For the late William Charvat (1905–1966), it was a truth that a literary work of art does not exist until it is made public—until, that is, it is somehow published—and that we cannot know the full stature of its author until we have become as fully informed as possible concerning his struggles in the literary market place. Unlike those who are of the opinion that literary studies are best carried out in an economic and social vacuum, Mr. Charvat was intensely interested in precisely those economic and social forces that helped to shape the work of artists, and he vigorously maintained that knowledge of these forces provided the scholar and the critic with valuable tools for the interpretation of an author's works.

It was the working conditions of authors as paid craftsmen that was to form the substance of Mr. Charvat's work in progress at the time of his death, The Profession of Authorship in America. He planned it as a systematic and comprehensive investigation of the triadic relationship of author-publisher-reader; and though his work on the project was far from finished, enough has survived in his published essays and in extensive unpublished material found in his files after his death to indicate fully, if not finally, the dimensions of the monumental project he had undertaken.
The Profession of Authorship in America, 1800–1870

The Papers of William Charvat
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The Papers of WILLIAM CHARVAT

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