

and Culture, shows that disciplines and specialties need not remain deaf to each other.

The winter 1996 J. Crew catalog of clothing and accessories depicts a young man dressed up to look disheveled and bookish, wearing oversized horn-rimmed glasses and a shapeless tweedy outfit. In bold type these words appear across his crotch: "men's style canon . . . deconstructed" (30). I would want my students to know what that language means and what it's doing over his crotch and to imagine by what trajectory some former English major might have come to earn a living writing such advertising copy. Would the literary or cultural studies be more likely to produce informed consumers capable of articulating their complex relation to that image? Whatever it takes is cool.

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My attempts to consider cultural studies and the literary as isolated, distinct, and at least potentially antagonistic created overwhelming cognitive dissonance in me, even though I am aware of the institutional, ideological, and intellectual context of contemporary North American higher education, in which such a confrontation not only makes sense but is indeed crucial to enact and explore. My mental impasse leads me to suggest, through a personal testimonial, a tentative blueprint for the constant, inescapable merging of the literary and the cultural in my ongoing apprenticeship of academic teaching and scholarly research.

The first novel that I can recall reading as a child growing up in Poland was *In Desert and Wilderness*, by Henryk Sienkiewicz, the author of *Quo Vadis* (1896), who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1905 but who was principally renowned in his native country for historical novels that romanticized Poland's past and powerfully shaped the national historical imagination. *In Desert and Wilderness*, a book destined for "young adults," tells the dramatic story of a precocious Polish boy and a charming English girl bravely making their way across Sub-Saharan Africa after escaping from Sudanese warriors, rebels against the Egyptian government and British colonial rule, who had held the children hostage. The pair's encounters with elephants, lions, and savage tribes, along with young Staś's constant displays of chivalry toward his delicate charge (whose age was approximately my own), sent the first shivers of reading pleasure down my spine, a pleasure that, I believe, was genuinely literary.

I was reminded of Sienkiewicz's novel recently when, attending a talk by a historian who touched on events that unfolded in Sudan in the late nineteenth century, I was

jolted by the recognition of a reality that I had first apprehended in another form and context. In my excitement, I decided to reread the novel and found the experience as riveting as the first reading, although for different reasons, since I now held a doctoral degree in literature from a North American university and was soaking up post-structuralist, feminist, and postcolonial theory. Despite my discovery of the novel's painfully obvious artistic flaws, I was fascinated by its entangled cultural meanings, from its pervasive if unexceptional racism and naively conservative sexual politics to its ingenious opposition of Sudanese anticolonial rebellion and the partitioned Poland's struggle for national independence. My pleasure in these new riches was as intense as the literary delight I had taken in the novel some thirty years earlier.

Without my experience of the novel's literary appeal, I doubt that I would ever have bothered to reread the text and thus to explore its less innocent but more complex aspects. The seductive power of literariness brings readers and texts together, keeps us reading and rereading, and ultimately makes us desire to teach others to read. However, had I remained the culturally and ideologically naive reader that I was those thirty-odd years ago, my second reading would have been merely a pale reenactment (or, more likely, a disillusioned retraction) of my early fascination. One of the most compelling qualities of the literary text is its fine-tuned ability to engage the manifold realities of the world from which it springs in an ongoing dialogue that can only be appreciated fully by readers who recognize that literature is as implicated in and relevant to the dirty business of reality as economic disputes, scientific arguments, and political campaigns.

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At the present moment, and with an increasing intensity that is the product of reactive anxiety, the assertion is made that the growing significance of cultural studies in the humanities (and, indeed, in the social sciences) has begun to overshadow or displace the study of literature as literary critics and teachers have known and practiced it. The specifics of the literary and the virtues of a literary sensibility, traditionalists and critical theorists both argue, are being blurred if not drowned by the rising tide of cultural studies. Leaving aside the empirical falsity of these claims—cultural studies and the associated developments in postcolonial studies, minority studies, queer studies, and women's studies remain a small percentage of offerings in literature departments, according to MLA surveys (Bettina J. Huber, "What's Being Read in Survey Courses? Findings from a 1990–91 MLA Survey of En-

glish Departments," *ADE Bulletin* 110 [1995]: 40–48)—I want to argue that cultural studies represents the fulfillment rather than the displacement of literary study, a critical return to its fundamentals rather than its demise.

Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*, which is often taken as the cornerstone of literary pedagogy, is subtitled *An Essay in Cultural Criticism*. Arnold's work stands in the mainstream of a critical tradition, ranging from Coleridge to Leavis and Williams, from Trilling to Said and Jameson, that sees literary criticism as inseparable from cultural and social criticism. Within this tradition, despite the efforts of Practical and New Criticism, the singular and autonomous literary object has been less the goal of study than a convenient pedagogical fiction that enables repetitions and transmissions in the classroom. Indeed, efforts to assemble literary objects into a canon of sufficient regularity to demarcate a discipline have been notoriously unsuccessful. Like cultural studies, whose multiplicity of possible objects has caused serious problems of definition, literary studies remains, as Lacan remarked of Freudian psychoanalysis, a science in search of an object. This characteristic has always been a source of its vitality.

There is no doubt that developments in cultural studies have introduced new objects into pedagogy and research. Whereas Arnold wrote of newspaper articles and religious sectarianism, of the infanticidal mother Wragg and the idea of the state, of acts of Parliament and middle-class tea parties, contemporary cultural criticism's objects range from the transnational circulation of cultural commodities to the activities of everyday life, from political texts and practices to film and popular music. Most important, it has extended the purview of literary study by including the cultural and social dynamics of ethnic minorities and immigrant communities in the United States, as well as these groups' literary production. In doing so, cultural studies has not only deployed literary criticism and a historicized semiotics but also drawn on the methods of history, anthropology, sociology, and other disciplines. No less, it has extended to those disciplines the methods and theoretical questions that have emerged in literary theory, increasingly obliging the nonliterary disciplines to be answerable to questions of interpretation and representation, of authorial subjectivity and cultural perspective, of the situatedness of archival and contemporary texts, and so forth. Throughout, the effect of the interdisciplinary imperative of cultural studies has been both to enrich literary studies and to rethink the superordination of the literary work as the sole proper object of the discipline.

This effect has led to fundamental methodological shifts that are not confined to cultural studies. Academic

disciplines traditionally encouraged the separation of objects of study into discrete and autonomous categories: the scientific, the literary, the sociological, for example, or high culture versus folk and mass cultures. As fields become interdisciplinary, they constitute new objects and draw from different disciplinary methods. At the intersection of disciplines, knowledge is rearranged, formerly overlooked sites and practices become visible, and forms of cultural practice and production and their embeddedness in specific places and times are analyzed more finely. Thus, for example, the interaction of transnational economic circuits and global political repression with the resistant styles of popular music can be unfolded at both the micro and the macro levels of analysis, and the study of Irish popular and nationalist movements in music, sport, or theater can offer invaluable insights into Yeats's dramas or Joyce's *Ulysses* in Ireland's colonial context.

The methodological shifts taking place are also shaped by the advent of a transnational cultural and economic sphere. The increasing global commodification and circulation of culture has dislodged the nation-state from its role as the core around which literary and cultural traditions are stabilized, just as the accelerating transnational movement of labor and capital has undermined the ideal of the ethnically homogeneous and autonomous nation. In the United States, transnationally informed work on immigrant and minority cultures has increasingly marked the internal differentiation of the nation, challenging national myths of unification and the centrality of Euro-American culture that have obscured the processes of racialization since the nation's inception. Cultural studies has increasingly engaged the relations between subordinated and dominant racial groups, emphasizing the contestatory status of marginalized cultures and the alternative literary and cultural forms that have emerged from their marginalization.

The differential methods in the best cultural studies work displace the fundamentally comparative approach that undergirds traditional literary studies (as they do in many disciplines across the human and social sciences). While differential methods tend to situate and even disperse their objects among the systems and networks of cultural signification, teasing out the dynamics of complex and often incommensurable relations, the comparative method tends to require the stabilization of its objects. That stabilization is either hierarchical—works are judged in relation to canonical touchstones—or developmental, as in the assimilative and evolutionary model of European comparative literature that extends into discrete national traditions. In displacing the traditional hierarchies and canons of literary studies, cultural studies addresses more adequately, concretely, and inclusively the actualities and

genealogies of cultural phenomena, for these phenomena do not lend themselves to hierarchization or comparison.

