

Long Live Literature?

Englit, Radical Criticism and Cultural Studies

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Has the time come for 'English' as an academic discipline to disappear? A crisis can only last so long, after all, before it becomes terminal (or terminally boring). And 'English' has been in a self-proclaimed state of crisis for the last fifteen years, in part at least because of the challenges mounted by radical critics concerned with the social determinants, reception and meanings of writing and culture.¹ The appearance of exciting new work during the 1980s only served to intensify doubts as to whether the discipline was viable. Feminist scholarship and theory extended the boundaries of the canon, and then moved on to question the criteria, and the notion, of the canonical. Conceptually sophisticated studies prodded and pulled Englit out of its notorious theoretical innocence: theory began to become its own object, until literary texts – 'primary texts', did we once call them? – barely figured in the works of some critics. Historicisation, especially the project of cultural materialism, seemed to represent a decisive move beyond the old model of 'literature and its background': but this was to take literary studies into areas beyond the usual competence of literary academics. As studies of popular culture grew more numerous and ambitious, and as 'high' and 'low' texts were increasingly viewed together, the boundaries of the canon were further blurred or eroded. In short, all this intellectual energy was profoundly disturbing of the disciplinary status quo – which was, in most cases, part of the explicit intention of the authors involved.²

So is it time for Englit, abandoning any claim to academic autonomy, to move into the conveniently adjacent field of 'cultural studies'? Cultural studies in Britain may have been initially sociological in inspiration, concerned with mass culture in recent and modern times, its favoured objects forms of contemporary social regulation and resistance, rather than instances of representation (certainly, rather than high cultural instances): this at any rate was clearly the focus of work at Birmingham. But the historical study of cultural production, surely part of 'cultural studies' in any full definition, will accord a greater prominence to the written word. If literary texts can no longer be read as instances of "literature" as a given and self-sufficient object,³ they can be read instead, within such a programme, as instances of discourse in a given social and historical

conjuncture. *Jude the Obscure* will not be offered as part of 'our heritage' (the canon), but as an exemplar of the late Victorian construction of gender and sexuality. Perhaps 'literature' (the texts) will survive, taking or usurping a central place in the new field, even as 'literature' (the discipline) collapses?

This however is to beg the question of how, within the wide field of representations which cultural historians confront, we are to define those qualities of literary texts which justify our paying particular attention to them. How are we to back Raymond Williams' surprisingly confident assertion of the 'centrality' of 'writing' (and for Williams, the term 'writing' as he uses it here would tend to imply canonical literature)? The field investigated by 'cultural materialism', Williams argued in his 1981 lecture on 'The Crisis of English Studies', 'still centrally includes ... major forms of writing, which are now being read, along with other writing, in a different perspective. Cultural materialism is the analysis of all forms of signification, including quite centrally writing, within the means and conditions of their production'.⁴ In the dozen years since that lecture, Englit has moved substantially in some of the directions Williams advocated. I doubt, *pace* Antony Easthope, that any 'new paradigm' of literary study is being or will be agreed: change has perhaps been a semi-intended result of the introduction of modularity, and of the consequent breakdown of disciplinary boundaries in the humanities in HE, as much as it has come from the consistent implementation of any 'paradigm'.⁵ Literature surely is being studied less as a pre-determined body of texts, and more as part of the history of discourses, within 'the analysis of all forms of signification' – even if this has happened under the sign not of 'cultural materialism' but of 'cultural studies', a politico-theoretically agnostic title. But the basis for this continuing attention to the literary (beyond the natural readiness of literature teachers to go on teaching literature, even if no longer 'under conditions of their own choosing') has been little articulated. If what we are interested in is representation, social-historical semiotics at large, why, and how, should we go on studying *these* forms of 'signification'?

