

CULTURAL CAPITAL

THE PROBLEM OF LITERARY
CANON FORMATION

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Chapter One

Canonical and Noncanonical: The Current Debate

The Imaginary Politics of Representation

Not only in their answers but in their very questions there was a mystification.

—MARX, *The German Ideology*

Social Identity

In recent years the debate about the literary canon has entered a new phase, with the emergence in the university and in the popular media of a strong conservative backlash against revisions of the curriculum.¹ Given the renewal and even intensification of the debate after what had seemed a successful transition to an expanded syllabus of literary study, the moment may now have arrived for a reassessment of the debate, and particularly of the theoretical assumptions upon which the practice of canonical revision has been based. These assumptions derive without question from the political discourse—liberal pluralism—to which we owe the most successful progressive agendas of the last three decades. It will not be my intention to question social objectives whose realization is both necessary and urgent, but to demonstrate that a certain impasse in the debate about the canon follows from the fundamental assumptions of liberal pluralism itself. This impasse is visible, for example, when the distinction between “canonical” and “noncanonical” works is institutionalized in two very different and even contradictory ways: as the canonization of formerly noncanonical works, and as the development of distinct and separate noncanonical programs of study. I shall argue in this chapter that the vulnerability of curricular revision to attack from the right is one consequence of the contradiction between integrationist and separatist conceptions of curricular revision, a

contradiction that can be traced to theoretical problems with pluralism itself, and that threatens to disable an effective response to the conservative backlash.

While the explicitly political ends of canonical revision are obvious, it has not been sufficiently acknowledged how much the language of revision owes to a political culture which is specifically American. It will be my contention that however easy it has been for both progressive academics and their reactionary critics to conflate the critique of the canon with the forms of leftist and even Marxist thought, the terms and methods of canonical revision must be situated squarely within the prevailing conventions of American pluralism. These conventions have been usefully summarized by Gregor McLennan, in his *Marxism, Pluralism, and Beyond*, as follows:

- a sociology of competing interest groups;
- a conception of the state as a political mechanism responsive to the balance of societal demands;
- an account of the democratic civic culture which sets a realistic minimum measure for the values of political participation and trust;
- an empiricist and multi-factorial methodology of social science.²

Within traditional liberal pluralist thought, individuals are conceived in their relation to the state as members of groups whose interests are assumed to conflict. Hence the object of representing these groups within the legislative institutions of the state is to negotiate among the interests of particular social groups or constituencies. "Representation" in political institutions now describes an important objective for many social groups, defined by a variety of forms of association: women, trade union members, the elderly, consumers, the sick, the disabled, veterans, and most recently members of minority ethnic or racial groups, the communities which constitute our pluralist society. In the context of the long-term development of democratic culture, the pluralist version of liberalism emergent in post-World War II American society registers a certain deepening crisis in the institutions of political representation, the sense (not necessarily conscious) of having reached an apparent limit in the capacity of these institutions to represent diverse social groups.³ This crisis has reached a new stage with the decline of postwar liberalism in American political culture and the resurgence of a strongly reactionary politics which now designs to purge liberalism from political culture in the same way that it formerly (and successfully) purged socialism. In response to an increasingly hostile climate of opinion, it would seem that the political culture of liberalism has estab-

lished a last redoubt in the university, where the very extremity of its situation has deformed its discourse by rigidifying certain defensive postures.⁴ The deterioration of what was in the United States always a very limited program of economic socialization, along with a general decline in the credibility of democratic political institutions, constitute the immediate conditions for the development of a political critique of "representation" in contexts other than those formerly conceived as political. In retrospect it was only in the wake of liberalism's apparent defeat in American political culture that such agendas as "representation in the canon" could come to occupy so central a place within the liberal academy.⁵ The new curricular critique made it possible for the university to become a new venue of representation, one in which new social identities might be represented more adequately, if also differently, than in existing political institutions of American society.

If the politics of canon formation has been understood as a politics of representation—the representation or lack of representation of certain social groups in the canon—this circumstance may well be a consequence of that fact that, as McLennan points out, the "whole relationship between subjects, individuals and their identity as members of certain social categories is one which has been dramatically unsettled in recent social theory."⁶ Because the concept of "social identity" has undergone a kind of mutation, with which democratic institutions have not yet caught up, the venue of representation can be displaced to new arenas of contestation. But that displacement, while it reconciles a process such as canon formation as "political," leaves unclarified the question of the precise relation between a politics of representation in the canon and a democratic representational politics. In order to answer the question of what "representation in the canon" means within the larger context of American political culture, we must acknowledge at the outset that our concept of "social identity" is a product of that culture, and that only within that culture can the category of an author's racial, ethnic, or gender identity found a politics of curricular revision. Any reconsideration, then, of canon critique in its political context must begin with the notion of "social identity."

I propose to offer here a critique of the assumptions underlying the current understanding of the canon, a critique which derives its premises from a set of terms and arguments closer to Marxism than to liberal pluralism. But the point of such a reorientation is not to argue for the mutual exclusivity of Marxism and pluralism. I take it for granted that Marxism itself has theoretical limitations, which recent "post-Marxist" confrontations with pluralist methodology (for example, that of Laclau and Mouffe) have had to confront, with important theoretical results.⁷ The major terms

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of my analysis are drawn from the arguably post-Marxist theory of "cultural capital" elaborated in the works of Pierre Bourdieu.⁸ Insofar as the concept of cultural capital presupposes the concept of capital, and inasmuch as it foregrounds the category of class, Bourdieu's theory must be located within the Marxist rather than the pluralist critical tradition. The object at the present moment of advancing a Marxist critique (however qualified) of liberal pluralist revisions of the canon would be to indicate the inherent limitations in pluralist analysis in order to bring to light certain questions occluded by the current problematic of "representation." These questions concern the *distribution* of cultural capital, of which canonical works constitute one form. I will assume, following Bourdieu, that the distribution of cultural capital in such an institution as the school reproduces the structure of social relations, a structure of complex and ramifying inequality. However, it will not be possible to explore the relation between the canon and access to the forms of cultural capital, until we have first demonstrated the inherent limitations in the problematic of representation, in the very questions it asks.

For the purposes of that critique, we can extract from the current debate about the canon two pervasive theoretical assumptions: The first of these assumptions is implicit in the word "canon" itself, not until recently a common term in critical discourse.⁹ The word "canon" displaces the expressly honorific term "classic" precisely in order to isolate the "classics" as the object of critique. The concept of the canon names the traditional curriculum of literary texts by analogy to that body of writing historically characterized by an inherent logic of *closure*—the scriptural canon. The scriptural analogy is continuously present, if usually tacit, whenever canonical revision is expressed as "opening the canon." We may begin to interrogate this first assumption by raising the question of whether the process by which a selection of texts functions to define a religious practice and doctrine is really similar *historically* to the process by which literary texts come to be preserved, reproduced, and taught in the schools. This question concerns the historicity of a particular kind of written text, the "literary." Since the hypothesis of closure is a historical conjecture, it is subject to historical proof or disproof, a task I shall undertake in this and subsequent chapters.

The first assumption of canonical revision operates in concert with a second, which posits a homology between the process of *exclusion*, by which socially defined minorities are excluded from the exercise of power or from political representation, and the process of *selection*, by which certain works are designated canonical, others noncanonical. The second assumption clearly requires the first—literature as quasi-scripture—in order

to make the claim that the process of canonical selection is always also a process of social exclusion, specifically the exclusion of female, black, ethnic, or working-class authors from the literary canon. The unrepresentative content of the canon is described in the rhetoric of canonical critique as a kind of scandal, after two millennia a scandal which has gone on long enough. If the forces of exclusion have been so powerful as to prevail without challenge until recent years, the strategy for their defeat has been surprisingly obvious, even simple. It has only been necessary to "open" the canon by adding works of minority authors to the syllabus of literary study. In this way the socially progressive agenda of liberal pluralism could be effected in a particular institution—the university—by transforming the literary syllabus into an inclusive or "representative" set of texts.

Again, it will not be necessary to dissent from the larger aims of the progressive social agenda (far from it) in order to raise a question at the level of theoretical assumptions about the relation between the literary curriculum and "representation." The movement to open the canon to noncanonical authors submits the syllabus to a kind of demographic oversight. Canonical and noncanonical authors are supposed to *stand for* particular social groups, dominant or subordinate. One can easily concede that there must be *some* relation between the representation of minorities in positions of power and the representation of minorities in the canon, but what is that relation? The difficulty of describing this relation is in part a consequence of the fact that a particular social institution—the university—intervenes between these two sites of representation. Given the only partially successful social agenda of educational democratization in the last three decades, we may conclude that it is much easier to make the canon representative than the university. More to the point, those members of social minorities who enter the university do not "represent" the social groups to which they belong in the same way in which minority legislators can be said to represent their constituencies. The sense in which a social group is "represented" by an author or text is more tenuous still. The latter sense of representation conceives the literary canon as a hypothetical *image* of social diversity, a kind of mirror in which social groups either see themselves, or do not see themselves, reflected. In the words of Henry Louis Gates, Jr., the "teaching of literature" has always meant "the teaching of an aesthetic and political order, in which no women and people of color were ever able to discover the reflection or representation of their images, or hear the resonances of their cultural voices."¹⁰ I shall argue that the sense of representation as *reflection* or *image inhabits* what may be called the field of "imaginary" politics. But by the latter term I do not mean what is opposed to the real but a politics which is manifestly a politics of *the image*. Such a politics

belongs to the same political domain as the ongoing critique of minority images in the national media, to the project of correcting these images for stereotyping, or for a failure to represent minorities at all. Such a politics has real work to do, as complex and interesting as images themselves, but it is also inherently limited by its reduction of the political to the instance of representation, and of representation to the image. It is only the first step toward a political critique of the literary curriculum to say that it is a *mediation* of cultural images. This mode of canonical critique reduces the curriculum to such a medium, and thus, as we shall see, to a mass cultural form. In this sense the critique of the canon betrays its determination by certain postmodern conditions, by those conditions in which media images have the central ideological function of organizing our responses to virtually all aspects of our lives.¹¹ If there is any difference worth considering between the politics of image-critique and the politics of canonical revision, this difference must inhere in the latter's institutional location. The literary curriculum is precisely not the site of mass cultural production and consumption, but the critique of the canon has proceeded as though it were, as though canon formation were like the Academy Awards. Clearly a "representative" canon does not redress the effects of social exclusion, or lack of representation, either within or without the university; nor would the project of canonical revision need to make this claim in order to justify the necessity of curricular revision. But in construing the process of canon formation as an exclusionary process essentially the same as the exclusion of socially defined minorities from power, the strategy of opening the canon aims to reconstruct it as a true image (a true representation) of social diversity. In so specifying "representation" as the political effect of the canon, the liberal pluralist critique fails to consider what other effects, even political effects, the canon may have at its institutional site.

Whatever effects the canon as an image of equal or unequal representation may actually produce within the university, we must nevertheless insist that the politics of canonical revision is in its present form an imaginary politics, a politics of the image. That is just the reason why the social effects of a representative canon are so difficult to determine.¹² What the project of canon-critique still lacks is an analysis of how the institutional site of canonical revision mediates its political effects in the social domain. There is no question that the literary curriculum is the site of a political practice; but one must attempt to understand the politics of this practice according to the specificity of its social location. The specificity of the political here cannot mean simply a replication of the problem of "representation" in the sphere of democratic politics, and therefore it cannot mean simply importing into the school the same strategies of progressive politics which some-

times work at the legislative level.¹³ Should we not rather rethink the whole question of what the "political" means in the context of the school as an institution? The institutional question bears directly, I shall argue, on the current impasse at which the pluralist agenda is lodged, its vacillation between integrationist and separatist institutional strategies, between the incorporation of noncanonical works into the curriculum on the grounds that such works ought to be canonical, and the establishment of separate or alternative curricula of works which continue to be presented as "non-canonical" in relation to the traditional curriculum.

With respect to the latter alternative, it is relatively easy to see why it has seemed necessary to many progressive critics to present certain texts by minority authors as *intrinsically* noncanonical, as unassimilable to the traditional canon. The separatist strategy follows from the same basic assumption of pluralist canonical critique as the integrationist, that the process of the inclusion or exclusion of texts is identical to the representation or nonrepresentation of social groups. In the context of curricular revision, the category of the noncanonical loses its empty significance as merely the sum total of what is not included in the canon, and takes on a content specified by the contemporary critique: the noncanonical must be conceived as the *actively* excluded, the object of a historical repression. But paradoxically, the most surprising aspect of the current legitimization crisis is the fact that the "noncanonical" is not what fails to appear in the classroom, but what, in the context of liberal pedagogy, *signifies exclusion*. The noncanonical is a newly constituted category of text production and reception, permitting certain authors and texts to be *taught* as noncanonical, to have the status of noncanonical works in the classroom. This effect is quite different from the effect of total absence, of nonrepresentation *tout court*. What it means is that the social referents of inclusion and exclusion—the dominant or subordinate groups defined by race, gender, class, or national status—are now represented in the discourse of canon formation by two groups of authors and texts: the canonical and the noncanonical. It is only as canonical works that certain texts can be said to represent hegemonic social groups. Conversely, it is only as noncanonical works that certain other texts can truly represent socially subordinated groups. This fact must be grasped in order to understand why the critique of the canon has proceeded in recent years to restate at the level of institutional practice, of curriculum, the same opposition—between the canonical and the noncanonical—that its early agenda of "opening the canon" called into question.

If the objective of representation in the syllabus is the expression of an imaginary politics, this objective does not exhaust the agenda of the liberal

pluralist critique. The sense in which a canonical author represents a dominant social group, or a noncanonical author a socially defined minority, is continuous with the sense in which the work is perceived to be immediately expressive of the author's *experience* as a representative member of some social group. The primacy of the social identity of the author in the pluralist critique of the canon means that the reevaluation of works on this basis will inevitably seek its ground in the author's experience, conceived as the experience of a marginalized race, class, or gender identity. The author returns in the critique of the canon, not as the genius, but as the representative of a social identity. We scarcely need to be reminded of the fact that just as the first wave of theory called into question such categories as that of the author (along with notions of genius, tradition, etc.), much other contemporary theory calls the valorization of experience itself into question, in order to critique the very concept of representation. Laclau and Mouffe, for example, set out from the recognition that the coherent identity demanded by a practice assuming the perfect fit of identity and experience is in fact unavailable to anyone:

there is no social identity fully protected from a discursive exterior that deforms it and prevents it becoming fully sutured. Both the identities and their relations lose their necessary character. As a systematic structural ensemble the relations are unable to absorb the identities; but as the identities are purely relational, this is but another way of saying that there is no identity which can be fully constituted.¹⁴

Such theoretical arguments (which evoke the vexed question of "essentialism") have surprisingly coexisted in the present debate with an otherwise incompatible rhetoric of canonical revision in which it is precisely the fit between the author's social identity and his or her experience that is seen to determine canonical or noncanonical status. The typical valorization of the noncanonical author's experience as a marginalized social identity necessarily reasserts the transparency of the text to the experience it represents.¹⁵ If the practice of canonical revision cannot pause to indulge theoretical scruples about such assertions, its urgency betrays an apparently unavoidable discrepancy between theory and practice, an incapacity as yet to translate theory into political practice at the site of *institutional practices*. Hence the critique of the canon remains quite vulnerable to certain elementary theoretical objections, but this fact is itself symptomatic of a political dilemma generated by the very logic of liberal pluralism. It suggests that the category of social identity is too important politically to yield any ground to theoretical arguments which might complicate the status of

representation in literary texts, for the simple reason that the latter mode of representation is *standing in for* representation in the political sphere. We must speak here (and perhaps generally in postmodern culture) of a certain displacement of the political which is the condition for the new politics of representation. Hence the *theory* of representation, and the *politics* of representation, have begun to move in quite different directions.

While we may readily acknowledge that the relation of theory to practice is never easy to specify, we may also wonder whether practice is really condemned to invoke theoretical assumptions so manifestly deficient as those which govern liberal pluralist practice, in its present incarnation as "identity politics." Consider, for example, the invocation of "race, class, and gender" as the categories which are supposed to explain the historical process of canon formation. It would be difficult to deny that the canon critique's assumption of the text's transparency to the race, gender, or class experience of the author has been instrumental in the short term, in that this assumption has served as the immediate basis for canonical revision; but the ubiquitous invocation of these categories of social identity continually defers their theoretical discrimination from each other on behalf of whatever political work is being done by pronouncing their names in the same breath as practice. But what work is that? What political work requires the deferral of theory, despite the fact that one must always gesture to some future, as yet unelaborated, analysis of the *relations* between race, class, or gender? It is not so much that such analyses are presently unavailable—in fact, they are!¹⁶—but that in the context of canonical critique and revision they have no obvious application. In that context the equation of all minority writers as "noncanonical" brings their social identities into ontological correspondences, and equates their works as the expression of analogous experiences of marginalization. For the present, it would appear that there is much greater pressure to equate the social identities of minority authors than to distinguish them in a systemic analysis of the modes of domination specific to different social groups.

The telegraphic invocation of race/class/gender is the symptom of just the failure to develop a systemic analysis that would integrate the distinctions and nuances of social theory into the practice of canonical revision. We can indicate briefly here what is at stake in the difference between a Marxist/post-Marxist and a liberal critique of the canon by insisting upon the theoretical and practical incommensurability of the terms race, class, and gender: the modes of domination and exploitation specific to each of these socially defined minorities thus cannot be redressed by the *same* strategy of representation. It is by no means evident that the representation of blacks in the literary canon, for example, has quite the same social effects

as the representation of women, precisely because the representation of blacks in the *university* is not commensurable with the representation of women. It remains difficult, if not impossible, within a pluralist critique to express the practical political implications of the fact that race and gender do not merely signify analogous experiences of marginalization but incommensurable modes of social identification.¹⁷ Even within the category of race, socially constructed racial identities are as different as the modes of racism specific to the oppression of different races (and these modes are obviously very different). A politics presuming the ontological indifference of all minority social identities as defining oppressed or dominated groups, a politics in which differences are sublimated in the constitution of a minority identity (the identity politics which is increasingly being questioned within feminism itself)¹⁸ can recover the differences between social identities only on the basis of common and therefore commensurable experiences of marginalization, which experiences in turn yield a political practice that consists largely of *affirming* the identities specific to those experiences. For this reason the differences or antagonisms that exist within and between dominated social groups tend to become the basis for the constitution of new social identities or subgroups, rather than the occasion for an analysis of the systemic nature of social antagonisms. This point has been made with particular persuasiveness by Peter Osborne, whose discussion of Laclau and Mouffe's version of identity politics is worth quoting at some length:

Claiming an "identity" on the basis of the experience of a specific oppression is seen here as the ground for a wholly new kind of politics, for which the affirmation and validation of experiences of "difference" are at least as important as the analysis of the basis of oppression and its location within the perspective of a wider oppositional movement—if not more so. On this model, oppressed social identities are transformed *directly* into oppositional political identities through a celebration of difference which inverts the prevailing structure of value but leaves the structure of differences untouched.

... the problem with [this] position is that it tends to reduce radical politics to the expression of oppressed subjectivities, and thereby to lead to the construction of moralistic, and often simply additive, "hierarchies of oppression," whereby the political significance attributed to the views of particular individuals is proportional to the sum of their oppressions. Such a tendency both positively encourages a fragmentation of political agency and harbours the danger of

exacerbating conflicts between oppressed groups. It also makes group demands readily recuperable by the competitive interest-group politics of a liberal pluralism.¹⁹

Granted the theoretical perspicacity of Laclau and Mouffe's analysis of the category of social identity, that analysis, in Osborne's view, fails to produce anything like a practical politics; hence the gesture toward the coalition politics of "hegemony" provides no indication of any expressly *political* means for the formation of such coalitions and falls back upon the same practice of affirming discrete and autonomous social identities their own theory subjects to a definitive critique. In Osborne's formulation, such a politics "ends up *reducing* political to social identities."²⁰ This reservation is worth emphasizing, not because it vitiates every aspect of Laclau and Mouffe's theoretical argument, but because it calls attention to the symptomatic discrepancy between the theory of social identity and the practice of identity politics. If liberal pluralism has discovered that the cultural is always also the political (which it is), it has seldom escaped the trap of reducing the political to the cultural.²¹ There is surely no more exemplary instance of this trajectory of pluralist critique than the canon debate, which remains preeminently an expression of identity politics.

The above argument may explain why a culturalist politics, though it glances worriedly at the phenomenon of class, has in practice never devised a politics that would arise from a class "identity." For while it is easy enough to conceive of a self-affirmative racial or sexual identity, it makes very little sense to posit an affirmative lower-class identity, as such an identity would have to be grounded in the experience of deprivation *per se*. Acknowledging the existence of admirable and even heroic elements of working-class culture, the *affirmation* of lower-class identity is hardly compatible with a program for the abolition of want. The incommensurability of the category of class with that of race or gender (class cannot be constructed as a social identity in the *same way* as race or gender because it is not, in the current affirmative sense, a "social identity" at all) does not, on the other hand, disenable a description of the relation between these social modalities. This was after all the problem sociology once addressed by means of the distinction between class and *status*. The current equation of gender, race, and class as commensurable minority identities effaces just this structural distinction.

The underlying theoretical problem here, one might speculate, is the result of an as yet unacknowledged theoretical slippage between the concepts of "subject" and "identity." While it is typical enough for current practice to use these terms interchangeably, it is worth recalling that the problematic of the subject derives from theoretical projects which were at the time

of their inception (in the 1960s) explicitly Marxist or psychoanalytic. As these projects were assimilated into American liberal pluralist discourse, the problematic of the subject was more or less displaced by that of identity, or simply confused with that concept. This confusion is evident in the argument sometimes expressed within feminist thought, that theory's overthrow of the autonomous subject somehow conflicts with a feminist political practice. That overthrow might on the contrary have been the *basis* for such a practice. Without reprising at this point the various debates within the critique of the subject, we can say that the problematic of the subject always emphasized the complex formation of subject positions by unconscious processes or by impersonal forms of social structuration. The politics implied by such a theoretical problematic was always addressed to the exposure of these unconscious or structural modes of subject formation. The problematic of identity, on the other hand, insofar as it has developed a voluntarist politics of self-affirmation, has little use for the subject of Marxist or psychoanalytic theory. This is not to say that the latter theories do not continue to circulate alongside a liberal pluralist practice, but that their actual incompatibility with that practice tends to go unrecognized. The fact that identity politics is brought up short before the concept of class suggests the limit, in one direction, of the concept of identity, but it also argues for the urgency of theorizing the relation between subject and identity, since "identification" (whether affirmative, negative, or in Laclau and Mouffe's view, constitutively incomplete) belongs to the process of subject formation as one of its moments.²²

Meanwhile, we may say that the incommensurability of different subject formations (and, likewise, the "experiences" of these subjects) is the condition for an accurate description of the systemic relations between race, class, and gender. In the context of the present critique of the canon, the actual incommensurability of these categories as *author*-identities remains to be acknowledged. The fact of incommensurability explains why the revisionist critique of the canon has in practice been incapable of identifying "noncanonical" works by lower-class writers who are not already identified by race or gender. For how would such "identities" be registered as self-affirmative? The name of "D. H. Lawrence," for example, may signify in the discourse of canonical critique a white author or a European author, but it does not usually signify a writer whose origins are working-class. Within the discourse of liberal pluralism, with its voluntarist politics of self-affirmation, the category of class in the invocation of race/class/gender is likely to remain merely empty. But this fact only confirms that the critique of the canon does indeed belong to a liberal pluralist discourse, within which, as Gregor McLennan has pointed out, the category of class has been systematically repressed.²³

[Canon Revision or Research Program?]

We are in a position now to make the even stronger claim that the category of "social identity" is entirely inadequate to explain how particular works become canonical in the first place, in a particular set of historical conditions. Let us approach this question first from its end point, from the canonical history currently being made in the classroom: What does it mean in the real conditions of institutional practice to open the syllabus of canonical works to works regarded as "noncanonical," that is, to works by authors belonging to socially defined minorities? I would suggest that the objective of canonical revision entails in practice shifting the weight of the syllabus from older works to *modern* works, since what is in question for us are *new* social identities and new writers. In fact, the history of the literary curriculum has always been characterized by a tendency to modernize the syllabus at the expense of older works. The "opening" of the classical curriculum to vernacular writing in the eighteenth-century primary-school system, in response to certain cultural demands of the nascent bourgeoisie, is one momentous example, ultimately responsible for displacing many Greek and Roman works from the curriculum altogether. Closer at hand, and slightly less momentous, are the generic modernizations of the canon, the inclusion of the novel in syllabi of the later nineteenth century, or film since the 1960s. (By defining canonicity as determined by the social identity of the author, the current critique of the canon both discovers, and misrepresents, the obvious fact that the older literature, the less likely it will be that texts by socially defined minorities exist in sufficient numbers to produce a "representative" canon. Yet the historical reasons for this fact are insufficiently acknowledged for their theoretical and practical implications.) The reason more women authors, for example, are not represented in older literatures is not primarily that their works were routinely excluded by invidious or prejudicial standards of evaluation, "excluded" as a consequence of their social identity as women. The historical reason is that, with few exceptions before the eighteenth century, women were routinely excluded from *access to literacy*, or were proscribed from composition or publication in the genres considered to be serious rather than ephemeral. If current research has recovered a number of otherwise forgotten women writers from the period before the eighteenth century, this fact is not directly related to canon formation as a process of selection or exclusion on the basis of social identity, but to the present institutional context of a valid and interesting *research program* whose subject is the history of women writers and writing. No other defense is required for studying these writers than the aims of the research program (and these could well be *political* aims). It is not necessary to claim canonical status for noncanonical works in order to justify their study, as the archive has always been the resource of

historical scholarship. If the feminist research program has recovered from the archives the works of a number of women writers now all but forgotten, such as Lady Mary Wroth or Katherine Philips, it must also be borne in mind that the archives preserve (and bury) hundreds and thousands of writers, of various social origins and identities. The question for us, in reconsidering the rhetoric of canon revision, is why any particular noncanonical author discovered by a research program has to be presented as *excluded* from the canon. The hypothesis of exclusion has more to do with a misrecognition of the political work accomplished by the research program than with any actual historical circumstances of judgment.²⁴ But this misrecognition itself has certain political consequences, since it effaces the historical significance of literacy in the history of writers and writing.

The social conditions governing access to literacy before the emergence of the middle-class educational system determined that the greater number of writers, *canonical* or *noncanonical*, were men. The number of canonical texts represents in turn only the minutest percentage of these works, and the body of canonical authors could never in that case have reflected the actual social diversity of their times or places—not even, it might be added, in the case of women writers of the early modern period, who were literate by and large as a consequence of being aristocratic.²⁵ The retroconstruction of early modern women writers as expressing the marginalized experience of women in general, as though the difference between an aristocratic woman and a peasant were indifferent, is thus only the obverse of the error identifying the writings of these women as excluded from the canon merely as a consequence of the fact that they were written by women. If much feminist theory now problematizes the category of “woman” itself, what theoretical inhibition disallows the problematization of the “woman writer” in the canon debate?²⁶

One might nevertheless want to object here that even if the most socially consequential process of exclusion occurs primarily at the level of access to literacy, it might still be the case that canon formation functions to exclude works by minority writers who do manage to acquire the means of literary production. For reasons I shall now indicate, even this qualified hypothesis is in crucial ways inaccurate. It is without question true that some past writers have suffered an undeserved oblivion; indeed the history of canon formation offers many examples of writers rediscovered after periods of obscurity. What seems dubious in historical context is that such cases can be *generally* explained by invoking the categories of race, class, or gender as the immediate criteria of inclusion or exclusion. These categories might well explain at the present time why some writers have been recovered

from the archive, but not necessarily why they ceased to be read. Nor does the circumstance of their being read now mean that they have become canonical—only that they are read now.

Let us consider once again the category of gender as a hypothetical criterion for exclusion from the canon: The existence of canonical women authors, even before the revisionary movement of the last decade, invalidates in strictly logical terms the category of gender as a *general* criterion of exclusion; which is to say that in the case of an excluded woman author, it will not be sufficient merely to invoke the category of gender in order to explain the lack of canonical status. The principle that explains the exclusion of Harriet Beecher Stowe from the canon on the basis of gender cannot really account for the complexity of the historical circumstances governing the reception of Stowe's work, for the same reason that it cannot account for the counterexample of Jane Austen's canonical status. This is not to say that the category of gender is not a *factor* in the subsequent reputation of Stowe, or of any woman author. We can expect that many factors will enter into the situation of the reception of a given author's work, and that these factors will advance and recede at different moments in the history of the work's reception. This point can be briefly underscored by citing the famous opening sentence of F. R. Leavis's *The Great Tradition*, whose canonical intentions are entirely explicit: “The great English novelists are Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James and Joseph Conrad—to stop for the moment at that comparatively safe point in history.”²⁷ Leavis seems not to be thinking of gender at all in pronouncing his canonical judgments. His project rather has to do, as readers of Leavis know, with defining a High Cultural novelistic canon in opposition to the deprecations of what he sees as the emergence concurrently of modern mass culture and the novel (his canonical list excludes Dickens on the grounds of his mass cultural affiliations, despite his “great genius”). We can hardly attribute the apparently equal representation of men and women authors in Leavis's novelistic canon to the absence of bias, much less to any feminist sympathy. The point of the example is that the historical process of canon formation, even or especially at the moment of institutional judgment, is too complex to be reduced to determination by the single factor of the social identity of the author.

If the social identity of the author appears to us now as the condition of canonicity or noncanonicity, this is as much as to say that the categories of race and gender are contemporary conditions of canon formation; they are historically specific. These categories will not bind future critics either to the canonical choices of the present or to the categories of liberal pluralist critique. Social identities are themselves historically constructed; they

mean different things at different historical moments, and thus the relation of different social groups to such cultural entitlements as literacy will be differently constructed at different times. Acknowledging the conditional force of literacy in the history of canon formation would thus disallow us from ever assuming that the field of writing is a kind of *plenum*, a textual repetition of social diversity, where everyone has access to the means of literary production and works ask only to be judged fairly. The fact that the field of writing is not such a *plenum* is a social fact but also an *institutional* fact. Linda Nochlin arrives at much the same conclusion in rejecting the premise of the question, "Why are there no great women artists?" The answer to this question lies not in the supposition that there must exist many unjustly forgotten great women artists but in reckoning the social consequences for women of "our institutions and our education."²⁸ An "institutional" fact such as literacy has everything to do with the relation of "exclusion" to social identity; but exclusion should be defined not as exclusion from representation but from access to the *means of cultural production*. I will define literacy accordingly throughout this book not simply as the capacity to read but as the *systematic regulation of reading and writing*, a complex social phenomenon corresponding to the following set of questions: Who reads? What do they read? How do they read? In what social and institutional circumstances? Who writes? In what social and institutional contexts? For whom?²⁹

The question of literacy foregrounds what is at stake in the difference between a pluralist and a Marxist/post-Marxist conception of canon formation: for literacy is a question of the distribution of cultural goods rather than of the representation of cultural images.³⁰ From the point of view of such a materialist critique, it would seem that pluralism can only apprehend the history of canon formation as a history of consumption, the history of the judgment of cultural products. But if the socially unrepresentative content of the canon really has to do in the first place with how access to the means of literary production is socially regulated, a different history of canon formation will be necessary, one in which social identities are historical categories determined as much by the system of production as by consumption. The present tendency to restrict canonical critique to the reception of images attests to the absence of any theoretical understanding of the relation between a real historical silence—exclusion from the means of literary production—and the sphere of reception, in this case, the university. What becomes visible there is an immense collection of works, among which only a few can be "canonical," selected for inclusion within the curriculum of literary study. A critique which is confined to the level of consumption must necessarily misrepresent the historicity of literary

production, the systemic effects of the *educational system* in the determination of who writes and who reads, as well as what gets read, and in what contexts. The educational institution performs the social function of systematically regulating the practices of reading and writing by governing access to the means of literary production as well as to the means of consumption (the knowledge required to read historical works). Nothing confirms the failure to ground the critique of the canon in a systemic analysis of the educational system more than the failure to reflect upon the most salient fact of the canon debate, its locus in the university. No one speaks there of the relation between canonical revision and the primary levels of the educational system, where for a much larger part of the population the content of the university curriculum is simply irrelevant. If literacy is a problem of the distribution of cultural resources, this problem is very much larger than the problem addressed by a politics of "representation in the canon."

Canonical and Noncanonical Values

In recent years the distinction between canonical and noncanonical works has been invoked to organize the curriculum in a new way, by institutionalizing that distinction in distinct syllabi. It would be difficult to overestimate the significance of this second phase of canonical critique, since it discovered a new project of representation for the curriculum. While the category of social identity continued to be employed to account for the historical lack of representation in the canon, it was no longer necessary to rectify that circumstance solely by the strategy of inclusion. In the second phase of canonical critique, the curriculum became representative in another sense, by reflecting the *actual* division of the social order into dominant and dominated social groups, each now represented by its own syllabus of works. In this context of representation, the "values" according to which works were canonized could themselves be called into question or declared to be simply incommensurable with the "values" embodied in subordinate cultures. This phase of canonical critique was raised to the level of theory in Barbara Herrnstein Smith's *Contingencies of Value*, which argues that works cannot become canonical unless they are seen to endorse the hegemonic or ideological values of dominant social groups:

since those with cultural power tend to be members of socially, economically, and politically established classes . . . the texts that survive will tend to be those that appear to reflect and reinforce establishment ideologies. . . they would not be found to please long and well if they were seen *radically* to undercut es-

establishment interests, or *effectively* to subvert the ideologies that support them.³¹

Conversely, noncanonical works can be seen to express values which are transgressive, subversive, antihegemonic. While it would be easy enough to demonstrate that most historically noncanonical works are not characterized by any such political effectivity, we need to remember that the critique of the canon was never concerned with most noncanonical works, only with those works already marked by the socially defined minority identity of their authors. If one can successfully extend the critique of the canon from the category of social identity to the category of *cultural value*, then it would indeed follow that the inclusion of noncanonical works in the canon misrepresents the social significance of the canon by failing to recognize it as the inevitable embodiment of hegemonic cultural values. On this account canonical and noncanonical works are by definition mutually exclusive; they confront each other in an internally divided curriculum in the same way that hegemonic culture confronts nonhegemonic subcultures in the larger social order.

