

spirit of Bakhtin's "novelization," draws on common culture to subvert both the high literary and the high cultural and with them the political monology they faithfully serve. This postcolonial subversion collides with much of what passes for postmodernism, doing, for example, precisely what Hutcheon's postmodernism would proscribe: redeeming literature by appropriating culture as a literary source. At the same time, however, this subversion tangibly effectuates postmodernism's all-too-nebulous rhetoric of difference.

My analysis accords with an increasingly common postcolonial complaint against postmodernism: that its distrust of reference and its boundless self-absorption close it off from the concrete reference of emic representation—from local voices. In literature, as in anthropology, the basic colonial process persists under postmodern auspices. To the extent that the colonized assimilate the colonial, they surrender local knowledge and with it their subjectivity. Postmodernism's complicity in a general "death of the subject," which leaves us everywhere and nowhere, is incommensurable with postcolonialism's call for localized resistance.

The colonial erasure of the local, whether modern or postmodern, could go unchallenged for so long because it was assumed that reality exists in great books. From the colonial vantage, the mission of a literary education is to take locals elsewhere, a will to exile that reaches far beyond any geographic positioning of the colonial-postcolonial contest. It is as much a First World as a Fourth World issue. Broadly construed, colonialism operates where local voices are systematically muted. It prevails wherever local subjects are de-realized in the name of a literature that displaces common culture.

To be sure, in recent years culture has made a nominal comeback within literary studies. There are many narratives about how this came about and what it signifies. Unfortunately, most of them revolve around the power plays of interest groups that would privilege their own (albeit much revised) literary-cultural canons. Are all literary voicings of culture self-defeating, then? Does such counterflow inevitably transform a living but deprivileged voice into a privileged but inert literary artifact? So far as most critical and educational practice is concerned, the answer must still be yes. The current drift toward literary decanonization does not go nearly far enough. It simply deprivileges a particular literary tradition. What is needed is the decanonization of literature as such, so as to promote unimpaired dialogic exchange. This would open new avenues for counterdiscourse by making culture a source and not merely an effect of literary representation. Steven Greenblatt assigns to this counterflow the name *cultural poetics*. My Bakhtinian premises incline

me toward *cultural prosaics* (see, e.g., my "Cross-Cultural Prosaics: Renegotiating the Postmodern/Postcolonial Gap in Cultural Studies," *Prose Studies: History, Theory, Criticism* 17.2 [1997]). Whatever the name, traditional literary distinction is losing some of its colonial allure. Culture is finally "writing back."

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It is old news that cultural studies has turned away from the literary: an undergraduate literature curriculum built around historical coverage, the reading of poetry, and the analysis of form has gradually been dismantled. Yet if the relinquishment of a normative notion of the literary once seemed liberatory and overdue, its replacement by an equally normative notion of the cultural has been profoundly discouraging.

Literature was once taught—especially in secondary schools—as if it were independent of history and social forces. This pedagogy became the target of several different kinds of ideology critique. Louis Althusser, Roland Barthes, Pierre Bourdieu, and Renée Balibar excoriated a complacent and compromised bourgeois humanism (linked, in their view, to class domination and the centralization of the state) that made universal claims for literature. The Frankfurt school feared that eighteenth-century attempts to create an autonomous sphere for art and for philosophy had fostered a tradition of political quietism and prepared the way for the inner emigration of the Nazi period. Such French and German critiques, however, still presupposed the centrality, indeed the power, of literary experience. Following Flaubert's *Dictionary of Received Ideas*, Barthes pilloried the self-affirmation of the bourgeoisie through art. Yet it was not literature itself that was to be annihilated: *S/Z* destroyed the realist surface of the text only to discover the pleasures of a much richer text beneath. Theodor Adorno criticized artists' efforts to disengage themselves from the social processes of their time but honored their attempts to find a realm of freedom *in form*. For him, difficult and hermetic literature was implicitly utopian, in its refusal to reflect contemporary social reality as inevitable and in its effort to create an alternative order in art. Indeed, from Marx and Engels onward, the tradition of Marxist aesthetics has always emphasized the historical importance and politically redeeming aspects precisely of bourgeois literature.

