

The SAGE
Handbook of
Cultural Analysis



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Edited by
Tony Bennett
and
John Frow

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And, having first started work on this project in 2001, we are, finally, thankful that it is completed!

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Any update?

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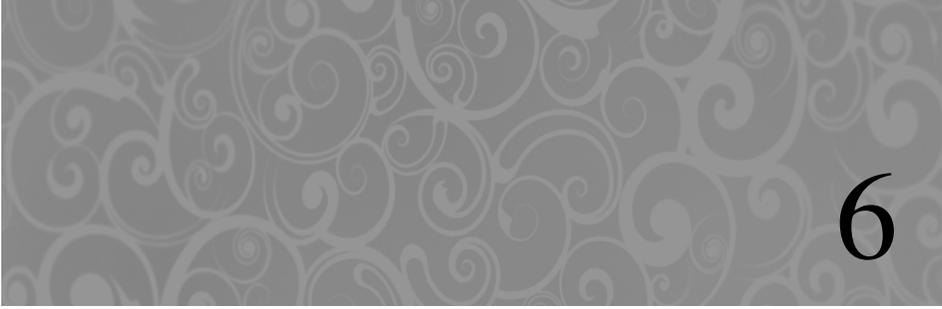
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6

Literary Studies

James F. English

Although this is the only chapter of the *Handbook* that is focused on literary study, a glance through the Contributors Notes will show it to be far from the only one whose author is housed in a literature department. The large number of contributors who either are now or have been at some point in their careers members of English or Comparative Literature faculties is an index of literature's enduringly powerful position within the disciplinary spaces where cultural theory and analysis are practised. Though departmental divisions and emphases vary significantly from one institution and one country to another, the general rule at most of the world's colleges and universities is that literature departments are larger than departments of art history or music or film studies, and larger than the 'cultural' wings of such departments as communications, sociology, economics or anthropology, even in the wake of recent shifts that have enlarged the disciplinary apertures of the social sciences with respect to traditionally cultural matters. No other form of cultural practice has been as thoroughly subjected to academic scrutiny, as written about by scholars, or as widely promoted and

disseminated by the educational apparatus as literature has.

And yet, according to what has lately become a persistent and intensifying complaint, literary study has practically disappeared from many higher-educational institutions, and the true literary scholar is today a largely residual figure. Though the number of literature departments remains large and the number of bachelors degrees they award each year, in the USA and worldwide, has risen over the last quarter century, it is said that what is studied in those departments is no longer literature in any important sense of the term. The literature faculties are viewed as having turned their backs on literature while devoting attention to works of 'popular culture' such as movies or comic books; to instances of 'discourse' drawn from a predominantly non-literary archive in which novels or poems serve as historical evidence alongside newspaper reports, ships' logs, and criminological treatises; to sociological 'data' such as consumption patterns or production figures; or to the cultural politics of 'class, race, and gender', in terms of which literary works hold

no interest or value beyond their perceived utility or disutility as tools of identity-based social struggles.¹ From this standpoint, the *Handbook's* list of contributors tells a different story: here, as in the profession at large, there seem to be many literature professors but scarcely any of them writing about literature.

How is it that literary study can occupy this radically ambiguous position within the academy, at once thriving and imperilled, expanding and vanishing, envied for its centrality and lamented for its marginality? What, really, is its place on the field of contemporary cultural analysis, and what are likely to be its contributions going forward? To give good answers to these questions, we need to trace the longstanding connection between literary form and institutional form, between scholars' concern with the formal particulars of 'literature itself' and their collective, ongoing struggle for recognition and security in the modern university.² Form is not just the fulcrum around which the important debates in literary theory have revolved; it is also the point of articulation between those abstract debates of ideology or method and the concrete institutional stakes that have been in play. It was by focusing on the analysis of specifically literary form that English and the other fields of modern literary study first managed to gain and consolidate institutional legitimacy within the initially inhospitable higher-educational apparatus of the early and mid twentieth century, and it has been through tactical modifications (rather than outright abandonment) of the main principles and protocols that took shape in those decades that the discipline has managed to guard some of its advantage, albeit at a certain cost, within the even more hostile academy of the neoliberal era. The impetus behind recent demands for a 'return' to form is not merely philosophical, nor is it wholly attributable to the cyclical or generational rhythm of intellectual fashion. It is institutional and strategic, having less to do with any actual disappearance of formal or aesthetic emphases from literary study than with the struggle for resources and status

in a period of rapid and threatening higher-educational rearrangement.

LEGITIMATION: THE FOUNDING FORMALISMS OF LITERARY STUDY

Literary study, in the sense of a distinct and widely legitimate academic discipline in which one may pursue higher as well as lower degrees and make a career as a practising scholar, dates back no more than 90 years. Prior to the World War I, it had at best a marginal role in the expanding European and North American system of research universities. This marginality was underscored by the fact that the main groups of students who were at this time receiving sustained education in modern literature (at least in the Anglophone universities) were precisely those marked out as incapable of 'higher' study, such as colonial students in Africa and South Asia (Gikandi, 1996; Viswanathan, 1989), or those regarded as needing remedial training in 'correct, Metropolitan English', such as the university students in Scotland (Crawford, 1998: p. 8). In the imperial nations themselves, literary study was reserved for students in the women's and working-men's colleges (Baldick, 1983; Graff, 1987: pp. 37–38). Among the more privileged students who constituted the undergraduate populations at Cambridge, Humboldt or Johns Hopkins, reading modern English and European literature was something to do outside the compass of one's academic pursuits. It was essentially a recreational practice, albeit a tacitly required one with whose basic lines of play any member of the ruling classes would be expected to have some familiarity.

Thus arriving like an ambitious scholarship boy from the colonies, the upstart discipline of literary study could only gain a place in the university if it managed to meet certain entrance requirements. Achieving disciplinary status in the modern university was after all precisely a matter of demonstrating a commitment to requirements, standards, examinations and credentials. There had to

be 'research', which meant there had to be standardized 'methods' that could be taught to degree-seekers and could issue in verifiable or falsifiable 'results'. Just as important, the systematic methods and testable results of the new discipline had to serve a differentiating function. It would be no good proposing literary study as a mere branch or extension of established practices of historical or linguistic research or of philosophy; its standards and protocols and objects of study needed to be distinct enough to justify an expansion of the existing disciplinary array.

By proposing literary form as its proper object, and casting the literary scholar as a rigorous, objective practitioner more closely resembling a research scientist than a learned gentleman, the new discipline was able to meet these institutional demands. The emergence of Russian Formalism towards the end of the World War I is often seen as the decisive first step in these developments. Terry Eagleton, for example, begins his bestselling 1983 primer *Literary Theory: An Introduction* with the 1917 publication of Victor Shklovsky's formalist manifesto 'Art as Device'.³ And without question, the work of Shklovsky, Boris Eikhenbaum, Roman Jakobson and others of this circle contributed significantly to the modern reconception of literary scholarship, rejecting the mysticism and symbolism that had dominated Russian approaches at the turn of the century in favour of a rigorous linguistic analysis, a 'concrete poetics' or 'hard science' of the literary. German philology already enjoyed a reputation for scholarly rigour and a place of some consequence within the research universities. But where philologists studied the language of literary works in order to discover the laws of linguistic evolution, the Russian Formalists did so in order to discover the laws of the literary as such. Philology was interested in the words and grammar, all the raw material; formalism was interested in the *artistic uses* of that material, the uses whose deviance from ordinary language practices might be said to define the 'art' or the 'poetic function' of a text, its special qualities or properties as literature.

