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 mys-
tification.
—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. Given the re-
newal and even intensification of the debate after what had seemed a suc-
scessful 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 polit-
ical 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, where 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 pro-
grams of study. I shall argue in this chapter that the vulnerability of curricu-
lar 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, this 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 confuse the critique of the canon with the forms of leftist and even Marxian 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.

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 emerged in post-World War II American society requires 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. 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. 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. 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." 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 reconstitutes 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 views 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 Lacoue and Mouffe) have had to confront, with imports theoretical results. 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.6 Although 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 Marxiste rather than the pluralistic critical tradition. The object at the present of advancing a Marxiste critique (however qualified) of liberal pluralistic visions of the canon would be to indicate the inherent limitations in pluralistic 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 expelling 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 is the problematic representation, in the very questions it asks.

For the purposes of this 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. The word "canon" disposes the expressly hierarchical term "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 select, whenever canonical revision is expressed as "opening the canon." 7 We may begin to interrogate this first assumption by raising the question of whether the process by which the 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 historical 'literary' 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 positions 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, elite, or working-class authors from the literary canon. The interpretative 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 democratic 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 sets 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 concerns 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."8 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

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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 in 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 medium 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 inherit 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, this 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 "noncanonical" 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 AOA/CIP and 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 total 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 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
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plurality critiques. 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 a representative member of some social group. The primacy of the social identity of the author in the plurality critique of the canon means that the revelation of works on this basis will inevitably seek its ground in the author’s experience, conceived as the experience of a privileged or dominant 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 that of the artist, so (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 different identity demanded by a practice assuring 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 presents it becoming fully subverted. Both the identities and their relations lose their necessary characters. In a systematic structural ensemble the relations are unable to absorb the identities, but as the identities are purely relational, this is another way of saying that there’s no identity which can be fully constituted.44

Such theoretical arguments (which evoke the vered 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 typology of the noncanonical author’s experience as a marginalized social identity necessarily unscrambles the transparency of the text to the experience it represents.45 If the practice of canonical revision cannot pause to indulge theoretical speculations about such assertions, it urgently betrays an apparently unavoidable discrepancy between theory and practice, an incapacity 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 literal 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 Nothing in for representational in the political sphere. We must speak here (and perhaps generally in postmodern culture) of a certain dispersion 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 conditioned to invoke theoretical assumptions so manifestly deficient as those which govern literal 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’s critique of the 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 categorized social identity continually deflects their theoretical differentiation 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? Is it not so much that such analyses are presently unavailable—in fact, they are45—that is, 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 correspondence, 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 redeployed by the same strategies of representation. It is by no means evident that the representation of blacks in the literary canon, for example, has the same social effects
Granting the theoretical perspective, we can see how identity politics is often understood as a form of social activism or political mobilization. Identity politics is grounded in an understanding of the relationship between individuals and groups, and how these relationships are shaped by power dynamics.

Identity politics is closely linked to the concept of identity, which is often understood in terms of shared characteristics, such as race, gender, sexuality, or ethnicity. These shared characteristics are seen as defining a group's sense of self and can be used to mobilize political action.

Identity politics is often associated with the struggle for social justice, and it is often seen as a way for marginalized groups to assert their rights and demand equal treatment. However, identity politics is also often criticized for being divisive and for prioritizing group identity over individual rights.

Identity politics is often seen as a way to challenge the dominance of dominant groups and to create a more just society. However, it is also often criticized for being exclusionary and for prioritizing group identity over individual rights.
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The problem of identity, on the other hand, usually involves developing a...
historical scholarship. If the feminin 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 origin and identities. The question for us, in reconsidering the categories of canonisation, is why any particular non-canonical author discovered by a research program has to be treated as excluded from the canon. The hypothesis of exclusion has more to do with a microcosmatisation of the political work accomplished by the research program than with any actual historical circumstances of judgment.25 But this microcosmisation itself has certain political consequences, since it affects 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 greatest 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.26 The reconstitution of early modern women writers as expressing the marginalised experience of women in general, as though the difference between an aristocratic woman and a peasant were indistinguishable, is thus 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 problematises the category of "woman" itself, what theoretical inhibitions disallow the problematisation of the "woman writer" in the canon debate?27

One might nevertheless want to object here that even if the most socially conscious processes of exclusion occur primarily at the level of access to literacy, it might still be the case that canonical formations to exclude works by majority writers who do manage to acquire the means of literary production. For reasons I shall now indicate, even this qualified hypothesis is a crucial way inexact. 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 must be said 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 works 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 the hypothesis of exclusion 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 repudiation 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 resolve 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."28 Leavis seems not to be talking of gender at all in pronouncing his canonical judgments. His project surely has to do, as readers of Leavis know, with defining a High Cultural novelistic canon in opposition to the deprivations of what he sees as the emergent concurrently of modern mass culture and the novel (his canonical list excludes Dickens or the grounds of his mass cultural affiliation, despite his "great genius"). We can hardly attribute the apparently equal representation of men and women authors in Leavis's non-canonical canon to the absence of bias, much less to any feminist sympathies. The point of the example is that the historical processes of canon formation, ever or especially at the moment of institutionaljudgment, 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 noncanonical, 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 critics. Social identities are themselves historically constructed; they
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establishment interests, or effectively to subvert the ideologies that sustain them.

Conversely, noncanonical works can be seen to express values which are transcendent, subversive, antihemomic. 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 Herrenstein Smith's incoherency position; but I should like to postpone until a later chapter a full consideration of that theoretical product of the debate, since what is at issue in the reassessment 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?22

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 reground 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 result in 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.23 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 boorishness are just as good as fine literature."24 The latter author fears becoming what he has been made to behold: the condition of
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Aesthesis is nothing other than exclusion from literary production. But why should the coming-into-writing of those formerly excluded from the means of literature as the experience of cultural values? Or, on the other hand, why must the writing of minority authors be considered intrinsically subversive, as the overturning of supposed hegemonic values? These alternatives are only enjoyed upon us by the supposition that canonical works are characterized politically in some universal way, as either progressive or regressive in their values.

