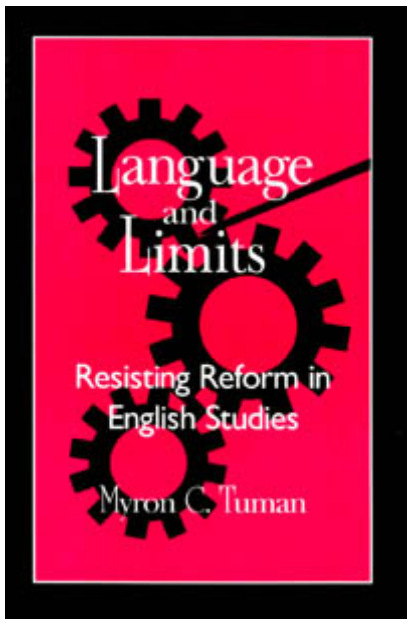



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Limits

Resisting Reform in English Studies

Myron C. Tuman

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*For Ginny (as always)*
*and the many other gifted teachers I have known*

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Contents

Preface

*I have stated that the type of abstract philosophical criticism prevalent in our day is detrimental to poetry, but only if imparted as school-subject to adolescents. That type of criticism benumbs their imagination and stupefies their memory, whereas poets are endowed with surpassing imagination, and their immanent spirit is Memory, with her children, the Muses.*
Vico, *On the Study Methods of Our Time*

What has long been the aesthetic core at the center of English studiesa sense that reading and, to a lesser extent, writing entail a form of imaginative inhabiting of another world (what in this study will be called *deep language*)is now widely under attack by any number of disciplinary and cultural forces, for the most part posing as *reforms*. This work looks closely at one such reform effort: the movement to place the mastery of a new, higher form of thinking (a kind of thinking often referred to as "critical") at the center of contemporary language study. Subjecting this reform movement within English studies to analysis is likely to be neither an easy task nor a popular one, given the broad-based, commonsensical, seemingly incontrovertible status that *critical* seems to have achieved in adjectival form. Pedagogic reforms labeled as *critical* now seem to have the widest possible cultural endorsements. Who could possibly oppose the notion that teaching students to think critically needs to be at the center

of our educational efforts within English studies as well as all levels of the language arts curriculum? And what would replace this new emphasis on critical analysis: certainly not some form of *uncritical* language education that teaches students to accept, without careful examination, the assumptions of others?

Clearly, one can get nowhere with such an analysis of the reform of educational practices if one accepts the terms "critical" and "uncritical" at face value: that is, if one accepts a whole class of pedagogic practice as being inherently and necessarily "critical" (whatever that means) while all other forms of educational practice (especially those forms that do not proclaim themselves to be "critical") are just as inherently and as necessarily "uncritical." A critique such as this of new pedagogic practices carried out in the name of a higher, "critical" level of thinking can only proceed by placing the central terms of debate themselves under careful (critical?) analysis. This study does so by focusing on two main concerns: first, the methodological and ontological assumptions of this new critical practice that can be expressed as a theory of literacy (What it means to read and to write *critically*? What makes a text or an assertion *critical*, for example, as compared to aesthetic?); and second, the historical connections between oppositional or resistant thinking and another, essentially aesthetic, set of reading and writing practices that arguably has been at the center of English studies for most of the last two centuries. The overarching thesis of this study is that these two forms of literacy practicethe reform efforts now promoted as a new critical pedagogy and this other, unreconstructed practice, involving empathic, imaginative attachment to other ways of beinghave historically complemented one another, each in its own way devoted to coping with the rampant, often disruptive social change that has characterized modern industrial society.

Education in such a world has long been seen as a process for training individuals and groups to deal effectively with an ever-changing present, in part by forging a personal future that offers them a modicum of protection from the most radical historical changes associated with constant free market economic expansion. On the one hand, the general effort within society to promote a higher level of critical practice, including efforts to make language pedagogy more critical, attempts to deal with such a shifting present by directing our attention to a utopian concern with reform, con-

stantly projecting for us a vision of a better, more just world. On the other hand, the deep-language practices at the center of English studies have continued to resist a wide array of reformspedagogic and socialpreferring to deal with the demands of the present by emphasizing our continual need to reestablish our attachment to the world we inhabit, in part by understanding it better, more deeply.

The primary audience for this critique of current critical reforms within English language studies is language educators themselves, especially those who work in college composition. Beyond professional educators, there are people with broad misgivings about reductionist, oversimplistic, even dogmatic aspects of many contemporary calls for remaking education. These are people who sense that much of what is being put forward as bold and radical solutions to social ills may well be little more than an old orthodoxy (for example, about the primacy of thought over feeling, philosophy over poetry) in a new garb. One goal of this study is to reassure language educators that we really do not have to start anew, to remake ourselves completelythat our traditions in the study and teaching of literature and composition, far from being benighted practices awaiting the transforming touch of the latest ideologues, are themselves, even in outwardly conservative moments, imbued with the spirit of resistance to the most threatening, disruptive practices of the modern world, practices often promoted in the name of reform. The practice of resisting such reforms has been and remains is at the historical core of English studies.

With this recognition of traditional practices as more resistant to dangerous political pressures than we often admit comes a strange and disturbing corollary: the possibility that the pedagogic practices currently promoted under the banner of reform, in the end, may turn out to be less resistant, more accommodative than those they stand to replace. That a weakening of this resistant spirit may be a central element in this current wave of pedagogic reformsspecifically the notion that the assumptions of critical pedagogy are themselves largely exempt from sustained critical inspectionwould be the irony of ironies and, if true, the ultimate danger: The undermining of students' power to think for themselves and hence to resist widespread cultural assumptions trumpeted as pedagogic reform. if true, then how appropriate: under what better banner to undermine the most resistant tradition of independent thinking,

and in turn to establish a new hegemony, a new ideology of control and allegiance, than one proclaiming the new supremacy of critical thought itself?

Given the seeming progressive direction of most aspects of pedagogic reform in English studies, the essay that follows might strike readers as a "conservative" sally in the contemporary culture wars. Two notable advocates of such reform, for example, James Berlin and Robert Scholes, come under attack in this study for narrowing and, in key ways, weakening the resistant power of the language curriculum, although in both cases, the attack is grounded, not in contemporary right-wing polemics, but in an alternative, older progressive tradition associated with thinkers like Alvin Gouldner, Christopher Lasch, and Herbert Marcuse. This work is put forward, then, as an attack, not on progressive goals, but on certain forms of leftist pedagogic practice, and specifically on their lasting connection to the Enlightenment and hence to the basic naïveté of its underlying utopian aspirations: especially the belief that progress is the natural order of human history and the corresponding belief that the one great obstacle to progress is prejudice, that is, other people's *unenlightened* view of the world. The principal target of this work is the smugness that too often locates the most significant obstacle to "literacy" and to social progress as a whole in *how other people think*. Behind so many reform efforts lies the broad-based assumption that, if only everyone thought like meif only everyone else were as open to change, as accepting of difference, as enlightened as I amthe barriers to social justice would crumble as so much dried clay.

This monograph represents a less sanguine view of the possibilities of pedagogic practice and, in turn, human history itselfa more somber view but still one with its own left-wing connections grounded in a recognition of limits, both human and natural. As such, this study of contemporary language practice can be seen as taking place in the context of the long-standing romantic critique of the Enlightenment faith that the just society (the city on the hill) is to be grounded on human reason. Two centuries ago, one of the first great critics of the Enlightenment and a prophet of limits, Thomas Malthus, formulated his great work on population as a corrective to what he saw as the unduly optimistic, reformist views of Godwin and Condorcet:

> Though human institutions appear to be the obvious and obtrusive causes of such mischief to mankind, yet, in reality they are light and superficial, they are mere feathers that float on the surface, in comparison with those deeper seated causes of impurity that corrupt the springs and render turbid the whole stream of human life. (xviiixix)

Malthus is not opposing progress here as much as what he sees as the false belief that progress is a readily attainable state (once humans are "enlightened"). Similarly, this monograph opposes, not the ideal of pedagogic reform based upon heightened critical analysis, but the largely unexamined assumption that students or anybody else can easily be made to think critically and in so doing to overcome the prejudice and distortions that others with greater historical power than ourselves introduce in order to subordinate our interests to theirs. Instead, this essay will claim, in many different ways, that real thinking (deep or critical) is only rarely attainedand, then, as likely to come, incompletely and not through reason, but through the deep, emotional attachments associated with metaphor and literary language. As such this essay may be read as an act of retro-criticism, one that, like the best contemporary retro-jazz artists such as saxophonist Scott Hamilton, attempts to enrich the present by giving new life to the best of our traditional modes of expression. Its ideal listener or reader is that person who, contemporary protestations about the need for critical resistance notwithstanding, remains emotionally attached to the aesthetic dimension of earlier, and, today, seemingly conservative, notions of deep reading and writing.

While this essay has neither the status nor scope of Malthus's work, it is part of the same Malthusean critique of modernitya critique grounded in the importance of recognizing limits, and thus a critique deeply resistant to untrammeled progress and the general overthrowing of local practice. It is a critique that most fulfills its own historical role by rejecting the legitimacy of the world of constant change that in large measure first nurtured this very tradition of resistance. Here, then, is the contradiction at the core of this monograph: the reform of pedagogy in the name of a higher level of critical thinking is today promoted in the language classroom as a form of social resistance, often opposed to tradition, but

so, this work will argue, is its apparent opposite, that whole strand of seemingly traditional language practice solidly in the way ofhence resistant tothe efforts to "reform" the English curriculum by making it more contemporary, more politically aware, more "critical." That this essay, so clearly in opposition to the reforming spirit of critical pedagogy, is itself thoroughly critical is a point readily conceded here, and at numerous other places belowbut where it differs even from the reforms of critical pedagogyin allegiance with Malthus and opposition to such Enlightenment thinkers as Godwin and Condorcetis in its belief that the most ennobling of such acts of resistance are less likely to be found in grand social theories pitting oppressed against oppressors than in a myriad of small-scale local practices that each in its own way reveals humans struggling to overcome, if only momentarily, the constraints that define our common historical condition.

Of these various local practices none is more important for this study than the one that has for the last two centuries been at the center of language study: namely, the reading and writing of literature itself. While the reformers of language pedagogy loudly announce themselves as the sole heirs to the modern tradition of resistance, we too often forget that modern literary study, with its emphasis on deep feeling, attachment, and compelling imagery, has long been *another*, less visible current of that tradition. English studies this centuryunreconstructed by advocates of various new critical reformshas been a key part of the "culture of modernity," a culture which philosopher Charles Taylor refers to as being characterized by "*grandeur* as well as by *misère*" (*Ethics* 12021). A major goal of this work is to reveal this resistant streak in English studies over the last two centuries and hence to reveal this discipline, even in its most aesthetic, unreformed moments, as still that most resistant of academic subjects. English studies, even in its fallen, unreconstructed state, remains one vital part of the culture of modernity for which we need offer no apologies.

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One
Lying Cretans, or the Paradox of Critical Thinking

*For the contest is great, my dear Glaucon," I said, "greater than it seemsthis contest that concerns becoming good or badso we mustn't be tempted by honor or money or any ruling office or, for that matter, poetry, into thinking that it's worthwhile to neglect justice and the rest of virtue.*
The Republic of Plato

An Aura of Suspicion

What is this "contest" that Socrates considers herethis struggle between "becoming good or bad" cast as a test of our individual character and collective will? What kind of contest is this that demands that we remain resolute against, not just the enticements of wealth and fame, but also that least likely of temptations, poetry? Are we not more accustomed to seeing poetry presented as a palliative that might help restore our fallen spirit but which, out of sloth or some other vice, we resist taking? And if poetry (here a metaphor for all of literature and perhaps aesthetic experience, even feeling, as well) is the enemy, then who are our allies, if not some form of writing or thinking that is decidedly unpoetic, unliterary, anti-aestheticor,

stated positively, some form of writing and thinking that is determinedly analytical or critical? If Socrates' concern is the same as oursthe long-standing tension between critical and aesthetic thinkingthen is there not much for us to learn in where his real interests lie, perhaps less with logic, rational control, or objectivity (three things long associated with critical thinking) than with matters of ethics and specifically with the overriding demand that we reform how we live?

The call for a critical pedagogy, as expressed here in one of its earliest forms, appears to be fundamentally more concerned with ethical reform than social analysis: more concerned with the good than the true. Its motive seems to be less to understand the world than to resist it, as the first crucial step in changing it presumably by replacing current practices with better ones, namely, those that move us closer to the ideal of universal justice. When the issue is justice, in Socrates' words, "becoming good or bad"replacing the unjust world we all know with something bettercan aesthetic questions relating to the emotive state of readers be seen as anything other than self-indulgence, a form of moral laxity and corruption?

Yet what a strange, frightening world Socrates depictsthis warlike world of allies and enemies, with the decadence of poetry associated with indulgence and pitted against the self-denial of resistance, the right living of critical thought! What an odd stance for philosophy, we may wonder, with its apparent concern for objectivity! Are we wrong to suppose that Plato, philosopher and author of *The Republic*, in this passage is more interested in promoting virtue than truth, or is critical truth even here best seen as an arm in the battle for social change, progress?

Is not the principal question we are raising one of motives, and of trust? Can we finally trust the truthfulness of a philosopher, or an educator, whose main concern seems to be largely with moral reform, that is, more with changing the world than with understanding who we are? Or to focus more directly on the concerns of this essay, just what are we to make of language educators who laud either the ethical value or the objectivity of critical analysis over the dangers and misrepresentations of literature, and in some extreme cases, of reading and writing themselves? Just how are we to respond, for example, to an impassioned book like J. Elspeth Stuckey's *The Violence of Literacy* that attacks the tyranny of modern

language study and the educational system organized to train people to read and even write books like her own? Are we not in danger of falling into the classic paradox of the Cretan philosopher who warns us about the lack of trustworthiness of people from Crete? Is not Stuckey's book a type of warning about Cretans, or English teachers, from a fellow resident of Cretein this particular case arguing that literacy is "a system of oppression that works against entire societies as well as against certain groups within given populations and against individual people" (64)?

One way out of the paradox of the Cretan philosopher and hence to a better understanding of the current pedagogic conflict between critical analysis and aesthetic expression may be to recognize the two different ways of viewing Stuckey's assertions about language. On the one hand, there is the truth of the utterances themselves, what might be called the *phenomenological claim* that each assertion makes on us by holding up something before us that strikes us as truthful. "Ah, yes," we say, "here's an insight: Now I can see that reading and writing teachers, like Cretans, really are a deceptive group." In understanding the utterance we feel enlightened; in focusing on the text itself, we trust its speaker as a spokesperson for truth, ignoring whether or not she too is a teacher of reading and writing or, in the case of the ancient paradox, the philosopher's own place of origin. Here we believe, logical consistency notwithstanding, that certain truthsperhaps ones uttered by individuals with a special status, such as philosophers or authorshave a universal or transcendent quality that prevents them from being entirely reducible to the circumstances in which they were generated. As receivers of such a phenomenological claim, we shed much of our skepticism; we believe in the value of the message and subsequently trust the messenger, not because we know the person's profession or origin, but as a source of an insight that we ourselves find valuable.

On the other hand, we can have a quite different relationship to this assertion, one based not on passive acceptance of the phenomenological claim but on our active ability to judge the validity of the claim based on an expanded knowledge of the world. In this alternative mode, grasping the phenomenological claim of the text is only a first step in true understanding. We then must transform that first insight into a more rational basis for our acting in the world: "I'm not fooled," we respond; "the speaker is herself a writing

teacher or a Cretan, and, consequently, not trustworthy." Countering the seductive phenomenological claim of all statements is our own exercise of *critical control*, an exercise based on our ability to assess and then act on phenomenological claims, in this case, the self-referential claim that undermines the speaker's own trustworthiness. With critical control, the reader remains outside the spell of the text, informed but largely unmoved by the message itself and thus free to arrive at a conclusion about the relative untrustworthiness of all speakers and about the special untrustworthiness of this particular message.

What is important here is the broad status of the current assumption that our exercise of critical control is the stronger of two responses to the text, essentially working against, or enveloping, a text's phenomenological claim. First, it seems, we have to consider the claim of the texta false allure that often would have us act against our own intereststhen we have to exercise control over that claim. First we receive the warning about Cretans, then we act on it by questioning the speaker's reliability. The claim of the text appeals to our emotions in the private act of reading, whereas in exercising critical control we act rationally and in a wider social context, guided by a simple and direct message: Be wary. This contrast between the private emotional claim of the text on largely passive readers and the active, public critical control of readers permeates contemporary discussions of language education; or to anticipate the current position, the one persistent phenomenological claim of the professionin conference after conference, lecture after lecture, and, most telling of all, book after bookis the primacy of critical control, the need for readers to get beyond the private, phenomenological claim of texts in order to exercise rational control over what they read and over cultural sign-systems in general. It is the need for suspicion before all texts, especially those most likely to act on us emotionallywhat phenomenological critic Joel Weinsheimer refers to as the *classic*, the text that has an extrarational authority over us, that makes a claim on us, either by virtue of its status within a venerated tradition or by the intense emotional experience it engenders within us.

One such conference of language educators that emphasized this contrast between phenomenological claim and critical control was the English Coalition Conference, a gathering of sixty English educators who met at Wye Plantation in Eastern Maryland for

three weeks in the summer of 1987 and subsequently produced two books, an official publication edited by Richard Lloyd-Jones and Andrea Lunsford and subtitled *Democracy Through Language*, and an unofficial account, *What Is English?* by Peter Elbow. This conference represented all levels of language instruction, elementary through college, and what is important here is the high degree of consensus this diverse group reached about achieving and maintaining, not a delicate balance between phenomenological claim and critical control, or between poetry and criticism, but instead the dominance of the latter over the former. We need to see past the emotional appeal of texts, the conference participants tell us in a multitude of ways, to see such phenomenological claims for what they really are: a disguised and potentially injurious means of short-circuiting our ability to respond critically. At the heart of language is, not poetry, not the rich, imaginative sharing of momentary insights in the midst of our collective ignorance, but social interaction between individuals and groups with diverse and conflicting interests. Verbal meanings arise, not out of inspiration or personal reflection or even accident, but through purposeful, goal-directed social interactionhence the oft-repeated imperative for students to become active language users, less by digging deep within their own experiences to explore what is rare and half-hidden, than by stiffening their resolve in dealing with others. The key admonition for students and all readers is not to be mislead by appearances but instead to root out other people's real motives and in so doing to take responsibility for their own language useall as a means of learning that the principal use of language is not poetic expression, not delight or wonderment, but control of the world through critical reflection, often upon the workings of language itself. As Elbow states, "The way of talking that probably best sums up this idea for all participants is this: learning involves *making of meaning* and the *reflecting back on this process of making meaning*not the ingestion of a list or a body of information. At all levels we stressed how this central activity is deeply social" (18).

The positive imagery here, of students as active builders versus passive consumers, people who "ingest" information as just another product, deflects real opposition (and therein weakening the very opposing voice it claims to be fostering) by caricaturing and eventually demonizing other long-standing and once dominant traditions of language learning that emphasized such things as poetic

expression, a distinct literary tradition (reading the classics), or even the far humbler work of mastering a distinct set of reading and writing skills. As we are thus told in the first principle of the Secondary Strand (the secondary school section), "Learning is the process of actively constructing meaning from experiences" (Lloyd-Jones and Lunsford 17), and, by definition, all nonactive learning becomes nonlearning. The new critical pedagogy, outwardly so insistent upon the value of questioning and open debate, seems to encourage an oversimplification that stifles debate by separating all parties into one of two camps: the electactive, critical learners who question everything, except, perhaps, the need to question everythingand everyone else. Critical teaching, argue two forceful spokespeople for this new sensibility, Cy Knoblauch and Lil Brannon, "presumes that a critical citizenry, willing as well as able to take responsibility for the nation's future, is preferable to a passive, unengaged citizenry that lets government, business, and mass media do its thinking" (6).

James Berlin, in his posthumous *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures*, echoes this call for an "education [that] exists to provide intelligent, articulate, and responsible citizens who understand their obligation and their right to insist that economic, social, and political power be exerted in the best interests of the community" (52). But what, we must ask, is the source of this new-found student power? Stand up for what is right, students are urged, but how are they to know what is right, other than to look around and see the obvious: Who is just and who is unjust? "We must take as our province the production and reception of semiotic codes," Berlin argues, "providing students with the heuristics to penetrate these codes and their ideological designs on our formation as subjects" (93). Is this anything more than the traditional claim of teachers who want to pass on their knowledge and wisdom to their students? "Attempts to negotiate and resist semiotically enforced cultural codes," Berlin adds, "can take place only when these codes can be named and interrogated in reading and writing, and this is a central role of the teacher in the literacy classroom" (112). Yet just how are we to do this as teacherstrain students to use reading and writing to see the truthunless, of course, the battle between justice and injustice, or between good and evil, is easily there for all to discern (that is, does not require any special reading and writing skills), if only people commit to seeing the world with a clean heart?

This new English teacher exhortsand often seems to do little else: rarely in Berlin or in Knoblauch and Brannon are we given images of other well-established learning traditions that for centuries have helped students, albeit often indirectly, better understand the world and themselves. In the drive to reform the curriculum, anything that is not active resistance is reduced to blind, mindless passivity. Consequently, there are few positive representations of the value of meditation, introspection, and soul-searching. Rarely do we find praise for the discipline of solitary practice often involving a near-compulsive imitation that, counterintuitively, excites the youthful genius even more often than the drone. Advocates of restructuring literacy education under the banner of critical language largely ignore our delight in manipulating preexisting forms and patterns, our desire for that form of creativity that entails both variation and repetition, that is, for what Michael Oakeshott calls the "practical knowledge [that] can neither be taught nor learned, but only imparted and acquired" and then "only by continuous contact with one who is perpetually practicing it" (11). Nor are they likely to deal with the meditative repose associated with the loss of self that we all feel, as novices or experts, in mastering a well-established craft, from playing the violin to molding clay, in many cases often with the help of a master teacher.

Similarly, seldom do these reformers deal with the constructive, truth-finding roles of fantasy, fiction, misrepresentation, lying, and, above all, metaphor. Instead, we are given picture after picture of beginning students, not as clumsy neophytes, but as *active meaning-makers* who, much in the mold of budding social scientists, use language to investigate both the world at large (including the motives of their own teachers) and, more importantly, self-reflectively, language itself, in the process coming to see what many of their teachers are presumably blind to and hence has to be explained to them in pamphlet after pamphlet: how existing power relations permeate and control language use. Verbal meaning does not take place in a vacuum, we are repeatedly told, but in a social world characterized by the unequal and unjust distribution of power. To be *critical*, accordingly, is not an abstraction or a vague synonym with being objectiveit is instead to be objective in a special way, namely, by recognizing and resisting this pervasive inequality and lack of social and economic justice, in part by insisting on the social negotiation of meaning as a key means of correcting broader social inequities.

The focus of English as an academic discipline becomes, not what it has been for most of its hundred plus years of academic existence, the study of aesthetically heightened textsthat is, the study of literaturebut instead the general study of the *production* of literature and texts themselves, or what might be called the sociology of literature. "Above all," writes Elbow, our concern must be "about making knowledge rather than about studying already existing knowledge" (118). The idea of literature as a special category of writing grounded in aesthetic experiencelong a mainstay of English as an academic disciplineis thus largely refuted by the English Coalition Conference. The older notion was present in the 1966 Dartmouth Conference, where literature was cited as a unifying force in modern life to be read "for its own sake, as its own reward," or in the words of British critic Denys Thompson, quoted by Herbert Muller (like Elbow, the unofficial recorder of events), as "stand[ing] for humanity at a time when the human values are not upheld, as they used to be, by religion and the home, or even by education itself as a whole" (77). Some twenty years later, Elbow tells us that "the question of literature was left strikingly moot" by the English Coalition Conference, adding, "Not only was there no consensus, there was a striking avoidance of the issue" (96).

Elbow's evaluation of the status of literature, however, is misleading. The coalition was silent only on the issue of traditional literature, including Shakespeare, the historical core of English studies and also on the matter of which texts to study. It was not silent on the more basic question of redefining the very term *literature* by questioning and then eliminating fiction, poetry, and drama as special categories of writing deserving extra attention by readers and in turn offering them extra rewards. Here the work of participant Robert Scholes, quoted by Elbow, played a key role: "To put it as directly, and perhaps as brutally, as possible, we must stop 'teaching literature' and start 'studying texts.' . . . Our favorite works of literature need not be lost in this new enterprise, but the exclusivity of literature as a category must be discarded" (Scholes 16). And, it should be added, once this change is effected, with the ability to "use the term *language arts* interchangeably with *English studies*" (xxi), much as the term *social studies* now often replaces the more traditional, narrative form, *history.*

The implication here and, as we shall see, a chief motivating force of the new critical pedagogic reformers is the belief that the

same social, political, and economic forces that distort all human relations are never absent from language use or, in Stuckey's critique, from education. To the extent that these forces remain unexamined (especially in those most seductive, hence most dangerous of all texts, emotion-packed literature), moreover, there is little being done to prevent the powerful from using language to control the powerless. "Our larger purpose," writes Berlin, "is to encourage students to negotiate and resist these [cultural] codesthese hegemonic discoursesto bring about more democratic and personally humane economic, social, and political arrangements" (*Rhetorics* 116). To be *uncritical* in a classroom setting, therefore, becomes less a failure of thought processes than of social and moral will, less a matter of subjectivity than an immoral unwillingness to oppose injustice.

"Oppression," conclude Knoblauch and Brannon, "in the service of privilege is a persistent social condition, which critical consciousness aims to expose and relieve" (163). The *uncritical* is not so much wrong-headed as wrong-hearted, if not evil. Everywhere in the reformist calls for more critical language instruction there is a palpable aura of suspicion, at times almost an incipient paranoia, directed toward an ill-defined but seemingly omnipresent "other," and cultivated by authorities within the profession who seem to be untiring in proselytizing the virtues of self-criticism, albeit often to true believers. "Language practices," goes the steady drumroll, "enforce a set of ideological prescriptions regarding the nature of 'reality'" (Berlin, "Rhetoric" 35).

The problem here is not with the assertion that language distorts: no one can deny that language hides as often as it reveals, or, perhaps more accurately, hides what (and while) it reveals. We are all deceived much of the time and about many, if not most, things, especially those closest to ourselves, those that most directly relate to our self image. The problem with Berlin and other vigorous advocates of a new critical pedagogic reform is not with the diagnosis (the Nietzschean notion that misrepresentation is a given of the human condition), but with their pervasive optimism regarding treatment for the problem: namely, their belief in how easily we can overcome linguistic, even ideological, distortion. For partisans like Berlin, it is as if the language of distortion magically falls away when one claims the moral high ground, claims for one's own discipline, as Berlin does, the one great task of education, "no

less ambitious than [of] distinguishing true from untrue discourse in disputations about power and privilege" ("Composition Studies" 103).

At the core of Berlin's pedagogy is a commitment to an overt, unambiguous announcement of its break with past practices, or at least a break with an ideological projection of those practices. Everywhere the basic opposition is between a yet-to-be-enacted reform (what I do and am urging others to do) and a widespread traditional practice (what everyone else now does). One is reminded of the great Enlightenment thinker Condorcet and his boundless optimism that the apparent multiplicity of knowledge in the world would have little impact upon our ability to teach people (even "those who can study only for a small number of years in childhood" 233) the few basic truths that would liberate them. His secret: focus exclusively on that which "excludes all dependence, either forced or voluntary." As with Berlin, Condorcet places his utopian hope for students, not in the mastery of a living tradition (not in being taught how presumably I myself was taught), but in their following me now in leapfrogging current practice, thus avoiding how everyone else teaches:

> We shall prove that, by a suitable choice of syllabus and of methods of education, we can teach the citizen everything that he needs to know in order to be able to manage his household, administer his affairs, and employ his labor and his faculties in freedom; to know his rights and to be able to exercise them; to be acquainted with his duties and fulfill them satisfactorily; to judge his own and other men's actions according to his own lights and be a stranger to none of the high and delicate feelings which honor human nature; not to be in a state of blind dependence upon those to whom he must entrust his affairs or the exercise of his rights; to be in a proper condition to choose and supervise them; to be no longer the dupe of those popular errors which torment man with superstitious fears and chimerical hopes; to defend himself against prejudice by the strength of reason alone; and, finally, to escape the deceits of charlatans who lay snares for his fortune, his health, his freedom of thought and his conscience under the pretext of granting him health, wealth, and salvation. (23334)

There are two hundred years, but only a short ideological jump, between Condorcet's plan for banishing all ignorance with a year or two of the right kind of schooling and the very first call from the College Strand of the English Coalition for producing students "who are able to reflect critically on their own learning" (Lloyd-Jones and Lunsford 25), and hence able to question the validity of their teachers. The result is the ultimate critical pedagogy, a teacher-proof method of freeing students from all educational biases, even those inherent in the teachers themselves and hence in the very curriculum being taught to the students in questionunless, protestations notwithstanding, such rigorous and rigid self-questioning (of everything but self-questioning) results in making students clones of their teachers.

Current classroom practice is thus regularly reduced to an uncritical extension of a benighted, reactionary tradition, presumably the source of all our troubles in the first place. "What are seen as 'normal' or 'assumed' or 'obviously true' views or practiceseven 'always already' principles," Elbow recites as the "dominant theme" of the coalition, "must be recognized to be just as much 'special interests' as the views or practices commonly labeled as special interest" (79). In such words we find Stuckey's basic insight elevated to the one universal theme of contemporary language instruction. As a profession, Elbow warns, we have aligned ourselves with "groups in power [who] tend to label smaller groups as special interest, not seeing that they themselves are special interest." Like a serpent with its fangs tightly embedded in its own tail, reformers of language education often seem fixated on a single enemy: the other, that projection of pedagogic practices as represented (or caricatured) by our worst teachers, that is, in a vision of how the unenlightened, how *everyone else*, continues to teach reading and writing.

Empowerment

It is new pedagogic practice, one labeled as *critical*, that provides the one clear break with the past. A critical pedagogy, in compelling students to question authority and tradition, thus becomes *the* exception to the reactionary nature of current language instruction, the one form of revolutionary practice that furthers the broad

democratic ideal of more even distribution of power and wealth by giving students from lower social groups with relatively less power and wealth one tool they can use to help correct the system: critical language learning, or critical literacy, as a means of political empowerment. "As students learn to reflect on their own practices in reading and writing," Elbow writes, "they will become more self-aware, more independent and strong as readers and writers" (51).

Self-reflection, as the first step in self-empowerment, must start with language educators themselves, the audience of the English Coalition. While there is nothing in Elbow's report as blunt as Stuckey's warning that English teachers may be just another special interest group, we are repeatedly told that "nothing must be taken as normal, neutral, disinterested, inevitable, necessary, objective" (79). Yet the effect of this warning is to alert us more about the trustworthiness of "others"Cretans generallythan about the trustworthiness of the current speaker, than about *our* trustworthiness, than about the inherent duplicity of reason and language itself. We are urged to be wary readers of everything, to recognize that all people need "to take charge of their reading and writing processes and not be told what's right by virtue of authority" (79), hence, in theory at least, to question the basis for the selection of the sixty English teachers who formed the English Coalition Conference. What, we need to ask, was the real purposethe hidden agendaof this conference? "After all," concludes Wayne Booth in his foreword, "it is only when we teachers engage in reflection on what we want to learn and why, only when we 'take responsibility for our meanings,' that we become models of what we want our students to become" (xii).

The explicit message here is to question everyone, starting with one's teachers, and thus presumably, beginning with the very producers of the coalition report. What qualities did these sixty educators have that identified them as "representative"? What benefits did they receive for their efforts? And, on a deeper level, how did the eventual consensus they arrived atthe pervasive distrust of tradition, literary and otherwise, already notedreflect their own individual and collective historical situations, for example, within a profession once historically dominated by men of European descent and now one of the more conspicuous places within the national economy providing opportunities to women and people of color (although, perhaps significantly, predominantly in the lower

professional rungs), or within the larger picture of the role of an emerging professional class in a late-capitalist economic order that at times seems to totter on the brink of collapse itself, balanced as it seems between the need for ever more efficient economic production and ever more wasteful consumption?

Important questions, few would denyand questions that will be addressed belowbut questions promoting skepticism of the English Coalition findings that few readers, including those most accepting of the call for placing critical analysis at the center of language study, are themselves likely to pursue in any systematic fashion, and indeed questions that, if passionately pursued, would lead to a radical skepticism ("All argument is special pleading") that might end up undermining most of the specific reforms advocated by the Coalition Conference as well as the possibility of any long-term, systematic pedagogic reform. Or to take a somewhat different tack, why do we assume that radical skepticism by teachers or students will lead to democratic reforms within education, especially when comparable skepticism in the body politic seems as often as not to be a breeding ground, not for egalitarian reform, but for populist, anti-intellectual, and reactionary attacks on any and all systematic efforts at such reform? Current political skepticism often seems aimed, not at the sources of repression and inequality (corporate especially), but at government itself, the media, the liberal establishment, Washington insiders, intellectuals and experts generally, or anyone or anything else seen as hostile to populist, often reactionary notions of "personal freedom." Why then the assumption that skepticism nurtured by rigorous critical analysis leads away from rather than toward the latent anti-intellectualism seemingly indigenous to American lifethat is, why do we assume that radical skepticism is an especially useful pedagogic tool in countering the divisive, right-wing, neopopulist forces that are never far below the surface of our social existence and seem to thrive in the open forums of radio talk shows?

One response to such questions is the observation that the call for basing language education on a new critical practice is far less radical than it seems, entailing the overthrow, not of all teachers and all practice, but only the "bad" practice of "other" teachers. Indeed, the entire organization and production of the English Coalition Conference can be seen as growing out of the desire to thwart such radical skepticism, mainly by producing an authoritative

utteranceto codify the "good" practice of "good" teachersand hence an utterance capable of changing the practice of others in the profession. Here we see a common phenomenon: the complex connection between skepticism and authority. It is no accident that the Cretan uttering the "universal" truth about fellow Cretans is a philosopher, someone whose business is generating truth, and not, for instance, a merchant with the clear ulterior purpose of selling something. Likewise, the coalition represents the work, not of commercial vendors with products to sell, but of career educators selected for possessing the experience that would seem to give them the capability of rising above local self-interests.

Just as we can play the role of logician and see the contradictory, self-destructive nature of the Cretan assertion, we too can be social scientists concerned with rooting out the self-interest in the coalition participants themselves. In both cases, however, we have other, likely stronger, instincts at work, including the desire to believe and to trust. Do not most readers focus on the phenomenological claim of the text in both situationstaking what the coalition has to say about language education largely on its own terms, as a universal assertion about the needs of students and the necessity to reshape the curriculum, treating the call for self-reflection less as a guide for dealing specifically with its own text than as a claim for how to deal with the profession as a whole, that is, as a critique of existing practice and not as a metacritique, a critique of critique? Are not readers of *Democracy through Language* supposed to ignore the self-reflective part of the coalition's own message, ignore the call to see its own work as a plea for a true populist, anti-intellectual critique of motives? Readers are not to be radical skeptics themselvesquestioning in Rush Limbaugh fashion the motives of Elbow and others, seeing their efforts solely in terms of their own possible professional aggrandizement. Instead readers of Elbow's book are to focus on the issues he raises about the conclusions of the English Coalitionthe broad-based, authoritative, consensus-driven effort to restructure language instruction itself. *Being critical* in the context of language reform, it turns out, is not the neutral term it appears; it has to do less with the generic ability to raise questions, especially about other people's motives, than with the ability to raise the right kind of questions, in this case, those aimed at supporting widening democratically inspired reforms of existing pedagogic practices and institutions.

Belonging

The coalition's own privileging of critical pedagogy (the importance given to the reader exercising control over the claims of all texts) seems not to be fully supported by our actual practice of reading nor, if we look more closely, by the original paradox of the Cretan philosopher. The initial critical control that leads to our resistance to the philosopher's authority (here because of the fact that he himself is a Cretan) is after all based on comprehension of a prior phenomenological claim (that all Cretans are liars). Without the phenomenological claim about the mendacity of Cretans, there seems to be no basis for action and hence control, although the validity of this knowledge is quickly vitiated by our willingness to act on this insight, putting us into the endless cycle of claim and control that constitutes, not just the original paradox, but what has been called the hermeneutic circle: here that critical control requires understanding that is itself precritical. Once in the circle of this paradox, there seems to be no way out, no way to privilege control over claim. What is doubtful, however, is if we ever really get entangled in such a paradox in the first place, whether the tension between phenomenological claim and critical control is based on anything more than a logical sleight of hand.

As in the case of Stuckey's warnings about writing teachers, as readers we regularly receiveand then freely heed or rejectnot paradoxical puzzles from logicians, but real warnings about Cretans from other Cretans, from philosophers about philosophy, from politicians about politics, and, in the case of the English Coalition Conference, from English teachers about English teaching. "Cretans lie!" we are told . . . by Cretans; "Don't trust politicians!" we are told . . . by politicians. "English teachers have ulterior motives!" we are told . . . by English teachers. "Readers need to scrutinize authors of books!" we read in books. All would-be paradoxes, to be sure, but statements that in practice rarely strike us as such. Instead, claim and control seem to operate in a radically unbalanced way: it is when we are most taken in by the phenomenological claim of the text, when we are convinced of the untrustworthiness of Cretans or politicians, or of the oppressive nature of language education, that we are most trusting of the philosopher, the politician, or author making the claimand, ironically, the least likely to be critical ourselves and apply in this instance the radical skepticism necessary to

reject the specific assertions each is making. Conversely, the more we exercise critical control over the textenacting the claim of the text by raising questions about the philosopher's place of origin or about the authors' motivations (where they were trained, the conditions of their employment, etc.)the less trusting we become of the author and the less likely it is that we would ever take the phenomenological claim of the message seriously in the first place.

In practice, in other words, our reading of any text seems to be dominated, in turn, either by its seductive claim or our desire to exercise control over it: we are more critical about texts and assertions when we are less enamored and more suspicious of the person who utters them. But even this explanation is likely too simple in assuming that critical control is the opposite of phenomenological claim. Instead, such control is perhaps better seen as our operating according to the claim of another assertion, one that is less visible, but finally not necessarily more critical or objective. It is naïve to fall prey to the logical structure of the paradox that requires us to see our rejection of the Cretan philosopher as a higher, more critical response and not just as another effective way of condemning Cretans generally as liars (effective in coating our original dislike of Cretans with the patina of logic). In actual practice, our skepticism about someone else's motives, while often taking the form of a logical argument, does not in fact guarantee that we are really acting more rationally, more criticallya Republican attack on a policy advocated by a Democratic president, that is based on questioning the president's motives for advocating such a policy, is not necessarily more critical than a fellow Democrat's support of that same policy. "In how many ways does love distort our judgment?" writes the great antimodernist, antireformer, Giambattista Vico. "In how many ways does hate impede it? He who loves praises the deficiencies of his beloved as if they were virtues. He who burns with hatred sees her good qualities as if they were abhorrent" (*On Humanistic Education* 70).

The paradox of the Cretan philosopher collapses with real readers with real feelings (about Cretans or about Bill Clinton), with readers who are predisposed, based on their experiences prior to encountering this particular assertion (the "paradox"), either to trust or distrust Cretans or the presidentpredisposed, in Hans-Georg Gadamer's term, to "pre-judge" Cretans, politicians, writing teachers, or anyone else. Those who dislike Cretans are predis-

posed to accept wholeheartedly the phenomenological claim of the assertion: "Yes, I agree with you; Cretans are liarsI've known it all along," and in so doing fail to exercise critical control over the assertion. Yet such a response is no more emotional than that of the supporters of Cretans who also never reach the stage of critical control, seeing the Cretan philosopher from the outset as a disreputable spokesperson, if not a traitor, and consequently rejecting the philosopher's phenomenological claim out of hand: "I don't believe you for a minutephilosophers are all liars!"

Too often, the call for a new critical pedagogic reform takes on the status of objectivity (becomes "critical") only in the context of a specific political agenda, as skepticism directed toward present arrangements for redistributing wealth and powerand even this may not be adequate since various right-wing activists groups cast as *critical* their own activities aimed at regaining control of their lives, which they see as having been centralized by government and other institutions associated with the left. Within the reconstructed English classroom, critical pedagogy then takes on the status of objectivity as discourse that echoes one's own predisposition or, put positively, critical pedagogy takes on the status of objectivity when readers perceive it as grounded in a more basic sense of belonging with the "right" side, in what Gadamer refers to as a larger, "sustaining agreement" (*Reason* 136), a condition that Gadamer sees as always present whenever we want to understand something that, in his phrase, "anticipatorily joins" us with the object of our inquiry.

Our "critical" response to Stuckey and the findings of the English Coalition Conference, therefore, is more likely grounded, not in applying to their work the same critical scrutiny they would have us apply to others, not in skepticism and questioning and thus not in critical analysis itself, but in our sense of belonging to groups whose self-image is enhanced by their findings, that is, by our phenomenological or life history in this world. What is crucial in determining our response to an act that we would deem "critical" seems to have less to do with logic and abstraction than with the strength of our emotional attachment to the claims embedded in the "critical" texts themselves. No form of critical practice, we need to realize, can itself ever fully escape claims of *belonging*our having a host of allegiances, many unanalyzed and all related to our sense of acceptance in the world and hence

feeling of well-being. There can be no critical practice, in other words, that is ever fully critical.

Accordingly, the strongest champions of Stuckey or of the English Coalition Conference come, not from the most critical or most suspicious readers, but from those readers who are inclined to agree with the phenomenological claim each makes based largely on a prior affiliation with what each assertsa key aspect of belonging that Gadamer in *Truth and Method* identifies with *pre-judgment* or *prejudice*. "Ideal readers," accordingly, are not those who are most suspicious of the authors themselves (most critical) but those who most strongly share the suspicions of the authors, in the case of Stuckey or the English Coalition Conference because perhaps at a deep, unconscious level identifying with this common criticism of established practice (how others teach) enhances their own sense of the superiority of their own teaching practices, grounded as those practices are in the superiority of their own intentions: here are teachers truly committed to social justice and hence not like other, traditional teachers who are committed to other, more selfish concerns. The prior emotional commitment here is grounded less in critical objectivity than in more important matters of self-esteem, an issue sharpened by the fact that the attachment to the marginalized in society felt by so many college writing teachers may well reflect their own sense of being marginalized within the larger profession of English studies dominated for most of this century by mostly male literature professors, people whose professional ethos seems to entail a far lesser commitment to social justice.