Even as early as 1917, however, there were other, parallel initiatives under way elsewhere, all aimed in their different ways at putting literary study on a new and sounder institutional footing by constructing a more or less systematic theory of literature and a concomitant critical method. The American critic Joel Spingarn published his *Creative Criticism* that year – calling for 'a real philosophy of art' capable of grasping the 'intrinsic virtues' of literature (1917: pp. 127, 130), while in London T.S. Eliot inaugurated his own brand of 'programmatic criticism' with his influential essay on *vers libre*; within two years he would publish the essays 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', 'The Perfect Critic', and 'Hamlet and His Problems', which shifted emphasis away from questions of personality and emotion towards the objective literary fact, and invoked Aristotle (with whom Western poetics begins) as a model of the kind of 'scientific mind', rarely possessed by actual scientists, that literary study required (Eliot, 1920: pp. 20–21). These essays were to become canonical for both the Practical Criticism in Britain and the New Criticism in the USA, helping to draw those streams together into a dominant current from the later 1930s through the 1960s.

A curriculum in modern literature was all the while being developed in Scotland and in the colonies of Great Britain and of France, and this global emergence has had important effects – not least for the imperial nations themselves. But inasmuch as our concern here is literary study as a legitimate field of university research (rather than simply a curricular option or pedagogical emphasis), the development of Russian Formalism, Practical Criticism and New Criticism in the interwar years was more consequential. Together, these constituted the founding formalisms of literary study. Russian Formalism, the most explicitly scientific of the three in its ambitions and procedures, arose from the radical turn towards structure inaugurated by Ferdinand de Saussure's lectures on semiology. Starting from Saussure's rejection of the diachronic study of languages and language use in favour of a synchronic science

of the abstract language system, the Russian Formalists (and the Prague Circle of linguists that continued their work through the 1930s) proposed an autonomous science of literature that would seek not to trace the historical unfolding of genres or careers, nor to express the higher meanings or transcendent truths of literary works, but to discover the basic units and laws of 'literariness' itself (*literaturnost*): its constitutive devices and the rules or relations of their organization within a given literary system (whether that defined by an individual work, an authorial corpus, or a particular style or genre). This project certainly differed in many respects from that of the Practical Criticism developed at Cambridge University in the 1920s by I.A. Richards. The Richards model offered its own ostensibly scientific 'apparatus of rules and principles' (Richards, 1929: p. 11), but with the quite different aim of exploring and refining readers' affective processing and evaluation of literary works, the structure of their subjective responses. Both differed from much American New Criticism, which adhered neither to the semiological roots of the Russian school nor to the affective orientation of the Cambridge school, and was in fact more of a composite approach than a unique doctrine. But these different formalisms did nevertheless constitute a common disciplinary enterprise, as suggested by the professional trajectory of René Wellek. Starting as a specialist in English literature, Wellek became a protégé of Jakobson in the Prague linguistic circle (Jakobson himself having migrated from Moscow); made repeated trips to England and engaged discursively with Richards and others of the Cambridge group in the 1930s; emigrated during the war to the USA, where he allied himself with such New Critics as Robert Penn Warren and Cleanth Brooks; joined the faculty at Yale as it was becoming the major hub of New Criticism in the early postwar years; and in 1949 published with Austin Warren the *Theory of Literature*, which would serve as the bible of literary theory for American graduate students throughout the subsequent period of New Critical hegemony. Indeed, by 1950 or so, the 'New Criticism' had

become simply an umbrella term for a range of (not always internally consistent) critical precepts and practices that derived as much from Moscow, Prague and Cambridge as from New Haven or Nashville.

This mid-century mixing and matching of the discipline's founding formalisms was possible because, despite their points of philosophical divergence and their varying levels of commitment to 'theory', they shared several broad aims and basic practices. In terms of aims, they all sought to establish and defend the specificity of the literary object, its intrinsic difference from other kinds of verbal or cultural artifact, its autonomy from the conscious intentions of its producer, and its unique and irreducible value as art. Implicitly, if not explicitly, they elevated the object of literary study above the things of 'ordinary' life, including merely recreational forms of culture such as dancing or movies, while at the same time isolating it from the other objects of legitimate disciplinary inquiry such as those of history, theology, biography and politics. As a matter of basic practice, they all insisted on what came to be known as *close reading*, an intensive analysis of a text's unique formal particulars: not merely the words, as in philology, but the constitutive devices, patterns, or elements of style, including such effects as rhythmic regularity or irregularity, such tropes as irony or apostrophe, such narrative techniques as free indirect style or stream of consciousness, such thematic features as doppelgangers or Manichean binaries, and such structuring devices as foreshadowing, misdirection or flashback. From the formalist vantage, literariness consisted of problems or complications, 'impediments', as Shklovsky had called them (1988: p. 29), to a reader's rapid and virtually automatic comprehension. Close reading was a way of highlighting these textual intersections or roadblocks where the mind is forced to slow down and scout for detours.

As Chris Baldick has pointed out, the wide imposition of this new practice can be seen in the fact that, by the 1940s, 'a typical page in a critical book or essay, especially if concerned with poetry, would ... be broken up

by frequent passages of quotations from texts, its exposition tending to weave in and out of them' (Baldick, 1983: p. 78). Indeed, such page-by-page evidence of formalist reading, the systematic back-and-forth between the critic's language and the language of the text in question, remains an easy way to distinguish, across the spectrum of contemporary criticism, the kind of work that is faithful to the discipline's original impulse (and that still provides the main counterweight to the more 'distant', fast-reading practices of History and the social sciences, as well as of journalism). Its strong presence in some of the most influential works of postcolonial criticism, queer theory, cultural studies and the New Historicism shows that, contrary to the more strident rhetoric among contemporary neoformalists, this impulse is very far from having been obliterated. Testimony regarding the fundamental importance of close reading to historical understanding or theoretical advance is commonplace, while the kind of work that has programmatically disavowed close reading remains decidedly on the margins.⁴ Franco Moretti's recent declaration that what we need is a new kind of literary scholarship produced '*without a single direct textual reading*' ('we know very well how to read texts; now let's learn how not to read them')—can only be offered and received as an extravagant provocation, a modest proposal which not even Moretti would 'expect to be popular' (Moretti, 2000a: p. 57). And even this is very far from a disavowal of formalist reading as such.⁵

The success with which close reading was established as the unshiftable cornerstone of the discipline can be accounted for in various ways, but the qualifying phrase in Baldick's remark above points to a crucial factor. A typical page of criticism from this period *would* be concerned with poetry. This was not because there was necessarily more deviation from ordinary, non-literary language in poetry than in prose. All scholars working in the development of the 'new poetics' recognized that the poetic function could be highly active in prose writing.⁶ The tendency to focus on lyric, which became more pronounced

as the New Criticism secured its dominant position in the late 1930s, is better explained by the fact that the close reading of a short poem (or a complete stanza detached from a longer poem or play) was an eminently practical pedagogic exercise, a way to teach students how to read literature as literature, and an especially suitable way to examine them on their discipline-specific skills. And, as with the somewhat later structuralist-inflected formalisms of genre theory and narratology, which proposed to capture long and unwieldy novels with simple maps or charts or diagrams of their structure, close reading served originally as a means of bracketing out not just (social or political) history but the temporality of the literary work itself, its often inconvenient length and seeming resistance to being apprehended or consumed as a single coherent object for classroom study and discussion.

