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# Forum

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**T**HIS FORUM contains thirty-two letters submitted in response to a call for comments on the actual or potential relations between cultural studies and the literary. The statements are arranged in three sections: Critiques, Reworkings, and Interconnections. A list of the contributors follows.

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## Critiques

In *Keywords* Raymond Williams traces the complex genealogy of the word *literature*, observing that *literary* first appeared in the seventeenth century and “only acquired its more general meaning”—“the practice and profession of writing”—sometime in the middle of the eighteenth century ([New York: Oxford UP, 1976] 184). Crucially, however, he also notes that even into the first quarter of the nineteenth century, *literary* “still referred to the whole body of books and writing” (185). Hence William Hazlitt could write in “Of Persons One Would Wish to Have Seen” (1836), “I suppose the two first persons you would choose to see

would be the two greatest names in English literature, Sir Isaac Newton and Mr Locke” (Williams 188). Literature, in other words, was once implicitly interdisciplinary, encompassing, as Hazlitt indicates, science as well as philosophy. Yet as Williams remarks, in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the *literary* became both exclusive and overspecialized, exclusive because overspecialized. Since then, literature and the literary have been “increasingly challenged, on what is conventionally their own ground, by concepts of *writing* and *communication* which seek to recover the most active and general senses which the extreme specialization had seemed to exclude” (187).

Cultural studies—if one can use such a generic term for such a wide range of practices—is a direct response to this process of superspecialization. The crucial period is 1957–64. The first moment, which derives from the dual discourses of Leavisism and British Marxism, accords with a now canonical set of texts: Richard Hoggart’s *Uses of Literacy* (1957), Williams’s *Culture and Society* (1958), and E. P. Thompson’s *Making of the English Working Class* (1963). The second, slightly later moment of cultural studies, which marks a shift from author function to institution, text to social formation, is generally associated with the founding of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, in 1964. In his inaugural lecture at the center, Hoggart, whose own work on literacy repeated even as it radicalized Leavis’s, programmatically defined the trivium of cultural studies as the sociological, the historical/philosophical, and, most important, the literary critical (Patrick Brantlinger, *Cruel Footprints* [New York: Routledge, 1990] 60). But if “Hoggart assumed that the best method of reading and evaluating the cultural or social text was literary-critical,” as Brantlinger chronicles, “his students and successors disagreed” (61).

A glance at the contents of *Reading into Cultural Studies* (1992), a collection of essays edited by Martin Barker and Anne Beezer on the key texts of the second generation, registers this intellectual shift. The topics vary from prime-time soap operas like *Dallas* to the politics of “mugging” and “moral panic”; from subcultural style to the social history of Victorian class and leisure; from the “Bond phenomenon” to the “really bad news” of BBC news programming; from mass-market romantic fiction to the “meaning and ideology” of advertising codes; from male working-class culture—“learning to labour” in the West Midlands—to the mundane and familial rituals of watching *Nationwide*.

In sum, second-generation cultural studies was interested less in the literary as such—as the work in *Reading into Cultural Studies*, composed between 1977 and 1986,

illustrates—than in “writing and communication,” especially mass communications and writing in the general-economic sense. (*Of Grammatology* first appeared in *English* in 1976.) Literature is still, to be sure, an object of analysis, but it is literature with a small *l*: “spy-fi,” the Gothic novel, Harlequin romances. More generally, cultural studies today understands the literary—and even the literary-critical practice of textual analysis—as one discourse or mode among a constellation of other media and discourses, methodologies and social formations. In this sense (and here one might think of Galileo, if not Newton), literature is simultaneously deprived and rehistoricized.

Now, this state of affairs may seem revolutionary to those who see Literature as the foundation of society and consider cultural studies yet another accomplice in the current retrogressive mutation from a print to a televisual culture—from the Bard to Beavis and Butt-head. But my sense of things is rather more utopian: cultural studies is not some Frankensteinian monster come to vanquish literature (unless, of course, one reads Frankenstein as the return of the mass-cultural repressed and Literature as the embodiment of classical bourgeois culture). Rather, cultural studies, as intellectually partisan and methodologically motley as it sometimes is, should be considered part of a larger process of regeneration, where regeneration for both literature and cultural studies is only possible when there is a thorough acknowledgment of the past as well as the present future in all its sociological and philosophical, even scientific, aspects. Indeed, at least as I read it, the literary will continue to live on—will remain alive (*It’s alive! It’s alive!*)—only insofar as it remains, like cultural studies, a vital part of this historical process.

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If people rue the loss of the literary in the emergence of cultural studies, I suggest they look on their separation anxiety as they would their feelings at the marriage of a beloved child: they are not losing literature; they are gaining culture. After all, the literary was really not a very good concept in the first place. I always associate the word *literature* with Lionel Trilling’s pronunciation of it. In his courses at Columbia University, he would rise up on the tips of his toes and articulate the word as Laurence Olivier or Lionel Barrymore might have, the staccato trumpet of the consonants giving way to the languorous, anglicized diphthong. *Literature* was destined for a British pronunciation (even though Trilling, as it turns out, attended the same public high school in the Bronx that I did). The isolation and fetishism of the liter-