There is no paradox, no logical tension in Stuckey's rhetorical claim that literacy education is little more than a vast patronage system for teachers"Are we helping those in need of economic and social opportunity, or those (including ourselves) who wish to maintain their own economic and social advantage" (viii)since this is less an appeal for critical resistance in her readers than for cheering, less a matter of the empowerment of critical readers than the seduction of the emotionally inclined, namely teachers who share Stuckey's own sense of alienation within a profession that has not done as well as it might for women and minorities (leaving many in low-paying, part-time positions), and thus professionals who welcome the implication here of the prospects of a better, more ennobling pedagogic practice.

Likewise, we can ask, where would we expect to find the strongest resistance toor the most *critical* analysis ofthe claims of Stuckey and the English Coalition? Surely not from the left or from those trying to follow the new message of critical literacy and gain a higher level of critical control of their texts (as this text may at least claim to be doing)? We would expect such resistance from conservatives of various kinds, those with stronger, phenomenological claims, emotional binds, to other pedagogic practices and traditions, to the traditional ("bad") current practices both directly and implicitly under attack in the appeal to the new practice of critical teaching. It is this prior affiliation, grounded in an emotional attachment to other ways of teaching, and not in a rational application of critical techniques, that is likely to lead mostly traditional critics of current reforms to question the motives of reformers from the outsetperhaps seeing the overall reform of language education as grounded in a broader, left-wing political agenda that they may oppose. Critics of Stuckey, for example, may resist the very attachment to social reform that motivates her defenders, not sharing her well-founded resentment of the historically poor treatment of women in the profession or her passionate concern for helping marginal students in poorly funded writing programs. Such critics might see the *real* issue in Stuckey's larger allegiance to broader social change, and as a result oppose her program for reform, not on its merits, but categorically, that is, without a fair, detailed hearing. It is precisely such moral combat, waged by both the left and right and based on the suspicion of motives, that leads to the posturing about symbolic values that so often passes for contemporary public debate, in education no less than in politics.

In a world of posturing over symbols, the paradox of the Cretan philosopher and the more general notion of logical paradox can both be dissolved in a larger, more powerful interpretive strategy, one that posits an implicit distinction between real practice (how others teach or, in the case of the Cretan philosopher, how others lie) and an ideal practice embedded in the text itself and that somehow escapes its own logical limits as a speech act. The paradox of the Cretan philosopher can thus be seen, not as a paradox at all, but as a strategy for social reform based on first affirming and then overcoming the gap between *what is real* (Cretans as they

are today) and *what is possible* (how much better, more truthful Cretans can be). Opposition, Bruce Robbins argues in his *Secular Vocations*, is now "central to professionalism," in a key phrase that he quotes from Stanley Fish, "constituting by the very vigor of its opposition the true form of that which it opposes" (105). English studies is now a profession that defines itself by that which it wants to become, and hence, largely by opposition to what it is.

In this light, the general thrust of the efforts to reform English studies can be seen as an extension of what Nietzsche calls "the fundamental will of the spirit" (*Beyond* §229) to seek, neither insight nor truth, but agreement and accord. Only rarely, Nietzsche would contend, and never easily, is an individual able to overcome the need for affiliation, and thus able to stand apart from the group, to strike out on one's own. "In all taking things seriously and thoroughly," Nietzsche writes, there is always a strong antisocial element, a raising of personal satisfactionalbeit an intellectual oneover the group's sense of its common purpose: "in all desire to know there is already a drop of cruelty" (*Beyond* §229). In this sense, the pedagogic notion of the reader's critical control of a text is better seen not as an alternative to its phenomenological claim but as another, higher, form of attachment, an attachment, not to what currently exists, but to the promise of something better, the possibility of a yet-to-be-attained ideal: the new breed of Cretan who ("like me") tells the truth, the new breed of writing teacher who ("like me") actually helps students. What gives power to the findings of the English Coalition has less to do with readers' thinking critically than with their identification with its ennobling vision of the profession as a central player in expanding democratic opportunities, underscored by Booth's prefatory reference of our common mission, the assertion that we are "not just a profession with a set of assumptions and prejudices, but a *vocation*, a *calling*, a *commitment*" (x)all appeals, like critical thought itself, based finally less in reason itself than in universal, utopian notions like justice and liberation.

## The Limits of Control

The task before us in this work, simply stated, is not to reject the phenomenological claim about critical control that now exercises

such power in efforts to reform language education, but, for once, to take it seriously. That is, to investigate the role of critical control in reading and writing, in the process trying to understand the very concept of understanding itself: what it means to know something well through language, to understand deeply through reading or writing. Part of this task entails gaining critical control by following the dictates of the reformers in unmasking their own professional interestsa process already begun. The task here is to place the current privileging of critical control over phenomenological claim, of critical pedagogy over literary identification, in a fuller historical context, or put somewhat differently, to investigate the nature and source of the power of the *one* particular textual claim that denies its own power.

"Whence did logic come into existence in the human head?" asks probably the greatest critic of critical practice, Friedrich Nietzsche. "Certainly out of illogic, whose realm must initially have been tremendous" (*Gay Science* §111; *Reader* 60). In his last, posthumous work, James Berlin seems close to touching on this founding paradox of human existence: the irreducible irrationality of reason, or, as he states, that we have thoughts and positions "that do not always square with each other," or, "to state the case in its most extreme form, each of us is finally conflicted, incoherent, amorphous, protean, and irrational in our constitution" (*Rhetorics* 6263). For Berlin, however, such skepticism of motives seems quickly to fall away, become transformed into a kind of "critical objectivity" once individual or personal issues are placed in an historical context cognizant of the broader claims of social justice. Seldom in Berlin or other reformers do we see a willingness to consider what Nietzsche calls his "*fundamental insight*," the disturbing possibility that "there is no pre-established harmony between the furtherance of truth and the well-being of mankind" (*Human, All Too Human* §517; *Reader* 198). Nietzsche describes as a nausea akin to seasickness the feeling that accompanied his insight that "hatred, envy, covetousness, and lust for domination" are "life-conditioning emotions . . . which must fundamentally and essentially be present in the total economy of life, consequently must be heightened further if life is to be heightened further" (*Beyond* §23). A true critique of critical pedagogy would have to account for the unpleasant, the undemocratic possibility in seeing the world as it is, and for the possibility that as a species we are organized to

flee from such insight, even to punish those teachers who insist on such total honesty, while relentlessly seeking other, more pleasing self-representations.

There is good reason, in other words, for questioning the value of placing relentless philosophical inquiry at the center of our educational efforts. There is a positive goal to this critique of critical pedagogic reform as well, only begun here and to be continued in the following sectionnamely, of rehabilitating the discipline of English studies itself and the constructive and necessary roles that imaginative engagement and aesthetics play in understanding, and hence in all that is suggested by the deep use of language, or *deep language*, for short. The goal here is not to reject the obvious and oft-repeated basis of the new critical pedagogythat verbal meanings are a social phenomenon, historically grounded in common human experience, thereby at some level reflecting existing power relations. After all, where else could meaning exist but in history defined as all that we are and all that we know? The goal is instead to see the real complexity in this claim. It is to take seriously the claim regarding the social or historical basis of all verbal meaning, not reducing it to a simplistic claim, even a bromide such as, "Everyone is out for his or her own interests," but enacting it as a matter of principle in our actual professional dealings in languagefor example, to see the full historical context not just of English as a profession and the national enterprise of language education but of our own place within this tradition at the end of the twentieth century, assuming of course that one can ever escape living in history in order to see it with any degree of clarity.

The response taken here is not to deny the charge that meaning is social or that as readers or students we need to gain same control of the social process of meaning making. (This text is an effort at both: to see the social basis of the contemporary interest in critical language pedagogy, and hence to be critical about the limits of critical practice generally.) Rather it is to emphasize, first, the difficulty in doing thisin understanding ourselves historically or verbally while immersed in history and languageand, second, the need to recognize the positive role for understanding that resides in our emotional engagement as readers and writers with the worlds of others as fully realized in language. Until recently, modern language study regularly eschewed the utopian optimism of rational reformers preaching what Gadamer called "the perfect self-

transparency of knowledge," the faith that all becomes clear if we just free ourselves from superstition, for a more realistic epistemology based on Gadamer's insight that wisdom finally entails "that we have to accept the limits posed for finite natures" (*Reason* 52).

Contemporary language reformers urge us to help students to resist hegemonic or dominant assumptions implicit in texts; but recognizing the inherent limits in ability to see our own biases in the world, hence recognizing the limits of pedagogic practice designed at exposing biases, can itself be seen as another form of resistance. There are different types of resistant discourse, in other words, different ways to resist the threat of outside control of one's life. Long before recent reform efforts to empower students, English studies was trying to help them resist such control by engaging them with verbal works that dramatized our collective ability to attain a limited, momentary control ("critical" or otherwise) over the world and ourselves by imaginatively embracing, not suppressing, the phenomenological claim of texts. A main task before us remains rehabilitating the resistant strain of deep reading and writing, and, in turn, rehabilitating the complex, resistant core at the center of English studies itself.

Two
Reading, Writing, and Resistance

*The very idea of a textual web as a force in which all are caught calls into question the objectivity of those who treat it as an object of knowledge that affects only others; conversely, precisely insofar as the textual anthropologists can be objective and unaffected by the Text, their objectivity calls the very idea of textual force into question.*
Weinsheimer, "The Question of the Classic"

"Mere" Literacy

Part of the problem with the diminished standing of the phenomenological claim of written texts is the result of our still not having an adequate understanding of the term *literacy*, an understanding that clearly connects the larger cultural claims made for literacy (for example, in promoting either emotional sympathy or critical resistance) with a set of specific practices for reading and writing texts. The introduction to *Democracy through Language* calls for "making literacy a possibility for all students" (Lloyd-Jones and Lunsford xx), and then refers to a new notion of literacy as a means to "assimilate, evaluate, and control the immense amount of knowledge and the large number of messages produced every day"without fully apprehending the nature and value of its own practice. Like the high school students referred to

in the Coalition Conference report, we all should be able to "recognize and evaluate the ways in which others use language to affect [us]" (Lloyd-Jones and Lunsford 19), but just how is one to do this, and specifically what role is the mastery of the reading and writing skills traditionally taught in language arts and English classes to play in this process? Who can deny that all of us, like these high school students, should be able to "reflect on and evaluate [our] own language use," but how are we to do this, and with what toolsother than with language that at some point is not reflected on and thus not subjected to rigorous self-evaluation? We all should be able to "use language effectively to create knowledge, meaning, and community in [our] lives," but how will this differ from the knowledge, meaning, and community that surrounds us, alternately nourishing and frustrating us, based on *precritical* bonds of kinship, affiliation, and belonging with only indirect, obscure, or even marginal connections to effective (critical) language use? Where is this new language that criticizes the old language to come from, if not from some older, perhaps even literary, languagean emotion-packed language that for generations students of English have found valuable, in part for its power to help us understand (critique?) new experiences? How, in other words, is critical discourse, itself embedded in ordinary language, to free us (and itself?) from other forms of discourse, from the literature, for example, that we love precisely for the power of the seemingly noncritical claims it makes on us?

The model of critical literacy implicit in the Coalition Conference constantly holds out the promise of a refuge of clear understanding, reason, and controlakin to Gadamer's "perfect self-transparency of knowledge": a safe haven free from the unequal power relations and corrupt language practices that ordinarily distort our understanding of the world, a safe haven that we can claim not so much from mastering a traditional practice like English (especially its mechanical components like spelling, punctuation, etc.) as from an act of will entailed in announcing our attention to stand against an implicitly regressive tradition. Calls for a critical remaking of the English curriculum, such as those in *Democracy through Language* and *What Is English?*, present themselves as guides to reaching that safe haven, under the banner of resisting the totalizing and constricting power that texts make on us, yet they do so without ever promulgating a theory of reading

and writing capable of accounting for its own practice, in this case, how texts like *Democracy through Language* or *What Is English?* acquire the broad authority and institutional endorsement necessary to induce teachers to reform their classroom practice. How can being literate be reduced to the engendering of a pervasive suspicion in readers of all texts except those that announce the need for suspicion in the first place? Such a notion of reading cannot account for what many have long sensed to be the central experience of literacy: a writer generating a new understanding and readers in turn struggling to reshape their sense of the world through comprehending that understanding, and in certain instances, altering their subsequent behavior to accord with that new understanding.

The theoretical incompleteness of critical pedagogy as a model of literacy is largely hidden by the fact that other, more common notions of literacy are even more incomplete. On the one hand, there is wide acceptance that literacy refers to the basic ability to handle written languagespecifically, to be able to transcribe what is spoken and recite what is written down. Historically people who lack these skills have been deemed *illiterate* (a strongly pejorative term not often used today in reference either to individuals or even specific groups), and, at least by implication, people who are *not illiterate* are deemed *literate*. My 1987 study, *A Preface to Literacy*, labeled this definition of literacy "unproblematic," since it left so little in doubt: people who could transcribe speech and decode writing were "literate," that is, "not illiterate." If this definition ever had much use, it was for people like census takers and workers in the field of adult basic education with a compelling interest in measuring and, through institutional policies, changing the number of people who possess the minimal skills necessary to be deemed "literate."

On the other hand, except for census takers and other statistically minded professionals who have reason to like definitions that support accurate enumeration, this definition has had little explanatory power, especially for the discipline of English studies, where high school and college teachers historically have had entirely different concernsnamely with enhancing and evaluating the *quality* of what students write and their relative level of comprehension, and specifically in enhancing and evaluating the insightfulness of student responses, in a key phrase, the *depth* of their reading and writing. Here is another notion of literacy, one dealing with the quality or depth of the experience with written

language, and which the 1987 study referred to as *problematic*, emphasizing the inherently open nature of any substantive debate about this essential aspect of literacy: any serious debate about the presence or absence of literacy was always a matter of degreethat is, a question not of whether someone was literate or not but of *how* literate that person was. Although in shorthand fashion we sometimes are tempted to reduce literacy to the literal ability to transcribe speech, we have for at least a century known that it really refers to something elsenamely the ability to compose and in turn comprehend a certain kind of text, that is, the ability to work with extended accounts of how people view the world constructed entirely through the imaginative power of language. There is nothing metaphorical in the assertion that Milton *wrote Paradise Lost*, although he never took pen to paper. What in 1987 I called problematic literacy, and what is here referred to as *deep language*, I then defined as the "ability to deal with discourse that projects a world" (*Preface* 30), that is, as the ability of readers to comprehend new understandings embedded in textsseeing both what is strange and familiar in those understandings, how the writer is both different from and similar to ourselvesand in turn to create such texts ourselves as writers, to render our own sense of the world solely through language in such ways that readers can grasp in them something highly specific yet universal.

This vast discrepancy between the undeniably high status of the term "literacy," derived in part from our common experience of the power of problematic or deep reading and writing, and the relatively simplistic, mechanical nature of the minimal coding skills of undiplomatic literacy continues to undermine many discussions of language education, professional as well as general. While traditional workers in the field of adult education, for example, retain a broad commitment to reading and writing instruction under the banner of "literacy," they and their students often place greater practical value in something both more and less specificnamely, a job, and the general intellectual and social skills, whatever they might be, necessary to get one. One result then is the tendency within mainstream adult education to transfer the strong positive connotation associated with the term *literacy* from its specific but unexciting denotation of coding skills to the more compelling goal of employment and its promise of economic empowerment, for individuals and for society as a whole.

Working backwards, literacy thus often becomes defined, at times implicitly, as the skills necessary for economic advancement. Among adult educators, those charged with shaping labor-related government policy, and in some of the general population, real literacy education is associated, not with simple coding skills, but with organized instruction that promotes individuals' ability to get ahead in the world as well as our collective ability to effect increasingly more powerful transformations of nature; in a phrase, the education or training that promotes economic modernization. Hence the pervasive contemporary reliance upon an ever growing list of compound literacies (computational literacy, computer literacy, geographic or map literacy, etc.), each of which moves beyond a narrow concern with the mechanics of transcription to matters that truly shape one's life, in part by helping one get a job.

Yet for language educators themselves, and for a large portion of the professional class as well, *real* literacy education has always conveyed something close to the opposite of such job training; instead, it has long been associated with a broader form of social resistance, a greater self-consciousness toward all the diverse forces of economic modernizationthat is, with some form of critical pedagogy. Here then is the source of the constantly recurring contrast among language educators between a *nominal literacy* based in job training or other efforts at promoting the individual's assimilation into the world and an *unnamed literacy* that has to do with the development of the highest intellectual powers of individuals to challenge their worldto resist what others would have them believe, to think for themselves, and thus to think critically. The contrast, in other words, between the nominal literacy that goes by its own name (and that hardly anyone valuesleading to the common reference to "mere literacy") and some other, "real" literacy that insists on seeing itself as something else ("not mere literacy"), often in compound form, as in the term "critical literacy" itself. The key issue here is what becomes of the actual acts of reading and writing, of comprehending and expressing complex new ideas through written language? Do they go with "mere literacy" and all that is superficial and mechanical or with the truly important matters, the deeper language, the higher, unnamed literacy, that goes beyond "mere reading and writing"?

What is remarkable in this debate about "mere" and "higher" literacy is that neither form of literacyhence, much of our national

literacy debatehas much, if anything, to do with the high-level reading and writing practices that have long defined college and even high school English instruction. Neither "mere literacy" nor "real literacy" (or "critical literacy"), in other words, ordinarily has much to say about the actual practice or value of reading and writing themselves. As a result, one commonly finds discussions of either job training or critical literacy (and sometimes extended, book-length discussions of either) *without* substantial consideration of any matters relating to the use of written language, that is, without discussion of "mere literacy." Hence the extraordinary tendency for a concern with reading and writing themselves to drop out of contemporary discussions of "literacy" altogetherwith proponents of both job training and critical literacy commonly associating reading and writing, not with deep understanding and expression, but with minimal coding skills, and, as a result, advocating the need for any number of compound and, at times, contradictory literacies, such as a *functional literacy* that actually trains one for the real world, helps get people jobs, and the like, or a *critical literacy* that gives people the ability to understand themselves, that empowers them, and so forth.

Discussions of *literacy*, it seems, often leave unaddressed, and unresolved, the central issue of literacy itselfthat is, the value of concentrated, or deep, instances of reading and writing as special modes of social action or self-understanding. If, for example, we accept as the guiding principle of critical pedagogic reform that resistance to current practice is good, then a central question quickly becomes, is it possible to see the acts of reading and writingas historically represented in the practice of authorship (that is, the authoring of texts worthy of an historically distinct readership)as special forms of resistance? Can there be a "literacy," for instance, based entirely in resistance in action and speech, and hence totally independent of reading and writing? Or put more positively, do acts of authorshipenabling people to master some higher form of reading and writing (what others might be tempted to call "print-based" or even "literate literacy")have any unique value as potentially resistive or liberating forms of social practice?

What, if anything, is special about resistance organized through *real* literacyunderstanding of and action in the world achieved through the reading and writing of books and other complex, verbal textsthat is, through the *deep reading and writing*, at the

historical center of modern English studies, instead of the simple coding of oral language ("mere" literacy") or some higher, compound form of literacy involving political resistance to injustice? What, we need to ask, is the special value of such deep reading and writing, if any, to individuals and societyespecially as compared to fields of study like communications theory that may consistently raise important questions with students about the meaning and power of all sorts of images apart from the close, sustained reading and writing of imaginative verbal texts?

A short answer to these questions might begin by affirming that the deep reading and writing of English, grounded as it is in common language but expressing uncommon thoughts, really does offer a special vehicle, one not unrelated to the larger task of critical practice and social resistance. The deep language use at the center of unreconstructed English studies, this argument continues, is itself a form of resistance grounded neither in ordinary action nor in ordinary language (neither in politics nor speech) but solely in that special form of verbal action that originates in our understanding of what is not present, that is, in the verbal imagination. The language practice promoted within the mainstream English curriculum can thus be seen as a special form of resistance, one grounded in language and, like play, connected to our larger aesthetic impulse to enrich life as a whole by transforming the ordinary in accord with our desires and dreams for a better world.

This aspect of deep language does share an important similarity with pedagogic reform: namely, an originating discomfort with the world. The act of deep reading and writing is motivated by underlying disagreement with ordinary perceptionhow others view the subject under consideration. Proponents of deep language, unlike reformers, value one's assertion of discomfort only to the extent that it is embodied in the distinct sensuous form of a literate text itself. As an expression of discomfort with the world, the literate text necessarily has an actual structure that reflects its invented or fictive dimension, regularly projecting or inventing its own readerspeople interested in this subject but who, until reading and comprehending the text, lack full or deep understanding.

Hence the implicit two-part structure of the deep text, an elaboration of the form of argument: here is how something appears; here, how it really is. Similarly, the literate text is usually addressed to strangers, or at least to listeners who are unlikely to

accept its conclusions on the basis of existing social connections with the author. Deep writing, even when addressed to friends, defines such people in an entirely new role; namely as people who, for the moment at least, are more interested in the content of what is being communicated than in their prior understanding of the writer. Unlike evanescent thought, moreover, the literate text is a sustained utterance, in its length going far beyond what hardly anyone ever attains in speech. It reaches its length largely by means of a level of detail and allusion not characteristic of speech, and, because of its length and amount of detail, it ordinarily requires a formal linear structure (a beginning, middle, and end) and a syntactic sophistication, normally based on extensive subordination (hierarchical embedding) not characteristic of thought.

Projecting a thickly populated world of people and ideas yet composed and read largely alone, filled with concrete details and images yet almost entirely totally devoid of graphic interest, reverberating with loud voices yet not making a soundthe fully articulated literate text remains the fundamental vehicle for the expression of the verbal imagination, in all writing, fictive or factual, presenting a complex, organized projection of a world that is there in words only. Our thoughts, writes Russian linguist Lev Vygotsky, presumably even our most critical, are in the form of "condensed, abbreviated speech," a speech that is "almost entirely predicative because the situation, the subject of thought, is always known to the thinker" (100). On the contrary, what we write, he adds, since it "must explain the situation in order to be intelligible," can only exist through the presentation of language that is organized and detailed: "The change from maximally compact inner speech to maximally detailed written speech requires what might be called deliberate semanticsdeliberate structuring of the web of meaning." Or as he adds elsewhere, "[Thought] does not merely find expression in speech; it finds its reality and form" (126).

A constructive goal of this critique of critical pedagogic reform, therefore, is to show how the deep language at the historical center of traditional English studies includes rather than opposes critical practice, to show, in other words, how critical thought like all acts of deep language is itself based, not in dry, objective reason, but in the play between our deep-felt emotional condition of belonging to our world and the common, transforming acts of imagination that

regularly enable us to see ourselves in, and thus gain some limited distance from, this world. Such a constructive goal requires countering the claims of critical pedagogy for self-sufficiency, and in so doing, replacing the ideal of control at its center with a reconstituted, revalidated aesthetic ideal drawn from English studies itself. The reaffirmation of mainstream traditional English studies is tied to the act of revealing the incompleteness, the vanity, in the claim of critical reformers to be engaged in an activity that goes beyond *mere* reading and writing, as if we really had powers at our command for seeing the world objectively or for understanding ourselves that somehow are stronger than the deep and aesthetically complex acts of reading and writing that have long been at the center of our professional lives.

"Real" Literacy

Any model of literacy answers three basic questions: what does it mean to read, what does it mean to write, and what is the nature of the text at the center of the basic literate transaction? Like most models of literacy, the new language of critical pedagogic reform begins with dissatisfaction with the overly simplistic strictures of the unproblematic response to each of these questionsthat reading is the ability to decode what is written down; writing, the ability to encode what is said; and hence text, a form of transcribed speech. For reformers, the mechanical explanations of the unproblematic model are hopelessly naïve, failing to recognize the extent that texts always reflect and often attempt to enforce various forms of ideological control of readers. Texts, they claim, are cultural artifacts, expressing dislocations of power within society, rather than the personal visions of individual authors, and what becomes most valuable are acts that recognize and somehow increase our distance from all claims, including those of texts, and thus strengthen our ability to see the arbitrariness, and thus, the alterable state, of the historical world.

In its most conservative formulation, such reform efforts play off two forms of literacyan ideal, active, engaged form of reading and writing (a practice always associated with the possibility of language reform) against a real, albeit stolid, unimaginative, pedantic, overly literal focus on the mechanics of textuality (a practice associated

with traditional language instruction). Accordingly, traditional practice is characterized by mystified readers writing essays that mimic their teachers' ideas on awe-inspiring literary textswhat Robert Scholes refers to as the image of "the exegete before the sacred text" (16)the timid student intimidated into stunned silence by the inflated reputation of an authority (person or book). Here is Scholes's pedagogic picture of "ultimate Hell": "a brilliant instructor explicating a poem before a class of stupefied students" (24).

Admittedly this is not a pretty picture and one few would endorse, but what this image suppresses in focusing on one unpleasant scenario are other equally unpleasant pictures one could paint. Are matters really improved that much, for example, if the text is not a poem or literary work but a critical essay or even a cultural artifact with the teacher showing students how active (reform-minded) readers can expose its ideological (conservative) assumptions, and students' heads nodding up and down in agreement, going along with the teacher, less as a shared concern with social justice than a means of getting the grade they want out of the course? Or perhaps even less pleasant: students engaged in an active discussion, as loud and raucous and often ill-informed as daytime talk television, except with only a handful of students doing most of the talking, a few in strident disagreement and a few in strident agreement, with the mass of students turned off by a classroom that seems to mimic the frantic activity and noise of the "real" world instead of providing them with the one thing most lacking in that world and that many students can find only in school (and which is often the product of traditional pedagogic practice): namely, a contemplative space.

The issue here is what really happens in the language classroom when the general act of resistance, and not specific acts of reading and writing, becomes the evaluative normspecifically, when little distinction is made between a detailed written response and an oral one, and then not always a fully formed oral response but possibly a vague, half-articulated agreement with the teacher. If the goal of critical pedagogic reform is resistance, in the words of Knoblauch and Brannon, "to join with students in piercing the opacity of dominant ideology" (164)what they refer to as grasping "the truth," and not merely replacing one opacity with anotherthen is it really possible for teachers (or people generally) to see ideas or texts that oppose their own efforts at piercing opacity as

anything but a means of facilitating oppression, that is, aiding and abetting a real enemy? The stakes here, at least for a reformer like Jim Merod, are hardly small. "More than anything else," he writes, "the unworldliness of the classroom obscures, if it does not deny altogether, the possibility that critical activity is (or might be) the one human force most committed to clarifying the world's structure in order to change it" (1).

But what is this "unworldliness" other than another, pejorative name for a teacher's commitment to some distinct, traditional disciplinary procedures? Is there no place in such a world of light and darkness for the subtle shadings of disciplinary shadowsstudents mastering a craft? Nothing to learn, nothing to engage in, except critical activity itself? Is there no place at all for pedagogic practices that are at their core traditional, supportive of existing social bonds, and for students, parents, and a general population more interested in nurturing than altering those bonds? No place for Oakeshott's "practical knowledge"? Must we really agree with Henry Giroux that "the liberal arts should be defended in the interest of creating critical rather than 'good' citizens" (121)?

## A Resistant Text

English educator Joseph Harris, in a 1992 exchange with three educators who responded to his 1991 article on the Dartmouth Conference, gives a detailed account of efforts he and a co-teacher made to assist one determined student, enrolled in a remedial course, to improve her writing. The assignment in question called for the student to write an essay that both recounted a story from her own life and related it to what educator Mike Rose had to say about reading, writing, and schooling in *Lives on the Boundary*. Heather, the student at the center of this article, turns in what Harris calls a "typical" response, one that focuses more on her own story than Rose's criticism, and, more important for present purposes, adopts an overly familiar narrative mode: a happy ending based on initiative and hard work. Specifically, Heather describes how she struggled throughout her senior year to get on the high school paper and by the end of the year, after much effort, has her story published on page one.

For Harris what is wrong with Heather's paper, its problem as a deep work, is precisely its narrative mode and its origins in

Hollywood B-films and the broader accommodative culture that such films support: "The rookie comes off the bench to save the game; the understudy steps in for the lead and brings down the house" (709). His specific complaint is that "her story is a very familiar one and thus hard to energize," but this complaint is only partially true, since one reason that Heather's narrative is familiar and used repeatedly is that it continues to energize a large audience. Heather's story appeals to readers or viewers who see individual success as the key ingredient in a larger plan of social progress and reform.

The problem with Heather's paper turns out to be fundamentally ideological; the success story at its core lacks a sufficient degree of resistance that defines the best deep writing and instead supports an unwarranted faith in the ameliorative flexibility of the present, market-based economic system. Heather has not yet grasped the largely unstated critical assumption of English studies for the need to resist conformity by seeking richer, more narratively complex local practices. In this regard she is similar to another student described by Rose, who had been required to write an essay for her speech class criticizing a statement of Ronald Reagan. "'You can't criticize the president,' she explains. 'You've gotta support your president even if you don't agree with him'" (Rose 190).

What is at stake here are the nature and quality of Heather's attachments, both in the success story she wrote and, as the co-teacher wrote to her, in "another story that seems to emerge at points in your paper that asks me to become a different sort of reader" (Harris 710). This final phrase, "a different sort of reader" is a little disingenuouswhat the co-teacher really wants, and is reluctant to admit, is an essay from Heather that will make her readers less comfortable with their world, in large part by embodying Heather's own discomfort. The teacher then goes through the obligatory motion of giving the student full choice to decide which story to write ("Now you decide whether you want to stick to revising the success story, or revising the second story"), but the ideological imperative is clear: deep writing dramatizes resistance to any simplistic notion of progress by objectifying complex, local real experienceor put the other way, close, accurate observation of the real world reveals a higher (or deeper) truth of experience (its real complexity) that necessarily reveals the inconsistency and inadequacy of generalized models of how the world is supposed to work.

Heather's revision, which Harris readily admits "interests me more," is just such a locally more complex narrative, a tale in which Heather details her own insecurity as a writer. As Harris notes, while still a "success story of sorts, it is no longer as clear cut or simple as before" (712). She now more closely identifies with Rose's story, seeing the value in Rose's students whounlike her first narrative presentation of herself, and like the more "realistic" presentations of working-class studentsoften do work hard at school without succeeding. Here in this new narrative, concludes Harris, is "a student beginning to forge her own voice as writer," not by writing well according to any set rules of grammar or style, but by dramatizing a moment of resistance in her own life and relating that moment to the lives of others, through what Harris calls "entering an active and critical dialogue with others" (712).

With Harris it is important to note that there is no trade-off between the resistant spirit of the content of writing and the quality of written expression, in large measure since the focus remains clearly on the production of traditional written text. The model here for good writing, even good narrative writing, is critical distance, an assertive, resistant stance to received knowledge. Hence in gaining resistance, the student gains in both analytic and expressive power. And so it may be for many students: narratives that embody the complexity of their own particular local experiences often involve a level of expression and a wealth of details that result in more powerful writing. Harris, in other words, has reason to be pleased with his effort, although, as any writing teacher knows, the relationship between the nature of the student's resistance (the spirit of the paper sometimes referred to by teachers as its "content") and the quality of its actual expression is hardly simple and direct: there are papers with spirit and insight that in most other ways are poorly written, and there are meticulously crafted papers that have almost nothing to sayleading to the common practice of split grading, a grade for "content" and a grade for "writing."

While unreconstructed English studies will insist that the two cannot be distinguishedthat the content of writing, as compared to less formal utterances like speech, is inseparable from its complex expressionreformers continue to move contemporary writing instruction in the opposite direction, on the one hand, by increasingly emphasizing the critical insights of students and, on the other, by deemphasizing the whole array of technical impediments to

writing, such as grammar, diction, and syntax. To be sure, the conservative formulations of contemporary critical reformers do not openly push for such a rupture, preferring instead to have the best of both worlds, supporting the reformist spirit of critical thinking without having to reject traditional writing practices outright. In such conservative formulations the technical aspects of writing, and obviously writing itself, are still important, only now there is the recognition of the need to realize that students master these skills in the process of doing real writingthat is, in using language critically. You cannot teach grammar in isolation, we are toldor more positively, that the best way to teach grammar, and presumably more important technical aspects of writing involving syntax and diction, is through actual writing. Here is a warrant then to focus initially, and in some cases, primarily, on the content of writing, while holding technical matters in abeyance. And no doubt, over time, the two partscontent and expressionbalance out for many English teachers.

Such a balance, however, is not necessarily intrinsic to a reformed curriculum, which even in its conservative mode never completely shakes its faith in the value of the student's honesty and sincerityhe student's resistive spirit apart from its specific formulation, that is, the spirit of the text apart from its letter. Even in its more conservative formulations, there is a tendency for the new critical pedagogy to enhance the value of the student's insight, often the degree of his or her resistanceand, as we shall see, increasingly without regard to the form of that expression, valuing speech as well as writing, while at the same time belittling matters of techniques, not referring to the subtle role that style, syntax, and diction play in differentiating shades of meaning but reducing all such questions to pedantic matters of "mere mechanical correctness."

"Textual power," writes Scholes as the concluding sentence of *Textual Power*, "is ultimately the power to change the world" (165), but change it how, and, essential for our concerns, just what roles are reading and writing to play in this transformation? Just how does one transform the world, and what role does the imaginative transformation through written language play in this process? Is not a literate text the projection of such a world, and, if so, is not the ability to enact such a projection either as reader or writer dependent upon a technical ability to manipulate language proficiently in creating and comprehending this new reality? "In

creating language," writes F. R. Leavis, "humans create the world they live in" (285), yet it is not *language*, which seems to be present and in some technical sense equal for all humans, that really concerns him here, but the *creating* with languagewhat we do with language that is especially imaginative or expressive, and as a consequence, what we do that produces an artifact (the text itself with all its expressive power) that reflects a level of real accomplishment in the writer and the reader that, unlike the putative universality of language itself, is decidedly local and hard-earned. Hence the point of Leavis's warning about the possible decay of language: "When language is impoverishedand it is being fast impoverished today*the world* is impoverished" (285).

The answer to such questions offered by critics like Scholes is too often ambivalent, with the suggestion that the practical changes in the world, including the new ideas in the minds of others, are at least as important as formal properties of the texts themselves. It is as if English has become a discourse concerned, not with enriched imaginative constructions, but with real change in the world, regardless of how initiatedthrough talk or intentions (verbalized or not) as well as reading and writing. In the conservative formulation of the new curriculum, in other words, there is always a tendency to downplay, although not reject outright, formal properties of the text compared with the critical spirit of the reader or writer. There is always a tendency to move beyond *mere* reading and writing, seldom a parallel one to move beyond *mere* critical language, that is, seldom an interest in assessing the formal or aesthetic properties of the text independent of the resistant stance of the authorial voice.

## Resistance as Text

This ambivalence toward textuality can be seen in the general response of language educators for over a generation now, as they have attempted to rebalance text and thought, expression and content. At a practical level, educators have been faced with responding to changing demographic patterns that have increased the numbers of students, many poor, whose general language background seems to leave them largely unprepared for the traditional demands of college writing but whose life experiences seem fertile breeding grounds to a general cultural resistance close to the spirit of pedagogic reform itself. Thus, many of the new students have

seemed relatively unprepared for writing traditional college essays, critical and otherwiseessays that even in their simplest form typically call for hundreds of words of text, with dozens of concrete details elaborately linked together through sophisticated syntax and diction as well as a complex pattern of subordination that relates every individual detail to a single, overarching idea, the thesis. Many of these students continue to come from a largely oral culture, one that according to Walter Ong stresses earlier rhetorical devices like call and response, addition, repetition with variation, the interspersion of colorful details, but not the deep subordination and hierarchical organization of print culture and of the typically well-organized essay.

Conversely, the very nontraditional experiences of these students appeal directly to teachers who are themselves deeply committed to changespecifically, to getting students to question the status quo and everyone else to recognize the inherent value of such questioning. In the eyes of teachers, these are students who seem to be more resistant to the easy accommodation to existing patterns of cultural reproduction, less eager to follow blindly the career patterns of their middle-class cohorts, more willing to engage in the broad cultural questioning that lies at the heart of critical pedagogic reform. Hence, one ongoing dilemma within the profession: balancing a desire to reward the enhanced critical awareness in nontraditional students with the traditional demands for textual proficiency, demands that seem to call for ideal unified texts, achieved through subtle forms of subordination, in students who seem increasingly acculturated to oral forms that promote a different sort of textual diffuseness and a lack of organizing focus, even if interspersed with colorful details.

What has been one main solution to this potential standoffa solution traceable back at least to William Labov's widely influential 1969 essay, "The Logic of Nonstandard English"is to win near unanimous support by dissolving the potential tension between text and resistance in a grand compromise involving three, seemingly mutually inclusive positions: first, that there is a real and unrecognized value in the oral language skills of the students least well-equipped for the traditional rigors of college writing; second, that enlightened teachers recognize these skills as providing the practical basis for mastering the demands of college-level literacy; and third, that what we mean by *literacy* needs to be broadened to

include a full range of oral language skills. This three-part response combines the underlying humanitarian instincts of teachers in the first point (all students have something to contribute) with their long-standing practical instincts in the second point (good teachers always draw upon the strengths of students), to produce a kind of broad ideological force that disguises the radical nature of the third point (that literacy is something other than reading and writing) and thus largely blurs the central concern of contemporary language education for most of this centurythe special role of well-formulated written texts.

The problem here has to do with the contradictory nature of the first two pointsand hence the need to privilege one over the other, likely asserting one point as a rhetorical concession to the other. While few teachers would object to the first point, that all students have something to contribute, traditional teachers would tend to see it more as a tactical concession offered as a means of strengthening the second point (the demand for more effective teaching). The focus for traditional teachers, meanwhile, is on the second point: the need for substantial and effective change *in students themselves*. Such a comparatively speaking conservative position lies at the center of Mina Shaughnessy's intentions in *Errors and Expectations*a position that can be summed up in the practical importance of teachers' having a positive attitude about their students in order to help them learn.

Yet to the extent that we take the first point seriouslythat students really do have valuable language skillswe create ever more pressure to revise our goals and classroom practices. The more seriously we take the first point, the greater the need for substantial and effective change *in teachers themselves*, for example, in recognizing the importance of teachers' learning about the interesting and unusual ways that their students use language, not just as a strategy for changing students but because their nontraditional use of language is indeed intrinsically interestingperhaps, as we shall see, precisely for being nontraditional, that is, resisting accepted norms. It is this alternative, more radical positions that lies at the center, not of Shaughnessy's conservative pedagogy, but of the widespread enthusiasm with which her work was greeted. The success of *Errors and Expectations* continues to have little to do with readers accepting any of Shaughnessy's practical and largely outdated pedagogic suggestions (including what may prove to be

the last chapter ever to be written on the pedagogy of penmanship in college composition). Shaughnessy remains a major figure in the profession for creating a work that expresses an undeniable admiration, even ardor, for what all students, even the least well-prepared, can accomplish, in part by altering our understanding of the skills they already possess.

With a little finessing, one can balance the two positions, alternating between the conservative and radical positions of calling on, in turn, students and teachers to changea practice clearly established by Labov, although hardly in his case, with full balance. On the conservative side, there is Labov's begrudging admission that the following, rather formal, off-putting aspects of literacy, "may all be useful acquisitions": "Precision in spelling, practice in handling abstract symbols, the ability to state explicitly the meaning of words, and a richer knowledge of the Latinate vocabulary" (208). Here is Labov stressing, albeit briefly, the second point (that students need to change), but largely as a rhetorical concession. Labov's heart clearly is with the first and third points, changing, not students (who have the spunk and the resistance that Labov's more-educated, pallid colleagues lack), but teachers and thus, indirectly, our general understanding of literacy: "In high school and college, middle-class children spontaneously complicate their syntax to the point that instructors despair of getting them to make their language simpler and clearer" (208).

Like Stuckey and other reformers, Labov associates school writing not with his own forceful writing or that of other writers who may have influenced him (a discourse defined by some as "flexible, detailed, and subtle") but with the "turgid, redundant bombastic, empty" qualities of the worst school-based writing as found in learned journals as well as in student writing. Labov's implicit target is an intellectual establishment that appeared to him, as well as to many others of his generation, to be morally bankrupt. As a spokesperson for critical thought, Labov is attacking not just formal language instruction but all formal practices that promote the status quo (specifically, the dominance of the masses, including most minority groups, by a technological elite).

With Labov, we have a clear break away from the conservative formulation of critical pedagogy, with nonstandard English, especially in its vernacular oral form, being valued as a vehicle of resistance. The power of his workand especially the wide reception it

received among English teachershas little to do, for example, with his own formal linguistic analysis as to what group of students, rich or poor, black or white, has the highest percentage of well-formed sentences. Most of Labov's readers lack his expertise in this area of analysis and are likely to be suspicious of formal analysis in any case, readily seeing it as special pleadingwhen it is used to argue against their own predisposition. Furthermore, Labov's claims flew in the face of the classroom experience of most English teachers then and most parents today, black or whitespecifically his claim that the schooling that professional parents seek for their children (and which in suburban flight continues to be one of the great motivating forces in American demographics) does little to increase the likelihood that these students will be able to write effectively, with passion as well as power. Of course the very terms "good" and "bad" writing are transformed to the extent that what one values most has less to do with formal properties of writing (well-formed sentences) and more to with the intensity of resistance that one's writingor, more to the point, one's oral languagemight express.

Alternately stated, the more one identifies resistance as the key to good writing, or all language use, then the more likely it is that economically deprived students will actually have an advantage, and, ironically, the more deprived and thus more alienated the students are the better. In such thinking we find the basis for Labov's much-noted example of Larry, the student who when pressed as to why he asserted that God must be white, responded:

> Why? I'll tell you why. 'Cause the average whitey out there got everything, you dig? And the nigger ain't got shit, y'know? Y'unnerstan'? Soumforin order for *that* to happen, you know it ain't no black God that's doin' that bullshit. (213)

Here is real literacy, Labov suggests throughout his essay, at least the essential quality of a literacy worth its name, defined not like the polite and verbose speech of Charley M., a college-educated black man, speech that "most middle-class listeners [would] rate very high on a scale of 'job suitability'" (214), but a speech capable of articulating through its resistance (in the process helping to overcome) the gross dislocations, the deep alienation, of modern history. The implicit contrast in Labov is between the street and the officebetween the vibrant, informal language of resistance

and the dry, lifeless academic writing. There seems to be no middle groundmost interestingly, not where one might expect to find it, in an impassioned and technically proficient text like Labov's own.

