, Johnston and Baumann note. Democracy ends at the checkout line.

SOCIETY

The Myth of the Master's Degree

THE SOURCE: "Teacher Credentials Don't Matter for Student Achievement" by Charles Clotfelter, Helen Ladd, and Jacob Vigdor, as summarized in ***The NBER Digest***, Aug. 2007.

In many school districts, slogging through extra college courses to get a master's degree boosts a teacher's annual salary by $2,000 or more. But an extra diploma doesn't significantly improve student achievement. In some cases, elementary school pupils taught by teachers with advanced degrees actually do worse, write Duke University economists Charles Clotfelter, Helen Ladd, and Jacob Vigdor.

Most Americans agree that the quality of their child's teacher is crucial to learning, but teacher quality is notoriously hard to measure. The Duke economists studied the test scores of about 75 percent of all North Carolina third, fourth, and fifth graders between 1994 and 2003. They found that a teacher's increasing experience and acquisition of a "regular" teaching license rather than an "other" license (given to those who do not meet all official requirements) made a positive difference on students' test scores, particularly in math. Teachers with 21 to 27 years of experience were most effective, they found.

But teachers who earned a master's degree before they began their career or during their first five years of teaching were no better at raising student achievement than teachers with only an undergraduate degree. Those who got an advanced degree more than five years after they started teaching appeared to be "somewhat less effective" on average than those who did not get one at all, the researchers found.

The authors question whether the higher salaries given to teachers with master's degrees—not to mention the graduate education subsidies offered by some districts—are well spent. In ascertaining why master's degrees don't matter, the answer could well be a variation on Bill Clinton's old campaign slogan: "It's the teacher, stupid."

PRESS & MEDIA

Forget the Error

THE SOURCE: "How Complete Are Newspaper Corrections?: An Analysis of the 2005 'Regret the Error' Compilation" by Michael Bugeja and Jane Peterson, in ***Media Ethics***, Spring 2007, and "Reign of Error," by Jack Shafer, in ***Slate***, Aug. 15, 2007.

Newspapers constantly call for more vigilance and transparency in government and other institutions, but in the one realm over which they have total control—their pages—they have failed their own test, according to a study of 600 corrections from 70 newspapers conducted by Michael Bugeja and Jane Peterson of Iowa State University. In fact, if editors confessed to everything that was wrong in their news columns, they would have to devote 50 times more space each day to corrections, says Jack Shafer, editor at large of *Slate*.

Moreover, published corrections, as highlighted on the website Regret the Error, maintained by Canadian freelance writer Craig Silverman, were themselves often full of blunders. Only 30 percent specified when the error happened, very few described how it occurred, and virtually none

suggested what the paper was going to do to prevent future occurrences, according to Bugeja and Peterson, director and associate director, respectively, of the journalism school at Iowa State. A 1986 study found many of the same problems.

Shafer writes that Scott R. Maier, who teaches journalism at the University of Oregon, sent accuracy questionnaires to major sources noted in 3,600 articles in newspapers including *The Philadelphia Inquirer, The Mercury News* of San Jose, and *The Tallahassee Democrat.* Roughly 70 percent of the recipients completed the survey. They spotted 2,615 factual errors in the stories for which they served as sources. No paper corrected more than 4.2 percent of its flawed articles. Maier reports that when 130 of the sources he queried asked for corrections, only four were published.

> If newspapers confessed to every error they made, they would have to devote 50 times more space each day to corrections.

Even if some of the errors were relatively minor, such as a wrong age or title, or were out of the newspaper's control (such as faulty information from sources other than those evaluating the facts), the results are shocking to even the "most jaded" of newspaper readers, Shafer writes. And worse than the papers' sloppiness is the cover-up they perpetrate on a daily basis.

PRESS & MEDIA

Penny Wise, Culturally Foolish

THE SOURCE: "Goodbye to All That" by Steve Wasserman, in ***Columbia Journalism Review***, Sept.–Oct. 2007.

Like members of a nearly extinct species, newspaper book review sections and features are dying at an accelerating rate, and the survivors are increasingly feeble. *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, The Dallas Morning News,* the North Carolina Research Triangle *News and Observer, The Orlando Sentinel, The Cleveland Plain Dealer* and *The San Diego Union-Tribune,* among others, have cut staff or coverage or pages. Several newspapers have grafted the stump of book coverage onto sections that list upcoming events for readers with interests as divergent as auto racing and celebrity cooking.

The sorry plight of book reviews is only a chapter in the larger story of cultural and technological change affecting the printed word. Newspapers are in crisis, trying to adapt to the new digital technologies sucking away advertising revenue and readers. The bookselling industry is roiling from consolidation and digitization. Most troubling, however, writes Steve Wasserman, the former editor of *The Los Angeles Times Book Review,* is the "sea change in the culture of literacy itself." A speeding and visually dazzling world makes serious reading increasingly irrelevant. The habits of attention indispensable for absorbing long-form narrative and sustained argument have been eroded.

Newspapers have tried to adjust to the new taste for the short, "bright" item, and many book reviews consequently have become mere pabulum, almost deserving of their fate, Wasserman writes. When Stendhal's *The Charterhouse of Parma* was newly and brilliantly translated several years ago, Wasserman commissioned a long review from Princeton's Edmund White and splashed it prominently in the Sunday book section. His editor motioned him into his office the next morning. "Steve," he said wearily, "Stendhal? Another dead, white, European male?"

Serious reading has always been a minority enterprise, but in 2004, for the first time, a majority of Americans said that they had not read a novel, play, or poem in the past year. That nevertheless leaves a lot of people. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that in 2002 nearly 100 million people read literature of some type.

Even so, newspaper book review sections generally, perhaps universally, lose money. So if they don't bring in profits, and are generally "shockingly mediocre," according to Wasserman, why not consign them to a merciful death? He concludes that readers know in their bones something newspapers forget at their peril: "Without books, indeed, without the news of such books—without literacy—the good society vanishes and barbarism triumphs."