The canon debate has given rise in recent years to a general critique of values, particularly "aesthetic" value, on grounds both philosophical and sociopolitical, a critique well exemplified by Herrnstein Smith's neorealist position; but I should like to postpone until a later chapter a full consideration of that theoretical by-product of the debate, since what is at issue in the reassertion of cultural "relativism" is the very possibility of a specifically aesthetic value. It will not be necessary here either to dismiss or to defend that possibility in order to register a large reservation about the mapping of the distinction between canonical and noncanonical texts onto specific cultures and their values. It will suffice to open the terrain of this reservation to note a certain peculiar convergence in the characterization of the canon in the rhetoric of both progressive critique and reactionary defense. Here, for example, is the egregious William Bennett, whose polemics in the 1980s as director of the NEH, and later as secretary of education, popularized the revanchist reaction to curricular revision:

For some 15 to 20 years now there had been a serious degree of embarrassment, of distancing, even of repudiation of that culture on the part of many of the people whose responsibility, one would think, is to transmit it. Many people in our colleges and universities aren't comfortable with the ideals of Western civilization.

Bennett stands up and says, "You know, I really think people should be familiar with Homer and Shakespeare and George

Eliot and Jane Austen," and they say, "We don't do that any more. Why should we have to do that?" All right, if the purpose of the institution is not to transmit that culture, then what is the institution's purpose?³²

Such remarks, presented more formally in the NEH publication "To Reclaim a Legacy," have been widely provoking, but not because Bennett's conception of what constitutes cultural value has itself been contested. On the contrary, pluralist critics of the canon would agree that canonical works do represent the "ideals of Western civilization," and that these ideals or values constitute a "culture." Whether Homer, Shakespeare, Eliot, and Austen actually express in some homogeneous way a culture of "Western civilization" is not in question on either side of the debate.

In this circumstance it has become surprisingly difficult to define a progressive political rationale for the teaching of canonical texts. Leaving aside the option of not teaching them at all (an entirely logical alternative, if the teaching of canonical texts actually disseminates hegemonic values), progressively inclined teachers of these texts must regroup the politics of their pedagogy on assumptions that are themselves theoretically weak. Hence it might seem necessary to assume that a politically progressive reading will consist of *exposing* the hegemonic values of canonical works. Whenever liberal pluralist critique slides into such a characterization of its object, we can say that it has found its way back to what was once considered to be a "vulgar" Marxism; but the more important point is that such a rediscovery of "reflection theory" is determined by the internal logic of pluralism itself, by its theory of representation as reflection, as image.

Just as weak theoretically is the liberal position that claims for canonical texts an intrinsic subversiveness, that discovers in the intrinsically "liberating" effect of these texts the reason of their canonicity.³³ The deficiency of this compromise with the rhetoric of canonical critique is apparent as soon as its genealogical relation to the liberalism of the old bourgeoisie is revealed. For that apparently egalitarian ideology was always implicitly "elitist," in the sense that it divided the population into those who were capable of being so liberated and those who were not. Thus the defense of the canon on these grounds will inevitably resurrect the charge of elitism, as the bad conscience of its own bad theory, as in the following statement: "If we are alert to these elements of freedom in the canon of great literature, the charge of elitism will be less destructive of cultural values, and we will not have to stand mute before claims that inarticulateness, ignorance, occult mumbling, and loutishness are just as good as fine literature."³⁴ The latter author fears becoming what he has been made to behold: the condition of

muteness is nothing other than exclusion from literary production. But why should the coming-into-writing of those formerly excluded from the means of literary production be experienced as the degeneration of cultural values? Or, on the other hand, why must the writing of minority authors be considered *intrinsically* subversive, as the overturning of supposedly hegemonic values represented by Homer or Shakespeare? These alternatives are only enjoined upon us by the supposition that canonical works can be characterized politically in some universal way, as either progressive or regressive in their social effects.

The virtual agreement of the progressive and the reactionary participants in the canon debate about the relation between culture and value suggests that the positions of these antagonists are more complexly interrelated than a narrative of hegemony and resistance would imply. We will have to say rather that the two positions are mutually constitutive, and even more that they both fall well within the normative assumptions of American political culture, even within the normative principles of liberal pluralism. (It is important to remember in this context that even the reactionary defenders of the canon are scrupulous to "include" token minority works in their conception of "Western civilization".)³⁵ Here I would like to consider briefly three propositions about cultural value to which both progressive and reactionary critics would presumably assent, in order to demonstrate that these propositions are questionable, on whatever side of the debate they happen to be argued.

1. *Canonical texts are the repositories of cultural values.* The equation of the values expressed in a work with the value of the work is assumed by both the revanchists and the revisionists when they conceive literary texts as the means of transmitting specific values in the classroom. It is certainly the case that at the primary levels of the educational system "values" are simply decanted from carefully chosen texts which are not always the same texts taught at higher levels. In the stratosphere of pluralist pedagogy, the same reified values are often exposed and ritually qualified, subverted, or rejected, as though the work were simply the container of such values. What fails to be noted about this institutional arrangement is that the pedagogic relation between value and the literary work is very much keyed to the level of the educational system. At the level of the graduate school and the professional conference, the educational capital specific to that level can be signalled by a certain refusal of the rhetoric of "great works" characteristic of the lower levels of the system. Hence Michael Ryan, commenting on the surprising number of sessions at the 1984 MLA convention critical of the canonical epic tradition, can present the thesis that the epic is "a renowned bastion of male self-aggrandizement" as merely the con-

sensus of these sessions.³⁶ Yet, as I hope to demonstrate more fully at a later point in this argument, the meaning of patriarchal or misogynist values, in contradistinction to "Homeric" values, is enormously attenuated when spread over thousands of years and dozens of social formations. "Homeric values" are not transmitted to students any more than Homer expresses immediately the "ideals of Western civilization." The latter ideals are specific to individual social formations, to successive ideologies of tradition, and they are expressed in determinate social conditions of reading. These conditions are of course pedagogic, but it is a measure of the theoretical deficiency of the canon critique that "values" transmitted in the classroom can simply be conflated with the contents of historical works.³⁷

2. *The selection of texts is the selection of values.* Within the world of reified and ahistorical values, aesthetic value confronts the reader, the consumer of values, as just another value, not in any conceivable way more important than the value of justice or social equality. Thus Lillian Robinson writes of the feminist critique of the canon: "At its angriest, none of this reinterpretation offers a fundamental challenge to the canon as canon; although it posits new values, it never suggests that, in the light of those values, we ought to reconsider whether the great monuments are really so great, after all."³⁸ The desirability of such a reconsideration is hinted by Nina Baym, on behalf of a version of feminist criticism operating vigorously in the last two decades in the field of canon revision: "it is time perhaps . . . to reexamine the grounds upon which certain hallowed American classics have been called great."³⁹ The distinction between masculine and feminine values has been relatively easy to superimpose upon the field of writing, especially as women writers in the modern European languages emerged earlier than writers of other minority groups. There is accordingly a larger body of writing by women to organize in alternative canonical form, and in such a way as to confirm the alignment of canonical and noncanonical texts with hegemonic and antihegemonic values.

The entrance of women into literary culture, however, is not a simple transition to an unambiguous literacy, as though writing were the neutral medium for the conveyance of gendered values. To acknowledge only the most conspicuous complication of the transition, for example, one might invoke, as does Myra Jehlen in her critique of Nina Baym, the historical relation between writing by women and the division of public writing into "serious" and "popular" genres; for Jehlen this is a question of women's "relationship to writing as such."⁴⁰ The distinction between serious and popular writing is a condition of canonicity; it belongs to the history of literacy, of the systematic regulation of reading and writing, as the adaptation of that system's regulatory procedures to social conditions in which

the practice of writing is no longer confined to a scribal class. The explosion of popular writing in the eighteenth century was an effect of the fact that writing itself was becoming "popular." Thus the generic category of the popular continues to bear the stigma of nonwriting, of mere orality, within writing itself, since popular works are consumed, from the point of view of High Culture, as the textual simulacra of ephemeral speech. This is not to say anything of the actual importance of popular writing, of its multiple social effects, or of why one may wish to read it or study it. It should also be stressed that the distinction between serious and popular is a far less stable mechanism for enforcing social stratification than the sexual hierarchy itself, and it thus permits (because it cannot always prevent) the production of "serious" works by strategically placed members of groups to whom it means to assign devalorized textual practices—a contradiction marking the history of writing by women as the relation between their writing and the novel, itself a noncanonical genre until the end of the nineteenth century. The canonization of novels written by women was thus conditional upon the legitimization of the novel form, the canonization of a popular genre.

Considerably more would need to be said here in order to give even a brief creditable account of hierarchizing procedures within the field of writing and their complex relation to social stratification; but the above remarks should indicate at the least how unhistorical it is to claim, as Jane Tompkins does in *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction*, that popular fiction "has been rigorously excluded from the ranks of 'serious' literary works,"⁴¹ as though the two categories did not define each other in a system of literary production. Or to claim that the evaluation of popular writing by women can be subjected to a canonical reversal simply by revaluing the values expressed in these works: "My own embrace of the conventional led me to value everything that criticism taught me to despise" (xvi). Tompkins's project of "reconstituting the notion of value in literary works" dissolves the aesthetic, in a gesture now foundational in the critique of canon formation, by substituting for it a pseudo-historicism disguising the fact that the values being "revalued" are very simply *contemporary* values: "Instead of asking whether a work is unified or discontinuous, subtle, complex, or profound, one wants to know, first, whether it was successful in achieving its aims; and second, whether its aims were good or bad" (xvii). Hence the assertion that Susan Warner and Harriet Beecher Stowe offer "in certain cases a critique of American society far more devastating than any delivered by better-known critics such as Hawthorne and Melville" is defended not on the basis of a symptomatic reading of their texts in historical context, but on explicitly moral grounds, namely the af-

firmation of such values as the "sanctity of motherhood and the family" or "the saving power of Christian love" (145). If one demurs at endorsing these values, one need not look beneath this ground of value for a mythical elephant or tortoise, a fact perhaps not interesting with respect to the values in question but immediately indicative that values in this context always mean *moral* values.

The reversion to moralism is determined by the equation of text-selection with value-selection. For this reason much of what passes for political analysis of historically canonical works is nothing more than the passing of moral judgment on them. The critique of the canon moves quickly to reassert absolute notions of good and evil; the overturning of Kant's autonomous aesthetic is brought up short before Nietzsche's critique of morality. One need only compare Tompkins's theory of canon formation with Hans Robert Jauss's equally revisionary concept of "horizontal change" to see that a fall into moralism will occur regardless of what values are set against the category of the aesthetic. Tompkins argues that the "text succeeds or fails on the basis of the 'fit' with features of its immediate context, on the degree to which it provokes the desired response, and not in relation to unchanging formal, psychological, or philosophical standards of complexity, or truth, or correctness" (xviii). Her statement yields a spectacular but in the end illusory contrast to Jauss's historicization of literary tradition:

The distance between the horizon of expectations and the work, between the familiarity of previous aesthetic experience and the "horizontal change" demanded by reception of the new work, determines the artistic character of a literary work, according to an aesthetics of reception: to the degree that this distance decreases, and no turn toward the horizon of yet-unknown experience is demanded of this receiving consciousness, the closer the work comes to the sphere of "culinary" or entertainment art.⁴²

The difference between Jauss and Tompkins disappears entirely when Jauss comes to define how it is that a work can frustrate the expectations of its initial readers. The formal innovation Jauss admires rather more than Tompkins (his example is Flaubert's *style indirect libre*, valued over the conventionality of Feydeau) is finally only the vehicle for the introduction of new moral values, which may be "immoral" from the standpoint of the old: "If one looks at the moments in history when literary works toppled the taboos of the ruling morals or offered readers new solutions for the moral casuistry of his lived praxis, which thereafter could be sanctioned by

the consensus of all readers in the society, then a still little-studied area of research opens itself up to the literary historian" (454). Whatever pleasure is produced by *style indirect libre*, or style as such, is thoroughly chastened in this Whiggish history of "the competitive relationship between literature and canonized morals." If Jauss's theory can then be used to *devalue* the same popular works Tompkins desires to revalue as the embodiment of excluded, counterhegemonic values, this paradox has less to do with any absolute difference between these two critics than with the inadequacy of reductively moralistic theories to account for the process of canon formation.

3. *Value must be either intrinsic or extrinsic to the work.* As we have just noted, the Kantian aesthetic is distantly engaged in the critique of canon formation by the argument that value is not intrinsic but rather relative, contingent, subjective, contextual, or, in other words, extrinsic. The distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic value accords well at the level of pluralist theory with a historical narrative of inclusion or exclusion. According to that narrative, the canonical judgments of dominant groups have been typically justified by an appeal to transcendent norms of judgment, as though history itself were the judge of works, or as though individuals could really transcend the conditions of their specific judgments. Yet the exploding of such fictions of intrinsic, universal, or transcendent value, which was a necessary means of recovering a sense of the historicity of judgment, does not necessarily clarify the actual circumstances in which judgments are made and have effect. Further, the strategy of exposing intrinsic value as simply extrinsic has the curious effect of disabling at the outset any project of revaluation, where the object revalued is the work, and not (as in Tompkins) other extrinsic (moral) values. In the case of devalued or forgotten works, revaluation typically appeals to the "real" value or quality of the work; nothing other than a strong assertion of such value is likely to succeed in the actual institutional circumstances of canonical revision. Recently it has been possible to argue that the process of valuation is grounded in the consensus of a particular community where, for the members of such a community, such values function as though they were absolute. On this account values are indeed extrinsic to the work but they are at the same time intrinsic or internal to what Stanley Fish calls, in the most prominent version of this argument, an "interpretive community."⁴³ Hence it is only in the *absence* of consensus that a distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic value need arise at all with reference to particular works. Elizabeth Meese discovers the answer to the vexing question of "the failure of so many feminist commentaries aimed at demonstrating the stature of neglected works by women" in Fish's unapologetic observation

that "the act of recognizing literature . . . proceeds from a collective decision as to what will count as literature, a decision that will be in force only so long as a community of readers and believers continues to abide by it."⁴⁴ Such an argument implies that a different community of readers—women readers, for example—will very likely express different values by valuing different works, that is, by positing a different canon of "literature." Having faced the fact that judgments cannot be reconciled under a universal norm of value, or by a surreptitious appeal to a transcendent court of judgment, advocates of this theory need no longer be troubled by the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic value: judgment can always be grounded in some community or other.⁴⁵

One can see in retrospect that the formulation of such notions as that of the "interpretive community" provided an early theoretical justification for the separatist phase of canon critique, since it is only necessary to claim that the university is host to more than one "interpretive community" in order to justify the institutionalization of different canons—canons of the noncanonical. Once consensus is achieved by any "community of readers," however, that community enters into what looks like a state of mass delusion, in which valuation can proceed without reference to any constraints imposed by the social function of the school itself or by the difficulty of constituting a community sufficiently homogeneous in its interests or identity to operate by consensus. Hence those who dissent from a given consensus are compelled either to fall back upon assertions of the innate value of the cultural products they value or to constitute themselves as another distinct "community of readers"—a sequence of action and reaction repeatedly characterizing the canon debate. Shall we not say in this circumstance that "consensus" has the same relation to value within a particular "interpretive community" as the notion of transcendent value once had for a "community of readers" which imagined itself to be the only such community? But one only has to consider the fact that value judgments can and do come into conflict *within* an interpretive community in order to call into question the notion of consensus as the name for how judgments achieve canonizing force. Literary culture in general, and the university in particular, are by no means structurally organized to express the consensus of a community; these social and institutional sites are complex hierarchies in which the position and privilege of judgment are objects of competitive struggles.

The problem of value is scarcely resolved by recourse to the notion of the community as its hypothetical ground. On the contrary, consensus is the pleasant ideological shift by which social determinations are mystified as "collective decisions" that are finally only the sum of individual decisions.

In this polity texts confront readers in an artificial social vacuum like the space of the voting booth, behind the curtain of private judgment. Disagreements about value within such a pseudodemocracy are comfortably absorbed in a continuous plebiscite within which even the coming to power of the loyal opposition changes nothing structurally, since there is no theoretical limit to the number of "interpretive communities," and since each one believes itself to function in exactly the same way, by consensus. The democratic metaphor is quite potent here, since the conflation of judgment with a kind of election betrays the fact that the terms of the canon debate are entirely determined by the basic assumptions of liberal pluralism.⁴⁶ This is why the critique of the canon has always constructed the history of canon formation as a conspiracy of judgment, a secret and exclusive ballot by which literary works are chosen for canonization because their authors belong to the same social group as the judges themselves, or because these works express the values of the dominant group.⁴⁷ The poverty of this historical reconstruction determines the limits of the response to it—the notion that dominated groups must choose their own canonical works by a kind of pseudo-election or "consensus." If the process of judgment is more complicated than the electoral analogy suggests, this model of canon formation will have to be discarded. While the selection of texts for preservation certainly does presuppose acts of judgment, which are indeed complex psychic and social events subject to many kinds of determination, these acts are necessary rather than sufficient to constitute a process of canon formation. An individual's judgment that a work is great does nothing in itself to preserve that work, unless that judgment is made in a certain institutional context, a setting in which it is possible to insure the reproduction of the work, its continual reintroduction to generations of readers. The work of preservation has other, more complex social contexts than the immediate responses of readers, even communities of readers, to texts; as we shall see, these institutional contexts shape and constrain judgment according to *institutional* agendas, and in such a way that the selection of texts never represents merely the consensus of a community of readers, either dominant or subordinate. The scene in which a group of readers, defined by a common social identity and common values, confronts a group of texts with the intention of making a judgment as to canonicity, is an *imaginary* scene. That imaginary scene must now be set against what happens in a real place, the school.

The Pedagogic Imaginary

The socioinstitutional constraints upon the process of canon formation are well exemplified by such welcome and necessary projects as the Norton

Anthology of Literature by Women, or the forthcoming *Norton Anthology of Afro-American Literature*. The constituency for these anthologies will continue to consist largely of university students, who will use them as textbooks, or as instruments of research. This fact is a condition for the production of both anthologies, but it is a condition whose force is easily forgotten when the critique of the canon assumes that the selection of texts for canonicity represents the consensus of some community, either dominant or subordinate, and therefore that the anthologies represent "alternative canons." For many compelling social reasons neither the *Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* nor the *Norton Anthology of Afro-American Literature* can represent the consensus of hypothetical communities of women or Afro-Americans. The responsibility of selecting texts for the purpose of defining a tradition of literature by women, or by Afro-American writers, resides much more narrowly in the editors of the anthologies, whose relation to female or Afro-American culture is considerably more complex than might be indicated by the term "representation." This circumstance is neither scandalous nor extraordinary; it means nothing more than that judgments with canonical force are institutionally located.⁴⁸

It is nevertheless an interesting consequence of the canon debate that it has called every act of judgment into question, not simply because judgment is always historical, local, or institutional, but more profoundly because it is exercised at all. The latter position is expressed unequivocally by a participant in the debate over the Stanford "Western Culture" course:

The notion of a core list is inherently flawed, regardless of what kinds of works it includes or excludes. It is flawed because such a list undermines the critical stance that we wish students to take toward the materials they read. . . . A course with such readings creates two sets of books, those privileged by being on the list and those not worthy of inclusion. Regardless of the good intentions of those who create such lists, the students have not viewed and will not view these separate categories as equal.⁴⁹

It is difficult to see how the logic of such an argument would allow any works to be taught, since every syllabus of study selects some works rather than others. The curious logic of this argument conflates the syllabus, a selection of texts for study in a particular institutional context, with the canon itself—the sum total of works supposed to be "great." A syllabus will necessarily be limited by the constraints of a particular class and its rubric, even by the irreducibly material constraint that only so much can be

read or studied in a given class. In no classroom is the “canon” itself the object of study. Where does it appear, then? It would be better to say that the canon is an *imaginary* totality of works. No one has access to the canon as a totality. This fact is true in the trivial sense that no one ever reads every canonical work; no one can, because the works invoked as canonical change continually according to many different occasions of judgment or contestation. What this means is that the canon is never other than an imaginary list; it never appears as a complete and uncontested list in any particular time and place, not even in the form of the omnibus anthology, which remains a selection from a larger list which does not itself appear anywhere in the anthology’s table of contents. In this context, the distinction between the canonical and the noncanonical can be seen not as the form in which judgments are actually made about individual works, but as an effect of the syllabus as an institutional instrument, the fact that works not included on a given syllabus appear to have no status at all.⁵⁰ The historical condition of literature is that of a complex continuum of major works, minor works, works read primarily in research contexts, works as yet simply shelved in the archive. Anyone who studies historical literatures knows that the archive contains an indefinite number of works of manifest cultural interest and accomplishment. While these works might be regarded as “noncanonical” in some pedagogic contexts—for example, the context of the “great works” survey—their noncanonical status is not necessarily equivalent in anyone’s judgment to a zero-degree of interest or value. The fact that we conventionally recognize as “the canon” only those works included in such survey courses or anthologies as the Norton or the Oxford suggests to what extent the debate about the canon has been driven by institutional agendas, for which the discourse of the “masterpiece” provides such a loud accompaniment. The merest familiarity with historical context brings the continuum of cultural works back into focus and demonstrates that the field of writing does not contain only two kinds of works, either great or of no interest at all. For this reason the category of the “noncanonical” is entirely inadequate to describe the status of works which do not appear in a given syllabus of study.

What does have a concrete location as a list, then, is not the canon but the syllabus, the list of works one reads in a given class, or the curriculum, the list of works one reads in a program of study. When teachers believe they have in some way challenged or overturned the canon and its evaluative principles, what they have always really done is devise or revise a particular syllabus, as it is only through the syllabus that they have any access to the imaginary list which is the canon. While this point is in some respects quite obvious, it nevertheless usefully exposes the fallacy of using a revision

of the syllabus against the *principle* of the canon. So far from being the case that the canon determines the syllabus in the simple sense that the syllabus is constrained to select only from canonical works, it is much more historically accurate to say that the syllabus posits the existence of the canon as its imaginary totality. The imaginary list is projected out of the multiple individual syllabi functioning within individual pedagogic institutions over a relatively extended period of time. Changing the syllabus cannot mean in any historical context overthrowing the canon, because every construction of a syllabus *institutes* once again the process of canon formation.

To illustrate the latter point let us consider at somewhat greater length the much controverted “Western Culture” course offered at Stanford University, since revised so as to include works by various minorities, as well as works by non-Western writers:

ANCIENT WORLD

Required: Strongly recommended:

Hebrew Bible, Genesis
Plato, *Republic*, major portions of books 1–7
Homer, major selections from *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, or both

Thucydides
Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Politics*
Cicero
Virgil, *Aeneid*
Tacitus

At least one Greek tragedy
New Testament, selections, including a gospel

MEDIEVAL AND RENAISSANCE

Required:

Augustine, *Confessions*, 1–9
Dante, *Inferno*
More, *Utopia*
Machiavelli, *The Prince*
Luther, *Christian Liberty*
Galileo, *The Starry Messenger*, *The Assayer*

Strongly recommended:
Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*
Aquinas, selections
A Shakespearean tragedy
Cervantes, *Don Quixote*
Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, *Meditations*
Hobbes, *Leviathan*
Locke, *Second Treatise of Civil Government*

MODERN

Required:
Voltaire, *Candide*

Strongly recommended:
Rousseau, *Social Contract*, *Confessions*, *Emile*

- Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*
 Freud, *Outline of Psychoanalysis, Civilization and Its Discontents*
 Darwin, selections
 Hume, *Enquiries, Dialogues on Natural Religion*
 Goethe, *Faust, Sorrows of Young Werther*
 Nineteenth-century novel
 Mill, *Essay on Liberty, The Subjection of Women*
 Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals, Beyond Good and Evil*

If one glances over the list of works on this syllabus, one sees that no women writers are required (the nineteenth-century novel category makes one slot for a woman available). There are no nonwhite authors (depending upon how one defines the race of St. Augustine—and this question is not an uninteresting complication of our notions of social identity); and the father back one goes in the list, the more likely that the author comes from a privileged class, priestly or noble. Obviously in order to “open” this canon, one would have to *modernize* it, to displace the preponderance of works from earlier to later. And there are of course many good reasons to do so. The pressure to modernize the curriculum has succeeded again and again despite the inertial conservatism of the educational institution, and it is this pressure which is largely responsible for many historically significant *exclusions*: The fact that we read Plato but not Xenophon, Virgil but not Statius, has nothing to do with the social identities of Xenophon or Statius, something more to do with later evaluations of their relative interest; but the necessity of choosing between them has everything to do with the modernization of the curriculum, with the imperative of *making room* for such later writers as Locke or Rousseau. The totality of the canon as an imaginary list is always in conflict with the finite materiality of the syllabus, the fact that it is constrained by the limits imposed by its institutional time and space.

Nevertheless this fact has been hard to acknowledge, perhaps because none of us will ever be familiar with more than a fraction of what has been written that might be considered to be worth reading or studying. Everything that counts as “knowledge” is a selection from a continually expanding aggregate. What sense would it make, then, to argue that the Stanford curriculum “excludes” Herodotus, Ovid, two of the three major Greek tragedians, medieval romances, Rabelais, Calvin, Montaigne, Bacon, Kant, Hegel, the Romantic poets, Proust, Joyce, Mann, not to mention Virginia Woolf, Simone Weil, Richard Wright, or Zora Neale Hurston? If one re-

placed some entries in the Stanford syllabus with the names just cited, would the Stanford course have been more (or less) representative of something called “Western Culture”? I would suggest that it would be better to begin a critique of this course with the notion of Western culture, the umbrella term under which all these different texts take shelter from the labor of critique, the labor of reading. (It is perhaps worth noting here that the concept of Western culture is itself of relatively recent origin—perhaps no earlier than the eighteenth century—and that it is constructed by suppressing the elements of African and Asian culture it has assimilated, as well as the difficult suturing of the Judaic and the Hellenic; but of this I shall have more to say in the next section.) The homogenizing concept of Western culture hints that all these texts are in accord about certain fundamental issues, or that they all share something that might go by the same name. However much they may all be worth reading, one would have to say that they do not necessarily share anything in the way of fundamental notions.⁵¹ It would be absurd to conclude from a critique of the canon that one should not read any particular work; one should of course read as much as one can. But the construction of a syllabus begins with selection; it does not begin with a “process of elimination.” What is excluded from the syllabus is not excluded in the *same way* that an individual is excluded or marginalized as the member of a social minority, socially disenfranchised. What is wrong with the Stanford curriculum has less to do with its inclusions or exclusions than with the fact that it is not and *cannot* be a course on Western culture.⁵² It is because the construction of the syllabus works backward from this notion that it takes the form that it does. Hence, as soon as any of these works begin to be taught as expressive of a homogeneous and overarching culture extending from the fifth century B.C. to the present, they begin to be *misread*.

What one would like to comprehend with a finer set of terms is the relation between the material constraints of the syllabus, as an instrument of pedagogy, and the various imaginary totalities projected out of historical curricula. The syllabus has the form of a list, but the items on the list are given a specious unity by reference to a whole from which they are supposed to be a representative selection. This specious unity indeed characterizes not only the canon but the syllabi we call English literature, Romantic literature, women’s literature, Afro-American literature. The canon achieves its imaginary totality, then, not by embodying itself in a really existing list, but by retroactively constructing its individual texts as a *tradition*, to which works may be added or subtracted without altering the impression of totality or cultural homogeneity. A tradition is “real,” of course, but only in the sense in which the imaginary is real.⁵³ A tradi-

tion always retroactively unifies disparate cultural productions (and this is no less true for the tradition of women writers or the tradition of Afro-American writers); while such historical fictions are perhaps impossible to dispense with, one should always bear in mind that the concept of a given tradition is much more revealing about the immediate context in which that tradition is defined than it is about the works retroactively so organized. Also, and perhaps more interestingly, the larger and more disparate the body of works to be retroactively unified, the more urgent and totalizing the concept of tradition is likely to be. If a principle of specious unity is implicit in the construction of any syllabus, this means that the form of the syllabus sets up the conditions within which it is possible to forget that the syllabus is just a list, that there is no concrete cultural totality of which it is the expression. The confusion of the syllabus with the canon thus inaugurates a pedagogy of misreading, wherein a given text's historical specificity is effaced as it is absorbed into the unity of the syllabus/canon.

Here it will be possible to raise a larger question about the social context of the present canonical reformation, since the construction of alternative canons (that is, alternative syllabi) is very much concerned to reassert the cultural *unity* of subcultures or countercultures. The syllabus functions in a pedagogical context to embody that unity by projecting an alternative or oppositional "canon" out of the synecdochic list which is the syllabus. I would suggest that the present very anxious fixation on the canon (and on the syllabus as its avatar) by both its defenders and its critics, can be read as symptomatic of a certain anxiety associated with the perceived disunity of contemporary society. The critique of the canon responds to the disunity of the culture as a whole, as a *fragmented* whole, by constituting new cultural unities at the level of gender, race, or more recently ethnic subcultures, or gay and lesbian subcultures. The real question before us is not whether these subcultural formations produce a demonstrable regularity of behavior in certain social groups (they obviously do), but whether the concept of "community" accurately names the site and mode of operation of these cultural regularities. The absence of any other concept in the present debate for describing the site of culture represents a serious defect in the sociological vocabulary of liberal pluralist discourse, a poverty that is especially evident if we were to invoke the distinction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* introduced long ago by Ferdinand Tönnies in his 1887 study of that name. It is immediately apparent that while liberal pluralism continually employs an implicitly sociological concept of *Gemeinschaft* (community), it has no concept of *Gesellschaft* (association) at its disposal at all. Hence it is unable to describe the political effect of any form of association which does not entail the assumption of cultural unity, or

"community." Tönnies's distinction was intended to address the fact that modern societies are in fact characterized by the predominance of *Gesellschaft* over *Gemeinschaft*. Whether or not we can speak of a politicization of *Gemeinschaft*—and there may indeed be many reasons why we should wish to do so, reasons which have to do with the "postmodern" condition—such a politics is not likely to prove effective if it forgets the conditions which actually complicate the existence of communities, if it forgets modernity itself. Our postmodern tribalism does not make these conditions disappear. To return this argument to the context of the canon debate, a forgetting of modernity can be seen to correspond to a forgetting of the institutional being of the university, its being as "association." The desire to reduce the question of the canon to a relation between a set of texts and a given community forgets the fact that the university is not a community, despite its misrecognition as such in the pedagogic imaginary.

The discursive form which mediates between the pedagogic scene of debate about the canon and the social scene of perceived social fragmentation or *Gesellschaft* is the *list itself*. I would like to suggest that an obsession with the form of the list defines a version of what Cornelius Castoriadis and Claude Lefort have called the "social imaginary," the entire realm of imaginary significations organizing social life as something beyond the satisfaction of material needs or functions, and positing the unity of "society" in the face of social division.⁵⁴ What I will call the "pedagogic imaginary" similarly organizes the discursive and institutional life of teachers in excess of the simple function of disseminating knowledge by projecting a unity of the "profession" in the ideality of its self-representation, the discourse of its own being as a kind of community.

In order to make the pedagogic imaginary visible as a fetishizing of the syllabus/list, let us consider the example of the list which is appended to E. D. Hirsch's *Cultural Literacy*, and which has the simple function of communicating what Hirsch believes to be a quantity of knowledge prerequisite to functional literacy. We need not linger here over the peculiarity of an argument which offers as information prerequisite to reading the same information one ordinarily acquires as a *consequence* of reading. If Americans are "culturally illiterate," this fact is evidence of the educational system's failure to install a motive for reading in a nominally literate population. For the purposes of the example, however, I am less interested in disputing Hirsch's argument (it has been well and thoroughly contested by others)⁵⁵ than in explaining why the knowledge defining cultural literacy must take the form of a *list*; and in fact I would argue that it is really the form of the list which has allowed Hirsch's book to produce effects of fascination in both the social and the pedagogic imaginary. The list which de-

finds a common culture of the "culturally literate" (that is, the culturally advantaged) is itself an exemplary artifact of mass culture, with its lists of ten-best-everything. As such, the form of the list is a significant instance of the social imaginary at work; but within that imaginary what does it signify? One would have to invoke Lukács or Adorno to undertake a critique of the nostalgia for community that pervades this aspect of mass culture, in the midst of its carnival of cultural diversity, its infinite dispersal and fragmentation of knowledge. The fetishized list is one symptom of what Lyotard has described (and also celebrated) as the "postmodern condition of knowledge."⁵⁶ Indeed nothing can be more alienating (in the full range of Marxian senses) than to read through Hirsch's list, from which I excerpt the following sequence for comment: Agamemnon, aggression, Agnew (Spiro), agnosticism, agreement (grammar), agribusiness, air pollution, air quality index, Akron, Ohio.⁵⁷ From Agamemnon to Akron, Ohio is, to be sure, quite a stretch; it is Western culture on the rack. Nothing *makes sense* of the sequence, least of all its origin in the house of Atreus. Nevertheless the relations among these terms are not so difficult to recover at another level of analysis, at the level of a critique which takes as its object not the content but the *form* of the list, the form which unifies these terms as constitutive of that cultural capital called "cultural literacy." The latter form of capital has everything to do, as we shall see, with the kind of knowledge that *grammar* is, the kind of knowledge conveyed by a literary education; but it does not of itself reveal the relation between agribusiness and air pollution, or between Spiro Agnew and aggression. Its specious unity is a repression of the *systemic* relations between the very terms which might signify (with surprising accuracy) the world of late capitalism, where the detritus of "Western" culture is merely juxtaposed to the name of Akron, Ohio, the center, as Hirsch's subsequent *Dictionary of Cultural Literacy* tells us, of rubber production in the United States. The form of the list forecloses any systemic analysis of its own terms on behalf of a nostalgia in which Agamemnon and Akron might truly belong to a "common culture." The nonexistence of this culture, or its actual existence as mass culture, is just the fact which Hirsch's list both manifests and denies.

