

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

and Culture, shows that disciplines and specialties need not remain deaf to each other.

The winter 1996 J. Crew catalog of clothing and accessories depicts a young man dressed up to look disheveled and bookish, wearing oversized horn-rimmed glasses and a shapeless tweedy outfit. In bold type these words appear across his crotch: "men's style canon . . . deconstructed" (30). I would want my students to know what that language means and what it's doing over his crotch and to imagine by what trajectory some former English major might have come to earn a living writing such advertising copy. Would the literary or cultural studies be more likely to produce informed consumers capable of articulating their complex relation to that image? Whatever it takes is cool.

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My attempts to consider cultural studies and the literary as isolated, distinct, and at least potentially antagonistic created overwhelming cognitive dissonance in me, even though I am aware of the institutional, ideological, and intellectual context of contemporary North American higher education, in which such a confrontation not only makes sense but is indeed crucial to enact and explore. My mental impasse leads me to suggest, through a personal testimonial, a tentative blueprint for the constant, inescapable merging of the literary and the cultural in my ongoing apprenticeship of academic teaching and scholarly research.

The first novel that I can recall reading as a child growing up in Poland was *In Desert and Wilderness*, by Henryk Sienkiewicz, the author of *Quo Vadis* (1896), who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1905 but who was principally renowned in his native country for historical novels that romanticized Poland's past and powerfully shaped the national historical imagination. *In Desert and Wilderness*, a book destined for "young adults," tells the dramatic story of a precocious Polish boy and a charming English girl bravely making their way across Sub-Saharan Africa after escaping from Sudanese warriors, rebels against the Egyptian government and British colonial rule, who had held the children hostage. The pair's encounters with elephants, lions, and savage tribes, along with young Staś's constant displays of chivalry toward his delicate charge (whose age was approximately my own), sent the first shivers of reading pleasure down my spine, a pleasure that, I believe, was genuinely literary.

I was reminded of Sienkiewicz's novel recently when, attending a talk by a historian who touched on events that unfolded in Sudan in the late nineteenth century, I was

jolted by the recognition of a reality that I had first apprehended in another form and context. In my excitement, I decided to reread the novel and found the experience as riveting as the first reading, although for different reasons, since I now held a doctoral degree in literature from a North American university and was soaking up post-structuralist, feminist, and postcolonial theory. Despite my discovery of the novel's painfully obvious artistic flaws, I was fascinated by its entangled cultural meanings, from its pervasive if unexceptional racism and naively conservative sexual politics to its ingenious opposition of Sudanese anticolonial rebellion and the partitioned Poland's struggle for national independence. My pleasure in these new riches was as intense as the literary delight I had taken in the novel some thirty years earlier.

Without my experience of the novel's literary appeal, I doubt that I would ever have bothered to reread the text and thus to explore its less innocent but more complex aspects. The seductive power of literariness brings readers and texts together, keeps us reading and rereading, and ultimately makes us desire to teach others to read. However, had I remained the culturally and ideologically naive reader that I was those thirty-odd years ago, my second reading would have been merely a pale reenactment (or, more likely, a disillusioned retraction) of my early fascination. One of the most compelling qualities of the literary text is its fine-tuned ability to engage the manifold realities of the world from which it springs in an ongoing dialogue that can only be appreciated fully by readers who recognize that literature is as implicated in and relevant to the dirty business of reality as economic disputes, scientific arguments, and political campaigns.

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At the present moment, and with an increasing intensity that is the product of reactive anxiety, the assertion is made that the growing significance of cultural studies in the humanities (and, indeed, in the social sciences) has begun to overshadow or displace the study of literature as literary critics and teachers have known and practiced it. The specifics of the literary and the virtues of a literary sensibility, traditionalists and critical theorists both argue, are being blurred if not drowned by the rising tide of cultural studies. Leaving aside the empirical falsity of these claims—cultural studies and the associated developments in postcolonial studies, minority studies, queer studies, and women's studies remain a small percentage of offerings in literature departments, according to MLA surveys (Bettina J. Huber, "What's Being Read in Survey Courses? Findings from a 1990–91 MLA Survey of En-