

This effort may involve retracing some of the steps in the move from work to text and observing how the text works—what kind of cultural labor it involves.

ASTRADUR EYSTEINSSON
University of Iceland

I take this Forum topic to imply an opposition between cultural studies and the literary where cultural studies is a counterdisciplinary ethos of ideological unmasking that foregrounds mass-cultural, often nonverbal critical objects and where the literary is the object of an embattled but still academically entrenched high-cultural practice of textual celebration.

I believe it must follow from this distinction (but it is a problematic distinction) that literary studies will have given away all that can make ethical and institutional sense of its existence if the writerly nature of writers or the written nature of texts becomes incidental to the work of literature departments. If it is ever generally held true, for example, that authors simply exemplify their ideological moments unproblematically or stand as notable renegades against, or apologists for, cultural structures, the study of authors will be tantamount to the study of significant celebrities or instructive nobodies, made available to study through procedures of historical recovery that could issue from any number of academic quarters—history, women's studies, anthropology, and so on. Of course, such studies can be inspiring and thought-provoking, even though they do not hinge on, and sometimes do not even credit, any specifically literary quality of their objects. But they are not invested in a conception of the literary.

Nevertheless, I do not consider the trend toward cultural studies and away from procedures of rhetorical exegesis a serious problem for literary studies. Now more than ever, any elaborated or ideologically specific description of what might be “generally held true” about literary studies is likely to prove inadequate or even deluded. Academic trends take place within a matrix of varied practices, and no single trend can constitute that matrix. As an academic enterprise in literature departments, cultural studies makes little sense without the literary, and the literary makes little or no sense without cultural studies, a conclusion analogous to the one implied by the letters on interdisciplinarity in the Forum last year (111 [1996]: 271–311).

It would be foolish, however, to say that the urgency this debate has assumed is illusory. In some of the contest's more fully articulated forms, a principled antagonism can take shape between partisans identifying with these two modes of scholarship—say, during faculty hir-

ing. But it seems to me that such a dispute would not turn fundamentally on an antithesis of critical enterprises. A better explanation lies in the anxiety-provoking economics of scarcity within higher education, which forces intractably the question of who will populate and lend shape to each venue of literary academia (department, journal, conference) at a time when there is not necessarily a place for every person, every voice. Like travelers stranded in a storm with inadequate food and shelter, academics may rashly direct their frustration at their fellows. How to assess and manage a finite and even dwindling environment is the imposing question.

In contexts where any broad articulation of literature is at issue, such as a department that must serve the needs of students and a community, an inclusive and affirmative notion of critical diversity has more-urgent claims than does either cultural studies or a scholarship of the literary. Curiously, departments might well say of critical enterprises, “United we fall.”

DAVID WAYNE THOMAS
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

Despite the speed at which its projects are multiplying, cultural studies continues to find itself, or reach critical self-awareness, at the limits of the literary. Of course, these limits too are manifold and slippery, as befits an institution that instantiates what Derrida once dubbed “the drama” of indeterminate destinations (*Les fins de l'homme: A partir du travail de Jacques Derrida* [Paris: Galilée, 1981] 214). But whatever criteria one uses to identify the literary, it is clear that in recent years its semiotic destinations have become ever more uncertain. Enter cultural studies, stage left.

In the broadest historical terms, cultural studies can be read as a response to two interlinked developments affecting literary discourse. On the one hand, the literary has tended to become increasingly specialized, so that typically *literature* now refers—as it once did not—to the forms of imaginative writing with uniquely creative or aesthetic value: the poem and the novel, say, and not biography or the essay. Many of the current preoccupations of literary criticism continue to take their point from this shift: hence the various attempts to valorize and defend a canon or the ongoing investigations into “literariness,” the distinctive properties of literary language. On the other hand, literature has been massively displaced, squeezed on all sides by the new electronic media, and it is often represented—often represents itself—as under siege. Writers may try to claim that literature retains a privileged role in the production of their cultures' key narratives, but this last-ditch stand only un-

derscores the thorough subsumption of the literary into the wider, media-saturated environment.