The very structure of Richards's *Practical Criticism* is that of a mock-exam – or rather, a teachers' guide for would-be examiners. As a lecturer at Cambridge when the English tripos was first introduced after the war, Richards had taken to confronting his students, chiefly undergraduates seeking the new degree in English, with unattributed short poems and requiring them to submit written analyses and evaluations of these isolated bits of literary language, plucked out of their historical and biographical contexts and accompanied by no explanatory apparatus. The first main section of *Practical Criticism* consists of 13 of these test-poems along with some 150 pages of sample student responses (what Richards calls 'protocols'). The remainder of the book comprises Richards's own assessment of the students' work, based on an evaluative scheme that systematically checks each protocol against the actual language of the poem while screening for ten kinds of fundamental literary-critical error or misreading, all the while attending carefully (like one who must administer grades) to distinctions of better and worse. Whatever its shortcomings as a scientific contribution to the theory or psychology of literature, *Practical Criticism*

was, as Richards had put it, 'a new and powerful educational instrument' (Richards, 1948: p. 4). It made brilliantly clear that the 'new poetics' could be broken down into a series of tests, that literary study could be used to screen students for, and hopefully inoculate them against, such aesthetic failings as 'sentimentality', 'inhibition', or distraction by 'mnemonic irrelevances'. As Ian Hunter argues, practical criticism thus met the discipline's underlying (and in his account, constitutive) 'pedagogical imperative' by repurposing aesthetic education 'as a technique in the governmental training of sensibility' (Hunter, 1988: p. 198). This new deployment of formalism, aimed in part at producing 'a special kind of personage – the teacher-critic' (Hunter: p. 219), ran straight through the subsequent, textbook-dominated decades of the New Criticism, maintaining an advantageous alignment of research methods with teaching practices and thus an unprecedentedly smooth cycle of intellectual reproduction.

RATIONALE: THE COMMUNITARIAN MISSION OF LITERARY STUDIES

By constructing itself as a more or less rigorous academic discipline involving a field-specific object of study (literariness; the literary), an overarching science or theory of that object (formalism; the 'new poetics'), and a practical method capable of producing testable, valid or invalid statements about the object (practical criticism; close reading), literary study thus managed to gain a distinct and secure position in the modern university. But it found its way to this position through the back door, as it were, still lacking the elite pedigree and symbolic prestige of Classical studies or Philology, while at the same time, even with its positivist-sounding commitment to rigour and system, lacking the kind of real-world purposiveness that might recommend it to students aiming for the middle-class professions or the world of business: the very students the new university was designed to serve. It was a discipline that, while meeting

the basic requirements, seemed destined for a rather marginal future in the academic apparatus.

Another way of putting this would be to say that formalism was always something of a dirty word. Recent calls for a return to the literary or to aesthetics have taken it as given that 'formalism became a term of abuse, connected with various invidious forms of political befuddlement or conservatism' just lately (Loesberg, 2005: p. 1), but it was already such when it was slapped upon the Moscow critics (who disdained the label). To be called a formalist suggests your commitment to sheer form or mere form, form for the sake of form or for the sake of evading messy and unpleasant, but ultimately more important, social realities. This was always recognized as a potential disciplinary pitfall, and was sidestepped in various ways. By far the most successful and enduring of these was that of suturing a neo-Arnoldian sense of elite social and cultural mission to the project of specification and formal analysis. Rather than simply accepting its place as one more (essentially technical) discipline in an expanding academy, literary study laid claim to a higher moral seriousness and greater universality of values than all the other disciplines combined. Indeed, Literature was the discipline from which the moral impoverishment of other disciplines, and of the modern society within which they increasingly served as a training ground, could be made visible; it provided a commanding critical vantage on the educational apparatus in which it was lodged and on the society as a whole. This claim to a keystone position as the most central and lofty of academic disciplines – the only specialist field that ultimately concerned itself with the whole of life rather than accepting such fragmentary and compromised knowledge as might be produced by Chemistry or Mathematics or even History – was initially most insistent in Great Britain, and is often considered the legacy of F.R. Leavis. An early student of the English tripos at Cambridge who then became a colleague of Richards's, Leavis assimilated the methodological insistence on

practical criticism or close reading as well as the foundational belief in the absolute specificity and uniquely elevated value of 'the literary' (for which he, like both Richards and the Russian Formalists, often interchanged the term 'poetry' or simply 'art').

But beyond these basic points of connection, Leavis was not much concerned with science or system: he would not admit to any coherent theory of literature and in fact warned against the eclipsing of deeper, more intuitive, and more individual forms of knowledge by abstract dogma. In this way, he effected a certain relaxation of the insistence on disciplinary rigour, offering reinforcement of the new 'scientific' discipline via an earlier, anti-scientific, 'culturalist' rationale, which held the attentive reading of literature to be a guarantor of personal integrity and a measured form of resistance to the encroachments of commodified culture and homogenized consciousness. But challenging particular theoretical elaborations of literary study was far less important to Leavis than installing it within a broader project of collective moral improvement and social renovation. Thus, for example, no amount of virtuosic technique or verbal inventiveness could establish a text's status as literary/art in the absence of a powerful moral and critical engagement with 'life'. In a great work of literature, there had to be an 'organic principle informing, determining, and controlling' the variety of formal devices, making the work's unique particulars function as a 'vital whole' integrally connected to society rather than simply as a brilliant but sterile aesthetic system (Leavis, 1948: p. 36).

This insistence that the formal excellence of literary art depended on the moral integrity and intensity of its organic underpinnings – its rootedness in the deeper life of the 'community' – was not merely a criterion of evaluation (establishing, for example, that D.H. Lawrence was 'much more truly creative as a technical inventor, an innovator, a master of language, than James Joyce' [Leavis, 1948: p. 36]). It was a way of ensuring that literary study would lead to a clearer understanding of a community's shared moral

stakes and purposes, sharpening the critical vision with respect to society as well as art. Though literary scholars required advanced training, they were more than just academic experts or technicians; they formed the proper leading edge of the community, an elite group with deep and comparatively uncompromised access to its most urgent values and needs, and were therefore capable, as no one else could be, of directing it towards, a better future. 'Upon this minority', Leavis wrote in a manifesto of 1930, 'depends our power of profiting by the language, the changing idiom ... without which distinction of spirit is thwarted and incoherent. By "culture" I mean the use of such language' (Leavis, 1930: p. 5). In Leavis, literary study, the study of specifically literary language, having already made the case for its academic legitimacy, found an advocate for its social necessity. What Shklovsky had described as literature's unique power to de-automatize and reroute habitual lines of perception was seized upon as the means to a more complete and liberating reattunement of the mind. In the wake of this intervention, English – and literary study more generally – managed, without declaring any kind of directly political agenda, to stake a claim of social relevance and urgency that, whatever its other effects, brought students to its door in large numbers and bolstered both its sense of institutional entitlement and its institutional advantage over other fields of cultural study.