The virtual agreement of the progressive and the reactionary participants in the canon debate about the relation between culture and value suggests that the processes of antagonism are more complexly intertwined 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." Here I would like to consider briefly three interrelated propositions about cultural values to which both progressive and reactionary critics would probably 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 repositories of cultural values. The equation of the values represented in a work with the values of the work is assisted by both the revanchists and the revisionists when they conceive literary texts as the means of transmitting specific values to 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 stratification of pluralist pedagogy, the same valued values are often explicated and ritualized, 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 signified by a certain fetish of the "histrionic" or "great works" characteristic of the forms of the center. Hence Michael Ryan, commending 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 vision of male self-aggrandizement" as strictly the cases of these sessions. Yet, in 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.

2. The selection of texts is the selection of values. Within the world of real and ahistorical values, aesthetic value confounds the reader, the consumer of values, and in any conceivable way more important than the value of justice or social equality. That Lillian Robinson writes of the leftist critique of the canon: "at its angriest, none of this reinterpretation offers a fundamental challenge to the canon at canons; although it points 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." The desirability of such a reconsideration is hinted by Nona Baym, on behalf of a version of feminism criticism operating vigorously in the last two decades in the field of canon revision: "it is time perhaps to re-examine the grounds upon which certain hallowed American classics have been called great." 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 emergence 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 Nona Baym, the historical relation between writing by women and the division of public writing into "serious" and "popular" genres; for Jelen this is a question of women's "relationship to writing as such." The distinction between serious and popular writing is a condition of anachronism; 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 social class. The expansion of the concept of "writing" from a practice for the elite to a practice for everyone has had a profound impact on the way we understand and value writing. The recognition of writing as a universal human activity has challenged traditional notions of literacy and has opened up new possibilities for communication and self-expression.

Discussing the evolution of writing practices, the text suggests that the emphasis on literacy and the development of writing as a tool for knowledge and power has transformed societies. The spread of writing systems has facilitated the transmission of knowledge, the creation of new ideas, and the development of complex societies. Writing has become a medium for expressing and preserving thoughts, experiences, and cultural heritage.

The text also notes the impact of writing on social structures and power dynamics. Writing has been used as a means of control and domination, as well as a tool for empowerment and liberation. The ability to read and write has been a source of social status and privilege, while illiteracy has been associated with marginalization and oppression.

In conclusion, the text emphasizes the importance of understanding the historical and cultural contexts in which writing practices have evolved. By recognizing the dynamic interplay between writing and society, we can better appreciate the significance of writing as a fundamental human activity and as a reflection of our shared humanity.
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the consensus of 21 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 Whigish history of "the competitive relationship between literature and canonical morals." If Jeann's theory can then be used to devalue the same popular works Tompkins desires to value as the embodiment of exclusion, intertextual 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 dually engaged in the critique of canon formation by the argument that value is not intrinsic but rather relative, contingent, subjective, consensual, or, in other words, onticmic. The distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic value accords well at the level of pluralistic 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 exploitive nature of such 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 ignoring intrinsic value as simply extrinsic has the curious effect of disabling at the outset any project of revaluation, where the object revitalized 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. Recent critical literature is largely built on the premise 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 intrinsic 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." 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 status 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 different communities 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 fixation 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 non-canonical. 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. Literature 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.
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In this potted essay confront readers in an artful social vacuum like the space of the voting booth, behind the curtain of private judgment. Disagreements about value within such a democracy are comfortably absorbed in a context where it is possible for the power of the opposing rationale to go unnoticed. There is no theoretical limit to the number of "interpreters of communities," and each one believes itself to be the only way, by consensus. The democratic metaphor is quite potent here, since the condition 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. 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. 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 pseudoelection 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 assure 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 must now be set against what happens in a real place, the school.

The Pedagogic Imaginary

The anti-institutional 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.

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."
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The canon of works

read or studied in a given class. In no classroom is the "canon" itself the
goal of study. Where does it appear, there? 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
canon's work; no one can, because the works invoke as canonical change continually. Anything that is a candidate for the canon is only occasionally approved or contested. 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 canons anthology,
which remains a collection from a larger list which does not itself appear anywhere in the anthology's table of contents. In this context, the distinc-
tion 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. The his-
torical 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 re-
garded as "noncanonical" in some pedagogic contexts—for example, the
case of the "great works" survey—their noncanonical status is not nec-
ecessarily 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" pro-
vides such a loud accompaniment. The nearest familiarity with historical
context brings the continuum of cultural works back into focus and dem-
onestates 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 "non-
canonical" 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 overthrown the canon and its evalu-
ative principles, what they have always really done is devise or revise a par-
ticular 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

Canonical and Noncanonical

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 histori-
ally 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 indi-
vidual 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 as somewhat greater length
the much controverted "Western Culture" course offered at Stanford Uni-

wer, once revised so as to include works by various minorities, as well as works by non-Western writers:

ANCIENT WORLD

Required:
- Hebrew Bible, Genesis
- Plato, Republic, major por-
tions of books 1–7
- Homer, major selections from Iliad, Odyssey, or
  both
- At least one Greek tragedy
- New Testament, selections,
  including a gospel

MEDIEVAL AND RENAISSANCE

Required:
- Augustine, Confessions, 1–9
- Dante, Inferno
- Machiavelli, The Prince
- Luther, Christian Liberty
- Galileo, The Starry Mesen-
ger, The Assayer

MODERN

Required:
- Voltaire, Candide

Strongly recommended:
- Thucydides
- Aristotle, Nicomachean
- Ethics, Politics
- Cicero
- Vergil, Aeneid
- Tacitus

Strongly recommended:
- Boethius, Consolation of Phi-
losophy
- Aquinas, selections

A Shakespearean tragedy
- Cervantes, Don Quixote
- Descartes, Discourse on
  Method, Meditations
- Hobbes, Leviathan
- Locke, Second Treatise of
  Civil Government

