

between literature and the cultural and political structures in and through which it is written, read, and assigned significance. Such an approach does not absolve us from reading literature and texts. It asks us to read them more completely.

The traditions of Latin American literature do not exactly fit aesthetically oriented definitions of “the literary” or sever the aesthetic function from other spheres. The canon includes letters, diaries, speeches, historical tracts, and written approximations of oral texts.

The question for me is not whether to do cultural studies but which cultural studies to do, and how. Like multiculturalism or the critique of colonial discourse, cultural studies can be done in a number of ways. In a 1996 “virtual speech” on Latin American subaltern studies (archived at <http://www.pitt.edu/~gajjala/virtual-john.html>), John Beverley suggested that cultural studies now tends to describe but not critique cultural processes, thus eliding subaltern cultural agency and helping to create a “transnational postmodernist sublime.” I suspect it is this tendency that makes cultural studies acceptable to otherwise conservative deans, who talk about using cultural studies to “soften up” foreign language curricula so as to attract more majors. The man in the bar worried that as a practitioner of cultural studies I might watch too many Mexican soap operas (I do), but he would have been even more concerned had he realized I also dose myself with Marx. When cultural studies is used to deflect other progressive lenses, or to blunt radical social critique, I’ll be reading the *Quixote*.

LESLIE BARY  
*University of Oregon*

Cultural studies cannot be properly understood apart from an awareness of what informed previous efforts to give literature an identity in an academic world of increasing specialization. Definitions of literature provided by formalism, structuralism, and the New Criticism were designed to consolidate the autonomy of literature against possible dispersion, dilution, and contamination. In each case the autonomy of criticism was secured by a theoretical effort that identified the literary with the form of the work rather than with some broader conception of content, with psychology, or with history, areas that were thought to exceed the boundaries of humanities research.

Recent critical approaches (including hermeneutics, reception theory, reader-response criticism, deconstruction, and poststructuralism) have challenged the role that the literary has played in definitions of literature as a humanistic discipline. The literary text has been inserted in a broader cultural framework that is sometimes assumed

to provide the basis for a new definition of literature as transnational, multiethnic, and historically differentiated. The training of professionals in literary studies should allow them to contextualize documents in ways that are not obvious to psychologists, political scientists, and social historians. The origins of literature in ritual, ceremony, and seasonal festivities can also widen definitions of the object of study. As a result, cultural studies is generally recognized as furnishing a new approach to literature.

However, cultural studies seems to threaten the autonomy of research as normally carried out in literature departments. The challenge to the literary has revived a concern about reductionism, the danger that originally led to the isolation of form as the essence of the literary in twentieth-century criticism. Moreover, the possible opposition between cultural studies and the literary may not preserve the disciplinary autonomy of literary professionals. The large contributions that the social sciences (especially psychoanalysis, sociology, anthropology, and ethnology) might make to cultural studies could thus undermine the independence of the new field.

A major problem with earlier definitions that essentialized literature is that they generally failed to emphasize linguistic competence, which can help to refute the more rarefied conceptions of literature as self-referential. While linguistic competence should not be narrowly defined as perfect mastery of a verbal medium, its importance for less commonly studied languages cannot be ignored. I believe that rigorous instruction in the Chinese language, for example, is a prerequisite for much (but not all) work in Chinese studies, my area of expertise. Cultural studies has a future as an academic discipline to the extent that it recognizes the unique contributions that language-based disciplines can make to the examination of literature as a socially symbolic act. Cultural studies should not be threatened by definitions suggesting how the existence of literature is guaranteed by the ongoing vitality of language as a public institution.

MAO CHEN  
*Skidmore College*

Cultural studies represents less a turning away from the literary, defined as a distinct discourse with particular uses of language and models of reading, than a broadening of the scope of study beyond a static site of privileged cultural experience both to a wider array of texts and to the historical circumstances contributing to specific writing and reading practices. Although many might recognize the literary as a constructed form of cultural experience, even those who take for their object of study the history of that construction need to integrate the interplay

between that history and the literary's shifting formal conventions in their analysis of cultural production and of the conditions producing the literary.