We have come a long way indeed from a conservative critical pedagogy grounded in literate texts. In this new, radical iteration, critical pedagogy, "reading" and "writing" become terms with only metaphorical connection to written language. Such a shift can be seen as part of what a tradition-minded critic like Yaron Ezrahi might condemn as the "democratization of uniqueness":

> the view of each individual as a singular entity, as a particular being different from all others, as having the property of uniqueness not by virtue of a privileged birth, an extraordinary talent, a special education, or a remarkable achievement, but by virtue of the elementary fact of being a person. (248)

The issue here is less the uniqueness of someone like Larry than it is his radical unwillingness to accommodate to the larger forces of cultural assimilation. Larry's nonstandard language is valued, neither as a traditional text nor as a unique text (that is, not part of Ezrahi's "democratization of uniqueness"), but as a distinct variation of a common textone grounded in a determined expression of cultural resistance.

In *A Preface to Literacy*, I noted how the textual identity of Larry's words was solely the result of Labov's efforts, and in so doing I missed the point that what matters most to Labov and to other reformers is the intense resistance in the text itself (in this case, originating in Larry), and not who is responsible for its transcription (in this case, Labov). It is Larry who is, so to speak, the exalted poet; Labov, the lowly amanuensis. Labov's praise for Larry is thus not unlike that of Dick Hebdige's for contemporary countercultural or subaltern groups, including punk rockers and other purposely outlandish forms of adolescent rebellion, interpreted by Hebdige as a "declaration of independence, of otherness, of alien intent, a refusal of anonymity, of subordinate status" (35). In both cases, there is an immanent value in being the outsider, a situation that makes resistance a natural response. What we most admire in such peoplestreet kids like Larry in Philadelphia in the 1950s and those Hebdige finds in London in the 1980s, or displaced groups generallyhas less to do with reading and writing or even with

oral language than with a pervasive unwillingness to be rolled up into modern culture, to conform. In other words, what we most admire is the obvious presence of a resistant attitude, one that supports "both a play for attention and a refusal, once attention has been granted, to be read according to the Book" (35).

The opposite of literacy, what literacy opposes, therefore, is less often what seems most natural, *illiteracy*, than it is a kind of political quietism, almost complicitythe lack of resistance to normative institutions and values; that is, the opposite of literacy is the lack of a sufficient critical spirit. With "illiteracy" associated with false trust or prejudice, "literacy" becomes associated with the attack not just on error or prejudice but on the political system and actions within that system based on false allegiance, or ideology. "The prejudice against prejudice," writes Paul Ricoeur, "is rooted at a deeper level, namely in a prejudice against authority, which is identified too quickly with domination and violence" (71). What become thought of as the real (if implicit) literacy and illiteracy, as compared to the "mere" ones, have less to do with reading and writing than with one's willingness to oppose an oppressive statewhat Max Weber, as cited by Ricoeur, identifies as "the institution *par excellence* which rests on a belief in the legitimacy of its authority and its right to use violence in the last instance" (71).

The resistance of a subculture, consequently, is seen as the result of its critical *reading* of the state and the dominant or hegemonic culture that supports the state; the subculture *writes* itself in its resistance, its very style becoming its text. Reading and writing as such become a fundamental form of demystification based on a distinct thread of Marxian analysis, one that traces an implicit connection between production and social organization, or between economic base and superstructure, with superstructure consisting of a vast array of human activities and institutions, including texts, without any apparent economic connections. To *read* is thus to see a text's connection to power; to *write* is to expose those connections. The production of wealth in any society establishes winners, those who profit from the labor of others, and losers, those who do the work or in others ways do not share fairly in the general wealth. According to this strand of Marxist analysis, the winners maintain their superior position less through force than through a vast ideological apparatus, through the force of what Gramsci labeled *hegemony*, a force that implicitly privileges their own particular social

practices, and what Knoblauch and Brannon call "stories" or "representations," as superior.

The belief system that naturalizes the privileged position of its adherents is often labeled *ideology*, what Gouldner calls "a belief system that makes pretentious and unjustified claims to scientificity" (*Dialectic* 9). Critical language as a form of pedagogic discourse entails not just what its supporters claima kind of generic hard thinking concerned only with replacing widely held misconceptions (false stories) with the truth. It also entails the formulation of a new set of stories, those specifically designed at debunking the claims of the powerful. The goal of critical language is always to escape the claims to belonging made by existing stories; as Knoblauch and Brannon conclude, "To see these stories as rhetorical constructions, historically situated, is effectively to see 'through' them to their ideological designs. To see 'through' them is to exercise the power to think critically" (5).

Yet the fundamental question remains: just what does one see when one "see[s] 'through'" hegemonic stories? The implication in Knoblauch and Brannon, as in pedagogic reform generally, is that in unmasking ideology one sees *the truth*. In the new critical pedagogy, ideology is like storytelling generally, a fundamental form of distortion, nominally for class or hegemonic reasons; truth is best defined, then, as the overcoming of ideological distortion.

## A New Orthodoxy

Ricoeur, a staunch proponent of deep language, is willing to concede the critical insight he finds exemplified in Jürgen Habermas, that "all knowledge is supported by an interest" (245), but not without the added provision that all such interest is mediated by contradictory impulses based on prior affiliations and attachments that are themselves never easily subjected to critical analysis. Underpinning all forms of critical practice lies the universal precritical condition of belonging: before we think critically, we belong to groups that elicit from us and in return fulfill many of our deepest emotional needs. Ideology as the distortion of our thinking resulting from such associations thus becomes for Ricoeur, "an unsurpassable phenomenon of social existence, insofar as social reality always has a symbolic constitution and incorporates an

interpretation, in images and representations, of the social bond itself" (231).

The interest in emancipation at the center of pedagogic reform is not a pure, extrahistorical entity capable of elevating itself, in Ricoeur's terms, "to the rank of absolute knowledge" (245), but a claim for a new, higher form of self-identity, that is, a utopian plea no less historically situated than parallel ideological pleas. Ideology for Ricoeur is something "*in which* men live and think, rather than a conception *that* they pose" (227). Ideology, accordingly, as the irreducible mode of our thought, can never purely or simply be the *subject* of thought: "It operates," Ricoeur contends, "beyond our backs, rather than appearing as a theme before our eyes. We think from it rather than about it." Ideology is "by nature an uncritical instance" since no individual or group can "thematise everything [,] . . . pose everything as an object of thought" (227).

Reason is the well-lit area of human existence, the safe area illuminated by the campfire; beyond these limits is the great darkness of ideology and irrationality. Yet as we see everywhere, our dealing with this irrationality, this darkness, is not without its own reasonone that Ricoeur rightly sees as related to a primal, prerational sense of belonging. There is for Ricoeur no escaping ideology, no "objectifying knowledge about our position in society, in a social class, in a cultural tradition and in history" that is not "preceded by a relation of *belonging* upon which we can never entirely reflect" (243). We can only think about the world from a condition of belonging to it, not just abstractly as a member of the human race (although such an illusionconsidered at length belowmay lie at the heart of intellectuals as a class), but concretely as a member of a specific group, or tribe, one with a strong need, related to the instinct for survival, for asserting its collective identity.

It is here, in this impulse for identity, that Ricoeur locates the principal interest of reformand possibly the central question of human history: the prospects and limits of human tolerance, specifically, the possibility that under the right circumstances (including perhaps proper coaxing from educators) people can learn to live together in increasingly larger units subject to increasingly abstract and universal notions of justice. For reformers such as Knoblauch and Brannon, proponents of a new critical pedagogy, human tolerance is mainly a matter of people acting responsibly

(like grown-ups), in part by responding to the admonishments of their teachers: "American citizens," they lecture us, "should understand, accept, and live amicably amidst the realities of cultural diversityalong axes of gender, race, class, and ethnicitythat are hallmarks of American society" (6).

For Ricoeur, and for the older, modern tradition of English studies, human tolerance is also a matter of managing as well and as justly as we can, but with a recognition of real limits of tolerance imposed upon us by virtue of the phenomenological constraints of our being people whose primary identity derives from a necessarily *prelogical* sense of belonging. "The intolerable begins," Ricoeur contends, "when novelty seriously threatens the possibility for the group to recognise and re-discover itself" (227). The admonishment that forms the moral core of pedagogic reform is finally based on the belief in the possibility of awakening in a people a truly universal sense of belonging that transcends local considerations of class, gender, race, and ethnicity.

Just how does one reach such a step, where an abstract, universal attachment to social justice seems more compelling than local attachments to groups that define themselves largely in terms of concrete, local obligationsof which the most compelling may be to the core family unit itself (the belief that blood is thicker than water). If throughout history, people's attachment to the concrete and the local seems so much more compelling, more forceful than their attachment to the abstract and the universal, how then do we account for fervent calls for broad tolerance in Knoblauch and Brannon and other reformers? One answer is that intellectuals, and most especially language teachers, really are an historical exception, a model social group that has found a way to substitute a general, more intellectual sense of belonging to humanity for the often more emotional, parochial attachments of ordinary belonging.

In some sense, the ability to effect such a substitution of universal for local attachment is the primary legitimatizing act of intellectuals, the basis for its claim to be a universal class worthy of assuming a leadership role, and thus the primary justification for its heightened professional (if not comparable economic) status. What defines intellectuals as a class is not just expertise in any one area but, much in the fashion of clerics, this forswearing of familial or local obligations for a seemingly higher, universal belief. If taken seriously, however, such thinking would seem to dictate that, for

students and eventually for everyone else to share intellectuals' commitment to social justice, they would also have to share the expanded sense of belonging and altered self-identity of teachers themselves, that is, for all students to recapitulate the life histories of their teachers, and hence for all people to become intellectuals.

There are two inherent problems with such a solution, however. First, it is diametrically opposed to the message of teachers themselves and certain strains of reformthat, unlike intellectuals who traditionally rise above immediate class and ethnic interests, students and people should be true to their own distinct backgrounds. But what if that ethnic background itself has a strong element of group identification that fosters intolerance of outsiders or strictly classifies social roles on the basis of gender? The problem here is that too often reformers want the best of both worlds: people true to their own group with its diverse heritage and traditions, but only up to a point, and beyond that instead adhering to the values of one overriding new group, that of a seemingly universal class, that of professional reformers and educators intent on repressing local allegiances and local identity.

The second problem is even subtler and more intransigent, and involves the historical, economic basis of professional status and class values. A central insight behind the efforts of critical reform is that what seem to be universal values like tolerance are not a separate and distinct category of virtues that some people (good people) have and others (bad people) do not, but are instead just another form of adaptive responses, really no more virtuous or less selfish than other responses, but cloaked in an aura of virtue by a group as a result of its dominant position in society. "Follow us! Accept X!" is the universal battle cry of all vanguard groups, with X always packaged as a universal goodbe it peace, salvation, truth, or tolerance. But what if one is part of a group whose identity is threatened, not enhanced, by the vanguard's conception of truth or tolerance? Does not pedagogic reform itself instruct us to see the local interests behind all universal claims, to see the current plea for greater tolerance in terms of the immediate professional interests and needs of its staunchest advocates, English teachers themselvesperhaps, for example, to see such teachers as that professional group most eager to align itself with (and even promote) the rising social and economic standing of a new, demographically diverse, postindustrial managerial class? If, as Knob-

lauch and Brannon suggest, "politics is the essence of social life" (6), then is not some form of patronage the essence of politicsthe gist of Tip O'Neill's aphorism that all politics is local (that is, about patronagea good joband other forms of immediate economic advantage)?

Thus what looks like the one solution to this dilemma of students' identification with their teachers' resistance may in the end be just another case of mistaken identity, with teachers themselves just one more group in a long line of groups that step forward to announce themselves as *the* vanguard group, the one new universal class engaged in the creation of the good society. Might not the elevation of a new critical pedagogy as the one defining virtue of a new class even be part of what Habermas refers to as the primary characteristic of "the political public sphere in the welfare state[:] . . . a singular weakening of its critical functions," with "publicity" and "public relations," not rational discourse itself, being "enlisted in the aid of the secret policies of interest groups" (236)?

English studies, meanwhile, from its outset has always been far less utopian, far less prone to disguising special pleading under a universal claim, more willing to accept Ricoeur's belief that there may be no escaping intolerance, just mitigating its effects. What Ricoeur calls "a radically pluralist, radically permissive society" (227) may indeed not be possible, or even worse, may be only an excuse for a new, subtler form of intolerancejust as pedagogic reform may itself be seen as a new, subtler form of intellectual hegemonythat is, as just another new postmodern orthodoxy.

Three
Deep Reading and Writing

*To say more than human things with human voice,*
*That cannot be; to say human things with more*
*Than human voice, that also, cannot be;*
*To speak humanly from the height or from the depth*
*Of human things, that is acutest speech.*
Wallace Stevens, "Chocorua to Its Neighbor"

English and Deep Language

Whereas the language of pedagogic reform is defined largely by political motivesin what Antony Easthope calls part of "a return of the repressed, accompanied by a radical politics and concern with other oppression (gender, race) besides those enforced through class" (7)the deep language at the center of unreconstructed English studies is predicated on the transforming power of the text to embody new and alternate understandings of the world, or in the language of phenomenology, new and alternate ways of being in the world. Deep language thus builds on the basic notion of literacy as little other than the ability to *read* and *write*, with reading and writing defined, not as transcription or coding skills, but as the ability to comprehend and to

generate new and complex meanings in texts, meanings that did not exist and hence could not be pointed to in the writers immediate social world but instead had to be created in the text itself, and likewise of the ability of readers to grasp those new, complex meanings through direct interaction with the text and in part by transcending the limits of their world.

Accordingly, in three basic, interrelated ways, the deep language of mainstream English studies opposes the new pedagogic reforms. First, with deep reading the goal is not demystification but comprehension. Readers comprehend a text in part by identifying with it, an act of recognition of common traits that, even if it ends in distance and control, at some point entails empathy, a state that requires heightened emotions, including a crucial element of mystification. Second, with deep language, texts are fundamentally hierarchical, with better texts allowing for a richer, more intense experience of recognition (often preceded by a more intense experience of mystification). Third, deep writing itself cannot be equated with the writer's intention or mental statenot, as in most forms of critical pedagogy, with the writer's expression of resistancebut is instead far more dependent on the writer's technical ability to construct sophisticated written texts that do not so much communicate intentions as embody, transform, even create them.

One way to envision the history of English studies is as the principal academic discipline committed to the promulgation of deep language, that is, to enhancing the fundamental human act of engagement with language by which individuals are able to transcend their customary worlds, or in a phase used by Gadamer, to fuse their horizon with that of someone else's. At the traditional heart of English studies is a notion of literacy concerned not with alphabetic matters, writing per sescript or printbut with the notion of sustained verbal innovation, new ideas, new thoughts pictured in words. While the connection between English studies and writing is neither logical nor absolute (English studies has never been the study of all writing; not all writing has warranted inclusion in English studies), neither is this connection purely accidental. The connection, instead, is essentially historicalthat is, at least since the invention of printing in the sixteenth century, people projecting new worlds through language have relied on writing (here also admitting that a great deal of what has ever

gotten written down has not been concerned with such imaginative projection).

Deep writing involves much more than coding one's speech just as deep reading involves more than decoding the speech of others, since with speech the fundamental issue of imaginative projection of alternate worlds is seldom present. Thus reformers are right to see that the principal obstacle to reading and writing is not technical, not concerned with transcription, but conceptual and, in a key sense, even ideological, since by definition the literate message strains at the limits of convention, what is already known. Deep reading and writing, in other words, entail not copying and reciting but saying and understanding something new. In such literate acts, we temporarily associate with something we are notthe author or reader of the text, someone who dwells, at least temporarily, in this new setting and who, in the process of understanding, leaves behind parts of her or his old self, in order to be receptive to the possibility of becoming something new.

As Ricoeur asserts, understanding involves a dialectic process of distancing and appropriating; we distance ourselves from our ordinary selves, turn our backs, as it were, on our customary prejudices, and in so doing we can grasp (what he calls "appropriate") the meaning of the text: "To understand is not to project oneself into the text," not to remake the text entirely in one's own image, "but to expose oneself to it" (94), to recognize in the text the possibility of some other way of being in the world, indeed, in the act of empathic reading, to live that possibility. To understand is "to receive a self enlarged by the appropriation of the proposed worlds which interpretation unfolds."

There are five important corollaries to this key notion of depth at the heart of unreconstructed English studies. First, that depth explains the sense of personal discovery and growth that people have long associated with reading and writing. Whereas reformers offer us power over the world, deep language offers us power over ourselves, largely through expanding our ability to recognize our own condition in others and the condition of others (even that of human outcasts) in ourselves. While the connection between reading and an expanded self is well established, writing teachers have also recognized the complementary side of this equation: that writing is also a form of growth and recognition, that as writers we do come to express something new in our work,

something that we may well have not fully realized in ourselves before writing.

Second, that depth accounts for the crucial importance of interpretation. Here English studies has embodied the notion that the meaning of a text is not a preexisting idea that is merely conveyed (or, as viewed by reformers, distorted) by writing but a complex, new experience that is, as it were, created through the text. Whereas reformers also focus on the meaning, or ideological dimension, of the text, proponents of deep language see such issues as finally indistinguishable from the particular, unique expression that each text embodies. For deep language, the full richness and complexity of the idea is inseparable from its expression; there is value in rich, complex verbal expression as a source of another way of being that is independent of the ideas conveyed, or stated differently, ideas apart from their concrete, local expression tend toward bland generalization with little phenomenological value. Paraphrase, while potentially helpful, is never complete, never a substitute for the experience of the text. Conversely, and here is the source of the distrust that critical pedagogy has for aesthetic utterances generally, an expressively rich text, even if it contains ideas with which we disagree, is more valuable than an abstract, expressively empty text that mouths widely shared or "correct" views.

Third, and a necessary extension of the first two corollaries, that depth in language both requires and in turn helps account for depth psychology, the notion of a universal, autonomous self that is enriched, *deepened*, by certain kinds of experiences. For current reformers it is unlikely, given what Tony Bennett calls "the configuration of today's political struggles," that so naïve a fomulation as the self "might be forged that would be of equal service in the multitude, intersecting, but equally noncoincident foci of struggle constituted by black, gay, feminist, socialist and, in some contexts, national liberation politics" (166). For deep language the notion of an autonomous self is not so much a simplistic given, a single, monolith, than it is a goal, something that we work toward and thus create in part through mediating imaginative experiences like literature and play, activities where we are most encouraged to step free from what we have been. "Self, then," writes Donald Polkinghorne, "is not a static thing or a substance, but a configuring of personal events into an historical unity which includes not only what one has been but also anticipations of what one will be" (qtd. in Bruner 116).

Fourth, that depth in language follows the structure of metaphor in providing for an irreducible experiential or aesthetic dimension of understanding. One must experience the text, open oneself up to it, as a new form of living, just as in order to understand a metaphor one must imagine, sensually see its figurative vehicle in order to grasp its literal meaningactually picture sleep as a kind, comforting person knitting up the ravelled sleeve of care. "Prior to any generalization about literature," writes Paul De Man about the experience of deep reading, "literary texts have to be read, and the possibility of reading can never be taken for granted. It is an act of understanding that can never be observed, nor in any way prescribed or verified" (107). An essential part of "all critical discourse" is for De Man a kind of living with the text itself, what he labels "an area of immanence" that "poses the problem of its intelligibility in its own terms."

Fifth and last, that depth necessitates an element of empathic understanding, living with the other, that must take place prior to, and hence independent of, any formal, scientific explanation or critical analysis. Indeed, the idea of depth at the center of English studies has a tendency to want to guard the rich phenomenological experience of understandingthe living with the text with its key sense of a unified, irreducible wholenessfrom the reductive nature of explanation and analysis, just as it typically resists the reductive nature of paraphrase (for example, the belief that the literal assertion, sleep refreshes, is an adequate explanation of Shakespeare's metaphor). Once again, what De Man says explicitly about the allegorical nature of poetrythat it "must contain a representational element that invites and allows for understanding, only to discover that the understanding it reaches is necessarily in error" (18586)is true for deep writing generally. It is not just lyric poetry that is "an enigma which never stops asking for the unreachable answer to its own riddle" but writing itself that fulfills the originating metaphoric impulse of language to allow us to see the familiar as new and the new as familiar.

These five corollaries can be collapsed into a single defining feature of deep language, one that places it at the center of English studies as an academic field of study for most of this century and, as such, distinguishes it from most current efforts at curriculum reform: namely, the belief that an individual's sense of personal autonomy is enhanced by the sensual experience at the center of

language. Here, at the heart of unreconstructed English studies, one finds the source of the world-empowering connotation so widely attached to the term "literacy" this century as well as what has long made English such an attractive discipline: this sense of there being an extraordinary, irreducible, irreplaceable aesthetic experience at the core of all "ordinary" life. The study of English, since its late-nineteenth-century inception, has been, in its highest form, training in the practice of deep language, or, what might be called training in the practice of "real" literacythat is, the use of language for the imaginative purpose of naming, a process that allows us to see through words alone a dimension of living that would not otherwise be there.

In some sense, therefore, English studies shares the historical disdain for the machinery of language characteristic of all reformers, but for an entirely different reason, one grounded in a radically different conception of the nature of language itself. For reformers, language is a universal experience consisting largely of formal, abstract properties (possibly wired in the brains of all peoples), presumably something that has little to do with how people actually use language. Breakdowns in thinking, for the advocates of a new critical pedagogy, are less matters of language itself than of logic or ideologyhence the overriding concern of such advocates, not with students' verbal ability (a universal faculty), but with their political orientation, specifically their willingness to question the status quo.

For pedagogic reformers, the key to language education surprisingly has little to do with more effective reading and writing, little to do with technical and mundane matters such as helping students to control syntax and extend their mastery of dictionthus little to do with "mere" literacyand instead everything to do with seemingly more compelling, ideological issues like students' willingness to speak out, to empower themselves, as well as our willingness as their teachers to accept their many forms of expression. For reformers such as Stuckey, all the important matters relating to literacy education are ideological, involving ways of exposing to students the "real" power relations that underlie and distort ordinary social interaction, enabling them to see for the first time what we ourselves can seehow the state and other oppressive institutions, including the schools themselves, use education to stymie legitimate political aspirations. Contemporary

pedagogic reform, in other words, is often dismissive of any and all concern with language per se. Reading and writing are purely mechanical actswhat matters is the quality, the independence of student thinking.

Mainstream English studies, on the other hand, while acknowledging a purely mechanical side to reading and writing (its transcriptive component), has traditionally defined literacy largely in terms of the quality of verbal expressionthe completeness of the world embodied in the text itself. Even the term "language," when used in the context of English studies, ordinarily refers not to universally shared verbal skills but to those rare uses of language that expand our understanding of our own personal or collective identity. "Language," within the field of English studies, has most often been a normative, not a descriptive, term, referring not to the common but to the ideal, and often most uncommon, form of communicationthat form of verbal expression that fulfills the highest demand of culture by displaying for us new, expanded means of self-representation and recognition, new ways of being in the world.

As the hermeneutic tradition has long recognized, there is no escaping the task of generating and interpreting such self-representationsall of us, writers included, are caught in the struggle, not just to express ourselves, but like all readers to understand reflectively what it is we have expressed. As Ricoeur says, "To understand an author better than he understood himself is to unfold the revelatory power implicit in his discourse, beyond the limit of his own existential situation" (191). What we value in language most is precisely what deep texts have most to offer: the power of language, in the words of Paul Ricoeur, for "indefinitely extending the battlefront of the expressed at the expense of the unexpressed" (123).

The deep language at the center of English studies thus entails the skills to be able to use written language, either creating texts as writer (author) or comprehending them as reader, less to control the world directly through technology or politicsless to empowerthan to see the world, and ourselves, anew, that is, to enrich the world and ourselves by adding to the possibilities of being in the world. Here is the mimetic power of language that like metaphor lies at the center of verbal aesthetic experience, allowing us to move others and be moved ourselves solely through the force of

imaginative representation. The most powerful texts, created and comprehended by the most powerful readers and writers, are those that are most transformative, that call forth the challenging questions, that in so doing provide for the most complete break with ordinary practicedrawing us into a strange, new world that only gradually we come to recognize as our own, then returning us to a world that now seems that much less familiar.

Unlike the efforts of current reformers, English studies traditionally has sought, not to remove us to some objective platform above the fray, but to plunge us ever further into the circle of complex expression and interpretation; it gives us a glimpse of what it is like, in Stevens's terms, "To speak humanly from the height or from the depth / Of human things." Hence the dual historical tendency within English studies and all of the humanities: on the one hand, opposition to the practical, to literacy education as job training or anything practical aimed at promoting the individual's readier integration with the immediate needs of others, and on the other, privileging of the aesthetic, that which provides that enriched view of an alternate way of being.

Resisting Deeply

English studies has historically regarded language in much the same way it has regarded culture: neither all-encompassing nor broadly egalitarian but instead based on a qualitative divide between that which furthers self-representation and that which does not. The tension between the traditional deep language of English studies and most new critical practicesover the nature and value of language, the self, and literatureall rest on this initial disagreement. At its most basic level, the disagreement is one of attitude toward discourse: for unreconstructed English studies, faith in, even gratitude for, the power of discourse to disclose new worlds, to enrich us, versus, for a new critical pedagogy, caution, even suspicion that the emotional allure of discourse is invariably a trap, a way of dangerously heightening our sense of belonging in, accepting, this world. This conflict over faith and suspicion is sometimes explained as a conflict over two ways of knowing any experience, *understanding* characteristic of aesthetic experience and *explanation* characteristic of sciencethat is, understanding it

through emotion and empathy, opening oneself to the mimetic, representational power of the world of the text, and gaining explanatory control over an experience by placing it within a larger structure of cause and effect.

The conflict here is fundamentaland goes to the long-standing strain between humanities and social sciences, even when the two intellectual endeavors share the same basic goal of opposing the status quo. Historically English studies and the social sciences has each prided itself on cultivating its own discourse of resistance to accommodative pressures, with each motivated both by a real, imminent sense of danger created by rapid change associated with industrialism and by its faith in the distinctive resistant power of its discourse. Whereas English studies traditionally has grounded resistance in ever more accurate, more individual (and deeper) forms of self-representation, forms that depend upon the interplay of feelings, structure, and imagery and that in turn give individuals a keener sense of the distinctive, original, hence valuable aspects of local practice, the new critical pedagogy grounds resistance on the claims of rational objectivity and controlthat is, being able always to explain the local by placing it into a wider causative field. The goal of this new pedagogy thus remains to understand the world, as Merod notes, "in order to change it" (1).

Mainstream English studies would protest that such reforms err here and elsewhere in privileging acting in the world over understanding it, as if understanding the world through self-representation (either expression or interpretation) is not itself a form of action. For Merod, what matters most is less a matter of understanding than a willingness to act to oppose "the state's irrational authority" through "material and ideological combat": "If the humanities are to become a force of persuasive dissent within our culture, they will have to manufacture moral commitment and political energy that relieve their embarrassed privilege as civilized but silent witnesses" (63). Champions of reform thus regularly characterize the aesthetics of deep reading developed over the last two centuries, in romantic aesthetics and later New Criticism, not as a form of resistance celebrating the personal and the localoften found in the isolated, the uncommon, the ruggedly differentbut as a massive effort at self-induced historical blindness, one that ignores the productive forces of history in order to see the text as

a transhistorical verbal icon, a source of infinitely rich, aesthetic meaning.

The "blindness" of aesthetics becomes one of the main obstacles overcome by the "truth" of the new critical pedagogy, a truth increasingly promoted as the goal of the broadest possible intellectual mandate: the criticism of culture itself. The new pedagogy often fashions itself, in the mode of the Cretan philosopher, as the one anomalous cultural practicethat form of critical practice so imbued with suspicion as to be able to oppose culture and, in so doing, to oppose itself. This fiercely resistant dimension of critical practice, advocate Richard Johnson contends, can be found in three insights regarding the nature of culture: first, that culture is "intimately connected with social relations, especially with class relations and class formations, with sexual divisions, with the racial restructuring of social relations and with age oppressions as a form of dependency"; second, that "culture is a power and helps to produce asymmetries in the abilities of individuals and groups to define and realize their needs"; and third, that "culture is neither an autonomous nor an externally determined field, but a site of social differences and struggles" (Johnson 39).

On one level, Johnson's claims can be seen as based on two radically contradictory notions of culture, as alternately the site of struggle and as an area that, if not completely apart from this struggle, has enough distance from it to speak objectively (or critically) about itthat is, culture as both the historical struggle that subsumes any effort at understanding and the rising above such a struggle via the light of a new critical pedagogy itself. If culture is where we struggle, then this new critical practice is inherently extracultural, a place where we learn which side to choose and what tactics to adopt to help the right or just side (our side?) triumph. Pedagogic reform in such a dichotomy becomes, not what it might logically seem to bean aspect of culturebut rather that one practice able to stand apart from culture. Culture consequently comes to refer to not all of our collective life but only that part not yet fully penetrated by rationality.

History, meanwhile, itself takes on the characteristic of a morality play, with reason and emancipation opposed to tradition and oppression: tradition enslaves us, and reason sets us free, or, to use Ricoeur's terms, the new critical pedagogy is a retelling of the story of "the *autonomy of man* as an agent of his own history" (225). If

we push Johnson's position just a little, we can see that, like other models of literacy, it operates on an unstated assumption about a false sense of cultural practice that goes by its own name (*culture*), and is used by the powerful to oppress the powerless, and a true, albeit nameless, practice, that works for emancipation and is implicitly allied with reform.

One question that remains unresolved for Johnson and others becomes what makes for a true rather than a false practicewhat makes for real culture (that is, critical activity itself, although unnamed as "culture") versus the false culture that is the rightful subject of criticism. In other words, what must a cultural practice do to be emancipatory, or in some way to further so worthy a goal as our collective emancipation from self-interest, bigotry, injustice? The problem starts when we strip the term *culture* of its normative, idealized, hierarchical dimension, and instead label all human activity as cultural. While there is something worth studying in all human activity, or even in the adaptive strategies of all living species, it may still make more sense to reserve the term *culture*, not for the activities themselves, but for our organized, focused efforts of learning as a distinctly human endeavor, and thus what we do as part of the process by which we purposefully adapt our behavior, and try to understand which of our collective activities most assist in this endeavor. It is these activities concerned with expanding our sense of self-identity that would then most fully define our status as humans, and to which the term *culture* might be most fittingly applied. Deep reading and writing would then be special, not everyday, experiences through which, as Stevens observes, we occasionally get a glimpse of ourselves. English teachers might then be defined as those who study and organize the written forms of these collective experiences, in the process devoting great passion to assisting others in having such transformative experiences with texts.

For a reformer like Antony Easthope, such efforts are hopelessly and naïvely elitist, even reactionary. There is for Easthope only one kind of text"from popular culture or the canon, its object is not transcendent but immanent, not art but artifacts, not creation but production" (166). Accordingly, there is only one kind of author, that collection of forces that *produces* texts, and one kind of reading or analysis, that which sees the text strictly in terms of "the local discourses and institutions in the present within which

the text is *constructed* in a present reading" (44). For an advocate of deep language like Ricoeur, however, such leveling of discourse is illusionary, if not dangerous"the most sterile of lucidities," a social group "without distance from itself, without a self-representation" (241). True, Easthope might respond that the distance, the self-representation is to come through critical study itself, but in so doing he is suggesting that this new critical practice, and its proponents (himself included), exist somewhere and somehow on a plane apart from the texts under scrutiny. There seems to be no escaping the reductive and finally circular nature of this core pedagogic claim. When the notion of culture is flattened to include all human activity, the practice of critical teaching then necessarily emerges as the one self-reflective, objective human activity: the old notion of hierarchical culture, reborn with a new namecritical practice itselfonly now seemingly freed from the biases and passionate attachments of everyday life.

Four
Metaphor, Culture, and Play

*"Art" begins precisely there, where we are able to do otherwise.*
Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Play of Art"

Naming and Social Construction

Perhaps the full significance of the reformist challenge to deep language can be seen most clearly in the shifting attitude toward metaphor: from the gratitude of deep language for the chance that the heightening of ordinary language affords us, as slight as it might be, to see the world and ourselves anew versus the overriding suspicion of reformersthe sense, not just that everywhere we are in danger of being deceived (since an essential point of deep language is the inherent difficulty in distinguishing insight from deception), but that deception itself has a clear rational basis in the political or hegemonic interests of *other people*. In the eyes of reformers, no noncritical use of languageand especially the verbal play, even deception that lies at the heart of metaphorcan ever be a process of expanding our understanding but is instead inherently pathological, a product of a wider social injustice capable of being overcome through rigorous critical activity itself. In a key, oft-repeated phrase of reformers, language is "a social construction that shapes us as much as we shape it." It is,

Berlin predictably continues, "a product of social relations and so is ineluctably involved in power and politics"including, "economic 'realities' and the distribution of wealth; social and political 'realities' regarding class, race, and gender and their relations to power; and cultural 'realities' regarding the nature of representation or symbolic form in art, play, and other cultural experience" ("Rhetoric" 35). The argument with Berlin here is less with the unarguable assertion that "all language is interested" than with his decidedly rationalistic assumptions about how best to deal with, to disarm as it were, those interests.

Berlin rarely wavers from the belief that, through a combined effort of will, assertion, and sustained analysis, readers and writers can come to understand the systematic, hegemonic nature of this system, specifically, to see how "groups in ascendance [call] on all of their resources of power to maintain dominance in the face of opposition and resistance." The one and only task of reading and writing thus becomes unmasking of distortion and error, ideological or otherwisewhat Berlin calls "a working out of semiotic codes" ("Rhetoric" 35).

Here and elsewhere in Berlin, the Platonic distrust of poetry becomes attached to all language that escapes rigorous scrutiny. In the absence of sustained critical effort, he suggests, all verbal constructs retain their destructive allure, remain cleverly disguised tools of accommodation to the status quo. Berlin exhibits little sympathy for the unreconstructed notion that poetry and other acts of verbal self-representation are often primary sites of opposition to otherwise difficult-to-resist pressures of accommodation. For deep language, reading and writing skillswhat Wallace Stevens calls "acutest speech"are not just forms of window dressing, decorative matters, added on top of some underlying, "real" literacy. Such verbal embodiments of the poetic or the personal are sources of neither flight nor escape, but instead, like arts and crafts and many other local practices, are themselves enclaves of resistance against all universal forces of change, including those motivated by greater technological efficiency and geared at creating a more rational society. Unreformed English studies has historically opposed the world and all its sophistry and fraud, less by argument or reasonless by cleverer arguments, better political organization, more votes, that is, less by more effective political actionthan by striving for an alternate form of experience, one grounded in the

ordinary but transformed into something extraordinary through the mastery of a new technique that adds a general intensity to this new practice.

Deep language can be seen as an abbreviated, metonymic reference of the rich understanding and expression characteristic of literature, and often referred to in abbreviated form by writers and educators simply as *language* itself. What educators and others referring to the peculiarly rich quality of human language have often had in mind is not some sort of generic verbal communication (what all people are capable of doing with language) but a special form of verbal communication involving the creation and comprehension of meanings that expand our sense of ourselves, achieving in language what only a few, rare people actually accomplishwhat they have been referring to as the mastery of deep language itself. Many seemingly general discussions about the nature and value of language are best seen as barely distinguishable from questions about the creation and comprehension of the aesthetically enriched verbal texts. Even the simplest questions about "language," therefore, are often grounded in the single, founding image of deep language: that of humans inhabiting a world they do not now, and can never, entirely understand.

For deep language, the world we inhabit remains an alien place that we make our own, and then only temporarily, through acting in it. Deep language thus does not begin, where reformers are apt to start, with an expression of our rational control of the world; as such it has little in common with Augustine's famous parable about his own initiation into language, with the autonomous individual exercising control of the world by naming things in accord with their true nature:

> When [my elders] named any thing, and as they spoke turned towards it, I saw and remembered that they called what they would point out by the name they uttered. And that they meant this thing and no other was plain from the motion of their body. . . . And thus by constantly hearing words, as they occurred in various sentences, I collected gradually for what they stood; and having broken in my mouth to these signs, I thereby gave utterance to my will. Thus I exchanged with those about me the current signs of our wills, and so launched deeper into the stormy intercourse of human life. (*Confessions* 11)

In such an anecdote, we see a founding image of critical practicethe clear, unambiguous correspondence between words and objectsand hence a countering image to the abiding uncertainty of deep language. The emphasis in Augustine is on utilitarian control of human desires, with happiness found in acquiring the right rewards: the drink, the food, the stick that the individual can now properly call for.

But what does the Augustinian parable tell us about the child who desires, not the visible objects themselves, but a story about them, whose goal is not something physical but instead a new and startling verbal picture of the world? Compare Augustine's parable on the origin of language with one from the early-eighteenth-century Italian philosopher Vico. Where Augustine's languageless child is already living in a safe, perfectly ordered world, with clear rewards for actions, Vico's languageless "children" are thrust in a world finally and forever beyond their full understanding:

> Thereupon a few giants, who must have been the most robust, and who were dispersed through the forests on the mountain heights where the strongest beasts have their dens, were frightened and astonished by the great effect whose cause they did not know, and raised their eyes and became aware of the sky. And because in such a case the nature of the human mind leads it to attribute its own nature to the effect, and because in that state their nature was that of men all robust bodily strength, who expressed their very violent passions by shouting and grumbling, they pictured the sky to themselves as a great animated body, which in that aspect they called Jove, the first god of the so-called greater gentes, who meant to tell them something by the hiss of his bolts and the clap of his thunder. And thus they began to exercise that natural curiosity which is the daughter of ignorance and the mother of knowledge, and which, opening the mind of man, gives birth to wonder. (*New Science* §377)

"Wisdom," for Vico, writes Donald Verene, "stems from an understanding of the image as the first and genuine thought" (217)the image, like the world itself, as something that we experience wholly and sometimes terribly, but without first understanding it. In the beginning, there is a Word, here "Jove," but not a word that acts

as referent pointing to something out in the world, naming an object, but a word that creates something entirely newa Godbased on metaphorical similarity: we are men and make loud groans; what kind of being must it be then that can make groans as loud as thunder?

At the core of Vico's view of language is an overbidding sense of limitsthe fundamental, almost overwhelming, disparity of power between ourselves and nature that defines human existence. Yet this is clearly not the power disparity noted by Colin Lankshear in an occasional paper entitled, "Critical Literacy": here instead we find the oft-repeated observation that "language is deeply and inescapably bound up with producing, reproducing, and maintaining arrangements of power which are unequal" (11). Nor is Vico's sense of limits and power disparity similar to that defined by Berlin as one skewing all discourse in favor of the victors: that "those who have the most to gain from historical explanations that validate present economic and political arrangements, the most recent victors of historical battles, will continue to sponsor histories from their point of view, framing master narratives that authorize power and privilege" (*Rhetorics* 73). Unlike Vico, Lankshear and Berlin are both filled with a postmodern sense of struggle between distinct human groups, most notably between the haves and the have-notes.

The struggle in Vicoand advocates of deep language generallyis less between competing historical groups that animate efforts of critical reformers than within humans themselves, the internal conflict within all of us between our ideals (in Vico a principal result of our imaginative powers) and our desires, between that which elevates the biological species into a civilized being (creating, for Vico, the world of culture) and those forever strange, forever menacing forces, historical and natural, that threaten to turn us back into wild beasts haunting the dense forest. Man's interests, Vico writes in his second Inaugural Oration, "are not only diverse and contrary, but even foreign and abhorrent to his proper and common nature." Any student of human nature, he continues, would soon "discover in how many strange and even bewildering ways each man continually changes and, in an hour, would become dissatisfied with himself." Here, then, is expression of a founding contradiction of deep language: "that men are lovers of truth surrounded with errors; . . . gifted with reason but subservient to passions; . . . admirers of virtue but full of vices." Humans,

he concludes, "are searching for happiness but oppressed by miseries; they have a desire for immortality but languish in their idleness of which, as of death, it is best not to speak" (*On Humanistic Education* 55).

There is in Vico only one all-encompassing, heroic struggle at the center of all human existencethe struggle represented by human culture itselffrom which, given Vico's sense of return, there can only be momentary respite. Cultural studies for Vico is the historical study of this long-standing struggle, and what makes Vico the founding philosopher of the humanities is his belief that our single greatest asset by far in this struggle is neither technology nor reason but the imaginative power of language itself to account, metaphorically as it were, for the one constant of human existence, and in ways we neither entirely control nor understand, even retrospectively.

Human history, for Vico, is indistinguishable from cultural history, and is to be finally located in the metaphoric or poetic power of language itself, specifically the ability to identify, or describe in words, something new on the basis of its similarity with the familiar. "No one," writes Borges in his parable "The Library of Babel," "can articulate a syllable which is not filled with tenderness and fear, and which is not, in one of those languages, the powerful name of a god" (57). For Vico, as for Borges, our initial identification of Jove-as-god is the archetypal, initial act of cultural identity or self-representation, by which we gain a kind of spiritual comfort and element of security in our strange world by using language to imagine, create, something new (here the world of Jove) based on similarity to what is already known. Jove stands less for a Platonic idea of God than for the metaphoric experience of Godthe power and noise associated with thunder, the sense of nature's awe contrasted with humanity's fearfulness, overcome in part by this act of self-representation that begins, not in the sound itself or even the word "Jove," but with the shared experience, here of wonder and awewhat Vico himself calls a "metaphysics, not rational and abstract like that of learned men now, but felt and imagined as that of those first men must have been, who, without power of ratiocination, were all robust sense and vigorous imagination":

> This metaphysics was their poetry, a faculty born with them ...; born of their ignorance of causes, for ignorance, the mother of wonder, made everything wonderful to men who

> were ignorant of everything. . . . [T]hey gave the things they wondered at substantial being after their own ideas, just as children do, whom we see take inanimate things in their own hands and play with them and talk to them as though they were living persons. (*New Science* §375)

Here is a picture of language that accords with Gadamer's observation that knowledge starts "at a point where something strikes us as alien because it runs counter to habitual expectations": "According to Plato, the beginning of philosophy, the desire for knowledge, is wonder (*thaumazein*)" (*Reason* 143).