Rousseau, Social Contract,
- Confessions, Emile
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 authors come from a privileged class, primarily male. 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 moderate the curriculum has recurred again and again. Despite the initial 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 to do with allegiances of the institution; 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. This might be considered to be worth reading as studying, perhaps that counts as "knowledge." It 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 chief major Greek tragedians, medieval romances, Rabelais, Calvin, Montaigne, Bacon, Kant, Hegel, the Romantic poets, Proust, Joyce, Marx, not to mention Virginia Woolf, Simone Weil, Richard Wright, or Zora Neale Hurston? If one excludes some texts in the Stanford syllabus with the names you 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 umbrellas 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 surmounting of the Judeo and the Hellenic; but of this I shall have more to say in the next section. The homogenizing concept of "Western culture" hinges 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 to the way of fundamental notions. 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 marginalised as the member of a social minority, socially disadvantaged. 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. 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 present text is likely to remain misunderstood. The real question is not whether...
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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 I have described (and also celebrated) as the "postmodern condition of knowledge." 36 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), agrarianism, air pollution, air quality index, Akron, Ohio. 37 From Agamemnon to Akron, Ohio is, to say the least, 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 Areteus. 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 contrast 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 in itself reveal the relation between agrarianism 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 unites 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 units, especially units 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 homogenous 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. 38

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 code 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 "de-skilling" of teachers, and the virtual removal of texts, literary or otherwise, from the classroom. 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 refor- mation 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.
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"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 credibly 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.44

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 supressing culture in the ethnographic sense—or re-serv[ing] that sense of culture for non-"Western" artifacts—that the traditional curriculum can appropriate the great works of Western civilisation for the purpose of constituting an imaginary cultural unity such as Bennett or Hirsch envisons. 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 than 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 literature to maintain the fiction of a profound evolution or destiny of Western thought extending from the pre-Socrates to the present. 45 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 breaks 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 exactly corresponds in its thesis to the assertion of nationalism itself.46

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The homogenizing textual effects of deacration 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 deacration 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 not written works), the real difference between school culture and the culture which gives rise to works disappears from view. By supressing 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.47 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.48 For the very same reason, only the simplest countercultural pedagogy can make the works of the multicultural curricula 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 postcolonial 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, they need not be equated with the multiplicity of cultures, as though every cultural work were only the organic expression of a discrete and autonomous culture.49 The fact that we now expect the curriculum to be a principle of its organization the very distinctness of cultures, Western or non-Western, canonical or noncanonical, points to a certain intransigent 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.50 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 “multiversity” 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 writing and appropriate “values” before they select the courses 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 consummating canon 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 new 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 at present
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 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." 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 revaluation 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." The crucial question, however, is not how "narrowly specific" this cultural capital is to be, but how it is to produce the effect of satisfying 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 greatly iniquitous 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 property 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. Raising its agenda upon such assumptions, a left politics of representation seems to have no other choice than to institutionalize alternative syllabi as representational 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.
not continue to study them after their sophomore year. It is only by first
recognizing the elements of the university's curriculum, and then
first recognizing them through the eyes of the present student, that
we can begin to think....

It will first be necessary to cast the social imagination by the teaching
curriculum. Or, in other words, we need a national multicul- 
loss., and the recent Hockenburgh report on the uni-

The objective of political education is not to be confused with the
objective of academic education, which is to teach, to generate
knowledge (by which is meant neither information, nor 'university,'
nor 'common culture'), even if the educational system inevitably
university's curriculum. In fact, as the present student attests,
the curriculum is the result of the curriculum, and in the present

In this context, we can recognize that the curriculum, in the case of
a particular university, is not the curriculum of the whole of the
universe, but is the curriculum of the individual student. The
university is a microcosm of the world, and it is through the

It has been all too easy to confuse the effect of academic education
with the effect of political education. The distinction is important,
to any attempt at a clear interpretation of the curriculum, because

The curriculum of the university is, at its core, a political process,
not a process of education. The political process is the process
of creating a new world, not a process of educating the new world.

It is time for progressive universities to break with the
humanities curriculum—after all, as an integrated program of

By breaking with the humanities curriculum, the university
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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 not just as the institution of separate curricula for separate consistencies. 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-minded in this way, because any cultural work will objectify in its very form and content the same social contradictions that the canon debate allegorizes by means of a divided curricu-

lum. 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 anti-

hegemonic, through the content of the curriculum. If it is a definable ob-
jectives 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 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 be-

coming objects of study in the curriculum, 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 school for the abandonment of all standards of judgment, it is no longer politically strategic to argue for the necessity of teaching cer-

tain "noncanonical" works solely on the grounds that these works repres-

ent 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 distance ourselves and our students from the idea that canonical or noncanonical syllabi have natural consistencies, 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 "uni-
tary" curriculum. Extra- and beyond Gramsci's analysis of the relation be-

tween the school and democracy, we can predict that different curricula for different consistencies 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 lost the fact that cultures are interdependently independent 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 ac-

knowledge this "postmodern" condition. It is certainly acknowledged in the domain of mass culture, where cultural products are very often pro-

duced for particular consistencies, but where their circulation "inter-

culturally" is virtually assured by the relentless 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." * Inter-

cultural literacy would consist of a network of inquiry that respects the ac-

cumulation of shared symbols (thus the term literacy) but also invites re-

search into the processes by which cultures are formed and particularly en-
courages analysis of how cultures constitute themselves by reference to each other.**

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 apologetic exercise—
because these works are supposed to embody hegemonic values—but be-
cause 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 inconstant 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 cul-
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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 minority and 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 displace ourselves and our students from the idea that canonical or noncanonical works have natural constituencies, the members of dominate 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 malleable constructive exercise of (in Gramsci's terms) a "unitary" curriculum. Reradiating 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 looking 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."**

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 aporoptic 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 imminent 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
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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 imperialized 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 corereading 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 constitutive 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 never-

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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 structure 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 purism when the democratic is built to last. To outlast us, no dialect exists.

—JOHN ASHERB, "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."56 Benjamin offers no unequivocal response to the fact of barbarism, rather a certain "caution detached";

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."57 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
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 reproduction of social relations, but it does not enter this process immediately. The canon does not accrete over time like a crystal or mold 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, knowledges. 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.

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

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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.42 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."43 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, represents the effort 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-
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structures seek to legitimize and stabilize what is always illegitimate and ungrounded. These contexts are not necessarily the same. They are not necessarily the same.