I would suggest further that the fetishized mass cultural form of the list, as an instance of the social imaginary, determines the form of the critique of the canon in the university, the fixation on the syllabus as an exclusive list. A nostalgia for community pervades the debate about the canon on both the right and the left sides of the debate—on the one side as the unity of Western culture, and on the other as the unity of its individual countercultures, represented by canons of "noncanonical" works. Both unities contend with the actual dominance of mass culture by projecting an imaginary

totality out of mass culture's image of cultural diversity—the form of the list. There is no question that cultural unities, especially unities in opposition, have political effects, that the concept and experience of "solidarity" is essential to any struggle. But the pedagogic imaginary within which the critique of the canon has been advanced is at once in excess of that solidarity, because it constructs out of its alternative canon/syllabus/list a culture (of women writers, or Afro-American writers, etc.) more homogeneous than it actually is, and in defect of that solidarity, because the image of cultural homogeneity it disseminates is only an image for those who consume it in the university, where it is consumed *as* an image. The "open" canon can lay claim to representational validity in the experience not of "women" or "blacks" but of women or blacks in the university—which is not itself a *representative* place. The university is nevertheless a locus of real power (for the distribution of cultural capital), and therefore a good place for a political praxis to define its object. Such an object should not be the imaginary alone, the canon as image, even if such a praxis must sometimes act upon the image, or mobilize the potent force of the imaginary. The imaginary has real and sometimes beneficial social effects, but these effects are always mediated by the institutional form within which they are expressed.⁵⁸

The difference between the canon and the syllabus, then, is the difference between the pedagogic imaginary, with its images of cultural or countercultural totality, and the form of the list, as the instance of mass culture's social imaginary, with its simultaneous denial and manifestation of cultural heterogeneity. As teachers we should of course never let the syllabus determine pedagogy, even or especially when we "change the syllabus." The fact that we have conceived of the latter project as changing or even overthrowing the canon itself means that the form of the syllabus fails to be recognized as a mediating structure in its institutional place. To decline the theoretical and practical labor of analyzing pedagogic structures in their institutional sites is to cede everything to the imaginary, to play the game of culture without understanding it. It is only in the pedagogic imaginary that changing the syllabus means in any *immediate* sense changing the world; what is required now is an analysis of the institutional location and mediation of such imaginary structures as the canon in order first to assess the real effects of the imaginary, and then to bring the imaginary itself under more strategic political control.

It is a fact, to be sure, that many more women authors are taught in literature classes than used to be, just as it is a fact that there are now many more women authors, and just as it is a fact that there are now many more women in professional and managerial fields. It is also a fact that the bur-

den of poverty in the last decade has been shifted more and more onto the shoulders of women. What is the relation between these facts? The critique of the canon can at present offer no analysis of the relation between the forms of cultural and material capital, nor will it ever if it merely confirms the imaginary ego ideal of a newly constituted professional-managerial class, no longer exclusively white or male. Those who have never been taught, or have been very inadequately taught, the *practice* of reading have little occasion to rejoice at being "represented" in the canon. Such representation does not address or compensate for the socioeconomic conditions of their existence so long as the school continues to distribute cultural capital unequally. Let us recognize, then, that the university belongs to an educational *system*, inclusive of every level and every kind of school, higher and lower, public and private. If we have undertaken a necessary modernization of the curriculum in the last decade, we should reflect upon the fact that what has been revised is a curriculum in the *university*, in response to social pressures registered much more ambiguously at the lower levels of the educational system, where the democratization of the school has been simultaneously subverted by the withdrawal of public funding, the "deskilling" of teachers, and the virtual removal of texts, literary or otherwise, from the classroom.⁵⁹ What would it mean to redefine the object of our critique as the institution of the school, of which the syllabus is only an instrumentality? It would mean acknowledging that the canonical reformation has somewhat less social effect as an agency of change than it claims, by which I mean, precisely, "less." To have drawn up a new syllabus is not yet to have begun teaching, nor is it yet to have begun reflection upon the institutional form of the school.

Multicultural Interlude: The Question of a Core Curriculum

Every relationship of "hegemony" is an educational relationship.

—GRAMSCI, *Prison Notebooks*

While the debate over the canon concerns what texts should be taught in the schools, what remains invisible within this debate—too large to be seen at all—is the school itself. The absence of reflection on the school as an institution is the condition for the most deluded assumption of the debate, that the school is the vehicle of transmission for something like a national culture. What is transmitted by the school is, to be sure, a kind of culture; but it is the *culture of the school*. School culture does not unify the nation culturally so much as it projects out of a curriculum of artifact-based knowledge an imaginary cultural unity never actually coincident with the culture of the nation-state. In this way the left hand of the educational

system—the dissemination of a supposedly national culture—remains ignorant of what the right hand is doing—the differential tracking of students according to class or the possession of cultural capital. If the structure of the system, its multiple levels and its division between public and private institutions, divides the population in this way, the culture the *university* produces (as opposed to other kinds or levels of school), can only be "national" for that plurality which acquires this level of education. What this group may learn to think of as a national culture is always a specific *relation* to the knowledge defined by the university curriculum.⁶⁰

The extraordinary effects of confusing school culture with national culture are most conspicuous when the national culture is made to swallow whole the even larger fish called "Western culture," and in such a way as to produce an image of the American nation as the telos of Western cultural evolution. Here we may adduce William Bennett's complacent version of this narrative in "To Reclaim a Legacy":

We are a part and a product of Western civilization. That our society was founded upon such principles as justice, liberty, government with the consent of the governed, and equality under the law is the result of ideas descended directly from great epochs of Western civilization—Enlightenment England and France, Renaissance Florence, and Periclean Athens. These ideas, so revolutionary in their times yet so taken for granted now, are the glue that binds together our pluralistic nation. The fact that we as Americans—whether black or white, Asian or Hispanic, rich or poor—share these beliefs aligns us with other cultures of the Western tradition.⁶¹

The interesting point about this argument is not the typically American chauvinism Bennett immediately denies ("It is not ethnocentric or chauvinistic to acknowledge this"), or the dubious assimilation of Western thinkers to democratic political principles many or even most of them would not in fact have endorsed. What remains interesting and consequential in Bennett's statement is a confusion which, as we shall see, characterizes both Bennett and his opponents in the canon debate: the slippage between *culture* and *civilization*. The semantic burden of the latter term obliquely recognizes what the concept of the national culture denies—the necessity of defining that culture largely by reference to the High Cultural artifacts to which access is provided in the schools. Bennett admits as much, without drawing any adverse conclusion from this point: "No student of our civilization should be denied access to the best that tradition has to offer." Is "our civilization," then, the same as "our culture"? One

may reasonably question what necessary *cultural* relation a university-trained suburban manager or technocrat has to Plato or Homer by virtue of his or her American citizenship—no more, in fact, than an educationally disadvantaged dweller in the most impoverished urban ghetto. The suburban technocrat and the ghetto dweller on the other hand have very much more in common culturally with each other than either of them ever need have with the great writers of Western civilization. If “Western” civilization—defined by a collection of cultural artifacts—can imaginarily displace the real cultural continuities that obtain at the national level, such an exemplary expression of the social imaginary is the effect of a crucial ambiguity in the concept of culture itself, an ambiguity familiar enough in the history of the concept as the distinction between culture in the sense of refinement—in this case, familiarity with the great works of “civilization”—and in the ethnographic sense of common beliefs, behaviors, attitudes—what a “national culture” would really have to mean.⁶² The attempt to make the first sense of culture *stand* for the second names a certain project for the university, but one which it seems less well suited to undertake than ever (for reasons I will consider presently). The apparent failure of the university’s cultural project of constituting a national culture elicits from the New Right the clamorous demand for a return to what was after all the *bourgeois* school, the institution enabling the old bourgeoisie to identify itself culturally by acquiring the cultural capital formerly restricted to the aristocratic or clerical estates. This capital consisted of nothing other than the “great works” of Western civilization.

If the national cultural project of the school is no longer a real possibility (it was always a class project anyway), the canon debate has nevertheless decisively problematized the notion of culture in its controversial language. The absence, however, of any concept of a specific *school* culture in the debate has meant that the perceived monolith of Western culture has had to be contested by the assertion of an antithetical “multiculturalism” as the basis of a politically progressive curriculum. Multiculturalism defines Western culture as its political antagonist, and vice versa. Yet the rather too neat polarization of these terms elides the question of what school culture really is, that is, what *relation to culture* is produced by the formal study of cultural artifacts. Whatever other effects the introduction of multicultural curricula may have, the *theory* of multiculturalism perpetuates the confusion of culture as the study of preserved artifacts with the sense of culture as common beliefs, behaviors, attitudes. It is by no means the case that the study of cultural works simply operates as the agency of cultural transmission in the second sense—although school culture, as Bourdieu has shown, does its part to install a *class habitus* in the subjects of its pedagogy. This

habitus is defined not by the content of cultural works (Plato is not really part of “our culture”), but by the relation to culture inculcated by the school, the relation named precisely by Bennett’s “legacy”—a relation of *ownership*. It is not the ideas expressed in the great works that account for their status in arguments such as Bennett’s, but the fact that these works are appropriated as the cultural capital of a dominant fraction. That appropriation is in turn justified by representing the ideational content of the great works as an expression of the same ideas which are realized in the current social order, with its current distribution of cultural goods.

In order to accomplish the cultural task of appropriation, however, the school must traverse the heavily mined terrain of a certain alienation produced by the formal study of cultural works. We should not forget that the effects of this alienation are sometimes permanent, and that it is precisely “one’s own” culture which sometimes fails to survive the culture of the school (that is to say, the school sometimes produces, despite its acculturative function, dissident intellectuals). Similarly the formal study of cultural works produced within minority cultures is not a means of reproducing minority culture (in the ethnographic sense). If the formal study of Latin-American novels in the university does not really transmit or reproduce Latino culture, it follows that the relation of even Latino students to these artifacts will not be entirely unlike the relation of “American” students to the works of “Western” (American or European) culture. The question is what this relation is, or what it should be.

One conclusion to be drawn immediately from this argument is that there is no ground of commensuration between Western cultural artifacts on the one hand, if examples of these are the *Odyssey* or the Parthenon; and Latino culture on the other, if the latter means the totality of a living culture, and not just its artifacts. Insofar as it is only the *works* of Western or Latino culture to which one has direct access in the school, these works will ultimately be constructed and legitimated as objects of study *in the same way*, by a process of deracination from the actual cultural circumstances of their production and consumption.⁶³ If works by Afro-American, Latin-American, or postcolonial writers are read now in formal programs of university study, this fact may be the immediate result of a political project of inclusion, or the affirmation of cultural diversity. But the survival of these works in future school curricula will be seen otherwise, as a consequence of their status as interesting and important cultural works that no intellectually responsible program of study can ignore. The current project of affirming *cultures themselves* through the legitimation of cultural works in university curricula is enabled by the very conflation between the senses of culture to which I have drawn attention. The very intensity of our

"symbolic struggle" reduces cultural conditions of extreme complexity to an allegorical conflict between a Western cultural Goliath and its Davidic multicultural antagonists. Hence it is never really Greek culture, or French culture, or Roman culture, that is compared with Latino culture or Afro-American culture, but always "Western" culture. Multiculturalism finds itself in the position of having to credit both the reality and the homogeneity of that fictional cultural entity, which achieves its spurious self-identity only by consisting of *nothing but* cultural artifacts.⁶⁴

If the fiction of the cultural homogeneity of the West is nevertheless a very powerful one (because it is ideological), perhaps the better strategy for resisting its domination-effect may be to expose the relation between the "culture" it pretends to embody and the institution which is its support in reality. It is just by suppressing culture in the ethnographic sense—or reversing that sense of culture for non-"Western" artifacts—that the traditional curriculum can appropriate the "great works" of Western civilization for the purpose of constituting an imaginary cultural unity such as Bennett or Hirsch envisions. The deracination of the text tradition thus forces us to define the intertextual relation, say, between Aquinas and Aristotle as evidence of the continuity of Western culture, but it allows us to set aside the fact that Aristotle and Aquinas have almost nothing in common *culturally*. It should be remarked here also that the construction of Western culture depends more upon a body of philosophical than literary texts. If the canon debate originated in university literature departments, the defenders of the canon extended the debate to the question of the humanities curriculum as a whole—the "core" curriculum—by resurrecting the philosophical text tradition as the basis for that core curriculum. This text tradition can be invoked more easily than national vernacular literatures to maintain the fiction of a profound evolution or destiny of Western thought extending from the pre-Socratics to the present.⁶⁵ Yet the fact remains that this continuity was always the historical support for *nationalist* agendas. The schools in the early modern nation-states provided an instrument by means of which the state could dissolve the residually feudal bonds of local sovereignty and reattach personal loyalty to itself. Nationalism is, as we have seen, entirely on the surface in Bennett's document. In the early modern period, the great vernacular literary works of the nation-states were taught in such a way as to constitute retroactively a pre-national "West" (usually classical rather than medieval), a continuity intended to cover over the traumatic break of early modern societies with traditional feudal cultures. The "West" was always the creation of nationalism, and that is why one observes that the assertion of the continuity of Western tradition explicitly corresponds in its intensity to the assertion of nationalism itself.⁶⁶

The homogenizing textual effects of deracination are even more obvious when we consider the fact that, for us, Plato and Aristotle, Virgil and Dante, are great works of literature *in English*. The translation of the "classics" into one's own vernacular is a powerful institutional buttress of imaginary cultural continuities; it confirms the nationalist agenda by permitting the easy appropriation of texts in foreign languages. Yet the device of translation should not be regarded as extraordinary or atypical of school culture, for translation is only a more explicit version of the same technique of deracination by which all cultural works are constructed as objects of study. This point may clarify the otherwise confusing status of "oral literature," which has become a favored site for the contestation of Western culture's hegemony. It is not a mere contingency that oral works must become "written" in order to be brought into the arena of curricular conflict as "noncanonical" works, excluded or devalued by the Western text tradition. In fact, oral works *cannot* otherwise enter the institutional field, since orality as a cultural condition can only be studied at all ethnographically, as the "writing of culture." When the condition of oral production is on the other hand ignored in the context of interpreting or evaluating these works (by treating oral works as though they were other written works), the real difference between school culture and the culture which gives rise to works disappears from view. By suppressing the context of a cultural work's production and consumption, the school produces the illusion that "our" culture (or the culture of the "other") is transmitted simply by contact with the works themselves. But a text tradition is not sufficient in itself either to constitute or to transmit a culture, and thus school culture can never be more than a part of a total process of acculturation which, for societies with schools, is always complex and has many other institutional sites.

The function imposed upon schools of acculturating students in "our" culture often thus requires that texts be read "out of context," as signs of cultural continuity, or cultural unity. We need not deny that the text tradition can sustain intertextual dialogue over centuries and millennia, however, in order to insist that what is revealed by the historical context of this dialogue is cultural discontinuity and heterogeneity.⁶⁷ A rather different pedagogy, one that emphasizes historical contextualization, would at the very least inhibit the assimilation of cultural works to the agenda of constituting a national culture, or the Western culture which is its ideological support.⁶⁸ For the very same reason, only the simplest countercultural pedagogy can make the works of the multicultural curriculum stand in a "subversive" relation to Western culture. The historicization of these works too will have to confront the mutual influence and interrelation between domi-

nant Western and dominated non-Western cultures (in the case of post-colonial works, for example, the fact that "Western culture" appears as a cultural unity *only* through the lens of the colonial educational system, and that postcolonial literatures are in constant dialogue with the works taught in that system). While there exists a multiplicity of sites of cultural production, then, this multiplicity can never really be equated with the multiplicity of cultures, as though every cultural work were only the organic expression of a discrete and autonomous culture.⁶⁹ The fact that we now expect the curriculum to reflect as a principle of its organization the very distinctness of cultures, Western or non-Western, canonical or non-canonical, points to a certain insistent error of culturalist politics, its elision of the difference the school itself makes in the supposed transmission of culture.

From the perspective of long-term developments in the educational system, the canon debate itself may seem oddly beside the point. Bennett and his associates already acknowledged in their 1984 document that the "crisis of the humanities" refers to the fact that fewer undergraduates choose to major in traditional humanities than in the past. One has the impression in surveying the musings of the right-wing pundits that this fact is the result of nothing less than abdication by the professors of their duty to teach the traditional texts.⁷⁰ Nothing could be further from the truth—these texts still constitute the vastly greater part of the humanities curriculum—and in that sense the complaint of the New Right is simply fraudulent. A welcome reality check is provided by Patrick Brantlinger in his analysis of the "crisis":

Tradition gives the humanities an importance that current funding and research priorities belie. At giant public "multiversities" like the Big Ten schools, humanities courses are taken by many students only as requirements—a sort of force-feeding in writing skills, history, great books, and appropriate "values" before they select the chutes labeled "pre-professional"—pre-med, pre-law, and so forth. . . . Clearly, one doesn't need to blame the radical sixties for the current marginalization and sense of irrelevance that pervades the humanities today.⁷¹

The crisis of the humanities is the result not of university professors' unwillingness to teach great works (the idea is an insult especially to those teachers and graduate students who could not find employment in the recessions of the 70s and 80s) but of the decisions students themselves make in the face of economic realities. Granted the fact that the crisis is not the result of curricular decisions by humanities teachers, why is the content of

the curriculum the site of such controversy? The canon debate will not go away, and it is likely to intensify as the positions of the right and of the multiculturalists are further polarized. The very strength of the reactionary backlash, its success in acquiring access to the national media and funding for its agitprop, suggests that the symptomatic importance of the debate is related in some as yet obscurely discerned way to the failure of the contestants to give an account of the general decline in the significance of the humanities in the educational system. It has proven to be much easier to quarrel about the content of the curriculum than to confront the implications of a fully emergent professional-managerial class which no longer requires the cultural capital of the old bourgeoisie. The decline of the humanities was never the result of newer noncanonical courses or texts, but of a large-scale "capital flight" in the domain of culture. The debate over what amounts to the supplementation (or modernization) of the traditional curriculum is thus a misplaced response to that capital flight, and as such the debate has been conducted largely in the realm of the pedagogic imaginary. I would propose, then, that the division now characterizing the humanities syllabus—between Western and multicultural, canonical and noncanonical, hegemonic and nonhegemonic works—is the symptom of a more historically significant split between two kinds of cultural capital, one of which is "traditional," the other organic to the constitution of the professional-managerial class.

In this larger socioeconomic context, the polarization of the debate into a conflict between Western culture and multiculturalism has proven to be a political misstep for the left. For both the reactionary scapegoating of the noncanonical syllabus as the cause of the crisis of the humanities, and multiculturalism's reduction of canonical works to the ideology of a monolithic Western culture fail to recognize the real relations between the humanities curriculum and the social forces which operate on it. If the debate is ever to acknowledge the presence of these forces, it will have to move beyond the curricular distinction between the canonical and the noncanonical; it will have to raise the much larger question of what is at stake in the relation between the kinds of cultural capital. Since both canonical and noncanonical works constitute at base, despite their apparent conflict, the same *kind* of cultural capital, the social forces displacing this kind of capital will sooner or later strand the participants in the canon debate on an ever shrinking island within the university itself.

What needs urgently to be recognized now is that the polarization of the curriculum into canonical and noncanonical works is very much more in the interest of the right than of the left. The investment of the right in the great works of Western civilization—a "core" curriculum—is in extreme

had faith. For Bennett has already decided that what Bloom calls the “big questions” have been given definitive answers in the American social and political system, which rests on the unshakeable foundation of the *free market*. Yet it is the market itself which produces the effect of cultural capital flight. The professional-managerial class has made the correct assessment that, so far as its future profit is concerned, the reading of great works is not worth the investment of very much time or money. The perceived devaluation of the humanities curriculum is in reality a decline in its *market* value. If the liberal arts curriculum still survives as the preferred course of study in some elite institutions, this fact has everything to do with the class constituency of these institutions. With few exceptions, it is only those students who belong to the financially secure upper classes who do not feel compelled to acquire professional or technical knowledge as undergraduates. The professional-managerial class, on the other hand, many of whose members have only recently attained to middle and upper middle-class status, depends entirely on the acquisition of technical knowledge in order to maintain its status, or to become upwardly mobile. The challenge posed to a class analysis of culture by the professional-managerial class has been well described by Gouldner in his *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class*: “What is needed for the systematic analysis of the old and new class is a *general theory of capital* in which moneyed capital is seen as part of the whole, as a special case of capital. Conversely, what is required for the understanding of culture as capital is nothing less than a political economy of culture.”⁷² Whether such a political economy of culture has been successfully elaborated in the work of Gouldner or Bourdieu, it is entirely indicative of the conceptual limits of the curriculum debate that it could be carried on for over a decade virtually without reference to either figure.

In this context the right-wing design of purging noncanonical works from the curriculum has as one of its evident objectives the reevaluation of the cultural capital of canonical works by associating them with currently popular nationalist and xenophobic sentiments. Mary Louise Pratt is surely correct in identifying the aim of this polemic as the creation of “a narrowly specific cultural capital that will be the normative *referent* for everyone, but will remain the *property* of a small and powerful caste that is linguistically and ethnically unified.”⁷³ The crucial question, however, is not how “narrowly specific” this cultural capital is to be, but how it is to produce the effect of unifying a “caste.” Because this unity is not preexistent in American society—capital itself is dispersed now among a number of ethnicities, genders, and even linguistic groups—it must be constituted in the university *after the fact*, as a new project for that institution. This

circumstance explains why the right's agenda for the university always makes room for *some* members of minority groups, because the right believes these self-made individuals can be assimilated to the “caste” of all those with an interest in preserving the rights and privileges of their acquired capital. Such assimilation will leave (and has left) the grossly inequitable social structure more or less unchallenged. It is not quite the case, then, that the New Right wishes to purge the university of all linguistic or ethnic others, but that it sets the university the project of unifying the new possessors of cultural capital by cultural means, by means of a “common” curriculum which will identify them as (justly) privileged. In this way Bennett's “legacy” can be reclaimed for its proper inheritors, those who leave the university possessed of capital, of whatever kind. The cultural legacy so probated will present an image to a somewhat more ethnically heterogeneous propertied class of its unified cultural identity as the inheritors of cultural capital.

If this analysis is correct it does not seem the most effective strategy for the left to cede to the right the *definition* of cultural capital; but this is exactly what multiculturalism does when it yields canonical works to the right, when it accepts the right's characterization of the canonical syllabus as constitutive of a unified and monolithic Western culture. Basing its agenda upon such assumptions, a left politics of representation seems to have no other choice than to institutionalize alternative syllabi as representative images of non-Western or “counter”-cultures. This is finally why the project of legitimizing noncanonical works in the university produces an irresolvable contradiction between the presentation of these works as equal in cultural value to canonical works, and at the same time as the embodiment of countercultural values which by their very definition are intended to delegitimize the cultural values embodied in canonical works. The polarization of the debate into Western culturalism versus multiculturalism must then be seen not as a simple conflict between regressive and progressive pedagogies but as the symptom of the transformation of cultural capital in response to social conditions not yet recognized as the real and ultimately determining context of the canon debate. Both the right-wing attempt to shore up the cultural capital of the “great works” by advocating a return to a core curriculum, and the pluralist advocacy of multiculturalism respond to the same demographic circumstances, the heterogeneous constituency of the university. But neither version of culturalist politics responds to the heterogeneous constitution of cultural capital, and hence both movements are condemned to register this condition symptomatically, as a false perception of the mutual (cultural) exclusivity of canonical and noncanonical works.

It is chastening to recall that a leftist analysis of the heterogeneity of cultural capital was available long before Bourdieu or Gouldner, in the work of Antonio Gramsci. In his prescient notes on the subject of education, Gramsci recognized that the displacement of the classical curriculum by professional and technical knowledge would have the effect of precipitating the "humanist" curriculum into what seems to be a permanent state of crisis:

The basic division of schools into classical (i.e. grammar) and trade schools was a rational scheme: trade schools for the instrumental classes, classical schools for the ruling classes and intellectuals. The development of the industrial base in both town and country led to a growing need for a new type of urban intellectual: alongside the classical school there developed the technical school (professional but not manual), and this brought into question the very principle of the concrete orientation of general culture based on the Greco-Roman tradition. This orientation, once brought into question was in fact doomed, since its formative capacity was largely based on the general and traditionally indisputable prestige of a particular form of civilization.⁷⁴

Gramsci expresses in his notes what may seem to the present liberal academy a surprising conservatism on curricular issues. Without arguing for the retention of the classical curriculum—Gramsci allows that it had to be replaced—he was concerned to point out the paradoxical social effects of the "new type of school" which, while it "appears and is advocated as being democratic" is actually "destined not merely to perpetuate social differences but to crystallize them in Chinese complexities."⁷⁵ The apparently conservative tenor of his remarks should not be confused, then, with the usual complaint about "specialization," which expresses nostalgia for the even less democratic educational system of the past (Gramsci insists that the older system was always "intended for the new generation of the ruling class"). The question is not whether technical or professional knowledge will or should be taught, but whether there exists a body of knowledge to which *everyone* should have access in the schools. Gramsci's solution to the emergence of a "crisis of the humanities" was to propose the formation of a "single, humanistic, formative, primary school of general culture which will correctly balance the development of ability for manual (technical, industrial) work with the development of ability for intellectual work."⁷⁶ Gramsci's proposal may seem, at this date, uncritical of the content of such a curriculum, since he did not have to consider his own society as in our

sense "pluralist"; but we should remember that his sense of a politically strategic educational practice is supported by what is perhaps the most powerful theory of intellectual labor in the Marxist tradition, as well as by the very concept of hegemony that is invoked in virtually all forms of current cultural criticism. For these reasons a serious consideration of Gramsci's analysis may be in order.

What Gramsci called the "unitary school" was supposed to "break [the] pattern" of the traditional educational system, in which "each group has its own type of school, intended to perpetuate a specific traditional function, ruling or subordinate."⁷⁷ The new technical and professional schools reinstated the division of society "into juridically fixed and crystallized estates rather than moving towards the transcendence of class divisions." The issue here is not only class division but the conditions of possibility for democratic self-government, since Gramsci rightly sees the schools as providing the means for participating in government: "But democracy, by definition, cannot mean merely that an unskilled worker can become skilled. It must mean that every 'citizen' can 'govern' and that society places him, even if only abstractly, in a general condition to achieve this" (318). This is of course an old theme, but the simultaneous and not unrelated decline of both public education and participatory democracy in the United States should confirm its continued pertinence. For reasons too obvious to belabor, Gramsci's "unitary school" was never a goal in this country; but since our concern is with the American educational system, we can at least note that the very limited "democratization" of that system has been accompanied by the gradual displacement upwards to the university level of the curriculum Gramsci conceived as the basis of a "unitary school." This arrangement accomplishes the effect of class fractioning by tracking most students into the work force at the end of their primary or secondary schooling (an effect reinforced also by the distinction between public and private schools). Given the social pressure to enforce vocational tracking at the lower levels of the educational system, and to dispense more highly valued professional and technical knowledge at the university level, the slot into which the humanities curriculum is confined is very small—as we know, the first two years of college study. In the absence of a "unitary school" at the primary or secondary levels, the possibility of installing a core curriculum of philosophical or literary works exists only during this brief period. Many colleges, of course, have always had some form of a core curriculum, but the important point is that the formal study of a set list of "great works" is condemned to have something of a remedial status for those students who have not read literary or philosophical works, either historical or contemporary, at the lower levels of the system, and who will

not continue to study them after their sophomore year. It is only by first recognizing the remedial status of the first two years of college study that we can then pose the question of what Gramsci's analysis may have to offer the present debate.

It will first be necessary to exit the social imaginary by acknowledging that there is no question of producing a *national* culture by means of a *university* curriculum. Or conversely of producing a national multiculturalist ethos by the same means. The question is rather what social effects are produced by the knowledges disseminated in the university, and by the manner of their dissemination. It should not be the business of the university to produce a "common culture," even if the educational system inevitably produces a school culture, a specific relation to knowledge among its subjects. The objective of political integration is not to be confused with the altogether questionable objective of cultural assimilation. Gramsci's analysis suggests that a necessary social condition of democracy is the general exercise of a certain kind of intellectual labor, and that a specific body of knowledge (by which is meant neither *information* in Hirsch's sense, nor *culture* in Bennett's) is the necessary medium in the schools for the exercise of this intellectual labor. The point of the unitary school is that it is a school for everyone; by definition it is not the university. A necessary objective of a Gramscian reconsideration of the curriculum debate would thus be the rearticulation of that debate in the context of the educational system as a system. In this context, we can recognize that the constraints upon the university curriculum at its present moment and in its present form account for the fact that the project of a core curriculum is so easily annexed to a socially regressive agenda. Time is one such constraint, since it intensifies the effect of deracination to the point of reducing the study of "great works" to a shallow rehearsal of contextless ideas; such "ideas" turn out unsurprisingly to be nothing more than the clichés of right-wing ideology.⁷⁸ It has been all too easy as a consequence for the left/liberal professoriate to identify the only respectable adversarial stance with opposition to a core curriculum. The institutionalization of the distinction between canonical and noncanonical works thus emerges as the necessary response to any attempt to reinstitute an exclusively traditional curriculum. As an expression of the same culturalist politics which confuses school culture with culture in general, this adversarial position unfortunately also deprives the teaching of canonical works of an adequate progressive rationale.

It is perhaps time for progressive teachers to take back the humanities curriculum—all of it—as an integrated program of study. Such a program will be severely limited by the narrow stratum of the educational system

which it is forced to inhabit, but until we can begin to think and speak about education as a system of interrelated levels, these limits will continue to function subliminally, beyond analysis or intervention. In the meantime, we can imagine that an integrated curriculum would supersede the distinction between canonical and noncanonical works in the recognition that a syllabus of study always enacts a negotiation between *historical* works and *modern* works. There is no question now, nor has there ever been, of the inevitability of curricular change: the latter-day curriculum is the archaeological evidence of its own sedimented history. When we read Plato or Homer or Virgil in a humanities course, then, we are reading what *remains* of the classical curriculum after the vernacular revolutions of the early modern period. The fact that we no longer read these works in Greek or Latin, or that we read far fewer classical Greek or Latin works than students of premodern school systems, represents a real loss; but this loss must be reckoned as the price of the *integration* of these works into a modern curriculum. The inevitable loss of older works in any humanities curriculum, even one hypothetically much larger than current programs tend to be, is the result, as we have observed, of the *absolute* accumulation of cultural works. The reactionary defense of the traditional "canon" thus betrays itself as ignorant of the cultural history sedimented in the very syllabus it desires to fix. On the other hand it should no longer be necessary to present certain other works, "noncanonical" works, as intrinsically opposed to a hegemonic principle of canonicity, as this is likewise to forget the history sedimented in any syllabus of study.

An alternative theoretical formulation of the curriculum problem will thus have to repudiate the practice of fetishizing the curriculum, of locating the politics of pedagogy in the anxious drawing up of a list of representative names. The *particular* names matter even less at the university level, since the number of historical and modern works worth studying is vastly greater than any (remedial) course of study could begin to consider. The syllabus should rather be conceived as the means of providing *access* to cultural works, both historical and modern (the contrary assumption—that works not on the syllabus will never be read—is an entirely disreputable assumption for teachers to make). Since noncanonical works are in every case either historical works (the objects of research or reevaluation) or modern works (the objects of legitimation for the first time as cultural capital), they are in fact what all canonical works once were. To contend otherwise is to commit oneself to the notion that some works are intrinsically canonical, simply expressive of the dominant ideology, and other works intrinsically noncanonical, utterly unassimilable to hegemonic culture. If that were true, what would the struggle to legitimize new works as objects of

study be for? Hegemony, in Gramsci's sense, is to be fought for; it is something that is continually won and lost by struggles which take place at the specific sites of social practice.