All human culture emerges out of ignorance and the stories we invent to deal with that ignorance. How different is this world of Gadamer and Vicoalmost consumed by a sense of the limits of thoughtfrom that of reformers generally and that of Vico's one great contemporary opponent, the relentlessly analytic reformer of the modern world, René Descartes. Real thought, for Descartes, is that which is freed from, not grounded in, ignorance:

> Again, I thought that since we have all passed through childhood to manhood, and had long to be governed by our desires and our preceptors (in frequent conflict with each other, and neither perhaps counseling always for the best), it is almost impossible that our judgments should be as clear and firm as they would have been had we enjoyed the full use of our reason from birth and been always guided by it alone. (qtd. in Fisch 29)

Whereas Vico looked to see the truth *in* ignorance, what we can learn from lies as well as poetry, Descartes turned to deduction and reason to discover the truth *behind* ignorance (a truth somehow free of all ignorance). With Vico, there is always the insistence that, as in literary interpretation, we should never allow universal scientific explanation to distort or overlook the concrete and the specificwhat he calls "the importance of the single events and their circumstances" (*Study Methods* 34)and the possibility that if we observe closely enough we will see how the real always manages to confound the abstract supposition.

For Vico, as for advocates of deep language generally, interpretation must be based on the recognition that all human events reflect the contradictory nature of humans themselves, "that many

of the circumstances are extraneous and trivial, some of them bad, some even contrary to one's goal," and hence in need of a pedagogic approach grounded, not in the symmetry of abstract reason, but in the rough asymmetry of actual experience: "It is therefore impossible," Vico concludes, "to assess human affairs by the inflexible standards of abstract right; we must rather gauge them by the pliant Lesbic rule, which does not conform bodies to itself, but adjusts itself to their contours" (*Study Methods* 34). What Descartes largely sees as ill-shaped, unwieldy aspects of human life most ill-suited to relentless rational analysisnamely, the entire cultural world of law, religion, philosophy, poetry, history, even the adult mind itselfVico sees instead as magnificent manifestations of the imaginative, metaphoric power at the core of human experiencewhat we might call the mythifying truth of human ignorance. The field of interpretive studies that emerges from Vico entails offering thick or rich, if inconclusive, individual accounts of the mythifying force of all such distinctly human constructs, as the principal means by which we come to understand ourselves.

Vico's understanding of metaphor helps us see the contradiction of the lying Cretan as the founding paradox of thought itself, the defining insight at the center of this new field of cultural studiesand restated by Nietzsche a century ago: "How can something originate in its opposite, for example rationality in irrationality, the sentient in the dead, logic in illogic, disinterested contemplation in covetous desire, living for others in egoism, truth in errors?" (*Human, All Too Human* §1; *Reader* 53). And the answer also seems to be given elsewhere by Nietzsche as wellthat "the falseness of a judgment is to us not necessarily an objection to a judgment":

> The question is to what extent it is life-enhancing, life-preserving, species-preserving, perhaps even species-breeding; and our fundamental tendency is to assert that the falsest judgments . . . are the most indispensable to us, that without granting as true the fictions of logic, without measuring reality against the purely invented world of the unconditional and self-identical, without a continual falsification of the world by means of numbers, mankind could not livethat to renounce false judgements would be to renounce life, would be to deny life. (*Beyond* §4)

What emerges here is a picture of language emerging, as in Vico, not from reason and science and their efforts to achieve a real (what Piaget would call a "constructive") control over nature, but from play and the imagination where our control over the world is fanciful but no less delightful for being in closer accord with our immediate desires. It is in Vico that one finds the recognition that the origin of language is to be found in the basic act of playful representation by which we use the known to figure the unknown, that is, that language derives from and never loses its attachment to metaphor.

Children, according to Vico, recognize this fact, as did our earliest ancestorsboth of whom lacked fully developed powers of constructive assimilationbut it is a truth that Vico sees hidden in the modern world (Vico's third age of man) with its synechdochic, scientific concern with part-whole relationships and reliance upon distance and irony. Discussion of metaphor today, like that of the imagination generally, is likely seen, within a more encompassing scientific discourse, as referring to a distinct area of concernoften as a form of embellishment, a more pleasing, colorful way of conveying a general truth. Such is the approach taken by Vico's great rationalist contemporary, John Locke:

> Since wit and fancy finds easier entertainment in the world than dry truth and real knowledge, *figurative speeches* and illusion in language will hardly be admitted as *an* imperfection or *abuse* of it. I confess, in discourses where we seek rather pleasure and delight than information and improvement, such ornaments as are borrowed from them can scarce pass for faults. But yet, if we would speak of things as they are, we must allow that all art of rhetoric, besides order and clearness, all the artificial and figurative applications of words eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong *ideas*, move the passions, and thereby mislead the judgement, and so indeed are perfect cheat; and therefore . . . wholly to be avoided and, where truth and knowledge are concerned, cannot but be thought a great fault either of the language or person that makes use of them. (II, 105-106)

The sentence, "My blood boils," is for the critical thinker Locke merely a decorative derivative of the analytic assertion, "I am angry."

For Vico, a thinker in an alternate tradition, all language, knowledge, and culture follow a different coursethe path of metaphoric projection of a new representation of the world, one that literally extends the limits of thought, conjuring up an image of the body at odds with itself, possibly succumbing to passions it normally controls.

Weinsheimer notes how for followers of Locke, the "literal suffers what appears to be an exile into the improper when it undergoes metaphorical transference" (73), that its sense becomes strained, at some point, perhaps even nonsense. Yet what really happens, Weinsheimer argues, is just the opposite, with the literal, not reduced but enriched, "released from its previous confines and expanded": "Through the assimilation of difference in metaphor, the literal finds in the other to which it is applied its own fuller propriety. What appeared as exile is in fact homecoming" (73).

Similarly, a century before Weinsheimer, Nietzsche responds thus to the question, What is knowledge? "Nothing more than this: something strange shall be traced back to something *familiar*":

> [I]s our need to know not precisely thisneed for the familiar, the will to discover among all that is strange, unaccustomed, questionable something which no longer disturbs us? Is it not the *instinct of fear* which bids us know? Is the rejoicing of the man of knowledge not precisely the rejoicing of the feeling of security re-attained?" (*Gay Science* §355; *Reader* 68)

This notion of a homecoming, with its profound, pervasive sense of temporarily overcoming the normal state of estrangement, as echoed in Nietzsche and Weinsheimer, lies at the ontological core of deep language. "In fact," Vico writes in his fifth Inaugural Oration nearly two centuries before Nietzsche, "nature has unhappily established that we, by the impetuousness of our mind, fall into error and are brought around to that truth which we are born to reach by a direct path only by a tortuous one" (*On Humanistic Education* 111).

Deep language is predicated on this recognition of limits: that the forces of ignorance are so great and our own tools of understanding so limited. Yet, because of these odds, Vico suggests, how heroic, how marvelous the struggle. In this sixth oration, he notes how, "since man's language in almost all situation is inadequate, it

does not come to the aid of the mind and even fails it when the mind seeks its help in expressing itself" (128). He calls speech "awkward and uncultivated," noting how "what we say is misunderstood or stumbles over itself by the very words which are spoken." This sixth and last oration then continues with Vico adding, to the weaknesses of language, those of thought and the body or passions:

> To these deficiencies of language are added those of the mind. Dullness constantly grips the mind. False images of things toy with it and very often deceive it. Rash judgments cause the mind to form hasty conclusions. Faulty reasoning lays hold of it, and finally this confusion of things baffles and bewilders it. But, by Hercules, how much more grave are the shortcomings of the soul which are churned up by every storm and flux of the passions more turbulent than those of the straits! Thus it burns with desire and trembles in fear! It becomes dissipated in pleasures and is given to weakness in pain! It desires all things but never finds delight in any choice! What it once disapproved it now approves, what it now disapproves, it once approved! It is constantly unhappy with itself, always running away from itself and yet seeking itself! (*On Humanistic Education* 12829)

What contradictory creatures we areand how isolated by our own desires from what it is we truly want to become. Do not be fooled, Vico warns in his conclusion to this passage: "Because basic human nature has been changed by original sin, assemblies of men may appear to be societies, but the truth is that isolation of spirits is greatest where many bodies come together. Even more is it like the crowded inmates of a prison where the spirits that I have mentioned above endure punishments, each in the cell to which it is assigned" (12829).

Alone and uninformedeach of us in our own cell. If we search within our own natures, Vico asks, we see "nothing but mind, spirit, and capacity for language" (*On Humanistic Education* 127). For Vico and other proponents of deep language, metaphor is not a linguistic trope but a primary mode of thought, in the words of Paul Ricoeur, designating "the general process by which we grasp kinship, break the distance between remote ideas, build similarities or

dissimilarities" (132). We need to see metaphor, Ricoeur concludes, as a "heuristic fiction for the sake of redescribing reality." "Man in his ignorance," Vico quotes an ancient maxim, "makes himself the rule of the universe" (*New Science* §405). We discover "the bowels of the earth," Vico argues, like we discover all metaphor, hence all knowledge, not as "rational metaphysics teaches[,] that man becomes all things by understanding them (*homo intelligendo fit omnia*)" but instead as "imaginative metaphysics shows[,] that man becomes all things by *not* understanding them (*homo non intelligendo fit omnia*)."

Vico's role as a founding figure of deep language study is tied into his insight here into the complex, holistic nature of the human mind itself. "The human mind in the ear hears, in the eye sees, in the stomach shows anger, in the spleen laughs, in the heart discerns, and in the brain understands; but still it has no definite shrine in any part of the body" (*On Humanistic Education* 41). The mind is not to be confused, as Descartes, Locke, and contemporary language reformers would have it, with the rational powers of the brain itself but is instead the product of entire bodily experiencean experience often driven by fears and desires about which even the wisest among us often remain ignorant.

Metaphor, meanwhile, is a principal process of learning from this bodily ignorance, an ignorance that after all, despite all the wonders of science, remains our real condition in the world. It is at the center of the "rebirth of the rebellious subjectivity" that Marxist social critic Herbert Marcuse saw as our one best means of grasping the revolutionary potential latent, but regularly obscured, in all experience. This is the deeply aesthetic, anticognitive appreciation of the world that has long driven English studies: its concern less with political change than with recognizing old patterns in what seems new and strange. For Marcuse, as for Ricoeur and Vico, it is metaphor that provides us with the one sure means of such discovery, of "shatter[ing] the reified objectivity of established social relations and open[ing] a new dimension of experience" (7).

Again and again, Vico uses metaphor himself to describe the one path he sees away from the isolation and barbarism of Cartesian skepticism, a pedagogic practice that he believes casts in doubt "the truth that unites men, disposes them to follow their sense [*senso propio*], each according to his own pleasure or advantage, and thus recalls them from civil community for the sake of solitude" (letter of January 1729; qtd. in Mooney 101). Such students

become like animals, living not together peacefully but "scattered and alone in their dens and lairs." Meanwhile, instead of guiding their student masses with "reflective wisdom," educators, who teach them only to reason, wind up giving them "the cruelest shove so that they rush headlong forward and perish" (qtd. in Mooney 101).

What Vico urges teachers to do instead is to promote practices that "foster with zeal the society of men" (*On Humanistic Education* 130): namely, to find ways to combine eloquence and fantasyteaching what we would call the poetic or lyrical imagination. In what may well serve as a founding declaration of modern language studies, Vico explains just why it is that the Greeks were right to honor, not philosophers and logicians, but those people best able to use feeling to tame the beasts within us:

> For no other reason, the very wise poets created their poetic fables of Orpheus with his lyre taming the wild animals and Amphion with his song able to move the stones, thus erecting the walls of Thebes. For their feats, the lyre of the one and the dolphin of the other have been hurled into the heavens and are seen among the stars. Those rocks, those oaken planks, those wild animals are the fools among men. Orpheus and Amphion are the wise who have brought together by means of their eloquence the knowledge of things divine and human and have led isolated man into union, that is, from love of self to the fostering of human community, from sluggishness to purposeful activity, from unrestrained license to compliance with law and by conferring equal rights united those unbridled in their strength with the weak. (130-31)

Orpheus and Amphion, humans who become gods for their power with words and song, a power that allows them to transfer our worst instincts to our highest calling. A parable for our time and for a profession searching for its own center: "[To] have brought together by means of their eloquence the knowledge of things divine and human and have led isolated man into union."

Constructing the Self

> "English studies," Berlin argues, "will then explore the role of signifying practices in the ongoing life of societiesmore specifically,

in their relations to economic, social, political, and cultural arrangements" ("Literacy" 261), leaving unexplored and hence unproblematic, the metaphoric foundation of truth itself, the notion, as enunciated by thinkers like Vico, Marcuse, and Ricoeur, that there is no truth available to us as humansall our critical protestations notwithstandingthat is not ultimately based on untruth. Such, of course, is merely another form of the debate between the truth of poetry versus the truth of philosophy, with pedagogic reformers and more recently advocates of the social construction of language now playing the role of hard, fact-minded philosophers. Language may well be, as Berlin suggests, "a social construction that shapes us as much as we shape it." But just how is it possible that out of the literal falsehood of metaphor we gain insight into the world and ourselves, come to see both anew? For proponents of deep language, the ability of metaphor to use old language to name new things remains constant proof that there indeed are times when we are shapers of language and of our own world. And what about this language itself that is shaping us, asks Vico: Where does it come from, if not from metaphor, poetry, desire?

One problem with the notion of language as a social construction that comes out of current reform efforts is that it never takes itself, including its own radical skepticism, seriously enough. For all its relativistic talk, it remains deeply committed to a simplistic notion of falsehood and errorinevitably located in the distorted discourse of others (especially those with power), and thus always redeemable by the light of a higher level analysis, inevitably the kind of analysis and classroom practices its proponents are advocating. Social construction makes all language users captives of their historical moments, mired in deception, except for those with the ability (ironically enough) of giving universal validity to their assertions by publicly acknowledging the relativistic, pragmatic bent of all discourse. Social constructionistic views of language share with pedagogic reformers generally the belief that human error is the product of bad faith, hence something that can be readily avoided. It resides primarily in the selfish deeds of others, thereby defining the basic struggle in life as that between good and evil people.

Ironically, the work of one of the thinkers often cited as a founder of social constructionism, G. H. Mead, has close ties to the complex

tradition of deep language, with its notion of truth as a momentary, dialectic act, often involving individuals overcoming their own propensity for error. Mead recognizes the individual as a complex entity, comprised of, and torn by, dual forces: what he distinguishes as "me," or our sense of ourselves as seen through our experience of others, and "I," that presocial, unformed self full of all our more basic urges, desires, wishes, and dreams. It is the "I", as opposed to the "me"writes Mead in a key section of *Mind, Self, and Society* entitled "The Social Creativity of the Emergent Self"whose values are to be found in "the immediate attitude of the artist, the inventor, the scientist in his discovery, in general in the action of the 'I' which cannot be calculated and which involves a reconstruction of the society, and so of the 'me' which belongs to that society" (214). The two parts of the self are mutually dependent upon each other, but hardly at peace: "Just as there could not be individual consciousness except in a social group, so the individual in a certain sense is not willing to live under certain conditions which would involve a sort of suicide of the self in its process of realization." The creative self, the "I," will not at all times allow itself to be dominated by the "me."

There is something inside us all, Mead believes, an "I" that, like metaphor itself, wants to rebel against, or perhaps more accurately, in the spirit of metaphorical language itself, wants to create beyond, the literalness of existence as represented by widely accepted social norms. We can work profitably in groups, sharing ideas based on agreed-upon notions, Mead suggests, but never fully at peace. Leaders and "great characters," for Mead, are people who have fulfilled the role of metaphor itself by having "enlarged or enriched the community" (216), taking what is given and then reshaping it as a means of redefining the group. Artists, meanwhileand most writers are artists-in-trainingprobe far beyond the given, "reveal[ing] contents which represent a wider emotional expression answering to a wider society" (218). For Mead, the creative power of the "I" is "not peculiar to the artist, the inventor, and the scientific discoverer, but belong to the experience of all selves where there is an 'I' that answers to the 'me'" (214). As he concludes, "To the degree that we make the community in which we live different [And is this not the very point of metaphor?] we all have what is essential to genius, and which becomes genius when the effects are profound" (218).

Resisting Culture

Culture is a thoroughly discredited term, perhaps unsalvageable, and the source of some of the current tension between reformers and their opponents. While one path might be to substitute a euphemism for culture, such as imaginative self-representation, a more important task is to reestablish the normative, hierarchical component of collective life by showing the adaptive value of qualitatively distinct experiences. One place to begin this task of reconstruction is with a consideration of Richard Johnson's three defining aspects of culture in order to see if we can uncover his own implicit model of culture hidden in his own imperative to demystify the world. His three claims about culturethat it reflects existing class relations, that it contributes to social inequality, and that it is really an area of disguised strugglereflect three basic and arguably false assumptions about culture: that it is a negative force of oppression and totalization; that it is used by specific social groups (those in power) against others; and that there is some other essential cultural practice ("what I do" in my "critique of culture") that somehow escapes the first two assumptions.

According to Johnson, the Arnoldian notion of *culture*, for example, that emerged in the nineteenth century as "the love of perfection," as "a disinterested endeavor to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world" must be seen, not as a universal statement about human aspirations, but as the particular expression of ideas that implicitly advanced the interests of Arnold's own class, namely the bourgeoisie. Reading for reformers thus derives its value as a form of opposition to culture, specifically by identifying itself with the opponents of the bourgeois ruling establishmentnotably, women, people of color, the working classand by grounding itself in a notion of literacy as an essential form of intellectual resistance to, or demystification of, prevailing practice.

Its principal tactic in this regard is to insist that all attempts to elevate any cultural practices, for example, particular writers in literature classes or forms or styles of discourse in writing classes, must be first seen in terms of social struggle, with one group (usually with inherited power and prestige) attempting to impose its own taste on others. Or stated positively, the new critical pedagogy

posits culture as a descriptive, nonhierarchical, nonnormative term that includes the full range of adaptive practices of all peoples. As such, the language of reform becomes the one nonhegemonic, nonideological discoursea discourse addressed to the interests, not of any one class (even the class of intellectuals from which it originates), but to all people. The language of this critical new pedagogy, as such, puts itself forward as *the* universal discourse, the one right form of human utterance.

Such an attitude toward language can be seen as an extension of the rejection by reformers of the aesthetic as a special category of culture, or as Easthope cautions, "When literary study marks off its field from other disciplines by separating the literary canon from the texts of popular culture it produces an already existing cultural distinction which has come to segregate a specialized domain of the aesthetic from the rest of life" (7). At the heart of the new pedagogy is the determination to deny what Easthope refers to as the "aura of literature" (60). Instead, reformers see emancipatory potential in the categorical rejection of what Easthope calls the "magic of essence," the notion of a qualitative distinction in discourse based on its ability to provide heightened experiences of self-representation. The new practice insists that all discourse be read "as examples of a signifying practice," hence according to a single (critical) technique, one that, Easthope argues, frees so-called literary texts of the "hegemonic power," presumably thus transferring that power to the readers themselves who now assume (through mastery of this practice) control of these works:

> The attempt to read texts and history *together* . . . promises that all aspects of the social formation, both texts and practices, are to be comprehended within a unitary problematic, placed homogeneously within a single perspective, so that recognition of the actual unevenness of different levels of effectivity, different times, becomes replaced by a sense of totality as an expressive unity; to know the theoretical perspective of the study is to know the effects of those texts in terms of a prior account of the social formation. (138)

Or as Berlin argues, the goal in replacing literary concerns with cultural ones is to be able to focus on the distorted nature of read-

ing and writing practices themselves: "Rather than organizing its activities around the preservation and maintenance of a sacred canon of literary texts, [the new language curriculum] will consider the production, distribution, exchange, and reception of textuality in the general and in the specific, in both the past and present" ("Literacy" 261). It is as if the reader while watching the stage (reading the literary text) is able to keep from being engrossed in the play by focusing a wary eye on the theatrical apparatus itself (by not losing track of the "prior account of the social formation" of the text).

It is questionable whether such a balance can really be maintained, or if in trying to do so one does not fail on both accounts, either experiencing the play as a dramatic event (subjecting oneself to its mimetic force) or understanding it as sociological phenomenon. This is the same issue of the value of the aesthetic that keeps reappearing in many different guises. "The aesthetic," Berlin warns us, "cannot be regarded as a category functioning apart and beyond all other considerations" ("Rhetoric" 36). But just what does this mean other than that the person who goes to see a play has a place within the economic orderhas a job, a family, an intricate series of commitments, a connection to world economic, social, and political history, which in certain regards that person would just as soon forget, or at least hold in abeyance, for the course of the play? Does it mean, however, what Berlin repeatedly suggests: that the aesthetic experience of the play can only be a fundamental distortion of truth, a lie, unless placed within this other, larger context, that of historical truth? If such is indeed the case, then the aesthetic realm essentially disappears. There is nothing seductive left to experience within the theater, only the historical apparatus of drama, the playhouse, and the actors themselves, individually or collectively striving to produce effects in an audience.

While there is undoubtedly an element of control for the viewer, perhaps a feeling of autonomy, in being able to place the production within a larger theatrical or even historical context, the matter of the direct experience of the play itselfand the pleasure it affords when we lose track of theatrical contextstill has to be addressed. Part of the richness and magic of the play resides in the momentary loss and rediscovery of the self that the play itself (or that any activity of play) demands. Even with Brecht's notion of epic the-

aterof drama aimed at raising thoughts not emotionsthere is the sense that pleasure and finally understanding derive from extraordinarily resilient, possibly irrational, powers of mimetic identity: as in the paradox of the Cretan philosopher, deep emotions such as those aroused by flattery have the power to disarm our critical defenses and be warmly welcomed by us even when we recognize their ulterior or contrived source.

Even the most critical among us are liable to delight in barely disguised flattery. Yet our susceptibility to flattery is part of our same capacity for wonder and insight, for learning about ourselves from the experiences of others. Behind pedagogic reform lies the notion of culture as artifacts and patterns of action somehow independent of this attempt to represent our own confusion and misunderstanding, that is, as artifacts and actions that are fundamentally distinct from pedagogic practice itself. Within the new, reformed curriculum, culture too often gets reduced to an object of study, something that we observe and, with sufficient objectivity, control from the outside; as such, this new, critical pedagogy (even when it calls itself "cultural studies") regularly faces the danger of setting itself up as the one cultural activity that somehow escapes culture itself.

In the deep language of English studies, on the other hand, there is no escapeno study of theater that does not demand we experience the plays, no study of culture that is not itself immersed in culture, and hence not part of the larger drama that comprises our collective struggle for self-realization. For proponents of deep language, there can be no critical practice apart from a larger cultural understanding with its own empathic connections with ignorance, confusion, and misunderstanding. There can be no representation apart from misrepresentation, no truth apart from lying, no understanding without metaphorical extensions of similarity and difference.

Ricoeur, for example, defines culture largely in terms of self-representation, the task of our representing through artifact and imagery what it is we are not or what it is we can yet become, with the highest cultural forms presenting us with the richest, most compelling images of that other self. Cultural practice has the task of displaying or unfolding historical possibilities in such a way that people can recognize them as suchpotential ways of being in the

world. Deep language thus rejects, not the study of culture but only cultural studies as a discipline that too often fails to see itself for what it clearly is: just another cultural practice plagued by ardent followers eager to proclaim both the equality of all cultural forms and the superiority of its own critically heightened discourse. If cultural studies is a superior form of study, something students should practice in their reading and writing in school, then it has to have a normative value that needs to be accounted for, something other than the assertion that all cultural practices are equal except this one, or that all attempts to elevate any other discourse form in schools need to be resisted. If any form of critical pedagogy is valuable as cultural practice, then that value can only be explained by a new, more sophisticated model of culture.

## A Deep Text

Mike Rose's *Lives on the Boundary* embodies three central characteristics of deep language. First and foremost is its own narrative stylethe same detailed narrative style, the same saturation of thought and life, that, as we shall see, Matthew Arnold finds and praises in the political theory of Edmund Burke, and with a similar focus: the saving value of local practice, here the detailed richness of Rose's account of his own working-class origins as well as those of his students:

> One early Christmas [my parents] got me a small chemistry set. My father brought home an old card table from the secondhand store, and on that table I spread out my test tubes, my beaker, my Erlenmeyer flask, and my gas-generating apparatus. The set came equipped with chemicals, minerals, and various treated papersall in little square bottles. You could send away to someplace in Maryland for more, and I did, saving pennies and nickels to get substances that were too exotic for my set, the Junior Chemcraft: Congo red paper, azurite, glycerine, chrome alum, cochinealthis from female insects!tartaric acid, chameleon paper, logwood. I would sit before the set and play for hours. (19)

Here is writing that works in the tradition of other first-person educational accounts like Jonathan Kozol's best-seller, *Death at an*

*Early Age*, by using narrative density to create a novelistic sense of authorial sincerity. In a second example, Rose describes what he saw "one late afternoon from the office window," involving Terry, an "isolated, distant, minimacho" youngster determined to "let nothing, *nothing* affect him":

> Terry was shooting baskets alone when a young girl, noticeably hydrocephalic and retarded, wandered onto the playground. She saw Terry and walked over. Terry said something to her I couldn't hear, and she responded, and he handed her the basketball. She tried to bounce it, and it hit the tip of her shoe and shot off. Terry ran after it, and for about ten minutes he tried to show her how to shoot a basket. Then he took her by the hand and led her back out of the schoolyard. (113)

The thesis here is that truth and goodness are to be found in the spontaneous affiliations that define local practice largely free of the dual, at times, competing universal forces of market pressures and large-scale state planning.

A second characteristic is the implicit model of the great, charismatic teacherin Rose's account, first Jack MacFarland in high school and later a series of inspired teachers at Loyola University. All are teachers who are able to succeed where others fail largely on the strength of his or her personality, usually by cutting through traditional bureaucratic and curriculum structures to engage the active interests of the child. The author also becomes such a model, in part explaining why the great teacher is an implicit rather than then an explicit model for successful language education. Teacher-authors have difficulty recognizing the exceptional nature of the strength of their own personalitya force evident in the powerful book he or she goes on to writeand instead look to specific reforms they adopt to explain their success, in Rose's case, for instance, the rather common practice of having students write about familiar pictures.

Finally there is the abiding concern with the transcendent, unifying nature of real knowledgewhat might be called the phenomenological or experiential component of truthbalanced by a low tolerance with academic boundaries in general, both between and within disciplines, and especially with typical school subjects that emphasize technical mastery of procedures rather than the larger search for truth. This characteristic finds expression in Rose

and the wider literate tradition in the dismissal of standardized assessment, which, no matter how finely tuned, rubs out the distinguishing, hence richly valuable characteristics (the local practices) of individual students. Here is how Rose contrasts the real past with the official record of one such student, labeled by one specialist as an aphasic:

> Harold had been on a shuttlecock odyssey: his intelligence was calibrated, his eyes checked, the rhythms of his brain monitored. The journey yielded snapshots, but they were cropped of his history: camping with his father, his solitary walks to the lake. His past was being replaced by a sterile chronicle of assessments that couldn't get to the living center of the problem: the lost father, the mother receding slowly into a dim parlor, the growing weight of the assumption of his feeblemindedness. Harold was made stupid by his longing, and his folder full of tests could never reveal that. (127)

The real past, called Harold's "history," is saturated with novelistic details and opposed to the "snapshots," the "sterile chronicle of assessments" that constitute Harold's life as fitted into universal categories, hence shorn of local practice. In the cosmology of deep language, there is no benign bureaucracy.

Nor is there a benign disciplinary boundary, and here we can see Rose's passion for the complexity of truth and deep language at its purest. It is not enough for Rose that remedial students do well in their college courses, in psychology, mathematics, and political science; Rose wants to reform the curriculum itself so that students can really learn, not just academic vocabulary and technique, but the larger truths behind these diverse subjects. Students expect psychology, for example, to "be a discussion of human motivation and counseling, what it is that makes people do what they doand some coverage of ways to change what they do" (191). Instead they discover that "their textbook has only one chapter on personality and psychotherapy," with the rest on the quantifiable research that consumes academic psychologists"animal studies, computer models of thought, lots of neurophysiology." What all students need, even the weakest, is a real discourse that enables them "to rise above the fragmented learning" (194) that Rose associates here

with the lower-division curriculum but that is hardly absent from much professional education as well.

In this concern Rose reflects the ambivalence in much of college English between helping students acquire the writing skills they may need to do well in various classes (for example, learning how to write a marketing report) and helping them master the deeper discourse that would enable them to critique the entire field of marketing by seeing and thus resisting its historical connection to free market forces. Rose's sympathies are on the side, not of reformnew pedagogic practices that work to enhance the efficiency of instruction, to help students master skills they will need in the worldbut, like those of nearly all supporters of deep language, of a visceral, almost anomic resistance to such reform.

Five
The Emperor's New Clothes: A Tale of Resistance

*A Klee painting named "Angelus Novis" shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.*
Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History"

Regulating the World

The English Coalition talks everywhere of *empowerment* through language studyin the words of Wayne Booth, that "we are 'teaching English' as the best way we know of 'enfranchising,' 'liberating,' 'enabling' 'empowering' those who will make our future" (x)descriptions with such strongly positive connotations and

uttered with complete self-assurance as to their historical legitimacy (Isn't this what we've always done?). Within the profession of English, however, *empowerment* is a relatively new term, replacing an older, now largely ignored term that once was just as compelling, *enrichment*. While the two overlapwhen empowered we are enriched, when enriched we are empoweredthe two derive from opposing traditions of language study, with empowerment a primary goal of pedagogic reform. We are empowered through language education when given the tools and confidence to stand up to authority, to question what others too readily take for granted. Yet why should we assume that standing up to authority is necessarily good, either for individuals or society as a whole?

To raise such a question is to step outside, as it were, the ordinary parameters of reform, to question rather than accept its founding principlethat deep and lingering suspicion of the present, including the entire panoply of hegemonic institutions and values, the traditions, that support the status quo. The efforts at reforming the English curriculum can thus be seen as part of a deliberate challenge to the untheorized, phenomenological claim of the present. It is energized and legitimized, always and everywhere, by a fundamental distrust of current practice, and offering instead its own, "more critical" practicea practice associated with a new type, the critic of current practice, and a new professional class, that of the intellectualas a better substitute for achieving a more just society. But how are we to distinguish between these two kinds of practicesthe widespread current practice that must be opposed and the "more critical" practice that is to replace it? Can critical practice be reduced to its contrariness, its shock valuea position that occasionally produces some strange bedfellows, such as radical reformers possibly aligned with creationists in attacking the ascendancy of mainstream science? What, if anything, makes something a *critical* practiceother than its staunch opposition to certain normative practices, or perhaps its implicit affiliation with the aspirations, even the lifestyle, of intellectuals as a new social class?

One answer to such questions lies in a deeper understanding of the notion of practice itselfhow people act in the worldand the ways such action can be described as *universal* and *local* as well as *common* and *critical*. On one level, all human actions have a local dimension: they occur at a specific time and place, but a truly local

practice involves activity that could only happen locally, that would be substantially different if it occurred anywhere else. When we travel as tourists, one of our goals is often precisely to seek out truly distinctive local practice: to see local sites and festivities, to eat foods in distinctive restaurants, to buy products that are only available locally (and increasingly we are frustrated by the fact that even the souvenirs from remote destinations are Asian imports). Likewise, at other times when we travel, perhaps for business, we may seek out the brand-name (the Sheraton hotel) that at least offers the promise of a universal practice, here a standard level of comfort and service regardless of location. On one hand, the tension between local and universal practice can be reduced to the difference between drinking a local beverage versus a Coke; on the other hand, it is possible to see the expansion of the universal at the expense of the local as a dominant theme of modern life over the last two centuries, a drama in which critical reform and deep language have played distinct and, at times, opposing roles.

Part of the difficulty here is in recognizing that over the last two centuries the application of critical thinking, in school and out, has essentially played two different roles, at some point abandoning its initial allegiance to the critical nature of the universal. Thus it is necessary to speak of two distinct and partially contradictory modes or stages of critique, reflecting first the ascendancy of and then the challenge to the most important forms of universal practice, science and technology. While these two modes parallel the common and contentious terms *modern* and *postmodern*, sociologist Zygmunt Bauman provides two more helpful terms*legislative* and *interpretive*.

Legislative critique reflects the historical struggle to transform the natural and social world through science and the general application of universal principles to diverse local practices. It aligns itself with science and technology, with liberal democratic institutions, and with free and unfettered discourse, and hence in general opposition to practice governed by tradition, superstition, and prejudice. Eighteenth-century France witnessed an early and most dramatic instance of this struggle, with the Catholic Church cast as the staunch opponent of progress and supporter of the prerogatives of ruling elites. The original goal of legislative critique was *enlightenmen*a variation of the contemporary term *empowerment* that describes the condition that enables individuals to overcome local

practice and grasp important operative universal truths about the rule of nature or society.

What for deep language is the ultimate source of knowledtemultiplicity of experienceis for the Enlightenment (legislative-minded) philosopher Condorcet a source of possible mental exhaustion and hence the collapse of reason, a condition that we can best overcome by ignoring the concrete and specific in favor of the universal. That the individual can never know "more than a part of the objects that the nature of his intelligence allows him to understand" is, for Condorcet, a condition humans can readily correct by learning how to categorize all aspects of experience, "to classify them and to subsume them under more general facts." This process of generalizations at the center of legislative critique transforms distinct, picturesque, but immeasurable local entities into the pure rational structure of science:

> [S]ince, as more relations between various objects become known, man is able to reduce them to more general relations, to express them more simply, and to present them in such a way that is possible to grasp a greater number of them with the same degree of intellectual ability and the same amount of application; since, as the mind learns to understand more complicated combinations of ideas, simpler formulae soon reduce their complexity; so truths that were only discovered by great effort, that could at first only be understood by men capable of profound thought, are soon developed and proved by methods that are not beyond the reach of common intelligence. (236)

The highest knowledge is the simplest and most rational, algebra itself, although whether or not algebra actually describes anything real seems to be beside the point.

Within the construct of legislative critique, intellectuals are best defined as the class of enlightened individuals, those capable of making universal judgments based, not on their status (as was the case in societies dominated by tradition), but on their knowledge of universal principles. As legislators, Bauman argues, intellectuals have the confidence to make "authoritative statements which arbitrate in controversies of opinions and which select those opinions which, having been selected, become correct and binding" (4). Leg-

islative critique reflects a progressive spirit of reformwith reformers having the confidence of a new, ascendant class, one that really does believe that it has a new practice involving free inquiry that if widely adopted would lead to the material benefit of society as whole.

Legislative critique was for decades the discourse of a bold and optimistic new class of professionals who possessed what Bauman calls "the modern conviction that society need not be as it happens to be, that it might be made better than it was," and hence that "each case of individual and group unhappiness [could be made] into a challenge and a task" (257). This self-confidence reflects the optimism that political scientist Yaron Ezrahi sees at the heart of what he calls an *attestive* (as compared to a *celebratory*) attitude toward culturethe belief that individuals have the power to *see* the world as it really is, to use vision to overcome the force of tradition, especially the manner in which tradition dresses up ideas, giving them an unwarranted aura of authority (in the past associated with the ceremonies of church and royalty) that wrongly encouraged people to accept them against their own interests. Legislative critique is born for Ezrahi with the attempts of science to free itself from the sway of religion and an older celebratory style, a struggle he sees in the emblematic efforts of the Royal Society in the early eighteenth century to "differentiate a rigorous scientific mode of seeing and reporting from religious and common sense modes which are guided by celebratory and other nonrational, nonattestive visual orientations" (77). Here Ezrahi sees its struggles in its response to Cotton Mather, accepting his claims about meteors but, "begging pardon of the Reverend Gentleman that attested it," not about monstrous birds, psychosomatic illnesses, and other matters that "relate little to natural philosophy."

Before the emergence of this new sense of what Ezrahi calls "factual reality," sight was used not empirically by a new class of inquirers to question and prove but by agents of the state, in celebratory fashion, to dazzle and delight, not "to establish factual reality as a potential check on the claims of political authority but rather to uphold epistemologically and adorn aesthetically as well as to celebrate its powers to defy the limits imposed by any extra-governmental social or public norms like 'common sense' reality" (71), that is in hegemonic support of the state or tradition generally, what skeptics might call the Big Lie. This initial stage of

critique that forms the basis of the new pedagogy is thus grounded in what Ezrahi calls "a strategically central, political construct" (71), an historically new willingness of individuals to stand up to traditional state interests in order to "to decentralize and restrain political power."

For Ezrahi, Hans Christian Andersen's fable, "The Emperor's New Clothes," is the classic parable of legislative critique, reflecting as it does the deep-seated suspicion that an emerging age of science has for the tomfoolery of pomp and ceremony. There is no greater symbol of the power of celebratory tradition than an emperor and his court; no greater symbol of the new attestive tradition than the honest questioning of a boy, someone not yet socialized to the old style of seeing what you have been taught to believe. It is for Ezrahi a parable of modern determination "to 'strip off' political authority so that citizens could see what was hidden beneath the garments of the king," a tale of "the critical force of the attestive" (1089).

In this Enlightenment tradition, education generally and literacy specifically are regularly seen as extensions of legislative critiqueprimary means of further debunking unwarranted celebratory authority. In legislative critique, reading and writing work in conjunction with science and reason, and as such are opposed to an older, traditional view of literacy as knowledge of proper ritualsfor example, the correct form of address citizens would use in writing their superiors, and other, superficial matters such as spelling or standard diction. Legislative critique instead advocates a view of literacy fit for a progressive, scientific age, one based on an ever-expanding body of knowledge largely generated through the inquisitive efforts of young minds, if not literally youngsters like the hero of Andersen's fable:

> [N]ot adulatory but descriptive and testimonial; the intention is not to glorify but to attest, record, account, analyze, confirm, disconfirm, explain, or demonstrate by showing and observing examples in a world of public facts. The stress is on displaying and seeing as elements of the enterprise of persuading critical spectators, not of swaying trusting worshipers. . . . [T]he attestive visual code defines the eye as a dispassionate skepticalrather than credulouswitness of facts. The attestive eye testifies to the existence of the observable world and its

properties. It disconfirms claims which cannot be corroborated by what can be seen. (74)

Attestive visual culture has long played a central role in college composition and our larger sense of the proper claims for arguments, what Ezrahi calls our "liberal-democratic canons of persuasion" and our "particular notions about the nature of the public space of visual perception and its legitimate uses for demonstrating and testing claims of knowledge" (74):

> [W]hat forms of language-use and rhetorical style are appropriate in discourse, which kinds of testimony are reliable, how acts of seeing enter into confirmation or disconfirmation of the claims of agents, what the appropriate relations are between the performers of public acts and their spectators, and finally what qualities are demanded of the public as an aggregate of trustworthy spectators and witnesses.

Attestive culture supports the broad legislative claims of modern critical practice since its findings are ultimately supported by factual evidence, and as such are the basis for technological control of nature, or as Ezrahi states, "Science functions as an authoritative cultural model which socially validates the normative status of attestive visual codes" (75).

## Resisting Regulation

The current ambivalent status of the reforming spirit of legislative critique is well captured by social critic Christopher Lasch. Where such spirit was once energized, it is now more likely enervated, by what Lasch refers to as "the intoxicating prospect of man's conquest of the natural world":

> As the heir to the critical traditions of the scientific revolution and the Enlightenment, the new class pins its hopes on the eventual triumph of critical intelligence over superstition, cosmopolitanism over provincialism, man over nature, abundance over scarcity. Its belief in progress, chastened by twentieth-century events but not yet relinquished by any

> means, transcends commitments to any particular system of production. We can readily agree with Gouldner's description of the professional class as the "most progressive force in modern society"; the question is whether that can still be regarded as a virtue. (*True* 528)

The fall from favor of legislative critique is thus indistinguishable from the far broader shift in cultural thinking that rejects the simpler Whig notion of history as moving uniformly, guided by Western science and political institutions, from a benighted past to a liberated futurea shift described by Bauman as follows:

> The hierarchy of values imposed upon the world administered by the north-western tip of the European peninsula was so firm and supported by powers so enormously overwhelming, that for a couple of centuries it remained the baseline of the world vision, rather than an overtly debated problem. Seldom brought to the level of consciousness, it remained the all-powerful "taken for granted" of the era. It was evident to everybody except the blind and the ignorant, that the West was superior to the East, white to black, civilized to crude, cultured to uneducated, sane to insane, healthy to sick, man to woman, normal to criminal, more to less, riches to austerity, high productivity to low productivity, high culture to low culture. All these "evidences" are now gone. Not a single one remains unchallenged. (120)

And it is the regular challenging of this evidencein our own discourse and in the language and lives of our studentsthat constitutes the eroding basis of legislative critique, a notion that, despite being, in Bauman's words, "repelled by global visions and wary of all prospects of societal engineering" (258), still hangs on to one global vision of legislators, what might be called *the* global vision, that of universal liberation, with all of us, individually or collectively reaching some higher, more just state. The new, antilegislative mode of contemporary critical practice, as Lasch suggests, aligns itself with the seemingly contradictory position of social change that opposes progress, a position that stills clings to the notion of universal justice, and hence indirectly of the idea of progress, but sees it as more likely to exist through local initia-

tives, through local acts of empowerment, and not a playing out of some universal script.

Interpretation as Resistance

This new form of critical practice is not legislative but *interpretive*, and as such is grounded not in technology and the physical sciences but the interpretive strategies of the humanities. Its model is not the engineer but the social critic, the intellectual, who may have mastered the old legislative skills (including deep reading and writing) but who now renounces the universal value of such skills. Interpretive critique can thus be seen as a form of metacritiquea critique of critical practiceone that associates blind, uncritical tradition against which it positions itself, not with superstition and reaction, but with the dominance of science and technology itself, and, as a result, ironically often assigns the role of oppressors to liberal reformers themselves. No longer are these nominal reformers seen as spokespeople for universal progress benefiting everyone (a rising tide raising all ships) but, as we saw in Stuckey, as apologists for their own professional class interests.