The strenuous English nationalism at the heart of Leavis's notion of 'community' (and indeed the admittedly too Anglocentric orientation of my discussion) does not at all mean that this was a merely local phase in the construction of the discipline. To varying degrees, the rearticulation of literary scholarship in terms of an elite calling and communitarian mission, a belief that through literature one can resist the false beliefs and desires promoted by modern social arrangements and access the deeper, more legitimate values and aspirations of one's community, has pervaded literature classrooms down to the present day. In so far as the last decades of the twentieth century may be characterized

by the challenge posed to established nation states and imperial blocs by a range of new nationalisms and of diasporic and transnational identity formations, this particular way of justifying literary study, and of selecting a canon, has become more rather than less pertinent. As Simon Gikandi has shown, Leavis's movement, focused in significant measure on education and the task of the educator, left a profound and lasting imprint on the literary professoriate at the colonial universities. There, where literary study had been the linchpin in an educational agenda of imposed heritage, scholars and teachers were poised to make their own nationalist uses of Leavisism as they built a simultaneously global and, in Gikandi's account, curiously parochial, postcolonial curriculum (Gikandi, 2001: p. 650).

In Britain and North America, too, the privileged link between literature and the lived experience of a particular community ('the consciousness of the race', as Leavis said) has helped since the 1960s to propel the movements for new ethnic or minority curricula, supporting the value claims that are made for African-American literature, Asian-American literature, gay and lesbian literature, women's literature, and other important subfields. The effort to canonize Toni Morrison's novels, for example, has not been justified on the basis merely of their historical or sociological value but on the strength of their artistic distinction in Leavis's sense: on the moral force of Morrison's (complex, difficult, 'truly creative') language, language whose power is rooted in the collective life of a black community lodged problematically within the larger national community. And by the same token, the rationale for teaching Morrison, and for hiring specialists to do that teaching, is not 'merely' formal or aesthetic, a matter of the author's purely technical innovations and achievements, any more than it is 'merely' political, a matter of ratios of representation in the canon and on the faculty – although the capacity of literature departments to make better headway in this respect than other fields, especially those outside the humanities, has been a key institutional advantage as political

pressure for more diverse faculty hiring has mounted.⁷ The *discipline-specific rationale* is that a sustained, rigorous engagement with Morrison's writing, carried out by scholars of real expertise and authority, is critical to the black community's and ultimately to the nation's self-understanding, and that with the capacity genuinely to engage with Morrison as a literary artist comes a capacity for more enlightened critique and leadership. Or, to put this point more generally, while the rise of identity-based subfields of literary study, starting with feminism's attack on the all-male canon, has of course involved significant extension and adjustment of the received paradigm and a fiercely critical rewriting of Leavis's 'great tradition', it has not in and of itself implied a divestment from 'the literary' as repository of community values and compass of community aspiration.

THE THEORY REVOLUTION

It should already be clear that my aim in retracing this institutional history is to emphasize, even at the risk of minimizing the stakes of many internal struggles and disputes, a powerful 'conservatism' in literary study which is not at all restricted to right-wing or rear-guard fractions and which has undoubtedly helped to stabilize the discipline's institutional position through a period of rapid change. I want to suggest, contrary to other accounts, that neither the 'theory revolution' of the late 1960s and 1970s nor the 'cultural turn' of the 1980s – both of these inflected by the new social movements and the concomitant struggles for inclusion and recognition in the academy and beyond – has truly dislodged the framework that was put into place in the discipline's first half-century. An investment in literariness (stressing the peculiar and problematic qualities of a text: its difficulties, resistances, or irresolvables as opposed to its readily extractable thematic or narrative content), a commitment to close reading (presenting the actual linguistic or structural particulars of a text – including particulars of narrative structure), and an

adherence to the communitarian rationale for literary study's privilege within the academy (insisting that literary study advances the interests and values of a community larger and less advantaged than that of literary scholars, and that more resources, symbolic as well as economic, should therefore be directed towards the discipline) remain very much active today, and not as merely residual elements. The current state of literary study is defined not by its abandonment of the mid-century model but by the tensions that have arisen as that model has attempted to accommodate itself to a formidable reshaping of the social, cultural and educational fields and a depreciation of the symbolic value of literature as such.

The theory revolution in literary study arrived in the wake of the campus protests of the 1960s, protests expressive of a new and largely admirable antagonism among students and younger intellectuals towards the university, which in policing student dissent seemed frankly to disclose its function as what Louis Althusser called an 'ideological state apparatus' (1971). In this context, the standing claim that literary scholars and educators constituted the only real force of integrity, independence and resistance to a barbarous modernity which was advancing itself through (rather than in spite of) the work of the university was not so much rejected as turned reflexively back upon the discipline in a move of theoretical distancing and critique. The normative model of literary study, which had been founded as a radically new science of a complex object, and had been frequently attacked for its highly specialized methods and technical vocabulary, had, after several academic generations of successful reproduction and reinforcement, and grafted as it was to a 'soft' culturalist rationale, become such a deeply entrenched or naturalized set of orthodoxies that it had come to seem singularly uncritical of the status quo and emphatically *untheoretical*: a pseudo-discipline vulnerable to the very charge it had contended with in the first decades of the century, that it was no more than a glorified, academically sanctioned version

of refined opinion or good taste, with nothing much actually to teach – something closer to rationalized recreation for the cultured classes (or remedial training for the uncouth) than to advanced study. There was a new pressure, intensified by the new social movements of this period, to resist the homogeneity and reproductivity of the literary critical establishment, to challenge the canon as an academic enshrinement and euphemization of established social hierarchies, and, not least, to promote alternative, radically dissenting critical methods which had previously been kept to the margins.

By and large, however, the particular appropriations of structuralism, phenomenology, reception aesthetics, psychoanalysis and even Marxism that animated this moment in literary study allowed the discipline's most stubbornly normative practices to prevail. As had already been clear in the case of Northrop Frye's widely read *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), the structuralist approach was more complementary than antithetical to the doctrine of close reading. Structuralists and narratologists swapped out the molecular optic of the New Criticism for a molar optic that addressed literary form in terms of the shape of the work as a whole and the place of that shape in the larger relational system of genres or types (a system that many structuralists, from Roland Barthes to John Ellis, recognized as socially constructed and historically variable). But a resolution between the two optics – and hence between structuralism and the New Criticism – was already being proposed, under the banner of Aristotle, by the 'pluralistic' formalists of the Chicago School (Booth, 1961; Crane, 1998), who postulated a fundamental alignment of molar and molecular such that the specification of local devices via close reading could assist in apprehending a general logic and ideal form, while the specification of that ideal form via a relational theory of genres could assist in discerning and accounting for the local effects of style.