What difference would such a reformulation of terms make? First, that current research programs such as women's studies, or Afro-American studies be recognized as such, as research programs and not as the institution of separate curricula for separate constituencies. But even more important, the humanities curriculum should be presented as an integrated program of study in which the written works studied constitute a certain kind of cultural capital, and in which works therefore cannot be allegorized as intrinsically canonical or intrinsically noncanonical, intrinsically hegemonic or intrinsically antihegemonic. No cultural work of any interest at all is simple enough to be credibly allegorized in this way, because any cultural work will *objectify* in its very form and content the same social conflicts that the canon debate allegorizes by means of a divided curriculum. Further, a conception of an integrated curriculum would make it impossible to forget that what one internalizes in the school is not one's own culture but the culture of the school (which has in turn a certain relation, but not a relation of identity, to culture in the ethnographic sense). The school produces a culture, then, neither unambiguously good or bad, but it does not simply reproduce a given culture, hegemonic or antihegemonic, through the *content* of the curriculum. If it is a defensible objective of the school to disseminate knowledge about the "multicultural" diversity of the nation (defensible because the nation is so diverse), it follows from this very objective that it is just as important for majority students to study the cultural products of minority cultures as it is for minority students to be able to study the cultural works of their own cultures. Hence when works by minority writers are legitimized as cultural capital by becoming objects of study in the university, it will follow that everyone will have a right of access to them.

Especially in the wake of a reactionary backlash which indicts the liberal critique of the canon for the abandonment of all standards of judgment, it is no longer politically strategic to argue for the necessity of teaching certain "noncanonical" works solely on the grounds that these works represent social minorities. It is on the contrary much more strategic to argue that the school has the social obligation of providing access to these works, *because they are important and significant cultural works*. In this way we will disabuse ourselves and our students of the idea that canonical or noncanonical syllabi have natural constituencies, the members of dominant or subordinate cultures respectively. The latter notion operates tacitly in the canon debate as the illegitimate displacement of liberal concepts of repre-

sentation to a site—the school—where democratic objectives are better served by the modestly coercive structure of (in Gramsci's terms) a "unitary" curriculum. Extrapolating from Gramsci's analysis of the relation between the school and democracy, we can predict that different curricula for different constituencies will produce the same effects of social stratification as different schools for different classes. There is not, and should not be, one national culture, but there is, and there should be, one educational system.

But here we return to the fundamental point: pluralism has been able to affirm different cultures but not the fact that cultures are inescapably interdependent both at the moment of a cultural work's production and at that of its consumption. The question is whether or not the school is to acknowledge this "postmodern" condition. It is certainly acknowledged in the domain of mass culture, where cultural products are very often produced for particular constituencies, but where their circulation "interculturally" is virtually assured by the restless promiscuity of commodity exchange. These conditions need not be denied in the university but rather made the occasion of what Christopher Miller, in responding to Hirsch's notion of a national culture, has called "intercultural literacy": "Intercultural literacy would consist of a mode of inquiry that respects the accumulation of shared symbols (thus the term *literacy*) but also invites research into the processes by which cultures are formed and particularly encourages analysis of how cultures constitute themselves *by reference to each other*."⁷⁹

An integrated curriculum would imply a second, pragmatic assumption: It is just as important for both minority and nonminority students to study historical works as it is for both groups to study modern works. The study of historical works need not be justified as an apotropaic exercise—because these works are supposed to embody hegemonic values—but because they *are* historical works. The cultures which give rise to them are as other to all of us as minority cultures are to some of us. Here we can take leave of another fetish of the canon debate, namely, the exclusive emphasis on cultural artifacts as representative of cultures, in the absence of real knowledge about the history of these cultures. The relative lack of reference to history in the curriculum debate is symptomatic of how the concept of culture is deformed in the mirror of the pedagogic imaginary, all the more so since this deformation fails to account for the immanent historicity of even the most recent works. No program of multiculturalism will succeed in producing more than a kind of favorable media-image of minority cultures if it is not supported at every point by an understanding of the historical relations between cultures. At the same time one must insist that it is no

study be for? Hegemony, in Gramsci's sense, is to be fought for; it is something that is continually won and lost by struggles which take place at the specific sites of social practice.

What difference would such a reformulation of terms make? First, that current research programs such as women's studies, or Afro-American studies be recognized as such, as research programs and not as the institution of separate curricula for separate constituencies. But even more important, the humanities curriculum should be presented as an integrated program of study in which the written works studied constitute a certain kind of cultural capital, and in which works therefore cannot be allegorized as intrinsically canonical or intrinsically noncanonical, intrinsically hegemonic or intrinsically antihegemonic. No cultural work of any interest at all is simple enough to be credibly allegorized in this way, because any cultural work will *objectify* in its very form and content the same social conflicts that the canon debate allegorizes by means of a divided curriculum. Further, a conception of an integrated curriculum would make it impossible to forget that what one internalizes in the school is not one's own culture but the culture of the school (which has in turn a certain relation, but not a relation of identity, to culture in the ethnographic sense). The school produces a culture, then, neither unambiguously good or bad, but it does not simply reproduce a given culture, hegemonic or antihegemonic, through the *content* of the curriculum. If it is a defensible objective of the school to disseminate knowledge about the "multicultural" diversity of the nation (defensible because the nation *is* so diverse), it follows from this very objective that it is just as important for majority students to study the cultural products of minority cultures as it is for minority students to be able to study the cultural works of their own cultures. Hence when works by minority writers are legitimized as cultural capital by becoming objects of study in the university, it will follow that everyone will have a right of access to them.

Especially in the wake of a reactionary backlash which indicts the liberal critique of the canon for the abandonment of all standards of judgment, it is no longer politically strategic to argue for the necessity of teaching certain "noncanonical" works solely on the grounds that these works represent social minorities. It is on the contrary much more strategic to argue that the school has the social obligation of providing access to these works, *because they are important and significant cultural works*. In this way we will disabuse ourselves and our students of the idea that canonical or non-canonical syllabi have natural constituencies, the members of dominant or subordinate cultures respectively. The latter notion operates tacitly in the canon debate as the illegitimate displacement of liberal concepts of repre-

sentation to a site—the school—where democratic objectives are better served by the modestly coercive structure of (in Gramsci's terms) a "unitary" curriculum. Extrapolating from Gramsci's analysis of the relation between the school and democracy, we can predict that different curricula for different constituencies will produce the same effects of social stratification as different schools for different classes. There is not, and should not be, one national culture, but there is, and there should be, one educational system.

But here we return to the fundamental point: pluralism has been able to affirm different cultures but not the fact that cultures are inescapably interdependent both at the moment of a cultural work's production and at that of its consumption. The question is whether or not the school is to acknowledge this "postmodern" condition. It is certainly acknowledged in the domain of mass culture, where cultural products are very often produced for particular constituencies, but where their circulation "interculturally" is virtually assured by the restless promiscuity of commodity exchange. These conditions need not be denied in the university but rather made the occasion of what Christopher Miller, in responding to Hirsch's notion of a national culture, has called "intercultural literacy": "Intercultural literacy would consist of a mode of inquiry that respects the accumulation of shared symbols (thus the term *literacy*) but also invites research into the processes by which cultures are formed and particularly encourages analysis of how cultures constitute themselves *by reference to each other*."⁷⁹

An integrated curriculum would imply a second, pragmatic assumption: It is just as important for both minority and nonminority students to study historical works as it is for both groups to study modern works. The study of historical works need not be justified as an apotropaic exercise—because these works are supposed to embody hegemonic values—but because they *are* historical works. The cultures which give rise to them are as other to all of us as minority cultures are to some of us. Here we can take leave of another fetish of the canon debate, namely, the exclusive emphasis on cultural artifacts as representative of cultures, in the absence of real knowledge about the history of these cultures. The relative lack of reference to history in the curriculum debate is symptomatic of how the concept of culture is deformed in the mirror of the pedagogic imaginary, all the more so since this deformation fails to account for the immanent historicity of even the most recent works. No program of multiculturalism will succeed in producing more than a kind of favorable media-image of minority cultures if it is not supported at every point by an understanding of the historical relations between cultures. At the same time one must insist that it is no

less only the vehicle for critical thought, not its realization. As cultural capital it is always also the object of appropriation by the dominant classes. The pluralist strategy of institutionalizing the category of the noncanonical is incapable of grasping this essential ambiguity of the school as an institution. For the same reason that a syllabus of canonical works cannot reproduce a culture of the dominant outside a certain total structuration of the educational system, no syllabus of noncanonical works can function ipso facto as the embodiment of that system's critique. To demand that critical thinking be institutionalized entails an obvious contradiction, but the desire for the institutionalization of a pluralist critique is what drives the current form of curricular revision. We can at most, however, institutionalize the *conditions* of critical thought, in this case a curriculum that makes possible the maximum dissemination of the practices of reading and writing. Inasmuch as the study of cultural works in historical context constitutes a good condition for these practices, no curricular intervention which does not *reaffirm* the cultural capital of these works can ensure the viability of that condition. In the present regime of capital distribution, the school will remain both the agency for the reproduction of unequal social relations and a necessary site for the critique of that system.

Literature as Cultural Capital: An Alternative Analysis

What need for purists when the demotic is built to last,
To outlast us, and no dialect hears us?

—JOHN ASHBERY, "PURISTS WILL OBJECT"

The School and the Reproduction of Social Relations

The defense of the noncanonical may justly take as its epigraph Walter Benjamin's remark that "there is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism."⁸⁰ Benjamin offers no unequivocal response to the fact of barbarism, rather a certain "cautious detachment"; but what is the barbarism congealed in the work such that one can remove oneself to a distance from it? This question is further complicated by the continuation of Benjamin's thought: "And just as it [the document of civilization] is itself not free of barbarism, neither is the process of transmission [*Überlieferung*] by which it descends from one to another." The latter statement suggests how one might begin to conceptualize the social effects of the canonical form. Canonicity is not a property of the work itself but of its transmission, its relation to other works in a collocation of works—the syllabus in its institutional locus, the school. Is the barbarism of transmission, then, the same barbarism we find in the "document of civilization"? Ultimately no doubt, but not immediately. Whatever the relation of the

longer intellectually defensible to equate historical knowledge with "Western history." It has always been the case (if not always acknowledged) that Western history is the history of the *global* relations of Western states, societies, and cultures; and even more that it is only as a consequence of its global relations that the "West" could conceive or write its own history. If the curriculum is to produce intercultural literacy, in recognition of the imbricated sites of cultural production, we must assume that the context of cultural production is nothing *less* than global.

Were the left/liberal academy to reappropriate the "humanities," that is, to take back the authority to define the cultural capital embodied in its curriculum of study, it would have to devise a rationale for an integrated curriculum of textual/historical study exceeding the laudable objective of affirming cultural diversity. A left rationale for an integrated curriculum would have to present all of the cultural works in that curriculum, whatever their provenance, as a species of cultural capital constitutively different from the capital embodied in technical and professional knowledge. This difference can be defined by the proposition that *everyone* has a right of access to cultural works, to the means of both their production and their consumption. The dissemination of these means produces at every level of the educational system a form of "literacy," or what we would otherwise recognize as the practices of *reading* and *writing*. It would make an immense social difference if the knowledge designated by the latter terms were the property of everyone; but we are speaking here of what may be called "socialized" education, that is, of something that does not exist in this country. If the current educational institution does indeed (like every other social institution) reproduce social inequities, it achieves this effect by the unequal distribution of cultural capital, or by presenting cultural works in the classroom as the organic expression of the dominant classes' entitlement to those works. This effect cannot be undone by changing the university curriculum alone, because it is an effect of the educational system, of which the university is only a part. Does this mean that curricular reform is pointless, or that it has no social consequences? On the contrary, the university curriculum is at this moment a privileged site for raising questions about the educational system as a whole, just because it is the site at which a "crisis" of cultural capital (or the "humanities") has occurred. The claim of the present argument is that an analysis of this crisis in terms of the distribution of cultural capital will produce a more strategic theory of curricular reform than will a pluralist critique.

If progressive teachers have a considerable stake in disseminating the kind of knowledge (the study of cultural works as a practice of reading and writing) that is the vehicle for critical thinking, this knowledge is neverthe-

work to its initial audience, it must certainly have other relations as a canonical work. The failure to make this distinction is the premise of every ideology of "tradition," if tradition implies the supposed reproduction of cultural values by the monuments of culture themselves. Yet if canonical works do not all by themselves reproduce cultural values, it is significant—even integral—to the real social process of reproduction that they are thought to do so. The real social process is the reproduction not of values but of *social relations*. These relations consist of much more than a relation of text to reader.

The form of the canon belongs to the process of the reproduction of social relations, but it does not enter this process immediately. The canon does not accrete over time like a pyramid built by invisible hands, nor does it act directly and irresistibly on social relations, like a chemical reagent; in its concrete form as a syllabus or curriculum, the canon is a discursive instrument of "transmission" situated historically within a specific institution of reproduction: the school. We may define the latter institution as a more or less formal arrangement for undertaking intensively educational functions also distributed extensively across the institutional breadth of any social formation. The system of educational institutions reproduces social relations by distributing, and where necessary redistributing, knowledge. The canon is thus not grounded in an "institution of criticism," as is sometimes said. Criticism is not an institution but a disciplinary discourse inhabiting a historically specific educational institution.

The instrumentality of the canon within this system is a function of its status as an objectification of the reproduction process, Benjamin's "cultural treasure," or Bennett's "legacy," which is inexhaustible because it appears to reproduce itself—it is wealth never consumed by consumption. The educational apparatus regulates, because it makes possible, access to this inheritable treasure. Individual works are taken up into this system (preserved, disseminated, taught) and confront their receptors first as canonical, as cultural capital. There is no other access to works: they must be confronted as the cultural capital of educational institutions, a circumstance proven rather than disproven by the exceptional case of the autodidact. The question of access, however, is far from simple. The school does not exist merely to lift a veil of ignorance, or to set one at the threshold of the temple. The school functions as a system of credentialization by which it produces a specific *relation* to culture. That relation is different for different people, which is to say that it reproduces social relations.

To give an account of the exact constitution of these relations is to index the "barbarism" of which Benjamin writes: the social relations of domination and exploitation. But to foreground the particular barbarities of the

historical record, as though mere exposure to canonical works were the same as exposure to these barbarities, is to misrecognize certain recurrent structural features of the institutions which constitute the mechanism of social reproduction. The implications of this fact are immensely significant if the duration of educational institutions can be shown to be (in part) an effect of formal objectifications of reproduction, such as canons of texts. The institution elicits out of its very structure a demand for the subordination of the historical specificity of individual works to the ideology of the canonical form (tradition), and this subordination is recognizable in pedagogic practice as a homogenizing of dogmatic content, the positing of universal truths discovered and rediscovered in the great works. Against this inert narrative one can respond with Benjamin's determination to "brush history against the grain"; but this is never a simple act, for reasons Bourdieu persuasively argues. Institutions of reproduction succeed by taking as their first object not the reproduction of social relations but the reproduction of the institution itself.⁸¹ No institution is in that sense reducible to its social function. Only by reason of its relative autonomy does an institution succeed in the remote function of reproducing social relations. Autonomy in no way transcends social formations but rather takes the form of a structural atavism existing in complex relation to the motors of social change. Hence major reorganizations of social relations alter only very slowly the larger structural features that allow the school historically "to occupy homologous positions in the system of relations which link it to the dominant classes" (129). Elsewhere Bourdieu draws a stark conclusion from such facts: "it is no doubt in the area of education and culture that the members of the dominated classes have least chance of discovering their objective interest and of producing and imposing the problematic most consistent with their interests."⁸² This conclusion might be qualified, but not until the full measure of its force is acknowledged.

Bourdieu's argument will seem most surprising to those critics who would like to represent education as a means of directly effecting social change. Schools have seldom conceived of themselves in this way, and in fact it is only at certain privileged moments of crisis that consistently adversarial pedagogic practices have been cultivated. From the perspective of the present analysis, we can say that strategies such as the "opening of the canon," or the institution of noncanonical syllabi, repress the fact of reproduction through institutional forms in the belief that social relations are directly acted upon in the classroom. To insist again on what may now seem an obvious point, the apparatus of stratification by which knowledge is socially distributed—the educational system itself, with its multiple levels of access and procedures of credentialization—remains largely un-

structures serve to legitimate and stabilize what is always illegitimate and unstable—the momentary conjunctural order.⁸⁵ But let us name this situation exactly: it is contradiction. John B. Thompson draws a similar conclusion to the one implied here in his critique of Bourdieu, when he argues that social reproduction is not so much “a concert performed without a conductor” (Bourdieu’s phrase) as it is a “cacaphony of divergent and discordant notes.” Reproduction succeeds in late capitalist society as the effect of the proliferation of difference itself, the extreme divergence of interests resulting in “a lack of consensus at the very point where oppositional attitudes could be translated into political action.”⁸⁶ This observation stops short of theorizing a mechanism of systemic transformation, displacing it to the effects of extremely dispersed struggles upon the social totality. But no such theorization is necessary to advance the present argument, only a recognition of the exponentially increasing complexity of reproduction in the context of a historical *durée* in which many institutions survive long after the conditions of their emergence have disappeared.

Canons of texts belong to the *durée* of the school as both an objectification of “tradition” and as a list of texts (syllabus, curriculum) continuously changing in response to the frictional relations between institutional and social reproduction. Yet the significance of this tension between the two sites of reproduction is concealed from revisionists of the canon, who see a direct relation between the canon and social struggle but misrecognize the institution mediating this relation as a mythical “interpretive community,” or as an autonomous “profession.” The profession is not an institution any more than criticism is: it is the self-representation in the “pedagogic imaginary” through which teachers misrecognize their relation both to their discursive practices and to the institution of the school. The objective history of canon formation, if the latter is an effect of syllabus construction and revision, exhibits enormous variation, but this history can be recovered only in the context of the history of the school, whose invariant social function is the distribution of knowledge by means of techniques of dissemination and rituals of credentialization. The invariant function of credentialization, however, does not determine what constitutes credentials in a given social order, the certifiable possession of skill, knowledge, judgment, taste, genius, or whatever. The forms of cultural capital are rather determined within the whole social order as arenas of both certification and contestation, because the social totality is structured by the multiple and relatively incommensurable distinctions of class, sex, race, national status (to name only the crudest of many), distinctions produced and reproduced in a system that never closes upon its objective of homeostasis.

If the critique of the canon posited a direct relation of “representation”

touched by such programs; and it is unfortunately also a fact that adversarial pedagogies are largely restricted to elite institutions. More important, only a very impoverished notion of reproduction represents it as incompatible with social change. In the present socioeconomic order the reproduction of the system as a whole demands rapid transformations in social relations in response to rapid changes in the relations of production and consumption. In this context, the very success, for example, of feminist revisions of the literary canon must be read not simply as the victory of an oppositional culture but as a systemic feature of the reproduction of the sexual division of labor, the most recent form of which is manifested by the entrance (not without struggle) of middle-class women into expanded professional and managerial fields. Educational institutions facilitate the production of new relations (in necessary conflict with other institutions of reproduction, such as the family) and thus facilitate the reproduction of the system as a whole. This is to say nothing, of course, about the desirability of these new relations, or about the possibility of their use as a staging ground for more systemic strategies of resistance. Progressive teachers must first intervene, however, at the site of reproduction, *and even as one of its agents*, in order to put into circulation any critique of the system as the whole.

To repress the fact of the school’s institutional structure, as though the classroom had no walls, does not mean that the social effectivity of such strategies as curricular revision is merely illusory, but rather that it will never be quite what is intended, that pedagogy is never wholly within the control of pedagogues. But it is better to be aware of this fact than not, particularly in the case of the canonical/noncanonical distinction, which, as we have seen, has effects which exceed the immediate intention of affirming the cultural products of minority cultures. The crucial point in extending and qualifying Bourdieu’s account of an apparently homeostatic system of reproduction is the question of institutional atavism, Bourdieu’s insistence that “by ignoring all demands other than that of its own reproduction, the school most effectively contributes to the reproduction of the social order.”⁸³ Such a condition certainly obtains in the short run (even counter-cultural movements, once institutionalized, direct a good deal of their energy to ensuring the reproduction of their institutional forms); but Bourdieu’s analysis seems to beg the question of very large systemic transformations.⁸⁴ Any given social formation constructs itself out of much older apparatuses of reproduction that must be adapted to new social relations. These older apparatuses coexist with and complicate the social space of recent, perhaps more organic institutions (the capitalist corporation, for example). In the face of inevitable struggles within and at the juncture of institutional ensembles, the most atavistic features of older institutional

between social identity and the canonicity of certain texts, the effect of that correlation was to dehistoricize the forms of cultural capital, as well as the forms of social identity. This fact can be demonstrated by raising the specific question of what historical forms of cultural capital are embodied in literary texts. The answer to this question will of course entail recognizing the historicity of the category of literature itself, the recognition that its history cannot be dissociated from the history of the school. Let us begin with an example drawn from R. R. Bolgar's authoritative study, *The Classical Heritage and Its Beneficiaries*, an encyclopedic account of the transmission of classical literature from late antiquity through the end of the Renaissance. The example concerns the teaching of Graeco-Roman literature in the provinces of imperial Rome, and it is chosen both because it is an extreme case, and because its extremity disturbs Bolgar's narrative of transmission in instructive ways:

As the protective might of the legions weakened, so the imperial government came to rely to an ever greater extent on its intangible assets; and the excellence of Graeco-Roman culture was turned into useful bait for retaining the loyalty of uncertain provincials. Steel was in short supply. So the provinces were to be grappled to the soul of Rome by hoops of a different make. Literature was taught with great zeal as an introduction to the Roman way of life; but what it introduced men to was in the last analysis the old life of the city-states.⁸⁷

When Bolgar reaches this point in his account, his prose is excited into an unusual state of figurative radiation by the spectacle of what Bourdieu calls "symbolic violence," "the imposition of a cultural arbitrary (*arbitraire*) by an arbitrary power."⁸⁸ The legions withdraw and are replaced by schools. But for Bolgar this fact in no way compromises the excellence of Graeco-Roman literature. On the contrary, the reproduction of the Roman system in the provinces comes to rely in part upon the very quality of its literature, which for Bolgar remains uncontaminated by the business of imperial administration. It would seem that the original context of a work's production becomes simply irrelevant when individual works are appropriated by the empire's ideological machinery, which flattens local cultures in its path. Bolgar is struck by this discrepancy and cannot refrain from noting and even belaboring the bewildering circumstance that the literature read in the provincial curriculum seemed to reflect favorably the "old life of the city-states" rather than the contemporary norms of the imperium.

There is indeed a real and irresolvable discrepancy in the relation between the historical specificity of works and the factitious universality of the

canonical form, which aspires to transhistorical validity by masking the pedagogic function of disseminating this year's orthodoxy. But the puzzle of why this discrepancy does not seem obvious to everyone is not nearly so inexplicable in the context of Bourdieu's point that social reproduction is not effected directly through the contents of the curriculum. At the moment when the spectacle of symbolic violence begins to play on the stage of empire, it becomes easy to forget what is elsewhere for Bolgar merely given, that the first objective of the educational system in the provinces was to teach future colonial subalterns the Latin language. As students of Roman education, these administrators had a different relation to Latin than native speakers, as well as a different relation to their own languages. If the primary objective of education in the provinces was to produce this linguistic differentiation of the subject populace as a technical means of administration—government by symbolic rather than by physical violence—then the signifying effects of Latin literature, its ideological "contents," were necessarily mediated, diffused, or even contained by the effects of this superimposed social stratification. The primary fact about the teaching of Latin literature was thus not that it conveyed Roman cultural values but that it was the vehicle for the teaching of the Latin language. This goal was important enough to overwhelm any objection that might have been raised to particular Latin works whose contents may not have been wholly compatible with the norms of the imperium. As carriers first and foremost of *linguistic capital* these works could then become the vector of ideological motifs not necessarily expressed within the works themselves.

The example of imperial education is not exceptional. The situation of provincial administrators was not markedly different from that of the educated citizenry of Rome itself, where the Roman way of life also had to be reproduced. This fact is quite apparent in Bolgar's discussion of the "well organized educational system of the Empire," which had for its main aim not so much to teach the Roman way of life as to teach the two literary languages of Latin and Greek. These were not, of course, the languages learned by Roman infants; they were languages "remote from ordinary speech" (22), second languages learned in the formal context of an institutional relation between teacher and student, and by means of that abstract alienation of language known in the classical world as "grammar." At this point the question of literacy may be taken up again, in recognition of the fact that the systematic regulation of reading and writing belongs to the project of social reproduction. What one learns to read is always another language, and because that language is unequally distributed, it is a form of capital. The internal differentiation of language produced by the classical

ter with better works—nor is it a question of insuring the ideological orthodoxy of texts by extraordinary procedures of exclusion and censorship (these measures have for the most part been imposed from above, by church or state). Literary curricula, historically the substance of most educational programs, are capable of assimilating the otherwise dangerous heterodoxies expressed in some works by means of homogenizing methods of textual appropriation exercised within institutional structures of symbolic violence. The ideological effect rides on the back of the effect of sociolinguistic differentiation produced by access to the literary language, which is therefore its vector. Only in this way can one explain the use of the same canonical works to inculcate in different generations of students many different and even incompatible ideologies.

Authors themselves do not produce the effect of linguistic differentiation, any more than their works can produce for later generations of readers the same effects of persuasion they may have intended for readers of their own time, and which, when we set out to critique these effects, we call “ideological.” Authors cannot be said to write *for* the educational system but in a determinate relation to it, *as the subjects it produces*. The history of canon formation belongs to the history of literary production, therefore, as a condition of production; in the same way, literary production is a condition of reproduction, of the history of canon formation. Hence the production of literary texts cannot be reduced to a specific and unique social function, not even the ideological one. Authors confront a monumentalized textual tradition already immersed as speakers and writers in the social condition of linguistic stratification that betrays at every level the struggle among social groups over the resources of language, over cultural capital in its linguistic form. When these authors are joined to the frieze upon which they formerly gazed, the record of struggle seems to pass into oblivion as the unwritten. Yet that record is immediately available in works themselves as the *language of literature*, out of which literature is made, and in the process of canon formation as the institutional intervention by which the literary curriculum becomes the pedagogic vehicle for producing the distinction between credentialled and uncredentialled speech.

Literary Language as Linguistic Capital

If the pedagogic form of the canon always assumes (as well as activates) an ideology of tradition, that ideology collapses the history of canon formation into an autonomous history of literature, which is always a history of writers and not of *writing*. The critique of the canon fails to overcome this ideology, and thus it has consistently fallen back on notions of tradition, in the form of various countertraditions of noncanonical writers. A history of

educational system as the distinction between a credentialled and a noncredentialled speech reproduces social stratification on the model of the distinction between the tribe or nation and its sociolinguistic other, the “barbarian.” Incorrect speech is marked from the first appearance of Alexandrian grammars as “barbarism,” a characterization persisting into the present as a strategy for mobilizing xenophobia in the service of an internal linguistic stratification constructed upon and reproducing internal social distinctions. The barbarism about which Benjamin writes is nothing other than the ironic inversion of that ideological representation of the dominated lower classes as the barbarians *within the walls*.

It has long been known that the appearance of literature as a collection of canonical texts was from the first a scholarly pedagogic device of the classical grammarians. Thus E. R. Curtius, in his *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*: “In antiquity, the concept of the model author was oriented upon a grammatical criterion, the criterion of correct speech.”⁸⁹ Quintilian writes of the classical world’s primary educators, the *grammatici*, that they were concerned to teach “the art of speaking correctly” and “the interpretation of the poets,” the one by means of the other.⁹⁰ They developed procedures for the selection of texts that sometimes constituted the sole means of their preservation (for example, the anthological handbooks within which many classical authors survive as exemplary fragments). Nor is the formation of textual canons merely accidentally allied to the emergence of grammatical speech as socially marked. The constitutive link in classical education between the selection of texts and the distribution of cultural capital in linguistic form is remarked by Curtius in connection with Aulus Gellius’s extension of the term *classicus*, one of Rome’s five propertied classes, to the best of the poets, “a first class and taxpaying author, not a proletarian”—about which Curtius comments, “What a tidbit for a Marxist sociology of literature” (250). But this general-ogy of the classics has remained merely an etymological joke (and Curtius himself is seldom cited in the canon debate) because selections of texts historically have the appearance of having selected themselves. This is certainly the case in any very complex social conditions of literary production, where the literary tradition is generalized as the heritage of a homogeneous literary culture, whose text tradition is curiously independent of the institutions transmitting that tradition. It is by no means necessary to reduce the former to the latter in order to see what lies plainly before us: a process of unnatural selection, a social history. The literary canon has always functioned in the schools as a pedagogic device for producing an effect of linguistic distinction, of “literacy.” The production of this effect does not depend upon the biasing of judgment—the educational system works bet-

writing would by contrast have to pose first the question of what genres of writing count as "literature" in a given historical context, a question that logically precedes the question of what criteria of value may affirm or deny the canonicity of particular writers.

In this context, it is well worth reconsidering the first theoretical movement in the twentieth century explicitly to reject the concept of tradition, namely, Russian Formalism. The Formalists attempted to move beyond the history of writers by displacing the agency of change within literature from the psychology of authors (genius, originality) to the "literary system," conceived as a specific and irreducible linguistic system with its own immanent laws of evolution. Here I would like to follow the Formalist argument, very summarily, to its theoretical conclusion, the dead end that cleared the way for the advances of the Bakhtin school. In retracing this history, I propose to make several points preliminary to constructing a historical-theoretical sketch of canon formation. The first of these points is that twentieth-century literary theory has usually attempted to define literature by reference to linguistics, because this adjacent, apparently more scientific discipline seems to offer some assurance against lapsing into psychologistic notions of genius or originality. The Formalists, much in advance of what came to be called "theory" in the 1960s, worked through certain hypotheses about the autonomy of the "linguistic system," and discovered at the end of this project that they were forced to affirm the inseparability of the linguistic from other aspects of the social. Second, since the problem of canon formation has emerged at the margins of theory (and sometimes, as we have seen, in direct opposition to it), it has tended merely to regard the question of the relation between literature and language as having nothing to do with the process by which certain *authors* have been excluded from the canon. Yet histories of canon formation, when they consist primarily of a narrative of *reputations*, of the names which pass in and out of literary anthologies, explain nothing. Such narrative histories fail to recognize generic or linguistic shifts which underlie the fortunes of individual authors by establishing what counts as literature at a given historical moment. In this context the Bakhtinian response to Formalism makes available a strategic method that might now be used to address at the level of theory the neglected philological evidence presented in the preceding section. I refer to the Bakhtin circle's reformulation of the question of literary language as the question not of an *essentially* different kind of language (literariness) but of linguistic differentiation as a social fact.

While the critique of the canon is now being advanced in critical debate in conjunction with a thorough skepticism about the narrow discursive category of literature, any simple dismissal of this category would fail to

recognize its historical force. The ontological groundlessness of literature in no way diminishes its social effects as a means of marking the status of certain texts and genres. To their credit, the Russian Formalists recognized the historical variability of literature without dismissing it as a mere fiction. For that reason the question of generic transformation in history was first and last on their theoretical agenda: they were interested to understand what counts as literature in a given organization of social life. From a very early point, with the publications of the *Opayaz* movement, the solution to this problem was founded upon a distinction between "poetic" and "ordinary" language. This distinction cut across the historical forms of literature, which were deduced from the more fundamental concept of "literariness," in Eichenbaum's words, "an element of such specificity that its study can be productive only in immanent evolutionary terms."⁹¹ The question of literariness, as opposed to literature, is the opening move of theory, even today, at the most sophisticated levels of rhetorical reading, and long after Medvedev's definitive critique of that concept in his 1928 volume, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*. With regard to Shklovskii's typical discussion of poetic language, Medvedev objects, for example, "to the continual naive confusion of the linguistic definition of language (Sumerian, Latin) with its poetic significance ('heightened language'), confusion of dialectological characteristics (Church Slavonicisms, popular dialects) with the poetic functions of language."⁹² Yet the polarization of linguistic practices into the poetic or literary, and the ordinary or practical, generated an attractively simple and elegant model of historical transformation conceived as an oscillation between the processes of familiarization and defamiliarization (*ostranenie*). This model (in Medvedev's terms, a pseudo-dialectic) seemed finally to bypass the agency of individual psychology; literary evolution produces its effects in the fashion of waves moving through authors as through a medium. In fact, as Medvedev argues, the model of evolution by defamiliarization is wholly grounded in individual psychology, in the form of an invoked psychic law of perception, an oscillation between the stimulus of the new and the fatigue of long-standing perceptions.⁹³ In this sense, the supposedly immanent evolutionary model turns out to be not immanent to the literary system at all, but rather an effect of an unchanging law of human psychology. Now this theoretical deficiency, a dead end acknowledged implicitly by Tynjanov in his later writing (in particular, "On Literary Evolution"), as well as by Marxist critics of Formalism, is well worth pondering: beneath the thin ice of linguistics lies the ocean of the psyche. It will be necessary to return from this depth, where grammar itself is supposed to have been found, in order to recognize literariness as *literary* language, as writing.