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between social identity and the autonomy of certain texts, the effects of class, region, and particular historical conditions on the production of a given text, or the intertextual and contextual relations between different texts. The question of how literature is shaped by society and how it shapes society is thus central to the study of literature. Classical literature, for instance, is not only a form of cultural capital but also a means of social identity and self-expression. The study of classical literature, therefore, cannot be separated from the history of the school, the history of education, and the history of language and culture. The example of the Roman novel, as well as the case of the Roman education system, illustrates the significant role that literature played in the Roman world. The study of classical literature is essential for understanding the historical and cultural context in which it was produced and transmitted. The study of Roman literature, for instance, is not only a means of understanding the historical and cultural context in which it was produced but also a means of understanding the role of literature in the Roman empire. The study of Roman literature is essential for understanding the role of literature in the Roman empire.
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Educational system as the distinction between a credentialed and a non-credentialed 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 Alex- andrian 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 domi- nated 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 orientated upon a grammatical criterion, the creation of correct speech." Quintilian writes of the classical world's primary educators, the gramm- atici, that they were concerned to teach "the art of speaking correctly" and "the interpretation of the poets," the one by means of the other. They developed procedures for the selection of texts that sometimes constit- uted 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 al- lied to the emergence of grammatical speech as socially marked. The con- stitutive 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 classics, one of Rome's five properties classes, to the best of the poets, "a first class and taxing author, not a pedlarian"—about which Curtius comments, "What a tidbit for a Marxist sociology of literature" (250). But this genealogy of the classics has remained largely a eponymological joke (and Curtius himself is seldom cited in the canon debate) because selections of texts his- torically have the appearance of having selected themselves. This is cer- tainly 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 insti- tutions 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 unsanctioned selection, a social history. The literary canon has always func- tioned in the schools as a pedagogic device for producing an effect of lin- guistic distinction, of "literacy." The production of this effect does not depend upon the biasing of judgment—the educational system works bet- ter with better works—not in a question of insuring the ideological or- thodoxy 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 edu- cational 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 sym- bolic violence. The ideological effect rests on the back of the effect of socio- linguistic 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 incalculable in different generations of students many dif- ferent and even incompatible ideologies.

Authors themselves do not produce the effect of linguistic differentia- tion, 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 condi- tion of reproduction, of the history of canon formation. Hence the produc- tion of literary texts cannot be reduced to a specific and unique social function, not even the ideological one. Authors confront a monumen- talized 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 seem 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 credentialed and uncredentialed speech.

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If the pedagogic form of the canon always assumes (as well as activates) an ideology of tradition, that ideology collapses the history of canon forma- tion into an autonomous history of literature, which is always a history of writers and not of writing. The critique of the canon falls 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
writing would be contrived to pose first the question of what genre of writing counts as literature in a given context of culture, a question at once two-dimensional, multi-faceted, and inherently subjective.

The social convention and the social circumstances in which literature is written and received are therefore the most important factor determining what counts as literature in a given context of culture. A very rich and diverse literature may flourish in one society, while being completely absent in another.

The study of literature, or the literary canon, involves the selection of texts that are considered to be of special importance and influence in a particular society. This selection process is heavily influenced by the social, political, and economic factors of the time.

The concept of literature is not static but changes over time, reflecting the shifting values and priorities of different eras. The study of literature, therefore, is an ongoing process of re-evaluation and re-definition.

The selection of texts for inclusion in the literary canon is a complex and controversial process. It involves a combination of objective criteria, such as literary merit and historical significance, and subjective factors, such as personal taste and social influence.

The study of literature is not only about the texts themselves, but also about the social and cultural contexts in which they were written and received. This involves an examination of the literary movements and trends of different periods, as well as the role of literature in shaping and reflecting the social and political values of a society.

The study of literature is also concerned with the relationship between literature and other cultural and artistic forms, such as music, art, and film. This involves an exploration of the ways in which literature has influenced and been influenced by other forms of cultural expression.
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. Hence it can be said that what the Bakhtin school salvaged from the work 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 poetry." In Bakhtin's writing, the axis upon which literature appears as a particular kind of valorized language is rotated away from the essentialist mode 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 literary narrative circle (in the example cited above, the language of "respectable society"), the written language of its everyday and semileterary 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 language and everyday (in the sense of dialektologica) 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 swells in from all sides on the fixed and strict poetic genres—genres whose demands spring neither from conversational nor from everyday

"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 metaphoric spatial sense of what this means, expressed in his image of colliding centrifugal and centripetal linguistic forces. With the exception of such "concrete forces" of 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 presence of "the sealed-off quality of a privileged community" (182). Nevertheless a certain referential vagueness at this point in his argument suits the purpose of raising and universalizing heteroglossia, abstrac
ted 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 heteroglossia: "The novel senses itself on the border between the completed, dominant literary language and the extralinguaries languages that know heteroglossia" (77). This border is permeable in other 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 "vernacularization") 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.
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In this Bakhtin's project is still very much in accord with such Formalist themes as Shklovsky's "cannibalization of the junior branch." 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. 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. 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 coincide 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 forces and social/linguistic stratification. Hence, while it is simple (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 heteroglossia. 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 formal genre—the novel as the heteroglossic mechanism of literary transformation—to a formal 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 (or even rhetoric), 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 liter-
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 that 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 socio-linguistics, it does not make much sense to envision the sets of social options as constituting the high variety of writing (literature in the European historical 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 alleged to obscenity a great number of medieval works, has unfortunately appeared to literary historians primarily as a revelation 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 socio-linguistics to theorize change in the literary language as anything other than a process of linguistic erosion, the devastation of the distinction between the original katharevousa 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 sets: models by reminding us that if the difference between the written and the spoken is that 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 bear 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 social relations of writing. The facts of this history are already very well known. The following sketch is intended not only to recontextualize 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. 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 forms. 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 rearticulation 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 and Latin 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 articulated 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 only in a fragmentary form, was replaced in the school curricu-
vernacular writing continually falls away from classical paradigms, even actively resists them with the same gesture of cheerful resignation with which Shakespeare evoked 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 Peck has rightly called "that eruption into 'high' culture of an unofficial (but potent and ubiquitous) sub-cultural formation—that worthy of popular 'carnival' forms into the classical form of writing which is traditionally called the Renaissance. Canon formation within the early vernacular thus appears as a conservative discourse of classicalism among the intellectuals, who occupy an unstable position between the traditional pedagogic invocations of the clergy, the political structures of absolutism, and a continually re-nascent popular culture. Within this coexistence it is a vernacular humanist like Erasmus 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 humanism, its knowledge of classical languages.