In what follows, I begin by offering an extended critical review of the developments which have undermined the

disciplinary autonomy of Englit, and argue that as the historicisation of literature becomes the dominant tendency, some kinds of literary text are likely to disappear from circulation; but others, read in new ways, will acquire new kinds of interest. Teaching literary texts within the analysis of cultural history requires, I then go on to claim, something more than a view of literature as, simply, 'discourse'. But a theoretically sharper definition of literature as related to 'ideology' is problematic in other ways – in part, because of the collapse of the political and theoretical confidence which underwrote the concept of ideology; in part, because that concept, deployed monolithically and at a high level of generality, was always a blunt instrument for engaging with the complexities of good writing. An overarching theorisation of the literary in relation to the social/historical is not within our grasp at present. What may be attainable, and what I offer in conclusion, is some methodological clarification as to how within the analysis of cultural history we can engage with (some) literary texts in ways that respect, and draw upon, their qualities as particular kinds of discourse: kinds, namely, which while they offer us material for a specification of cultural discourses at large, also work on the basis of forms of (humanist) identification. These forms may in principle be deconstructed by anti-humanist readings, but they remain persistently available to readers because they constitute the principles of intelligibility of the text itself. This way of seeing literature will only preserve some bits of 'our literary heritage', however, and it will do so on grounds different from those which have underlain the canon of Englit.

The 'Value-question'

Terry Eagleton declares in *Criticism and Ideology* that 'the instalment of the "value-question" at the heart of critical enquiry is a rampantly ideological gesture'.⁶ He then goes on to make this 'gesture' for the next 25 pages, in a discussion of 'Marxism and Aesthetic Value' which stands as one of the clearest statements of the issues in recent radical criticism.⁷ There are in fact good reasons why the 'value-question' cannot be repressed, both because, as Steven Connor has recently insisted, it is inherently ineluctable (to deny value is to invoke it),⁸ and because if the curriculum of Englit and its status as an academic discipline are under challenge, then the validity of aesthetic valuing, as the (alleged?) basis of the canon, is all the time at stake. As Lillian S. Robinson points out, it is all very well to preserve an agnostic or pluralist attitude towards the canon and its aesthetic underpinnings in principle, but things sharpen up once changes are proposed, displacing established texts in favour of newcomers. Are feminist critics and scholars challenging the very notion of canonicity, are they proposing a female counter-canon to parallel the existing largely male one, or are they arguing that women writers (Edith Wharton, for example) should be better represented in *the* canon since their work is as good, by the established criteria, as that of men writers whose place is secure? In other words, is there one spurious canon; a plurality of

separatist canons; or one authentic, but changeable, canon?⁹

This involves familiar arguments as to whether aesthetic judgement is in principle (or in part) transcultural, or whether aesthetic valuations are just culturally relative.¹⁰ What is not always observed is that Englit can survive – has survived, and is surviving – major shifts in taste, and the canonical revisions that follow on these. If Englit is defined as the study of those texts which at a given time are regarded as especially valuable from an aesthetic point of view, this definition can persist even as the criteria of value shift and the books that figure in the canon alter: after all, the Leavisian 'Great Tradition' began life as a counter-canon.

Literary works surely must be viewed as possessing what we may agree to call 'aesthetic value', in the following sense. They have qualities ('aesthetic qualities') that cannot be replicated in any account or paraphrase of their discursive and denotative aspect (their 'content' and 'meaning'), and which we can apprehend as distinct from that aspect. These aesthetic qualities do not exist in any pure state, since the work is both 'content'/'meaning' and 'aesthetic qualities' through and through. But readers can become aware of and take pleasure in the work's aesthetic qualities, at least insofar as they have been educated to do so. For such readers, the aesthetic dimension of the work is a factor in the value they place on it, and a criterion by which they may value one work more highly than another – though other factors, to do with other qualities (what the work is *about*), certainly also influence this valuing: when we value literary works we do not value them 'purely aesthetically'.

By summing things up like this, I intend to put the matter in a form that allows us to see how the 'value-question' is implicated differently in Englit and in cultural studies. The former has constituted itself as a discipline on the ground of the aesthetic. In its own account of itself, its canonical texts are selected in virtue of their aesthetic excellence. Its pedagogy and academic literature have been mainly concerned to identify and communicate the elements and conditions of that excellence. In Englit, as Bennett sardonically notes, the student is to prove her/his fitness as a reader by producing, as if it were her/his own, the expected 'judgement' on the work's *quality*.¹¹ 'Content', and the 'background' of history, politics, intertextuality, all figure here as distractions, dangerous insofar as they tempt readers to discuss the text in the wrong way, as if it was good because it was *about* something. In the words of the *Punch* joke that Orwell quoted long ago, 'one doesn't write *about* something, one simply *writes*',¹² and it is this ideology of writing which, in its pure form, Englit would inculcate. Aesthetic quality is hypostatized as an essence which is the *only* fit object of attention.