This practice is institutionalized first in the teaching of grammar, which, so far from being a structure to be recovered from a depth, is a linguistic practice upon the two-dimensional plane of the text.⁹⁴

Hence it can be said that what the Bakhtin school salvaged from the wreck of Formalism was precisely linguistics. In the absence of a concept of literary language, no explanatory model could be brought to bear upon the variable historical forms of literary production, much less upon the formation of textual canons. One had only to place the concept of literary language in its proper category—not aesthetics but sociolinguistics, what Medvedev called “sociological poetics.” In Bakhtin’s writing, the axis upon which literature appears as a particular kind of valorized language is rotated away from the essentialist scale of automatization/defamiliarization and repositioned along a hierarchy of socially marked forms of speech. Bakhtin stages this axial rotation to the vertical as a defense of that language which erupts into the literary from beneath, as its antagonist or object of colonization. The literary language and its other, what Bakhtin calls *heteroglossia*, are defined relationally and contextually at the moment of their contact. Here it is necessary to quote a key passage from “Discourse in the Novel”:

In different national languages and different epochs, the general and, as it were, extra-generic category of the “literary language” is filled with a variety of concrete content; it has different degrees of importance in the history of literature as well as in the history of literary language. But everywhere and always “literary language” has as its area of activity the conversational language of a literarily educated circle (in the example cited above, the language of “respectable society”), the written language of its everyday and semiliterary genres (letters, diaries, etc.), the language of socio-ideological genres (speeches of any kind, pronouncements, descriptions, printed articles, etc.) and ultimately of the artistic prose genres, in particular the novel. In other words, this category attempts to regulate the area of literary and everyday (in the sense of dialectological) language not already regulated by the strict previously coalesced genres, with the specific and well-differentiated demands they make on their own languages; the category of a “general literariness” does not of course apply at all in the areas of the lyric, the epic, and the tragedy. The concept of “general literariness” regulates the area of spoken and written heteroglossia that swirls in from all sides on the fixed and strict poetic genres—genres whose demands spring neither from conversational nor from everyday

written language. “General literariness” attempts to introduce order into this heteroglossia, to make a single, particular style canonical for it.⁹⁵

“Literary language” does indeed ride the crest of a historical wave, but not as the defamiliarized or the new. On the contrary, it forms at the interface between the language of preserved literary texts and the context-bound speech that continually escapes total regulation and hence *changes*. It is different from both. Within this complex one glimpses the operation of certain institutional forms hinted by Bakhtin. If the “older poetic genres,” preserved as nothing other than canonical texts, exert a kind of drag on the velocity of linguistic change, the product of which interaction is “literary language” (or Bakhtin’s “general literariness”), the place at which this braking action is applied is a specific social locus—primarily, if not exclusively, the school. Bakhtin has a highly metaphorical spatial sense of what this means, expressed in his image of colliding centrifugal and centripetal linguistic forces. With the exception of such “concrete forces” as genre (other such forces would be “an academic grammar, a school, salons”) he prefers to emphasize more abstract terms of analysis, although he is by no means reluctant to identify the function of literary language as the preservation of “the sealed-off quality of a privileged community” (382). Nevertheless a certain referential vagueness at this point in his argument suits the purpose of reevaluating and universalizing heteroglossia, analytically abstracted from its social base as that which lies just outside the reach of linguistics, marking the boundary of that discipline.

The theoretical difficulties thrown off by this program have scarcely begun to be resolved, but they need to be acknowledged if it is desirable to retain the concept of heteroglossia as the necessary complement to the sociolinguistic concept of literary language. These difficulties are most acute in Bakhtin’s description of the novel as a genre, specifically the “noncanonical genre,” by which he means that it never develops generic rules (canons) even as it accumulates a repertoire of works. The novel as noncanonical genre is privileged for Bakhtin as the genre which welcomes the heteroglossic: “The novel senses itself on the border between the completed, dominant literary language and the extraliterary languages that know heteroglossia” (7). This border is permeable in either direction, making heteroglossia accessible to hegemonic cultural forms and vice versa. Hence the boundaries of the genre itself cannot be fixed, nor can its appearance as a modality in other High Cultural genres (what Bakhtin calls “novelization”) be easily contained. What is important for Bakhtin in the valorization of the novel as genre is the recovery of a determinable mechanism of change in literary history from the vertiginous domain of social relations.

erature as everything that is written, and the more modern sense, dating from the later eighteenth century, of literature as particular kinds of writing (poetry, plays, etc.).⁹⁹ If the term "literature" can be retained to indicate a transhistorical phenomenon at all, it would have to be defined as the canonical genres of writing, whatever these genres happen to be in any particular time or place, and whatever name may have been given to them collectively. We are speaking, then, of certain genres of *writing* which become paradigmatic for a socially differentiated *speech*.

Sociolinguists have referred to the recurrent historical relation between a body of writing, (literature) and a socially marked "literary language" as *diglossia*, defined in a seminal essay by the sociolinguist Charles Ferguson as

a relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language (which may include a standard or regional standards), there is a very divergent, highly codified (often grammatically more complex) superimposed variety the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature, whether of an earlier period or in another speech community, which is learned largely by formal education and is used for most written and formal spoken purposes but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation.¹⁰⁰

Aside from providing an interestingly different perspective on precisely what we call "canon formation," Ferguson's study demonstrates (we shall have occasion to reflect upon this fact) how faithfully sociolinguistics follows in the path of that defunct literary discipline, "philology." Ferguson derives the concept of diglossia, defining high and low language varieties in a given speech community from such classical precedents as the distinction in ancient Greek between *katharvsa* and *demotic*. It now seems apparent that Ferguson's strict distinction between dialects and diglossic language varieties is too narrow, since in many cases diglossic hierarchy is unquestionably superimposed upon preexistent spoken dialects. Nor is it necessary to deny that bilingual cultures can erect diglossia on the basis of fully distinct languages, especially if one is to understand the operation of imperial languages within colonized territories. In an important revision of Ferguson's argument, Joshua Fishman has suggested that diglossia is most usefully conceived as "the social allocation of functions to different languages or varieties," whether or not this functional distinction appears within a single language or upon a base of dialectal or multilingual diversity.¹⁰¹

In this Bakhtin's project is still very much in accord with such Formalist themes as Shklovskii's "canonization of the junior branch."⁹⁶ This objective accounts for certain peculiarities in the theory, for example, the argument Todorov has reasonably questioned, that the novel flourishes during periods in which the central power (centripetal force) weakens.⁹⁷ If genre is indeed the important concept in constructing a history of literary production, that history need not seek to explain the appearance of new works.⁹⁸ It already follows from Bakhtin's discussion of literary language that this language and heteroglossia cannot be opposed as old and new—they are exactly contemporary. Literary language (as the product of the educational system) will always mediate between canonical texts (the syllabus of study) and the production of new literary works; but literary language is neither necessarily inhibiting nor enabling in relation to new works. The relation will rather be differently constituted at different times according to the total complex of institutional forms and social/linguistic stratification. Hence, while it is simply (but not trivially) correct to say that literature must be written in the literary language, with its linguistic and generic constraints, it does not necessarily follow that the heteroglossic is the wellspring of the new, but rather that it acts through texts upon the literary language and its genres. Literary language also changes, if at a slower pace than extraliterary language, or heteroglossia, and this is the crucial point. Canonical texts, institutionally preserved and disseminated, constitute the paradigmatic basis of literary language, the guarantor at the lower educational levels of simple grammatical speech, the exemplar, at higher levels, of more expansive as well as more elite standards of linguistic use (stylistic or rhetorical rather than simply grammatical norms), even the licensed abuses that are now virtually identified with the language of high canonical literature. Hence canonical texts cannot be reduced wholly to exemplars of the literary language or the grammatical speech abstracted from them, and that difference is as consequential as the perpetual difference of the heteroglossic. This point seems to me congruent with Bakhtin's argument in preserving his picture of colliding sociolinguistic forces, but with the focus of analysis shifted from a perennial genre—the novel as the heteroglossic mechanism of literary transformation—to a perennial social-institutional situation. This displacement is necessary in order to isolate the concept of literary language as a linguistic fact with the same duration as the school.

Literary language therefore cannot be characterized monolithically as the recurrent foregrounding of a particular linguistic feature (not even rhetoricity), nor need it be equated with a unique kind of speech act (such as fiction). In very useful discussions of the allied term "literature," Raymond Williams has emphasized the historical distinction between the sense of lit-

social relations of writing. The facts of this history are already very well known. The following sketch is intended not only to recollect these facts, as they have been recounted by Auerbach, Curtius, and others, but to enact a return, with theoretical hindsight and with a different political agenda, to this "philological" narrative.

The Historical Forms of the Literary Canon Grammar and poetry. The category of "literary language" is of course foundational for philology; it was given consummate treatment by Auerbach in his *Literary Language and Its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and in the Middle Ages*, first published in 1958. Auerbach's identification of literary language, what he calls *Hochsprache*, by the signal features of "selectivity, homogeneity, and conservatism," agrees precisely with Ferguson's description of diglossia.¹⁰² Neither Auerbach nor Ferguson, however, recognizes the generally recurrent structure of the phenomenon they observe: a technical arrangement for the distribution of cultural capital in linguistic form. The history of literature, the history of textual canons, the history of languages—these histories yield nothing but facts if they do not bring into view this structural arrangement. Within the history of canon formation we will always be able to discern the arrangement and rearrangement of (1) an institutional practice, or pedagogy; (2) a body of preserved and disseminated writings, or canon; and (3) a produced linguistic knowledge, or *Hochsprache*.

Auerbach insists that the literary language must be regarded as "not only the written language but also the spoken, everyday language of the educated classes" (249). This point characterizes more accurately than does Ferguson's account the diglossic situation of classical Latin, which Latin writers themselves acknowledged in the distinction between *sermo rusticus* and *sermo urbanus*. Setting aside the obviously interesting geographical basis for this distinction (as well as the bilingualism of the Greek-reading literati), it is worth emphasizing that the literary language is always also a speech, a *sermo*. The Roman educational system was designed to train the upper social classes for oral performance, a task delegated to the highest level of the system, the schools of rhetoric. "Literacy," the knowledge of how to read and write, was a prerequisite to that higher training. The degree of correspondence between the written language as it was abstracted and formalized from a body of writing, and the actual speech of the "educated classes" is not known, but it can be conjectured that the formalized written language had to some degree diverged from the speech of educated Romans by the end of the first century B.C., when Ennius, who survives now only in fragmentary form, was replaced in the school curricu-

Diglossia defined as a differentiation of social/linguistic function does not permit a simple identification of hierarchized languages with the hierarchy of classes. The distinction between high and low is a distinction of function only, and access to function can be regulated in various ways, many of which are far more subtle than the mechanism of inclusion/exclusion. For example, it was not especially important for the medieval nobility to be literate in the high language, Latin, a language mainly reserved for the clergy. The control of the medieval clergy over the functions allocated to the high variety served to reproduce with relative stability and efficiency the ideological discourses of feudalism, with its specifically religious mode of symbolic domination. From the perspective of sociolinguistics, it does not matter what combination of generic options constitutes the high variety of writing (literature in the transhistorical sense), a fact that can be verified by comparing the medieval curriculum, founded upon specialized discourses of knowledge (the trivium and quadrivium), with the curriculum of the early modern humanist schools, founded upon a canon of classical literary works, and from which is derived a repertoire ("copia") of literary styles. But this transition, which relegated to obscurity a great number of medieval works, has unfortunately appeared to literary historians primarily as a revaluation of particular authors and texts. Here the inadequacy of empirical literary history to theorize canonical reformations as anything other than the rise and fall of individual reputations is matched by the inadequacy of sociolinguistics to theorize changes in the literary language as anything other than a process of linguistic erosion, the devolution of the distinction between an original *katharêvusa* and an original *demotic*. The linguistic model isolates literary language as a social fact, but it also overemphasizes features of stability and duration whose social function is masked in the normative prescriptions of grammar. Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia disrupts both static models by reminding us that if the difference between the written and the spoken is at stake in the continuous transformation of the literary language, this difference can be made to take the charge of many other differences constitutive of social struggles. Hence it is no tragedy that linguistic analysis must always arrive too late upon the scene of heteroglossia, that heteroglossia can never be isolated before it comes into contact with what Bakhtin calls "official language." The silence that follows this lapsed conversation is always legible as the written itself—literature, of whatever genre. The oppositional terminologies Bakhtin mobilizes in order to hear these conversations—the distinction between the dialogical and the monological, carnival and official culture—need less to be applied in a quasi-Bakhtinian reading than invoked as a possible (but not the only) means of theorizing the history of the

lum by Virgil, a more up-to-date model of grammaticality and style. This is not to say that the pedagogic need for grammatical models is an exclusive determinant of preservation or canonicity (though it was, in fact, for many Greek authors). Grammaticality, correct speech, becomes an increasingly complex social practice precisely because the literary language changes without discarding older literary works. One consequence of this fact is that bodies of canonical texts are internally organized in later phases of accumulation to reflect distinctions such as "archaic," "classical," or "modern," which are indifferently both "literary-historical" and "linguistic" categories.

The scriptorium. The distinction between *sermo urbanus* and *sermo rusticus* does not, as one might expect, disappear over the following centuries. On the contrary, as Auerbach notes, the "High Latin" of the senatorial aristocracy had become virtually unintelligible to the common man by the fifth century A.D., while vulgar Latin, in continuous creolizing contact with the "barbaric" languages, evolved into the dialectal variety of the early Romance tongues (252). This primeval forest of philology concerns us only insofar as it conditions a new arrangement of institution-canon-*Hochsprache*, with very different social effects. Notwithstanding the *sermo humilis* of the early church fathers, the Latin *Hochsprache* ceased to have a broad social base until classical educational institutions had been fully appropriated by the literate clergy. And this development waited upon an accumulation of Christian writing in Latin (including a Latin Bible) sufficient to undergo canonical organization, and to which other classical writing might be subordinated in various ways. The fusion of early Christian scriptural form, with its severe canonical and doxological anxieties, with the surviving texts of classical pedagogy, produced an extremely complex canonical arrangement within which the category of literature in the narrow sense (poetry, plays, etc.) may be said to have been completely irrelevant. The medieval *scriptorium* had no need for such a category, and it does not emerge until much later. The medieval pedagogic canon was selected according to the criterion of *truth*. It is a question of how a work like Virgil's *Aeneid* will be read: the criterion of truth enjoins a practice of interpretation so different from our own that it would indeed be inaccurate to say that Virgil was read at this time as "literature." Even the late medieval parodic texts celebrated by Bakhtin interrupt this regime of truth not as fictions but as the linguistic complement of the truth, namely, the lie.¹⁰³

Access to the *scriptorium*, to what counts as literacy in the Middle Ages, was successfully regulated without installing the Latin *Hochsprache* as a (ruling) class language. Rather, the linguistic differentiation of literate clergy and illiterate nobility marked the relative cultural autonomy of

the "estates," as well as their historical complicity (since the ranks of the higher clergy were generally drawn from the nobility). The collapse of this pure allocation of functions (in Auerbach's words, the clerical "monopoly on writing") dates from the eleventh and twelfth centuries, with the simultaneous revival of classical Latin and the emergence of vernacular writing. Auerbach is uncomfortable with the problem of explaining this origin (now of course the subject of intense research and controversy), and while glancing briefly at such economic factors as the expansion of trade and the growth of towns (both of which imply secular uses of literacy), he is finally determined to credit the "spontaneous force" that "gives rise to individual talents" (276). A different sense of how certain social struggles give rise to new kinds of literary production is conveyed by Natalie Zemon Davis, in her discussion of the changing relation between the medieval nobility and the clergy: "from the twelfth through the fourteenth centuries in France, knights and noble landowners were trying to set themselves off from the clergy and forge an independent cultural identity."¹⁰⁴ This project, which no doubt responded to many pressures including the paradoxical one of a relative relaxation (or delegation) of military functions among the warrior class, involved the appropriation of literacy as a form of cultural capital, but not the *Hochsprache* or pedagogic canon of the scribal class.¹⁰⁵ The appropriation of literacy was accomplished in conjunction with another appropriation—of that popular, folk culture from which the nobility had never distinguished itself. Hence the elaboration of narrative material of folk culture into vernacular forms of writing came to be consumed at the court in a different way than such material had formerly been consumed by the folk. The emergence of a vernacular High Culture not only weakened the major clerical form of domination—its monopoly of literacy—laid the groundwork for the cultural alienation of the nobility from the lower classes by instituting a linguistic differentiation within the vernacular where none had existed before.¹⁰⁶ This linguistic alienation, an analogical extension of the norms of Latin grammaticality into vernacular speech, forms one basis of that aristocratic culture about which Norbert Elias writes in his major study, *The Civilizing Process*. This process concealed its origins in the violent forms of feudal domination behind the finery of acquired taste, culture, civility.¹⁰⁷

Neoclassicism. The measure of this double appropriation has only begun to be taken; it remains difficult to assess because its effects are not necessarily produced by an extraordinary increase in the absolute magnitude of literacy. It was sufficient to alter the entire structure of linguistic stratification that the educational apparatus no longer function as a clerical monopoly. The acquisition of literacy by noble (and eventually also, bour-

geois) culture is the condition for the appearance of diglossia within the vernaculars, as opposed to the bilingualism of medieval “international” culture. Dante glimpses this development when he distinguishes in *De Vulgari Eloquentia* between a primary speech “which we learn without any rules in imitating our nurse,” and “another speech which is dependent on this one called by the Romans ‘grammar’.”¹⁰⁸ Dante’s “eloquence” will eventually require the institutional mediation of that same grammar. The production of vernacular grammatical speech is as complex as the incipient nationalism of the early modern period, and thus difficult to describe. Dante’s survey of Italian dialects in quest of a literary language, for example, dreams of a national language, however far removed a national polity may be from realization. The problem here, as Gramsci argues in his very helpful discussion of this subject, is not just the erection of one dialect over others as the language of writing (Bakhtin’s “generalized literariness”), but the persistence of bilingualism among the intellectuals, not all of whom now are clergy.¹⁰⁹ That is to say, these intellectuals are laymen, but not *laicus*, “ignorant of Latin.” Hence the paradigms of Latin grammar continue to dominate and deform vernacular grammaticality (as ever since), producing an ever more severe diglossic distinction of high and low, and at the level of literary production, an intensifying classicism. Gramsci argues that “for the Humanists the vernacular was like a dialect,” and that they were “therefore continuators of the universalism of the Middle Ages” (233). This construction of the humanist cultural project is entirely compatible with the now firmly established picture of the early modern absolute monarchy as, in Perry Anderson’s words, “a redeployed and recharged apparatus of feudal domination.”¹¹⁰ Such a state required, according to Gramsci, a new *noblesse de robe* of “administrators, scholars, and scientists, theorists, non-ecclesiastical philosophers etc.,” but their authority, especially pedagogic authority, was defined in contradistinction to the authority of the clergy and its *Hochsprache*, as the prestige of classical Latin or Greek, purged of medievalism.¹¹¹

At the point of the Latin language’s maximum pressure upon vernacular diglossia, it becomes possible for the accumulation of vernacular writing to be submitted to its first canonical organization, according to criteria of judgment manifestly classical. An example here would be Sidney’s *Defence of Poetry*, with its survey of English poets under the rubric of classical genres, as well as its strictures against the “mixing” of genres, an inhibition which already evinces humanism’s inability to assimilate medieval genres to the new order of neoclassicism. Those literary productions most in conformity with classical paradigms are momentarily advantaged vis-à-vis canonicity, but (as we shall see) only momentarily. It is also the case that

vernacular writing continually falls away from classicist paradigms, even actively resists them with the same gesture of cheerful resignation with which Shakespeare entrusted his book to the flood. The very severity of the distinction between high and low culture now partially inhibits the late medieval appropriation of popular, folk culture by the new High Cultural vernacular writers and occasions instead what Graham Peckey has rightly called “that irruption into ‘high’ culture of an unofficial (but potent and ubiquitous) sub-cultural formation—that entry of popular ‘carnival’ forms into the classical form of writing which is traditionally called the Renaissance.”¹¹² Canon formation within the early vernaculars thus appears as a conservative discourse of classicism among the intellectuals, who occupy an unstable position between the traditional pedagogic institutions of the clergy, the political structures of absolutism, and a continually re-nascent popular culture. Within this conjuncture it is a vernacular *Hochsprache* that finally emerges as most politically useful to the nobility of the sword, even if the nobility of the robe stakes its claim to autonomy and status upon its bilingualism, its knowledge of classical languages.¹¹³

The vernacular canon. The instability of the conjunctural position of literary culture in England is manifest as early as Sidney but reaches its first point of crisis in the judicial rhetoric of Dryden’s critical essays, where the imperative to judge literary merit according to linguistic or even “grammatical” criteria vexes the question of the relative merits of Jonson and Shakespeare.¹¹⁴ It would be misleading to dismiss this problem of judgment as a *lusus culturae*, as it persists in many versions through Samuel Johnson and beyond (for example, as the problem of the sublime, the question of the value of flawed works of genius versus “correct” works). The place of Shakespeare within the English canon is perhaps the result of the working through of this problem. Its definitive resolution, however, waits upon the entrance of vernacular writing into the school curriculum (earlier for the lower levels, later for the higher). In the meanwhile, vernacular literature occupies the place of a more or less unofficial culture in relation to existing pedagogic institutions still dominated by the clergy (and therefore by the Latin *Hochsprache*), but not to the new, transitional configuration of classes that come to be known as *la cour et la ville*. In his discussion of this hybrid culture (“polite society”) Auerbach writes of its distinctive valuation of *le bon usage*, in retrospect a remarkable fetishization of grammar.¹¹⁵ The rigorous simplification of grammaticality from the more latitudinarian norms of Renaissance humanism facilitates a cultural homogenization of aristocracy and bourgeoisie at a very high social level, where the aristocracy was finally “stripped of its feudal character” and the “wealthy bourgeoisie had begun to turn away from gainful occupations to-

While the vernacular canon as pseudo-scripture takes its place in the emergence of national "traditions," the ends of nationalism were served not simply by the establishment of vernacular classics but even more crucially by the use of these texts in the schools as a means of standardizing the vernacular language. We can recognize that the vernacular curriculum is a vector of nationalist ideology (in addition to whatever other cultural pieties may be transmitted in the classroom), but that recognition does not in itself explain the relation between these ideological motifs and the linguistic project of standardization. That relation is extraordinarily complex, since it is the standardization of the vernacular that enables some social groups to achieve upward mobility and other groups to be more effectively administered, kept in their places. This is to emphasize once again a cardinal principle of the present analysis, that literacy is not a simple matter of knowing how to read or write, but refers to the entire system by which reading and writing are regulated as social practices in a given society.

The ambiguous effects of that system are well exemplified by the phenomenon literary history denominates as the "rise of the novel," since the novel was an arena of literary production which challenged the restrictive generic definition of literature almost as soon as that definition was put into practice. The question raised by the novel was whether poetry or prose ought to provide the paradigms for a national standard language. In Bakhtin's terms the novel represented a "centrifugal" force, opening the domain of writing to a much larger populace, consisting of readers and writers whose class or gender would formerly have excluded them from literate culture. The existence of the novel at the interface between literate and illiterate culture produced a crisis in poetic production itself, symptomatically registered by the Romantic break with the "poetic diction" of eighteenth-century poetry, and its turn to a prose paradigm of "generalized literariness." Thus Wordsworth writes in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* that "there neither is, nor can be, any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition."¹²⁰ Without inquiring any further into the ambivalence of Wordsworth himself about the new prose paradigm of generalized literariness, we can at least affirm that by the beginning of the nineteenth century, such a paradigm was firmly established.

Literary language. Once installed as the triumph of a class-based sociallect over regional dialects, the standard becomes the condition of literary production, just as the literary curriculum becomes the institutional means for the reproduction of the standard. This linguistic/institutional fugue has been analyzed by Renée Balibar and Dominique Laporte in studies of the French language which have as yet no exact parallel in English criticism.¹²¹ In addition to their admirable rigor in insisting upon the mutual relation

ward *otium cum dignitate*."¹¹⁶ At this moment too, ephemeral institutions such as the salons produce and reproduce vernacular literary language as the prototype of a national standard language. Auerbach points out that the "public," that is, the polite reading public, "came . . . to be dominated by *la ville*, the bourgeoisie" (333). This development is somewhat easier to trace in England, where an early version of what we now call Standard English is being developed not only in the salons but more significantly in such institutions as the coffeehouse. These official/unofficial institutions are thrown across the gap between the still structurally medieval schools and the appropriation of the pedagogic apparatus by a hegemonic bourgeoisie whose administrative and ideological needs require a standardization of the vernacular language.¹¹⁷ It is in this climate of cultural transformation that a polemic is generated by such writers as Thomas Sheridan on behalf of a vernacular curriculum which, in Sheridan's view, would confirm for everyone that the works of English literature are fully the equal of the Greek and Latin "classics."¹¹⁸

The eventual retooling of the school as it turns out the new product of Standard English by means of a new curriculum of English writing does not transform the school beyond recognition; the vernacular curriculum required more than a century to rise from elementary schools to the university level, and the classics continued in the meanwhile to function as the rarest and most expensive form of cultural capital. But in another sense it is only vernacular writing that has the power to bring into existence the category of "literature" in the specific sense of poetry, novels, plays, and so on. The brackets that close around a particular set of genres at this time increasingly distinguish it on the one side from philosophical and scientific writing, and on the other from scripture—but this is not to say that "literature" does not claim for itself a "truth" which communicates and competes in some fashion with both these kinds of writing. The very fact that the body of literary works can be analogized to the scriptural "canon" betrays the fact that vernacular writing must borrow the slowly fading aura of scripture as a means of enhancing and solidifying its new prestige.¹¹⁹ Indeed the retroactive annexing of the Bible itself to the history of literature in our own time has effects that are quite distinguishable from the humanist *imitatio* of the Greek and Latin classics. The vernacular canon belongs to a nationalist agenda, quite distinct from the multilingual cultural internationalism of the Renaissance humanists. To mistake the emergence of the vernacular "canon" for a process like the formation of scripture, then, is to confuse the institutions of the church and the school. Even more, it is to misunderstand the functional atavism that allows the bourgeois school to be staffed by an unreconstructed clergy.

between the school and the discursive category of literature, these studies have the advantage of making visible the reappearance of diglossia in the different ways in which literature is taught at different levels of the school system. In their theoretical summary of Balibar and Laporte's work, Pierre Macherey and Etienne Balibar describe this difference as "different practices of the same language."¹²² Hence the distinction between the practices they designate as "basic language" and "literary language" is not simply a repetition of the distinction between *katharévusa* and *demotic*, nor between the standard and the dialect, although one may say that all forms of diglossia are homologous with respect to the function of social stratification. This point is rather more significant than might at first appear. Macherey and Balibar describe literature as "the agent for the reproduction of ideology in its ensemble," an agency it is able to enact by displacing the contradictions of class struggle onto the linguistic plane of a common language (56). While in my view this formulation does not always escape from an essentialism that attributes the same ideological function and content to all literary works, it is unquestionably the case that the "literary" language of which Renée Balibar and Dominique Laporte speak is a fission of the bourgeois sociolect resulting from the very success of its dissemination. Thus, while the standard or "common" language seems to efface social stratification by making language itself the vehicle of a common national identity, the "literary" language reinstates at another level a linguistic difference by which the upper classes can continue to mark their cultural distinction.

The difference of which Macherey and Balibar speak is not easy to define; yet it is immediately recognizable as the difference between *spoken* and *written* language. That is to say, "standard" spoken English becomes something different when its norms begin to imitate the norms of written English. Let us acknowledge here the truth of the still popular Strunk and White and say that this difference is produced by the "element of style," that is, by the practice of writing. But the two-handed engine which the new grammarians have wielded to harrow the ranks of the ungrammatical does not know its own doubleness, and Strunk and White are thus able to say, in a telling conflation, that style, by which they mean *written* style, is "a matter of ear, of reading the books that sharpen the ear."¹²³ Style may seem natural and individual, but it is the effect of a "good" education, that is, of contact with the *right* books. Even more tellingly, "Only a writer whose ear is reliable is in a position to use bad grammar deliberately." Style is nothing other than a certain relation to grammar, a relation most visible at the vanishing point of grammar's abrogation.

The effect of style, as we now know it, is ultimately a product of that

system within which the texts canonically organized for the purpose of instituting grammatical speech are not the same texts used to produce the element of style. Hence the emergence, beginning in the nineteenth century, of a canon of texts specific to the primary levels of the educational system, a canon consisting of writers and texts who are relatively "minor" in relation to the High canonical writing.¹²⁴ To these writers is entrusted the task of producing in the general populace a standard language, whose somewhat rigid norms are then relaxed, though in an altogether regulated way, with the introduction of more properly "literary" texts at the higher levels of the school system.¹²⁵

Literature and composition. The difference between standard and literary language roughly corresponds to the levels of the school system, but it also characterizes the university curriculum itself in the form of the cognate programs of composition and literature, yet another way in which "different practices of the same language" are inculcated in the school. The present urgent expansion of composition in the university undoubtedly exposes a failure to install the standard vernacular at lower levels of the educational system, or the return of what appears to be a condition of dialectal multiplicity (actually, a multiplicity of class, racial, and ethnic sociolects). The disintegration of the standard also throws into relief the institutional interdependence of composition and literature, widely misrecognized as a disrelation. Macherey and Balibar's analysis would lead us to conclude that "composition" is simply the belated attempt to install grammatical norms in college students by means of the linguistic form in which grammaticality is embodied, namely, "good" writing. But the program of composition has never been so limited as to identify grammaticality as its sole end; it has on the contrary posited grammaticality as the means to emancipatory political ends which are not finally different from the posited political ends of literary education.¹²⁶ Like the law, grammar is the same for everyone, except of course that it is not. The inflation of vernacular grammaticality into a universal speech, the language of participatory democracy, now goes by the ancient name of "rhetoric." In this way the classical sequencing of credentialization, first in grammar (literature) and last in rhetoric (oral performance), is reversed, but in order to produce a new kind of "oral performance" on the basis of the new kind of writing practice inculcated in the compositional syllabus. We will have no difficulty in recognizing what this speech sounds like: it is the speech of the professional-managerial classes, the administrators and bureaucrats; and it is employed *in its place*, the "office." It is not "everyday" language. The point of greatest historical interest about this speech is that its production bypasses the older literary syllabus altogether. Students need no longer im-

merse themselves in that body of writing called "literature" in order to acquire "literary" language. In taking over the social function of producing a distinction between a basic and a more elite language, composition takes on as well the ideological identity of that sociolect, its pretension to universality, its status as the medium of political discourse.

The fact that the universal speech is entirely based on the practice of writing marks the contradiction between its universality and the fact that it is not for everyone, a contradiction that subtends both the most ideologically mystified position on the relation of composition to the vernacular standard (E. D. Hirsch: "The normative character of a national written language lies in its very isolation from class and region"), and the avowedly progressive "writing across the curriculum" (James Kinneavy: "[Students] must be taught the common language of humanity in its full rhetorical scales").¹²⁷ Mistaking the class-based sociolect for the language of "humanity" is an Enlightenment dream from which the political subject is not meant to awaken. Hence we may read the ideology of composition, the curricular distinction by which composition names a practice of writing and literature a practice of reading, as obfuscating the real social relations between writing, reading, and speech, as concealing a conflict between the literary syllabus and the composition syllabus over what kind of writing will furnish the paradigms for the New Class sociolect. For this reason the boundary between the two syllabi has been subject to considerable surveillance, brusquely registered in composition theorist Edward Corbett's warning that "literary texts will more often than not serve as a distraction from, rather than a promoter of, the objectives of a writing course."¹²⁸

Sociolects. As the vernacular standard reaches the borders of internal colonization, manifest destiny turns over into defeat: it is no longer possible for these national borders to be ruled from a linguistic center, from within literature. In fact we know that fewer students are now routed through the curriculum of literature, although this is not a matter of numbers only—the center of the system of social reproduction has moved elsewhere, into the domain of mass culture. Hence the current state of the literary language, in which stylistic norms derived from literature have the anachronistic aura of "old money," no longer yields to an analysis identifying the literary text as "the privileged agent of ideological subjection."¹²⁹ The crisis of the literary syllabus is that it is indeed no longer such a privileged agent, because it is no longer the basis of the vernacular standard. Its very claim to universality meant that it took upon itself the universalization of every specific system of domination, and that it therefore opened itself to every specific force of resistance. This is one reason why the literary syllabus should seem to us now so vulnerable to the charge of a failure to "rep-

resent" various social groups, while the syllabus of composition proceeds quietly with the work of producing a language that is at once manifestly privileged, and which aspires at the same time to "universality," the same claim that was once asserted virtually without dissent for the literary curriculum. The students who regard composition as a necessary prerequisite for entry into professional life know this, without knowing what it is that they know. In this context, the movement to open or expand the canon might be regarded, among other things, as a belated attempt to save the bourgeois sociolect by expanding its base of textual representation, but to save that sociolect for literature. So long as this movement fails to recognize the social relation between writing and speech, or the institutional relation between literature and composition, it will not be capable of understanding the historical forces which compel the literary canon to manifest itself as *linguistic capital*. The relative decline of literary study in the schools is proof that the status of literary works as cultural capital depends to a significant degree upon their status as linguistic capital.