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. It would be misleading to dismiss this problem of judgment as a 'lower' culture, 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 in 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 humanists), but not the new, transitional configuration of classes that come to be known as the lower and the middle. In his discussion of this hybrid culture ("police society") Auerbach writes of its distinctive valuation of le bon usage, in retrospect a remarkable fetishisation of grammar. The rigorous simplification of grammaticality from the more latinitarian rhapsodies of Renaissance humanism facilitates a cultural homo- geneization of anti-avocacy and bourgeoisie at a very high social level, where the aristocracy was finally "striped of its feudal charivari," and the "wealthy bourgeoisie had been turned away from gainful occupations to-
ward osium cum dignitate. " 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 shown 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 imitation of the Greek and Latin classics. The vernacular canon belongs to a nationalist agenda, quite distinct from the multicultural and 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 unconstructed clergy.

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 nationalistic 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 dictum" 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 sociology 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
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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.” 110 The distinction between the practices they designate as “basic language” and “literary language” is not simply a repetition of the distinction between katharevousa and demotic, nor between the standard and the dialect, although one may say that all forms of diglossia are homogeneous with respect to the function of social stratification. This point is rather more significant that might at first appear. Macherey and Balibar describe the literary 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. 111 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 René Balibar and Dominique Laporte speak is a fiction of the bourgeois soocle resulting from the very success of its dissemination. Thus, while the standard or “common” language seems to efface social stratifications by making language itself the vehicle of a common national identity, the “literary” language reinserts at another level a linguistic distinction 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 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 narrow the ranks of the ungrammatical does not know its own doubling, 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 east, of reading the books that sharpen the ear.” 112 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 “insular” in relation to the High canonical writing. 113 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. 114

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 inscribed 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 sociocritics). 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. 115 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 inscribed 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-

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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 socioculture, its possession to universality, its status as the medium of political discourse.

The fact that the universal speech is entirely built on the practice of writing marks the contradiction between its universality and the fact that it is not for everyone, a contradiction that subsumes both the most ideologically mystified position on the relation of composition to the vernacular standard (F. D. Hirsch: "The normative character of a national written language lies in its very isolation from class and region"), and the now ideologically progressive "writing across the curriculum" (James Kenway: "[Students] must be taught the common language of humanity in its full rhetorical modes"). Mistaking the class-based socioculture 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 two 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 socioculture. For this reason the boundary between the two syllabuses has been turned to considerable surveillance, briskly registered in composition theorists Edward Corbett's warning that "literary texts will more often than not serve as a distraction from, rather than a promotion of, the objectives of a writing course." 128

Sociocultures. 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 literary. 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 anarchistic aura of "old money," no longer yields to an analytic 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-

resend" various social groups, while the syllabus of composition proceeds quite naturally with the work of producing a language that is at once manifestly privileged, and which aspire at the same time to "universality," the same claim that was once asserted virtually without dissonance 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 socioculture by expanding its base of textual representation, but to save that socioculture 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 a 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 socioculture—is currently being registered in the universities as a crisis of the distinctive category of literature itself. This critique implies neither the "death of literature" nor the degeneration 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 formula 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 sociocultures, proceeds from "below" as the failure of Standard English (a process of credentialization, 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 socioculture, even if composition theorists will continue to speak of a "common" language. In their very multiplicity, the new sociocultures may appear to parody the vernacular standard, vaunting between the hypergrammatical and the ungrammatical, between eloquence and awkwardness. Moreover, these sociocultures 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
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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 institu-
tions of higher learning are called upon to create skills, and no
longer ideals—not 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 fulfill-
ing their roles at the pragmatic posts required by its institu-
tions.110

Lyotard goes as far as it may be possible to go in celebrating the carnival of
sociocenosis, 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," in-
stalled in the populace by means of a privileged (literary) curriculum. No
Doubt Lyotard is rather too eager to conclude that the "emancipation nar-
rative" 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 un-
takes to criticize everything, including its own language.111 The poverty of
Lyotard's merely celebrating the rise of sociocenosis is the same poverty that
finds a solution to the problem of "representation" in the practice of cul-
tural separatism. I shall continue to insist that the project of political inte-
gration 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 con-
sumption. 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 systemic 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 cur-
rency, 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 pro-
cessed on the assumption that a class has both an economic and a cultural compo-
nent, 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 unidimensionality. Gouldner's conception of cultural
capital casts the New Class in the role of a sort of bourgeois aristocracy; the historical suc-
cessors to whom. I have kept Gouldner's theory in mind, somewhat warily, prefer-
ning Bourdieu's less normativizing mode of class analysis. For the more
purified purposes of the present argument, it perhaps does not matter whether
the professional-managerial classes are conceived to be a distinct class, or, as
Eric Olin Wright argues in his response to the Ehrenreichs in the Walker volume,
"a contradictory location within class relations" (pp. 482-483). What matters to the
present argument is that the emergence of the professional-managerial class has enor-
mously altered the constitution and distribution of cultural capital in the school
system, and that these new conditions remain the unmarked horizon of the canon
debate.

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hundreds of amalgams and anecdotes with which it has proscribed the case against
the liberal academy, in articles now too numerous to list. E. D. Hirsch, Jr., Cultural
Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know (New York: Houghton Mif-
fine, 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.

*Greg McClennen, Marxism, Pluralism, and Beyond (Cambridge, Mass.: Pol-

*As McClennen remarks, in "What is the state brought into this picture of
competing, exchanging groups?" is represented as driven by a tendency to
equilibrium, not in which the 'preferences' of interest groups can be expressed and
the 'interest' of state satisfied." (122).