Cultural studies, by contrast, would appear to pay scant deference to 'aesthetic qualities'. The history of aesthetic judgement may be of interest as a region of discourse/ideology, and the value placed on various cultural works or genres may itself be an object of enquiry, but the selection of texts for examination within the analysis of cultural history need not obey aesthetic criteria. That selection would appear to be determined mainly by the cultural-

historical questions we are interested in: thus insofar as literary texts do remain of interest, and 'writing' remains 'central', it will be above all and in principle because their content/meaning engages us. The milieu in which a text circulated will also be pertinent. From this it would follow that, other things being equal, elite culture may well be regarded as less interesting than popular culture.

Many works, of course, are likely to be picked out by either Englit or cultural studies criteria. Thus *Jude*, as we noted, readily justifies itself as culturally-historically interesting, quite apart from being an established (though quite recently established) canonical text.¹³ A kind of judgement which in fact involves 'aesthetic criteria', but probably not as explicit grounds of choice, seems likely to persist, insofar as cultural historians selecting literary texts for attention are unlikely to dispense with some kind of distinction between what Edward Said bluntly calls 'good books and less good books'.¹⁴ If we decide to look at some of the many available 1890s novels dealing with marriage and sexual conventions, and if we pick *Jude* and Gissing's *The Odd Women*, rather than Grant Allen's *The Woman who Did* (even though the latter was more widely read, and imitated, at the time),¹⁵ this will be because we regard them as *better* for our purposes: more interesting in the ways they represent, and work on, the issues that concern us. The very same books which are good in this sense will often be good also in terms of a more 'aesthetic' valuation focussed on their formal properties – narrative organisation, descriptive density and precision, vigour of language and so on. After all, a writer intelligently engaged with wider social and cultural questions is likely also to deploy that intelligence to other ends, as a 'purely literary' craftswoman/craftsman. And the material of the text, itself indissolubly both 'form' and 'content', is to be apprehended at once in itself and in relation to the wider social meanings and constructions that engage us.

But the fact that we have to read in both ways at once does not obliterate the distinction between ways of reading (ways we can be *taught* to read). Over the last fifteen years it has become less common in academic study to approach texts in terms of a hypostatised 'aesthetic value', and more common to approach them in terms of their implication in cultural and discursive history.

There is not, I think, much substance in the view that this kind of approach is necessarily reductive. With literary genres that have been significant sites of cultural contest and of social self-representation (Elizabethan and Jacobean drama and Victorian fictional

realism are the obvious instances in English writing), the text 'in itself' always tends to reveal a fuller meaning within the kind of historical and contextual specification which cultural historians can provide: one does not have to assent to every detail of his reading to acknowledge, for instance, that Paul Brown's placing of *The Tempest* in the context of Elizabethan and Jacobean colonial discourse actually extends our sense of the issues with which the play is dealing.¹⁶ (There are, of course, *other* dimensions of *The Tempest* than those which Brown illuminates: once the text is engaged with, it will have – a point to which I return – the power of exceeding our predetermined interrogative framework. This 'excess' tends to reveal the limits of a 'purely aesthetic' criticism, however, quite as much as those of a cultural-historical approach.

Where there *will* be a reduction is in the size and scope of the canon: some texts which have survived within Englit may (as in the cases of Shakespeare and Hardy) flourish anew within the perspectives of cultural studies, but other texts will cease to be of interest. Donne's 'Anniversarie' does not really yield all that much if we are looking for evidence about early modern constructions of gender. Seamus Heaney's engagement with questions of history and identity makes 'Station Island' an immediately interesting text for the cultural historian, but many of his poems in *Seeing Things* – those about perception, about the special visual quality of sea horizons – fit into no such cultural-historical basket.

