

I am not so sure. Typically, American undergraduates who intend to major in, say, Arabic, Chinese, French, German, or Japanese have little fluency in these languages and the corresponding cultures. In the two or three years devoted to their major, they must learn the language as well as part of the cultural legacy that goes with it. While cultural studies exalts humble objects that are often well known to students and teachers alike, foreign language training consists in assimilating a formidable amount of new information. Moreover, there is a compelling cultural reason for students acquiring a foreign language to study canonical literary works. In highly literate cultures such as the Arabic, Chinese, French, German, and Japanese, the native educational systems invariably include well-structured literary components, so nonnative students must become at least partly acquainted with the literary heritage of these cultures to achieve cultural fluency. The study of literary traditions thus forms an important part of learning the grammar of foreign cultures. Foreign language programs that aim to bring students to an adequate level of linguistic and cultural competence cannot afford to emulate the cultural studies bias against high culture.

Nevertheless, the impulse to open up literary studies to issues and texts beyond the literary canon can and should resonate with teachers of foreign languages and cultures. In French (my field), courses devoted to the major crises of twentieth-century French politics—the Dreyfus affair, the Vichy regime, and the Algerian war—have been remarkably successful. Similarly, teaching francophone literature, a popular area in recent years, involves a rich political and cultural component. An additional possibility consists in taking foreign cultural debates seriously and incorporating them into teaching. Familiarity with the theoretical discussions taking place outside the English-speaking world is an excellent way for American undergraduates to understand important features of other cultures as well as their own.

In the last decade, I have taught several versions of a course on contemporary French intellectual life. The course begins with the legacy of the poststructuralist generation, using Louis Althusser's memoirs and the late work of Michel Foucault and Louis Dumont. I then present some of the younger thinkers who both challenge and continue the previous generation's work on the links between individual and society: Vincent Descombes, Luc Ferry, Marcel Gauchet, and Alain Renaut. Further topics of discussion include individual rights and the democratic state, the unification of Europe, immigration, racism, and integration, illustrated by the recent work of Jacques Derrida, Alain Finkielkraut, Blandine Kriegel, Jean-François Lyotard, Pierre Manent, Jacques Rancière,

Dominique Schnapper, and Tzvetan Todorov. Readings from Gauchet and Gladys Swain introduce students to debates on mental health as part of the democratic ideal. Pierre Bourdieu and his disciple Luc Boltansky represent opposite sides in an ongoing conversation about the role of moral norms in shaping social behavior. A section on recent feminism and gender studies includes works by Geneviève Fraisse, Natalie Heinrich, and Mona Ozouf, as well as parts of the collective enterprise *A History of Women*. The course examines reflections on popular culture by Gilles Lipovetsky and ends with debates in aesthetics and literary criticism, including the critique of the Romantic philosophy and of the influence of this philosophy on contemporary avant-gardes (Jean-Marie Schaeffer and Rainer Rochlitz), the renewed interest in the notion of literary author, and the rise of genetic criticism.

In my experience, courses developed along these lines help students grasp the contentiousness of French intellectual life, its sensitivity to rapid changes in atmosphere, and the premium put on innovation. At the same time, majors become aware of the strong continuities that structure the world of French ideas at a deeper level. Since most of the topics discussed nowadays in France reverberate throughout contemporary American debates as well, students have an excellent opportunity to compare the approaches and solutions offered in these two cultures.

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The opposition between the literary and cultural studies merely rehearses the traditional antinomy between internal reading and external analysis. Since the emergence of cultural studies as an academic field is both evident and inevitable, the confrontational stage in this debate is useless: the real issue is how cultural studies is challenging and transforming literary studies. Far from being hostile to the literary, cultural studies can help invigorate literature and make it more relevant to a declining university audience by associating literature with cultural production and with an expanded context.

Cultural studies is not without flaws. Broadening study to include media other than the written text invites the objection that "anything goes," since no well-defined subject matter or field is proposed. Moreover, there is said to be a lack of theory in cultural studies, a vagueness that is a sign of dilettantism or amateurism, though this complaint may stem from the fetishism of theory in literary studies. I concede that cultural studies suffers from certain "sins of youth": a fixation on identity politics, overemphasis on Western and mass culture, presentism—faults mitigated by the rigor and professionalism of many prac-

tioners. To be sure, cultural studies often serves as a faddish way for neophytes to gain symbolic capital, but this characteristic may in part be dictated by the imperatives of the profession.