*The phenomenon of "political correctness," recently the object of so much com-
plain in the right-wing media, can be seen in this context as the paradoxical tri-
umph in the university of an otherwise defunct liberalism. It is not surprising that
a progressive discourse, more or less rooted in American culture, should find itself
driven to police the borders of its dimensioned 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 cer-
tainly 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 progres-
sive objectives, but with those assumptions of its theory and practice which, be-
cause they are uncritically shared with American political culture in general, have
disabled an effective response to the emergence of reactionary politics. Taking the
long view historically, there is considerable evidence for arguing that "identity poli-
tics" is now American politics, and that what we call identity politics exist on the
same continuum of "interest-group" politics with precepts that are manifestly conser-
vative or reactionary. Identity politics makes no conceptual break as a poli-
tics 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 systematic analysis recommends itself, and that certain knowledges
might become visible once again.

*The 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 Howard Baker (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins
University Press, 1984). See also Paul Leary, "History and the Canon," Social Text
12 (Fall 1983), 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): Jillian Robinson, "Lessen Our Text: Feminist Challenges to
the Literary Canon," in Critical Theory since 1965, ed. Hazel Adams and Leroy Searle
(Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 572–575; Deborah Rosenfeld, "The Polit-
ics 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), 13–31; Florence Howe, "Those We Still Don't Read," College English 43
(1981), 12–16. Howe writes: "What do we want? Nothing less than the transformation of the literary curricu-

*Marxism, Pluralism, and Beyond, 33.

*See Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: To-
wards a Radical Democratic Politics (London: Verso, 1985). Also interesting in this
case, and perhaps neglected by literary postmodernists, is the work of Samuel
Bowles and Herbert Gintis, particularly their Democracy and Capitalism: Prop-
erty, Community, and the Contradictions of Modern Social Thought (New York:
Basic Books, 1986). Because Bowles and Gintis, unlike Laclau and Mouffe, are
contrasts 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 "appeal to the category of women for inherently linguistic" purposes, for strategies always have meanings that exceed the purposes for which they are intended" (8). Still powerful too is Alice Earle's early warning against the essentialist politics of cultural separations, "The New Feminism of Yin and Yang," in Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality, ed. Ann Snire et al. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 439-39.

8The social-institutional sites at which the articulation of different identities—or the coalitions of minorities—can occur is actually very limited. For this reason, we need to be cautious about generalizing the possibilities for such coexistence from the "suffer 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 Bronowski and Crown Heights than by the university's version of identity politics, with its Puritan wing of the politically correct. If the formulation 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 bellicoseience 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-institutional group policies. The fact that liberal pluralism, in its current radical incarnation, has often been accused falsely of reducing the cultural to the political/present one from being the fact that liberal pluralism's more serious problem is the reduction of the political to the cultural.

9Here we may note the precedent of Michel Foucault's work on identification, as yet largely unassimilated in American cultural theory. See his Language, Semiotics, Ideology, and politics, Marthe Nusgal (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), in his New Reflections Lacan 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 (Lacan'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-
Learner and Resonance. Women, narratives have been shown to be versatile and a female
decision in the face, but one of the most important factors that shaped the narrative of
women is their ability to traverse the boundaries of text and identity. 

The study of women's narratives is an important area of research in literary studies, as it
provides insights into the ways in which women have constructed and challenged existing
narratives about gender and society. 

This research has been carried out by scholars such as C. S. Lewis and M. L. von Flotow,
who have explored the ways in which women have been represented in literature and the
ways in which they have worked to subvert and challenge these representations. 

Lewis's work, for example, has explored the ways in which women have been depicted
in literature and the ways in which they have worked to challenge traditional gender
roles. His work has been influential in shaping the study of women's narratives, and it
remains a important area of research in literary studies.

Overall, the study of women's narratives is a rich and complex field of research,
and it continues to be an important area of inquiry for literary scholars. 

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acy in any given set of social conditions, effects I have attempted to invoke continu-
ously 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 means of how children are taught to read (or not to read) in our schools. See for example, Michael Stobbs, Language and Literacy. The Socio-
linguistics of Reading and Writing (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980); W. Ross Winterowd, The Culture and Politics of Literacy (New York: Oxford Uni-
versity Press, 1989); John Willims, The New Literacy: Redefining Reading and Writ-
ing in the Schools (New York: James W. Totten, Planning Language, Planning Inequality: Language Policy in the Community (London: Longman, 1991); and Tony Crowely, Standard English and the Politics of Lan-

I 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 not the corner-
stone 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.


See, for example, Charles Altman, "An Idea and an Ideological 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."

Jeffrey Sammons, Literary Sociology and Practical Criticism (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), 134.

See 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 "minority" texts, such as Martin Luther King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," and his "I Have a Dream" speech.


This mistake is pervasive, even among the most theoretically enlightened edu-
cators of left pedigreed in the United States. Here I would cite, as an example, the otherwise judicious study of Patrick Brantlinger, Creean's Footprints: Cultural Studies in Britain and America (New York: Routledge, 1989). 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 'defined' individ-
uals (lyric romantic poetry, portraits of the artist, renderings of memories, parts of

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 repre-
sent the struggles of majorities [sic] against slavery, sexism, poverty?" (155). But is it really the case that Melville's Benito Cereno, Twain's Huckleberry Finn, or Faulk-
ner'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 rep-
resent the lives of "defined" individuals? When Brantlinger cites Frederick Doug-
lard's The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass as a noncanonical text, he
brays the fact that the canon critique really does construe every literary work per-
entially as autobiographical. 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.

Michael Robinson, "You Mean One Too," 574.


Jane Tompkins, Sensational Design: 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 Minne-
sota Press, 1984), liii: "For once the institution of art/literature has been
thematised, the question about the mechanisms that make it possible to exclude certain works as pulp literature necessarily arises. One might add that 'pulp liter-
ature' as such necessarily emerges simultaneously with the institution of the High Culture canon.

Hans Robert Jauss, "Literary History as Challenge to Literary Theory," in To-
ward an Aesthetic of Reception, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 23.