Even as this kind of happy resolution (which always refers art to formal stability and to harmony between part and whole) came

under sustained and devastating challenge from poststructuralist theories, the aim was often to support, by means of an immanent critique of the formal analysis, a more rigorous and nuanced specification of literariness, a more sophisticated ontology of 'the poetic', rather than to make a radical break from prevalent reading practices. Deconstruction presented itself as an anti-formalism, but it was such only in a rather restricted sense. The enormously influential pioneer of literary deconstruction Paul de Man was already declaring formalist criticism a 'dead end' in the mid-1950s, before the linguistic turn of poststructuralism had been decisively made even in his own work. Distinguishing his project from Richards's practical criticism, de Man argued that 'a theory of constituting form is altogether different from a theory of signifying form' (de Man 1983: p. 232). With respect to an ontology of the literary, this is certainly true, for it replaces the concept of literature as a mimetic or imitative object with that of literature as a creative or generative process, a process that constitutes rather than reflects its worldly 'material'. But as regards the practice of literary criticism in the 1970s, these different ontological assumptions, even when de Man, Derrida, and other deconstructionists pressed them to the point of radical textual undecidability, did not add up to so very much. Scholars trained on the practical/New Critical method took very readily to deconstruction, which made its institutional home in the formerly New Critical stronghold of Yale and which called upon critics to deploy, more strenuously than ever, their skills as close readers – and even (new social movements be damned) to focus those skills on a restricted set of canonically literary texts, such as the lyrics of English Romantic poets, the texts of the Continental Comparative Literature tradition, or the novels of Joyce.⁸ The main difference was that instead of directing the analysis towards the discovery of a final 'poetic' reconciliation beyond ambiguity, paradox and irony, these critics would now accept the ambiguity and paradox and irony as signs of the irresolvable, of the *aporia* or gap at

the heart of the poetic and hence of Being itself. But this, according to de Man, was in fact already evident (available by means of immanent critique) in the work of William Empson or of any really searching practical critic. Deconstructionist literary criticism, it turned out, was synonymous with close reading of the most rigorous and patient kind: the initial reaction against it, the 'resistance to theory' (de Man, 1986), was at bottom, like the reaction against New Criticism in the 1930s, a resistance to the demand for close reading, which always stands as an affront to those who seek the specification of meaning without complication or deferral.

Similarly, the belated arrival of phenomenology and reception aesthetics into the mainstream of literary study, both of which promised to shift attention away from the isolate object onto the generative subject of literature, smashing the dogma of the 'thing itself', in fact accomplished relatively minor shifts of register and terminology, leaving the practical operations of close reading largely unchanged. Though phenomenology began with Edmund Husserl at the turn of the twentieth century, its role in literary studies emerges with Sartre's writings in the 1940s and the work of the Geneva School theorists (Georges Poulet, Jean Starabinski) in the 1950s, and only begins to be adopted in the USA (partly owing to the influence of de Man) in the 1960s and 1970s by such critics as Geoffrey Hartman and J. Hillis Miller. For the phenomenologists, the governing principle or logic of a literary work is the immanence of the authorial mind or vision. The critic's concern here is emphatically not, however, with a biographical author, historically situated in the world, but with an authorial being somehow implied by and coextensive with the separate reality of the text, and approachable only through a rigorous close reading of the language that constitutes that reality. Not surprisingly, the phenomenological close reading tended to turn up much the same sorts of recurring patterns, ironies, ambiguities and harmonies that the New Critical reading would have done. Although these were now conceived as implying a particular author's

structuring mind, the unique form of the work corresponding to the unique form of the author's created reality, little had actually changed in terms of critical practice. It was still a matter of largely isolating the work from the material context of its production and consumption, scrutinizing it for formal patterns, devices and cruxes, and proposing a reading that made sense of these diverse formal elements.

Much the same can be said of reader-response criticism, a phenomenological approach to the act of reading which may itself be traced back to Husserl via the early work of his student Roman Ingarden and the intervening hermeneutics of Heidegger and Gadamer, but which did not emerge as a coherent and influential movement until the 1960s and 1970s with the rise of the Konstanz School in Germany (Hans Robert Jauss, Wolfgang Iser) and the work of Stanley Fish, Norman Holland and others in the USA. In this case, the generative subject of the literary was not author but reader. Yet what Iser called the 'implied reader' of a text (Iser, 1974), the reader whose implicit task it is to negotiate the text's many 'gaps' or 'blanks' or 'indeterminacies' (Iser, 1978: p. 182), is really nothing more than the mid-century formalist critic redoubled or reflected back on himself, tracing his close reading of the text back into the text so that a reified version of his own mental processes appears as textual lack or demand. Just as in Shklovsky's analysis, literary study figures here as a kind of cognitive problem-solving, and the problems are strictly those that arise between the individual text and the individual reader (even if, as in the essays of Fish [1980: pp. 167–173], that reader is identified with a larger 'interpretive community').

The most formidable line of thought to make its belated arrival in this period of retheorization was that of Marxism. Certainly, the discipline's serious engagement with the Marxist theoretical tradition was long overdue, given that the latter's emergence on the Continent and in Russia dated back to that of the founding formalisms themselves. The same span of years that takes us from the early

work of Shklovsky and Eliot to the publication of Richards's *Practical Criticism* and Leavis's *Mass Civilization and Minority Culture* saw the appearance of Georg Lukács's *Theory of the Novel* (1916) and *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution* (1924), Walter Benjamin's *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928), and several key works of the Bakhtin Circle in Moscow: P.N. Medvedev's *Formal Method in Literary Scholarship* (1928), V.N. Volosinov's *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1929), and M.M. Bakhtin's *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1929).

These works took up the problem of literary form more or less explicitly, recognizing that, as Medvedev expressed it in 1929, 'Marxist study of literature makes contact with the formal method and comes into conflict with it on the grounds of the paramount and most urgent problem common to both – the problem of specification' (quoted in Volosinov, 1986: p. 179). Traditional Marxism would of course reject any notion of 'pure form' independent of a content and context supplied by history, and thus also any notion of literariness specifiable by formal particulars alone. According to Marx's own account (in his Preface to the *Critique of Political Economy*), all 'definite forms of social consciousness', including specifically literary forms, are effects of the underlying relations of production, which provide the 'real foundation' of art, politics, law and all other elements of the 'superstructure' (Marx, 1972: p. 4). But by the 1920s, the strict economic determinism of this base/superstructure paradigm was under pressure within Marxism itself. And Marxist literary theorists could scarcely afford to ignore the stunning success of the formalists in specifying a new disciplinary object and launching a new field of advanced study with impressively elaborated criteria of classification and evaluation. The new line of Marxist literary theory aimed therefore to produce what Medvedev called an 'intrinsic' critique of formalism, one that accepted the formal specificity of the literary as a starting point for thinking the logic of form's historical genesis and determination.

