

Cultural studies is both a distinct epistemological mode and a contestation of the notion of disciplinary knowledge, both a specific set of methodologies and objects of study and a seemingly omnivorous range of interests. Scattered far and wide across the academic field, speaking from and to history, anthropology, and sociology as well as film, media, gay and lesbian, feminist, ethnic, postcolonial, and popular-culture studies, cultural studies may be unsettling to traditional literary scholarship but is nonetheless far from expelling “the literary” from its domain. Indeed, questions of signification and semiotics have been central to cultural studies, whose cross-disciplinary expansion of *text* to include a wide variety of cultural productions and practices has important consequences for the future direction of literary studies.

By *culture*, cultural studies refers to the social, economic, political, and institutional conditions under which meaning is produced, transmitted, and interpreted. In its analysis of how individuals make sense of the world by constituting culture, cultural studies is centrally concerned with identities, institutions, power, and change. Its anatomy of power sometimes seems in danger of reduction to a pat formula: “Where there is domination, there is also resistance.” Such brevity shortchanges the impressive diversity of resistance to dominant social systems and to official narratives of identity formation, from the patterns of working-class labor and leisure identified by Raymond Williams and E. P. Thompson to the everyday rituals and visual styles of youth subcultures explored by some British writers associated with the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in the late 1960s and the 1970s to the organized political opposition and cultural insurgency of women and racial and ethnic groups described by British feminists and black British scholars in the 1980s. Even as it focused attention on groups historically pushed to the margins, cultural studies scholarship challenged the notion that resistance inheres automatically and in predetermined, unambiguous forms in these groups. Critics of cultural studies might see a simple laundry list of class, gender, and race, but its practitioners have found fissures and contradictions within each of those categories, internal differences that complicate any identity-ideology index and call instead for theoretical accounts of the shifting patterns by which certain groups, at certain historical moments and under certain political and social pressures, affiliate with one another. The theories necessary for this work are themselves riven by internal debates—for example, Marxism as reread by Althusser and Gramsci and psychoanalysis as reread by its feminist, Marxist, and postcolonial critics. Cultural studies’ Marxism is attuned to the elisions of culture and ideology, of race and gen-

der, in classical Marxism and to the political uses that women and colonized persons have made of Marxism, just as cultural studies’ psychoanalysis is cognizant of the theory’s Eurocentrism and of the indispensability of an account of desire, identification, and fantasy to the theorization of contemporary subject formation.

American scholars have appreciated the conceptual flexibility of British cultural studies but, warning against the simple importation of theory, have insisted on a distinctly American version. While calls for national specificity against the threat of a potentially colonizing new school are important, so too are alternative imaginings of the relation between cultural studies and other disciplines. In my fields of comparative literature and postcolonial studies, cultural studies serves me less as an official blueprint than as a many-voiced conversation whose insights cast a transformative light on established and emergent disciplines alike. The influence of cultural studies’ cross-disciplinary exploration of the institutional formations of knowledge can be seen in the growing interest in the roles that the salon, the colonial school, and nineteenth-century philology and university curricula played in the development of comparative literature. Cultural studies’ rethinking of national identity through a consideration of mass-cultural texts argues for comparative literature to expand beyond its traditional canon of national literatures and to embrace the literary and cultural productions of those whose membership in the nation is less acknowledged—women, the colonized, minority groups, immigrants, the undocumented. Following cultural studies’ increasingly comparative and transnational emphases, comparative literature might not only compare national literatures and investigate the construction of the national but also chart the emergence of transnational, diasporic, and cross-cultural communities of cultural and literary production. Through dialogue with cultural studies and inquiry into the status of the cultural within the literary, comparative literature might collaborate with more-recent disciplines. For example, returning to its origins in nineteenth-century racialized notions of national culture and national character, it could begin to link its disciplinary history to the great decentering of Eurocentric notions of culture that is postcolonial studies’ major focus.