Cultural studies takes its rationale and much of its urgency from the problems of cultural authority posed by this unprecedented predicament. By stressing cultural politics, or dispersing politics into the everyday, cultural studies distinguishes itself from the plethora of purely intellectual moves towards interdisciplinarity. To think through cultural studies in this way is to bring it closer to its literary origins: to the breaks and continuities among Stuart Hall, Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams, and the earlier, formative moment of *Scrutiny*; to the attempt to bring literary criticism and close reading to bear on the newer, popular forms of communication; to the social and historical study of literature and culture. It is also to begin to imagine how other, nationally inflected genealogies for cultural studies might be devised, refracted through different academies, diverse intelligentsias, distant struggles.

Yet to position the literary as cultural studies' point of departure, however accurate historically, is to risk turning literary studies into an anachronism or a way station, a small step in a developing transdisciplinary logic, rather than to recognize in it a source of tension or resistance, an irritant that raises uncomfortable questions of time and value. In this light the literary becomes the other of cultural studies, recalling the new field to the measured responsibility of cultural criticism, slowing down the frenzied pace of reading, and demanding something more than a merely "diagnostic" or "paraphrastic" approach to texts—to cite J. Hillis Miller's helpful formulation (*Illustration* [Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992] 17). Indeed, since the shelf life of all manner of writings today seems increasingly compressed, this argument is perhaps now more compelling than ever.

But such nostrums, whether Leavisite or deconstructive, fail to give due weight to the way in which cultural studies has expanded the text's interpretive horizons and restored the multifarious acts of reading to their many and various publics. Cultural studies has accented the context or the social relations of reading. Because the technologies of textuality and representation have long since outstripped any solely literary determination, reading can no longer be imagined as a singular encounter between subject and text but must instead be reconceived as a historically variable bundle of norms, codes, capacities, and techniques whose precise configuration at any time (including the forms of agency and effectivity that reading supports) remains a topic for detailed examination. In cultural studies there can be no general, uncontroversial answer to the question of what it means to read or how reading is accomplished, no matter how final the

pedagogical solutions of close reading may sometimes deceptively appear to be.

Cultural studies has been criticized for its presentist bias and has even been deemed to have failed because of its alleged inability to deal with traditional, and especially premodern, cultural works historically or aesthetically. This is the burden of Colin MacCabe's recent critique, for example ("The Case for the Consortium," *Critical Quarterly* 38 [1996]: 3–12). Yet the study of reading and interpretation is surely the site where ethnography and cultural history have begun to intersect and where the frontier between cultural studies and the new historicisms has become increasingly fuzzy. In this interdisciplinary terrain the literary will inevitably come to occupy what will seem to many scholars a peculiarly uncongenial place, but they may be consoled on finding the new locale furnished with a far more heterogeneous range of literary materials and a more inclusive notion of literary culture than they had expected. There is, however, no guarantee that the literary can be preserved as a discrete theoretical object once its constitutive practices of reading and writing have been moved into the volatile and multidimensional domain of cultural representation, where it is anyone's guess what the concept of literature will look like. Perhaps this is one reason that discussions of the prospects for cultural studies regularly close with a call for better and considerably updated maps of the cultural landscape. But without a greater willingness to undertake more-demanding intellectual journeys, to improvise and experiment in hazardous conditions, another cartography will count for nothing.

DAVID GLOVER

University of Southampton

A few years ago, I freely admitted to a reporter that when it comes to reading for pleasure, I don't curl up with a "great book" of literature. Yellow journalism's version of the culture wars being what it is, this comment suffered a sea change in print, where it ran something along the lines of, "Ross doesn't read books anymore." The fabrication was then cited in other quarters—the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Lingua Franca*, and so on—as yet another indication that cultural studies had abandoned the literary, if not the entire Gutenberg galaxy, along with the cherished life of the mind. It's important to distinguish between that kind of innuendo, served up to fuel public anti-intellectualism and the academic gossip mill, and the frank embrace of this topic by the *PMLA* Forum. But both the reporting and this Forum hold in common the assumption that cultural studies once belonged to the literary profession and has lately moved outside that sphere,