

canon, the ideology of high culture, and other privileged forms of textuality. This project of contestation opens up new critical spaces in which marginalized subjectivities, oppositional agendas, and neglected discourses can be articulated (an excellent sample of relevant themes and approaches appears in *Cultural Studies*, ed. and introd. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler [New York: Routledge, 1992]).

Pluralizing culture as a multiple network of signifying practices and representational strategies, the new methodologies deconstruct the literary, at least those aspects of the category—the ideals of self-reflexive language and aesthetic autonomy—that were significantly shaped by the Western classical-Romantic tradition and its high-modernist redefinitions. Cultural studies allows us to re-examine (post)modernist literary interrogations of the dialectic between aesthetic self-referentiality and the representation of social reality. This dialectic is especially productive, I believe, in Western literary conceptualizations of cultural otherness.

A particular type of travel narrative, situated between modernist aesthetics and ethnography, illustrates what I mean. Edward Said shows that modernist features like self-consciousness, discontinuity, and irony may be seen as responses to the legitimacy crisis in Western culture, whose hegemony overseas can no longer be taken for granted (*Culture and Imperialism* [New York: Knopf, 1993] 186–90). This connection between modernism and the non-West goes beyond the context of imperialism and colonialism. Lafcadio Hearn's "My First Day in the Orient" (1894), for instance, combines early modernist literary preoccupations—with metaphysical truth, the reliability of memory, the limits of conceptual language, and the stereotypical outsider's shaping of foreign reality by prior reading—with the hermeneutic desire to avoid Eurocentric bias and to forge strategies of mimetic representation from the point of view of the foreign country's cultural traditions. For Hearn and for many later writers, Japan provides a radically new context of cultural displacement and refashioning; it forces them to acknowledge that modernist literary language can never be autonomous and self-referential but must face the task of conceptualizing non-Western customs, aesthetic values, morals, and ideologies against the background of a Euro-American tradition whose self-privileging has increasingly been questioned since the time of fin de siècle aestheticism.

This reciprocity of literary self-critique and the representation of the other can be traced, in various shapes, in more-recent narratives as well, from Donald Richie's *A Lateral View: Essays on Contemporary Japan* (1987–91) to Ihab Hassan's intellectual autobiography *Between*

the Eagle and the Sun: Traces of Japan (1996). Barthes's *Empire of Signs* (1970) is a limit text of this dialectic. Here the attempt to create new strategies of literary representation outside Western metaphysical notions of truth leads to the poststructuralist reinvention of Japan as a system of self-referential surface signifiers that is no longer meant to describe the real Asian country. In these texts, the literary is not merely the medium for the Western representation of the other, a window to the world of the East. Rather, the literary is the ground for a self-reflexive disclosure of the ways in which cultural construction works, revealing how Western subjectivities and writing practices constitute themselves in the continually changing contexts of Western (cultural) hegemony and non-Western resistance.

I am skeptical whether my readings qualify as an effective political intervention and thus exemplify cultural studies proper. But the texts I have mentioned show how literary representations of East-West relations illuminate the possibilities and limitations of transnational dialogue. Today more than ever, political change comes about slowly, but cross-cultural discourse may help to promote it.

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In a manner of speaking, a particular idea of the literary brought me to cultural studies. Though I came to the United States in 1987 to do graduate work in an English department, I really wanted to pursue a career as a novelist. Ten years later, if scholarship has assumed equal importance in my "professional" labors (despite the imminent publication of my first novel, *A Map of Where I Live* [Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1997]), cultural studies has played its part.

When I began my graduate work in the United States, there were still debates about the definition and origins of cultural studies, debates that no longer seem resolvable or useful. Most often, the field seems to encompass an interest among a variety of scholars in departments of literature (feminists, Marxists, postmodernists, etc.) in cultural phenomena such as romance novels, architecture, popular music, and so on, of which the literary is only one. Cultural studies is a reproach to literary criticism's restricted specialization, which remained unchallenged even at the height of the influence of "theory" a few years ago. As practiced in departments of literature, cultural studies is a radical revision of literary criticism, reducing literary phenomena to symptoms of a larger cultural terrain.