In accounting for the power of colonialism and imperialism and for everyday subaltern culture and resistance, postcolonial scholarship, particularly in history and anthropology, has profited from cultural studies’ work on the relations of dominance, subordination, and hegemony. However, postcolonial studies has not sufficiently incorporated this work into its institutional placement in English departments. A predominantly literary postcolo-

nial studies risks reduction to a catalogue of thematics and a canon of fiction and poetry, in which characteristic concepts of hybridity, creolization, and diaspora are not contextualized within related discourses of colonial and imperial knowledge (anthropology, ethnology, sociology, historiography, public policy), subaltern opposition, and subject formation. A postcolonial cultural studies, on the other hand, might recognize the potential of combining textual analysis with historical inquiry and seek to counter the elitism of a cosmopolitan model of intellectual, literary diaspora, asserting instead the local and global politics of gender, race, class and ethnicity. As the convergences between cultural studies and the literary fields of comparative literature and postcolonial studies suggest, there is far less to be gained from adversarial partitioning of this terrain than from interdisciplinary dialogue that leads to the self-transformation of literary studies.

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Even taken as neutral, descriptive terms, *cultural studies* and *the literary* are not analogous. *Cultural studies* designates a variegated field of the humanities and social sciences constituted by diverse theoretical and historicist critical methods, while *the literary* (as opposed, say, to *literary studies*) denotes primarily a kind of linguistic object and an attitude toward it. Cultural studies thus can and often does include the literary, while the literary has traditionally not included cultural studies. Moreover, from an orthodox literary point of view, history and the social sciences are valuable only if they illuminate the complexity of the literary text, whereas from the point of view of cultural studies, the literary should serve to illuminate history and politics.

This difference recapitulates the history of the relations of cultural studies to the literary. Cultural studies (of the sort that putatively opposes the literary) constituted itself as a political critique, as well as an extension, of the work of literature departments, which it saw as insular, elitist, exclusionary, reactionary. Not surprisingly, some people who advocate the literary over cultural studies—those who think that the literary needs to be protected from what they see as the relativist incursions of cultural studies—retain a kind of wounded resentment against that critique. They regard cultural studies as parasitic, interested in literature only out of a twisted desire to consume it and degrade it from its position of aesthetic superiority to the status of mere “culture,” so that it has no more intrinsic worth than a soap opera. There is some truth to this view: cultural studies sees literature as part of the warp and woof of culture and believes culture

to be “constructed” through the polymorphous language it calls “discourse” (which just happens to include the literary). If the literary attitude deems literature better than most other manifestations of culture, cultural studies deems it intrinsically neither better nor worse.

In departmental and disciplinary politics, *cultural studies* still connotes leftist or Marxian sympathies, however vaguely, while *the literary* suggests, for reasons not always logical, stances more to the right. It seems to me, however, that the two parties have learned a lot from each other, to the point where trying to relate cultural studies and the literary leads less to a methodological aporia than to a site for new construction within the academy. Practitioners of cultural studies may be among those who want to abolish certain canonical distinctions (period, genre, figure, etc.) that have long organized the literary. But they are just as likely to be actively enmeshed in historicist, archival, and deeply textual work. My colleagues include medievalists doing cultural studies who do not sacrifice the literary text any more than they ignore its contexts; postcolonial theorists who consider novels theory and therefore include literature on every syllabus; cultural theorists who profess close reading and reverence for the “great books” among theoretical texts. Contrariwise, there are persons working in every literary and cultural field who are, as R. P. Blackmur would have said, simplistically ideological, finding in any object they study only its ability or its failure to satisfy their ulterior motives.

Cultural studies and the literary are interactive and mutually permeable. Many who teach primarily the literary have expanded their ideas of what that activity means. And I see no reason to discount what is literary about the complex interpretive analyses produced by cultural studies. Enthusiastically hospitable to both, I find no contradiction in my writing about Henry James, bodybuilding, heavy metal, religion, and psychoanalytic theory. I have not written about all these together, but I haven’t ruled out that possibility.

Psychoanalysis is a prime example of how and why cultural studies and the literary are not mutually exclusive. As Carolyn Williams has said about feminist theory, psychoanalysis “is an epistemology and a critique of epistemologies” (colloquium, Rutgers U, 25 Sept. 1996). Claiming in its way to be a science of the literary, psychoanalysis often strikes readers as primarily literary. Psychoanalysis benefits from being scrutinized by cultural studies methods, and as a method it can and does enrich the practice of cultural studies. For decades psychoanalysis has been accused of knowing little and caring less about culture, but a new association of Lacanian theorists, the Association for the Psychoanalysis of Society