It has been argued that the Anglo-American model of cultural studies would erode the foundations of French studies in the United States by weakening the field's French identity (see Sandy Petrey's "French Studies / Cultural Studies: Reciprocal Invigoration or Mutual Destruction?" *French Review* 68 [1995]: 381–92). But why should French departments embody a certain idea of France more than departments in American studies, for instance, should of the United States? Cultural studies questions national and cultural identities and would find mythical the claims that exclude it from French studies. The term *French* in *French studies* or *French department* would thus only indicate the language of the domain under investigation.

There is no lack of cultural studies in France. Pierre Bourdieu's reflexive sociology is a type of French cultural studies, according to Marie-Pierre Le Hir ("Defining French Cultural Studies," *MMLA* 29 [1996]: 76–86), as is Régis Debray's monumental work on "la médiologie." Michel Foucault's work can be read as a theory and practice of cultural studies.

The perception that models for French cultural studies are scarce may persist because endeavors in cultural studies are primarily defined by their objects of analysis and therefore adopt a pragmatic approach, privileging contextualization and drawing on a variety of theoretical practices. Reflecting the zeitgeist, cultural studies tends toward fragmentation, heterogeneity, instability—in a word, *adisciplinarity*. While some see cultural studies as an unstructured and erratic postmodern *n'importe quoi*, it in fact reflects a radical change in research methodology in the humanities and sciences, as researchers increasingly aim at specific objects and transcend traditional disciplines. In *L'invention des sciences modernes*, Isabelle Stengers shows the extent to which classification and disciplinarity have been repressive agents in science ([Paris: Flammarion, 1995] 160–64). The destabilization of disciplines may present a nightmare to institutions. Still, defining a common ground for literary studies and cultural studies will encourage dynamic and plural approaches to cultural productions—literary texts as well as many other discursive practices.

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I went to hear a set of electrified Delta blues in a bar tonight and spoke there with a man who informed me I

was contributing to the decline of Western civilization by teaching Latin American literature. Did I work on minority writers and in cultural studies? In part, I said. He had assumed as much. Not that he disagreed with the slogan of the relentlessly commercial New Orleans House of Blues, which is "Unity in Diversity." But English literature in the great tradition is what should be taught and taught again, he said, because it contains the values we need. Moving away, I was glad indeed I had studied literature, a discipline that gave me the tools to read more than books.

Does cultural studies constitute a turning away from some aspects of "the literary"? It was created to do so. Conceived as a paradigm shift toward history and sociology, cultural studies exposes the often submerged relations of politics and letters. It thus challenges literary studies as constructed in Romanticism and high modernism, where the work is sufficient to itself and sharply distinguishable from other writing, and even as conceived in poststructuralist theory, which is more open but still text-based. That is not to say that cultural studies devalues literature, though it does knock works of high culture produced (or, in the case of transnational "Third World" literature, distributed) in dominant countries off the pedestal on which they are sometimes placed. Cultural studies takes as its point of departure the historicity of the literary as a category.

Cultural studies does not simply add mass and popular culture to the list of possible objects of study. It does not imply replacing the study of literature with, say, semiotic readings of New Orleans bars, nor does it make literary works "secondary" to sociological theories. It enables scholars to denaturalize and question the boundaries and limits of the literary. Cultural studies may desacralize the literary work, but the classics still look good to me even without their auras.

Before I understood the artificiality of disciplinary divisions, I worried about the specificity of literature more than I do now. I remember learning that a literary text was a cultural artifact engaging the imagination, constructed with great attention to form and to language itself, in which there were embedded dense layers of high meaning. I now think this basically Romantic definition, while not always incorrect, stems from a historically specific separation of the aesthetic and the rest of life. I find it more interesting at this point to theorize genres, and to wonder about the nature and uses of literacy, than to define literariness. Pierre Bourdieu says that art and its conditions of production and circulation are not separate realms but interrelated regions in a cultural field, itself positioned within still-broader social processes and structures of power. I am interested in the dynamic relations