Since form resonates with ideological implications, no student of cultural studies can afford to ignore the formal elements frequently consigned to the literary. I see a tight, mutually influential, fluid interrelation between the formal and the historical, evoked in this formulation by Bakhtin/Medvedev: "every literary phenomenon, like every other ideological phenomenon, is simultaneously determined from without (extrinsically) and from within (intrinsically)" (*The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*, trans. Albert J. Wehrle [Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1985]). Although potentially including the literary and "every other ideological phenomenon," cultural studies must take a dialectical approach that incorporates both the intrinsic (a history of formal conventions, shifting internal textual dynamics, and the gaps or silences representing suppressed alternatives) and the extrinsic (related historical pressures, social relations, and the forces responsible for silencing alternatives).

In my work I enter this dialectic by focusing on historical theories and practices of language—a subject to which the literary, with the sensitivity to language it often encourages, has much to contribute. A cognizance of the ways in which writers and readers adhere to and resist literary traditions and of the conventional laws to which language users respond is central in establishing the significance of literary and cultural productions and determining the meaning and history of such terms as *the literary*, *norm*, and *deviant*. I give particular attention to how—and why—writers and speakers appropriate and transform dominant linguistic rules and to the ideological pressures at work in the instituting of such rules.

Drawing from a revised philology that refuses the Eurocentrism and fixed classifications of its disciplinary origins, I would also like to reclaim the analysis of language from the merely formalist approach that literary study has too often adopted. Concentrating on linguistic histories allows me to take advantage of and resituate the linguistic turn in literary studies. As Voloshinov instructs, language is both a sensitive medium and a refracting lens of the social world it inhabits and shapes. Language registers "emergent structures of feeling," to use Raymond Williams's phrase, long before they solidify and bears the traces of residual ones long after they disappear or are suppressed. When I investigate etymologies and the uses to which the study of etymology has been put, the composition and historical construction of a standard language, or the literary representation of dialect, my goal is to illuminate the social embeddedness of particular usages and theories of languages. Inasmuch as literary rep-

resentations of language both foreground and alienate it, the literary invites interrogations of the sedimentary, multivalent character of language.

One productive relation between the literary and cultural studies, then, results when the attention to language fostered by the literary is merged with a situating of linguistic practices within the sociopolitical contexts they help recast. I am especially interested in the linguistic encounters produced by empire and in what language practices reveal about strategies and tactics of literacy, cultural assimilation, and resistance. In animating the social history of the sign, that site of struggle and contestation, I stress the agency of language and, more important, of its users. If the scholarship produced by cultural studies has had a limitation, it is perhaps the field's indebtedness to literary studies: too frequently cultural studies, like literary studies before it, focuses on consumption, analyzing moments of reading—albeit resistant ones in cultural studies. Cultural studies has emphasized the operations of discourses of power but has neglected movements of resistance that reject the micropolitics of alternative consumption.

An awareness of language as production in a hierarchical social context can allow recognition of the competing views of language existing between all language users, some of whom might come together briefly and contingently to contest the powers that would empty their languages of plural or defiant senses. The socially grounded analysis offered by cultural studies, coupled with the detailed attention to language invited by the literary, has the potential to help make that consciousness possible.

JANET SORENSEN  
Indiana University, Bloomington

To advertise a cultural studies reading group among our faculty, Thomas A. Wilson and I formulated this definition: "Cultural studies is an inquiry into the multiplicity of cultural practices, particularly modes of discourse and representation, and into the connections of those practices to relations of power. It is based on a systematic theorization of not only the ways in which certain identities (national, social, political, gendered, ethnic, religious, linguistic, etc.) are constructed but also the uses of those identities in contestation over meaning and truth in cultural domains." That a specialist in Chinese intellectual history and a medievalist in an English department could agree on a definition of cultural studies shows one of the field's important strengths: adaptability to different disciplines.

In my teaching, I find that my desire to broaden students' perspectives through the methodologies of cultural