So 'literature' will tend to shrink insofar as it becomes a branch of cultural studies. Given education's predominant role in defining and transmitting literary culture, some texts of Englit are likely to vanish from such general circulation as they still enjoy today, much as those of Sophocles and Horace have done. An 'educated person' (someone with a humanities degree) will no longer be expected to recognise

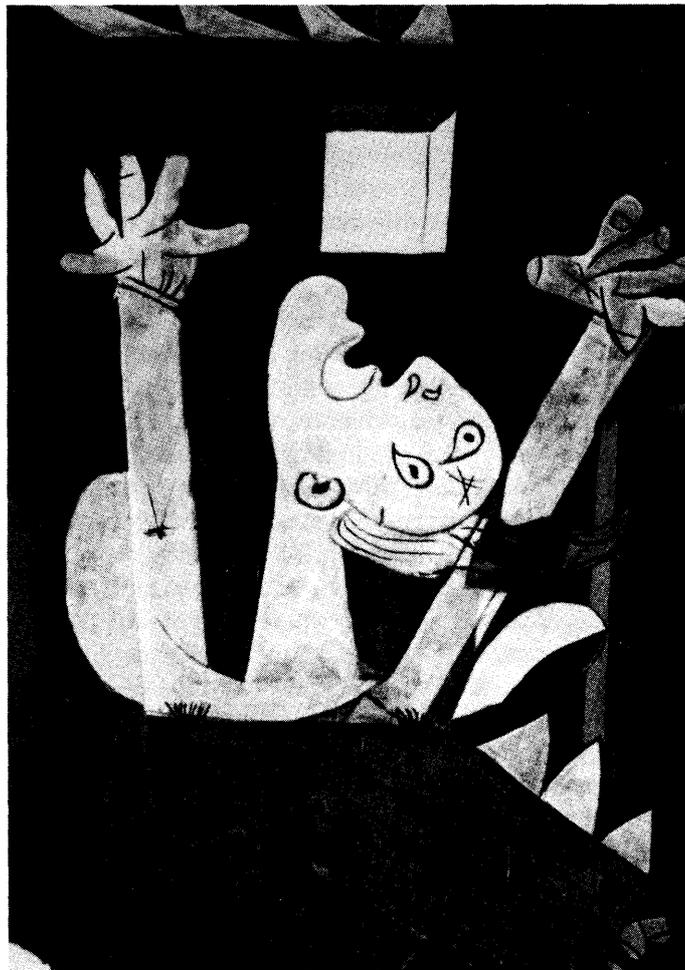


the work, or perhaps even the name, of (say) Andrew Marvell, let alone A. H. Clough. It is vain to hope that most of those texts valued within Englit for their aesthetic excellence, but unconcerned with issues of the kind pursued by cultural historians, will somehow survive within cultural studies. Everyone must decide for themselves whether their disappearance is a light or a heavy price to pay for the gains we have made by historicizing, and politicizing, the text.

Politicisation of the Text: 'Ideology' and 'Discourse'

To historicise is to politicize: to draw the text down from the empyrean of aesthetic transcendence, into the play of discursive projects and meanings in a given place and time – projects and meanings which will have a more or less marked political dimension (generally occluded in the established critical procedures, themselves in this negative respect 'political', of Englit). Beyond this general sense, a more particular and directed politicisation of literary studies has derived from the kinds of attention proposed by radical critics, which have been, of course, politically motivated. As well as determining the choice of texts and the kinds of questions asked of them, this has also altered the discursive relations they are drawn into. It becomes less pertinent to speak of a literary tradition, a series of diachronic 'influences' from (say) Jane Austen to George Eliot to Henry James (Leavis's succession in *The Great Tradition*), and more pertinent to contextualise (say) *Mansfield Park* synchronically: to look, for instance, as Said proposes, at how the English aristocracy managed the slave plantations it owned, a theme referred to quite tangentially in Austen's text, but of considerable importance to the social class she represents.¹⁷