Recent attempts to imitate these critiques in the United States, however, have served mainly to confirm a long national tradition of philistinism; the American bourgeoisie, after all, affirms itself by ridiculing art and the aspirations of intellectual life, attitudes now replicated

within the academy. As currently practiced, much of cultural studies is Marxism of an unfortunately vulgar kind. Insofar as cultural studies represents a reaction against the mandarin machismo of theory in the 1980s, trying to replace the disembodiedness of many theoretical discussions with an emphasis on the social functions of literature and with attention to a much broader range of material, it has genuine claims to inaugurate a more populist and progressive critical practice. But it has also extended and confirmed the de facto eclipse of literature already evident fifteen years ago, as theory took precedence over primary works.

Although all cultural forms are now supposed to be of equal interest, there is an implicit bias in favor of the productions of international mass media and against a literary tradition seen as hopelessly elitist and retrograde. (Film studies suffers from a similar blindness; despite its roots in the cinephile culture of the 1960s, it is increasingly uninterested in either art film or experimental film.) Yet literature is obviously a central cultural form, which it would be disastrous to forget or to dismiss. To take culture seriously is to take it whole and to be interested in the connections among all its parts. Demystifying a cultural phenomenon or discovering that it was invented does not mean that it disappears or becomes insignificant. In Saussurean structuralism, the arbitrary does not become senseless simply because we understand it to be arbitrary; within the system, it is powerful despite or even in its arbitrariness. For Lévi-Strauss, too, individual cultural forms assume a kind of inevitability, because they lock into the whole matrix of culture, but his project is in the end thoroughly relativist. Barthes takes apart mythologies, yet he also acknowledges the centrality of mythmaking—and the literary—for all cultures.

Ironically, as the possibilities for interdisciplinary investigation and the number of interesting texts available for study have expanded, the range of discussion has narrowed drastically. This need not be. Recent work in the emerging field of publishing history provides fresh ways of thinking about literary institutions, from academies and cliques to newspapers and magazines; the ground has now been laid for a rethinking of the sociology of literary form. And there should be better ways now to capitalize on the wonderful republishing programs of small independent and university presses (the efforts of Virago and Pandora; the reprinting of American radical novels by the University of Illinois Press; the translation of key forgotten works of central and eastern European literature by Northwestern University Press, Quartet, Sun and Moon, and Overlook; and so on). Cultural critics like C. L. R. James, W. E. B. Du Bois, Frantz Fanon, and Siegfried Kracauer are now being rediscovered, but this is

just the tip of the iceberg, given the number of half-forgotten thinkers, programmatic and otherwise, whose work defines a larger cultural field. Leroi Jones's *Blues People* and Hans Richter's *Struggle for the Film*, the work of Aby Warburg and of the *Annales* school, the Lynds' *Middletown* and Arnold Hauser's *Social History of Art*, British Mass Observation studies and Yury Lotman's semiotic analyses of Russian cultural history all deserve new readers.

There is no need to mourn literary education as it used to be. The most devastating condemnation of the old dispensation is that, far from creating lifetime readers of difficult works, it seems to have engendered hatred, ambivalence, or indifference toward literature in so many of those who now teach it. But there is also no need for the historical amnesia that now, despite the new emphasis on disciplinary history, dominates the profession.

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From my perspective outside the United States, I understand cultural studies to encompass two possibilities. On the one hand, it might involve the study of artistic forms besides those whose medium is language and of exploitations of language beyond the imaginative or narrowly textual. On the other hand, cultural studies might provide the opportunity for a serious investigation of the workings of specific contemporary cultures. Cultural studies may be responsible for a subtle shift of interest from canonical subjects, but its overall emphasis remains conservative and domestic. The radical reorganization of literary curricula ascribed to cultural activists seems vastly exaggerated.

While I recognize that the wide-ranging conclusions of some branches of cultural studies become a pretext and an alibi for ignoring individual cases, I disagree with the critics of cultural studies who aim to contract the compass of the literary field. Studies of texts and of the conditions of their emergence belong first in the literary department rather than the cultural. All foreign literatures should be studied as literature, not as ethnic fixtures in the vast wilderness of cultural studies. To relegate post-colonial literatures, for example, to cultural studies can only comfort defenders of the canon. Literary studies ought to keep pace with every kind of literary production.

The confusion between the literary and the cultural is not only an American disorder. Some books cited in contemporary literary journals are housed in the sociology