The goal of interpretive critical thought is not enlightenment but *empowerment*, a state often envisioned, like enlightenment, as having less to do with changing the world (for example, through legislation) than with changing our interpretation of it (seeing thingsclass interests, especiallyas they really are). Whereas neither enlightenment nor empowerment is directed immediately toward social change, enlightenment supports such actions by grounding new mental states in the universal principles of science, personal freedom, and liberal political reform. Enlightened legislators, accordingly, are comfortable advocating universal reforms: one set of governing laws for all. Interpreters, on the other hand, are suspicious of all universal schemes, seeing the local practices at risk by such "reforms" as primary sites of resistance. Interpreters, unlike legislators, Bauman argues, have the job of "translating statements, made within one communally based tradition, so that they can be understood within knowledge based on another tradition. Instead of being oriented toward selecting the best social order, this strategy is aimed at facilitating communication between autonomous (sovereign) participants" (5).

Interpretive critique thus occupies the seemingly ironic position of asserting its own critical discourse as a critique against critical discourse itself, and it can do this only by questioning the legitimacy of critical discourse itselfa process that entails labeling all forms of such discourse, the language of scientists as well as academic professions such as English teachers as the special pleading of a hegemonic elite (one often identified as white and male). Interpretive critique often takes the form of an antireformist plea for reform, a plea that regularly undermines the universalistic pretensions of current practice, in part by revealing their local connections: showing how groups like English literature and composition teachers enhance their status, while working against the class interests of many of their students, by giving universal standing to their own local preferences regarding what constitutes canonical texts or good writing. Interpretive critique thus regularly calls for a better future while denying the very notion of historical progress; as such, it is a utopian ideology that refuses to accept its own utopian impulse, often denying itself any vision of the future other than as an alternative to or a rejection of the present. Interpretive critique often ends up endorsing a kind of cultural laissez-faire, where order, reason, and social justice (the goals of its reforming spirit) seem capable of emerging out of the free play of diverse social forces: remove the lid of oppression, reveal how existing practices curb free and diverse expression, and the result will be, not racial tension, ethnic strife, and class warfare, but social progress.

This ruthlessly antiuniversalist tendency in interpretive critique, this rejection of all principles other than criticism itself, can be seen in the antiessentialist mode that Elbow traces in the English Coalition Conference. As the participants deliberated, even the seemingly innocuous phrase "a sense of common humanity" was rejected as opening the door to the "dangerous notion that we are all the same" (and not the more commonsensical reading that we all have some common interests), and hence dangerously promoting "the kind of language that promotes intolerance of difference" (Lloyd-Jones and Lunsford 62). The danger that interpretive critique detects in the notion of common interests, much less common essences, is too ready an acceptance (possibly any acceptance) of the notion of our belonging to a group other than one we choose, one that supports what we see as our own particular life interests (for example, as one variation of a minority group or another).

The operative belief here is that with proper insight (empowerment) we will all be able to see how the social world inevitably reflects rational conflict of individual and group interests, mediated through discourse in the name of greater powerall under the larger, albeit unstated assumptionthat universal justice is in fact furthered by any social conflicts that help weaken the status quo, that reduce the power of irrational bonds of belonging, replacing them with local affiliations based on rational, articulated self-interest. Hence the opposition to any emotional, untheorized identification with a generalized "other" (as in the vague "sense of common humanity"): such feelings of obligation, even kinship, have the potential of strengthening existing power relations, which by definition are opposed to interests of a broad range of identifiable groups (like women, people of color, the poor, gays and lesbians) who are not well served by these wider affiliations.

Interpreting the World

The rise of interpretive critique is thus linked to the decline in our faith in science and, in turn, in attestive visual culture itself, what Ezrahi sees as "signs of a growing distrust in the idea that science develops, clarifies, and refines the 'truth' within the bounds of common sense knowledge and is normative in relation to common discourse and action" (269). We have lost our faith in the concept of enlightenment, the notion that certain ideas have universal applicability, hence broad transformative power, the idea that all students should be actively encouraged to pursue truth in the hope that a few will actually make discoveries in the spirit of Thomas Edison and Jonas Salk that when applied on a universal scale will directly and materially improve the general conditions of life for all people.

In more traditional language education based on legislative critique, what truly matters is less that each person expresses his or her own feeling for whatever intrinsic value that expression may have than that an atmosphere of openness and true creativity be established so that exciting new ideas, with real transformative power, can emerge. The goal is less to ensure that each student expresses a personal response to a reading, and more to ensure that in giving all students this opportunity we increase the likelihood that one

student will develop a really brilliant response (the "A+" essay) that will then educate the rest of us. As Ezrahi writes, about governments and not just the classroom, what matters most is "a commitment to maintaining and enlarging diverse possibilities rather than to realizing a coherent idea of social justice and happiness" (246). For Ezrahi, a "coherent idea of social justice" must be founded on universal principles asserted not by the masses but by those individuals, like the boy in the Anderson fable, capable of grasping and asserting the truth. For Ezrahi, therefore, an essential problem of contemporary civil society, or for our purposes, the contemporary teacher, is that each "seems more concerned with projecting responsiveness to the need of symbolic equilibrium among diverse sociocultural and political commitments than to a single overriding commitment or a comprehensive ideology which endorses a consistent set of principles and actions."

In terms of the Anderson fairy tale, interpretive critique has a radically different concern, not in exposing the nakedness of the state but in revealing the symbolic richness of the different actors, for example, the boy's discovery of the role of his own experience and point of view in determining what he sees or fails to see, and hence the contemporary moral: "an appreciation by the individual of the difficulty of transforming private subjective visual experience into publicly admissible evidence" (Ezrahi 127), that is, evidence that, if accepted, would exclude other, competing explanations.

For Ezrahi, the two readings of the Anderson fable, and the attestive and celebratory styles of cultural interaction that each reflects, are mutually exclusive, with only the former based on universal or scientific principles worthy of being deemed *critical*. The goal of Ezrahi's book is to trace the direct connection between modern science and the growth of democracy, especially the development of a public discourse involving assertions about the social as well as the natural world that the mass of people accept as empirically testable, and as a result subject to a single discourse with a single standard of verification that all speakers must meet regardless of their high status: in other words, the creation of "a political order in which, consistent with some of the most cherished ideas of the Enlightenment, autonomous individuals were regarded as generating public discourse and public actions, which are supposedly checked by nonsubjective, apolitical, scientifically certifiable natural or social facts" (270). Ezrahi thus locates the most impor-

tant tradition of critical thought in legislative critique and its related public-spirited progressivism, which Ezrahi, like two other key modern figures, John Dewey and Jürgen Habermas, locates largely in a reform-oriented, civic-minded middle class and its dual desire to make scientific discourse more democratic and democratic discourse more scientific: "To render civic discourse scientifically informed and to instrumentalize civic actions is to democratize politics" (194).

For Ezrahi, as for Habermas, the collapse of legislative critique and progressivism generally, and the subsequent emergence of new interpretive critical practices represents a dangerous declineassociated less with the transformation of criticism from one mode to another than with its collapse. Ezrahi refers to this change ominously as "the 'repoliticization' of public policy making" and traces it to basic "developments in the very fabric of scientific notions of rationality and liberal-democratic politics, developments which may indicate the possibility of a turning point rather than a pendulum movement" (269). There is only one form of critical discourse for Ezrahi, that which subjects local claims to universal judgments, and its demise threatens our ability to engage in free and open political discourse: "What liberal-democratic concepts of political action, authority, and accountability can survive in a society of skeptical reflexive observers?" Ezrahi asks in alarm. "Can such a society develop and sustain a public realm? What is the status of science and technology in a political context in which the fragmentation of formerly shared cognitive and normative bases of public action exposes their historicity and limitations as local cultural artifacts?" (127).

For Ezrahi, as for other modernists, legislative critique was a universal discourse represented by a universal class, best represented by public-spirited, scientific-minded social reformers like John Dewey. Since legislative critique speaks in support of universal liberation and against local practice, all attacks on it can only represent special interests and hence special pleading. The single most valuable insight of interpretive critiqueand of the postmodern impulse to which it is closely tiedis in challenging the universalistic impulse, sometimes called the *essentialism*, of modern legislative critique, that is, in subjecting to critical analysis the very claims of legislative critique. Indeed, interpretive critique can be seen as coming into being mainly through the act of critiquing the

universalistic, legislative impulse of modern critical practice and specifically its claim that, in aligning itself with science in attacking tradition, it occupies some objective terrain above the fray, somehow itself freed from history and local interests in order to represent the universal interests of all people. Legislative critique, when once subjected to interpretive scrutiny, clearly reveals its own strong unacknowledged phenomenological claim of belonging to an aspiring professional class whose status and power derive from its ability to subject nature to increasingly more powerful transformations. Interpretive critique is correct in revealing the historical connections between universalistic assumptions of legislative critique and the universalistic assumptions of a managerial, professional class who over the last two centuries continue to organize society in an increasingly efficient, rational structure with a host of interlocking institutions such as schools, transportation, communication, banking, and the like, all capable of working smoothly together in order, for example, to complete mammoth engineering feats like damming the Colorado River.

At a very different level, the level of writing instruction, it is the legislative imperative that gives teachers the warrant to grade papers according, not just to a mechanical scale, but to a far more abstract, albeit still universal, standard as to what it means to write well, to be *deeply* literateand, as a result, to allow teachers to see their grading, in rewarding those who have truly mastered valuable skills (and move themselves furthest from the shackles of local practice), as an extension of their concern with social justice, in much the same spirit that one feels that a golf score is an accurate reflection of real attainment. Legislative critical practice gave a new standing to science and universal knowledge, thereby legitimizing as a progressive force, in Ezrahi's words, *all* "technically disciplined, rational measures [including the intervention of English teachers with their red ink] to correct or improve imperfect natural states" (68).

Language educators who see themselves as interpreters, however, do not so much grade according to different or local standards as they reject the very notion of grading, seeing little purpose in it other than to support the very universal standards it most wants to undermine. For teachers grounded in interpretive critique and concerned less with the economic progress of society as a whole and more with helping all of usstudents and teachers alikeunder-

stand each other better, grades are at best an annoyance. A great deal of scholarly activity by language educators is so intensely focused on interpreting local behavior that there is scarcely a place even to raise seemingly legitimate questions about assessment based on legislative assumptions. Once, for instance, after Walter Ong had given a thoroughly interpretive address, about the oral sources of common "problems" of some student writinglike the reliance on addition ("This and then that, and then this ...") over the preferred form of subordination ("After this but before that, I did ..."), I impertinently raised a basic legislative concern: How did knowing the source of students' difficulties actually affect how he graded their work? The assumption behind such a question was clearthat it would have no effectas was the effectiveness of his response: namely, given his interpretive interests and those of the audience generally, to change the subject, and not just to avoid the subject but, in rejecting the idea that to be legitimate our research interest must have a direct pedagogic implication, signaling his rejection of the wider legislative impulse for consistency in all our practice.

With legislative critique, the pedagogic goal remains tied to universal enlightenment, that one transforming response that teaches us all, and, by extension, to the creation of an intense, competitive classroom atmosphere that might support the emergence of that lone response. With the decline in what Ezrahi calls "coherence as a norm or an idea of public action" (283), the concern does seem to shift to meeting "the expectations and interests of heterogeneous publics," a concern that is met less by judging the potential universal applicability of these responses (since by definition they are "instrumentally and functionally less consistent and coherent") than by accepting (again via interpretation) their "gestural-symbolic aspect." Here is the response, at times the outrage, of the traditional teacher to the postmodern interest in empowerment, for example, in finding literate value in the response of Labov's student, Larry. For interpreters, the demand for coherence and consistency in writing as in thinking generally, becomes, not a challenge to tradition and hence part of critical practice, but a reactionary impulse. It is, as Ezrahi notes, the unique or local character of argumentwhat used to be considered special pleadingthat conversely is now seen as the essence of critical practice:

> [I]t is incoherence and inconsistency instead which indicate the absence of large-scale arbitrary action. In a society deeply affected by ethical relativism and cognitive skepticism, coherence tends to stand for pretense, untenable claims of knowledge and authority, and the unacceptable exercise of power. Incoherence, by contrast, seems to indicate humility, a refusal to suppress subjectivity and diversity, the toleration of numerous notions of purpose, causation, and reality. (28384)

In Ezrahi's words, we can see the interpretive, postmodern critique of contemporary language instruction, one marked by a pervasive disillusion, on a macrolevel, with enlightenment and its grand narratives of progress and universal liberation, and on a microlevel, with the moral and pedagogic value of traditional notions of coherence. With the loss of faith in a universal transforming truth, there is a broader loss of faith in legislative critique and enlightenment principles themselves. Interpretive critique seems to have a far different goal: not enlightenment (the ideal of one idea lifting everyone), but empowerment (each individual and each group gaining the power to speak its mind and to be heard). The faith in a universal message is gone, replaced instead with metaphors of conversations of different groups, some with and some without the power to be heard.

## Interpreting the Classroom

At the level of the classroom, legislative and interpretive practices can be quite different: in the case of Labov, for example, legislators committed to the ideal of enlightenment would only accept the literacy of Larry's response when it is embedded inside Labov's own narrative, for only then does it have the necessary internal coherency to attain universal power. Interpreters, committed to empowerment, however, focus on Larry's message itself, but less out of its own appeal to the value of diverse discourse (even all discourseat least, all discourse once properly interpreted) than out of a larger, although not necessarily acknowledged, impulse to elevate resistance to prevailing practice as the first key step in transforming the world. The suggestion here, therefore, is that interpretative critique is no more, and no less, critical than its

legislative mode, that both are equally critical, and, more to the point, equally uncriticalthat the central concern in all forms of critical practice is not logic but history, and hence, protestations notwithstanding, not universal laws but local practice.

All critical practice, in other wordsinterpretive as well as legislativeis a form of acting in the world through language, a practice with local origins in its opposition to prevailing practice and in allegiance with those that share this opposition. English teachers who advocate a new, critical pedagogy and their conservative colleagues are thus both committed, under diverse guises, to this single act of resistance to the common in support of the worthy. Just as educational legislators may have been more concerned with the promotion (or the defense) of a professional classor more accurately see the promotion of this new class as a universal goodthan with the absolute value of standards themselves, so too educational interpreters may be more concerned with the promotion of emerging groups of women and ethnic minoritiesor, more accurately, may see their promotion as a universal goodthan with the abstract principal of society as a diverse conversation of equal participants. Empowerment, in other words, may be no different from enlightenment, in springing less from its own critical ideology than from an ideal motive to resist and in so doing to change the world.

In terms of the Anderson fairy tale, both readings of the boy's response, and not as Ezrahi suggests, just the traditional, modernist one, are ultimately concerned with resistance. Questioning the boy's insight as interpreters are wont to do need not only be seen (as legislators, Ezrahi himself, too often fear) in terms of a conservative return to a celebratory style. After all, we live in a world where emperors are regularly debunked, are paraded forth annually, often less as an exercise in power than as a test of the analytic powers of students enrolled in a new, critical curriculum. To the response, "But he's naked," interpretive critics see a society too ready to respond, "Yes, that's right, and for your insight you win a four-year scholarship to the university of your choice." In calling for alternate readings of the emperor's nakednessseeing for instance how the boy is being unconsciously acculturated into rejecting tradition in favor of commonsensical or simple-minded observationinterpretive critics reveal themselves as less interested in their stated purposesupporting all alternative readings

than in trying to shake the grounds of the single, dominant reading of legislative critique. Alternate readings are valued precisely for being alternate, resisting what contemporary critical practice sees as dangerously totalizing impulses. And what happens to the students most adept at providing these readings? They now receive the same prize previously reserved for the best legislators: admission to, even advanced placement in, the country's best educational institutions. In either readinginterpretive or legislativethe boy is no longer the rebel (everyone knows this is a test, not a real emperor), only the "best" student.

## Regulating and Interpreting

Legislative and interpretive forms of critical practice, despite their obvious differencesespecially as regards the value of local practicenonetheless share a common concern with reforming the world. In both modes of critical practice, there is an underlying imperative for change, for social justice, to be effected by replacing the status quo with a new, more critically informed practice. Both forms of critical practice are future-oriented and even utopian in locating progress in the insight and thought processes of a new class of critical thinkers. The basic underlying tenet of either form of critical practice is that the world would be a better place if more people were as critical, as perceptive, as the social critics who come forward to serve as their teachers.

In this sense neither form of critical practice is ever able to free itself from universal aspirations and thus, its many protestations notwithstanding, to see itself wholly as a local practicefor example, to recognize the importance and the extent of its own precritical sense of identification directly with intellectuals as a class and indirectly with those groups most likely to be helped by the ascendancy of intellectuals. Behind legislative critique lies the historical emergence of the middle class and its need for doctors, engineers, and professional management; behind interpretive critique lies the historical emergence of that new part of the middle class, led by educators themselves who have clearly lagged behind in terms of economic and social standing but who nonetheless remain supportive of the professional aspirations of the many women and minorities already within their ranks. In both cases, however,

this local identification is suppressed in the name of critical analysis itselfthe call for a higher (more "critical") form of practice whose ascendancy will automatically result in a better world.

If the great accomplishment of interpretive critical practiceone might as well say, of postmodernism itselfis the critique of legislative critical practice, and hence the claim of postmodernism itself to be a critique of critical practice, showing the local under-pinnings of the universalistic assertions of science, then one can claim that its great weakness is its failure to provide an equally rich critique of itself (a critique of the critique of critical practice), specifically to see its own unavoidable universalistic connections, including its own phenomenological, precritical claim of belonging made to members of new, emerging social groups. This is a failure, one might claim, that has less to do with will than with the structural limits of critique itself, one might say, with the limits of reason itself and that part of human experience that shies away from confronting its own origins in the decidedly uncritical arena of fear and longing, wish and desire.

Any form of critical practice, quite simply, can only understand itself to the extent that reason can know itself, that is, to the extent that reason has a rational origin or can understand itself fully on its own terms. To the extent that reason like all of life is grounded in obscure emotionsparticularly our need to render a strange and frightening world hospitablethen any form of critical practice can only be fully understood as a local practice, not a universal discourse. From the outset, it has been the imaginative play of writers, and not the rational analysis of reformers, that has attempted to render the particularly local ("irrational") nature of all human experience.

Six
Literature as Local Practice

*The opposite of poetry in England is not prose but Jacobinism; and if the phrase "literary theory" seems to some an oxymoron, it is because literature for the English is an alternative to systematic inquiry, not an object of it. . . . It is not too much to claim that this whole ideology of the literary work is a traumatized response to the French Revolution.*
Terry Eagleton, "The Crisis of Contemporary Culture"

Awakening Resistance

As Socrates warns in the epigraph to the first section of this book, "The contest is great, . . . greater than it seemsthis contest that concerns becoming good or bad." Today, over two thousand years later, it is the aesthetic dimension of experiencethat broad range of issues relating to *enrichment*that remains the principal foe of critical practice, in both its legislative and interpretive forms. We are enriched when our sense of self has been expanded, often by close identification with the experience of anotherhence the danger that we forsake judgment, that we give ourselves to the phenomenological claim of some other person or some other text. While we are empowered by logic and reasoning to distance ourselves from such claims, to see the logical inconsistency

in the Cretan paradox and consequently doubt the speaker as well as his countrymen, through feeling and imagination, that is, through aesthetics, we are led to identify with others, even to the point of ignoring certain logical inconsistenciesfor example, that the speaker is human or specifically a Cretan, and thus incapable of not lying.

For reformers of English studies, the emphasis is on the importance of all readers' adopting a critical stance before all texts, including (or, especially) those formerly labeled literature. As a special category, literature had been thought of as appealing broadly to readers, and not just, or even primarily, to their reason, but to their emotions and imagination, offering, as rewards, pleasure and delight as much as control and power. There were different genres of literature and different national origins but in a Hegelian sense there was only one literature, that which used language in an imaginative expression of the human condition. All human diversity was part of a single storytold in world literature. No longer is there faith in literature as a universal category or, one supposes, in universal categories themselves. As teachers today we are still implored to help students "to imagine and value worlds other than their own," but we are told to do so, by studying, not literature, but "the many different kinds of writing and ways of thinking" (Lloyd-Jones and Lunsford xx).

Yet how do we study other "ways of thinking," if not in the words of other people, words that the imaginative rendering of literature brings to life? Curriculum reform in its most radical iteration, however, dismisses the distinction at the heart of English studies between ordinary and special languagethat which is uttered and almost immediately forgotten because it makes no lasting claim on us, and that which is uttered once and stays in our collective consciousness for generations. For the new pedagogy, literature is a false category, a veiled attempt by those in power to exempt a group of writing from being subject to the rigorous critical questioning necessary to unmask deception. "In an age of manipulation," writes Scholes, "when our students are in dire need of critical strength to resist the continuing assaults of all the media, the worst thing we can do is foster in them an attitude of reverence before texts" (16). What is needed instead, he argues, is "a judicious attitude: scrupulous to understand, alert to probe for blind spots and hidden agendas, and finally, critical, questioning, skeptical."

The dangerous image Scholes leaves us with is "the exegete before the sacred text"the halting student intimidated by the authority of a person or book. Who could do anything but reject such a picture in favor of one of eager minds posing demanding questions? But why limit the choice to intimidation or criticism; are there other, more positive emotions an exegete might feel before a text, other, more favorable images of young readers responding beyond the limits of reason? Why not a reader of James Thurber laughing, a reader of Emily Brontë in tears, of Malcolm X enraged? Is the rage of the last reader the one valid emotion, since in its resistance to prevailing social practice it exhibits a general spirit for reform, even though rage of one reader may be no less emotional than the laughter or tears of the other two? Is rage, in other words, the one "critical" emotion?

Who can doubt that we live in an age of manipulationwhat Scholes calls "the most manipulative culture human beings have ever experienced" (15)but are we certain that new pedagogic practices are our only defense, or even our best defense, to this situation? Where do we get the assurance that any one version of critical pedagogy is itself immune from this very problem, that it will not somehow end up as part of the problem, less a bulwark against manipulation than another cog in the vast hegemonic machine that is all the more powerful in setting reason against itself? Scholes is surely correct that students are "sadly deficient in certain kinds of historical knowledge," but is it really the case that gaining this knowledge will necessarily give "them some perspective on the manipulation that they currently encounter" (15)? One might argue that the principal trouble with the right-wing zealots who host radio talk shows, or those who flood these shows with calls, or even the most extreme form of zealots such as Holocaust deniers, is that they are deficient in "historical knowledge," and hence that if they knew what we knew, if they had "my historical perspective," they would think differentlyeven though many of the most determined right-wing conspiracy theorists spend their entire lives swamping themselves in historical minutiae. Is it more knowledge they are lacking, or just more knowledge of a certain kind?

Or maybe their problem has little to do with knowledge and more to do with a corrupt heart, burdened by a raging hatred of difference, fed in turn by the intense alienation of modern life? And

if so, why would we assume that more "historical knowledge" is the cure for such paranoia, and not, for instance, palliative experiences of poetry and narratives that entice us to listen to other people's stories? Why is it that all of a sudden we seem to have lost faith in the formative power of beauty and craft, art and contemplation, grace and feeling? Are we really certain that argument and suspicion are the surest paths to truth, much less to goodness? That students wouldn't be better offless likely to become bigotsif they were mastering woodworking or playing a Bach fugue? Is a reverence for texts really the worst thing we can foster in students? Would we really be better off in a world where all reverence was replaced by cynicisma world where no student watched a play, listened to a piece of music, read a poem in rapt silence, even awe, as if inhabiting a different world?

Students need, Scholes argues, "the knowledge and skill that will enable them to make sense of their worlds, to determine their interests, both individual and collective, to see through the manipulations of all sorts of texts in all sorts of media, and to express their own views in some appropriate manner" (1516). But is it onlyor mainlyknowledge and skill that gives us our sense of the world? What if we could, by the wave of a single magic wand, make our students into clones of ourselvestheir teachers? Which of uswhich teacherswould we select? In one sense the answer is obvious: those of us with the critical skills "to see through the manipulations of all sorts of texts in all sorts of media, and to express their own views." But could we agree as to which of our colleagues actually have these skills? And if we could agree, and make our students as critical as their most critical teachers, would they really be all that much wiser, would there be more truth in the world, more kindness, more justice?

And what about these teachers themselves: Are they happiest when most focused on overcoming deception, or do they, like the rest of us, find that much of the greatest passion and pleasure in their lives derives from rote-based, often sensual activities like gardening, jogging, and playing the piano where the mind seems to empty outactivities that may be so attractive precisely because they overcome consciousness? And just what is it that overcomes our consciousness at such moments? Surely not ignorance. If so, then it would be ignorance that we most desire, and hence knowledge or wisdom that we most flee, in such activities. What is far

more likely is that we are seeking an inner space free from the noise of contemporary life, critical or otherwise, that seems to render true understanding impossible. And if such activities do have a special kind of restorative value for us, even a certain kind of learning, are they to be just for us and not our students, or not for our students until they are first as critical as we are?

Perhaps these are unfair questionsperhaps it should be enough to give students a generic critical power, and take our chances that they then could both see through the vanities and pretensions of even their most critical teachers as well as those of society as a whole to find their own productive ways to enjoy their leisure. But if we, their teachers of critical practice, on the one hand, are enriched by prereflective activities and, on the other, are subject ourselves to the same sorts of distortions that surround us allno less vain than those without our reasoning skills, no less susceptible to the flattery, blandishments, and enticements of those who want something from us (and who realistically can doubt our own weaknesses?), then why should we expect more from our students?

Meanwhile, if we do ever find a universal model for our studentsthat ultimately wise teacheris it not just as likely that what impresses us is this person's overall wisdom, his or her ability to soften the dry harshness of critical judgment with full richness and subtlety of experience? What is the source of wisdom, in other words, in our teachers and in ourselves: knowledge of the rhetoric of advertising or having read and been touched by literary characters, and thus perhaps being wise in the complexities of desire and feeling? Are we, and our students, really better off reading Marx than Toni Morrison? Is sociology a more powerful discourse than traditional literature, or, in the spirit of a fervent reformer like Berlin, is there really just one way to read literature, not as the reenactment of experience, calling forth and thereby broadening human sympathy, but as a siren song of entrapment and ideological distortion that we must all be trained to resist, less by passively strapping ourselves to the mast than by active, ruthless questioning designed to strip away all possibility of mimetic identification?

"Whatever literary texts are chosen," Berlin notes, "all must be considered in relation to their conditions of production, distribution, exchange, and reception." Here is Socrates' call for the banishment of poetry: we may still read literary texts but only in the process of constructing a sociology of literary production. Students

will need to examine, Berlin continues, "both the variety of audiences for these texts and the variety of ways the texts were received in their own time as well as the corresponding audiences and reception strategies across time" ("Literacy" 261).

"Why is it necessary," John Stuart Mill asks incredulously of French critical thinker Auguste Comte, "that all human life [or, in the case of Berlin, all forms of reading] should point but to one object, and be cultivated into a system of means to a single end" (141)? Is it possible that on a large historical scale we may be poised to have our students relive Mill's own traumatic education, drilled by an unrelenting father throughout childhood on the supremacy of reason, only to be nourished as an adult, after a severe mental breakdown, by the poetry of Wordsworth? When late in life, Mill wrote a review of Comte, he was able to depict the deep emotional needs, at times the utter madness, that underlie Comte's passionate cry of reasonwhat for Mill was a near-madness that, as with reformers today, began with the urge to control the world, totally. As Berlin would rid the world of self-activating literary texts able to move us, as it were, against our better judgment, so Mill sees Comte as wanting to rid the world of all unexplained phenomena. What is Berlin's call for replacing the realm of the aesthetic with the sociology of aesthetics but an updating of Comte's insistence, as paraphrased by Mill, that "all ultimate laws are laws of causation, and [that] the only universal law is the law of universal causation, namely, that every phenomenon has a phenomenal cause; has some phenomenon other than itself, or some combination of phenomena, on which it is invariably and unconditionally consequent" (Mill 58)?

What is the source of this passion for reason and control, and this comparable fear of feeling? Mill saw the source of Comte's passion as the denial of pleasure in the name of morality: "All gratification except those of the affections, are to be tolerated only as 'inevitable infirmities.' Novalis said of Spinoza that he was a God-intoxicated man: M. Comte is a morality-intoxicated man. Every question with him is one of morality, and no motive but that of morality is permitted" (13940). While no one can deny a place for a sociology of artto study Beethoven's financial records, to learn who paid for his music, who published it, how he earned his living, perhaps all as a part of a universal explanation of oppression and class interactionwould even the staunchest defender of pedagogic

reform insist that such a study should be substituted for impassioned, imaginative listening to the Waldstein sonata?

And what is it we learn in such a listening experience? Something different to be sure than a study of economic pressures in Beethoven's life, but not obviously something less. Just why is it then that the new guardians of language education, filled with the spirit of critique, want our students arguing instead of writing and listening to poetry, want them watching *The Lehrer Report* or Rush Limbaughor engaged in political debate themselves via the Internetinstead of *Great Performances*, or better yet painting or dancing themselves?

Is there really an abstract theoretical understanding of society that enables students "to recognize when others use language to influence or manipulate them" (Lloyd-Jones and Lunsford xxii)? Can reason really remove us to a world where language is not manipulativeto a realm where we are able to spot many forms of manipulation while free from being manipulated by other, subtler forms of control? Are our colleagues who teach various forms of critical practice really in better control of their own lives, more knowledgeable about their own beliefs, about the self-imposed distortions of our own vanity, than novelists and playwrights who often display disdain for such logical analysis? Maybe Shelley went too far in calling poets the unacknowledged legislators of the world. Can we not err equally in the opposite direction? Would a society of lawyers, even lawyers committed to public interest advocacy, necessarily be better than one of poets?

What about all those among usincluding many of the nominally most literatewhose attraction to reading and writing has little to do with criticism and doubt and suspicion and more to do with personal growth and transformation directly related to the power of writing to draw us out of ourselves, *to act on us* as it were, and in so doing to make us into something else, in the case of Elbow's *What Is English?*, into better teachers? How does a pedagogy of suspicion account for our common experience of personal growth through surrender of the self? Is there anything less critical, but more human, one might ask, than to find oneself in agreement with others out of complex feelings of trust, affiliation, respect, admiration, enhanced self-image, mutual self-interest, and a host of other factors that have nothing to do with critical reason?

As shown by Socrates' response in Plato's *Republic*, critique's distrust of aestheticsreally a distrust of unexamined, and unexaminable, claimshas a long and complex history. What is worth dwelling on for the moment is parallel distrust of critique initiated in the name of aesthetics and phenomenological claims in general. The issue here is not just the opposition of disciplinespoetry versus philosophy, or literature versus sociologybut of fundamental attitudes toward the nature of human experience, social as well as aesthetic. At a basic level, the problem can be phrased in terms of containers: Which is the larger, more encompassing containerthe phenomenological claim of literature to expand our sense of belonging or the claim of critical practice to help free us from such irrational attachments? Which comes firstphenomenological claim or critical control? Which, then, can be used to explain the other?

For a thinker like Berlin the answer is obvious, with empathetic understanding flagged as the least reliable way of knowing the world. Berlin instead creates a strict analytic paradigm, with viewers and readers starting at the level of greatest distortionliterary textsand working, in the fashion of a Chinese puzzle, through successive layers of distortion. The goal, he writes, is "to look at the work in the generating literary environment, the literary environment in the generating ideological environment, and the ideological environment in the generating socioeconomic environment" ("Literacy" 262)arriving in the last stage at the objectivity of historical analysis, that is, at the truth.

Here is a restatement of the orthodoxy of Marxist materialistic aesthetics against which the Marxist theorist Herbert Marcuse so strenuously protested in his last work, *The Aesthetic Dimension*namely the belief that "the work of art represents the interests and world outlook of particular social classes in a more or less accurate manner" (ix). Marcuse's response to such rigid orthodoxy, discussed in detail below, is to consider the revolutionary potential of the aesthetic as residing in its largely separate, autonomous character, in the extent that aesthetic experience is *not* entirely conditioned by political, social, or economic forces. For now it is enough to resist the self-assured and seemingly logical insistence of the Chinese boxes metaphor in order to consider the possibility that the aesthetic and critical are inextricably linked, so that both are necessary, one to explain the otheritself a significant concession to phenomenological claim, since it accepts its one founding claim,

that no rational activity, not even the most rational (that is, not even my own thinking), can ever be understood fully apart from the underlying claims of belonging upon which that activity is based and never fully extricated.

If one fully accepts the underlying nature of phenomenological claims to all rational activity, then an assertion to that effect cannot be used, as it most often is, as a rhetorical ploy for a higher-level critical analysis (that is, as the basis for a text that tries to use its own recognition of the limits of reason as grounds for its own higher rationality). Instead, acceptance of the phenomenological claim of reason results not in a higher-level critique but a different mode of discourse, one more accepting of literature and metaphor, not as adornments or heuristic devices, but as true modes of beingalternate and at times higher forms, not of knowledge, but of what it is like to live in the world, higher forms of representation.

There can be an inherently conservative bent to the phenomenological opposition to critiquethe view that all that we accomplish, and all that we have accomplished, is part of a grand effort at self-representation, part of our effort to make something of ourselves. In terms of the fable of "The Emperor's New Clothes," this conservative component manifests itself in questioning the original impulse of the tale to disrobe an emperor, to have us all contemplate stark human nakedness where we had previously been wont to see the tailor's artistry. For Edmund Burke, a classic opponent of naïve critique, the insistence on removing clothes and ritualistic symbols generally, is a first step toward barbarism. He specifically saw the French Revolution as the nationwide embodiment of a new critical pedagogy, part of a larger modern movement aimed at eliminating the claim of experience in the name of reason:

> [A]ll the decent drapery of life is to be rudely torn off. All the super-added ideas, furnished from the wardrobe of a moral imagination, which the heart owns, and the understanding ratifies, as necessary to cover the defects of our naked shivering nature, and to raise it to dignity in our own estimation are to be exploded as a ridiculous, absurd and antiquated fashion. (171)
>
> Yes, we can do so, Burke argues, but for what purpose? Modern critics, exemplified by the French Revolutionary Assembly, have

the power, "like that of the evil principle, to subvert and destroy; but none to construct, except such machines as may be fitted for further subversion and further destruction" (161). Literature remains one key form of countering such "subversion and further destruction" by constructing imaginative new worldsin Anderson's metaphor, by dressing up the world.

## The Resistant Anthology

Since its appearance in 1962, the two-volume *Norton Anthology of English Literature* has occupied a central position in the practice of English studies in American colleges. In its size and scope, its thoroughness of organization and presentation, it has for many transcended its synechdochic function, coming to stand for English literature itself, that tradition of transcendent, mostly lyrical writing emanating from the British Isles over the last half-millennium. Volume 2 covers just the last two hundred years, albeit, in the sixth edition, in some 2,500 densely filled pages. Obviously even so large an anthology cannot be a perfect representation of all the literature of these two centuries. There is no way to represent the variety and narrative thickness of the Victorian novel, for example, or, given the artistic compression of lyric poetry, really any fair way to balance poetry and prose. Yet, given the pedagogic interest in major writers and major works, the anthology does attempt to include "minor" writersCharlotte Smith as well as Wordsworth, George Darley as well as Keats. In all, we might be tempted to conclude that, within some inevitable limitations, volume 2 does indeed fairly represent the full range of British literature from the past two centuries.

Embedded in this very assertion, however, is a crux with important implications: To what extent is any set of writings that we might identify as "English literature" representative of actual literary production and attitudes in the British Isles over the last two centuries? At a simple level, for instance, most of us likely make a governing qualitative assumption about both an anthology and English literature itself: that each represents not all writing of the period but only the best, with the result that a great deal of less worthy material is not fairly represented. Raising the issue of just what makes writing worthy or unworthy of the title *literature* can

lead us in many different directionsto an examination of class or gender bias, for example, or to the history of popular writing, commercial publishing, and mass circulation. In each examination the assumption would be that there is a hidden quality, in the writing being defined as *literary* and thus being fairly represented in the Norton anthology.

New historicism and other postmodern attitudes would most likely approach this issue with an abiding suspicion of class and gender bias and in so doing assist us in recognizing literary value in underrepresented and presumably politically resistant writing. But there is a very different, one might almost say, diametrically opposed bias working here as well, one that can be seen in the lone selection by one of the most prominent and best-selling Victorian writers, Thomas Macaulay. Macaulay, a writer who dazzled his contemporaries with his rhetorical brilliance and whose *History of England* and speeches were found in small home libraries throughout the last century, in America as well as England, is not included as a major or even minor writer but in a mini-discussion section, "Industrialism: Progress or Decline," and much to the detriment of his twentieth-century literary reputation, on the side of what is known as "the Whig interpretation of history,"the decidedly middle-brow, Chamber-of-Commerce belief that a country's prosperity (and England's prosperity specifically) is the fruit of competition and free trade, technological innovation, and Parliamentary reform (all considered "liberal" principles in the mid-nineteenth century).

The piece itself is a review Macaulay wrote on Robert Southey's *Colloquies*, a work redolent in a decidedly romantic, Tory disdain for the modern age. Macaulay fixes on a passage in which Southey waxes poetically about the traditional English cottage, "such as the poet and the painter equally delight in beholding":

> Substantially built of the native stone without mortar, dirtied with no white lime, and their long roofs covered with slate, if they had been raised by the magic of some indigenous Amphion's music, the materials could not have adjusted themselves more beautifully in accord with the surrounding scene; and time has still further harmonized them with weather stains, lichens, and moss, short grasses, and short fern, and stoneplants of various kinds. . . . [T]he hedge of clipped box

> beneath the windows, the rose bushes beside the door, the little patch of flower ground, with its tall hollycocks in front; the garden beside, the beehives, and the orchard with its bank of daffodils and snowdrops, the earliest and the profusest in these parts, indicate in the owners some portion of ease and leisure, some regard to neatness and comfort, some sense of natural and innocent, and healthful enjoyment. ...
>
> "How is it," said I, "that everything which is connected with manufacture presents such features of unqualified deformity? From the largest of Mammon's temples down to the poorest hovel in which his helotry are stalled, these edifices have all one character. Time will not mellow them; nature will neither clothe nor conceal them; and they will remain always as offensive to the eye as to the mind." (1583)

Sentimental, to be sure, yet expressing the value of the local over the universal, of handicraft over manufacturepreferences that are still widespread in the beliefs and consumption patterns in English departments and among other critics of the ugliness of industrialism across the country. Yet for Macaulay, and for similar Whigs then and now, there is only contempt for such nonprogressive sentiments: "Here is wisdom," he sarcastically exclaims. "Here are the principles on which nations are to be governed. Rosebushes and poor rates, rather than steam engines and independence. Mortality and cottages with weather stains, rather than health and long life with edifices which time cannot mellow." For Macaulay, Southey's social theorizing is little more than aesthetic judgment, "To stand on a hill, to look at a cottage and a factory, and to see which is the prettier," all the while failing to realize that the great mass of English peasants never lived in such cozy comfort.

What we see in Macaulay is classic Whig doctrine, reformulated into contemporary laissez-faire economic mantra, and as such could be dismissed as benighted were it still not so integral a part of mainstream economic thinking that left-leaning politicians often feel unable to do more than soften up the edges of such optimistic blather:

> History is full of signs of this natural progress. We see in almost every part of the annals of mankind how the industry of individuals, struggling up against wars, taxes, famines,

> conflagrations, mischievous prohibitions, and more mischievous protections, creates faster than governments can squander. . . . We see the wealth of nations increasing, and all the arts of life approaching nearer and nearer to perfection, in spite of the grossest corruption and the wildest profusion on the part of rulers. (*Norton* 1584)

In concluding, Macaulay raises a rhetorical question, one that gets to the heart of the complex relationship between the optimism of critical reform and the pessimism of deep language: "On what principle is it that, when we see nothing but improvement behind us, we are to expect nothing but deterioration before us" (*Norton* 1586)?

One response here would be to challenge Macaulay on what can be seen in the pastwhether or not the progress he sees is real or illusory. But to engage in such a debate has little to do with literary study; it is instead to play Macaulay's game, and that of social scientists generally, to take seriously the Blue Books and Parliamentary reforms enacted throughout the nineteenth century that a writer like Charles Dickens was so fond of satirizing but which taken collectively, in England and in all other industrialized countries, played an important role in creating the modern welfare state, itself a steady and often well-deserved target of satirists and creative writers but which when placed in a full historical perspective can be seen as representing an ambitious, possibly even noble effort at rationally and equitably allocating an ever-increasing supply of goods and services.

While all of us can imagine even more rational, more equitable reforms to the modern national state, to do soto argue how various components of the modern state could be made more rational, more equitableis to engage in political discourse similar to Macaulay's, but a discourse that, if the selections in volume 2 of the Norton anthology are any guide, seems to interest few other authors of English literature, major or minor. Few literary authors seem willing to take seriously the whole issue of shaping a better future through carefully measured, progressive political reforms, that is, to engage in a cost-benefit analysis that weighs any social, political, and economic gains against the losses associated with adopting any specific public policy.

In fact, except for the reform-minded, decidedly political critiques of Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill, both arguing

for the expansion of women's rights, there are few if any comparable works in the other 2,500 pages of the anthology, certainly no other works that so clearly adopt such a Rotarian attitude toward the benefits of social change. One can go even further and claim that the category of modern literatureboth the selection of texts and, as we shall see, how those texts are studied, including the crucial issue of what it means to read and thus understand a literary textcan be defined in terms of a pervasive, adversarial (anti-Macaulay) stance toward social change, from either the right or the left, that is, either that guided by "invisible" free-market forces so praised by Macaulay (and contemporary free-market conservatives) or that resulting from active social planning and hence dependent upon an expanding bureaucracy. Stated positively, a defining quality of the overwhelming majority of texts in volume 2 of the *Norton Anthology of English Literature* is *a pervasive resistance to almost all forms of social and political change*, and specifically to the hegemony of the market exchange of goods and services that has defined the industrial culture of the last two hundred years.

"The world is too much with us," laments Wordsworth in one of his great sonnets, and what can be considered a thoroughly emblematic work of modern literature, as perfect in its resistance to the changes transforming England in the nineteenth century, as Macaulay is in his support:

> . . . late and soon,
> Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:
> Little we see in Nature that is ours;
> We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!
> (*Norton* 199)

What supports this poem is a fundamental distinction between two worlds: the present, the world of business where in "getting and spending we lay waste our powers," where to meet immediate needs we nurture our intellect but deprive our hearts, where we are no longer able to appreciate the beauty of nature; and the past, a simpler, prescientific age ("a creed outworn") of vivid images and heroic acts, a world of "Proteus rising from the sea;/ . . . old Triton blow[ing] his wreathèd horn."