The disintegration of the vernacular standard as grammatical speech—the old bourgeois sociolect—is currently being registered in the universities as a critique of the discursive category of literature itself. This critique implies neither the "death of literature" nor the degradation of reading—it may even make possible a more historical understanding of the fortunes of literature, the sort of understanding Raymond Williams has been concerned to promote. Nevertheless we have to recognize that Standard English has dwindled to an impoverished scribal formulaic that takes refuge in the fortress of composition, where it defends itself against the continual invasion of barbarian tongues. This invasion, not of dialects but of sociolects, proceeds from "below" as the failure of Standard English (a process of creolization, the political consequences of which are perhaps not yet visible), but also from above, as the fracturing of the standard into technical jargons and styles of speech. "Writing across the curriculum," for example, already acknowledges that there no longer exists a single paradigm for the New Class sociolect, even if composition theorists still continue to speak of a "common" language. In their very multiplicity, the new sociolects may appear to parody the vernacular standard, vacillating between the hypergrammatical and the ungrammatical, between eloquence and awkwardness. Moreover, these sociolects are as much laterally competitive as they are vertically hierarchizing: they enact strategies of mutual derogation, of stylistic differentiation, responsive to social conditions which militate against the formation of a new standard. In the situation of apparent mutual incomprehension between different disciplines or professional fields, we recognize one form of what Lyotard calls the delegitimation of the

emancipation narrative," or the refusal of one speech for all, because the language of emancipation has always also been the language of the *ones* who speak for all:

In the context of delegitimation, universities and the institutions of higher learning are called upon to create skills, and no longer ideals—so many doctors, so many teachers in a given discipline, so many engineers, so many administrators, etc. The transmission of knowledge is no longer designed to train an elite capable of guiding the nation toward its emancipation, but to supply the system with players capable of acceptably fulfilling their roles at the pragmatic posts required by its institutions.¹³⁰

Lyotard goes as far as it may be possible to go in celebrating the carnival of sociolects, and he raises for us the crucial question of whether a systemic critique (such as that proposed here) must be articulated within and through such archaically hegemonic forms as a "common language," installed in the populace by means of a privileged (literary) curriculum. No doubt Lyotard is rather too eager to conclude that the "emancipation narrative" is disqualified by virtue of the fact that it has always been written in a "universal" language, but it would be a mistake to suppose that critique is identical to such a language; we should say rather that critique undertakes to criticize everything, including its own language.¹³¹ The poverty of Lyotard's merely celebrating the rise of sociolects is the same poverty that finds a solution to the problem of "representation" in the practice of cultural separatism. I shall continue to insist that the project of political integration is distinct from the project of cultural assimilation, and is in fact the basis for the latter's critique. Critique insists upon analyzing the systemic relations that exist between all the sites of cultural production and consumption. A politically effective critique of literary education would be better served now by discarding the problematic of representation for a problematic whose object is the systematic constitution and distribution of cultural capital. For if social groups now imagine that they are too different to speak the same language, or to be represented by the same cultural works in the schools, they are nevertheless always exchanging the same currency, even in the symbolic form of cultural capital. In the case of literature the problematic of cultural capital will always return us to the question of the relation between the means of literary production and the institutions of social reproduction within which speakers succeed or fail to speak for themselves.

Part Two Case Studies

Capital, ed. Pat Walker (Montreal: Black Rose Press, 1979). The controversy in the Walker volume over the question of whether the group of professional-managerial workers constitutes a class is scarcely settled in that volume. The Ehrenreichs proceed on the assumption that a class has both an economic and a cultural component, neither of which can be simply derived from, or reduced to, the other. This working assumption makes for a less than tidy theory of class, but the Ehrenreichs are not especially disturbed by this untidiness. Gouldner's conception of cultural capital casts the New Class in the role of a new bourgeoisie, the historical successors to the old. I have kept Gouldner's theory in mind, somewhat warily, preferring Bourdieu's less narrativizing mode of class analysis. For the more limited purposes of the argument I wish to make in this book, it perhaps does not matter whether the professional-managerial classes are conceived to be a distinct class, or, as Erik Olin Wright argues in his response to the Ehrenreichs in the Walker volume, a "contradictory location within class relations" (203). What matters to the present argument is that the emergence of the professional-managerial class has enormously altered the constitution and distribution of cultural capital in the school system, and that these new conditions remain the unremarked horizon of the canon debate.

Chapter One

¹See, for example, Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987); Roger Kimball, *Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Our Higher Education* (New York: Harper and Row, 1990); Dinesh D'Souza, *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus* (New York: The Free Press, 1991); and Alvin Kernan, *The Death of Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990). These texts have provided the popular media with the handful of arguments and anecdotes with which it has prosecuted the case against the liberal academy, in articles now too numerous to list. E. D. Hirsch, Jr.'s *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1987) is often cited in association with this backlash, although its agenda is rather more complicated than that of the texts mentioned above. See pages 35-36 below.

²Gregor McLennan, *Marxism, Pluralism, and Beyond* (Cambridge, Mass.: Polity Press in association with Basil Blackwell, 1989), 18.

³As McLennan remarks, in *ibid.*, "[W]hen the state is brought into this picture of competing, exchanging groups, the polity is represented as driven by a tendency to equilibrium, one in which the 'preferences' of interest groups can be expressed and to a large extent satisfied" (22).

⁴The phenomenon of "political correctness," recently the object of so much complaint in the right-wing media, can be seen in this context as the paradoxical triumph in the university of an otherwise defeated liberalism. It is not surprising that a progressive discourse, more or less routed in American culture, should find itself driven to police the borders of its diminished territory. As everyone on the left knows, the concept of political correctness was formulated within left discourse itself to critique the tendency to moralistic posturing provoked by the dire situation

of an increasingly reactionary social order. The usefulness of that concept is certainly at an end, but one may continue to speak of "identity politics" or what I would call "radical liberalism," a specific style of political discourse and practice distinct from the historical forms of socialism and Marxism. The argument of this chapter with liberalism, both traditional and radical, is not with any of its progressive objectives, but with those assumptions of its theory and practice which, because they are uncritically shared with American political culture in general, have disabled an effective response to the resurgence of reactionary politics. Taking the long view historically, there is considerable evidence for arguing that "identity politics" is now American politics, and that what we call identity politics exists on the same continuum of "interest-group" politics with positions that are manifestly conservative or reactionary. Identity politics makes no conceptual break as a politics with its precursors, even in its radical forms. I do not doubt that to those who are traumatized by the demise of liberalism, the alternative of a class-critique will seem even more quixotic; but it seems to me that it is in just this circumstance that a mode of systemic analysis recommends itself, and that certain foreclosed truths may become visible once again.

⁵The emergence of this topos into institutional prominence is marked by the publication of *English Literature: Opening Up the Canon*, selected papers from the English Institute, ed. Leslie Fiedler and Houston Baker (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981). See also Paul Lauter, "History and the Canon," *Social Text* 12 (Fall 1985), 94-101, and William Cain, *Crisis in Criticism: Theory, Literature and Reform in English Studies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984). Among feminist critiques of the canon are the following (others will be cited at later points in the chapter): Lillian Robinson, "Treason Our Text: Feminist Challenges to the Literary Canon," in *Critical Theory since 1965*, ed. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press), 572-85; Deborah Rosenfelt, "The Politics of Bibliography: Women's Studies and the Literary Canon," in *Women in Print*, ed. Joan Hartman and Ellen Messer-Davidow (New York: Modern Language Association, 1982), 11-31; Florence Howe, "Those We Still Don't Read," *College English* 43 (January 1981), 12-16. Howe writes: "What do we want? Nothing less than the transformation of the literary curriculum and the revision of critical theory and literary history that such a transformation would require" (16). See also Christine Froula, "When Eve Reads Milton: Undoing the Canonical Economy," *Critical Inquiry* 10 (December 1983), 321-48, and Adrienne Munich, "Notorious Signs, Feminist Criticism, and Literary Tradition," in *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism*, ed. Gayle Greene and Coppelia Kahn (London: Methuen 1985), 238-59.

⁶*Marxism, Pluralism, and Beyond*, 33.

⁷See Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985). Also interesting in this context, and perhaps neglected by literary postmodernists, is the work of Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, particularly their *Democracy and Capitalism: Property, Community, and the Contradictions of Modern Social Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1986). Because Bowles and Gintis, unlike Laclau and Mouffe, are

writing in response to an indigenous liberal tradition, they tend to emphasize the necessity for socializing the economy at the same time that it is democratized. Laclau and Mouffe do not disagree, but the very intimacy of their struggle with the Continental Marxist tradition, and the consequent vehemence of their post-Marxism, has had the unfortunate effect of underemphasizing for American readers the socialist commitments they also claim as their own.

⁸Basic statements of Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital may be found in his *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Sage Publications, 1977); "The Market of Symbolic Goods," *Poetics* 14 (1985), 13-44; *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); "The Production of Belief: Contribution to an Economy of Symbolic Goods," trans. Richard Nice, *Media, Culture and Society* 2, no. 3. (1980), 261-93; *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984); "The Field of Cultural Production or: the Economic World Reversed," trans. Richard Nice, *Poetics* 12 (1983), 331-56; *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990); *In Other Words: Essays towards a Reflexive Sociology*, trans. Matthew Adamson (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

⁹Rudolph Pfeiffer notes in his *History of Classical Scholarship from the Beginning to the End of the Hellenistic Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), that the analogy between the classics and the scriptural canon makes its first appearance in the work of the German philologist David Ruhnken, in 1768. As late as Frank Kermode's *The Classic: Literary Images of Permanence and Change* (London: Viking Press, 1975), it was still possible to discuss what we call canon formation exclusively by reference to the word "classic."

¹⁰Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "The Master's Pieces: On Canon Formation and the African-American Tradition," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 89 (1990), 105. Elsewhere, it should be noted, Gates has produced very effective critiques of certain aspects of the "representation" view of canon formation, among them the fetishizing of authenticity and individual experience. For a more complete view of the complex evolution of Gates's thinking on the subject of the canon, see his *Loose Canons: Notes on the Culture Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

¹¹In this context, see David Harvey, "Flexibility: Threat or Opportunity?" in *Socialist Review* 21 (1991), 74: "The postmodern embrace of ephemeral images, spectacle-type events, 'invented' traditions and heritages of all sorts, and perpetual novelty in the realm of cultural production deserves to be understood. . . . In recent years the cultural mass has pursued a whole host of political and ideological struggles that have general significance: anti-racism, feminism, and struggles concerning ethnic identity, religious tolerance, cultural decolonization, and the like. Because postmodernism is associated with a democratization of voice within the cultural mass, many of the struggles against a central source of authority and power (white, male, elitist, and Protestant, for example) have enlisted under the postmodern banner. I think it is fair to say that efforts to counter various forms of gender, racial, ethnic, or religious oppression have been more successful within the cultural mass than in many other segments of society. The problem is that these fights are being

waged within a relatively homogeneous class context, where issues of class oppression, though always on the agenda for political reasons, are by no means as strongly and personally felt as they would be among, say, women factory workers in the Philippines or Mexico." Harvey's understanding of the socioeconomic forces driving postmodern culture leads him to a thoroughgoing skepticism about the "ideological struggles" of the newly constituted cultural minorities. While I do not share the degree of Harvey's skepticism about the political significance of these struggles, there is a sense in which we might see the critique of the canon in the context of the new social movements as the latest version of a kind of left Hegelianism. The idealism of this critique consists in the belief that in order to change the world it is only necessary to change our image of the world. This is a question not of the reality of images but of the virtual absence of economic or class analysis in liberal pluralist theory. The absence of such analysis permits First World pluralists to construe the question of postcolonialism, for example, primarily as one of rehabilitating our images of the native cultures and identities of postcolonial populations, a program that does not begin to address the steadily worsening effects of what Immanuel Wallerstein has called the "capitalist world-system." See also Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1980); also Immanuel Wallerstein, *Geopolitics and Geoculture: Essays on the Changing World-System* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

¹²We are very far from being able to give a good account of the effects of images even within mass culture; this is one meaning, I take it, of the controversy over Spike Lee's film, *Do the Right Thing*. The provoking circumstance in that film's narrative of the absence of images of black Americans (the "brothers") from the wall of Sal's pizzeria (adorned with pictures of the heroes of Italian-American culture) suggests a rather obvious allegory of canon formation; but the subtler point, recently made by W. J. T. Mitchell, is that the provocation is beside the point when the narrative arrives at its complexly overdetermined moment of social violence. To see the images as the cause of the violence is to miss everything that overdetermines the social relations Lee is at such pains to evoke in their real complexity. Among its other accomplishments, the film suggests, then, not an allegory for the process of canon formation but for the liberal critique of the canon, that is, for our postmodern tendency to reduce the social to images of the social. See W. J. T. Mitchell, "The Violence of Public Art: *Do the Right Thing*," *Critical Inquiry* 16 (1990), 880-99.

¹³Hence the temptation to understand the process of canonical revision according to such political models as "affirmative action," a very dubious analogy which trivializes a necessary, fragile, and altogether too limited political practice whose site is very different—the site of employment. See, for example, Lillian Robinson, "Treasure Our Text," on the necessity of including more female writers in the canon: "It is up to feminist scholars, when we determine that this is indeed the right course to pursue, to demonstrate that such an inclusion would constitute a genuinely affirmative action for all of us" (572). The fact that the "affirmative action" analogy is usually tacit in the rhetoric of canon revision indicates some uneasiness with it, an uneasiness that needs to be honestly acknowledged.

¹⁴Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 111. See also Joan W.

Scott's judicious reconsideration of this question in "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* 17 (1991), 773–97. Scott argues that "A refusal of essentialism seems particularly important once again these days within the field of history, as disciplinary pressure builds to defend the unitary subject in the name of his or her 'experience'" (791).

¹⁵In his more recent *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time* (London: Verso, 1990), 231, Laclau relates social identity to the context of representation as follows: "The notion of representation as the transparency of the identity between representer and represented identity was always incorrect, of course: but it is even more so when applied to contemporary societies in which the instability of social identities makes the constitution of the latter around solid and permanent interests much more ill-defined." For the latest of many attempts to "reanimate the author" on behalf of a "politics of author recognition," see Cheryl Walker, "Feminist Literary Criticism and the Author," *Critical Inquiry* 16 (1990), 551–71. Walker wants to reassert the "antifeminist implications" of theory's notion of the death of the author (560).

¹⁶For a good summary statement of the issues involved in this articulation, with extensive bibliography, see Ann Ferguson, "The Intersection of Race, Gender, and Class in the United States Today," *Rethinking Marxism* 3 (1990), 45–64.

¹⁷The concept of a "minority author" should itself be submitted to critique. The unresolved contradiction between the assertion of equivalence vis-à-vis the experience of marginalization or oppression and the assertion of difference at the level of specific gender, racial, or ethnic identity is one consequence of identity politics, and accounts for at least some of the tensions expressed between different minority groups over the actually quite limited resources available for compensating disadvantaged groups. These tensions follow from the fact that the name of "minority" is superimposed upon specific gender, racial, or ethnic identities as *another* identity, a general identity which paradoxically effaces the very specificity which is the basis for the claim to that general identity. This contradiction can only be superseded in the recognition that the concept of "minority" names a historically determinate relation between dominant and subordinate social groups in a specific social context. The tensions between such groups in the practice of identity politics suggests that in identity politics' practice of traditional interest-group politics, the interest of the group is defined on the basis of a hypothetically *preexistent* identity (essential, if not natural), and not on the basis of an analysis of the objective conditions giving rise to that identity. Hence the apparent absence of analogy between, say, one's racial identity, and one's identity as a "consumer"—but the obvious contingency of such "identities" as the latter is also the reason why it is so difficult to translate class position into the identity of "minority author."

¹⁸See for example Judith Butler's dismantling of some of the metaphysical presuppositions of identity politics in her *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990): "Indeed, the fragmentation within feminism and the paradoxical opposition to feminism from 'women' whom feminism claims to represent suggest the necessary limits of identity politics. The suggestion that feminism can seek wider representation for a subject that it itself

constructs has the ironic consequence that feminist goals risk failure by refusing to take account of the constitutive powers of their own representational claims. This problem is not ameliorated through an appeal to the category of women for merely 'strategic' purposes, for strategies always have meanings that exceed the purposes for which they are intended" (4). Still powerful too is Alice Echols's early warning against the essentialist politics of cultural separatism, "The New Feminism of Yin and Yang," in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, ed. Ann Snitow et al. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 439–59.

¹⁹Peter Osborne, "Radicalism without Limit? Discourse, Democracy, and the Politics of Identity," in *Socialism and the Limits of Liberalism*, ed. Peter Osborne (New York: Verso, 1991), 216–17.

²⁰The social-institutional sites at which the articulation of different identities—or the coalition of minorities—can occur is actually very limited. For this reason we need to be cautious about generalizing the possibilities for such coalition from the experience of solidarities in the university. The latter version of solidarity is constructed on the basis of a common *institutional* affiliation, the very strong tendency of teachers or students to affiliate strongly on the basis of their "identities" as teachers or students. The question is what social basis of affiliation might create the possibility for such political coalitions outside the university. The conditions that really determine relations *between* minorities in our culture are more accurately invoked by the names of Bensonhurst and Crown Heights than by the university's version of identity politics, with its Puritan wing of the politically correct. If the formal and expression of a cultural identity are undeniably political acts, with political consequences, these consequences are at present very ambiguous. We do not know yet what kind of politics a real articulation of different identities would produce, what kind of "hegemony." Nor do we know of what mechanisms such a politics would consist. We only know that the bad conscience of identity politics about the identities always being "left out" of any community of common identities betrays the inability of radical liberalism to transcend the strategies of traditional liberal interest-group politics.

²¹The fact that liberal pluralism, in its current radical incarnation, has often been accused falsely of reducing the cultural to the political prevents one from seeing the fact that liberal pluralism's more serious problem is the reduction of the political to the cultural.

²²Here we may note the precedent of Michel Pêcheux's work on identification, as yet largely unassimilated in American cultural theory. See his *Language, Semantics, Ideology*, trans. Harbans Nagpal (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982). In his *New Reflections* Laclau also has some interesting comments on this question, which in my view go beyond the conclusions of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*: "the incorporation of the individual into the symbolic order occurs through *identifications*. The individual is not simply an identity within the structure but is transformed by it into a subject, and this requires acts of identification." Such a statement clearly implies a necessary distinction between identity and subject. In context (Laclau's remarks are in reference to Lacan), that distinction points to the concept of the subject as defining what the individual does not know about the for-

mation of his or her identity. Is it not one of the peculiarities of identity politics that it has everything to say about identity and little to say about identification as a moment in a process, a process which gives birth to the *subject* (always, of course, the subject-in-process)? It was of course never the project of theory to make the subject simply disappear but to make its claim to rational self-determination (its free affirmation of its identity) suspect. Even Foucault's most radical statement on the subject, "What Is an Author?" which has been read incorrectly as arguing that authors do not exist (just when women authors and black authors were being discovered or rediscovered) clearly says just the opposite: "But the subject should not be entirely abandoned. It should be reconsidered, not to restore the theme of an originating subject, but to seize its functions, its intervention in discourse, and its system of dependencies." It will prove to be a rich irony of our post-theoretical era if our new prize of "identity" should prove in the end to be nothing other than the old Cartesian subject, the subject as it was conceived before theory called its self-determination into question and exposed its social and psychological determinations.

²³See McLennan, *Marxism, Pluralism, and Beyond*, 21. Giving class its due does not, it should be emphasized, reduce the phenomena of race and gender to aspects of class; the point of insisting upon the incommensurability of these categories is only that nothing explains class but class.

²⁴The difference between a research program and canonical reevaluation is symptomatically confused in such statements as that by Marilyn L. Williamson, *Raising Their Voices: British Women Writers, 1650-1750* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990), which I quote for its representative puzzlement: "I do not therefore make aesthetic judgments the goal of my reading, and some readers will doubtless find much of the writing covered in this study deficient in quality and therefore not worth much attention. My work and that of other feminist critics offers the possibility of breaking out of the cycle of assuming that what is unknown or obscure deserves to be so. I do not claim to have discovered inglorious Miltons among the score of writers in this study, but I believe their work deserves attention nonetheless. The neglect is historical: most were well-known, some quite famous, in their own time. Just as historians are beginning to read popular pamphlets along with Hobbes and Locke, so literary historians are reading far beyond the canon and the taste and values it informs" (9). Historians will be surprised to learn that they are just beginning to read archival material in connection with the study of major authors. But historical scholarship has sometimes been practiced by literary critics too, and in the university it has, historically speaking, been the norm. The dovetailing of new forms of historical scholarship with a critique of the canon has produced the quite interesting misapprehension that writing about a given author is equivalent to canonization of that author.

²⁵This fact remains an unspoken in such arguments as Lillian Robinson's "Treason Our Text," which grapples with the meaning of the feminist research program in the following terms: "The emergence of feminist literary study has been characterized, at the base, by scholarship devoted to the discovery, republication, and reappraisal of 'lost' or undervalued writers and their work. From Rebecca Harding Davis and Kate Chopin through Zora Neale Hurston and Mina Loy to Meridel

LeSueur and Rebecca West, reputations have been reborn or remade and a female counter-canon has come into being, out of components that were largely unavailable even a dozen years ago." A footnote supplies a bibliography for the authors cited, but appends the qualification: "The examples are all from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries" (575). There follows a statement to the effect that "Valuable work has also been done on women writers before the Industrial Revolution," along with a somewhat briefer bibliography of this work. From such an argument one can glean no understanding of why so many women writers have been recovered from the period following the Industrial Revolution, and indeed whether this fact has anything to do with the Industrial Revolution. It is simply taken for granted that any woman writer not currently canonical is ipso facto "lost or undervalued," as though it really did not matter how such texts came to be, or what social conditions enabled or constrained the practice of writing for different social groups.

While I have not undertaken to give a full account in the text of the relation between the distribution of cultural capital (access to the means of literary production) and the position of women in the system of distributions, the lineaments of such an account can be briefly indicated. We might begin by reconsidering two leading questions guiding the current account of women writers in the history of canon formation: First, is the fact of the transhistorical oppression of women sufficient to explain the exclusion of women from the means of literary production, if not from the canon itself? And second, does this fact imply that such oppression operates autonomously from class structure? Fortunately history does not enjoin upon us any choice between a transhistorical sexism and a historical class analysis. A properly historical question would be: What determines women's access or lack of access to the means of literary production at any given historical moment? While transhistorical sexism always makes women available to occupy disadvantaged locations in the social order, it is only the historical class system which determines how they will be so disadvantaged. In the premodern sexual division of labor, women occupy a different site in the system of production than they do after the emergence of generalized commodity production. The same system which "commodifies" women in new ways also permits them to produce new commodities (such as novels), to become new kinds of cultural producers. The historical class system of capitalism produces a new sexual division of labor, or a rearticulation of transhistorical sexism on the system by which material and cultural capital is distributed.

²⁶See for example the argument of Denise Riley, *Am I That Name? Feminism and the Category of "Women" in History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

²⁷F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition* (New York: New York University Press, 1964), 1.

²⁸Linda Nochlin, *Women, Art, and Power, and other Essays* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 150.

²⁹I have generally followed the lead of Brian Street's *Literacy in Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) in his critique of Jack Goody's "autonomous" model of literacy. Street emphasizes the ambiguous effects of liter-

acy in any given set of social conditions, effects I have attempted to invoke continually by defining literacy as the systematic regulation of reading and writing. Literacy is now the subject of new and rather intense debate, centering on the very concrete and practical matter of how children are taught to read (or not to read) in our schools. See for example, Michael Stubbes, *Language and Literacy: The Sociolinguistics of Reading and Writing* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980); W. Ross Winterrowd, *The Culture and Politics of Literacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); John Willinsky, *The New Literacy: Redefining Reading and Writing in the Schools* (New York: Routledge, 1990); James W. Tollefson, *Planning Language. Planning Inequality: Language Policy in the Community* (London: Longman, 1991); and Tony Crowley, *Standard English and the Politics of Language* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

³⁰I shall pose the question of distribution throughout this book as one of access to literacy; but the concept of “access” should not be confused with the ideological notion of “opportunity.” We are not speaking here of providing individuals with the cultural capital necessary for “success.” That notion is of course the cornerstone of American ideology, which employs a fiction of “equal opportunity” as the ideological means of justifying a system in which some individuals fail and others succeed—through their own fault. Access to literacy should be considered on the contrary an absolute right, not a means to success in any other cultural or economic sense.

³¹Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Contingencies of Value: Alternative Perspectives for Literary Theory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 51.

³²*New York Times*, February 17, 1985.

³³See, for example, Charles Altieri in “An Idea and an Ideal of a Literary Canon,” *Critical Inquiry* 10 (September 1983), 55: “On this model, works do not address social life directly but elicit fundamental forms of desire and admiration that can motivate efforts to produce social change.”

³⁴Jeffrey Sammons, *Literary Sociology and Practical Criticism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), 134.

³⁵See William Bennett, “To Reclaim a Legacy: Text of Report on Humanities in Education,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, November 28, 1984, 18, where Bennett proposes his list of candidates for the canon of Western writers. The list contains a now obligatory nod to several minority texts, such as Martin Luther King’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” and his “I Have a Dream” speech.

³⁶Michael Ryan, “Loaded Canons: Politics and Literature at the MLA,” *Boston Review* (July 1985).

³⁷This mistake is pervasive, even among the most theoretically enlightened advocates of left pedagogy in the United States. Here I would cite, as an example, the otherwise judicious study of Patrick Brantlinger, *Crusoe’s Footprints: Cultural Studies in Britain and America* (New York: Routledge, 1990). In his discussion of American literature in the context of “gender, class, race,” Brantlinger remarks that “Great literature, my own education taught me, is not about public life or politics; it is instead about the experiences, lives, values of private, usually ‘refined’ individuals (lyric romantic poetry, portraits of the artist, remembrances of things past,

etc.). How then does one begin to understand and value literature which ignores refinement, etiquette, and ‘taste’ to tell the truth about a nation’s past and to represent the struggles of majorities [sic] against slavery, sexism, poverty?” (155). But it really is the case that Melville’s *Benito Cereno*, Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn*, or Faulkner’s novels “tell no truth” about the centrality of race and racism in the American experience, even if in the mode of sometimes expressing that racism? Or that they advertise hegemonic principles of taste and etiquette by habitually choosing to represent the lives of “refined” individuals? When Brantlinger cites Frederick Douglass’s *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* as a noncanonical text, he betrays the fact that the canon critique really does construe every literary work preferentially as *autobiography*. Yet even the canonicity of Douglass cannot finally be established on these grounds alone, because any text, even an autobiographical text which witnesses to the fact of racial repression, has to be read.

³⁸Lillian Robinson, “Treason Our Text,” 574.

³⁹Nina Baym, *Women’s Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 15.

⁴⁰Myra Jehlen, “Archimedes and the Paradox of Feminist Criticism,” *Signs* 6 (1981), 575–601.

⁴¹Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790–1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), xiv. On the subject of the distinction between serious and popular, see the argument of Peter Bürger in *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), liii: “For once the institution of art/literature has been thematized, the question about the mechanisms that make it possible to exclude certain works as pulp literature necessarily arises.” One might add that “pulp literature” as such necessarily emerges simultaneously with the institution of the High Culture canon.

⁴²Hans Robert Jauss, “Literary History as Challenge to Literary Theory,” in *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 25.

⁴³Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 11.

⁴⁴Elizabeth Meese, “Sexual Politics and Critical Judgment,” in *After Strange Texts: The Role of Theory in the Study of Literature*, ed. Gregory S. Jay and David L. Miller (Birmingham: University of Alabama Press, 1985), 90.

⁴⁵The argument for a less anxious response to this state of affairs is exemplified in the several essays and books of Frank Kermode on issues relating to canon formation, most typically in “The Institutional Control of Interpretation,” in his *The Art of Telling: Essays on Fiction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), *Forms of Attention* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), and *History and Value* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1989).

⁴⁶On the issue of consensus and community I shall have more to say in Chapter 5. In the meanwhile we can concur with Gregor McLennan’s observation that liberal pluralist theory tends to posit consensus as the ideal resolution to the competitive politics of interest groups (*Marxism, Pluralism, and Beyond*, 26). The canon cri-

that "in the 1920s processes were set in motion that virtually eliminated black, white, female and all working-class writers from the canon." These processes were "the professionalization of the teaching of literature, the development of an aesthetic theory that privileged certain texts, and the historiographic organization of the body of literature into conventional 'periods' and 'themes'" (23). It is difficult to see how these criteria are intrinsically unfavorable to minority writers, but the ease with which they can be made to coincide with and explain the disappearance of any given minority writer from one anthology to the next is a measure of how difficult it is for us to imagine that the social identity of the author is not the *real criterion* for every judgment, no matter where or when. The processes Lauter discovers are on his own account considerably more complex than judgments based on the social identity of authors. It is perhaps time to recognize that it is only the emergence in our own time of social identity as a *positive* criterion of judgment (as the basis, in Lauter's phrase, of establishing a "more representative and accurate literary canon") that requires a revisionist history in which social identity is the major *negative* criterion of judgment.

⁵¹The agreement of Western thinkers about certain fundamental questions would have been surprising news to many of them, had they been privileged to receive this information in their own time. From an abundance of possible counterexamples, I choose the following passage from Thomas Hobbes (a canonical writer according to William Bennett): "To conclude, there is nothing so absurd, that the old Philosophers (as Cicero saith, who was one of them) have not some of them maintained. And I believe that scarce any thing can be more absurdly said in natural Philosophy, than that which now is called *Aristoteles Metaphysiques*; nor more repugnant to Government, than much of that hee hath said in his *Politiques*; nor more ignorantly, than a great part of his *Ethiques*."

⁵²The question of culture, and Western culture in particular, will be considered at length in the following section.

⁵³On this subject, see *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

⁵⁴See Claude Lefort, *The Political Forms of Modern Society: Bureaucracy, Democracy, Totalitarianism*, ed. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986), 195ff; and Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), 115 ff. I have invoked a sense of the social imaginary somewhere between that of Castoriadis (for whom the imaginary converges upon the realm of the symbolic) and of Lefort (for whom it is closely associated with the theory of ideology).

⁵⁵See, for example, the Modern Language Association publication, *Profession 88* (New York: Modern Language Association, 1988), with articles by Andrew Sledd and James Sledd, Helene Moglen, Robert Scholes, and Paul B. Armstrong.

⁵⁶Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

⁵⁷Hirsch, *Cultural Literacy*. Hirsch comments on the form of the list on p. 143: "Not least among the virtues of a list of cultural literacy is the fact of its finiteness."

tique follows faithfully in the logic of this politics by positing countercanons which are supposed to be consensual for given social subcommunities. For a very effective critique of the separatist tendencies in the institutionalized forms of canon revision, and the pluralist bases of those tendencies, see Cornell West, "Minority Discourse and the Pitfalls of Canon Formation," *Yale Journal of Criticism* 1 (1987), 193-202.

⁴⁷We might also note here that the very American style of liberal pluralist critique has made the entire debate about the canon seem rather mystifying to European critics. See, for example, Alice Jardine's and Anne Menke's interviews with fourteen French feminists in a recent issue of *Yale French Studies* 75 (1988). Jardine and Menke discovered to their surprise that French feminist writers found it difficult to become exercised over the problem of the canon, and that they were even incredulous that it had become a feminist issue in America: "It was hard for us to understand how so many could profess indifference to inclusion of their own work in the canon. And inclusion was not the only problem: for many of these women the word 'canon' does not refer to the literary tradition, and few of them see it as an area of feminist concern" (230). Here, to cite one response, are Monique Wittig's remarks, which are not untypical: "To say that writers have been excluded from the canon because they are women seems to me not only inexact, but the very idea proceeds from a trend toward theories of victimization. There are few great writers in any century. Each time there was one, not only was she welcome within the canon, but she was acclaimed, applauded, and praised in her time—sometimes especially because she was a woman. I'm thinking of Sand and Colette. I do not think that real innovators have been passed by. In the university, we ruin the purpose of what we do if we make a special category for women—especially when teaching. When we do that as feminists, we ourselves turn the canon into a male edifice" (257).

⁴⁸Commenting in an interview about the experience of editing the *Norton Anthology of Afro-American Literature*, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., points to the difference between a research program and the exercise of judgment in an institutional context: "When I was in grad school in the 1960s everything black that could be found was reproduced. But some of it was terrible. We've got to make discriminations within the corpus of black literature, and to keep that which is worth keeping." These remarks are reproduced in Dinesh D'Souza's *Illiberal Education*, p. 172.

⁴⁹Cited in Mary Louise Pratt, "Humanities for the Future: Reflections on the Western Culture Debate at Stanford," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 89 (1990), 14.

⁵⁰This sense of the noncanonical is well exemplified in the argument of Paul Lauter, "Race and Gender in the Shaping of the American Literary Canon: A Case Study from the Twenties," in *Feminist Criticism and Social Change: Sex, Class and Race in Literature and Culture*, ed. Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfeld (New York: Methuen, 1985), 19-44, which provides an interesting and informative narrative about the construction of anthologies of American writing. Interpreting this information is not easy, however, since how one understands the narrative depends upon how adequate the paradigm of inclusion/exclusion is to describe the survival or disappearance of literary works. While Lauter states that "Obviously, no clone of cultural cardinals establishes a literary canon," he is concerned to show

As soon as one thinks about it, it is obvious that shared information in a large nation like ours must be limited. . . . Just to illustrate the finiteness of literate culture is useful. It should energize people to learn that only a few hundred pages of information stand between the literate and the illiterate, between dependence and autonomy." Hirsch does not go on to draw the appropriate conclusion, which is that the virtual infinitude of information in our culture corresponds to, is the "post-modern condition" of, the irreducible heterogeneity of the culture. The handy "finiteness" of the list is the ideological denial of that heterogeneity.

⁵⁸In fact there exists a large body of critique on the subject of the curriculum and its function within the educational system, critique of which the canon debate has remained largely oblivious. See, for example, Michael Apple, *Teachers and Texts: A Political Economy of Class and Gender Relations in Education* (New York: Routledge, 1988), and Michael Apple, ed., *Cultural and Economic Reproduction in Education: Essays on Class, Ideology and the State* (London: Routledge, 1982); or Stanley Aronowitz and Henry Giroux, *Education Under Siege: The Conservative, Liberal, and Radical Debate over Schooling* (South Hadley: Bergin and Garvey, 1985). These works include extensive bibliographies as well. The absence of reference to such work in the debate about the canon, and indeed the absence of comment about the relation between the university curriculum and the curriculum at lower levels of the system, testifies to how entirely the debate has been conducted in the pedagogic imaginary of university teachers. On the actual state of the public school system in the U.S., see Jonathan Kozol's vivid account, *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools* (New York: Harper, 1991).

