

ary served to make kids from the boroughs, like Trilling and me, aspire to higher patrician values (and accents), leave behind the organic intellectuals of street culture, and rise on the tide of high modernism with a cold eye cast backward at the literary movers and shakers of the past.

Cultural studies begins in the 1950s by making this antielitist point. Raymond Williams and E. P. Thompson, forerunners of cultural studies, came of age in communist history-study groups in the late 1940s and taught in adult education programs. Williams's *Culture and Society* (1958) and Thompson's *Making of the English Working Class* (1963) were landmark books that rethought culture, arguing that it included working-class experience and was made by, not bestowed on, society. These projects were clearly Marxist, tied to other kinds of labor-related, class analyses, like those of Ernst Bloch, Georg Lukács, Talcott Parsons, Christopher Hill, and others. Continental scholars contributed to the genesis of cultural studies, particularly those associated with the Frankfurt school and the journal *Annales*. Richard Hoggart, whose *The Uses of Literacy* (1957) analyzed the growth of mass media and working-class culture from the mid-nineteenth century, founded the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (the name of which paralleled that of the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research) in 1964. *The Popular Arts* (1964), by Stuart Hall, who followed Hoggart as head of the center, and Paddy Whannel, aimed to include radio, cinema, and recorded music in the canon of texts worthy of detailed analysis.

This pocket history is intended to point out that cultural studies is not a fad that critics have the option of wishing dead. It was long in the making, originating out of political and social praxis and pursuing a definite goal. There is as much inevitability in cultural studies as there was in literary studies. Thus, to ask whether there should be a turning away from the literary is as pointless as asking whether there should have been a turning away from the epic to the novel. The practice of cultural studies is a historical fact in the making like any other fact of intellectual history.

The unacknowledged political assumptions behind literary studies are no longer shared by most intellectuals in the United States or in the world—are indeed insupportable if not grotesque. These assumptions include the greatness of only certain national literatures, the genius of preselected (usually white) male (and occasionally female) writers, the unity and perfection of texts, and the seamless transmission of a tradition begun by “the Greeks” and handed down directly to people like E. D. Hirsch, Jr., and Dinesh D’Souza. New Criticism, which embodied and promulgated many of these assumptions,

was championed by mostly conservative, antimaterialist patricians with a definite anti-working class, antileftist bias. The effort of cultural studies to displace these practices and assumptions is therefore a logical retaliation. After all, literary study is not a monolith of perfection whose passing must be mourned but a kind of criticism conducted for a while by a definable group of people with certain aims.

That cultural studies has become associated mainly with the analysis of popular culture—mass media like television and advertising—has become a limitation to its practice and to the perception of its project. The argument against cultural studies gets shaped as, “Are you for Shakespeare or for rap music?,” a *reductio ad absurdum* that people like William Bennett have repeated so many times that the practitioners of cultural studies have begun to think the argument relevant. As one of the founders of the Group for Early Modern Cultural Studies, I can say definitively that cultural studies includes all canonical and uncanonical writers. The hundreds of scholars who have attended our conferences for the past four years would attest that cultural studies does not mean the jettisoning of literature. Rather, literature becomes, as it should be, one practice among many, a way of witnessing human experience and conflict that is no more sacred than any other.

This perspective has various advantages. It allows a sense of the complexity of symbolic production within a culture. Cultural studies brings into view social groups who may not have created much literature but who have clearly participated in cultures—the poor and illiterate, the working classes, slaves, peasants, women, people of color, people with disabilities, the deaf, and so on. Investigations of culture lead to questions about the peculiar divisions that make up specializations and areas of expertise and thus to the recognition that branches of knowledge derive from historical moments and political assumptions worthy of interdisciplinary, dialectical study.

Anguished nostalgia for the literary is fundamentally anxiety over a loss of faith. Why was it ever thought one had to devote oneself to literature as to a religion? Is turning away from the literary an act of apostasy? If so, against what or whom?

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Cultural studies extends critical focus to the material circumstances and (self-)signifying practices of popular culture; of minority discourses of gender, ethnicity, and political class; and of (post)colonial writing. In so doing, cultural studies seeks to decenter the Euro-American

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