

cause representations and commodities do not always explicitly refer to these aspects of trauma in their formal structures, it is necessary to contextualize our readings of them by invoking our extraliterary knowledge of history, politics, and economics. The most politically useful practice of cultural studies, and the most humanitarian, to my mind, engages these questions in order to expose the tyranny of states and transnational corporations.

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“Too many people simply rename what they were already doing to take advantage of the cultural studies boom. . . . [A] scholarly discipline, like literature, cannot begin to do cultural studies simply by expanding its dominion to encompass specific cultural forms (western novels, say, or TV sitcoms, or rock and roll), social groups (working class youth, for example, or communities ‘on the margins,’ or women’s rugby teams), practices (wilding, quilting, hacking), or periods (contemporary culture, for example, as opposed to historical work). Cultural studies involves how and why such work is done, not just its content” (10–11).

The urge to ask when or which literary scholars have been content with “just . . . content” underlines the unease about current relations between literary and cultural studies that is evident in this passage from Cary Nelson, Paula A. Treichler, and Lawrence Grossberg’s editorial introduction to *Cultural Studies* ([New York: Routledge, 1992] 1–16). The editors’ claim that “textual analysis in literary studies carries a history of convictions that texts are properly understood as wholly self-determined and independent objects as well as a bias about which kinds of texts are worthy of analysis” (2) also seems grossly unfair to all the literary scholars who long ago started a thorough questioning of such traditional attitudes and who have even concluded that new “ways of contextualizing literature in the expanded field of discourse, culture, ideology, race, and gender are so different from the old models of literary study according to authors, nations, periods, and genres that the term ‘literature’ may no longer adequately describe our object of study” (“The Bernheimer Report,” *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism*, ed. Charles Bernheimer [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995] 42).

There is not and never was any one “object of study” in literary studies, although *the literary* refers to a conceptual context relevant for critical work. The notion that literary analysis is not a strong method for cultural interpretation seems ridiculous in the light of Bakhtin, Benjamin, Barthes, and other prominent (literary?) scholars

who are among the progenitors of cultural studies as we know it.

The parameters of the literary involve an appreciation of texts and of their aesthetic qualities, an awareness of a literary tradition and institution that circumscribe the experience of reading, and a dialogic performance of culture where literature is an experiential and experimental scene of language. A narrow rhetorical analysis of texts, a weakened social presence of the institution of literature, and the need to think of literacy in broad cultural terms may contribute to a turning away from the literary in the “cultural studies boom.” However, the three interrelated parameters of the literary, considered with their historical and social implications, reconfirm the cultural role of the literary. The practice of reading and an aesthetic appreciation of texts are instrumental for much cultural criticism. The literary provides an eminent access to traditions, because literature, the art of language, is steeped in the historicity of language, which includes the ways in which cultural legacies are named and reprocessed.

The national legacy, for better or worse, is a crucial factor—although often obliquely so. For someone who comes from a society where literature and language have been the main sources of cultural values and national historicity, it seems impossible to disengage literary and linguistic inquiry from cultural studies. One of the traps of cultural studies may be that it takes language for granted, just as literary criticism has sometimes focused on language too narrowly. Language and the problem of translation are most likely to be underestimated in countries where English is the national medium. A society that speaks a lingua franca risks becoming inattentive to the ways in which cultural borders intersect with and differ from national ones and in which both kinds of boundary influence views of class, race, sex, and gender. Charged with the imaginary together with the quotidian, literary language is an important forum for the politics of place. Encompassing various cultural practices, a literary work can flesh out visions of individual and social sites, whether deeply rooted habitus, exile, or some form of the boundary existence increasingly characteristic of contemporary life.

Such arguments do not diminish the benefits that literary scholarship can draw from developments in cultural studies. If the literary is now increasingly viewed as a more open category than it has been at any time since the latter half of the eighteenth century, this is in part due to the challenge of cultural studies. You can certainly “do cultural studies” without renaming what you do. Literary scholars might want to pay more attention to the ways in which literary works constitute fields of cultural knowledge, critically mapping the acts and sites of culture.

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.

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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.”

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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-