⁵⁹See for example the important article of Michael Apple, "Curricular Form and the Logic of Technical Control: Building the Possessive Individual," in *Cultural and Economic Reproduction in Education*, 247-74.

⁶⁰Bourdieu makes this point in his essay "Systems of Education and Systems of Thought," *International Social Science Journal* 19 (1967), 349: "An individual's contact with his culture depends basically on the circumstances in which he has acquired it, among other things because the act whereby culture is communicated is, as such, the exemplary expression of a certain type of relation to the culture."

⁶¹William Bennett, "To Reclaim a Legacy," 21.

⁶²See the entry for "culture" in Raymond Williams's *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, revised edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976, 1983), 87-93, for a lucid account of what is at stake in the different meanings of "culture" historically. We might sum up the difference between our national culture and our school culture by acknowledging that for national culture "Nike" is the name of an athletic shoe, for school culture a Greek goddess.

⁶³Bourdieu, "Systems of Education and Systems of Thought," *International Social Science Journal* 19 (1967), 351, points to an analogous confusion when the concept of culture is made to refer indifferently both to popular culture and to school culture: "Just as Basil Bernstein contrasts the 'public language' of the working classes, employing descriptive rather than analytical concepts, with a more complex 'formal language,' more conducive to verbal elaboration and abstract thought, we might contrast an academic culture, confined to those who have been

long subjected to the disciplines of the school, with a 'popular' culture, peculiar to those who have been excluded from it, were it not that, by using the same concept of culture in both cases, we should be in danger of concealing that these two systems of patterns of perception, language, thought, action and appreciation are separated by an essential difference. This is that only the system of patterns cultivated by the school, i.e. academic culture (in the subjective sense of personal cultivation or *Bildung* in German), is organized primarily by reference to a system of works embodying that culture, by which it is both supported and expressed."

⁶⁴This argument should not be taken to deny the fact that the "West" is a real politico-economic entity, even though its cultural homogeneity lags far behind the unity of its politico-economic system. The *image* of that cultural unity remains the ideological support for the real unity of the West in its imperial relations with the Third World, or in its militarist competition with what was formerly the Eastern Bloc. The collapse of the Soviet Union as a result of that competition, and the consolidation of a Western alliance in the Persian Gulf War are sufficient evidence of what was and is at stake in maintaining the fiction of the cultural unity of the West. Finally, do we need to be reminded that it is Coca-Cola and not Plato which signifies Western culture in the realm of what Immanuel Wallerstein calls "geo-culture"? On this subject, see John Tomlinson, *Cultural Imperialism: A Critical Introduction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991).

⁶⁵This is the argument of Joan Shelley Rubin, *The Making of Middlebrow Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992). Discussing John Erskine's original idea for a "great books" program at Columbia University, Rubin notes: "[B]y contending that 'great books' portrayed timeless, universal human situations [Erskine] permitted the conclusion that the classics of Western literature were the American heritage" (173).

⁶⁶The example of Heidegger almost goes without saying, but not quite. Heidegger's belief in the deep affinity between the Greek and German languages, supposedly the only truly philosophical languages, forces us to recall that the text tradition which is the support of the notion of the West is itself supported in modern European thought both by philological and racial concepts of continuity.

⁶⁷Bourdieu, "Systems of Education and Systems of Thought": "Because of its own inertia, the school carries along categories and patterns of thought belonging to different ages. In the observance of the rules of the dissertation in three points, for example, French schoolchildren are still contemporaries of Saint Thomas. The feeling of the 'unity of European culture' is probably due to the fact that the school brings together and reconciles—as it must for the purposes of teaching—types of thought belonging to very different periods" (352). What I have been calling a "text tradition" is obviously the site of critical judgment, in the sense that the entire domain of intertextuality, or response to earlier by later writers, is a powerful agency for the preservation of these writers. Nevertheless I have consistently argued for locating the site of canon formation in the school, for the reason implied by Bourdieu in the passage just quoted. The point of the sociological argument, for both Bourdieu and myself, is that authors learn whom to read and how to judge in the schools, and that even the judgment of recent but uncanonized work must even-

tually be validated in the passage of writers into school curricula in order for one to speak of canonicity. One should not forget that literary history is filled with the names of writers whose high standing with other, more famous authors was still insufficient to insure their canonicity.

⁶⁸Schools do not always have to acknowledge the fact of deracination, nor do they necessarily have to employ historicizing strategies of recontextualization in classroom practice. Precisely to the extent that they deny the former and decline the latter, they can realize the objective of merely reproducing culture as dogma, as in the case of religious schools. The operation of culture as dogma will be taken up in Chapter 3.

⁶⁹This point has been eloquently argued by Kwame Anthony Appiah in the context of the production and consumption of African cultural works: "If there is a lesson in the broad shape of this circulation of cultures, it is surely that we are all already contaminated by each other, that there is no longer a fully autochthonous *eché*-African culture awaiting salvage by our artists (just as there is, of course, no American culture without African roots). And there is a clear sense in some post-colonial writing that the postulation of a unitary Africa over against a monolithic West—the binarism of Self and Other—is the last of the shibboleths of the modernizers that we must learn to live without." "Is the Post-Postmodernism the Post-Postcolonial?" *Critical Inquiry* 17 (1991), 354.

⁷⁰See Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, 352.

⁷¹Patrick Brantlinger, *Crusoe's Footprints*, 7.

⁷²Alvin W. Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class*, 21. Gouldner argues persuasively that "An investment in education is not simply a consumable. Something is left over, which produces a subsequent flow of income. It is *cultural capital*, the economic basis of the New Class" (27). On the other hand, I am not convinced that the problem-solving orientation of the New Class constitutes what Gouldner calls a "culture of critical discourse." This is not to say that the professional-managerial class has not produced some forms of social criticism—it has—but that this criticism is seldom systemic (it is usually anti-state but not anti-capital). I am also aware that arguments *against* systemic critique have been made on certain "post-Marxist" grounds. Foucault's concept of the "specific intellectual" might in this context be compared to Gouldner's concept of the New Class intellectual. My own argument follows Bourdieu, however, in his version of systemic critique.

⁷³Pratt, "Humanities for the Future," 9.

⁷⁴Antonio Gramsci, *The Modern Prince and Other Writings* (New York: International Publishers, 1957), 126.

⁷⁵Antonio Gramsci, *The Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916–1935*, ed. David Forgacs (New York: Schocken Books, 1988), 317.

⁷⁶Gramsci, *The Modern Prince*, 127.

⁷⁷Gramsci, *The Antonio Gramsci Reader*, 318.

⁷⁸There is reason to believe that the inevitable brevity and shallowness of the great-books tour are not so undesirable to the New Right. For they are less interesting finally in inquiring closely into historical complexities or discursive ambi-

guities than in making sure that students come away from their experience of reading great works with the *right ideas*. This objective is quite openly acknowledged by the classicist Donald Kagan, who has been celebrated in the right-wing media for using his position as the dean of Yale College as a bully pulpit for what he calls "common studies." Mindful of the liberal persuasion of many of his faculty, however, the dean has expressed some doubt about their suitability to teach these works in the *right way*: "Consider what a core constructed by the current faculty would look like, and the consequences that would ensue if they also had the responsibility of teaching it." See Donald Kagan, "Yale University: Testing the Limits," *Academic Questions* 4 (1991), 33. On the historical origins of the idea of "great books" in American society, and the tendency toward the "superficial" assimilation of the books, see Rubin, *The Making of Middlebrow Culture*, 192ff. Rubin demonstrates persuasively that Mortimer Adler's transformation of John Erskine's notion of a great-books program into the Encyclopaedia Britannica's *Great Books of the Western World* produced nothing less than a monument of middle-brow culture. The almost exclusive emphasis on philosophical rather than literary works in the Britannica project called forth the famous "Syntopicon" of "Great Ideas," which virtually assured that no one would ever have to read the books themselves.

⁷⁹Christopher L. Miller, "Literary Studies and African Literature: The Challenge of Intercultural Literacy," forthcoming in *Africa and the Disciplines: Contributions of the Study of Africa to the Humanities and Social Sciences*, ed. Robert H. Bates et al. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

⁸⁰Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Henry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 256.

⁸¹On this thesis, see Bourdieu and Passeron, *Reproduction*, 32.

⁸²Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 387.

⁸³Bourdieu and Passeron, *Reproduction*, 98.

⁸⁴Perhaps only "seems": For Bourdieu's response to the question about long-term historical transformation, see his *In Other Words*, 41–46.

⁸⁵An example: If the sheer formal atavism of an institution such as the church suits the function of social reproduction, the prestige deriving from its atavistic features can as well become the ground of resistance in a complex agonistic game requiring the expenditure of that prestige as cultural capital. Consider the fate of the Sanctuary movement in the mid-1980s: This movement staged the literalization of the church's institutional autonomy as the autonomy of its physical space, the imaginary "sanctuary" within which political refugees from the right-wing Latin American dictatorships could take sanctuary. Before such an elegant atavism, even our authoritarian state paused, though not for long.

⁸⁶John B. Thompson, *Studies in the Theory of Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 24.

⁸⁷R. R. Bolgar, *The Classical Heritage and Its Beneficiaries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954), 24.

⁸⁸Bourdieu and Passeron, *Reproduction*, 30.

⁸⁹Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper and Row, 1953), 250.

- ⁹⁰Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 4 vols., trans. H. E. Butler (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), 1:63.
- ⁹¹Boris Eichenbaum, "Literary Environment," *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*, ed. Ladislav Matejka and Kristyna Pomorska (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971), 62.
- ⁹²P. N. Medvedev/M. M. Bakhtin, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*, trans. Albert J. Wehrle (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 81.
- ⁹³Medvedev/Bakhtin, 166.
- ⁹⁴For an elaborated version of this argument, see Roy Harris, *The Language Makers* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 1-32. The main lines of the argument were foreshadowed by V. N. Voloshinov in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. Ladislav Matejka and I. R. Titunik (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 71: "At the basis of the modes of linguistic thought that lead to the postulation of language as a system of normatively identical forms lies a *practical and theoretical focus of attention on the study of defunct, alien languages, preserved in written monuments.*"
- ⁹⁵Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 381.
- ⁹⁶On this subject see Tony Bennett's helpful discussion in *Formalism and Marxism* (London: Methuen, 1979), 58 ff.; as well as Medvedev's comments, 160ff. Relevant passages of Shklovskii's *Rozanov* (1921) were translated for me by Christopher Caryl.
- ⁹⁷Tsvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*, trans. Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 58.
- ⁹⁸This position has been persuasively argued by Franco Moretti in *Signs Taken for Wonders: Essays in the Sociology of Literary Forms*, trans. Susan Fischer et al. (London: Verso, 1983), 13ff. See also Alastair Fowler's genre-oriented discussion of canon formation in *Kinds of Literature: The Theory of Genres and Modes* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).
- ⁹⁹Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 45ff.
- ¹⁰⁰Charles Ferguson, "Diglossia," in *Language in Culture and Society*, ed. Dell Hymes (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 435.
- ¹⁰¹Joshua Fishman, *The Sociology of Language: An Interdisciplinary Social Science Approach to Language in Society* (Rowley, Massachusetts: Newbury House, 1972), 102.
- ¹⁰²Erich Auerbach, *Literary Language and Its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and in the Middle Ages*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 249.
- ¹⁰³On the instability of the fiction category, see William Nelson, *Fact or Fiction: The Dilemma of the Renaissance Storyteller* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 11-37. This instability obviously characterizes the conditions giving rise to the novel.

- ¹⁰⁴Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), 232ff.
- ¹⁰⁵Brian Stock, in his *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), exhaustively surveys the effects of a reallocated literacy on religious controversy in the Middle Ages. The vernacular, of course, tends to be the language of heresy. According to Dick Leith in his *A Social History of English* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), 49, the English language begins to be used, though not exclusively, in government and law by the fourteenth century.
- ¹⁰⁶See Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), 58ff.
- ¹⁰⁷Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, vol. 1, *The History of Manners*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982).
- ¹⁰⁸*Literary Criticism of Dante Alighieri*, trans. Robert S. Haller (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1973), 3.
- ¹⁰⁹Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Cultural Writings*, trans. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 233. James Bown, in *A History of Western Education* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), 2: 218, points out that court tutors were to be found in almost all Italian aristocratic homes by the early fifteenth century. These tutors resurrected classical pedagogy (Quintilian, for example), and with that pedagogy classical literature. The progress of vernacular literacy thus came to depend upon the revival of classical literacy among a group no longer exclusively clerical.
- ¹¹⁰Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London: Verso, 1974), 18.
- ¹¹¹Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 7.
- ¹¹²Graham Pechey, "Formalism and Marxism," *Oxford Literary Review* 4 (1980), 80.
- ¹¹³An interesting light is thrown upon the ambivalence of the Humanists in relation to the vernacular by a letter of Gabriel Harvey's regarding the state of learning at Cambridge (the letter is dated April 17, 1580): "Tully and Demosthenes nothing so much studied, as they were wont: Luuis and Salust possiblye rather more, than lesse: Lucian never so much: Aristotle much named, but little read . . . Machiavell a great man: Castilio of no small reputation: Petrarch and Boccace in every mans mouth. . . . The French and Italian when so highly regarded of Schollars: The Latine and Greeke, when so lightly?" *Works*, ed. Alexander Grosart, 3 vols. (1984-85), 1:69.
- ¹¹⁴In *A Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire*, Dryden sees no way to alleviate his linguistic anxiety except by the establishment of an "Academy": "We have yet no English *prosodia*, not so much as a tolerable dictionary, or a grammar; so that our language is in a manner barbarous; and what government will encourage any one, or more, who are capable of refining it, I know not: but nothing under a public expense can go through with it." *Of Dramatic Poesy and Other Essays*, 2 vols., ed. George Watson (New York: Dutton, 1962), 1: 152.
- ¹¹⁵Erich Auerbach, "La Cour et la ville," in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 157.

the grammar schools and the high schools was always, as we know, very canonically organized; but this is a subject which has as yet provoked no comment in the canon debate.

¹²⁵With reference to Strunk and White, we might add that E. B. White himself now occupies the strange canonical limbo of a writer who survives to delight while instructing in the *elements* of style. More sophisticated writers and readers know that "literature" often violates precisely these elements.

¹²⁶On this subject, see the informative essay by Myron Tuman, "From Astor Place to Kenyon Road: The NCTE and the Origins of English Studies," *College English* 48 (1986), 339-49.

¹²⁷E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *The Philosophy of Composition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 44; and James Kinneavy, "Writing Across the Curriculum," *Profession* 83 (New York: Modern Language Association, 1983), 18.

¹²⁸Edward Corbett, "Literature and Composition: Allies or Rivals in the Classroom?" in *Composition and Literature*, ed. Winifred Bryan Horner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 180. Corbett may represent what was the mainstream of composition practice, which apparently policed prose as a means of regulating reading. The policing metaphor is Corbett's, not my own: "It was fairly easy for me to monitor the teaching of that small band of instructors; but every year I would discover some them . . . bootlegging literary texts into the course" (181). It would seem that this practice of writing is founded on a peculiar animus against the reading of literary works. The new school of composition theory represented by Richard Lanham and others provides an interesting retrospect on the disciplinary distinction between composition and literature. See, for example, Lanham's "Composition, Literature, and the Lower-Division Gyroscope," *Profession* 84 (New York: Modern Language Association, 1984), 13: "Up to now we have, in composition courses, taught a neutral, denotative, transparent theory of language . . . and then in the first literature course changed the rules completely and taught an opposite theory of poetic meaning, one that a bewildered student once described to me as the OWH, or obscurity-wordiness-hypocrisy, theory of language." Lanham rightly recommends the use of both literary and nonliterary texts in composition courses, but this measure reveals how mutually constitutive these syllabi have always been. This fact is confirmed too by the recurrence of certain "canonical" prose works in composition textbooks. One might add finally that there is no reason why composition classes cannot also be the site of a politically astute and critical pedagogy, as no doubt many are.

¹²⁹Pierre Macherey and Etienne Balibar, "Literature as an Ideological Form," 57.

¹³⁰Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 48.

¹³¹The assumption that critical thinking is only possible in "Standard English" is an error exploded by the many works of William Labov with reference to Black English. See especially "The Logic of Non-Standard English," in *Language in the Inner City: Studies in the Black English Vernacular* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972). With regard to the relation between writing and the sociolects of minority groups, one may cite the political use to which the King James Bible has been put in the cause of civil rights. It would not be inaccurate to say that

¹¹⁶Auerbach, *Literary Language and Its Public*, 333.

¹¹⁷One may recall here Joseph Addison's well-known statement in *Spectator*, No. 10: "I shall be ambitious to have it said of me that I have brought Philosophy out of Closets and Libraries, Schools and Colleges, to dwell in Clubs and Assemblies, at Tea-Tables and in Coffee-Houses."

¹¹⁸Thomas Sheridan, *British Education: Or the Source of the Disorders of Great Britain* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1970). For an interesting and provocative argument about the relation between canon formation and British imperialism, see Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989). Viswanathan tends to date the formation of the English vernacular canon somewhat later than I do, but we share some assumptions about the nationalist motives which are in part the support of the school system and of the imperialist project.

¹¹⁹The implications of this fact within the developing discourses of Romanticism have been summarized most astutely by Michel Beaujour in an essay entitled "Genus Universum," *Glyph* 7 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980): "If this segregation [of scripture from other forms of writing] corresponds but imperfectly to the distinction between the uses of Latin and the Vulgar tongues in medieval culture, it seems clear that the coexistence of a priestly tongue and various lay languages resulted in the institutionalization of a dichotomy: it is no accident therefore that the post-Romantic period attempted to re-instate this duality within various vulgar literatures in order to counteract the tendency to homogenization and equality that accompanies the removal of a sacred hierarchical principle, and the fading away of a hieratic language used at the top (and beyond the top) of the scale" (18). The "re-instatement" took the now familiar but little understood form of a supposed transcendence of genre by truly "literary" works; these works form the super-genre or *genus universum* of literature itself.

¹²⁰William Wordsworth, Preface to *Lyrical Ballads, Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson and Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 736.

¹²¹Renée Balibar and Dominique Laporte, *Le Français national: politique et pratique de la langue nationale sous la révolution* (Paris: Hachette, 1974); and Renée Balibar, *Les Français fictifs: le rapport des styles littéraires au français national* (Paris: Hachette, 1974). More recently there have appeared somewhat similar studies of English, *Re-Reading English*, ed. Peter Widdowson (London: Methuen, 1982), and *Re-Writing English*, ed. Janet Batsleer et al. (London: Methuen, 1985).

¹²²Pierre Macherey and Etienne Balibar, "Literature as an Ideological Form: Some Marxist Propositions," trans. James Kavanaugh, *Praxis* 5 (1981), 47.

¹²³William Strunk, Jr., *The Elements of Style*, with Revisions, and Introduction, and a Chapter on Writing by E. B. White. 3d ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1979), 77.

¹²⁴Anyone who has forgotten what these texts are may remember the charming occasion of the press conference in which President Reagan and Secretary of Education Bennett recited together Robert Service's "The Cremation of Sam McGee." At least one of these two individuals seems to have been more familiar with Service and company than with the "great works" of Western literature. The literary syllabus in

this alliance of Jacobean writing and spoken Black English has produced the only public oratory (or "rhetoric") we know today, in comparison with which our public speakers of Standard English barely evince any rhetorical skills at all. In this context see Ishmael Reed's apposite comment on the misuse of Standard English by white politicians (and why it does not matter to the distribution of political power), in "How Not to Get the Infidel to Talk the King's Talk," in *The State of the Language*, ed. Leonard Michaels and Christopher Ricks (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 180-81.

Chapter Two

¹Leslie Stephen, *Hours in a Library* (London: Smith, Elder, 1909), 97. Stephen raises the issue to be considered presently, of the effect of banality: "'The Bard' and the lines upon Eton have become so hackneyed as perhaps to acquire a certain tinge of banality."

²Edmund Gosse, *Gray, The English Men of Letters Series* (New York: Harper, 1882).

³I note that "The Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" is an item in the list which defines E. D. Hirsch's concept of cultural literacy. See his *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 169. Thomas Gray's name, however, does not appear on the list.

⁴A discussion of the form and contents of Gray's commonplace books may be found in Roger Martin, *Essai sur Thomas Gray* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 187-200.

⁵R. P. Gillies, *Memories*, 1851, II, 165, quoted in the annotation to Johnson's *Life of Gray, Lives of the English Poets*, ed. George Hill, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905), 2:441.

⁶The importance of the "notebook" in early modern education is stressed by R. Bolgar, in his *The Classical Heritage and Its Beneficiaries*, 272ff. Bolgar quotes the detailed instructions of Vivès: "make a book of blank leaves of a proper size. Divide it into certain topics, so to say, nests. In one, jot down the names of subjects of daily converse . . . in another, sententiae" (237). In this context see also the invaluable discussion of Terence Cave, *The Cornucopian Text: Problems of Writing in the French Renaissance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), which elaborates more than I am able here upon the difference writing makes to the mnemotechniques of the "commonplace." For a useful discussion of commonplace books in the early modern period, see Ruth Mohl, *Milton and His Commonplace Book* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1969), 11-30.

⁷Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets*, 1:77.

⁸The connection between property and landscape painting was suggested by John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972), 106. The relation between enclosure and landscape in literature is briefly discussed by James Turner, *The Politics of Landscape: Rural Scenery and Society in English Poetry, 1630-1660* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979), 124ff., and extensively in John Barrell's *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place, 1730-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), from which I would extract the following key

statements: "because of their dependence on the sort of techniques of organizing and composing landscape that I have been discussing, the cultivated classes in England felt much more at ease, in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, in landscape which had been enclosed" (32). And: "The effect, far from suggesting any sense of locality, instead serves to show that one locality . . . can be treated in much the same way as another, in that it can be persuaded to illustrate the same rhetorical commonplaces." I propose that the effect of generality in locodescriptive poetry is precisely the reinhabiting of the emptied "common" by the rhetorical commonplace. The process of enclosure is discussed at length by Barrell, 64ff.

⁹*The Complete Poetical Works of James Thomson*, ed. J. Logie Robertson (London: Oxford University Press, 1908).

¹⁰John Barrell, *An Equal, Wide Survey: English Literature in History, 1730-1780* (London: Hutchinson, 1983).

¹¹See, for example, "Summer," 1438ff. for Thomson's survey of English literature.

¹²William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (New York: New Directions, 1950), 4.

¹³For the concept of interpellation, the "hailing" of the subject in ideology, see Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 170ff.

¹⁴L. A. Richards, *Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgment* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1929), 197.

¹⁵Frank Brady, "Gray's Elegy: Structure and Meaning," in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Gray's Elegy* ed. Herbert W. Starr (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968).

¹⁶Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1982), 65, cites a typical statement of Defoe's: "Men are every day starting up from obscurity to wealth." The question of social mobility is no longer a simple one, if it ever was, and I must therefore add the following qualifications. Historians are now inclined to emphasize a disparity between the perception of upward mobility and the actual rate at which this mobility occurred. Doubtless if one confines the definition of mobility to actual examples of the bourgeoisie passing into the ranks of the nobility, the numbers of those passing, as Lawrence Stone has demonstrated in *The Open Elite? England 1540-1880* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), are relatively small. Stone biases his study by constricting his definition of the ruling elite to the landed country "squirearchy," and he is thus able to conclude that the "perennial openness of England's landed elite to penetration by members of newly enriched bourgeoisie is clearly no more than a hoary myth." Now this statistical revisionism is based upon what can only be an arbitrary judgment about precisely what minimum number of aristocratized bourgeois would qualify the elite as "open." Setting aside the question of whether this use of statistics is not intended to confound the very possibility of a class analysis, one may at least argue that the perception of upward mobility, which was ubiquitous and even hysterical in the eighteenth century, is a real event with real historical consequences. For a somewhat different analysis than Stone's, see Peter Laslett's *The World We Have*

matic authority is not extirpated but rather acquires a rhetorical mask of impersonality, and a jargon in which social relations can always be translated into the language describing purely formal relations between offices or ranks. Hence the emergence of *factions* within a bureaucracy cannot be predicted on the basis of the purely formal structure of a bureaucratic organization; rather, factional networks are superimposed in an indeterminate way upon the official structure, the ends of which are continually deformed by the pressure of these struggles. To quote Lefort's analysis, "behind the mask of rules and impersonal relations lies the proliferation of unproductive functions, the play of personal contacts and the madness of authority" (109). We may assume that familiarity with such madness is virtually universal, but the point of Lefort's analysis is not simply to denounce bureaucracy but to analyze it, to give the reason of its unreason. It is not enough merely to expose the "madness of authority" behind the stenciled doors of the bureaux. It is the intimate and mutually determining relation between the charismatic and the bureaucratic which stands in need of analysis, and which disallows the displacement of the one term by the other.

I would appropriate two further points of Lefort's analysis, both relevant to the specific question of the relation of the bureaucratic form to the charismatic authority of the master teacher. Lefort adopts, with certain qualifications, a Weberian thesis about the relative autonomy of bureaucratic institutions: "The bureaucracy is essentially indifferent to the interests and values defended by a political regime. It is an organ in the service of dominant groups, situated, as it were, between those who dominate and those who are dominated" (98). This formulation captures the self-preservative and opportunistic drive of bureaucratic institutions without failing to emphasize the real subordination of bureaucracies to larger sociopolitical determinations. The concept of "relative autonomy," which is indispensable to characterize a broad range of social institutions, signals the impossibility of any *absolute* autonomy within the realm of the social, or the fact that extrainstitutional "interests" can be expressed within a given relatively autonomous institution only as they are mediated by the self-interests of that institution. Of few institutions is the assertion of autonomy closer to absolute than the school, but for this very reason it has posed a particular problem for the analysis of the bureaucratic form. The second point I would appropriate from Lefort's discussion is thus his observation that, although "the position of the teacher [Lefort's example is, like de Man's, the French secondary school teacher] corresponds exactly to that which Weber attributed to the bureaucrat," the teacher is also atypical of the bureaucratic functionary. "[T]he content of his activity is only very partially determined by ministerial decisions. This professional activity has its

own goal which should not be confused with the objective goal immanent in the ministerial organization; it is an activity oriented towards a transformation of its object and this alone can provide it with a sufficient justification" (102). The degree of bureaucratization, or what I will call "heteronomy"—the degree to which one's work is prescribed by superiors in the bureaucratic hierarchy—exists in a certain ratio to the degree of "professional activity," a realm of more autonomous behavior, defined for teachers both by the privacy of the classroom and by the academic freedom of discourse among colleagues in a field.⁵⁰ In the American educational system, the realm of "professional activity," in the sense of work autonomy, has in practice been more and more confined to the universities, while the "content" of teaching at the primary and secondary levels is almost entirely dictated by a bureaucratic policy which has in effect "proletarianized" teachers. At the same time, universities (both public and private) have developed large bureaucratic apparatuses to which teachers belong as one level of the bureaucracy itself (increasingly so, since the growth of administration has been paralleled by an increase in the burden of administrative tasks imposed upon teachers). University teachers, then, at once occupy the classroom and the office, simultaneously moving within the relatively autonomous realm of the seminar or their professional research projects, and pursuing bureaucratically structured careers within the elaborately graded status hierarchy of the educational institution.

I have already alluded in Chapter 1 to the significance of the relative autonomy of pedagogic practice in the context of appropriating Bourdieu and Passeron's contention that "by ignoring all demands other than that of its own reproduction, the school most effectively contributes to the reproduction of the social order." The question before us now is somewhat more complex. Bourdieu and Passeron insist in *Reproduction* on the theoretical distinctiveness of the "autonomy" specific to the educational system, and they are thus resistant to any reduction of pedagogic action to a species of the bureaucratic. They object in particular to the argument of Michel Crozier in *The Bureaucratic Phenomenon* that "we should find, in the French educational system, the main characteristic patterns of the bureaucratic system of organization," a thesis they regard as construing the formal features of the educational institution merely as reflections of the dominant mode of social organization:

Thus, for example, Crozier is only able to grasp characteristic features of the school institution, such as the ritualization of pedagogic action or the distance between master and pupil, insofar as he recognizes in them manifestations of the logic of bu-

cratically administers pedagogy, and not only against the pressures that seek to constrain or determine pedagogy from outside the school. The defense of pedagogic autonomy has taken the form of an aggressive defense of "professionalism," whose social function we can now identify as an attempt to compensate for the bureaucratic constraints upon pedagogic autonomy. In these circumstances, the career of the college professor is increasingly structured as a mimesis of the bureaucratic career (even sometimes, as a movement "up" from teaching to administration). It would not otherwise be possible to explain the subordination of even the most rarefied intellectual inquiry to norms of "productivity" which usually determine the trajectory of the bureaucratic career.⁵¹

The larger question of the relation between the professional and the bureaucratic has been addressed recently in an excellent study by Magali Scarfatti Larson, *The Rise of Professionalism*.⁵² Larson points out that while the profession has always been represented as "the antithesis of bureaucracy," all professions are now "bureaucratized to a greater or lesser extent" (xvii), and further, "in a bureaucratized world, professions can no longer be interpreted as inherently anti-bureaucratic" (199). While a greater measure of "work autonomy" can still be said to define the professional mode of work organization, a condition which characterizes such institutions as "the medical clinic, the graduate school, the large legal or accounting firm, large architectural offices, and research institutes," the existence of common standards of "technical competence" governing all the "professional bureaucracies" suggests that bureaucracy and profession can be regarded as "two subtypes of a larger category—that of rational administration" (191). This proposition may seem at first glance only to reassert a Weberian thesis, but its implications are profound. Larson argues finally that "the alleged conflict between bureaucracy and profession as modes of work organization is not so much a conflict between two structures as it is a contrast between the structure of bureaucratic organizations and an ideology promoted by some of their members" (219). In the case of the university teacher, the claim to professional autonomy can thus be asserted *against the school itself*, despite the fact that accomplishments in the professional field are compensated by the usual rewards only a bureaucratically organized institution can offer. In reality, then, the "personal talent and charisma" of the professor, though they are established in the seminar or in the professional field, are never entirely distinguishable from the status hierarchy of the institution:

The more incorporated into heteronomous organizations a profession is, the more its members' prestige is determined by

reocracy, i.e. fails to recognize what is specifically scholastic about them, in that it expresses tendencies or requirements proper to all institutionalized educational systems, even when scarcely or not at all bureaucratized: the tendency toward "routinization" of pedagogic work, which is expressed in, among other things, the production of intellectual and material instruments devised by and for the School, manuals, courses, topics, etc., appears, alongside the first signs of institutionalization, in traditional schools like the rhetoric and philosophy schools of Antiquity or the Koran schools, which exhibit none of the features of bureaucratic organization. (190)

The argument of *Reproduction* is explicitly here, as it is implicitly throughout, a description of the transhistorical structure of the educational institution, and in the terms of this project, the concept of autonomy emerges as the single most significant concept defining the transhistorical identity of the school as an institution. The routinization effect exhibited in the school's formal procedures is thus only accidentally congruent with the historical form of bureaucracy, which is a mode of social relation specifically *modern*:

when Crozier sees in the institutional guarantees of university "independence" no more than a form of the guarantees statutorily written into the bureaucratic definition of official posts, he lumps together two facts as irreducible to one another as the systems of relations to which they belong, on the one hand the autonomy which teachers have claimed and obtained as civil servants subject to the common legislation of a Government department, and on the other hand, the pedagogic autonomy inherited from the medieval corporation. (190-91)

The distinction drawn by Bourdieu and Passeron between bureaucratic and pedagogic autonomy is indeed the crucial one, but that does not mean that in practice, in the pedagogic imaginary, the two forms of autonomy are not actually *confused*. It is not a question of "lumping together" the two autonomies, when they are "irreducible to one another," much less of reducing the pedagogic to the bureaucratic, but of acknowledging the overdetermination of the concept of "autonomy" in the contemporary school by the complex interaction of the two relative autonomies, the pedagogic and the bureaucratic. In the situation of the bureaucratized educational institution, pedagogic autonomy must defend itself against the heteronomous pressure of the *educational institution itself*, insofar as it bureau-

the organization: thus, the pattern of academic mobility—by “horizontal upward displacement” from campus to more prestigious campus—appears *prima facie* to replicate the pattern of the careers of executives in the private or public sector, or across both.

However, the individualization of organizational prestige is different in consulting or academic professions from what it is in technobureaucratic careers. The fact that achievements in the former are personalized seems to allow for an ideological blending of personal and organizational *prestige*. (205)

Such “ideological blending” is paradoxical in that bureaucratic organizations like the modern university tend to encourage the very professionalist ideology that denies the subordination of professional activity to merely bureaucratic ends. Professionalism is thus lodged within bureaucracy as the affirmation of the principle antithetical to bureaucracy itself, the principle Weber called “charisma” and which Larson recognizes as a form of “individualism”:

Typically, professions maintain indeterminate and untestable cognitive areas in order to assert, collectively, the uniqueness of *individual* capacities. Collectively they solicit trust in *individual* professional capitals and *individual* freedom from external controls. . . .