"Bad as feudal times were," writes Southey elsewhere in the *Colloquies*, echoing Wordsworth's own deeply anticommercial Tory bias, "they were less injurious than these commercial ones to the kindly and generous feelings of human nature, and far, far more favourable to the principles of honour and integrity" (Southey 2: 26767). What do we find in the modern world but struggle governed, not by tradition, but by abstract model of economic efficiency. Southey continues:

> Too truly must it be said that every man oppresses his neighbour, or is struggling to oppress him. The landlord racks the tenant; the farmer grinds the labourer. Throughout the trading part of the community every one endeavors to purchase at the lowest price, and sell at the highest, regardless of equity in either case.

Or as Southey states earlier, "There is no floating at ease upon the agitated waters of our society; they who cannot struggle and swim, and buffet the waves that buffet them, must sink. Never was there so stirring an age as present" (2: 259)! And then, with the touch of a poet, a final image of the disruptive, reckless nature of a world governed by economic reason: "In these days there is not perhaps one man in a thousand (except among the higher families) who, if he lives to manhood, is buried with his fathers."

Poetic nonsense, Macaulay contends elsewhere in his review: fancy sentiment when what is needed is careful analysis, even statistics. Southey, Macaulay argues, is totally out of place in the modern world and its open, analytic methods of social analysis; he is a man who "abhors the spirit of the present generation, the severity of its studies, the boldness of its inquiries, and the disdain with which it regards some old prejudice by which his own mind is held in bondage" (Macaulay 505). Progress driven by market-driven economic expansionwhat, for Macaulay, is the ultimate source of social goodis for Southey and Wordsworth the ultimate source of social disruption.

Liberal faith in progress versus conservative distrust of change! One might call them two sides of a long-standing political debate, one that continues today, although under different labels, and that taken together perhaps expresses a certain truth about ourselves:

that change is destructive as well as beneficial. Yet what is most interesting about the dialectical opposition between stasis and change is that it takes places almost entirely outside formal literary study. There is no such balance within mainstream English studies, no balance within volume 2 of the *Norton Anthology of English Literature*Macaulay's matter-of-fact assessment of historical change is a lone voice, while Southey's nostalgic view of the past is echoed over and over again, in Wordsworth and in almost all the other writers collected in this volume representing the last two hundred years of English literature. As Eagleton perceptively notes, within the field of English literary study, "the opposite of poetry" is not what we might thinkprosebut something quite different: Jacobinism, or the unfettered rule of reason and general law. That Macaulay is an historian and essayist, not a creative writer, only displaces the problem as to why history and essays were considered key literary artifacts for much of the nineteenth century and have for the last century or so lost their standing as literature.

Turning matters around, one might define modern literature strictly in terms of its political orientation, as highly detailed written accounts (narrative or lyrical) of individuals' personal experiences, organized and presented as a means of opposition to social change based on any sort of systematic, universal principle, either from the left or the right. As Eagleton notes, much of English literature of the last two hundred years can be read as "a traumatized response to the French Revolution" ("Crisis" 38). The modern notion of literature, as such, is an historically grounded phenomenona specialized form of discourse that in its commitment to the personal and to the concrete attempts to stay the tide of all forms of universal practice. The abstracting, standardizing force of universal practice is hardly less todayand so the need for literature as a form of protected, aesthetically enriched textual study would seem to be no less.

"The history of nineteenth-century civilization," writes economic historian Karl Polanyi in reference particularly to nineteenth-century art and literature, "consisted largely in attempts to protect society against the ravages of such a mechanism" (40). As Marcuse adds, "The 'flight into inwardness' and the insistence on a private sphere [two defining traits of modernist culture, both under attack by postmodernists as forms of bourgeois subjectivity] may well serve

as bulwarks against a society which administers all dimensions of human existence" (38). Literature and the aesthetic dimension of life were themselves long at the center of that "civilization" to which Polanyi and Marcuse referthe resisting world of emotion and personal autonomy that the middle-class counterrevolution constituted as the main form of resistance to the onslaught of progress.

Redefining Literature

The work of British Marxist literary critic Raymond Williams is often cited in attempts to untie the conundrum of the seemingly "conservative" nature of literature by revealing the relatively late origins of the modern notion of *literature* as writing with a decidedly aesthetic bent, and thereby suggesting the need to redress recent skewing against "nonliterary" work. A critical reformer like Berlin, interested in reclaiming the importance of rhetoric, especially the teaching and practice of a public civic discourse based on the analysis and discussion of social issues, seeks confirmation in Williams's claim that for hundreds of years *literature* referred to the general category of educated discourse and that only with the triumph of romantic aesthetics in the second half of the nineteenth century was the term narrowed down to refer to imaginative writing self-consciously constructed in an artistic tradition. Literature, Williams writes, originally was "primarily reading ability and reading experience" (*Marxism* 47), akin to the modern notion of *literacy*, and referred to "philosophy, history, and essays as well as poems" (48).

The implication here is that, in a broader historical setting, both the Norton anthology and English literary study generally are woefully nonrepresentative, reflecting serious ideological distortions of the last two hundred years, in this case as to what is literature. In such an assertion we see another form of contemporary ("new historicist") suspicion that the past is best read as an ideological struggle in which a dominant class attempts to assert its hegemony by controlling language (here the definition of "literature" and of criticism as the proper mode for the study of literature) to further its own interests (presumably that of an aspiring middle class) and at the expense of other groups (presumably workers).

"The specialized concept of 'literature,'" Williams writes, "developed in precise forms of correspondence with a particular social class, a particular organization of learning, and the appropriate technology of print" (*Marxism* 54). Such is the traditional view of literature that the Raymond Williams of *Marxism and Literature* and many other reform-minded English teachers today see as an obstacle to social progressa view that, in Williams's words, is "now so often invoked in retrospective, nostalgia or reactionary moods, as a form of opposition to what is correctly seen as a new phase of civilization" (54).

Contemporary reformers present us with a face-off between a true and a false literature, or possibly a true and false literacy, with the forces of the status quo and reaction on one side and progress through a heightened social resistance on the other. The assumption here is that the modern, decidedly aesthetic notion of literatureor deep language itselfis inherently reactionary, one that replaces real concerns with imaginary ones and in so doing discourages direct engagement with the world. The argument, with its origin in Plato's attack on poets in the *Republic*, is hardly weakened when one considers Virgil Nemoianu's contention regarding the conservative, if not outright reactionary or even fascist, political views of so many major modern writers. The list he offers is well rehearsed: Pound, Eliot, Yeats, Faulkner, Lawrence, Waugh, Thomas Mann, Giraudoux, Borges, with others like Kafka, Beckett, Ionesco, so disillusioned with the modern world as to be largely apolitical and others still, like Auden, Dos Passos, Malraux, Camus, turning steadily to the right after more radical beginnings. It is hard to argue with what Lionel Trilling had to say about the politics of great writers after surveying a similar list: "All of them have their own love of justice and the good life, but not in one of them does it take the form of a love of the ideas and emotions which liberal democracy, as shown by our educated class, has declared respectable" (16667).

Raymond Williams's earlier work, especially *Culture and Society*, first published in 1958, raises a number of issues about true and false writing relevant to the charges leveled by Trilling and Nemoianu. This early work by Williams is essentially a panegyric on the larger social value of a conserving literary tradition, one that repeatedly values a largely conservative tradition of social analysis based on an aesthetic or narrative appreciation of real

experience over a right-minded but abstract tradition of political partisanship. Time after time, Williams downplays the specific conservative political views of writers he admiresfrom Edmund Burke to T. S. Eliotin order to praise some saving truth in their wider social criticism.

One of the four key figures and heroes in Williams's first chapter is Macaulay's conservative nemesis Robert Southey, here contrasted with the reform-minded, politically correct activist Robert Owena man credited by Williams as "one of the founders of English socialism, and of the cooperative movement" (*Culture* 21). For Williams, Owen did what almost no literary figure did in the midst of calamitous social changes: he "offered answers where they raised questions; offered confidence where they perceived difficulty" (21). Yet Williams's stronger sympathies here are still with the Tory Southey and his heartfelt condemnation of the new manufacturing system that was transforming Englanda system, described by Southey, as designed "to collect wealth rather than to diffuse it. . . . [G]reat capitalists become like pikes in a fish-pond, who devour the weaker fish" (qtd. in *Culture* 23). Like Owen, Southey has a remedy, and surprisingly it is in a past not unlike the modern liberal view of the future: "There can be no health, no soundness in the state, till Government shall regard the moral improvement of the people as its great duty. . . . Some voluntary cast-aways there will always be, whom no fostering kindness and no parental care can preserve from self-destruction, but if any are lost for want of care and culture, there is a sin of omission in the society to which they belong" (qtd. in *Culture* 24).

"Culture," for Southey, Williams points out, is a matter, not of quantity, but of quality, of morality: "You cannot advance in [chemical and mechanical discoveries] too fast," Southey has Thomas More state in one of his *Colloquies*, "provided that the moral culture of the species keep pace with the increase of its material powers. Has it been so?" More asks rhetorically (qtd. in *Culture* 25). The key to life for Southey was the quality of feelings and affiliations that, like Wordsworth and the center of the entire English literary tradition, he saw as based on a complex play of attitudes, place, and traditionsa world of rich local practice he saw as being undermined by laissez-faire industrialism.

Like Southey, the early socialist Owen also was horrified by the ravages of industrialism: "All ties between employers and employed

are frittered down to the consideration of what immediate gain each can derive from the other" (*Culture* 27). Closer in spirit to Macaulay and thus counter to the whole English literary tradition, however, Owen believed in the possibility of finding rational solutions to this new historical situation, specifically by countering the massive dislocations produced by the invisible demands for greater economic efficiency being countered by large-scale social planningin a phrase, the modern welfare state: "Any general character, from the best to the worst, from the most ignorant to the most enlightened, may be given to any community, even to the world at large, by the application of proper means" (27). Yet for Williams, Owen's greatest accomplishment is less his planning and reform (although Williams does praise Owen's model schools at New Lanark) than his visceral opposition to capitalism, what Williams refers to as "the lived quality of his new view of society" (28). What matters most for Williams, in other words, is Owen the social critic and his bond with literary tradition in seeing "that human nature itself is the product of a 'whole way of life'" (29):

> Under this system there can be no true civilization; for by it all are trained civilly to oppose and often to destroy one another by their created opposition of interests. It is a low, vulgar, ignorant and inferior mode of conducting the affairs of society; and no permanent, general and substantial improvement can arise until it shall be superseded by a superior mode of forming character and creating wealth. (28)

Yet even this climactic passage cited by Williams reveals a certain ambivalence, starting as it does with a literary-like forceful condemnation of the present but ending with a call for systematic reform that, with its reference to wealth-formation, quickly passes beyond the personal and deeply felt and rendered.

For writers within the English literary traditionand Williams's *Culture and Society* is largely a paean to that traditionlaissez-faire capitalism is the archenemy. The one progressive (critical-minded) response it engendered, howeverof large-scale government-initiated planning, that is, the birth of the modern welfare stateis, oddly enough, often equally repulsive to that tradition. For Owen, unlike for imaginative writers, the emphasis is not just

on the "the most lamentable and permanent evils" of industrialism but also on the need for industrialism to "be counteracted by legislative interference and direction" (qtd. in Polanyi 128). Like industrialists, and unlike imaginative writers, Owen wants to replace quaint local practices with a new, rationalized orderwhile not the simplistic order of laissez-faire capitalism with its near total dependence on ever-more efficient production of wealth, a rationalized order nonetheless based on a newly created, benevolent, state-controlled system for redistributing wealth.

Given Owen's commitment to the early manifestation of the modern welfare state, Williams's praise of him is (given Williams's own radical credentials) surprisingly more tempered than what he affords to political conservatives of a more literary bent, a process that can be seen today with many reform-minded language educators who are simultaneously strong supporters of local practices like handicrafts, strong opponents of free-market economics, and often indifferent about reform-minded politics in general and the intricacies of legislative deliberations. As often happens in such situations, Williams's literary sensibilities, at least as a young scholar writing *Culture and Society*, seem to have gotten the better of his political judgmenta situation we can more clearly see in the initial dual portrait of the volume: Edmund Burke, "the first modern conservative," who is favorably contrasted with William Cobbett, "the first great tribune of the industrial proletariat."

It is perhaps ironic that Williams first praises Burke in the words of another archconservative, Matthew Arnold, for being able to see beyond the glare of slogans and rhetoric: "Almost alone in England," Williams quotes Arnold as saying, "[Burke] brings thought to bear upon politics, he saturates politics with thought" (qtd. in *Culture* 4). The key here for Williams is the verb "saturates" and not the noun "thought," especially in its normal sense as something opposed to feeling. It is rather, Williams writes, thought of as "a special immediacy of experience, which works itself out, in depth, to a particular embodiment of ideas that become, in themselves, the whole man." Indeed, what distinguishes Burke is precisely his ability to deal with the world as an imaginative writer, to experience political life in a deep, probing way, similar to how a great novelist values the authenticity of a character's feeling over any question of its moral validity:

> The correctness of these ideas is not at first in question; and their truth is not, at first, to be assessed by their usefulness in historical understanding or in political insight. Burke's writing is an articulated experience, and as such it has a validity which can survive even the demolition of its general conclusions. (5)

Politics is not the issue, nor is the eloquence that dazzled so many of Burke's contemporaries. What is the issue is depth of experience, mediated by languagethat is, Burke's command of deep language: "What survives is an experience, a particular kind of learning; the writing is important only to the extent that it communicates this. It is, finally, a personal experience become a landmark" (5). What finally elevates Burke for Williams is Burke's standing as literary author, his commitment to literature itself as a new, distinct kind of writing concerned with an accurate, detailed depiction of a world we all know but that we have never before seen in this light.

This is the modern, aesthetic notion of literature as writing that makes the strongest possible phenomenological claim upon us, not dazzling us with eloquent restatements of general truths, but moving us with realistic depictions of worlds we know but have not yet recognized as our own. Before Burke not even poetrythat most concentrated form of literaturenecessarily possessed the aesthetic dimension we now see as its essence. In *Rasselas*, for example, Samuel Johnson defines poetry more in terms of the rational impulses of contemporary reformers:

> The business of a poet, said Imlac, is to examine, not the individual, but the species; to remark general properties and large appearances: he does not number the streaks of the tulip, or describe the different shades in the verdure of a forest. He is to exhibit in his portraits of nature such prominent and striking features, as recall the original to every mind; and must neglect the minuter discriminations, which one may have remarked, and another have neglected, for these characteristics which are alike obvious to vigilance and carelessness. (52728)

Some twenty years after writing *Culture and Society*, Williams was quizzed on the oddly conservative cast of the book by the

editors of the *New Left Review* in a remarkable series of transcribed conversations, published as *Politics and Letters* (1978). Why did Williams ignore and hence seem to condone the openly reactionary political positions adopted by so many of the key figures discussed in the book, they wanted to know, and when Williams did introduce qualifications why were they more likely to be about the liberal politics of Shelley and Morris than the conservative politics of Burke and Carlyle? The gist of Williams's less than convincing response to these questions is that this was the work of a younger and, presumably, less responsible, writer: "It is not a book," Williams claims, "I could conceive myself writing now" (107). It is as if the conservative cast of the social criticism he found compelling was largely accidental and not grounded in the phenomenological nature of deep language: "The fact is," he continues, "that the origins of the book lie in ideas of either explicitly conservative or contradictory thinkers in the nineteenth centurybut conservatives who, at the point of irruption of a qualitatively new social order put many of the right questions to it but of course came out with wrong answers" (109).

## The Universal Threat

The issue of a "qualitatively new social order" is thus inseparable from the dual emergence of new forms of reading and writing and new forms of resistance. Literature did become a distinct form of aesthetic expression in the nineteenth century, but the larger issue is the status of aesthetic expression itself as a new realm of cultural experience, a haven in a heartless world where one could seek refuge in the richness of concrete experience itself. The new standing of literature as well as a new form of deep reading and writing did not just happen on their own, but were instead part of a new role for aesthetic experience generallyone that elevated it as a primary form of cultural resistance.

The aesthetic gained elevated status in English literature and eventually Western culture as a whole for offering a new, higher-level claim on readersone that in its delight in the world that was, in its details, its concreteness, its specificity, offered an alternate realm of experience that seemed richer and deeper than the generalizing forces of reason that were totally transforming, not

just the natural world via new technologies, but the social world as well, through new political arrangements based on abstract rather than personal bonds and, most threatening of all, new social arrangements based on a largely new form of economic exchange, one ready to sweep away all traditions, familial and communal, in the name of a strange new conceptprogress.

The aesthetic dimension of deep language finally springs from the same source as all modern reform effortswhat Karl Polanyi in his classic study by the same name, calls "the Great Transformation" of the modern world. While the interpretive component of postmodern critical analysis stems from the competing claims of emerging interest groupsas Gerald Graff writes, "Today new constituencieswomen, blacks, gays, and immigrant groups from Asia and Latin America in particulardemand a say in how culture will be defined" (8)matters were far simpler at the start of the modern age two centuries ago. Although it is fashionable today to see the rise of aesthetics and the general elevation of culture in the nineteenth century as the attempt of an emerging middle class to disenfranchise others, at the time the battle seemed far simpler and far more desperate: aesthetics, culture, and eventually deep language were all seen as acts of resistance, efforts to stem the tide of inexorable substitution of universal for local practiceas part of what Polanyi calls "the utopian endeavor of economic liberalism to set up a self-regulating market system" (29).

The history of humanity until the onset of industrialism, Polanyi argues, mostly entailed the creation and maintenance of local, often community-based, social and economic practices designed to deal with chronic shortages, most importantly in food. With few goods and with not much surplus or trade, there was little abstract about everyday economic lifeand the basic human values needed to survive in such a situation fluctuated between the positive impulse to share and the negative impulse to hoard. Economic life was largely subsumed in a greater social existence concerned with production of materials for immediate use or possibly for barter, a social as much as an economic exchange, tinged with deal-making, trust and suspicion, and personal debt.

Only with new, more effective methods of production, based eventually upon universal principles of scientific control, do we start to enter the familiar modern world where the concrete, diurnal concern with subsistence and social affiliation were replaced

with universal abstractions (what Polanyi refers to as the "fictions") that still dominate modern life: commodity markets instead of marketplaces, labor instead of human exertion, nature instead of land, contracts instead of obligations. Where before people had many, often overlapping obligations, now there is a new overarching, universal imperative: to acquire wealth, to gain an economic advantage over one's neighbors. Now for the first time in history, Polanyi laments, instead of the tensions of local practice, there is the new, modern notion of gain: "All transactions are turned into money transactions, and these in turn require that a medium of exchange be introduced into every articulation of industrial life" (41).

> Machine production in a commercial society involves, in effect, no less a transformation than that of the natural and human substance of society into commodities. The conclusion, though weird, is inevitable; nothing less will serve the purpose: obviously, the dislocation caused by such devices must disjoin man's relationships and threaten his natural habitat with annihilation. (42)

For Polanyi, there is only one great theme of modern life: the reorganization of society to meet more effectively specific economic rather than general human needs. As he summarizes, "[T]he development of the market system would be accompanied by a change in the organization of society itself. All along the line, human society had become an accessory of the economic system" (75).

It is not difficult to identify the complicity of the middle class, especially the merchant, the shopkeeper, in this transformation. "The Industrial Revolution," writes Polanyi, "was merely the beginning of a revolution as extreme and radical as ever inflamed the minds of sectarians, but the new creed was utterly mechanistic and believed that all human problems could be resolved given an unlimited amount of material commodities" (40). The ideology of the new emerging industrial and trading classes, reflected in Macaulay's crass optimism, was blinded to the devastating nature of change, a founding insight not only of postmodern critical thought but of modern social criticism, expressed thus by Polanyi:

> [T]he trading classes had no organ to sense the dangers involved in the exploitation of the physical strength of the worker,

> the destruction of family life, the devastation of neighborhoods, the denudation of forests, the pollution of rivers, the deterioration of craft standards, the disruption of folkways, and the general degradation of existence including housing and arts, as well as the innumerable forms of private and public life that do not affect profits. The middle classes fulfilled their function by developing an all but sacramental belief in the universal beneficence of profits. (133)

Polanyi closes this passage by raising an issue at the center of reformist critique and which will be considered at length in the concluding section of this essaythe possibility that the middle class's preoccupation with profits "disqualified them as keepers of other interests as vital to a good life as their furtherance of production."

What needs to be stressed at the moment is the magnitude of the historical problem against which the middle class was thenand, many will contend, still isreacting. For economic historian Robert Heilbroner, for example, the modern world can largely be defined in terms of this "dissolution of previous social relationships in which the peasant was entitled by law and custom to retain some portion of the crops he directly raised, and in which the urban worker owned his own means of production in the form of a cottage loom, a potter's wheel, and the like." From this change ("commencing in the fifteenth century or even earlier"), Heilbroner writes, came "the enclosure movement, the destruction of protected crafts and guilds, the creation of a proletariat from the cellars of society" (4142). He continues, noting how "the whirlwind forces of new technologies disrupted the social relations of older economic regimes and prepared the way for the wholly different regime of capital." It was, as Polanyi poetically states, the start of a new material way of life that "spread over the planet with a claim to universality unparalleled since the age when Christianity started out on its career" (130).

It is against the backdrop of such an epochal transformation that one must understand the emergence of an entire range of modern notions, many related to the new concept of deep language, including aesthetics as a distinct mode of human experience, culture as a special or higher state of human achievement, and literacy as the ability to read and write deeply. Terry Eagleton, hence, is right to talk about the "construction of the modern notion of the aesthetic" as being "inseparable from the construction of the dominant ideological forms of modern class-society, and indeed from a

whole new form of human subjectivity appropriate to that social order" (*Ideology* 3). Raymond Williams in *Marxism and Literature* is likewise right to note the distinctly modern nature of an aestheticized notion of literature, but wrong to abandon the central insight of his own classic *Culture and Society*, that such a shift can now be seen as a largely reactionary formationthat is, as supporting in current political context largely reactionary political forces. For Williams, literature provided the wrong (that is, conservative) answers, although it may have addressed the right questions.

And perhaps in some broad sense one can categorize the entire modern aesthetic response to the totalizing nature of modern life as literally *reactionary*, meaning "in opposition," since this response in privileging the local and the individual over the global and the collective often opposed, not just the onslaught of industrial capitalism, but most systematic efforts at reforming or opposing this onslaught, from liberal reform to communism, responses all equally condemned for their universalist presumptions. In his savage satire of industrial England, *Hard Times*, Charles Dickens attacks factory owners, liberal-minded reforms, and organized labor equally. Perhaps it is Dickens's complete dismissal of utilitarian reformers that is so completely indicative of the unwillingness of the aesthetic dimension of deep language to support any sort of political reforms based on the broad application of universal principlesthe founding utilitarian belief, for instance, "which approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever, according to the tendency which it appears to have to augment or diminish the happiness of the party whose interest is in question" (12). Indeed, in all of what passes for modern English literature, there is hardly a single kind word for the person responsible for this quotation, that most ambitious, most liberal, albeit least aesthetic of social reformers, Jeremy Benthamalthough, it is unclear what such a categorization actually means, what it means to brand the traditional corpus of modern literature, for example, the entire volume 2 of the *Norton Anthology of English Literature*, as reactionary.

## Deep Resistance

Critical practice thus needs to be seen not just in terms of its opposition to modern life but in terms of its fulfillment as well. In the early modern world of legislative critique, even the poet was

praised as a master of the universal, or in the words of Samuel Johnson, the person who "must divest himself of the prejudices of his age or country":

> [H]e must consider right and wrong in their abstracted and invariable state; he must disregard present laws and opinions, and rise to general and transcendental truths, which will always be the same. . . . He must write as the interpreter of nature, and the legislator of mankind, and consider himself as presiding over the thoughts and manners of future generations; as a being superiour to time and place. (528)

What is totally lacking here is what only one generation later the first generation of modern writers, the English romantic poets and critics, collectively dreaded: the universal, in all its forms as a constant, imminent threat to distinctive, colorful, life-enriching local practice. Wordsworth's famous preface to *Lyrical Ballads* is a revolutionary manifesto of literacy theory and not just poetics, rejecting as it does the eighteenth-century neoclassical concern with the abstract and universal for a new concern with local color"the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation," that is, not to forsake the universal (the meaning of things) but to find that meaning in what is local and distinctive, for it is here, in the out-of-the-way countryside that one is most fully free of the transformative force of modern life: not just industrialism or capitalism but the even-larger notion of the world as a place characterized by regular change directed by the application of universal law and producing ever greater human efficiency, in a word, progress.

There has always been change, and always a sense of aesthetic experience as oppositional to most, if not all change, and hence, inherently reactionary. As Nemoianu notes in a chapter titled, "Is Literature Always Reactionary?" the problem is not just with modern writers; as proof he offers a broad array of politically conservative, at times reactionary writers from earlier periods: Aeschylus and Aristophanes; Virgil and Horace; Dante and Shakespeare; Dryden, Racine, and Corneille; Pope, Swift, and Johnson; Goethe and Scott; Balzac and Tennyson; Baudelaire and Dostoevsky. Everywhere he finds "literary production and literary producers . . . preponderantly on the conservative side." While he recognizes the existence of the "often-invoked critical function of literature," he

sees it as time and again in support of tradition and in opposition to change, with even the nominally progressive work of writers like Defoe, Shelley, and Rousseau quickly co-opted for "stabilizing and pacifying effect" by a larger literary establishment.

The aesthetic dimension of language at the heart of unreconstructed English studies comes into being as a form of indirect opposition, not just to palpable increase in changes directed at effecting more powerful controls of nature, but to the modes of scientific, rational thought organized in support of such changes. Following Nemoianu we can refer to these as the primary and secondary worlds: on the one hand, the primary world of history and politics, the world of economic law and social and political change, the world that provides us with the means of meeting our immediate physical needs, the world that Macaulay saw as steadily improving, in a phrase, the world of increasingly widespread critical practice; and, on the other hand, the secondary world of art and literature, of dreams and desires ("Great God! I'd rather be/A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn"), of a past world with which we feel a spiritual kinship (as if we must certainly have once actually inhabited) and a future world we may yet remake in far closer accord with our own emotional needsthat is, the world of deep language.

Most forms of critical practice, even in their postmodern interpretive mode, stem from our same longstanding cultural desire to control the world through reason; deep language stems from a more intimate, less organized desire to feel at home in the world, to see the familiar in the strange and the strange in the familiar. Deep language is rooted in a fascination with anomaly, in preserving the ever-strangeness of the world, and thus in the same irrational aesthetic source as literature, what Nemoianu calls "a crystallized form of the quintessential human quality of memory, with its opposition to and support of action and progress" (xiixiii).

Just as the secondary is less the opposite of the primary than its complement, its undersideshowing us the corners of experience that critical analysis is always too eager to round offwhat Nemoianu calls "an area that reflects in its substance the relationships between principal and secondary . . . or at least enacts for the reader the dialectical drama of their relationship" (xii), so too does deep language need to be seen as something more than the opposite of critical practice. Such practice, despite its facade of objectivity, is

not solely a product of the primary world, not completely removed from the secondary, since its motivating vision of social justice has its own literary dimension in its desire, less to control the world than to make it into something elsea better, juster worldto transform the present out of a deep sense of its current inadequacy, its incompleteness.

Interpretive critical practice does move closer to deep language by foregrounding local practice, by calling for an ongoing critique of critical thinking itself, and in the end by its putative rejection of what has long been the single defining characteristic of critical practice: its utopian impulse. Much interpretive critical practice, however, its protestations notwithstanding, is reluctant to forsake its impulse to reform the world based on the same abstract, universal sense of truth and justice that lay at the heart of Socrates' renunciation of play in Plato's *Republic*. Is there not something morally wrong with indulging in imaginative play that ignores, in the words of Knoblauch and Brannonreminiscent of Socratesthe "persistent social condition" by which "oppression [acts] in the service of privilege"? How can one temporize about a "critical consciousness [that] aims to expose and relieve" (163) that oppression?

Measured according to a strict scale that rates all social practices according to whether or not they promote oppression or liberation, much of ordinary social life fails miserably, for most peoples at most times. While critical practice is organized to help right that balance, that is, to promote reforms that help the weak against the strongwomen against sexism, workers against owners and managers, people of color against ruling oligarchies, in a refreshingly simple phrase, good against evildeep language has a different concern. Where critical practice is clear, straightforward, and finally psychologically reassuring, in unequivocally placing those who agree with us on the side of virtue, deep language always equivocates. It helps us to see what we do not expect, in part because some part of us always seems so eager to deny our real complexity, to use demonizing labels like *racist*, *sexist*, and *classist* to identify and hence condemn the evil in others and, by implication, to purify ourselves. Which side are you on; with whom do you standwith racists or nonracists, with oppressors or liberators, with critical teachers who want to change the world or traditional teachers interested only in defending the status quo?

How much more comforting it is to be able to see evil everywhere in the world . . . but in ourselves! How quickly and easily the fuzzy aura of the *critical*critical teaching, critical literacy, critical whateverbecomes a license to fall back into the oldest, least critical patterns of purifying ourselves by demonizing others. Yet how antithetical to the mimetic impulse of deep language for ever more truthful representations of ourselves and others, not how we differ, but what we share even with those seemingly most unlike us. As the great modern realist Chekhov suggests, it is too easy to write plays condemning evil, to posture, for example, about the evils of horse stealingsomething that "has been known for ages," he notes, "without my saying so." Let others judge, he adds; his interest is in truth-telling, not sermonizing: "You are dealing with horse-thieves, so let me tell you that they are not beggars but well-fed people, that they are people of a special cult, and that horse-stealing is not simply theft but a passion" (148).

Or as another prominent, deeply conservative modern writer, Thomas Mann, notes, the passionate desire of artists for a more honest recognition of who we are may always be at odds with the desire to judge and reform others:

> Art will always "turn back," it will always be reactionary. It is with good reason that it has always been included, like religion, among the anti-democratic forces; and to compare the artist with the "intellectual" is democratic humbug. Never will art be moral in the political sense. Never will it be virtuous; never will progress be able to count on its assistance. Art has a basically unreliable, treacherous streak; its delight in scandalous irrationalism, its love of that "barbarity" which produces beauty is ineradicable. Even if one wanted to call this love hysterical, unintelligible, immoral to the point of endangering the world, it remains an immoral fact. And if one wanted to, if one could extirpate it, one would be both freeing the world from a grave danger and ridding it of art. (qtd. in Nemoianu 21)

"Unlike Matthew Arnold and unlike Dr. Leavis," confesses George Steiner, "I find myself unable to assert confidently that the humanities humanize" (30). But "humanize" is much too soft a term,

suggesting as it does some practical, almost measurable, and invariably positive social outcome. "*If humanistic culture really is a civilizing force, why wouldn't the college I worked for and the profession I worked in TAKE A STAND?*" bemoans an exasperated Richard Ohmann (21), in his classic 1976 critique of the discipline of English. Yet is not the real issue here what it means for us to be "humanized" or "civilized," if not to improve us in some clear and unambiguous fashion, that is, to make others knowledgeable or wise enough so that they will agree with me? The answer of deep languageand, one assumes, of the humanities generallycan only be that being "humanized" or "civilized" are inherently complex conditions, which, to the extent they do anything, entail, not just increasing our capability for choosing right over wrong, but *deepening us in all our contradictions*, including our capacity to understand and at some level accept the weaknesses in others as well as in ourselves.

Anyone who has felt the righteous calling of a cause can understand Ohmann's frustration at the timidity of his colleagues, but where Ohmann errs, and in so doing metaphorically at least misleads a generation of future English teachers bent on purifying the profession through pedagogic reform, is in suggesting that we really do have an alternative: that there is *another way of learning, another way of teaching*, other pedagogic practices that promise us that, in return for abandoning the aesthetic concerns of the past, we will at last have access to *the truth*, and no longer be subject to error. But what kind of knowledge is this offered by reformers, we must ask, that is so pure, so strong, so absolute that it removes from us the chance of choosing wrong and hence of choosing at all?

Does not politics constantly tempt us in this directionto sacrifice depth and formlessness of experience, aesthetics itself for orthodoxy? Is not this the same issue raised by Matthew Arnold in his complaint against "the young and ardent amongst us" and their insistence that everything be seen "in inseparable connection with politics and practical life" ("Function of Criticism" 282). The benefits of such concern may have been, in Arnold's term, "exhausted" over a century ago, but certainly not the originating impulse. What we need, both Arnold and Nemoianu argue, is a countering forcea writing concerned, not with reform and ideals, not with making our world or even ourselves "better" but with the expression, recognition, and acceptance of all that we are, for better or worse. Here is

affirmation of Nemoianu's notion of literature as that general class of writing concerned with offering truthful, although not necessarily flattering, representations of who we are: "The secondary finds artistic expression through disorder, relaxation, and idleness. Negligence, tolerance, and procrastination are its allies, lack of energy and purpose provide it with strength" (202). Or as Marcuse adds, in purely political terms, literature "does nothing in the struggle of liberationexcept to open the tabooed zones of nature and society in which even death and the devil are enlisted as allies in the refusal to abide by the law and order of repression" (21).

"The poetic imagination," writes Northrup Frye, "constructs a cosmos of its own, a cosmos to be studied not simply as a map but as a world of powerful conflicting forces" (xxii). Like Nemoianu, Frye sees this as a secondary world, existing between the outer world of natural science and the purely inner world of psychology, and in which a myriad of conflicting experiences and emotions are free to come into play, freeing the "ordinary consciousness" from its preoccupation with "either-or contrasts of subject and object" that otherwise prevent it from dealing with the complex realm of imaginative experiencewhat Frye calls "the notion of an order of words that is neither subjective nor objective, though it interpenetrates with both" (xxiii).

Frye's "order of words" is literature itself, acting as the fulfillment of deep writing itself and thus as a bulwark for all forms of local practice, against, not just the relentless onslaught of historical progress, but the seemingly unfathomable wellspring of delusion within us all regarding the many accommodations and rationalizations we are continually making to justify our own efforts to position ourselves comfortably in a continually changing world. Berlin is right that "English studies was founded on a set of hierarchical binary oppositions in which literary texts were given an idealized status approaching the sacred" and what he calls "rhetorical texts and their production were portrayed as embodiments of the fallen realms of science and commerce and politics, validating in their corrupt materiality the spiritual beauties of their opposite" (*Rhetorics* xiv). In a world torn asunder by unbridled capitalist expansion, it was only a deep or special discoursethat is, only literaturethat was able to maintain what Nemoianu calls "an adversarial-reactionary way towards history," a stance that in its very contrariness "manages to preserve and to refresh history" (135).

The danger of engaging the world directly, through rhetorical discourse, was being sucked up in the maelstrom; what was needed instead is not just literature, not just pretty writing, but writing that is determinedly self-distancing, resistant to reductive readings, writing, in a word, that is *deep*. All forms of deep language, in other words, not just what we label as literature, act subversively as "a force for defeat, and thus for renewal" (Nemoianu 202). It is writing that saves us from the pride, the smugness, the intolerance we all experience with a messy reality that refuses to conform to our own, "higher" image of reason and orderwhat he calls deep writing acting as "the providential friends and secret salvation of progressive movement" (135).

Nemoianu's concern mirrors Matthew Arnold's image of Oxford University itself as a counterforce, the physical embodiment of a determined, principled reaction to progress in all its modern and at times mindless varieties. At the heart of Oxford is a resistance to the modern world as fierce and as determined as that which motivates modern critical practice generallya "sentiment against hideousness and rawness [that] has been at the bottom of our attachment to so many beaten causes, of our opposition to many triumphant movements." Oxford for Arnold plays the same role that Ricoeur assigns to ideology and Nemoianu to literature generically:

> We have not won our political battles, we have not carried our main points, we have not stopped our adversaries' advance, we have not marched victoriously with the modern world; but we have told silently upon the mind of the century, we have prepared currents of feeling which sap our adversaries' position when it seems gained, we have kept our own communication with the future" (*Culture* 106)

Here is Oxford fulfilling what Nemoianu calls "the part of institutional and societal memory," that which protects the future by challenging the present with enriched images of the past. Deep writing, Nemoianu concludes, "challenges, prods, and renews; it gleans the potentialities abandoned during the actualizations of historical advance; and it replenishes the pool of options and images for our historical future" (135).

> "Literature," writes Marcuse in an effort to rehabilitate the aesthetic, in the process rescuing it from the dominance of the political, "is not revolutionary because it is written for the working

class or for 'the revolution'"that is, not revolutionary because it has good intentions, or, like Labov's Larry, is necessarily filled with resisting sentiments: "Literature can be called revolutionary in a meaningful sense only with reference to itself, as content having become form" (xii). While a younger generation of English teachers was becoming obsessed with the political, the aging radical Marcuse, trained in philosophy and social theory, wrote *The Aesthetic Dimension* in order to speak to the value of aesthetic knowledge at the center of English studies: "A work of art is authentic or true not by virtue of its content (i.e., the 'correct' representation of social conditions), nor by its 'pure' form, but by the content having become form" (8)that is, being able to give life to what one wants to say by embodying it in an aesthetic form. Without this aesthetic form, there is no possible aesthetic experience, no alternative realm one can escape to in order to foster dreams of better, alternate worlds, no place available for "breaking through the mystified (and petrified) social reality, and opening the horizon of change (liberation)" (xi). This deep writing is the source of Marcuse's "rebirth of the rebellious subjectivity" (7): the ability of the aesthetic, embodied in a sensual form, to provide for "the transcendence of immediate reality," to "[open] a new dimension of experience"the world of freedom.

No one can deny Berlin's point that language is "a product of social relations and so is ineluctably involved in power and politics" ("Rhetoric" 35). Again we are back to the container metaphor, the debate over whether or not deep writing is always subsumed by rhetoric or if it is ever capable of transcending it, and thus back to the paradox of the lying Cretan who still speaks truth; or, as Marcuse says about the paradox of art, that it is both, of a time and place and pitted against that time and place"inevitably part of that which is and only as part of that which is does it speak against that which is" (41). We are always immersed in "power and politics"; the question remains, however, can we ever establish any distance from or otherwise objectify that position, and, if so, how? Just how do we ever come to feel outside, or above, or somehow removed from the fray, if only temporarilyand, how do we get there? How are we ever able to contextualize or represent the flux of our own lives?

English studies has long appealed to us by offering in deep language one such placea site of complex understanding, distinct from the superficial and momentarybut just where is it that we

stand when we read and write, and how is it we get there as writers ourselves or help bring our students there as teachers of writing? What is the container in which we must place "power and politics" in order to be able to see their effects on our lives? To ask, then, the central question of contemporary language teachers: What is the shape of writing that best enables our students to understand their world?

Seven
"They Say That, But": Writing Instruction as Local Practice

*Workmanship, the artistic means, the technical possibility of artnot the insights or visions of particular artists. A person who practices an art without mastering its disciplines becomes his art's consumer. . . . The art lives for its insights and visions, but it cannot live upon them. An art is inherited and handed down in its workmanly aspects. Workmanship is one of the means by which the artist prepares forbecomes worthy of, earnshis visions and insights.*
Wendell Berry, "Discipline and Hope"

The Resistant Core

For reformers of English studies, the key to being literate, and thus to writing instruction, is more active engagement with the "real" world, at times bordering on the possibility that the very best assignments might entail such immediate and sustained involvement with the world that the writing component itself might become negligible, even nonexistent. Here is the notion that writing will be fulfilled in action and, hence, that when students are willing and able to act in the world (presumably in pursuit of social justice) they may no longer need to write about it. Ironically, many writing programs that emphasize modeling writing assignments on

real world situations quickly find their component of resistance minimized, if not eliminated entirely in favor of the practical, business-oriented writing that people actually do in the world of work. The core of resistance in writing assignmentsas in literacy itselfis often a reflection, not of the degree of direct real-world involvement, but of the strength of the elements of play. While it is possible to imagine real-world writing assignments that push students in the direction of organized resistance ("Write a letter of protest to your local city council ..."), as seen in an interesting collection of "real" writing assignments collected by Coles and Vopat discussed below, even these tend to work better with imaginative rather than real scenarios. As can be seen by examining this collection of assignments, in practice the best writing assignments always seem to push students in the direction of more intense play and thus in the direction of fulfilling the demands of deep language.

In the early 1980s, two college writing teachers, William E. Coles and James Vopat, assembled an interesting and unusual textbook, *What Makes Writing Good: A Multiperspective*, consisting of the favorite assignments of forty-eight noted writing teachers (including one each from Coles and Vopat) and the best student essay each of these forty-eight assignments produced. As editors, Coles and Vopat then tried to shape this material in such a way that other teachers could use it to produce writing from their own classes. For present purposes what is most compelling in their project is the implicit assumption in the overwhelming number of assignments (and the prize-winning essays they produced) as to what makes good writing. What we find over and over again is variations on the same phenomenological task: here is an observation about things not always working out according to plan, an observation about life being more complex than we often realize; now choose a moment in your life and recount it in such a way that it exemplifies this universal truth about the special singularity and hidden richness of existence. Take, for example, the very opening assignment, from Robert Holland: "Choose a moment from your own experience or from that of someone you know in which a presumed limit was found not to exist. Describe the moment of discovery. How was it learned that the 'known' limit was not real" (12)?

There are too many variations to recite fully: "When is the last time you made an important choice about your way of life" (William Irmscher)? "What separates a child from an adult" (Janet

Kotler)? Write a story that "represent[s] an important part of [your] life" (Susan Miller). "Write brief, imagined conversations" with each conversation giving "a different answer, at least by implication, to the question, 'Who are you?'" (James Sledd). Describe "a place that is interesting or meaningful to you" (Edward Corbett), or "some place whose influence on you has been strong but unexamined" (Janice Lauer). "Take any event, however trivial it seems, that you still remember from your childhood . . . and describe the event so that your reader comes to feel and understand why it was (is?) important" (Donald Daiker). Describe a trip where in "telling about what you have seen or where you have been, [you] reflect upon the meaning of the experience" (Frank D'Angelo). "Write about a first or last experience" (Sandra Schor). "Identify an experience that has been especially important to you" (Paul Eschholz).