Reflection on contemporary cultural studies aims not to consolidate it around certain privileged objects but to locate it in relation to existent disciplinary structures. This reflection requires an understanding of the historical determinants on the emergence of culture as a distinct sphere and on its subsequent conceptualization in anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies itself. Further, the present determinants on cultural studies need to be more fully articulated, especially the peculiar shifting of its terrain, which comprises macroscopic transnational movements and the micropolitical conjunctions along subnational circuits. In this sense, cultural studies fulfills as well as transforms the project of the literary.

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It has become something of a commonplace to observe that critical theory has problematized “the literary.” Though there seems to be a theoretical consensus that the literary is a socially determined category shaped by dominant disciplinary formations, in practice many critics still associate the concept with fiction. As a result, fictional texts are favored objects of investigations in a number of critical approaches practiced in the United States academy. For instance, recent scholarship in postcolonial studies is often concerned with elaborating how literary texts (like novels) disseminated in various ideological state apparatuses, such as the education system, created a bourgeois subject in the colonial period and how growing bodies of fiction produced in former colonies chart the emergence of a national bourgeois subject. This shift toward the interrogating of individual subjectivity and away from the concerns of some of the foundational texts in the field, like Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, which were more engaged in theorizing repressive colonial practices and resistance to them, has meant that postcolonial studies today discloses more about the psychological manipulations of colonialism than about the mechanisms through which it affects the quotidian lives of those under its rule. As postcolonial and cultural studies have become institutionalized in the United States, the critiques of repressive state practices that they launched have been blunted.

Perhaps it is time to turn our critical skills to the cultural artifacts, such as print media, television, and advertising, that are the principal modes through which various narratives of self, other, nation, and the world circulate in the United States. This is not to argue for the retirement of literary analysis: the strategies of reading developed in

literary studies have much to offer cultural criticism. Indeed, an examination of the literary aspects of a cultural artifact, whether produced by an individual or a corporate entity, can initiate an investigation into how representations are embedded in a matrix of economic, geopolitical, and social relations. Attention to narrative devices and structures can help to historicize, for example, women’s fashion advertising in which invocations of “the Third World” draw on late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century texts of colonial exploration.

Yet in order to perform the kind of cultural analysis that links representation to the material conditions of life in the late twentieth century, literary analysis should be supplemented with attention to three critical categories—and to the relations between them—often absent from cultural studies: geopolitics, transnationalism, and formations of state violence. By “geopolitics,” I mean the ways in which political and economic geography shapes domestic policies within states and the relations among states, particularly when national security is involved. My use of “transnationalism” draws on Masao Miyoshi’s definition of “transnational corporations” as “giant companies that not only import and export raw and manufactured goods but also transfer capital, factories, and sales outlets across national borders” (“A Borderless World: From Colonialism to Transnationalism and the Decline of the Nation-State,” *Critical Inquiry* 19 [1993]: 734). And I use “formations of state violence” to signify how concerns about domestic security can lead nation-states into violations against the bodily integrity or property of individuals who reside within their borders, both citizens and persons without legal status conferred on them by the state. Such violations include the states’ sanctioning or carrying out of the destruction of homes and businesses, detention, imprisonment, torture, and murder.

A focus on the interplay among representation, formations of state violence, geopolitics, and transnationalism marks the limits of literary methods in the reading of culture, for this focus helps to disclose the archives of historical trauma that often underwrite narratives. The task of criticism should be to uncover trauma—bodily injury caused by an external agent—in all its modalities in commodity culture by asking the following questions. What are the conditions that allow for the articulation of an image or a narrative at a particular moment? What kind of national ethos does the representation of a commodity evoke and to what extent does the representation acknowledge or occlude the struggles of those who are resisting the state’s authority? In what ways do the interests of transnational corporations and the state converge? Are workers, consumers, or the natural environment harmed in the production and use of a commodity? Be-