Such a critique could proceed intrinsically inasmuch as the whole deviationist orientation of Russian Formalism, and the broader concern with innovation and tradition which runs through Eliot, Leavis, the New Critics and modernist literary practices generally, relies on a diachronic model of norms and departures. Already in Shklovsky's 'Art as Device' it is clear that the formal analysis must always be historically situated. A device such as the 'roughening of language' through disordered rhythm will, says Shklovsky, cease to be effective as a technique of deautomatization the moment such disordering has itself 'become a convention' (Shklovsky, 1988: p. 30). Even at this 'purely formal' level of rhythmic regularity and irregularity, literariness is understood to be historically embedded and determined.

Needless to say, a Marxist critique could not stop here, with what might remain a perfectly autonomous intertextual history of technical innovations giving way to imitation, becoming stale conventions, and being succeeded or reanimated by further innovations.⁹ The central problem of literary study for Marxism was that of the *dialectics* between form and content, a problem hedged in on one side by naïve or 'vulgar' reflectionism (art as mirror and map of historical reality) and on the other by 'bourgeois' aestheticism and idealism (art as instance and intimation of a separate, higher reality). Trotsky was already seeking to thread this dialectical needle in his *Literature and Revolution* (Trotsky, 1957: p. 137), but it would take nearly half a century of refinements to establish not just that literature is embedded in historical process as both cause and effect, but also that what we call historical content, the material of history, has itself always already achieved significant form even before it finds expression in literature. Just as there is a historicity to form, so is there a formal structure to history; one must approach reality through its formal mediations and not hope to grasp it as an unmediated 'content'. Moreover, as Lucien Goldmann and Pierre Macherey would argue, literary criticism (Marxist or otherwise) is itself a formal mediation and

thus requires more than mere theoretical refinements. A certain critical reflexivity has to be built into it on the level of practice.

But while this line of thinking was intellectually powerful, it was institutionally very weak, and even by the late 1970s was only just beginning to suggest its implications for literary study at the institutional level. That is partly because, having developed mostly outside the disciplinary apparatus of literature, Marxist literary theory lacked any particular pedagogical strategy. Even in its more didactic forms, as in the later work of Lukács, it was not a self-sustaining 'educational instrument' precisely tailored for the training and accreditation of new teacher-critics. This institutional weakness was compounded by the fact that, prior to the 1970s, very little of the important Marxist work was translated into English, even as, with the passage into a second, American stage of the Anglophone hegemon, English became the dominant language not just of literary study but of the global university system – a system which was itself, of course, both an effect and an index of the overwhelming predominance of capitalist relations. Even in the nations of the Soviet bloc, the institutional space afforded genuinely dialectical theories of literary production was sharply limited by Stalinism, which suppressed and purged much of the best work of the late 1920s and 1930s. As a consequence of these several institutional handicaps, the American literary critic Fredric Jameson could assume, in his landmark overview of 1971, *Marxism and Form*, that his readers regarded Marxist criticism as no more than 'an intellectual and historical curiosity' (Jameson, 1971: p. ix). Similarly, Eagleton could begin his own first book on Marxist aesthetics, *Criticism and Ideology* (1975), with the observation that, as a Marxist literary critic from England, he felt 'acutely bereft of a tradition' (Eagleton, 1975: p. 7).

This long obscured and blunted tradition did, however, have the advantage of entering the horizon of mainstream literary study from at least two directions at once. The turn to theory was, in the case of Marxist theory, bolstered by the unsettling arrival

of cultural studies, which, though rooted in Marxist traditions of cultural critique, brought with it a much clearer range of institutional consequences, and indeed of institutional enticements, than did any school of abstract theory.

THE CULTURAL TURN

The first and most obvious of these enticements was simply that of expanding the range of possible objects of scholarly study to include forms of art more likely to satisfy the demands for curricular ‘relevance’ that had been articulated in the 1960s, and more closely associated with the new, younger and somewhat less homogeneous Literature faculties that had emerged during the period of postwar higher-educational expansion. While the root texts of cultural studies had been fiercely critical of popular music such as Jazz and Rock, of movies and television, and indeed of all products of the American-dominated ‘entertainment industry’, the literature faculties of the 1970s included scholars of a generation that not only possessed more intimate knowledge of these forms and their histories but also had embraced them in the 1960s as potentially powerful forms of protest and liberation. As this generation began to engage with the rather fragmented tradition of cultural studies, therefore, it responded less to the Marxist critique of cultural commodification that had impelled the wartime writings of Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer than to the Marxist critique of the bourgeois conception of ‘culture’ that had impelled the work of Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart in their revisionist studies of British working-class life in the late 1950s.

To be sure, these latter works shared the former’s fear and loathing of (American) popular culture, but this was not at all the same thing as endorsing literary study’s traditional elevation of literature (or ‘culture’ in Arnold’s and Leavis’s sense) above the welter of everyday practices and amusements. In place of the elitist or evaluative notion of

culture, Williams and Hoggart had deployed a more democratic and strictly analytic concept that takes in the whole range or system of signifying practices through which a social class or group reflects and makes sense of its world. This had always been the normal way of thinking in the social sciences – in anthropology, for example – and when asserted from that quarter it had scarcely discomposed the champions of literature. But cultural studies emerged from a far more ambiguous institutional space, a new conjunctural space between or across the social sciences on the one hand and literary study on the other. Hoggart and Williams were both literary scholars in the left-Leavis tradition, teaching English when they published their breakthrough books – Hoggart’s *The Uses of Literacy* (1957) and Williams’s *Culture and Society* (1958). This gave their interventions more purchase on the discipline in two senses: more leverage for reshaping it along anthropological lines, yes, but also more attachment to its established norms. As Stuart Hall has observed, Hoggart and Williams ‘set out – much in the spirit of “practical criticism” – to “read” working-class culture’ as if its ‘patterns and arrangements ... were certain kinds of texts’ (Hall, 1996: p. 32). As the project they initiated began widely to impact literary study from the late 1970s onwards, it was as much or more a matter of literary study imposing its disciplinary agenda, its poetics, on cultural terrain previously reserved for social scientists than of a sociological optic supplanting a literary one. Many works of cultural studies produced by literary scholars in the 1970s and 1980s can be described as textualist in Hall’s terms, ‘close readings’ of a subcultural fashion system or a television advertising campaign or a popular recreational practice, generally disclosing a certain complexity or challenging strangeness in this text, its *need* to be read closely – i.e. its literariness, in the broader sense: and generally supporting the view that rigorous study of these texts is indispensable for understanding a particular community (of fans, consumers, practitioners, etc.) with whom the scholar in some way

identifies (ethnically, sexually, generationally, geographically), and for advancing that community's distinct interests, or at least gaining some respect for its 'structures of feeling', its 'whole way of life', in the face of hostile homogenizing forces.

Cultural studies as a whole remains true to its interdisciplinary roots, its scholars scattered among a range of fields in the humanities and social sciences. Institutionally speaking, resistance to disciplinarity has been its defining feature. But within this network of practices, the textualist strain that first emerged from left-Leavisite literary studies represents a major and arguably dominant fraction. Eminently teachable – combining a respectable precision of method with a rationale of bold critique and utopian aspiration, all the while focusing on objects already of some familiarity and of particular interest to university-age students (subcultures of the elderly have received notably little attention) – this shift of what Antony Easthope (1991) called 'literary into cultural studies' has effectively replicated, at a time when the reading of poetry and fiction is no longer a common extracurricular activity, the discipline's original winning strategy in the competition for undergraduate enrolments.