If the project has its origins in Marxist criticism – Williams's *The Country and the City* (1973) is an early instance, even if the textual materials Williams analyses there now strike us as rather exclusively 'literary', by subsequent standards¹⁸ – feminist scholarship and criticism have been the major force in its development during the 1980s. The theoretical framework, particularly in England, has sometimes been anti-humanist (Lacanian or Althusserian); but feminist textual politics have reflected and extended a direct personal engagement with both the micro-politics of the academy and the social politics of patriarchy. A double move has been made: on the one hand, unpicking the naturalised surface of the text, showing how the gendered subject positions it offers are constructed both within and beyond the work; on the other (in some tension – a creative tension, I would argue – with this anti-humanism),¹⁹ revaluing literary work as having offered expressive possibilities to culturally marginalised writers, and illuminating the meanings of this work, which has been ignored or undervalued because that aspect of its significance was unrecognised in the critical tradition (it now seems hardly credible, for instance, that *Vanity Fair* can for decades have been regarded as a major novel and *Villette* as a minor one).²⁰ Gay critics have demonstrated that from their perspective too, interventions from the cultural margins



can raise questions about representation and subjectivity which resonate in such central texts as Shakespeare's, disturbing the harmonious closures which an earlier criticism liked to find in the plays and highlighting the contested meanings and 'dissident readings' which they can yield.²¹

I doubt if it is useful, or even feasible, to attempt a synoptic account of the relations between these and other kinds of recent radical criticism, and the various theoretical frameworks – derived mainly from Marx (often via Althusser and Macherey) and Gramsci, Lacan, Foucault and Bakhtin – that have been influential. A range of different and often incompatible positions has been adopted, sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly. Individual critics have been eclectic, and some of them have shown little interest in theory, or have been actively sceptical as to its uses. 'For many British literary critics,' Sinfield argues, 'including feminists and affiliates of ethnic and sexual minorities, the breakthrough of the late 1970s was less into theory and more away from formalism ... and into the possibility of relating English teaching and writing to left-wing political concerns.' And Edward Said has recently deplored 'the massive, intervening, institutionalised presence of theoretical discussion' as an obstacle to the 'historical study of texts'.²²

Nonetheless, without 'theory' it is difficult to speak of 'history' at all, to propose relations between history and textuality, or to bring this kind of analysis into connection with 'left-wing political concerns'. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the moment of high Althusserianism within the

literary academy, there was an attempt to produce a new general theoretical account of the status of literature in relation to the social/historical, and to develop a criticism that would deploy or activate this general theory. Some valuable studies (for instance, Penny Boumelha's *Thomas Hardy and Women*) expressed an indebtedness to this work. Nonetheless, it moved, in my view, at an unhelpful level of generality and was eminently vulnerable to the kinds of humanist mockery that E. P. Thompson directed at Eagleton in *The Poverty of Theory*.²³ It is far from clear that the abstractions of the critical-theoretical programme actually helped much when it came to the historical analysis of literature: what Macherey says about Jules Verne, for instance, in his *Theory of Literary Production* (the key text of this moment), is interesting and not altogether obvious, but hardly requires the particular theory to whose extensive (and often question-begging) elaboration the earlier part of the book is devoted.

Apart from its limited usefulness, high theoretical discussion of literature and ideology sometimes licensed that kind of criticism in which the critic, possessed of the master-discourse of the ideological (and enjoying the benefit of hindsight), carries out a series of forensic procedures on the body, or corpse, of the text. It is hard to know which to admire most, the critics' technical sophistication or their political virtue: in both departments the poet comes a long way behind.²⁴ The problem with this tone is not, I think, a superficial one: it betrays a kind of impatience with the literary which is not perhaps quite what one hopes for in the critic or cultural historian.

Be that as it may, the moment of Althusserianism has passed now, and in recent years Foucault and Bakhtin have been at least as influential as Althusser, Gramsci or Marx himself. There has been a shift from materialism towards a discursive conception of language less as an effect than as an instance (even a primary instance) of power. It is of course debatable whether such a loose notion of 'discourse' must or even can support a socialist politics of the kind which Marxist conceptions of ideology (however problematic) offered to validate. The adoption of a loosely Foucauldian view of power/language, going along with an interrogation of the text from the perspective of culturally marginal groups, has meant that the politics of recent radical criticism have often been more about identity (gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity) than about class.