Elaine Maimon follows the well-honored, self-reflective tactic of turning the assignment on itself, in this case having a student identify an effective assignment in the student's freshman textbook. Perhaps the phenomenological drive reaches a purer form in those assignments that reject their own formal structure, suggesting as they do that real truth can only come from an ever more intense form of introspection and resistance to imposed structures: "You don't have any writing assignments in the ordinary sense of the term in this course," writes Roger Garrison. "You'll choose your own subjects and set your own suitably spaced deadlines." Adds Rebecca Faery, "There were no specific assignments given in this course. We followed the workshop model and agreed at the beginning that class members would write and submit their work on a regular basis." Toby Fulwiler takes this drive for phenomenological purity one step further, ridding the course not just of formal answers but formal responses as well, substituting an ongoing journal for all traditional writing, "quizzes, tests, or term papers."

All the assignments in Coles and Vopat can be seen as variations of a single assignment, an *ur-assignment*, one designed to play up the fundamental contrast between universal operations and local practice, and specifically on the value of deep language (in this case, student writing) as countering the historical pressure we all face to succeed in the world by conforming to, even mastering universal operations. Lester Faigley, in discussing the narrow range of assignments in Coles and Vopat, raises the familiar charge of the left, in his case citing the observation of Bizzell and Herzberg,

although perhaps its fullest articulation is in Richard Ohmann's *English in America*, that personal narratives often "serve a profoundly conservative political agenda" (247) by focusing almost entirely on the matter of the individual's adjustment, thereby ignoring the deep, often hidden social forces that legitimate the status quo. The charge, in other words, is that personal narratives do not engender resistance, or if they do, they are too unfocused to pose a serious challenge to the status quo. Students, the fear is, will not make the connection between their personal plight and the general, unfair condition of others in societyother students, workers, women, minorities.

This charge is just another version of the central issue of this monograph itselfthe debate between the poet and the critic, and within language study the wide contemporary discounting of the political efficacy of aesthetics and a general hermeneutics of faith. In making this point, Faigley calls on one of the great modern sources of suspicion, Foucault, quoting from *Discipline and Punish* to the effect that "the entire society is involved in a massive apparatus of power that 'normalizes' individuals. Individuals are not so much 'repressed' as they are 'shaped' by the technologies of power" (145). The best response is perhaps, who would expect anything different? Or, more to the point, just how are we to get to a different world? And here Foucault, especially in *The Order of Things*, seems to differ from the American reformers who lack his acute awareness of how thinking can never escape what Foucault labels "unthought"an entity that can never be dealt with simply and finally as reformers might suggestas a "shrivelled-up nature or a stratified history"but which instead exists for us as the essential relation of the Other: "the Other that is not only a brother but a twin, born, not of man, nor in man but beside him and at the same time, in an identical newness, in an unavoidable duality" (326).

For too many contemporary language reformers the focus is less on this inescapable alter-world of unthought than on the unequal power relations that distort all meanings in our present, unliberated historical world. The key here is not that meanings are distortedan observation few could denybut that we have a ready means of escaping, even correcting, this situation, of rising above it, for instance, through a critical analysis like Foucault's, and, furthermore, that the best literacy education should consist precisely of training

in such analysis, in teaching people to think as critically as Foucault. Here then is one source of Berlin's call for a "social-epistemic rhetoric [that] most notably insists on examining all discourse within its historical context, examining the ways language serves as a mediator in the negotiation of individuals within their economic, social, political, and cultural moment" ("Rhetoric" 34).

How does one do precisely thisexamine all discourse, including presumably one's ownin terms of its political or ideological bent, except with other discourse that may be no less biased, protestations about its *critical* status notwithstanding? How, in other words, does one become *critical like Foucault*, and what does "critical like Foucault" actually mean? Does it mean "in agreement with Foucault," in which case one recites his name and cites from his work in hagiograhic rather than critical fashion, or does it means "as critical as Foucault," as deeply suspicious of others as he is, and thus deeply suspicious of Foucault himself? And if it is the latter, "being suspicious like Foucault"the only one that has much to do with being critical in some deep sensethen how is this state of being Foucault-like to be attained, and not just in the lone student with intense critical powers but, as is required in democratic education, in massive numbers of studentsin effect, *all* studentsincluding those students who have trouble creating or comprehending anything more than the simplest of written texts?

The implication here is that direct instruction in critical analysis (training in historical analysis of power and ideology) is *the* tool for reforming mass education, for helping all students extricate themselves and somehow rise above the fray, thereby placing themselves (in mass education: all of us?) in the comfortable position of being above or outside history. Such a position, however, can be as easily seen as a sleight of reasonanother variation of the Cretan philosopherfor if Foucault's original statement about power relations saturating history is indeed true, then it cannot be the case that we really do have an easy way out of the situation. The distortions introduced by the unequal distribution of power must affect the educated as well as the uneducated, those who have read, even published on, Foucault as much as those who have not. Alas, a true hermeneutics of suspicion, one nurtured in the spirit of Foucault and designed to penetrate into the essence of things, must be prepared to doubt the ability of human reason in its highest form to understand itself.

If we are all deluded by falsehoodand who really could assert otherwise?then do we not need a hermeneutics like Nietzsche's, capable of doubting the power of the world's greatest philosophers to see the truth? If Nietzsche is correct, that even philosophers are "one and all advocates who do not want to be regarded as such, and for the most part no better than cunning pleaders for their prejudices, which they baptize 'truths'" (*Beyond* §5), then how is it really possible to believe that college freshmen or even their teachers or scholars who write books for teachers can readily objectify their position through any individual act of formal analysis?

## Grounded in Narrative

The critical attack on narrative in Ohmann and others is less a response to such deep-seated suspicion than another form of preferring the criticthe master of formal operation (here of historical analysis)to the poet, and, hence, of trying to rob deep language of its phenomenological aesthetic core. In so doing, it reverses, without escaping, the phenomenological basis of traditional language study: poetry and imaginative insight become associated with normal (ideologically naïve, confused) experience while the formal operations of rational analysis are privileged. Meanwhile a phenomenologically based approach to writing implicit in the many assignments in Coles and Vopat will not allow such a reversal, will instead insist on the fundamental incompleteness, inadequacy of all formal operations.

Formal operationsthe method of Gadamer's great work, *Truth and Method*because of their universal quality can transform the natural world, but as recounted in phenomenological hermeneutics and the entire literary tradition of deep language, such operations cannot explain, or more to the point, reconcile, the heart's desires. As Gadamer's title suggests, there is a truth of experienceexplained in Heidegger's notion of beingthat can never be fully explained by method, in large part because ontologically experience comes first, before method. And such a belief in the priority of experience has likewise been at the center of English studies for much of the last centuryin aesthetic and social critics like F. R. Leavis who are fully committed to the priority of experience over method, fiercely determined to protect, keep whole, the literariness,

the poetic nature, of what it is we learn in that realm of study they dub simply *English*. The only objectivity available to us and the only one that matters to Leavis is that which "in an immediately recognizable sense is a product of human creativity" (285). In this sense we do not so much escape to a better world through analysis as followers of Foucault would encourage us to believe but instead create one, in large part through imaginative effort.

Therefore the essay assignments in Coles and Vopat all call for students to explore the fundamental dissatisfaction of general human existence by having them recreate in language the peculiar conditions of their own lives. There is only one task of deep language study, although it may not be achievable merely by asking students, as Stephen Tchudi does, to "write a paper on any topic of your choice related to the theme of freedom and human dignity." The essay resulting from such a well-meaning assignment is likely to be overly general and abstract and thus overly supportive of preexisting categories of formal analysis. As most writing teachers know, few students (and likely not that many professional writers) are able to break through preexisting categories and patterns of analysis without a heavy reliance on the personal details found in narration. To accomplish what Richard Ohmann would have students do"basically exploring issues of alienation"modern practitioners of deep language invariably take an indirect approach, asking students to focus on something concrete, specific in their lives. "Interview someone about their job," Ohmann tells his students, "focusing on satisfaction and dissatisfaction at work." Ira Shor is blunter: "Write about the worst job you ever had," he tells his students, as a first step in getting his students to see their lives phenomenologically, seeing the universal significance (and hence revolutionary potential) in their own individual livesas compared to the myth of formal operations that sees all work as good to the extent that it furthers production. And James Vopat may even be the bluntest of the three: "Define *degradation* in Studs Terkel's *Working*."

The best student writing does seem relentlessly grounded in narrative and especially in the specificity of details that makes even the most common experience of being in love or fearing death unique. Relate a story, asks Donald Gray, "of an actual or imagined event in which you carefully choose descriptive detail and arrange events so that your story makes a clear point." The traditional

distinction between fiction and nonfiction and, by extension, between literature and student composition here break down. What matters is writing and eventually thought grounded in actual experience, all as a way of getting closer to that truth of existence, a truth prior to and therefore largely resistant to formal, logical systems of analysis, and for this reason a truth not just about ourselves individually but about the human condition itself that in such full complexity is rarely approached in other parts of the college curriculum (where the emphasis remains more analytic, more critical). What the ideal writing class is after is a different sense of truth, a sense approachable through self-reflection: "Describe what happened to your writing during [the last] quarter," asks Wayne Booth, adding, "Don't leave out your feelings about it." It is also a truth shaped by language itself, and our consciousness of how language affects thinking: write two different factual accounts of "a small portion of Iowa City," asks Kenneth Dowst, both objective and yet with the first showing the place as attractive, the second as unattractive, and then reflect on the role of language in creating conflicting, objective descriptions of the same place. Or William Coles's self-reflective assignment on the role of language that started the textbook project: "What *is* the proper metaphor," he asks, "with which to define a university?"

Perhaps the clearest expression of the phenomenological bent of deep language practice is in Rosemary Deen's assignment: expand into a full paragraph something you have overheard that strikes you as outrageous. "Then, write your response to this outrageous statement *by recounting your own experience. 'They* say that, but *my* experience is this.'"

"*They* say that, but *my* experience is this." Here in a nutshell, the essence of the practice of deep language: namely, the implicit contrast between formal operation (what "they say") and our actual experience (the "but I feel"). The one lesson here, albeit with near-infinite variations, is, in the spirit of Gadamer's great work, the incompleteness of method (the *they-say*), no matter how encompassing and how powerful, compared with the richness of the personal when fully realized (the *but-I-feel*).

Look at what thirty authors had to say about the concept of ambition, writes Roger Sale. Now ask yourself, "Where do I see myself in relation to these authors on the subject of ambition?" Or, "It's often said," writes Walker Gibson, asking students to explore

this contrast, "that life will never be so free and independent as it is during one's college years. On the other hand, it's often said that college life is regimented and dominated by social conventions and orthodoxy" (186). The they-say here, even of experts, is a mess, in other words, awaiting resolution by the but-I-feel. Don't be fooled by the formal structure of historical operations, these assignments urge us repeatedly; play the role of the Persian traveler, see yourself as "shipwrecked and now . . . forced by circumstances to live in a strange land," Donald Stewart asks his students, and "observe the customs and rituals of a unique group of persons in the society." "One of the maxims you've repeatedly heard in your various courses and textbooks is that beginning teachers ought to carefully plan out, in writing, everything they intend to teach to a class," asserts Harvey Daniels, but is this always true? "Is it more or less important than the standard texts claim?" To which the student obviously knows to state "less," since the inadequacy of the formal explanation is the real, unstated assignment.

## The Form of Resistance

All students have ideas, some more politically progressive or resistant to authority than others, just as all see pictures and in some way hear songs, and any course of study can take it upon itself to change or improve the understanding of students about important matters, including their place in the confusing, ideologically charged world of signs and values. It is difficult to disagree directly with Berlin's assertion about the many worthy aims of a writing course: "[to] prepare students for citizenship in a democracy, for assuming political responsibilities, whether as leaders or simply as active participants . . . [to] enable students to learn something about themselves, about the often-unstated assumptions on which their lives are built" (*Rhetoric and Reality* 189). How can one take exception to a course that "empowers students as it advises in ways to experience themselves, others, and the material conditions of their existencein methods of ordering and making sense of these relationships"? Except, of course, to ask just how these noble aims are to be achieved; or, more to the point, to consider just what it is in a writing course that will convey all this insight into our lives that is not present in other subjects that take an equally big picture of

the human conditionin history, philosophy, communications, religious studies, psychology, sociology, anthropology, economics, or perhaps even biology?

The answer here, if there is one, would have to be the one thing that makes a writing course special: not its ideological drive to unmask falsehood (and what discipline doesn't prize itself on its truth-finding powers?), but on the writing itself, more specifically, the disciplined, focused, sustained, highly detailed, subordinated, and organized language use that all the teachers in Coles and Vopat strive so strenuously to have their students produce. Students and teachers have many rich ideas in all disciplines, but only a writing course necessarily takes the significant step of insisting on the embodiment of these fleeting impressions in the sensuous form of a literate text. "The political dimension of art," Marcuse writes, "lies only in its own aesthetic dimension." Like Nemoianu, he insists that the relation of art, or writing with an aesthetic form, "to praxis is inexorably indirect, mediated, and frustrating. The more immediately political the work of art, the more it reduces the power of estrangement and the radical, transcendent goals of change" (xiixiii).

In Marcuse's words, we have a clear explanation of the preference of nearly all the writing teachers surveyed by Coles and Vopat for student writing that revealed the complexity of existence by phenomenologically embodying itfor student writing, in a word, where the texts themselves became vehicles for experiencing a rich, deeply imagined and, as such, deeply aesthetic world, one created by the author and recreated subsequently by readers. What Marcuse says in the following passage about art applies as well to all writing:

> [T]he radical qualities of art [or deep language], that is to say, its indictment of the established reality and its invocation of the beautiful image (*schöner Schein*) of liberation [fully articulated experience] are grounded precisely in the dimensions where art [or writing] *transcends* its social determination and emancipates itself from the given universe of discourse and behavior while preserving its overwhelming presence. Thereby art creates the realm in which the subversion of experience proper to art becomes possible: the world formed by art is recognized as a reality which is suppressed and distorted in the given reality. . . . The inner logic of the work of

> art terminates in the emergence of another reason, another sensibility, which defy the rationality and sensibility incorporated in the dominant social institutions. (67)

As all writing teachers know, the text becomes authentic and hence fully realized only through a sufficient density of detailsa condition that in turn demands the concrete form of the textand it is this specific, concrete form, balancing and subordinating as it does the wealth of details, that distinguishes the concreteness, the sensual density of writing from the abstraction of thinking.

For Marcuse, "any historical reality" can serve as the basis to a challenge to the world: "The only requirement is that it must be *stylized*, subjected to aesthetic 'formation'" (44). Everyone thinks all the time, often with little sense of the resistance of formproblems of organization and development, of balance and subordination, that everywhere preoccupy, and often overwhelm writerswhat Marcuse refers to as the "restructuring [that] takes place through concentration, exaggeration, emphasis on the essential reordering of facts" (45). But it is this very problemthe giving of concrete sensuous form to that which is otherwise ephemeralthat constitutes the essence of the activity, in the same way that a game exists only through its formal rules. Generally we willingly accept the constraints or difficulty of a game since we recognize that the sense of creativity, freedom, often pleasure that the activity affordswhat might be called its contentis inseparable from its form. That which is authentic, Marcuse concludes, referring specifically to art but applying as well to deep language, "reject[s] the promise made too easily; . . . refuse[s] the unburdened happy ending" (47).

The ur-"A" college composition sought after by the contributors to the Coles and Vopat collection is the one that takes chances, that exhibits the willingness of the student writer to explore what she does not yet understand, in the process considering possibilities that she did not envision before composing the text. It is a text that best resists what Cornell West refers to as the "random nows" of contemporary, postmodern life: the "fortuitous and fleeting moments preoccupied with 'getting over'with acquiring pleasure, property, and power by any means necessary" (5). It is the relative stability of the student text that takes the random, aleatory, impulsive components of contemporary life and gives them a representative aesthetic form.

There may well be an unavoidable element of elitism in this phenomenon, embedded in the notion of awarding an "A" itself for the text that goes a step beyond the normal or expected reworking of materialalthough as Marcuse notes a potential "radical content" as well, specifically, in this self-imposed distancing necessary to create a sensual form that embodies a new say of seeing. "Writers," Marcuse adds, "must rather first create this place, and this is a process which may require them to stand against the people." Nonetheless, he concludes, "to work for the radicalization of consciousness means to make explicit and conscious the material and ideological discrepancy between the writer and 'the people' rather than to obscure and camouflage it" (35).

All writing has a contentthis monograph includednot fully extractable from its sensuous form, its play of language itself, beginning, meandering, somewhere concluding, and everywhere trying to win over, seduce the reader, leading that person via the mitigating structure of aesthetic form (an experience never fully separable from play and pleasure regardless of how serious or political its import) from one world or level of understanding to another. With writing, as with Marcuse's view of art, "the encounter with the truth of art happens in the estranging language and images which make perceptible, visible, and audible that which is no longer, or not yet, perceived, said, and heard in everyday life" (72).

Humans learn, according to Vico, not just by understanding the world, but creating a new oneand hence a new self in this new world. Our highest form of understanding entails precisely this exploration of our ignorance: "When man understands he extends his mind and takes in things," writes Vico, "but when he does not understand he makes these things of himself and becomes them by transforming himself into them" (*New Science* §405). The powerful transformation of the self comes not from manipulating what we already knownot, for example, from writing designated information for different audiencesbut by going beyond the given through transforming the known, thus representing to ourselves what it is that we do not yet understand.

For Marcuse, as for Ricoeur and Vico, the value of writing is enhanced by its ties, via deep language, with the phenomenological origins of metaphor itself: not to ornament or otherwise enhance communication, but in Ricoeur's words, "to shatter and to increase

our sense of reality by shattering and increasing our language. . . . With metaphor we experience the metamorphosis of both language and reality" (13233). We create a new world recognizableand, in the spirit of deep language, a new text comprehensiblethrough the similarities to the one we already know. We become what we do not understand by projecting a new possibility for being, one grounded in similarities to what we already knowthat is, as a writer, we transform ourselves and become the world that otherwise so baffles us.

Eight
"Shaped by the Rules": The Resistant Class

*To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the worldand, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are. Modern environments and experiences cut across all boundaries of geography and ethnicity, of class and nationality, of religion and ideology: in this sense, modernity can be said to unite all mankind. But it is a paradoxical unity, a unity of disunity; it pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish. To be modern is be part of a universe in which, as Marx said, "all that is solid melts into air."*
Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*

Remaking the World

In July 1956, a quiet, unassuming twenty-eight-year-old named Saloth Sar, soon to become a social studies and literature teacher, married a thirty-three-year-old literature teacher, a woman he had first met five years earlier when he was a student in Paris. At first he studied electrical engineering but was more attracted to the utopian appeal of left-wing politics. He also found time to read such nineteenth-century French poets as Hugo, Rimbaud, and

Verlaine, as well as another favorite, the archetypal social critic and malcontent, Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In June 1952, Sar wrote his first paper, denouncing a recent antidemocratic coup in his homeland. Right after his marriage, he began work at a newly founded private school, Chamaron Vichea ("Progressive Knowledge"), where he became known for a calm self-assurance and clarity of vision that led students, in the words of one, "to love justice and honesty and hate corruption" (Chandler 53). He continued teaching for six years before devoting himself full-time to politics.

Some thirteen years later, in January 1976, this high-minded, mild-mannered teacher emerged with a new identity, a rubber plantation worker and now head of the revolutionary party, the Red Khymer, that controlled the newly reformulated country of Democratic Kampuchea. Now known as Pol Pot (his former identity kept a secret until his overthrow in 1979), this teacher-turned-politician was about to launch one of history's most thoroughgoing efforts at social reformat remaking the world in accord with the dictates of social justice. It was also to be one of history's bloodiest and most ruthless. In what French writer Jean Lacoutre has called *autogenocide*, and what we know better as "the killing fields," Pol Pot led a political regime that in less than four years killed more than one million of his Cambodian countrymen (and recent investigations are pushing the total closer to two million)mostly through forced relocation of urban populationand at least another 100,000 by direct political assassination.

Political actions that seem so senseless and bloodthirsty to outsiders often have their own inner logic, their own intellectual purposeand this one was no different. While there was much random violence to be sure, the massive dislocation of people was all part of a larger, coherent planthe "Four Year Plan to Build Socialism in All Fields"designed to root out foreign influences, often associated with city life, and to establish Cambodia as a self-sufficient country. This was truly a revolution designed to transform the status quo, organized and directed by a reclusive intellectual, in the name of the rural peasants (known as "base people") and directed against soon-to-be-evacuated city dwellers (known as "new people" or "April 17 people") because they had not been supporters of the Red Khymer. The direct motivation behind the massive relocation of urban population was the simple and clearly enunciated revolutionary goal of remaking Cambodia into a

fully independent, agriculturally self-reliant country. At one level at least, as Pol Pot biographer David Chandler notes, here was a "courageous, doomed attempt by a group of Utopian thinkers to break free from the capitalist world system, abandon the past, and rearrange the future" (3)in Marx's famous aphorism, not just to study the world but to change it.

The central issue raised by Pol Pot goes beyond George Steiner's troubling questionhow men "could come home from their day's butchery and falsehood to weep over Rilke and play Schubert" (11). Steiner has at least two interrelated concerns here. First there is the apparent breakdown in what Steiner calls "a kind of rational and moral optimism," the belief that "the teaching and reading of the great poets and prose writers would enrich not only taste or style but moral feeling" (27). Such optimism is no longer possible in the late twentieth century, as Steiner laments concerning the failure of the humanities to humanize.

Yet the lack of a positive connection between art and morality is the lesser of Steiner's two concerns; more troubling to him is his suspicion that there may be a diabolical, inverse relation between the two, between "high culture" and barbarism:

> It might be that high culture, abstract speculation, the obsessive practice and study of the arts, could infect human consciousness with a virus of *ennui*, of febrile tedium, from which, in turn, would grow a fascination with savagery. . . . I asked myself whether my entire schooling and the intellectual and formal values which it embodied had not made the cry in the poem, the desolation in the sonata, come to seem more real, more immediate to my imaginings, than the cry in the street. (11)

Here is the possibility that the humanities may have the role of desensitizing, dehumanizing us, with Steiner especially conscious of the self-centered, almost infantile, hence imbalanced, dangerous, nature of anyone, artist or scholar, gripped by a passion. Such a person is in the grip of a "libidinal thrust more powerful than love or hatred, more tenacious than faith or friendship" (197). The scholar in particular does often completely lose track of practical concerns; yet, Steiner argues, it is "this disinterestedness [that constitutes] the dignity of his mania" (198), whether it causes one to ignore the cry in the street or not.

Steiner's ruminations on artists and scholars raise any number of perplexing questions, but they seem finally to move us in a different direction from the case of Pol Pot. With Pol Pot there may be the same, or comparable, "libidinal thrust more powerful than love or hatred," but, at least outwardly, it lacks the other-worldly self-absorption of the scholar. Pol Pot seems not lost to the world but obsessed by it, in particular obsessed by the mandate to correct the world, to remake it in accord with his own passion masking itself as the dictates of universal reasonand through strenuous human effort finally to produce the world that should be. Whereas Steiner draws the picture of the scholar lost in his "vertiginous attempt to classify the dung beetles of one corner of New Guinea" (197), Pol Pot seems to be just the opposite, the scholar consumed by a similar passion but one that directs him or her to act completely in what at least outwardly seems to be the interest of others.

Specifically, Pol Pot's goal, his monomania, which lead to the sacrifice of one-seventh of his country's population, was to make Cambodia into a single, large agricultural autarkya country totally free of outside control, including, most significantly, all vestiges of its colonial past. This goal itself became expressed in the Four Year Plan, with its key plank being the *tripling* of rice production, from a yearly average of less than one ton a hectare to the widely trumpeted national goal of three tons. Yet how were revolutionary leaders who, in Chandler's words, had hardly "ever planted, transplanted, and harvested rice to feed a family" (122) to accomplish this task? The answer seemed to have resided solely in the power of thinking, the seductive lure of reason itself:

> The party's slogan demanded that Cambodia's average yield be tripled at once, not in response to superior technology or material incentives but as a testimony to a collectivized revolutionary will and the transferability of military zeal into the economic sphere. "Can we accomplish the Plan or not?" Pol Pot asked rhetorically. "The answer is that we can accomplish it everywhere; the evidence for this is our political movement." (123)

The actual figure of three tons a hectare seems to have been adopted by party leaders with little agricultural experience themselves from a 1975 plan developed in China. In any case, the plan involved

placing 140,000 hectares of new and often unproductive land into rice cultivation, using more than one million city residents who were to be forcibly relocated. The city residents (the April 17 people) were themselves classified as enemies of the revolutionenemies of this clearly enunciated common goodand thus expendableor, as they were told by their revolutionary guards, "Keeping [you] is no gain. Losing [you] is no loss" (Chandler 123).

Other elements of the Four Year Plan were just as poorly thought through, time and again substituting abstract bluster for concrete details: under "tourism," for example, noting "Must organize: hotels, water, electricity, . . . places to relax" (125); under health, asserting the importance of traditional, prerevolutionary healerswhat in practice often turned out to be a new cadre of untrained adolescents roaming the countryside. The sole worthy social goal became the support of the new revolutionary state, and although the revolution was organized in the name of the peasants, their own cultural traditions were just as suspect as those of city dwellers. The Four Year Plan accordingly dismissed 2,000 years of indigenous Cambodian culture, depriving the Cambodian workers of their rich traditions in dance, instrumental and vocal music, decorative arts, and poetic recitation. For the new revolutionary regime, such practices were little more than acts of "mystification," ways in which natives hid their own oppression from themselves.

As Chandler notes, the "generous" reading here is that the new revolutionary order felt that colorful local practice would just have to be set aside until a new economic order had been erected. A more likely explanation, he feels, goes to the heart of this chapterthe nature of intellectuals as a class. He sees the new revolutionary leaders as "contemptuous or fearful" (127) of the essentially private nature of local practice. Cambodian peasants, Chandler argues, were, by Western standards, uneducated and illiterate, without modern science and technology, but unlike their new Communist leaders, they "had drawn pleasure, comfort, and cohesion . . . from their daily lives, building these up from such ingredients as families, religion and rituals, friendships, informal traveling (*dao Lenh*), eating and gossiping together, and sharing in often backbreaking work."

"Let all the arts perish if need be," wrote the early revolutionary and disciple of Rousseau, Gracchus Babeuf, "if only we have true equality" (qtd. in Gouldner, *Against* 50). What Chandler

analyzes here is a special form of terror that follows Babeuf's prescriptionthe tyranny of change and progress, of a critical pedagogy carried on throughout a society, at the expense of current local practiceand sponsored by the vanguard class that defines itself largely by its opposition to, indeed its complete intolerance of, the status quo. What we see in Cambodia, in other words, is the fulfillment of what Gouldner refers to as the Bakuninist project of sacrificing all forms of culture for material progress; it is the formation of a new kind of terror, one grounded in reason, and a new class of intellectuals whose roots in the European Enlightenment have long led them to support a unitary notion of progress in both material welfare and human culture.

Sacred Duty

As Gouldner worked out in a series of brilliant essays, one of the defining characteristics of modern life is the great aproria of Marxism: that the intense passion for radical change, nominally in the name of an oppressed working class, originated in Marx himself and has been sustained ever since by a new subset of the middle class, intellectuals or social critics whose discourse has been largely aimed at exposing the injustice of their own largely middle-class origins. At the core of this new class of intellectuals, Gouldner finds a certain attitude or ideology about how "discourse should be conducted," what he sees as the belief that "any assertionabout anything, by anyoneis open to criticism and that, if challenged, no assertion can be defended by invoking someone's authority" (*Against* 30).

The key here is the freeing of discourse from traditional sources of authorityinstitutions of wealth, power, and statusostensibly in the name of enhancing the standing of those not well served by the status quo. The proponent of a new critical discourse "suspects that all traditional social differentiations may be subversive of reason and critical judgment and thus facilitates a critical examination of establishment claims" (*Against* 31). Yet such critical discourse, Gouldner points out, does not happen in a vacuum, outside its own establishment claims. Specifically the New Class has emerged, largely located within the university (and liberal arts especially), whose professional status depends on the promotion of

critical discourse. Critical discourse, it turns out, is not just a critique of institutions; it is also the discourse of a new class, one that draws its recruits (as in the case of Pol Pot and reform-minded language educators today) from those who seek careers as critics and who often find their careers blocked by traditional authorities (opponents of critical practice) within their chosen profession.

Here is the classic paradox, already identified, between the conceptualizations of composition as training in critical practice and as mastery of various forms of professional discourse. Do we teach students to write a marketing report, or do we help them to see the full critical context, including all the false assumptions, built into such a report? For the ideal recruits to the New Class, there is no conflict here since either they want to master the discourse of critical thinking as part of becoming a teacher of criticism or, if committed to working within the field of marketing, they see the critical approach as offering a solid explanation of the difficulty they are likely experiencing moving ahead in their chosen career. "For the young," Gouldner concludes, "revolution is not only a spiritual value but is also a career alternative" (*Against* 32). Gouldner is not being cynical here. All of us who teach or who otherwise come into close contact with a wide range of young people know just how difficult, even agonizing, the choice of a career can be, pitting what he calls "a conventional career with its known and limited possibilitieswhich is called its 'security'" (and which has children walking in the footsteps of their parents) against "a career on the larger scale and stage of history" (32).

The critical idealist remains a fundamental contradiction, not just of Marxism, as Gouldner suggests in exhibiting an idealism that Marxism itself denies, but more generally in exhibiting a belief in the higher moral authority of reason that critical discourse seems on the surface to undermine. The belief in the moral superiority of the critical discourse of intellectuals is the linchpin of critical thought, rendering it, adopting Gouldner's words about Marxism, a discipline "only about, but not *by*, the proletariat" (*Against* 33). According to Gouldner, critical discourse springs, not from some Platonic notion of truth, but from the actual dissatisfactionwhat he calls the "critique of alienation"felt by a specific, historical class of individuals. "Alienation would not be problematic without the premise that man is and should be a Subject, that persons should control their own activity" (34). Alienation is thus an

expression of the "Promethean expectation of man's power," the desire of the Subject, not just for "*self*-control and *self-development*" but for "domination over the Object world":

> The critique of alienation, then, premises the Subject's right to dominate the cosmos. It is a tacit claim for mankind's right to master the universe and to subject everything in it to the needs and interests of his own species. The critique of alienation premises a human "emancipation" that requires human domination; it is an ideology of *humanistic imperialism*. (*Against* 34)

The critique of alienation, therefore, while made in the name of the weak, needs to be seen as an expression of an historically emerging classin the nineteenth century, Gouldner contends, not the proletariat or rural poor but an urban elite who would "necessarily *expect* autonomy, power, and freedom" and those who would be upset about their lack: "How can 'freedom' and 'autonomy' become problems for the powerless with barely adequate subsistence and shelter" (34), people with normally more concrete, immediate needs for food, clothing, shelter, and physical security as well as social needs involving "ritual status" (35).

Historically speaking, critical discourse is the language of "an elite without power," those with the intellectual, technical skills to envision a better world but forced into a subservient historical position where they were prevented from acting directly in the world themselves. An elite without power maybe, but not one without "great expectation":

> [A]n elite without riches, without privileged access to political or religious office, and, for the most part, with little public recognition, and thus with little regular influence on public affairs. . . . [It] was the nineteenth-century ideology of those intellectuals who were not privileged in the rapidly rising new world of business, industry, science, and technology and whose own origins were in *older* spheres of culture, who were writers, philosophers, theologians, or academicians, who did not conceive of science as the defining essence of modernity. (*Against* 35)

It is an elite that defines itself, is largely self-absorbed, by the cogency of ideas, by "an *ideological* politics . . . often concerned less

with the success of a practice [for example, the efficacy of a classroom practice to improve reading or writing] than that the practice [for example, that the best writing instruction or knowledge itself is collaborative] should be rationally interpretable and consistent" (38).

Critical discourse was thenand remains todaythe discourse of an elite with high professional hopes for itself yet caught in a double bind, since the desire for autonomy at the heart of its own critical discourse, as Gouldner has already argued, reflects less an ideal than a tangible historical achievement, and the promise of still greater achievement to come, both grounded in science (specifically, the scientific control of nature) and the emergence of a greatly expanded state apparatus charged with redirecting the large amount of new wealth generated by this control. At the core of critical discourse is the expectation of individual autonomy based on a palpable sense of choice and opportunity that are themselves the by-products, what might be called the froth, of a deeply entrenched and often forgotten system of expanding, ever more efficient means of economic production. Gouldner's most compelling observation, one, as we shall see, seconded by Lasch, is that the hard-earned fruits of this exploitative, world-transforming economic system are too often taken for granted; that the system itselfnow largely freed from backbreaking manual labor and for the most part managed by a not-always-visible technological eliteis too often ignored in discussions of social, political, or educational policy, and even in many discussions of environmental issues that deal directly with the question of restricting the efficiency of this system itself.

For Gouldner, the culture of critical discourse has always represented the interests of a New Class of intellectuals who have their own agenda for redistributing the fruits of this production, often through a unique blend of state-mandated social benevolence and increased employment opportunities for themselves in an ever-expanding state apparatuswith the issue of the size and scope of the state, and, by extension, the number and quality of associated jobs, still at the core of many discussions of critical practice. When uneducated workers asked Marx whom he represented, he roared backambiguously, suggests Gouldner"Nobody but ourselves." Meanwhile, the "we" of critical discourse is for Gouldner those writers and thinkers who claim not to be "here at all, except as the bearers of necessary 'theory,' or as friends and confidants of History," that is, as guardians of *the* Truth: "We, the ventriloquists

who put our own hopes and plans into the mouth of history; we, the bodiless voice of Logos without Being; we who speak only for rationality and justice but want nothing for ourselves, and whose ambitions for the working class are in no way colored by what and who we are" (*Against* 41).

Hence the founding paradox of all forms of modern critical practice including pedagogical reforms: that modern intellectuals and their culture of critical discourse are inseparable from the Promethean control of nature that they so often organize themselves to oppose. Rationality as an instrument of moral and social reform, Gouldner argues, can only exist by denying its own historical basis in the rational control of nature; the abstract "rational" call for ever greater equality founders on the *rational* demand for highly trained, professional-class experts to produce the surplus goods and services that underlie any dream of more equal distribution: "The rationality in which the permanent revolution of our time is grounded [that is, the call for an ever more perfect social world] is a self-contradictory, self-confounding structure. Its voice is the voice of universal equality, but its hands are the hands of a new elitism" (*Against* 46).

Here also is the double bind of contemporary writing teachers, advocating the equality of discourse in essays and monographs persuasive enough to be published, a key step in securing their own professional standing. For Gouldner, critical discourse finds itself "both constrained and obligated to affirm equality," both to win support from the disenfranchised and to establish its own moral legitimacy, and yet also committed to "recognize and reward intellectual worth thus generating new social hierarchies." Gouldner sees Maoism, therefore, with its ruthless determination to "bring intellectuals under control and subject them to radical egalitarianism" less an "Asian eccentricity" than as an exploration of "the limits of our own rationality" (*Against* 46).

Critical discourse, like any ideology, defines itself mainly through hope, what Gouldner refers to as "shunn[ing] the tragic": "It shunned that suffering to which the flesh is universal heirindeed its historicism casts doubt that any such is universaland attended to the suffering which men at certain times and places may, though struggle, avoid" (*Against* 261). It rejects "the human condition [the inevitability of decay and death] . . . on behalf of the historical condition [the possibilityor illusionof progress]." In denying the

tragic, holding out instead the illusion of freedom from suffering, critical discourse can become extraordinarily callous to ordinary pain, seeing it only as a temporary state to be endured until the new future is realized. "The 'essence' of the radical intelligentsia's political striving," states Gouldner, "is the removal of any social obstacle to societal rationality" (*Against* 48). From such thinking derives critique's rationale for sacrificing the present for the future: "The historically necessary becomes the sacred" (261); and, as history continues to demonstrate, people acting in the name of the sacred "can sanction almost any cruelty."

Class and Control

"A good deal can be said of the advantages of rules," exclaims Goethe's Wertheran early representation of middle-class malcontent:

> [M]uch the same as can be said in praise of bourgeois society. A man shaped by the rules will never produce anything tasteless or bad, just as a citizen who observes laws and decorum will never be an unbearable neighbour or an out-and-out villain; and yet on the other hand, say what you please, the rules will destroy the true feeling of Nature and its true expression. (32)

In Werther's dilemma, we find the early statement of a central and continuing dilemma of the middle class: that as a people we continue to reap the rewards that come from our establishing and following rules that produce our ever greater control of nature while at the same time we constantly chafe at the restrictions on our psychic life that such control demands.

This is the middle class described by Polanyi as developing "an all but sacramental belief in the universal beneficence of profits" (133). What is more important for our purposes here is recognizing that this same historical moment that produced the character type best able to succeed in a newly competitive world also produced the character type most intent upon resisting that world as wellor, what is perhaps more accurate, and finally at the center of the cultural conundrum that is deep language, that the ability to resist the world, in large measure, by nurturing a reserve of deep, inner

feeling, is merely another facet (albeit an important facet) of the more general historical power to transform that world, and hence, with a different goal in mind, to triumph in it as well. Here then is the central insight of this monograph: that critical resistance to hegemony, today so often proclaimed under the banner of the reform of the language curriculum, is in the final analysis another facet of the world-transforming power of industrial culture itself.

As a practical matter, therefore, we thus would not expect the locus of resistance to Polanyi's great transformation (an epochal event in world history far from played out) to come principally from outside the middle class, from workers or the most marginalized groups themselves. Such historical thinking, consistently supported by all forms of contemporary critical analysis, tends to divide society into simplistic groups, capitalists or other defenders of the status quo and anticapitalists or radicals, and then to divide individuals into one of two camps, based on equally simplistic motives, those content with material gain and those discontented with it. The great weakness of this approach, and consequently of contemporary critique as a whole, is in failing to account for the historical origins of resistance *within* the emerging middle class itself, especially in the reformist aspirations it has for its children and hence its widespread, seemingly never-ending interest in reforming child-rearing and educational practicesall geared to producing the individual best able to thrive in, even guide such a dynamic, unstable world. Here is the image of the *next* generation of children and students projected both as future exploiters of the economic order and as the artists, writers, and, over time, even the teachersthose who remain its deepest critics and hence the best suited to serve as future educators. The great weakness in many analyses of critical practice, in other words, is allowing the mastery of technique to be seen as an ahistorical phenomenon, removing the practitioners of new ways of interacting with the world from their own class-bound rootedness.

Deep language, on the other hand, with its greater tolerance for ambiguity and complexity, is better able to recognize the contradiction and inner discord of its own class origins, its abiding unease with its own historical situation, with the domination of nature and the strict control of self (the repression and sublimation) that such domination required. It is neither a coincidence nor an irony that an aesthetic approach to reading and writing, widely known

as "New Criticism," and described in Mark Jancovich's words as an "anti-bourgeois, anti-liberal, anti-scientific movement," should have attained such dominance in what he calls "a flourishing capitalist society such as post-war America" (16). Just as it is no coincidence that the great critics of modern life come from the same class (and often the same families) as its great supporters, or to take the analogy one step further, that critics of contemporary society, including language teachers who see themselves as a vanguard class in their promotion of a new critical pedagogy, tend to come from the same professional class, and the same professional schools, organized so as to nurture the skills necessary to support the economic expansion that critical practice so adamantly wants to redirect.

The best English teachers and the strongest advocates of reforming the language curriculum to make it more critical (and today the two groups often overlap) confirm rather than betray their origins in a class that is best defined by being in permanent revolt against itself. The parents, siblings, and children of the sixty teachers who formed the English Coalition may be a cross-section of contemporary America, but it is far more likely they represent a cross-section, less of the entire population than of the professional class itselfthe doctors, lawyers, middle managers, teachers themselves, whose high social status derives less from inherited wealth than from a mastery of the ability to perform sophisticated levels of symbolic manipulations (to think abstractly), a skill that in turn is nourished through many years of intense schooling enriched by family life that itself can be seen as organized precisely to be able to offer such support.

In its contemporary writers, both creative and social critics, as well as its teachers (including those English teachers who gathered at Wye), and above all in its own children, middle-class life continues to nurture the same two sets of contradictory skills and hence the same contradictory state that we see in Goethe's Werther: both the skills necessary to control nature and those that encourage our resistance to that control. Middle-class intellectual life, both in its conservative and radical form, is best defined in terms of its insistence on detailing the conditions of a distant, better worldfor conservatives, likely in the past; for radicals, in the future.

Perhaps it is the fate of middle-class life, in the style of high family drama, not unlike Goethe's, for these contradictory impulses to seem lodged exclusively in different characters: the rebellious

Werther versus the practical Albert, such that neither recognizes their common parentage. Accordingly, the resistant streak of critical practice is seen not for what it isthe other side of control (in Goethe's case and for many of his readers as well, the imagined narrative that enables people to deal with their own spiritual crisis by close imaginative identification with Werther, all before assuming their more prosaic, Albert-like pursuits)but as something inhabiting a different world. Albert and Werther: the good son and the bad; yet all our interest is with the "bad," what Marcuse refers to as the "celebration of the asocial, of the anomicthe secret rebellion of the bourgeois against his own class" (20). Such is the archetypical middle-class melodrama played out over and over, on stage and off: the parent as industrialist; the child, the social critic, with each failing to see their common heritage in a culture committed both to the relentless restructuring of the world based on human aspirations and desires and the direct cultivation of those desires through the world of the imaginationnot just through art, music, and poetry, but through acts of reading and writing.

Yes, we can strip the aesthetic dimension from deep languagethe aura of creativity from authorshipand insist on seeing only the sociological dimension of all texts. We can follow Terry Eagleton's own rejection of literature as a special category and instead see it only as "a name which people give from time to time for different reasons to certain kinds of writing within a whole field of what Michel Foucault has called 'discursive practices'" (*Literary Theory* 205). Susan Stewart, likewise, is essentially correct in her reading of Foucault: that "if we begin with the relation between authority and writing practices rather than with an assumption of authorial originality, we arrive at a quite different sense of this history, a history of originality as a concept emergent in the decline of the absolutist state, in the advent of mechanical modes of literary production, and in the rise of social democracies" (9). We can write the author as well as the aesthetic itself out of all forms of writing, even what we call *literature* (essentially by eliminating or redefining the term itself), but in doing so, are we not also in danger of losing something, and more to the point, denying something importantnamely, the intimate historical and biographical connection critical language and literature, the actual role that the aesthetic dimension of writing played in the development of Eagleton's and Foucault's own critical skills, and thus, by extension, the role deep

language has played for the last two centuries as a primary nurturing ground for critical resistance?

