

derscores the thorough subsumption of the literary into the wider, media-saturated environment.

Cultural studies takes its rationale and much of its urgency from the problems of cultural authority posed by this unprecedented predicament. By stressing cultural politics, or dispersing politics into the everyday, cultural studies distinguishes itself from the plethora of purely intellectual moves towards interdisciplinarity. To think through cultural studies in this way is to bring it closer to its literary origins: to the breaks and continuities among Stuart Hall, Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams, and the earlier, formative moment of *Scrutiny*; to the attempt to bring literary criticism and close reading to bear on the newer, popular forms of communication; to the social and historical study of literature and culture. It is also to begin to imagine how other, nationally inflected genealogies for cultural studies might be devised, refracted through different academies, diverse intelligentsias, distant struggles.

Yet to position the literary as cultural studies' point of departure, however accurate historically, is to risk turning literary studies into an anachronism or a way station, a small step in a developing transdisciplinary logic, rather than to recognize in it a source of tension or resistance, an irritant that raises uncomfortable questions of time and value. In this light the literary becomes the other of cultural studies, recalling the new field to the measured responsibility of cultural criticism, slowing down the frenzied pace of reading, and demanding something more than a merely "diagnostic" or "paraphrastic" approach to texts—to cite J. Hillis Miller's helpful formulation (*Illustration* [Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992] 17). Indeed, since the shelf life of all manner of writings today seems increasingly compressed, this argument is perhaps now more compelling than ever.

But such nostrums, whether Leavisite or deconstructive, fail to give due weight to the way in which cultural studies has expanded the text's interpretive horizons and restored the multifarious acts of reading to their many and various publics. Cultural studies has accented the context or the social relations of reading. Because the technologies of textuality and representation have long since outstripped any solely literary determination, reading can no longer be imagined as a singular encounter between subject and text but must instead be reconceived as a historically variable bundle of norms, codes, capacities, and techniques whose precise configuration at any time (including the forms of agency and effectivity that reading supports) remains a topic for detailed examination. In cultural studies there can be no general, uncontroversial answer to the question of what it means to read or how reading is accomplished, no matter how final the

pedagogical solutions of close reading may sometimes deceptively appear to be.

Cultural studies has been criticized for its presentist bias and has even been deemed to have failed because of its alleged inability to deal with traditional, and especially premodern, cultural works historically or aesthetically. This is the burden of Colin MacCabe's recent critique, for example ("The Case for the Consortium," *Critical Quarterly* 38 [1996]: 3–12). Yet the study of reading and interpretation is surely the site where ethnography and cultural history have begun to intersect and where the frontier between cultural studies and the new historicisms has become increasingly fuzzy. In this interdisciplinary terrain the literary will inevitably come to occupy what will seem to many scholars a peculiarly uncongenial place, but they may be consoled on finding the new locale furnished with a far more heterogeneous range of literary materials and a more inclusive notion of literary culture than they had expected. There is, however, no guarantee that the literary can be preserved as a discrete theoretical object once its constitutive practices of reading and writing have been moved into the volatile and multidimensional domain of cultural representation, where it is anyone's guess what the concept of literature will look like. Perhaps this is one reason that discussions of the prospects for cultural studies regularly close with a call for better and considerably updated maps of the cultural landscape. But without a greater willingness to undertake more-demanding intellectual journeys, to improvise and experiment in hazardous conditions, another cartography will count for nothing.

DAVID GLOVER

*University of Southampton*

A few years ago, I freely admitted to a reporter that when it comes to reading for pleasure, I don't curl up with a "great book" of literature. Yellow journalism's version of the culture wars being what it is, this comment suffered a sea change in print, where it ran something along the lines of, "Ross doesn't read books anymore." The fabrication was then cited in other quarters—the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Lingua Franca*, and so on—as yet another indication that cultural studies had abandoned the literary, if not the entire Gutenberg galaxy, along with the cherished life of the mind. It's important to distinguish between that kind of innuendo, served up to fuel public anti-intellectualism and the academic gossip mill, and the frank embrace of this topic by the *PMLA* Forum. But both the reporting and this Forum hold in common the assumption that cultural studies once belonged to the literary profession and has lately moved outside that sphere,

for better or worse. Yet none of the competing versions of the history of cultural studies would place the origins of the field firmly within the orbit of literary study. It is only in recent years that most literature departments have acknowledged de facto that inquiry into “culture and society” is part of their mission, although an innocent perusal of the MLA job listings would not yield any evidence of this recognition at all.

Literary scholars have long known that they inherited a weak disciplinary formation. Why study literature? was a nineteenth-century question that had no obvious response, and it is still a tough one to answer today. However, until recently the prestige of literature afforded writers and critics the role of intellectuals with an important voice on all matters of social consequence (today this role is generally only extended to writers outside the First World). Disciplinary hyperspecialization and professionalization has drastically reduced this role, and one of the impulses of cultural studies has been to recapture the broad sense of purpose that motivated the likes of Matthew Arnold’s *Culture and Anarchy*, José Martí’s *Our America*, C. L. R. James’s *American Civilization*, and Raymond Williams’s *The Long Revolution*. In this respect, the formalist reading of the high literary text, which many of us were trained to do and which is still held up as a fundamental disciplinary activity, is a recent, technicist aberration and certainly not a pedigreed vocation of long standing.

In the last decade or so, many literature departments, to their great credit, offered a haven for younger scholars pursuing developments in cultural studies. Depending on whose polarizing story you heard, this was either a reckless plunge into the “compost heap of popular culture,” to use Harold Bloom’s choice turn of phrase, or the only way of staving off intellectual sclerosis in the field. To my mind, the impulse derived as much from pre-professional traditions of cultural criticism by committed intellectuals as from any postprofessional tendency, whether progressive or apocalyptic. The backdrop for the ensuing debates has been the sustained assault on higher education: the depreciation of nontechnical knowledge, the villification of radical critical inquiry, the slack-

ening of the state’s will to fund the education of its citizenry, the corporatization of the university, a low-wage revolution in the academic labor force, and the first steps toward the eradication of tenure.

The questions raised by this *PMLA* Forum are inseparable from these conditions, which it would be dishonest for any current academic forum to ignore. It requires little hindsight to see that the alleged neglect of literature by cultural studies has been exploited cynically to create fierce divisions within the discipline (just as the supposed neglect of historical evidence or empirical data or field ethnography has been used to disrupt other disciplines), at a time when the humanities and the values-oriented social sciences are taking direct hits and can ill-afford to be in disarray if they are to survive with honor. It requires even less foresight to see how further exploitation of the same divisions might bring on a struggle to survive without honor—if swearing a loyalty oath to literature, for example, became a way of dodging the budget cutters’ blade or, alternatively, if fealty to cross-disciplinary cultural studies became a justification for administrators to downsize academic departments. How do we prevent these turf wars from needlessly inducing further assaults on the education infrastructure? Rallying around the flag of literature will not help in the long run. What we need is a discipline worth saving because of its energy and momentum, not because of its nominal allegiance to the love of literature. Until now, cultural studies has been pursued in an expansive spirit that is as close to free intellectual inquiry as the academic profession allows. Its insights into the relations between knowledge and power should help to explain how and why we have been under siege. Given the draconian impact of the pro-scarcity fiscal climate, this is not the right moment for us to voluntarily reduce our inquiry to a literary focus. If I have concentrated on such issues in this Forum, it is not because I believe that this debate has no other, more intellectual consequences. It is because the dire institutional conditions in which the debate takes place are no longer a backdrop but an urgent element of the discussion.

ANDREW ROSS  
New York University