To judge the potential and the limitations of this kind of 'identity politics' is to take on general theoretical and political questions which I do no more than mention here, turning, in my final section, to some more narrowly academic matters.

Foregrounding the Literary Text

If a 'weak' conceptualisation of literature as discourse has taken the place of a problematic but 'stronger' theorisation of the literary as related to the ideological, we are left with the critical and pedagogical question: how to teach, and write about, the literary as part of the discursive?

By the discursive we can by no means understand simply other more popular fictional texts alongside the existing high literary canon. A cultural-historical contextualisation of the literary requires us to attend to non-fictional written discourses such as politicians' speeches, legal and medical texts, journalism. It also requires attention to non-written texts (to take one example, the cultural production of 'Englishness' this century has been centred not just in writing, but in visual art and film), though my impression is that many attempts to bring literary criticism under the aegis of cultural studies have hitherto neglected this need for an interdisciplinary curriculum. The instances of cultural production reviewed will evidently be selected in accordance both with the theme we are pursuing – sexualities, national identity, eugenics and 'degeneracy', or whatever – and with the historical period in question: debate in the Victorian periodical press, for instance, makes an appropriate context for Victorian novels, whose address was to that audience and which were indeed often themselves published in those places.

Within a survey of cultural history, the literary text may well be regarded just as part of this wider discursive fabric; and its overall tendency summed up as part of a broader characterisation of the period in question.²⁵ The complexities of the text are readily ignored in such an approach, which calls on it to illustrate or confirm patterns of signification already traced elsewhere. However there is another kind of work, which foregrounds the text in order to engage with its internal and often contradictory play of meaning and establish its detailed relations with other cultural practices and languages.²⁶ It is in this context that we may be able to specify qualities of the literary text which, because they indicate how texts can be fruitfully taught and discussed, also go some way towards demonstrating why they are worth special attention. I conclude by commenting on some methodological issues which arise here and which perhaps have wider implications for the development of an evaluative approach to cultural production which does not seek value only or mainly in the kinds of (formal) properties traditionally associated with literary aesthetics.

Within 'cultural studies' conceived as the study of signification, to select any text for particular attention cannot but involve the production of a foreground-background perspective. If the selected text is at all complex and substantial, it inevitably appears *excessive*: the 'background' of other texts, as 'discourse' or 'signification' in general, acquires a kind of blank generality, while the work in the 'foreground' takes on a voluble specificity which continually drags us away from whatever questions we have already designated, towards the proliferating meanings of *this* text. For instance: we have chosen *Jude* because we are interested in constructions of gender and sexuality, but we find ourselves talking about the relation, then and now, between education and social mobility, or wondering why, when Hardy is reputed to be a 'pastoral' novelist, the few rural scenes in the novel are notably plain and brusque. In my view this foregrounding should not be regarded as a perhaps regrettable effect of necessary

pedagogical practices (to do with the need for reading lists and the availability of books), but defended, theoretically, as a proper way to grasp the cultural-historical.

In the first place, the variousness of the text, its sliding away from whatever point we would like to nail it down to and towards other matters related to other kinds of interest, should usefully remind us of the relativity of our own definition of what matters. Secondly, engagement with fictions of subjectivity will make us aware that the thematic and conceptual organisation which we deploy, when we isolate (for instance) 'gender', violates the actual interconnectedness among aspects of identity and social subjectivity as they arise in fictions. We may decline to believe in any notional full humanist subject whose being would transcend these partial specifications; but we will be reminded that at any rate, subjects of the kind whose representation is central to the procedures of complex fictional texts (as opposed to some theoretical or historical texts) never come into being except in the interplay between varied discourses. Moreover the 'contingent' elements in fictitious biographies parallel contingencies of life – the chances which fix birthplace, temperament and fortune – which while they resist theoretical reduction nonetheless have their determining influence on identity.

In these ways, the relations between the literary text and discourse in general can be seen as homologous with the relations between the subject and the social. If 'cultural studies' is concerned to analyse as a problem (rather than to expound as a truth) the social and discursive construction of identity, the foregrounded literary work offers for this analysis a kind of material which is not just particularly interesting, but indispensable.