This individualism is, I believe, one the powerful factors that make professions continue to appear, in the eyes of the public and of most social scientists, as the “anti-bureaucracy.” (206)

At the least Larson’s argument implies that discussions of the academic “profession” which do not acknowledge its incorporation into a heterogeneous bureaucracy simply disseminate an *ideology* of professionalism and not an analysis of its real institutional conditions. It is just such an ideology which has subtended the claims for the subversiveness of literary theory, and rhetorical reading in particular, by naming the “institution” as the object of subversive teaching by charismatic master theorists. Such charisma is always a “blending of personal and organizational prestige.” Yet within the ideology of professionalism, the charisma of the master theorist appears to constitute a realm of *absolute* autonomy, and therefore, as we have noted, an “other scene” of politics.

Nothing confirms this point more certainly than the mutation of the master theorists in the 1980s into “superstars,” into the free agents of pure charisma. It is not difficult to see that the deployment of this category was driven by the interests of competitive university administrations, for whom

the content of theory, subversive or otherwise, was largely irrelevant. What mattered was that the charisma of the master theorists could be converted into bureaucratic prestige. The social horizon circumscribing and conditioning the emergence of the academic superstar is thus nothing less than the total socioeconomic order, within which the pervasive mass-cultural form of the celebrity system is directly (but at the same time invisibly) correlated to the disappearance of “work autonomy” at every level and in every sphere of the work force. For the professoriate, it is only in the superstar as a form of *celebrity* that autonomy or free agency truly resides, an autonomy ratified by “horizontal upward mobility.” Such mobility signifies an imaginary transcendence of institutional heteronomy by means of *professionalism itself*, by the deliberate cultivation of charismatic authority.⁵³ But the figure in whom so large an imaginary investment is deposited, so far from representing a real autonomy, is the site of the maximum determination of the university teacher’s “professional activity” by external social forces, namely (as everyone also knows) the forces of the market. The invisible hand which gives the charismatic celebrity “mobility” is thus the same hand which makes a given commodity irresistible in a given time and place, especially when that commodity signifies (as so many commodities do) autonomy itself.

“the task of literary criticism”

The foregoing argument confirms, if it needs confirming, that the institutional position of the master theorist, as the person in whom institutional and personal prestige is “blended,” and in whom the concept of “autonomy” is maximally overdetermined, was always a condition for the emergence of theory. In the case of de Man, his institutional affiliation was never merely incidental, it was essential to the propagation of rhetorical reading as a school, and therefore also to the construction of his personal “charisma.” The same circumstances explain why the waning of deconstruction was a consequence not of its successful refutation, but of its successful dissemination, the transference onto the methodology. Theory itself is burdened with the task of “subverting” the very institutional conditions that permit it to construct itself as the vehicle of an anti-institutional, charismatic authority. This paradox is only intelligible from the point of view of a sociological analysis: as the pedagogic transference moves out of the seminar into the larger institutional field, it produces the phenomenon of *fac-tions*, the internecine bureaucratic conflict that is misrecognized as “institutional resistance” to deconstruction. Hence deconstructive theory is vulnerable, as the object of transference transferred, to the same bureaucratic and market forces the theorist experiences in his or her career. This point has been underscored in the wake of the scandal of de Man’s wartime

model the work of theory on bureaucratic work, and thus to reproduce as theory the mutual nonrecognition of the bureaucratic and the charismatic. It was the essence of this theory that its dissemination could be attributed to a "cognitive process" and not to the effects of the transference, the "madness of authority," for only by means of such a formalization of its method could theoretical discourse be disseminated beyond the immediate institutional sphere of charismatic authority, the graduate seminar. The-ory's constitutive "impersonality" was achieved not simply by the deconstruction of illusions of autonomous agency but by the transformation of the work of reading into an *unconscious mimesis* of the form of bureaucratic labor: "Technically correct rhetorical readings may be boring, monotonous, predictable, and unpleasant, but they are irrefutable" (RT, 19). There is no lack of overdetermination in this sentence; it characterizes rhetorical reading as "technical" in a quasi-scientific sense of "rigorous," but also as a specific kind of *work*, the work of the office. For the disciples, the transference is transferred not only onto the methodology of rhetorical reading, but onto the sheer "technicality" of that method, its iterability, which can then take on the properties of routinized labor in the bureaucratic sphere.⁵⁷ In this way the transference finds what appears to be the same object to cathect in both the intellectual and the bureaucratic fields, the routinization-effect it knows as "rigor." Only in this way can boredom, monotony, predictability, and unpleasantness be revalued as *positive* qualities of rhetorical reading, as the objects of a psychic investment. And the question of "boring to whom" is of course not the issue at all, since the referent of these terms is not some real, experiential boredom but the "technical" iterability of rhetorical reading. Just as transference transferred in the pedagogic sphere imparts to "rigor" the eros, the sexiness, of the master teacher, so in the bureaucratic sphere it signifies a *charisma of routinization*, the cathexis of routine.

To return to the lexicon of deconstructive terms, we can easily give a de Manian equivalent for the "charisma of routinization": it is the *pathos of rigor*. The puzzle of Hertz's "lurid figures" is solved by reading the terms "pathos" and "rigor" as equally overdetermined, provided we recognize that the concept of the "lurid" or the "pathetic" governs not only its specular instances—beheading, castration, and the like—but most of all the "pathos" of the method, its boredom, its predictability, its unpleasantness, the "tedium of its techniques" (RT, 106). At this point we may go on to contextualize the entire de Manian thematic by turning it inside out, as it were, by correlating the terms which are internal to its discourse with the terms defining the conditions of its institutional practice:

collaboration, since the scandal itself has absurdly but inevitably discredited deconstructive theory, as though the theory and the theorist were the same.

More consequential than the decline of deconstruction, however, is the current "crisis" of theory itself,⁵⁴ with which the name "deconstruction" is inseparably entangled. So far from recognizing here only the supposedly "journalistic" misapprehensions about a monolithic theory,⁵⁵ we must insist again that de Man himself always endorsed deconstruction's claim to be the most exemplary of theories ("always in theory, the most elastic theoretical and dialectical model to end all models"), in other words, that the-ory in which the name of theory is at stake. The resistance to theory was never anything other than the resistance to deconstruction. Are not the consequences of this gamble still with us? Why else should the fortunes of theory itself rise or fall *after deconstruction*? I do not imagine that any challenge to the authority of a monolithic "theory" (on behalf of, for example, a neorelativism or neopragmatism) would have the slightest chance of succeeding if theory itself were not capable of being experienced as monolithic, even by its advocates. There is no answer, then, to the question "What is theory?" because the concept of theory inhabits (like the concept of rigor), the pedagogic imaginary, where it does indeed mean *one thing*, however different that thing may be to different factions within the profession. If deconstruction no longer establishes the terms by which certain texts, of whatever provenance, can be integrated into the corpus of literary theory, that is preeminently because it no longer offers to the pedagogic imaginary a resolution to the problem of professional autonomy, a resolution which begins to fail in rhetorical reading as soon as the problem itself becomes visible in de Man's later essays as an uneasy reflection on pedagogy, on the dilemma of discipleship. To the demonstration of this point we now turn.

The nature of this problem has been well described by Bourdieu: "Intellectual labour carried out collectively, within technically and socially differentiated production units, can no longer surround itself with the charismatic aura attaching to traditional independent production."⁵⁶ The increasingly technobureaucratic organization of the professional field of literary criticism was a condition for the emergence of theory, which we can understand in retrospect as the reassertion of charismatic authority in the face of that technobureaucratic domination. In the graduate schools of the last quarter-century, a *contradiction* appeared to open up between an enlarged sphere of intellectual autonomy—a kind of extra-institutional space occupied by the master theorists—and the bureaucratization of professional life. The deconstructive resolution to this contradiction was to

reports on the future *productivity* of rhetorical reading. But to whom is the memo addressed? It is as though de Man were merely reporting, as though he were merely passing on instructions from somewhere higher or deeper within the institution itself, and not setting an agenda for his disciples, for the school (and faction) of rhetorical reading. The denial of the master theorist's charismatic authority, his reabsorption into the company of nameless critical laborers, is enacted in the erasure of any agency, any higher authority, directing "the task of criticism." No one can claim credit for the setting of this agenda, not even de Man.

If the mask of impersonality conceals the "madness of authority," that is no more than what is to be expected of bureaucratic domination. The denial of the charismatic network (and its factions) belongs to the official ideology of the bureaucratic organization, to its language of "impersonal" relations and merely "technical" standards of competence; and it is under cover of this ideology that charismatic authority can be cultivated to an extreme degree, can be given the maximum field of play. At the same time, the transferential dynamic can only be unofficially acknowledged, reduced to the language of gossip, which dominates everyday working life and is like talk about the weather, at once tedious and compelling. At this point we can offer a summary reading of the de Manian oeuvre as a *symptomatic* discourse, a discourse that registers at the heart of its terminology the historical moment of the fusion of the university teacher's autonomous "professional activity" with the technobureaucratic organization of intellectual labor. Within the larger discourse of "theory," rhetorical reading has the important symptomatic function of figuring a rapprochement with the institutional conditions of criticism, by acknowledging the loss of intellectual autonomy as a theory of linguistic determinism—at the same time that autonomy is continually reinvested in the figure of the master theorist. But this is an autonomy which exists only on the imaginary *outside* of the institution, as an "anti-institutional" charisma.⁵⁸

We are now prepared to take an even longer view of the moment of theory, and the symptomatic role of rhetorical reading in that moment. For what we have attempted to understand is a historically specific routinization effect—the "rigor" of rhetorical reading—that was always articulated on the preexisting routinization effects of literary education, the most important of which is the literary curriculum itself. On the syllabus as routinization effect, Bourdieu and Passeron have commented: "Because sacerdotal practice can never so entirely escape stereotyping as can pedagogic practice (the manipulation of secularized goods), priestly charisma can never rest so entirely as teacherly charisma on the technique of ritual deritualization, the juggling with the syllabus that is implicitly on the

Chapter Four

rhetoric vs. grammar
metaphor vs. metonymy
necessity vs. chance
pathos vs. rigor

↓
literary texts vs. philosophical texts

↓

charisma vs. routine
profession vs. bureaucracy
autonomy vs. heteronomy

By means of this diagram we can see that the development of a dual syllabus of literary and philosophical texts served as a kind of hinge between the rhetorical/thematic terminology, internal to the discourse of rhetorical reading, and its institutional conditions, the conditions of intellectual labor for literary critics in general. Our analysis has already revealed that the terms on the left-hand side of the diagram are entirely governed by the terms on the right: just as agency is deconstructed by the "effet machinal" of language, just as metaphor is "metonymized," just as metaphysical necessity is displaced by the mechanical causality of chance, so pathos is determined to be nothing other than the effect of rigor, the inexorable rigor of the deconstructive method. It is crucial nevertheless that what does not and cannot appear within deconstructive discourse is the *meaning* of these terms in their institutional context, what the lower half of the diagram reveals: the subversion of charisma, of the claims to professional autonomy, by the heteronomous organization of the school. Such heteronomy rather appears within rhetorical reading only as a symptomatic doctrine: the *linguistic determinism* which somehow determines, without the intervention of any authoritative agent, of any "intersubjective relation," the protocols of rhetorical reading as a disciplinary practice: "But there is absolutely no reason why analyses of the kind here suggested for Proust would not be applicable, with proper modifications of technique, to Milton or to Dante or to Hölderlin. This will in fact be the task of literary criticism in the coming years" (AR, 17). The supreme confidence with which this prophecy is offered as a fact is staked on nothing other than a "blending" of personal and institutional authority in the figure of de Man; but that hindsight observation scarcely begins to confront the statement's rhetorical mode. By the latter term, I do not mean that these artfully dry sentences perform the same deconstruction to which all of canonical literature is to be submitted. The rhetorical mode of the passage is rather more homely and familiar: it resonates with the style of the *memo*, the humblest text of bureaucracy. It

consciously) in the language of theory, its language of "rigor," is the problem of "specialization," or the effects of the technobureaucratic organization of intellectual labor on the discipline of criticism. The interesting historical question remains what institutional conditions produced the secondary routinization effect by which theory was constituted as a syllabus both supplementary to the literary syllabus and in a necessarily pendant relation to that syllabus.

We can emphasize, to begin with, that it is only in the graduate seminar that theory can emerge as such, as a distinctive "canon" of writers and texts. The institutional conditions for the emergence of literary theory are therefore related to the institutional distinction between the graduate and undergraduate levels of the educational system. The signal feature of that distinction will already have been apparent: the relatively greater autonomy of the graduate teacher, which is in turn the condition for the transferential cathexes necessary for the propagation of theory. The relative nondetermination of the graduate syllabus by any higher administrative power is the sine qua non of theory, and for that reason theory itself is the vehicle of a claim to autonomy; it is the discursive field in which that autonomy can be negotiated, even when it is negotiated ideologically, as the perennial theoretical problem of the relation between language and the agency of the subject. The development of theory was always premised on the inviolability of the graduate seminar, the site of an autonomy not possible at the undergraduate level, where the syllabus of literature was subject to much greater oversight. At the same time it seems unlikely that theory would have been permitted to achieve so extensively routinized a form in the graduate schools if an exclusively literary curriculum were still the norm at the graduate level. The indifference of university administrators to the graduate curriculum reflects less their respect for the traditional autonomy of the graduate teacher as it does an accurate estimation of the diminished significance of the literary curriculum in the context of the university's perceived social function, the perceived demand for the knowledges it disseminates.

The ultimate social horizon of the latter development is the hegemony of that technobureaucratic organization of intellectual life which has rendered the literary curriculum socially marginal by transforming the university into the institution designed to produce a new class of technical/managerial specialists possessed of purely technical/managerial knowledge. It is in this context that we shall have to understand the ambivalent position of literary theory with respect to literature, since theory is both indissolubly bound to that curriculum and yet opposed to reproducing it as the vehicle of universal "humanist values" constituting a knowledge of a

syllabus" (66-67). Rhetorical reading has vigorously endorsed the "scheduled improvisation" of theory, its "juggling" with the syllabus, and at the same time tacitly returned in its practice to the syllabus of literature. The latter motive is expressed without apology in de Man's injunction to "apply" the techniques of rhetorical reading to "the whole of literature" (AR, 16). As I have already argued, the theory of rhetorical reading can provide no rationale for limiting the syllabus to works of literature, and no rationale is available in de Man for the deconstructive reading of nonliterary texts, except by extending the quality of "literariness" to those texts. While departmental inertia may ultimately limit the extent of curricular "improvisation," the larger context of a general and well publicized curricular crisis of the "humanities" suggests that the ambivalence of theory with respect to the literary syllabus is itself related to long-term developments in the educational institution. For the "canon of theory" introduces into the institutional context of literary pedagogy (the graduate seminar) a syllabus whose symptomatic function is to signify precisely methodological "rigor," rather than the taste or discrimination which for so long determined the ideological protocols of literary criticism. In no other circumstance would it have been possible for deconstruction to circulate as the other *name* of theory, the name given by de Man himself in the Preface to *Allegories of Reading*. At a certain moment, then, the syllabus of literary texts, constituting the traditional "routinization" of literary education, could be perceived as inadequate to support a practice that possessed "rigor"; and that inadequacy could only be compensated by another syllabus, one which in effect signified rigor.

Those authors or texts designated as "theoretical" are now increasingly capable of being introduced to students in traditional routinized forms, even by means of anthologies. It is difficult to imagine how graduate education could proceed at the present moment without recourse to a relatively standardized set of theoretical texts, which are employed not only in the context of "application" to works of literature, but also in the seminar on theory. These arrangements are hardly to be deplored in themselves. The routinization of theory does not necessarily represent, as Gerald Graff worries, only the rise of another specialization within literature: "It is largely the institutionalization of literary theory as a special field that lends truth to the complaint that literary theory has become a private enclave in which theorists only talk to one another."⁵⁹ Graff points out that theory is no more specialized than any other specialization in a period or an author, and he recommends that it become more like work on a set of problems that concern all critics. But I would suggest that theory has already become just that, with the qualification that the problem which is negotiated (un-

recognize that the career of theory had everything to do with the status of literature in "a new phase of civilization."

A preliminary attempt at reconsidering the category of literature might begin with the observation that while the original ideological rationale of literature justified the social project of producing a standard vernacular by presenting literature as the repository of the most universal truths of the human condition, this project was always belied by the actual structure of the educational system. The contradiction between the politico-administrative requirement of linguistic homogeneity and the socioeconomic necessity of distributing unequally every form of cultural capital (including Standard English) burdened the educational system throughout its modern history with the impossible task of at once democratizing the distribution of knowledges and maintaining class distinctions. This contradiction marks in familiar ways the complex interrelations between public and private schools, and between the various levels of the educational system. At the present moment, the nation-state still requires a relatively homogeneous language to administer its citizenry, but it no longer requires that a distinctive practice of that language identify a culturally homogeneous bourgeoisie. That class has long since been replaced by a culturally heterogeneous New Class, which has in turn been fully integrated into mass culture, a media culture mediating the desires of every class and group. In this "new phase of civilization," the historical function of the literary curriculum—to produce at the lower levels of the educational system a practice of Standard English, and at the higher levels a more refined bourgeois language, a "literary" English—is no longer crucially important to the social order. We might even speculate that it is the *absence* of such a crucial social function which the professors of literature experience as powerlessness in the face of a political entity—the state—which they misrecognize as the source of disempowerment. For the same reason the absence of a central social function for the literary curriculum has become the occasion of an anxious thematizing of the political in literary critical discourse, as well as the occasion of an undervaluation of the field in which teachers do possess agency, namely, the school itself. What appears to be a politically significant fact from the point of view of a "cultural materialism" may be something rather different than the question of which social groups are represented in the canon: for example, the fact that the function of producing in a segment of the populace a minimal degree of linguistic uniformity (in ideological terms, "competence") has been given over to the field of composition, which has developed a nonfictional prose syllabus specific to its function, a syllabus which seems to have no necessary relation to the

nonspecialist nature. The project of literary theory in its premier deconstructive form was therefore to discard one ideological rationale for the literary curriculum, and then immediately to install another in its place. Rhetorical reading identified this rationale with the practice of *rhetoric*, but the invocation of that premodern discipline should not disguise the function of rhetoric as an ideological discourse when it is deployed as the means of transforming the method of reading into a rigorously iterable *technical* procedure. The refunctioning of rhetoric's *techné* as a kind of technology directly incorporated into the protocols of rhetorical reading a mimesis of the technobureaucratic itself. Deconstructive literary theory testified to the obsolescence of the "humanist" rationale of literary study not only, then, by attacking that rationale directly, but by reproducing in the form of its practice the form of that hegemonic rationality which had *already* rendered the traditional ideological rationale of the literary curriculum obsolete. The failure of deconstructive theory to produce a new rationale for the literary curriculum accounts for the tenacity of the concept of the "literary" in its discourse, the fact that its syllabus was in practice confined to a specific set of literary and philosophical texts selected for their capacity to foreground (or thematize) rhetorical reading's ideological motifs and methodological procedures.

The absence of a rationale for the literary curriculum has up to this point meant nothing but the absence of an *ideological* rationale. This is necessarily so because the syllabus of literary works always demanded an essentialist concept of literature to ground it. Theory replaced the "humanistic" thematic of literature with an equally universalizing, if antihumanistic, thematic of *language*; the important point is that theory belongs to the long-term historical project of providing a rationale for the literary curriculum that would effectively establish a syllabus of study. Can essentializing concepts of literature be discarded without resorting to the kind of ideological debunking of literary works sometimes characterizing the critique of the canon? Perhaps it is time to reconsider the implications of Raymond Williams's "cultural materialist" critique of literature, a critique which is opposed both to the traditionalist ideological defense of literature and to the rhetoricism of theory: "It is in a way surprising that the specialized concept of 'literature,' developed in precise forms of correspondence with a particular social class, a particular technology of print, should be so often invoked in retrospective, nostalgic, or reactionary moods, as a form of opposition to what is correctly seen as a new phase of civilization."⁶⁰ Yet the progressive critical movements of the 1980s took as the object of their critique not the historical category of literature but "the canon." We are in a position now to

study of literature. As we have seen in Chapter 1, the new institutional significance of composition marks the appearance of a new social function for the university, the task of providing the future technobureaucratic elite with precisely and only the linguistic competence necessary for the performance of its specialized functions.

The study of literature has taken its place in the undergraduate curriculum, then, as one apparent specialization among many others, but a specialization without a rationale specific to its syllabus. It is still a specialization with a *universalist* rationale, and this was true even of rhetorical reading, which expressed this contradiction as the discrepancy between its mimetically technobureaucratic methodology and its universalist theory of language, a theory which rediscovered in works of literature an expression of the universal human condition. If deconstructive theory did not provide an enduring new rationale for literary study, that was in part because it was incapable of seeing the relation between its practice of *supplementing* the literary syllabus at the level of the graduate school, and composition's practice of *displacing* it at the entry level of university study. Rhetorical reading was entirely symptomatic of theory in general in its incapacity to rationalize its syllabus, except by falling back upon the textual preferences of de Man himself, or by generalizing the concept of literariness to a particular set of philosophical texts. The weakness of this rationalization was only too apparent when it had to confront the demand from other factions of the profession to "open the canon." But the diminished significance of the literary syllabus in the university is in reality a systemic institutional effect, and not the result of a deconstructive (or any other) attack upon the universality of the values supposed to be expressed in the literary canon. Here, then, is a new "political" question: What is the systemic relation between the syllabus of composition and the syllabus of theory? Both of these practices have invoked in highly charged ideological contexts the precedent of rhetoric, and both have refunctioned rhetoric in practices which are overdetermined by the technobureaucratic conditions themselves responsible for the social marginality of the literary curriculum.⁶¹ What de Man considered to be the cultural irrelevance of the university describes a real condition, perhaps, not of the university but of the literary curriculum, a condition which has given rise, among other things, to the canon of theory. The difficulty of imagining what might succeed the curricular forms of literature and theory is well indicated in the following comment of John Frow, from his *Marxism and Literary History*:

The whole weight of recent literary theory has been on the *constitutive* status of language, on the impossibility of linguistic

transparency, on the agonistic rhetorical strategies of discourse, and on the shaping of language by the forces of power and desire. The effect of this emphasis should be in the first place to redefine the traditional objects of literary knowledge, and in particular the forms of valorization of writing which have prevailed in most forms of literary study.⁶²

Frow recommends a "general poetics" or "general rhetoric" which would not be addressed exclusively to the traditional canon of literary texts but would take as its object noncanonical genres and forms, including popular romances, journalism, film, television, scientific discourses, and even "everyday language." But the recourse to "poetics" and "rhetoric" confirms once again how nearly impossible it is to imagine what lies beyond the rhetoric of literary theory, and hence beyond the problematic of literariness. It is not yet clear whether a "cultural studies" curriculum has been conceived which does not replicate the theoretical and hermeneutic paradigms of literary interpretation. There is also evidence to suggest that cultural studies' new "opening" of the syllabus to popular or mass cultural works has been accompanied by a closure of the syllabus to the same High Cultural philosophical texts which were so important to the dissemination of theory. Such a cultural studies syllabus would certainly not be inclusive of cultural products generally.⁶³ If literary criticism is ever to conceptualize a new disciplinary domain, it will have to undertake first a much more thorough reflection on the historical category of literature; otherwise I suggest that new critical movements will continue to register their agendas symptomatically, by ritually overthrowing a continually resurgent literariness and literary canon. At the same time it is unquestionably the case that the several recent crises of the literary canon—its "opening" to philosophical works, to works by minorities, and now to popular and mass cultural works—amounts to a terminal crisis, more than sufficient evidence of the urgent need to reconceptualize the object of literary study. One may predict, without resorting to prophecy, that such reconceptualization will become "the task of literary criticism in the coming years."

ing in Literary Studies," *Critical Inquiry* 10 (1983), 349–64, for a response to Bate's complaint interestingly and prophetically different from de Man's.

⁴⁴Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, 2 vols., ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 2:1002.

⁴⁵Cornelius Castoriadis, *Political and Social Writings*, vol. 2, trans. and ed. David Ames Curtis (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 272.

⁴⁶Weber, *On Charisma*, 20.

⁴⁷Claude Lefort, *The Political Forms of Modern Society: Bureaucracy, Democracy, Totalitarianism*, ed. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986).

⁴⁸Karl Marx: *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), 107.

⁴⁹In a remarkable passage, which owes much to Hegel, Weber goes a long way toward identifying *Geist* with that bureaucracy whose Prussian form was the immediate context of Hegel's own celebrations of the state: "An inanimate machine is mind objectified. Only this provides it with the power to force men into its service and to dominate their everyday working life as completely as is actually the case in the factory. Objectified intelligence is also the animated machine, the bureaucratic organization, with its specialization of trained skills, its division of jurisdiction, its rules and hierarchical relations. Together with the inanimate machine it is busy fabricating the shell of bondage which men will perhaps be forced to inhabit some day, as powerless as the fellahs of ancient Egypt" (*Economy and Society*, 2:1402).

⁵⁰See André Gorz's discussion of the relation between autonomy and heteronomy in his *Critique of Economic Reason*, trans. Gillian Handyside and Chris Turner (London: Verso, 1989): "The economic and administrative apparatuses become differentiated, more complex and bureaucratized in synergy. The result of this, for individuals in their work, is that their *field* of responsibility and scope for initiative (but not necessarily their responsibility and initiative as such) are narrowed and what is more, the coherence and goals of the organization—within which they are more or less consenting cogs—become less intelligible. . . . I term the *sphere of heteronomy* the totality of specialized activities which individuals have to accomplish as functions co-ordinated from outside by a pre-established organization" (32).

⁵¹David Harvey makes this point in his essay "Flexibility: Threat or Opportunity?" *Socialist Review* 12 (1991): "University-based intellectuals, for example, now find themselves faced with far shorter turnover times in the realm of ideas and far stronger pressures to increase output than was the case in the 1960s" (77).

⁵²Magali Scarfatti Larson, *The Rise of Professionalism: A Sociological Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).

⁵³A similar point has been argued by Alvin Gouldner in *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class*: "Unlike the older bureaucrats, the new intellectuals have extensive cultural capital which increases their mobility. . . . They need not, moreover, seek status solely within their own organization and from its staff or clients. Rather, they also seek status in professional associations; they wish the good regard of the knowledgeable" (51).

⁵⁴In addition to *The Future of Literary Theory and The Textual Sublime*, from which I have already cited, see also Joseph Natoli, ed., *Literary Theory's Future(s)* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), and Thomas M. Kavanagh, ed., *The Limits of Theory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989). See also Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels's "Against Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 8 (1982), 723–42, and the subsequent controversy over this argument.

⁵⁵I emphasize once again that "theory" and "deconstruction" were virtually synonymous in both the "journalistic" accounts of deconstruction and the various specifically academic media of dissemination. Journalism can hardly be held responsible for this confusion, since the journalists only confirmed the considerable homogenization of theory in the graduate schools, the solidification of an epistemic rhetoricism which colored the practice of many different and on the surface conflicting theories. The villainizing of journalism in the wake of the de Man scandal is only a belated consequence of this homogenization effect, the inverse mirror image of deconstruction's self-image as the premier theory of its day. The level of anathema heaped upon the journalistic accounts of the de Man scandal is convincing testimony to how crucial the celebrity system always was to the dissemination of theory, how thoroughly theory's dissemination conformed to the cultural paradigms of the mass media.

⁵⁶Pierre Bourdieu, "The Market of Symbolic Goods," *Poetics* 14 (1985), 33.

⁵⁷The only critic I have encountered who has remarked on the "cathexis" and boredom in the practice of rhetorical reading is D. A. Miller, who detects and exposes such a cathexis in J. Hillis Miller's citation of precisely this passage from de Man's work. See "The Profession of English: An Exchange," J. Hillis Miller and D. A. Miller, *ADE Bulletin* 88 (1987), 42–58.

⁵⁸It seems evident in retrospect that deconstruction's solution to the problem of autonomy has been displaced in recent years by a more openly professionalist discourse that vehemently reasserts professional autonomy by celebrating precisely the "blending of personal and organizational prestige." Such an ideology of professionalism once again represses the bureaucratic determination of professional activity, though it is no less troubled by the omnipresence of such heteronomy; it wishes rather to play the game well, "pragmatically." Most importantly it no longer needs to project its solution to the problem of work autonomy onto a theory of reading. Indeed, the versions of pragmatism and relativism now circulating in the wake of theory can display a relaxed disdain for theory's "rigor," as that term signifies a kind of prior restraint upon professional activity. In that sense pragmatism is the theory of which professionalism is the practice.

⁵⁹Gerald Graff, *Professing Literature: An Institutional History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 1987.

⁶⁰Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 54.

⁶¹On the relation between technical knowledges and the practice of composition, see the interesting remarks of Stanley Aronowitz and Henry A. Giroux, *Education Under Siege: The Conservative, Liberal, and Radical Debate over Schooling* (Haley, Mass.: Bergin and Garvey, 1985), 52ff.

⁶²John Frow, *Marxism and Literary History* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 234.

⁶³Raymond Williams has always argued forcefully for maintaining a sense of the historical interrelation between High and Low Cultural works. See his comment in "The Future of Cultural Studies," in *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists* (London: Verso, 1989): "It is necessary and wholly intellectually defensible to analyse serials and soap operas. Yet I do wonder about the courses where at least the teachers—and I would say also the students—have not themselves encountered the problems of the whole development of naturalist and realist drama, of social-problem drama, or of certain kinds of serial form in the nineteenth century, which are elements in the constitution of these precise contemporary forms, so that the tension between that social history of forms and these forms in a contemporary situation, with their partly new and partly old content, partly new and partly old techniques, can be explored with weight on both sides" (159).

Chapter Five

¹Hume remarks that "The want of humanity and of decency, so conspicuous in the characters drawn by several of the ancient poets, even sometimes by HOMER and the GREEK tragedians, diminishes considerably the merit of their noble performances," although that judgment does not prevent Hume from saying in the same essay that "The same HOMER, who pleased at ATHENS and ROME two thousand years ago, is still admired at PARIS and LONDON." See David Hume, *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary* (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1985), 246, 243.

²Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value," *Diacritics* (Winter 1985), 74.

³Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. J. H. Bernard (New York: Hafner Press, 1951), 46.

⁴Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Contingencies of Value: Alternative Perspectives for Critical Theory*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 34.

⁵We have recently been reminded of this fact by Patrick Brantlinger in his *Crusoe's Footprints: Cultural Studies in Britain and America* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 73.

⁶See Althusser's "Letter on Art in Reply to André Aspre," in *Lenin and Philosophy*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971).

⁷T. W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. C. Lenhardt (London: Routledge, 1970), 9.

⁸Engleton's views of the work of art in this context are fairly represented by his chapter on "Marxism and Aesthetic Value," in *Criticism and Ideology* (London: Verso, 1976). Lentricchia has recently repudiated those literary materialists who "speak as if the real enemy were the aesthetic" in an interview with Imre Salusinszky, *Criticism in Society* (New York: Methuen, 1987), 200. More recently Perry Anderson has observed in his *English Questions* (London: Verso, 1992): "For aesthetic value is not to be dispatched so easily—the wish to finish with it recalling Dobrolybov, or Bazarov, more than Marx or Morris. Railing at canons is not the same as replacing them, which they have resisted. Evacuation of the terrain of literary

evaluation in the traditional sense necessarily leaves its conventional practitioners in place" (243).

⁹Tony Bennett, "Really Useless 'Knowledge': A Political Critique of Aesthetics," in *Thesis Eleven* 12 (1985), 33.

¹⁰Mary Louise Pratt, "Linguistic Utopias," in *The Linguistics of Writing: Arguments between Language and Literature*, ed. Nigel Fabb et al. (New York: Methuen, 1987), 56.

¹¹Suzanne Kappeler, *The Pornography of Representation* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 221. The dismissal of the aesthetic on behalf of political objectives is hardly defensible on "strategic" grounds, a point which can be illustrated again with the example of the antipornography movement. The coincidence of fundamentalist and feminist opposition to pornographic images of women in no way implies the unambiguous advantage for women of censorship legislation. The political objective of the fundamentalist antipornography movement is certainly to *reconfirm* the subjection of women by resacralizing the female body; such a gesture is the precise obverse of pornography's supposed objectification of female bodies. It remains to be seen which group, fundamentalist or feminist, has the more accurate understanding of the long-term effects of censorship on the status of women.

¹²*New York Times*, September 25, 1990, A16.

¹³Joanna Russ, *How to Suppress Women's Writing* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), 120.

¹⁴See, among other texts, Peter Fuller, *Seeing Berger: A Reevaluation* (London: Writers and Readers Publishing Co-operative, 1980).

¹⁵Jan Mukarovsky, *Aesthetic Function, Norm and Value as Social Facts*, trans. Mark E. Suino (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1979), 88.

¹⁶This point, one would hope, clarifies a confusion that derives from the apparent discrepancy between Smith's willingness to speak on the one hand of some works as "information-rich," and on that basis more likely to become canonical in the first place (51), and on the other hand to insist that any evaluative distinction between, for example, "Shakespeare's poetry" and "doggerel" is simply contingent in the sense that one may "prefer" doggerel in those contexts where it is the function of doggerel that one is interested in. True enough! But does it matter that these latter functions are *never* going to be those in which the canonical status of the work is at issue? It is simply not likely that Shakespeare's poetry and some example of doggerel verse are ever going to be seriously compared in the first place. The interesting question is why we might think that we need to give some account of why it is Shakespeare's poetry and not some example of doggerel verse which comes to be canonical. In the actual circumstances of commensuration, doggerel verse will be compared to other doggerel verse, or Shakespeare's work to other work in similar genres.

¹⁷Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, trans. Tom Bottomore and David Frisby (Boston: Routledge, 1978), 56.

¹⁸Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, 2 vols, ed. W. B. Todd (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1976), 1:44.