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


The argument for a less anxious response to this state of affairs is exemplified in the several essays and books of Frank Kermore on issues relating to canon forma-

On the issue of "cosmopolitan" and community I shall have more to say in Chapter 5. In the meanwhile we can concur with Gregor McConnell's observation that liberal pluralist theory tends to point consensus as the ideal resolution to the competitive politics of interest groups (Marxism, Pluralism, and Beyond, 26). The canon cr-
as in the 19th-century process, were set in motion that virtually eliminated black, white, female, and all working-class writers from the scene. Their processes were not

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decisive, the privileged social roles of the period, and the historical exceptions to the rule. For example, Alice Paul's and Jane Addams's contributions, which are often cited as counterexamples to the generalization that women were not active in public life, were exceptions that proved the rule. The women who were active in public life were those who were already established in middle-class roles, such as teachers and social workers, and who had access to the resources and networks that allowed them to participate in public life. Therefore, the generalization that women were not active in public life is not an accurate reflection of the reality of the period.

The generalization that women were not active in public life also obscures the ways in which women's contributions to public life were often seen as illegitimate or not truly part of public life. For example, the work of women's groups was often seen as charity work, or as work that was done for the benefit of the community, rather than as work that was done in the public sphere. This is evident in the way that the work of women's groups was often not recognized as work that was done in the public sphere, and was not counted as part of the work that was done by men.

The generalization that women were not active in public life also obscures the ways in which women's contributions to public life were often seen as the work of women, and not as the work of men. For example, the work of women's groups was often seen as the work of women, and not as the work of men, and was not seen as a way for men to participate in public life.

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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 debates.

127With reference to Statius and White, we might add that E. R. 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.

128On this subject, see the informative essays by Myron Tuman. , "From Asor Place to Kenyon Road: The NCET and the Origins of English Studies," College English 48 (1986), 139-49.


130Edward Corbett, "Literature and Composition: Allies or Rivals in the Classroom?" in Composition and Literature, ed. Winstead Bryan Horner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 180. Corbett may represent what was the main stream of composition practice, which apparently polled 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 Lasham and others provides an interesting retrospective on the disciplinary distinction between composition and literature. See, for example, Lasham's "Composition, Literature, and the Lower-Division Gyroscope," Profession 84 (New York: Modern Language Association, 1984), 11: "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 OPF, or obscurity-wordiness-hypocrisy, theory of language." Lasham 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.

131Macherey and balibar, "Literature as an Ideological Form," 57. 

132H. E. White, The Postmodern Condition, 48.

133The assumption that critical thinking is only possible in "Standard English" is an error explored 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 sociocultural context 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
Chapter Two

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


The importance of the "notebook" in early modern education is stressed by R. R. Bolgar, in his The Classical Heritage and Its Beneficiaries, 2728. Bolgar quotes the detailed instructions of Vives: "make a book of blank leaves of a proper size. Divide it into certain topics, so to say, classes. In one, jot down the names of subjects of daily converse . . . in another, sentences" (237). In this context see also the invaluable discussion of Terence Cave, The Conceptualisation Text: Problems of Writing in the French Renaissance (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), which elaborates more than I am able here upon the writing device making to the nototechnics of the " commonplace book."

The 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), 124, 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 points:

"because of the interdependence on the sort of techniques of organizing and composing landscape that I have been discussing, the cultivated classes in Eng-
land 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 take on the same rhetorical commonplace." I propose that the effect of generality in locodescriptive poetry is precisely the reinstating of the emptied "common" by the rhetorical commonplace. The process of enclosure is discussed at length by Barrell, 64.

The Complete Poetical Works of James Thomson, ed. J. L. Robertson (Lon-
don: Oxford University Press, 1908).

1780 (London: Hutchinson, 1983).

See, for example; "Summer," 43-88, for Thomson's survey of English litera-
ture.


Roy Porter, English Society in the Eighteenth Century (Harmondsworth: Pen-
guin Books, 1982), 65, cites a typical statement of Defoe: "Men are every day starting up from obscurity to wealth." The question of social mobility is no longer a simple one, if ever was, and I must therefore add the following qualifications. Historians are now inclined to emphasize a disparity between the perception of up-
ward mobility and the actual rate at which this mobility occurred. Doubtless if one confines the definition of mobility to actual examples of the bourgeois passing into the ranks of the nobility, the numbers of those passing, as Lawrence Stone has demonstrated in The Open Elite? England 1740–1800 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), are relatively small. Stone bases his study on the construction of commonplace books in the early modern period, see Ruth Mohl, Milton and His commonplace Book (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1969), 11–30.


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mestic authority is not extricated but rather assumes a rhetorical mask of the dominance of the form of human authority cannot be divorced from the processes of domination and subordination that it represents.

The point here is not to deny the existence of the social order but to recognize its inherent contradictions and the ways in which it is perpetuated and reproduced. The relationship between the master and the slave is not simply one of power and control, but rather a complex system of interdependent relationships that sustain the overall structure of the social order.

In this context, the role of education is to reproduce the social order, to instill the values and norms that sustain it, and to prepare individuals for their roles within the system. The curriculum and pedagogical practices of schools play a crucial role in this process, as they form the basis for the socialization of students into the norms and values of the dominant group.

This process is not transparent or neutral, but rather is deeply embedded in the historical and cultural contexts in which it occurs. It is therefore necessary to critically analyze the way in which education reinforces the social order and to develop alternative educational practices that can challenge and subvert these dominant structures.
Chapter Four

reucracy, 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 bureaucratised: the tendency toward "routinization" of disciplinary work which is expressed in, among other things, the production of intellectual and material instruments devised by and for the School, manuals, corpora, topics, etc., appears, alongside common signs of institutionalization, in traditional schools like the rhetoric and philosophy schools of Antiquity or the Korean schools, which exhibit none of the features of bureaucratic organization. (1990)

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 identical in social 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 "truly different," much less of reducing the pedagogic to the bureaucratic, but of acknowledging the over-determination 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 bureaucratised educational institution, pedagogic autonomy must defend itself against the heteronomous pressure of the educational institution itself, immanent as it bureaucratically 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 far-flung intellectual inquiry to norms of "productivity" which usually determine the trajectory of the bureaucratic career. (191)