Here we return to the tension between humanist and anti-humanist reading. In my view, both kinds of reading are required, both pedagogically and critically. To take *Jude* as an example one last time: it is clear that we can, and should, deconstruct the givenness of the two main female protagonists, demonstrating that they are produced within a familiar late Victorian binary opposition between madonna (Sue) and whore (Arabella). This refusal by the reader of offered subjectivities can extend also to other characters, and can involve us in contesting the unity and authority of the narrative voice. In all such moves, historicisation is important, allowing us to specify discourses, images and practices beyond the text which the novel articulates and/or with which it is in dialogue.²⁷ Critical practice of this kind is obviously anti-humanist in its subversion of stable, unified subjectivities and in its insistence on the discursive determination of identity – a subversion and an insistence in respect both of the text and of the social world.

Nonetheless, humanist identification is also required. At one level this is just a necessary adaptation to the act of reading, part of Coleridge's 'willing suspension of disbelief': it is known to every child that when we read novels or see plays, we must suspend our sceptical knowledge that these are not 'real people', or we can get nowhere. But a humanist reading plays its part also in our more sophisticated engagement and reflection. First of all (as in the case of

Jude: there are analogous critical and pedagogical strategies in other cases),²⁸ our rejection of the stereotypic binary definition of the feminine is motivated by our conviction that real women, at the time of the book's writing, could not be reduced to one or other of the available positions. And this appeal to an authentic identity *not* present in the text (without which the criticism is deprived of any political edge) is an appeal against the power of discourse in the name of that which discourse fails to represent. The crucial point, however, is that such a misfit between discursive construction and authentic subjective being is created within the text itself, both as a paradoxical effect and also as what we register as an intended, organised meaning. In Sue's case at least, this 'reading against the discursive' can be recognised as her own project. And the author too (it is necessary here to speak of Hardy as if he existed, if only to save time) is involved in this 'project', both in the banal sense that he wrote the book, and in the more complex sense that this meaning of *Jude*, this way of apprehending Sue as struggling in and against languages that would make her what she is not, is made available to us as a way of reading partly through the promptings and interventions of that same authorial voice which in some of its other interventions we may want to quarrel with, destabilise, and relativise as itself no more than the blotting-paper of received discourses written elsewhere.

To sum up: many literary texts (especially many plays and novels) offer this complex interplay between discursive construction of identity and refusal of that construction.²⁹ (These are rather likely to be the texts we used always to call 'good', since the kind of complexity we are discussing obviously tends to arise where characterisation is subtle and non-stereotypic.) Grappling with that complexity, using simultaneously a language of constructed subjectivity and a language of authenticity, a language of decentred textual signification and a language of readerly interpretation and authorial intention, we are inevitably engaged with questions that go to the heart of textuality and representation, of the social forms of identity, and therefore of the reasons why literature has been and is important.



Notes

The opportunity to attend the English Graduate Colloquium at the University of Sussex has been a valuable stimulus to my thinking on the questions which this essay addresses. I have learned a lot through teaching and designing Continuing Education courses with my colleague Nannette Aldred. I am much indebted to Kate Soper, for her scepticism as well as her support during many conversations on the themes of this essay. I am also grateful to those who commented critically on the original version of this article as submitted to RP.