Those in cultural studies have abandoned a narrow focus on the literary arguably because of a suspicion that

literary critics are increasingly irrelevant to society. As the social authority of the literary has become threatened, literary criticism has begun to appear a parsimonious discipline, with few gifts to bestow except the pleasure of reading. However, it is not yet clear whether cultural studies is a genuine attempt to liberate academic scholarship. It may instead represent simply the longings of a North American professoriat increasingly marginalized under late capitalism.

Meanwhile, literature departments in North America are rife with reports of a backlash against cultural studies in various institutions of higher education, where scholars seen as working in the field are said to have been unduly denied tenure. Such rumors may indeed suggest that cultural studies fundamentally challenges the knowledge regime of neocolonialist late capitalism. On the other hand, they may only demonstrate that literary criticism is defending its institutional privileges against an aspirant seeking to displace it.

It remains to be seen whether cultural studies will achieve its desire to be an antispecialization that makes departments of literature newly relevant to the public or whether it will succumb to the institutional seductions of specialization and become one more well-recognized concentration within a traditionally constituted department of literature. Nevertheless, cultural studies has provided me with the opportunity to pursue interests in film, ethnography, popular music, and advertising, as well as literature, that would have been impossible in traditional literary criticism. Indeed, the concept of the literary (originally, an understanding of human experience according to certain Western, bourgeois, and masculinist ideas of great writing) must itself be revised. At a time when catastrophic changes are occurring across the globe (environmental degradation and economic "liberalization" programs imposed on various countries by free-market fundamentalists are two examples), the literary seems too accommodating of received tradition and too timid in its political ambitions. In the pursuit of a critical humanism still in formation, cultural studies and a revised idea of the literary might yet find a conjoined purpose.

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From a postmodern perspective, Linda Hutcheon writes, culture must be understood as an effect of representation, not as its source (*The Politics of Postmodernism* [New York: Routledge, 1989] 7). This proposition can be tested on "great literature," which, true to the second clause of Hutcheon's statement, has usually been closed to any significant cultural counterflow. For Bourdieu this char-

acteristic goes to the heart of literary distinction and high taste and entails a profound distaste for common culture. From Arnold on, literary-cultural reformers have tried to cushion the social impact of that distinction by raising the literary awareness of the masses. Sooner or later the reformers have discovered the limits of the literary as an effective source of nonelite culture, joining a long line of disenchanted figures that includes such pioneers of cultural studies as Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams, who helped to move cultural studies away from its initial literary fixation.

What great literature failed to accomplish on the side of direct cultural formation it has more than compensated for on the side of cultural de-formation, the erasure of that offensive cultural excess which Arnold called "anarchy," Adorno "mass culture," and Baudrillard "America." Benjamin was a lonely dissenter against such elitist strictures; with postmodernism, he has been brought in from the cold.

Postmodernism's signal element is not its late-modernist self-reflexivity but its revaluation of popular culture. A dissenting branch of postmodernism, to which I subscribe, keeps its critical edge by refusing to "learn from Las Vegas" or from the American Popular Cultural Association: it refrains from lauding popular culture in general the more to celebrate the pockets of cultural excess that hold out against both high cultural and mass cultural designs on culture in general. Like the root of Sartre's chestnut tree, a significant part of culture remains obstinately *de trop*. It refuses reduction to the "world as picture" mind-set that characterizes the modern age for Heidegger. Rather it sustains a lived world that defies auratic representation as surely as it does scientific interpretation.

It is tautologically correct to say with Hutcheon that ordinary, prosaic culture is not the source of literary representation in the high-culture sense; but just as surely, "the ordinary" is no simple product of the empowered printed word. Culture is largely defined by its silent or at times carnivalesque refusal to be re-presented. The violence of redescription, as Rorty calls it, is matched by a resistance that enables cultural formation. It might even be said that culture is that resistance. It would thus be tautologically correct but insufficient to say, with Hutcheon, that culture is discursive. More to the point, it is counterdiscursive.

For the most part literature remains a willing tool of the colonizing process against which common culture defines itself. Of course, my argument—that literature is to culture what coloniality is to postcoloniality—requires careful definition and qualification. Great literature is only the empowered representation that produces high culture. There is also a "prosaic literature" that, in the