The larger question of the relation between the professional and the bureaucratic has been addressed recently in an excellent study by Magali Scarlatti Larson, The Rise of Professionalism. 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" (viii) and further, "in a bureaucratized world, professions can no longer be interpreted as inherently anti-bureaucratic" (1991). 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" (1991). 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
the organization of the society in which we live, and the way we think about ourselves. It is a society which is organized around the concept of hierarchy, with social class, status, and power being the primary determinants of one's position in society. The idea of a "master social order," as described by Talcott Parsons, is a key concept in understanding the functioning of a modern society. This order is characterized by a division of labor, where individuals occupy different roles and positions based on their abilities and the needs of the society. The master social order is maintained through a system of social control, which includes sanctions and rewards for conformity and deviance. It is through these mechanisms that the stability and continuity of the master social order is ensured. The concept of the master social order is closely related to the idea of the "ideal type," which is a theoretical construct that helps to clarify our understanding of complex social phenomena. The ideal type allows us to identify the essential characteristics of a concept and to understand how these characteristics are related to one another. In this way, the ideal type can help us to see the patterns and regularities in social life and to identify the underlying principles that govern social behavior. The master social order is a complex and dynamic system, and it is constantly being reshaped by the forces of social change. Despite this, the core principles of the ideal type remain constant, providing a framework for understanding the social world.
model the work of theory of bureaucratic work, and thus to reproduce as theory the mutual nonrecognition of the bureaucratic and the charismatic. It was at 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. Theory'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 anachronistic manner of the form of bureaucra-
tic labor: "Technically correct rhetorical readings may be boring, monoto-
ous, predictable, and unpleasant, but they are irrefutable" (RT, 19). There is no lack of overdeterminedness 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 disciple, the trans-
ference 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.

In this way the transference finds what appears to be the same subject to culture 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 valued 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 transference is not some real, experiential boredom but the "tech-
nical" iterability of rhetorical reading. Just as transference transferred in the pedagogic sphere imparts to "rigor" the aura, the sexism of the mas-
ter teacher, so in the bureaucratic sphere signifies a charisma of routiniza-
tion, the aethos of routine.

To return to the lesson 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 Hett's "lucid figures" is solved by reading the terms "pathos" and "rigor" as equally overdetermined, provided we recognize that the concept of the "lucid" or the "pathetic" governs not its spec-
tacular 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.
By means of this diagram we can see that the development of a didactic procedure for literary criticism was the same as that for literary and philosophical texts. The terms of literary and philosophical texts served as a kind of linguistic and psychological basis for the development of literary and philosophical texts. The terms of literary and philosophical texts served as a kind of linguistic and psychological basis for the development of literary and philosophical texts. The terms of literary and philosophical texts served as a kind of linguistic and psychological basis for the development of literary and philosophical texts. The terms of literary and philosophical texts served as a kind of linguistic and psychological basis for the development of literary and philosophical texts.
recognising, in a narrower sense, a “textual system of domination,” while another, in its broader sense.

At the heart of Bourdieu’s analysis is the idea of a “field” which is defined as a social space where cultural capital is produced, distributed, and exchanged. This field is divided into a “core” and a “periphery.” The core consists of the elite, who have access to the highest cultural capital, while the periphery is occupied by the less privileged members of society. Bourdieu argues that the elite use their cultural capital to maintain their position and to prevent others from entering the field.

In addition to this, Bourdieu also identifies the role of education in this process. He argues that education is a tool used by the elite to maintain their control over society. The education system is designed to reproduce the existing social order, ensuring that the elite remain in control.

Bourdieu’s theory is not only applicable to the study of education but also to other fields such as literature. He argues that literature is a manifestation of the struggle for cultural capital, with the elite using it to maintain their position and the lower classes using it to challenge the existing order.

In summary, Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital provides a framework for understanding the role of literature and education in maintaining the social order. It highlights the importance of cultural capital in the reproduction of social hierarchies and the role of education in reproducing this capital.
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 thus takes its place in the undegraduate 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 the mimesis 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 a new enduring 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 early 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 peculiarities of de Man himself, or by generalizing the concept of literality to a particular set of philosophical texts. The weakness of this rationalization was still 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 functioned rhetorically in practices which are determined by the technobureaucratic conditions themselves responsible for the social marginality of the literary curriculum. What de Miss 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
ing in Literary Studies," Critical Inquiry 10 (1983), 49-64; for a response to Bant's complaint interestingly and prophetically differs from de Man's.


"In a remarkable passage, which owes much to Hegel, Whorf goes a long way toward identifying Greco what that bureaucracy whose Russian form was the immediate context of Hegel's own celebration of the state. An insatiable machine is

mind obfuscated. Only this provides it with the power to force men into its service and to dominate their everyday living work as completely as it 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 insatiable machine it is busy fab

shaping the skill of problems which perhaps he to inhabit some day as

powerless as the fells that of ancient Egypt? (Economy and Society, 2:1402).


come 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 nar

rowed and what is more, the coherence and goal of the organization—within

which they are more or less consenting cogs—become less intelligible, . . . I see the sphere of heteronomy the totality of specialized activities which individuals have to accomplish as functions co-ordinated from outside by a pre-established or

ganization" (32).

David Harvey makes this point in his essay "Flexibility: Threat or Opportuni

ty?" Socialist Review 12 (1991): "University-based intellectuals, for example, now find themselves faced with faster turnover times in the realm of ideas and faster pressure to increase output than was the case in the 1960s." (77)


A similar point has been argued by Alvin Gouldner in The Future of Intellec

tuals and the Rise of the New Class: "Unlike the older bureaucrats, the new intel

lectuals have extensive cultural capital which increases their mobility . . . They

need not, moreover, seek status solely within their own organization and from its

staff or clientele. Rather, they also seek status in professional associations; they wish the good regard of the knowledgeable" (51).
Chapter Five

Hume 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 this 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, 247.


We have recently been reminded of this fact by Patrick Brantlinger in his cruise to Footnote America (New York: Routledge, 1990), 73.


Einstein's views of the world of art in this context are fairly represented by his chapter on "Maxim and Aesthetic Value," in Criticism and Ideology (London: Verso, 1976). Lessing's recent response to those literary materialists who "speak as if the real enemies were the aesthetic" in an interview with Ilene Salutsky, Criticism in Society (New York: Methuen, 1987), 250. More recently Perry Anderson has observed in his English Questions (London: Verso, 1992): "For aesthetic value is not to be dispensed with easily—the wish to finish with it recalling Dobylevsky, or Bazaine, 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