- 1 Here I focus exclusively on this aspect of the 'crisis in English studies' and do not discuss the influence (particularly strong in the USA) of Derridean deconstruction and more generally of new (or apparently new) varieties of close textual reading. For an overview of the field, see Patrick Brantlinger's recent (1990) study, *Crusoe's Footprints: Cultural Studies in Britain and America*, which, however, perhaps overstates the importance of literary studies within the overall development.
- 2 Some important books which have contributed to and which reflect these shifts within English literary criticism are listed in the bibliography. This is not meant as an exhaustive list. It reflects my own particular interests.
- 3 Bennett, p. 285.
- 4 In Williams, 1983, pp. 192–211.
- 5 Easthope's account of the 'old paradigm' is notably more convincing than his sketch of the new one, as I argue in my review of the book in *RP* 64.
- 6 Eagleton, 1976, p. 164.
- 7 But see also Bennett, chapters 5–7, for a full discussion. Eagleton's own account in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* is obviously grounded in much wider philosophical reference than this earlier, and influential, chapter in *Criticism and Ideology*.
- 8 See Steven Connor, *Theory and Cultural Value*, 1992.
- 9 Lillian S. Robinson, 'Treason our Text: Feminist Challenges to the Literary Canon', in Showalter, 1986, pp. 105–121.
- 10 The discussion in Bennett traces this argument back to its Kantian formulation.
- 11 Bennett, pp. 150–165.
- 12 In Orwell, *Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters* (Penguin ed., 1970 etc.), vol. 1, p. 289.
- 13 The secure place that Hardy now holds in the taught canon of nineteenth-century texts derives both from the arguments of radical critics (from Williams on: see *The Country and the City*) and from the continuing popular success of his work, with the major novels more or less continuously in print since the early twentieth century. Leavis, in *The Great Tradition*, notoriously felt that Henry James had 'struck the appropriate note' in his dismissive remarks on *Tess* ('the good little Thomas Hardy' etcetera). C. H. Sisson, who would probably be flattered to be described as a surviving English purist, allows himself a few gibes at the aesthetic deficiencies of *Jude* in his Preface to the Penguin edition (where he also describes Sue Bridehead as a 'bluestocking').
- 14 In his interview with *Radical Philosophy* 63, p. 24.
- 15 See Boumelha for a full discussion of how *Jude* is related to the literature of 'new woman' and 'anti-marriage' fiction.
- 16 Paul Brown, 'This Thing of Darkness I Acknowledge Mine', in Dollimore and Sinfield, 1985.
- 17 Said interview (see note 14 above): there is a discussion of the topic in Said's new book, *Culture and Imperialism*.
- 18 It is of course true that earlier critics, not all of them Marxists, had sometimes, e.g. in Humphry House's celebrated work on Dickens (*The Dickens World*, 1941), produced work which anticipates 'cultural materialism'. However, there has been a significant increase in both the amount and the sophistication of work produced since the early 1980s.
- 19 See especially Moi's discussion of humanist and anti-humanist

feminist criticism in the Introduction to *Sexual/Textual Politics*.

- 20 Gilbert and Gubar, 1979, is an influential instance of this kind of reevaluation, which includes chapters on the work of the Brontës.
- 21 See the essays in *Political Shakespeare* (ed. Dollimore and Sinfield, 1985); these include work written with close attention to the politics of race and class, as well as gender. See also Sinfield, 1992.
- 22 Sinfield, 1992, p. 8; Said interview (see note 14 above), p. 26.
- 23 E. P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory*, 1978, p. 358. Eagleton's elaborate terminology made *Criticism and Ideology* a particularly tempting butt, but similar substantive criticisms might have been made of elements in the influential books by Belsey and Wolff, and indeed of the Williams of *Marxism and Literature*.
- 24 Barrell's essay on Wordsworth (in Barrell, 1988) is an instance of useful historical commentary spoiled by this kind of tone – a tone found also in some of the essays in Glosersmith, in passages of Eagleton's *Criticism and Ideology*, and elsewhere.
- 25 As, for instance, in some of the discussion in Showalter, 1992 or Sinfield, 1989.
- 26 For instance, Boumelha, much of Sinfield, 1992, Stallybrass and White, or Watson.
- 27 It is thanks rather to its provision of this kind of evidence than to its Althusserian rigour that Boumelha's book is invaluable.
- 28 Sinfield pursues a similar tack in his re-readings of *Twelfth Night* and other plays in *Faultlines* – even though in his discussion in the early part of the book, he seems to opt for anti-humanism.
- 29 The centrality of the *Bildungsroman* owes something to the way in which it foregrounds this characteristic quality of fiction. *Jude* is Hardy's *Bildungsroman*, even though (unusually for the genre) it was his last novel. Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* (a far better example than *Pride and Prejudice*, discussed by Franco Moretti in *The Way of the World*) is an earlier case in point; Joyce's *Portrait* is a later one.

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