What seemed to be a threat to literary study's position in the academy was thus exploited as an opportunity for expansion, especially as the identity-based projects within the discipline seized the opportunity to analyse and legitimize particular 'ethnic' or gender-specific cultural practices, from romance fiction to gangsta rap to Barbie-doll collecting. But the obvious trade-off here, whereby a widening of the territory of literary studies is purchased at the price of attenuating the specificity of the literary object, becomes more profound as the anti-elitism and respect for popular or 'ordinary' cultural forms that had characterized cultural studies since Hoggart and Williams (and greatly assisted it in gaining adherents among literary scholars of the 1960s generation) merge into the theoretical streams of the 'linguistic turn' to issue in the more general 'cultural turn' of postmodern society.

This latter transformation, as Jameson has described in a well-known passage, represents an opening up or widening but also a kind of shutting down of culture as an object of study:

The very sphere of culture itself has expanded, becoming coterminous with market society in such a way that the cultural is no longer limited to its earlier, traditional or experimental forms, but is consumed throughout daily life itself, in shopping, in professional activities, in the various often televisual forms of leisure, in production for the market and in consumption of those market products... The closed space of the aesthetic is thereby also opened up to its henceforth fully culturalized context... Indeed, in a strict philosophical sense, the end of the modern must also spell the end of the aesthetic itself, or of aesthetics in general: for where the latter suffuses everything, where the sphere of culture expands to the point where everything becomes one way or another acculturated, the traditional distinctiveness or 'specificity' of the aesthetic (and even of culture as such) is necessarily blurred or lost altogether. (Jameson, 1998: p. 111)

The whole project of articulating culture with society is threatened by this postmodern extension of the cultural into every nook and cranny of lived experience. There is no longer any question of positioning culture, let alone literature narrowly defined, in relation to something else; one must conduct an interminable analysis of a cultural space coextensive with reality itself.

This radical opening of the space of the object in literary study might seem to work against the more or less simultaneous effort, following from the belated encounter with Marxism, to reorient the discipline towards history. But the strong emergence of history as a new god-term among literary scholars in the 1980s and 1990s can be viewed as a further permutation of the cultural turn (just as the cultural turn is itself an elaboration of the linguistic turn). The 'New' historicism was so branded because it was precisely *not* a matter of the mere revival or return of the historical modes of scholarship, either bourgeois or Marxist, that had been held in so decidedly subordinate a position through the period of New Critical hegemony and the first decade or so of high theory. The New Historicism

was largely built on the concepts and methods of French poststructuralist Michel Foucault, in whose writings literature enjoyed no particular privilege among the various kinds of cultural work or 'discursive practices', except in the specifically historical sense that certain of these practices were recognized and revered as 'literary' by certain people at certain times. The whole system of such practices at any given historical moment – from routine titles and salutations to juridical codes to notations in medical treatises – constituted a 'discursive regime', and this regime was responsible among other things for the production of literature as a distinct category. The proper object of study, therefore, for a literary critic as for a historian, has to be the entire field of knowledge and power. In fact, from this New Historicist vantage, there is nothing that is not discourse, nothing that may be bracketed, or leaned upon, as extra-discursive empirical bedrock. It is not just that the literary text emerges within and takes its meanings and value from a socio-historical context, as in the Marxist tradition of cultural studies, but that what we call society or history is, along with literature (or art, sex, justice, or man himself), a discursive construct, a problematic text that needs to be (closely) read. Just as from the postmodernist vantage described by Jameson, everything is culture, so from the Foucauldian vantage, everything is discourse.

The crucial difference between these two moments of the cultural turn is that for Foucault, discourse, the regime of knowledge, is indissociable from power. This New Historicist collapse of the cultural into the political represents a more fundamental departure from Marxism than does contemporary cultural studies (with its collapsing of the cultural into the everyday), and as such it raises the stakes of what we have described as a trade-off for literary studies. On the one hand, just as the opening towards more varied and popular cultural forms and practices expanded the field of study and helped the discipline reclaim its relevance and its communitarian rationale in the face of a less politically docile, less culturally, sexually and racially

homogeneous, and ever less reading-inclined post-1960s student population, the opening towards entire systems of knowledge/power not only represented a further expansion of textual terrain requiring the skills of attentive reading and textual analysis (now 'discourse analysis'), but helped the discipline to reinforce the long-asserted connection between its scholarly practices and truly critical thinking, i.e. the capacity to think through and beyond the particular knowledge regime of the academy as a whole and of the wider society (the orientalist regime, for example). Having jettisoned not just the narrow or elitist cultural canon but the very notion of a cultural elite in Leavis's sense, the literary professoriate could nonetheless still claim to be a kind of vanguard, conducting a struggle against an ever more thoroughgoing modern system of instrumentalist control by means of informed critical reading of discursive practices. But here again, the opening can be seen as a kind of foreclosure. To quote Jameson once more, 'The identification of knowledge with power, of the epistemological with the politics of domination, tends to dissolve the political itself as a separate instance or possibility of praxis, and by making all forms of knowledge and measurement over into forms of discipline, control, and domination, in effect evacuates the more narrowly political altogether' (Jameson, 1998: p. 107).

Seen in these terms, the reconnection of literary study with historicism has involved a notion of the political that, being coterminous with the broadest possible conception of culture, is practically undeployable. Notwithstanding the reactionary idiocies of the culture wars – from which vantage only scholars on the left, the so-called 'tenured radicals' (Kimball, 1990) are 'political' – literary study *has* in fact become 'more political' since the 1970s, more generally concerned to address the logic of culture's relationship to power and domination, and the discipline's own place within that relationship, and more explicitly desirous of effecting social change through scholarship and teaching. Yet, as culture, politics and the discipline itself have all become more resistant to specification, the

political rationale for literary study – the claim that more students, more faculty, more training in this particular disciplinary regime will help to produce a better society, one in which the forms of knowledge/operations of power are somehow more benign or palatable – has all but lost its force. This faltering of its claim to be a discipline of special integrity and resistance is in turn aggravating a problem with regard to the attraction and motivation of undergraduate students, for whom the object of analysis now exceeds the scope of their extracurricular knowledge and interests to the point of alienation. Literary study thus finds itself more ambitiously constituted than ever, with more technical skills to master, more textual material to analyse, and a broader agenda of political concerns and aspirations. Yet it is less able than ever convincingly to justify its place in the academy either on the basis of the urgency of its scholarship or on that of the popular appeal of its teaching.

DIVERSITY AND STRATIFICATION

If all this means that literary study has reached a point of ‘crisis’, it is just one such point among many for a discipline that has always had to labour against scepticism regarding its place in the modern university. Its history has been a ceaseless struggle to show that it possesses sufficient disciplinary rigour and specificity on the one hand and sufficient social utility on the other, and to coordinate the two claims convincingly enough to sustain high enrolments and continued investment of resources in the context of an academic apparatus that is forever ratcheting up the demands for testable, repeatable, verifiable results, for increased productivity and measurable value-added. In this situation, it is difficult to share the excitement of those who locate the discipline’s problems in its ostensible indifference to literariness and hostility to reading, and who propose as its salvation a grand return to the formal analysis of literature narrowly defined. Such challenges and proposals certainly misapprehend the

problem, treating the supposed collapse and hoped-for recovery of the literary habitus as phenomena independent of the academic field and its institutional agents (Bourdieu, 1984). And the solutions or remediations they offer would seem to have little applicability outside the most protected and privileged institutional locations.

In those spaces of special privilege, where private endowments supplement high tuitions, it may be possible to garner support for both the narrow, essentially departmental base of literary study and for the new interdisciplinary programmes and centres with which many literary scholars are now more closely affiliated. In those latter programmes, literary study is very far from having withered or faded away. It has imposed its practices, its politics and its personnel with startling effectiveness. A look at the mastheads of humanities centres, centres for cultural study and cultural history, Africana studies centres, centres for South Asian or Asian American or Latino or generalized ethnic studies or for women’s studies or gay and lesbian studies, for new media studies or transnational or global studies, turns up a disproportionate number of literature professors, as does a survey of the contents pages of interdisciplinary journals in which the work produced in such centres is published. And as I have tried to indicate, the work of these literary scholars, taken as a whole, remains, for all the shifts and adjustments of the past quarter-century, very discernibly literary – ‘all too literary’ if viewed from the normative vantage of history, or sociology, or economics, or geography, or philosophy, or any of the other disciplines that find themselves both collaborating and competing with Literature within these proliferating nodes of interdisciplinarity.

Literature, in other words, has managed to maintain its share of resources and to guard its departmental homes (traditionally the most secure base of power within a university) precisely by extending and imposing itself in the growing interdisciplinary quarters of the academy. Its interdisciplinary diffusion during the decades of the cultural turn has been tactically as well as intellectually

motivated – or rather, to avoid implying some kind of collective craftiness and cynicism, its intellectual and institutional itineraries have been mutually constitutive.

Any effort to draw back from that double itinerary towards a sharply narrowed conception of the literary object – to reverse, in effect, the cultural turn – would have to involve downsizing, either of the literature faculty or of the set of tasks the literature faculty performs. The latter would be, for most universities, a prohibitively high-priced option. Already there is some indication that the wealthiest institutions are the ones where the literary is being given its firmest and narrowest respecification (right alongside the expanding interdisciplinary centres and programmes where, at these institutions, there are ample resources for literary studies also to pursue its other paths). In this respect, the diversity of projects that now falls under the rubric of literary studies, from postcolonial analyses of corporate arts sponsorship to readings of queer adoption documentaries to critical biographies of Daniel Defoe to manifestoes of radical pedagogy – is also a stratification, whereby certain projects are suitable and sustainable at the elite level but fail the cost-analysis test at institutions of lesser symbolic and financial endowment. It is tempting to say that the forces of diffusion – not only the intellectual and economic forces driving the humanities and social sciences towards interdisciplinarity, but the broader forces that are spreading literary study to new sites of higher education (witness the massive expansion of literature departments in China) – will be more decisive for the future of the field than the movements that take hold in its most central and privileged locations. But we must bear in mind as well the forces of concentration, which, in higher education as elsewhere, are piling new advantages and privileges upon the already most advantaged and privileged, rapidly widening the gap between the upper and lower strata. It may be that over the coming decades literary study will, by and large, dissolve into the emergent forms of post-disciplinary knowledge production while at

the same time reconstituting itself in a handful of increasingly elevated locations around a renewed investment in the literary object as such.

NOTES

1 For some of the most thoughtful attempts to foreground this collapse of the properly literary-critical habitus and to return disciplinary attention to core questions of literariness and literary form, see Attridge, 2004; Levine, 1994; and Wolfson, 1998, 2000.

2 If the past two decades have witnessed a 'crisis of form' in literary study, which is to say a rising anxiety regarding the loss of disciplinary specificity, one effect of this has been a reexamination of the discipline's institutional history, a history in which the problem of specification and the sense of crisis appear always to have been intertwined. Among the most important of these historical accounts are those of Baldick (1983), Eagleton (1983), Graff (1987), Guillory (1993), Hunter (1988) and Readings (1997).

3 The 1965 Lemon and Reiss translation, which I have otherwise followed here, is titled 'Art as Technique'.

4 The most distinguished figures within the major schools of literary study since the 1970s, such as Stephen Greenblatt and Catherine Gallagher among New Historicists, D.A. Miller and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in queer studies, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi Bhabha in postcolonial studies (to name just a few), are all committed and exemplary close readers, insistent that the discipline's value and future viability depend on this dimension of its practice. Even at the apex of the New Historicism, in *Shakespearean Negotiations*, Greenblatt situated his own departures from 'close-grained formalism' at the 'margins' of the discipline, and observed that 'close reading of the textual traces and ... sustained, scrupulous attention to formal and linguistic design will remain at the center of literary teaching and study' (Greenblatt, 1988: pp. 3–4). More recently, in *Death of a Discipline*, Spivak argued that the postcolonial future of comparative literary study lies in its willingness to 'extend the privilege of close reading to the texts of the global south' rather than following the lead of Area Studies and Cultural Studies, which she calls 'monolingual, presentist, narcissistic [disciplines], not practiced enough in close reading even to understand that the mother tongue is actively divided' (2003: pp. 50, 20). Even more recently, a roundtable discussion among the editors of *PMLA* revealed general agreement across the lines of theoretical school and historical period that 'close reading is fundamental to everything we do' (Hirsh, 2006: p. 262).

5 On the contrary, in eschewing the demand to read texts, Moretti embraces the formalist categories

of the device and the genre: 'Devices, and genres. Two *formal* units. A very small formal unit and a very large one. These are the forces behind ... literary history. Not texts. Texts are real objects but not objects of knowledge. If we want to explain the real laws of literary history we must move to a formal plane that lies beyond them: below or above: the device, or the genre' (Moretti, 2000b: p. 217).

6 The Russian Formalists took particular interest in the poetic dimension of prose, and made a point of demonstrating that the latter could be just as 'artistic' as the former. See, for example, Jakobson's well-known essay on the prose of Pasternak (Jakobson, 1987).

7 It is also true that, as John Guillory has argued (1993: p. 38), the alternative or counter-canon that have emerged under the aegis of identity-based modes of literary study have involved certain confusions between the project of canon-formation and that of cultural democratization.

8 The interventions of these years did, however, have the effect of instituting a new canon of theory itself (Guillory, 1993: p. 176) – and thereby of provoking objections from cultural conservatives who complained that students were now encouraged to read Derrida instead of Dryden.

9 As Tony Bennett has pointed out in *Formalism and Marxism*, even the Russian Formalists themselves recognized by the 1920s that the historicity of defamiliarization went beyond intertextuality to involve the history of ordinary language practices and hence the much broader social context (Bennett, 1979: pp. 79–80).

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