The aesthetic dimension of reading and writing, it can be argued, has long played a major productive role in the development of the emotional and psychological predisposition to resistance that lies at the center of middle-class life. The prosperous professional parents and their rebellious child are both motivated by the spirit of resistance to the natural or inherited order of thingsa spirit born of the real historical power to effect change on a massive scale. And it is this resistance to the technological transformation of natureas much as support of this transformationthat defines middle-class life itself as well as it two primary forms of expressions, the more constructive, and hence more publicly sanctioned desire for critical reform, and its less cooperative, more atavistic sibling, the passion for deep language.

This is the great irony of modern intellectual life that Richard Ohmann dealt with but never succeeded in entirely working through in his classic study of English and its role in reproducing and expanding the power of the American middle class, *English in America*. Where Ohmann falls short is giving in to the temptation that plagues most proponents of critical reforms, going back at least as far as Marx, of defining middle-class life largely in terms of expanding scientific control of nature, a move that results in the primary site of resistance to such control (and by extension to middle-class life itself) being located in the various groups most visibly oppressed by middle-class lifewith Marx, obviously, the proletariat, and with contemporary critical practice, women as well as a wide range of marginalized groups, including people of color, gays, and lesbians. Such thinking, however, ignores the single great truth in the lives of many social critics (certainly Marx and Ohmann themselves): namely, the irrepressible urge within the professional ranks of middle-class life itself (in our own children, in ourselves)stemming no doubt from a deep-seated level of dissatisfactionnot just to expand the control of nature, but also to criticize and otherwise resist this control, through the rationalizing impulse of critical practice itself as well as through the intensive search for a new and expanded self-identity that defines deep language.

This is not to argue against the vital role now being played by women, minorities, and gays and lesbians in organizing and articulating this dissatisfaction; it is instead to suggest two related points:

first, that the dissatisfaction within these various groups, despite some obvious special interests, may not be substantially different from the general dissatisfaction that has been a defining characteristic of middle-class life for the last two centuries; and second, that the women, ethnic minorities, and gays and lesbians who are organizing and leading the resistanceespecially through means of the critical discourse of intellectuals or the expressive language of literatureare themselves likely either products of the middle class or, in their organization and resistance, and specifically in their heightened language use as well as their aspirations for their own children, in the midst of becoming members of that key subset of the middle class that defines itself in terms of the very resistance it engenders.

According to literary critic Lionel Trilling, novelist Thomas Mann once said that all his work could be understood as an effort to free himself from the middle class, to which Trilling adds, "This, of course, will serve to describe the chief intention of modern literature," to which historian Peter Gay adds, "Mann's observations and Trilling's gloss, reverberate with the authentic accents of the adversary culture" (25)that is, with the culture that most fulfills its goal of becoming something better by most strenuously resisting what it has been. The organization and articulation of resistance to modern life through written languageboth critical and deepremain a central defining characteristic of high intellectual standing within the middle class, albeit as both Trilling and Mann as well as the Wye Conference participants indicate, the one characteristic least likely to be acknowledged as class-based.

There is obviously a constant stream of first-generation members of the professional class, intellectuals as well as managers, people who master the mental side of middle-class life through training outside the home. The key for language education is whether there is, in any significant sense, a professional class not intent on passing these skills to their own children, and hence not intent upon organizing their family and social life so as to give their children all advantages possible in dealing with the intellectual tasks (both practical and critical) that define their own work and, by extension, whether it is possible to nurture these skills apart from a broader culture of critical discourse and practice. This is the sense in which Langdon Winner succinctly defined middle-

class life as a generic mastery of technique, and thus different from the case with other groups, where one was obliged to learn a specific set of practices by means of observation and apprenticeship. At the heart of middle-class life is the mastery of a skill akin to algebra, where one learns an abstract, generalized set of rules for manipulating unknowns.

The key to middle-class life, therefore, is not, as it is often presented by contemporary critical thought, the mere dominance of one arbitrary class and one arbitrary lifestyle over other, equally worthy classes and lifestyles, suggesting as it does that the content and organization of middle-class life is as arbitrary and fanciful, as little connected to material production, as the changing fashion of hemlines or hairstyles. The efforts to reform the English curriculum need to be seen in the historical context of the ongoing concern of middle-class education with the mastery of those techniques necessary to exercise ever more efficient transformations of natural processeswhile deep language in some sense can be seen as the detritus of this same process, the heart-felt recognition that deep psychic wounds caused by the demand for ever greater controls of nature are not to be cured entirely by our exercising ever greater control over our own thoughts.

It is no accident, therefore, that the most prestigious and often the most radical English programs are often located in the same universities as the most prestigious technical and business programs, just as the same family is likely to produce a social critic, a novelist, and an investment broker (and possibly two or even all three roles in the same person). Nor is it unusual for the best undergraduates at such institutions to be torn between conflicting majorsor, later on in life, for these people to have divided loyalties themselves between art and commerce, a divide often played out in their own child-rearing practices as they provide their children both private music lessons and high schools with an Advanced Placement curriculum.

The best professional-class educationthe one parents spend their limited savings to obtain for their childrenhas always reflected the ambivalent nature of middle-class life, regularly emphasizing not just the control of nature (scientific thinking, systematic time management, etc.) but both intense criticism of status quo and the deep personal and cultural value of aesthetic engagementthat is, everything in the curriculum that demands from

students substantive transformations of form: not the mechanical regurgitation of the given nor the mastery of more efficient persuasive practices (learning how to sell more effectively) but the reworking, rethinking, restructuring of the given that marks the highest level, most technically adept middle-class thought precisely in reflecting those very skills most crucial to the middle-class effort to remake the world.

Berlin is correct to note that training in political discourse and rhetorical persuasion were once much more highly valued in American life, preparing students "to take their rightful place as leaders in their communities," but is completely misleading as to why such training atrophied, replaced in part by equally demanding training "in the apolitical, aesthetic interpretation of literary texts" ("Rhetoric" 24). We lost faith in the value of persuasion and political discourse because neither was perceived as sufficiently transformative for the modern, technological ageboth relied on the manipulation of existing information (getting people to change their minds) and not the far more valuable task of generating new knowledge.

"The poetic/rhetoric bifurcation found in colleges and high schools in the United States," Berlin asserts, "serves the interests of a privileged professional managerial class while discriminating against those who are outside of this class" ("Literacy" 257). Yet who really could expect anything differentthat a class that sees the systematic application of its own highest transformative and restructuring skills as directly responsible for the overall material prosperity of society, that is, a class that sees itself as the universal class of the modern world, would do anything other than try to pass those skills, not just to its own children, but to all children? Is not one sure sign of the universal standing of the professional class the near-universal prestige of its educational practice, a practice that is relentless in its emphasis on the imaginative, the abstract, and the transformed as compared to the mimetic and the repetitive?

Do not most parents with upwardly mobile aspirations for their children desire such an education for them, desire schools where one can expect to find both the most innovative programs (educationally and politically)emphasizing collaborative projects focusing on conservation, poverty, multicultural issues, and the likeand the highest academic standards with the highest overall test scores, math as well as verbal, the most Advanced Placement programs,

and the best college admissions profiles? These would be the very schools, educating future business leaders, more likely with award-winning literary magazines than with junior achievement clubs that promote low-level business and marketing skills. Such regular mixing of the highest level scientific, critical, and aesthetic concerns in the best secondary education may well be a sign that the contradictory impulses of middle-class life (to control and to criticize, to analyze and to enact) may well not be contradictory after all, that there may be a common core at the center of both pedagogic reform and deep language.

## Critical Blindness

If there is such a common core, it is likely related to the level of symbolic manipulation that one finds across the middle-class school curriculum. Science, criticism, and art in this sense may all have connections to the common human desire to engage in imaginative play. While humans are not the only animals that play, with human play there is always a key element of excess, part of the process that Gadamer refers to as "trying things out." Here we can alter slightly the epigraph from Gadamer used at the start of chapter 4, in affirming that it is deep language itself, not just art, that "begins precisely there, where we are able to do otherwise" ("Play" 125).

As I argued in *A Preface to Literacy*, drawing on the psychological ontology of Piaget, distinctive human development takes the interaction of accommodation (often in the form of imitation) and assimilation (often in the form of play) far beyond that of all other animals. Imitation is a form of accommodation, a process by which we alter our actions so that we conform to something in the world. Likewise, when we play, we normally transform the world in accord with our own desires, for instance, making a broom into a flying horse. Pure imitation thus represents the near total domination of accommodation; pure play, the near total domination of assimilation. What defines human development for Piagetand hence what establishes cultureis not that humans learn to balance imitation and play or accommodation and assimilation (since all organisms achieve some level of balance), but that humans achieve this balance at ever deeper, more complex levels. Imitation, for Piaget,

becomes more developed as it becomes more *deliberate*, more freely chosen. Chimpanzees mimic their handlers, infants their caretakers, army recruits their drill sergeantswe all still imitate as we mature, only imitation becomes more subject to control, less an impulsive reaction and more freely a choice on our part of what it is we truly admire. Similarly, play, for Piaget, becomes more developed as it becomes more *constructive*, that is, less a magical and more a substantive reworking of the worldwe still play as we mature, only our action, despite its imaginative origins, now often involves the actual transformation of reality.

The central insight in Piaget is the same one that Marcel Danesi sees as "the unifying principle" of Vico's multifaceted *New Science* and on a smaller scale this study as well: "the idea that symbolic behavior is an extension of bodily experience" (34), that all thought, even the most critical, remains rooted in the dark, entangled irregularity of our immediate, untheorized experience of the world. What such an analysis suggests in terms of our collective experience is that, as already noted, the common source for the transformative impulse at the center of both critical pedagogic reform and deep language reflects what Gadamer describes as the paradigmatic structure of metaphor itself: "To seek one's own in the alien, to become at home in it, is the basic movement of spirit, whose being is only return to itself from what is other" (*Truth* 15).

Play cannot become more constructive, nor can imitation become more deliberate, without a real and ongoing increase in the power to construct, or more accurately, reconstruct one's worldto reshape the self in response to a reshaped world, real or imagined. In this sense, Vico is misleading in his assertion that "imagination is more robust in proportion as reasoning power is weak" (*New Science* §185), a point undermined by Vico's own robust, imaginative reason. Human cognition, including the power to reason and imagine, to criticize and create, is thus less a matter of brain mass and innate intelligence than a matter of our learning how to recognize and manage (to deliberate over) the choices that arise directly out of our real, not ludic, ability to reshape the world through our own interaction with it.

The emergence of scientific discourse and the parallel rise of critical practice and aesthetics are inseparable from the establishment of that stage of economic development that allows a substantial number of people (although certainly not all) to see

real possibilities for reformsthat is, the ability to articulate alternative ways of being in the world and, at least for some, the ability to set about making the practical changes in the world (including that most radical and violent changepolitical revolution) to effect those changes. From this ability to analyze and project change emerges a new social typeintellectuals as social critics and artists. Both critical practice and its new class of advocates (intellectuals) are thus dialectically inseparable from what they are organized to opposenamely, the massive reorganization of the world through the technological control of nature. There can be neither critical practice nor a resistant class fostering such practicenor for that matter a distinct world of aesthetic expressionwithout the transformative presence of technology and the economic, political, and social organization (that is, the modern state) to utilize, and inevitably, to exploit that technology, in other words, without the modern world that both nurtures and obstructs the passion for change.

## A Critical Future?

We are back at a paradox not unlike the warning about Cretansonly here it is the call for an education of resistance against middle-class hegemony, coming as it must from within the one class able to realize and fully articulate its own discontent. Here then is the final paradox of deep language: that both the resistance and the attachment to tradition is no more or less universal than the historical standing of the middle class itself. Phrased negatively (as is the norm for contemporary curriculum reformers), the claim is that all forms of modern literacy practices are themselves grounded in the experience of that class responsible for creating and sustaining the modern world. The great appeal of contemporary reform is its promise of escape, through greater self-awareness somehow stepping outside the contradition and exigency of class.

But there may very well be no such outside to class, no alternative to our condition. This very claim can also be phrased positively: that the middle class itself, as people raised through the mastery of technique to understanding and control of their own history, is itself a universal class, and thus, by extension, that best middle-class educationemphasizing as it does now, a broad range

of multicultural, environmental, collaborative concernshas claim for being a universal form of training. The argument hereand this is the real, albeit unacknowledged, argument of contemporary critical reformersis that only people capable of imagining, organizing, and effecting large-scale natural and social change ever develop a broadly skeptical but deeply constructive attitude toward the present, and it is only such positive skepticism that leads to the passionate study of the distinctly different that has so long characterized the highest levels of modern cultural study.

The issue here goes far beyond any the claim of pedagogic reform itself to the question of the universal applicability of what might be called the new culture of critical resistance and its ties to postindustrialism. Just as pedagogic reform puts itself forward as a new, higher mode of thought, so the culture of critical resistance and postindustrialism often entails claims as new, higher stages of historical development. Again the fundamental issue has less to do with the relative worth of the progressive issues that are themselves so closely tied with contemporary resistanceenvironmentalism and conservation, multiculturalism, the struggle for women's and minority rightsthan with the suspicion that much of the impetus for these worthy reforms grows, not just out of universal ethical claims (worthy as such claims seem to be of universal status), but also out of the suppressed historical interests of a fairly narrow but highly articulate professional class of information managers and government employees, including educators themselves, that is, out of the interests of those furthest removed from industrial production themselves, and, as a consequence, in many ways those best prepared for the radical alteration in living styles and likely institutional, bureaucratic government controls (certainly not all pleasant) that the new, more cooperative modes of economic and political organization may well require.

There is a political argument to be made here: that the future changes now so often announced with utopian aspirations (cooperation, collaboration, recognition of difference, etc.) may entail severe restrictions on personal freedoms (on such everyday matters as use of automobile or possibly even reproductive rights) that may prove to be bitter medicine indeed for many, and possibly, even more sinister, that we may not really be moving to a postindustrial world after all, just hiding the industrial basis of the twenty-first century by moving twentieth-century factories to "developing" countries.

The suspicion remains, in other words, that the culture of resistance may be acting today as it always has: as a reflection of the utopian aspirations, the projection of the deep subjectivity, of a rule-governed, technologically organized society.

It is in this sense that Bauman refers to postmodernity as being "no more (but no less either) than the modern mind taking a long, attentive and sober look at itself, at its condition and its past work, not fully liking what it sees and sensing the urge to change" (272)that is, postmodernity as just another stage in the intense, ongoing critical retrospection that is modernity itself. "Postmodernity," Bauman adds, "is modernity coming of age; modernity looking at itself at a distance rather than from inside." Hence, the source of the related suspicion, that if we radically alter our relationship to technology and productionfor example, give up efficient, integrated industrial production for small-scale, local economic development, what is sometimes called *autarky*, we risk undermining the very basis of resistance itself.

The work of Andre Gorz, especially his monograph *Farewell to the Working Class*, raises this issue of the relation between resistance, individual autonomy, and the size and scope of social and economic organizationor how best to organize society in an age of increasing awareness of limits in order to benefit citizen-workers. For Gorz it is important to confront the appeal and danger of alternative, postindustrial social (and, by implication, educational) structures, in part by resisting the nostalgia for autarkythe small-scale, self-sufficient community that so commonly served as the basis of preindustrial community. With echoes of Durkheim's notion of the interconnection of job specialization and the modern sense of personal autonomy, Gorz warns against the "impoverishing effect" of communal autarky: "The more self-sufficient and numerically limited a community is, the smaller the range of activities and choices it can offer to its members. If it has no opening to an area of exogenous activity, knowledge and production, the community becomes a prison" (102).

What is the advantage, Gorz asks, of "abolishing the sphere of necessity [in the English classroom, embodied in the traditional role of teacher] as a distinct sphere which imposes *external* rules and obligations, in such a way that necessities are assumed and internalized by each community and each individual" (107)? Gorz's answer is that there really is none. Freedom is only possible, he

argues, in a social system with well-defined rules, impartially enforced by an impersonal agentthe state, or the teacher: "The objectification of a set of obligations external to each individual yet common to them all is the only means of protecting the members of the community from the personal power of a leader [or teacher], with all its associated emotional blackmail and arbitrary behavior" (112). The social group without formal restraints, like a commune, Gorz argues, is one prone, alternatively, to excessive suspicion, if not paranoia (in a barter economy, he feels, almost every economic transaction is subject to suspicion) and excessive personal attachment.

He specifically warns against the dangers of "open" communities where the "apparent abolition of external constraints is achieved only by transforming them into internal obligations" (110). In such communities, where "the realm of necessity is not abolished but sublimated," Gorz feels that people no longer have a clear sense of the difference between what they must do and where they are free to act as they please; common rules become internalized as "ethical duties" enforced by the fear of "exclusion, dishonor or the withdrawal of love": "Individual goals and collective duties, personal life and group interests are merged into one, so that the love of *each* member of the community for *all* the others (and not the love of *each* other) becomes the prime *duty*. . . . The constraints and sanctions of law are abolished only to give way to the most tyrannical law: the *duty to love*" (110).

The key, for Gorz, is to reduce, not power and authority per seither of the state or, for our purpose, the teacherbut domination. And here we have a paradox: with the state (or teacher), the most obvious source of domination is being recognized as "the only agency able to reduce its own power and influence in favor of an enlarged sphere of autonomy" (115). The state, or teacher, does not enlarge autonomy by abrogating power, withering away and thus becoming, like the homeless Lear, an entity unable to provide for the common goodrather through constructive, although at times, paradoxical action. In acting effectively, a source of authority (teacher or state) must both protect its own central prerogative while promoting the realm of freedom of individuals: "As the site at which law is formulated and the material imperatives of the social system are translated into universally applicable objective rules known to everyone, the state serves to free civil society and

its individual members from tasks which they could only undertake at the price of impairing both individual and social relations" (112).

One key element in this paradoxical play of authority for Gorz turns out to be something quite traditional, albeit one of the elements viewed most suspiciously by educational and social reformers: the notion of science, criticism, and art as autonomous, creative arenas of human expressionareas of cultural life governed by rules determined and enforced *outside* one's immediate social group. "Only constantly renewed possibilities of discovery, insight, experiment and communication," Gorz argues, that is, only some form of what here has been called deep language, "can prevent communal life from becoming impoverished and eventually suffocating" (102).

"Discovery, insight, experiment, and communication" (or deep language) are liberating, for Gorz, because, by definition, they enable individuals to escape the restraints of their ordinary groupthey represent a realm of human experience *not* controlled by the same power relations, regulations, values, epistemological assumptions as govern everything else. In the language of contemporary educational reform, they are liberating, empowering, precisely because they are *not* socially constructed, at least not in any simple and immediate way, that is, not socially constructed by the same rules and powers that govern one's regular social dealings.

The problem with most critical practice, Gorz helps us to see, is that it is finally not critical enough. The problem is not just that this emphasis blindly and foolishly negates the real resistant, perhaps even revolutionary power of the aesthetic dimension of deep reading and writing, but that, in failing to see its own connections to middle-class production and the control of nature generally, it is far too uncritical of its own historical complicity with middle-class life and industrial production. It is one thing to celebrate various local practices as implicit critiques of universal lawthis, in a phrase, is the essence of modern aesthetic and critical practice; it is another matter entirely, however, not just to adopt those practices entirely oneself but to make this decision for one's own children and possibly theirs as well, and hence literally to reinhabit an earlier, craft-based world, one that may well be fundamentally anticritical in resisting the urge to resist, in spurring most innovations in both thought and practice, and instead, like artisans of the past, dedicating themselves to the perfection of their existing

traditions. In seeing reason as a safe haven for enlightened thinkingincluding a safe basis from which to organize effective political reformthe advocacy of critical pedagogy is revealed as being naïve and sentimental, sapped of its strength to resist its own cooption as a tool of the very middle-class production it seems to strive so assiduously against.

The danger here is what Vico calls, not the "barbarism of sense" that plagued our ancestors, but the "barbarism of reflection"that is, philosophy without poetry, analysis without feeling, and in general the overreliance of the modern age on analysis that produces "a deep solitude of spirit and will," characterized by a politics of special interests, with "scarcely any two being able to agree since each follows his own pleasure or caprice" (*New Science* §1106). The aridity of thought without feeling is for Vico our final loss of identity, where, in the spirit of Nietzsche, intellect provides the "soft words and embraces" by which each of us, pursuing our own special interests, "plots against the life and fortune of friends and intimates." What Vico calls "the few survivors" in such a degenerate world, those who flourish "in the midst of an abundance of the things of life," do so, not through sharpening their critical skills, but by simplifying their lives ("returning to the primitive simplicity of the first world of peoples"). This is not to argue that all resistance is vain, but only that true resistance to a world whose wealth, comfort, and security is based almost entirely on the control of nature is much more demanding and, in ways seldom considered, much more dangerous than critical reformers ordinarily admit.

Here, in only a modified form, is the complaint that Christopher Lasch launches against the critical nature of progressivism, labeling it contemptuously, "the smiling face of upper-middle-class benevolence" ("Revolt" 40). And at times, when a critical reformer of the stature of Berlin warns us against ignoring the "advice of employers" in their call for a "college education that enables workers to be excellent communicators, quick and flexible learners, and cooperative collaborators" (*Rhetorics* 50), the *resistant* strain of critical reform seems to fade away completely, exposing its traditionally progressive lineage as the pedagogy of an ascendant class.

The culture of resistance out of which progressive critical reforms derive, as recognized by both Lasch on the left as well as many conservative opponents, does nurture intense populist resentment (regularly fanned by the right) as the pampered child of

affluencean ideology that encourages bold action of critics, artists, and educators, only within the safe space offered them by a society based on, but suspicious of, its own control of nature. Simply stated, the call for critical reforms in educationwhat Lasch so harshly criticizes in Robert Reich's praise of an education that makes students "skeptical, curious, and creative" ("Revolt" 42)is at times indistinguishable from a call for a better, more effective middle-class education, one with inextricable links to the domination of nature it seems most intent upon opposing while at the same time being better both for the offspring of critical pedagogues and, in its heightened admiration for their newly mastered discourse, their own professional standing. In a phrase, middle-class educational reform reborn as a new, critical curriculum.

Such, C. A. Bowers argues in *Elements of a Post-Liberal Theory of Education*, was the limit of Dewey's progressivism, and such is the limit of the movement to redefine the study of English today as a new form of critical practice, in the process replacing the seductive study of literature with rigorous textual analysis. Reason is not just a safe haven for understanding and hence reforming the worldit is also our principal tool in creating that world in the first place, yet here, in the act of creation, it is rarely reasonable, rarely free from a multitude of complex motives, not a few related to basic, prerational claims of identity, self-possession, and that most elemental and least-and-most "rational" of all human traits, self-preservation.

It is only an age so completely imbued with the spirit of scienceso completely sold on its ability to solve all our problems through ever more effective control of natureit is only an age, in Gouldner's phrase, so intent on "shunn[ing] that suffering to which the flesh is universal heir" (*Against* 261), that can so smugly label resistance to "reform" (what might more accurately be labeled, "middle-class reform") as reactionary, that can debunk our most basic urge to hold fast to traditions as benighted. It is only the class of professionals whose success comes from its hard-won ability to manipulate the world rationallythat is, only the class overly proud of its potential, a class that preaches "Follow me!"that can place all hope for the future in an enlightened politics directed by a citizenry empowered to pursue its own interests. Here is a class that rejects what Lasch sees as the abiding wisdom of the workers of the worldthe traditionalists: the recognition "that there are

inherent limits on human control over the course of social development, over nature and the body, over the tragic elements in human life and history" ("Revolt" 40).

It is Nietzsche, the great philosopher of limits, who in his fable of the Don Juan of knowledge describes how the truth we discover through the deepest and most critical thought processes may finally turn out to be anything but comforting, who acknowledges the irony that the true philosopher may well end up "not lov[ing] the things he knows." What a strange twist, Nietzsche suggests, that the deepest insights of philosophy may render the philosopher an outsider forever unfit for ordinary human comfort:

> And then he would have to stand to all eternity transfixed to disillusionment and himself become a stone guest, with a longing for a supper of knowledge which he will never get! for the whole universe has not a single morsel left to give to this hungry man. (*Daybreak* §327; *Reader* 200)

Such is one possible end of any sort of reform based on relentless critical analysis, here unsentimentally presented as the stark opposite of the sense of belonging and acceptance that most of us yearn after in one form or anotherthe comfort and peace we associate with the nonjudgmental love of our first family, welcomed finally for ourselves and not the correctness of our thoughts. How similar it is to Vico's own fearful observation a century and a half before: "In my life I have always had the greatest apprehension of being alone in wisdom; this kind of solitude exposes one to the danger of becoming either a god or a fool" (*Study Methods* 80).

Rejecting the tradition of Vico and Nietzsche, critical pedagogic reform remains today what it has been for at least two centuries nowthe optimistic expression of an emerging professional class, one that all too readily confuses its own interests (for example, in securing greater economic or employment opportunitiesto be more *empowered*) with the interests of all humanity. As already noted in Gouldner, critical reform shuns the tragicthose aspects of existence, like the body itself, subject to inherent decay and deathchoosing instead to focus on those forms of suffering which people can alleviate. In denying the tragic, instead holding out the illusion of freedom from suffering, critical discourse can become extraordinarily callous to ordinary pain, seeing it only as a temporary state

to be endured until the new future is realized. The commitment to reform, as we see in Plato, inevitably requires this denial of pleasure in which, in Gouldner's words, "the historically necessary becomes the sacred."

Pedagogic reform is part of a long-standing, robust progressivism all too willing to challenge, in Lasch's words, "time-honored traditions of locality, obligation, and restraint," ready to "unleash a war of all against all" ("Revolt" 49), in the name of a higher idealwhat can only be called a *faith* in the cleansing power of reason itself. Nietzsche warns us about "an abyss behind every ground" (*Beyond* §289), a warning reformers are reluctant to apply to their own thinking, grounded as it is in an almost religious conviction in the saving power of thought. Listen to the voice of the great French philosopher of reason, Condorcet, soon to be guillotined, the victim of political fanaticism, as he rhapsodizes on the liberating power of ideal reason: "how this portrait of mankind, free of all these chains, no longer under the rule of chance, or the enemies of progress, and walking with a sure and certain step on the path of truth, of virtue and happiness, presents to the philosopher a sight which consoles him for the errors, the crimes, the injustices which sully the earth, and of which he is often the victim" (qtd. in Taylor, *Sources* 354)!

What matters most to Condorcet here is not reason itself but his mental picture of itwhat he calls "this portrait of mankind": "In the contemplation of this portrait he [the philosopherthe student] receives the rewards for his efforts towards the progress of reason and the defense of liberty."

> This contemplation is a refuge for him, where the memory of his persecutions cannot follow; where, living in thought with a humanity re-established in the rights and dignity of its nature, he forgets the one which is corrupted and tormented by greed, fear, or envy; it is there [in the *ideal*] that he exists in reality with those like him, in an Elysium which his reason knows how to create, and which his love for humanity has embellished with the purest enjoyments" (qtd. in Taylor, *Sources* 354)

Is there any less danger for the rest of us, we must ask, with progressives like Condorcet losing themselves in a phantasm of

ideal reasona form of belonging to an abstract communitythan with conservatives like Southey losing themselves in a phantasm of Edenic longing for the lost world of a caring family?

It is almost as if progressives like Condorcet are hopeful of finding some element of belonging in the ideal of pure thoughta place, freed from the exigencies of the physical, that promises the true believer the company of others equally pure of heart. This is the notion of critical practice failing to recognize its origins in the same condition of belonging that deeply mediates all our most fundamental historical attachments at a precritical level, indeed of actively suppressing this state of belonging as the one means of defining its own special status as the one group, through the exercise of reason itself, able to free itself from such emotional, prejudgmental attachments. This is the notion of critical pedagogy not as the one cultural practice most able to escape belonging, but as the one practice most insistent on denying itthe notion, in other words, of critical pedagogy as the ultimate expression of being an intellectual, of belonging to that one class most intent on asserting its autonomy.

At the end of the twentieth century does it still need stating that self-proclaimed intellectuals and others who seek comfort and dispensation for their extreme beliefs and actions under the guise of ideal reason may well pose a real and imminent danger for the rest of us? Is it possible that the goal of "critical" pedagogy might finally be to blind us to the most obvious and enduring of truthsto allow us to take seriously Condorcet's belief, perhaps more accurately labeled his fervent wish, that "truth is the enemy of power, as of those who exercise it"? What could possibly be the source of such fantastic idealism in Condorcetthe belief that "the more [truth] spreads, the less they will be able to mislead men, the more force it acquires the less societies need to be governed" (qtd. in Ezrahi 83)if not the self-righteous intoxication of thought itself? Only a fervor akin to religious conviction could blind so many well-schooled minds to a populist truth pervasive among the less educated: that tyranny is likely to be the result of unbridled virtue, and that an empowered citizenry and an enlightened politics both have their own inherent dangers, that in an instant each can become blunted instruments of tyranny, zealotry, and terror, and all without first announcing its change of form.

The Delicate Balance

We cannot increase our control over the world without also heightening our understanding of that control. Can anything be more basic to understanding the intellectual life of the last two centuriesalbeit often suppressedthan that middle-class life (Winner's culture of technique) is irreparably conflicted, torn between the material attractions that flow from more efficient control of nature (including such fundamental matters as freedom from famine and many of the infectious diseases and catastrophes that have plagued humanity almost continuously throughout its history) and a sense of spiritual loss and abandonment that is the one great theme of modern literature? The *angst* of modern artand thus the probing of deep languageis less the opposition to the self-confidence of technology than its alter ego, its dark side.

Even Marcuse, one of the last great products and critics of high bourgeois culture, had trouble understanding fully this connection in responding to the charge of "subjectivity as a 'bourgeois' notion." His response is an adverb off, perhaps the result of a co-translator: "Even in bourgeois society," he writes, "insistence on the truth and right of inwardness is not *really* a bourgeois value" (4; italics added). The proper adverb here, one feels, is *simply*that is, inwardness *is* a bourgeois phenomenon, just part of that other, resisting, hence less acknowledged part of middle-class life:

> With the affirmation of the inwardness of subjectivity, the individual steps out of the network of exchange relationships and exchange values, withdraws from the reality of bourgeois society, and enters another dimension of existence. Indeed this escape from reality led to an experience which could (and did) become a powerful force in *invalidating* the actually prevailing bourgeois values, namely, by shifting the locus of the individual's realization from the domain of the performance principle and the profit motive to that of the inner resources of the human being: passion, imagination, conscience. (45)

There is no separating either critical practice or deep language from its common technological base. One parallels the urge of modern technology to control the formerly uncontrollable,

attacking that urge with the common tools of logic and reason; the other mirrors that urge, searching out and celebrating the hidden crannies of human experience, using metaphor and other tools of poetic expression.

Certain contemporary, postmodern, "deconstructive" tendencies might seem to offer a way out of this dilemma by trying to dissolve the connection between critical practice and reason, and hence the broader connection between such practice and the control of nature. Yet this element of postmodernism often turns out to be less interested in dissolving the playful category of literature into a rigorous ("critical") new form of textual studies than in transforming interpretive critique itself into a form of aesthetic activity where all practices are played off against one another largely independent of their role in controlling nature and thus contributing to economic production. While this present monograph has focused on the parallel danger (the submergence of literature into criticism and the incipient collapse of literature as a distinct category of resistance), there is perhaps no less danger in this alternate strategy (the submergence of criticism into literature or aesthetics), for where formerly there had been two, complementary categories of resistance, each with its own strength, now there is only one.

The argument here has been against the complete triumph of reason and critical thought at the expense of literature and deep language, with their common aesthetic, metaphoric core. The argument has been against redefining the discipline of English as the analysis of power relationships and special pleading of groups, privileged or otherwise. This is not an argument, however, against the need for critical practice or reason. The value of deep language is enhanced, indeed made possible, by the tradition of critique and the possibility of the rational control of nature that enables that tradition. Bauman refers to contemporary efforts at critical self-understanding (what he calls postmodernity) as "modernity coming to terms with its own impossibility; a self-monitoring modernity, one that consciously discards what it was once unconsciously doing" (272). The argument here is only against actions that erode the delicate balance between technology and critical and aesthetic resistance. Without the effort to dominate nature, there can be no dominant critical tradition, nor can there be a parallel tradition of deep language with a distinctly metaphorical core. Like metaphor

itself, the larger tradition of deep language conflicts with a literal, scientific representation of the world.

Both curriculathe reconstructed one of pedagogic reformers and the unreconstructed one of deep languageare cultural reactions, forms of resistance, to our continued domination of nature. To subsume deep language into a broader critical practice is to lose the resistance of dreams and play, the subversion of the soul. Yet to subsume all critical practice into deep languageto see any interpretive critical activity as only a form of aesthetic playis just as futile, for then the world of dreams and play loses it subversive edge. There is neither deep language nor a distinct aesthetic tradition in cultures without an ever-expanding interest in the physical control of nature. Without such an ongoing interest, aesthetic representation loses its metaphorical edge and is instead subsumed in the larger category of religion, hence becoming indistinguishable from ritual and, to outsiders at least, magic.

It is Vico who again so elegantly links thought and feeling, philosophy and poetry. Each begins distinctly, he argues, poetic statements formed by "passion and emotion"; philosophic assertions by "reflection and reasoning": "The more the latter rise toward universals, the closer they approach the truth; the more the former descend to particulars, the more certain they become" (*New Science* §219). The insight here is not that the two ever come togethertruth and certainty are not the samebut that each leads to a way of knowing the world incomplete without the other. The total collapse of either mode of organizing instruction at the expense of the other would only result in the removal of a major category of cultural resistance to the ever-increasing technological control of nature and thus the continuing onslaught of modern lifeand, ironically, all in the name of greater resistance to that onslaught. The passion to reform the world and the deep desire to defend it only remain major categories of resistance when each faces off against the other.

The focus here has been on the dangers of untrammeled reform and the parallel need for keeping deep language as a distinct category of writing concerned with recognition and identity, not control. There may well need to be another, parallel monograph essay on the dangers of deep language unbalanced by regular involvement with controlling and reshaping the natural world. Or perhaps

we need to end this essay by suggesting the far-flung implications to both the efforts to reform the curriculum and to preserve the sanctity of deep languageand, indirectly, to thinking and writingin the contemporary disillusion with our continuing inability to establish a proper balance with nature.

Our imaginative impulse, without an accompanying power, rarely rises above an immature fancy. The ever-deepening explorations and self-representations of personal growth that define modern art of the last two centuries, as well as the parallel development of a systematic body of critical practice, are not unrelated to the enhanced constructive powers of assimilation of industrial culture. All people are not equally attracted to new representations of themselves; in fact, just the opposite, it is usually a strong element of psychic distress precipitated in part by rapid historical change that encourages people to seek out artists and philosophers able to create such new representations. As Walter Ong, among others has pointed out, the rise of aesthetics and technology, seeming oppositesone grounded in rational adaptation and the other in transrational imaginationwere two sides of a single cultural response, each growing out of "a noetic abundance such as man had never before known" (279).

What should we expect from humanscreatures so ambivalent on a personal levelbut a universal history fraught with ambivalence, even in our greatest technological accomplishments. "[Man] has built above him a great wall of stone," writes Vico in his third Inaugural Oration, "but it will crush him":

> He has dared to entrust himself to the sea, but it will shipwreck him. He has sharpened the iron, but it will inflict wounds upon him. The pleasures of the palate count far more than the needs of the body. With wine he has subverted sleep. He brings upon himself his own destruction by sumptuous feasting. From all directions he has raked together those forces that will corrupt and destroy his nature. (*On Humanistic Education* 75)

It is not deep thought or deep technology taken separately, but their conjunctionthe control of nature coupled with the insight into how that control nourishes both resistance and attachmentthat has defined the rich, precarious ambivalence of modern life so well captured, first by Vico and later by the sociologist Max Weber.

Some believe, Weber surmises, that material possessions produced by more effective control of nature should be no more a burden to us than a "light cloak, which can be thrown aside at any moment"that the material control of the world should not alter how we think and feel. Why then, Weber concludes, has this cloak become an iron cage?

> No one knows who will live in this cage in the future, or whether at the end of this tremendous development entirely new prophets will arise, or there will be a great rebirth of old ideas and ideals, or, if neither, mechanized petrification, embellished with a sort of convulsive self-importance. For of the last stage of this cultural development, it might well be truly said: "Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved." (*Protestant Ethic* 182)

And irony of ironies, this high industrial European civilization at the turn of the last century did produce something never before achievednot in its material wealth, certainly unprecedented at that time, but in the depth and breadth of its response to that wealth, that is, in both its critical practice and deep languagein Weber's own writing, as well as the writings of his many contemporaries, critical and literary, from Sigmund Freud to Joseph Conrad, that provides both an analysis and a representation, each rich and complex, of the conflicted modern temperament.

As we approach another turn of the century, it is uncertain if we have the focus or discipline, or even the self-confidence, to sustain this delicate balance. There is a pervasive lack of self-confidence in all aspects of the modernist projectin everything that is involved in our continuing to expand both our control of nature and the common culture of thinking and writing that mirrors that control. Today we seem no less enamored of the allure of possession than Weber's contemporaries and perhaps no less full of misgivings about the price we may be paying for those goods.

The danger, however, is in the tension itself breaking down completelyin our abandoning the effort to control the natural world and in the process passively accepting aesthetic play in place of critical analysis, in our believing that we can fully and readily extricate ourselves from the ravages of technology merely by

repudiating our desire to continue to dominate nature, or, for example, in our becoming ever more insistent on changing the system that produces such abundance while not wanting to give up any of the comforts it associated with that production. Here is the great contemporary temptation: our wanting to have it both ways, to be critics of technology in a world that has seemingly freed itself from the need of technology, largely by hiding that technology in distant, out-of-the-way places. It is the allure of a world ecological movement controlled by and serving the needs of the affluent. That is a likely danger, not a remote one.

In the meantime, as educators we also want to have it both ways. We want everyone to have our critical thought patterns, to think like professionals, but not necessarily our material possessionsin part because we are able to hide from ourselves the immense costs in energy and environmental degradation of both our own contemporary lifestyles (even the most environmentally correct ones) and our enlightened opinions. We regularly trick ourselves, in other words, into seeing our new environmentally and socially conscious selves as universal models based solely on our insights and our will to justice, and thus unrelated to our material possession and power to control the natural world. Hence we easily miss the one crucial lesson of our times: not that our ideals or our intentions are wrong, just that they are often naïve and self-serving. There is nothing wrong, in other words, with nurturing the fierce resistance to the status quo that is the mainstay of the reformersexcept to the extent that such advocacy ordinarily remains fundamentally uncritical by failing to recognize its own class and material origins in the very system it is so openly opposing and, in so doing, promotes the pervasive confusion of "critical" and "correct."

Nine
Vico's Voice, or Beyond Critical Pedagogy

*We walk through the woods: suddenly we hear the flapping of wings or the wind in the grass. A pheasant lifts off and then disappears instantly among the trees, a porcupine buries in the thick underbrush, the dry leaves crackle as a snake slithers away. Not the encounter, but this flight of invisible animals is thought. Not, it was not our voice. We came as close as possible to language, we almost brushed against it, held it in suspense: but we never reached our encounter and now we turn back, untroubled, toward home.*

*So, language is our voice, our language. As you speak, that is ethics.*
Giorgio Agamben, *Language and Death*

As you speak," Agamben concludesnot how you reason, think, or plan, not, in other words, how all of us deal with the abstract and the ideathere, he says, in the world, "that is ethics" (*Language* 108). No human action, Ricoeur likewise cautions, is pure and objective, that is, without interest. What transforms anything from ideology to criticism, Ricoeur argues here, is not the absence of interest itself but the presence of a another, albeit special, form of interest"an interest in emancipation" (245). It is Easthope himself, an advocate of eliminating the aesthetic dimension of language study in the name of the critical, who is perfectly forthright about the connection between the "paradigm shift away from literary study" and "a radical politics and concern with other oppression (gender, race) besides those enforced through

class" (7). The campaign for valuing the critical over the aesthetic can be seen as part of a larger effort to redistribute wealth and status within society and as such is likely to be championed primarily by individuals and groups whose own standing is either sufficiently marginalized or sufficiently privileged to make them feel relatively free of fear of losing, to emerging groups, employment opportunities for themselves or for their children. Yet how is such redistribution to occur, except through the two unlikely possibilities of continuing economic expansion or a radical new means of redistributing existing wealth?

In the conclusion of *Word Perfect*, I isolate four inherent limits to students ever widely attaining mastery of deep language (there called "print literacy"), and, as a result, the four elements most responsible for, and in some ways justifying, the current decline of the place of deep language in English studies: the historical limit, which points to print culture's connection, if only via opposition, to the material control of nature; the ethical limit, which points to the fact that aesthetic engagement with the world has always had ambiguous moral implications; the pedagogic limit, which points to the fact that only a minority ever seems capable of mastering deep reading and writing; and the aesthetic limit, which points to the fact that deep language, in its appeal only to the verbal imagination, offers little of the direct sensual pleasure of other forms of communication and expression. Deep language, in other wordsin large measure due to its own inherent limitationsseems doomed to failure as a mass movement, doomed to give way to the "reforms" of a new critical pedagogy, including new models for reading and writing at the center of a "reformed" language education.

What needs to be added, here the conclusion to this essay, is the recognition that some of the current interest over reforming language education can be seen as making the best of a bad situation. Let us not lament the fact that students can no longer read and write deeply (alas, few have ever been able to do so well); let us instead celebrate a new goal: a new critical pedagogy, without ever asking ourselves if such thinking is liable to be much more than proselytizing (or shouting) if freed from the tradition of expressing and comprehending complex, unexpected new experiences in writing.

Whereas the impulse for pedagogic reform is ruthlessly objective in dissecting the motives of opponents of such a noble cause,

it clothes its own advocacy in a high-sounding, largely unexamined morality. It is doubtful whether or not it is capable of replacing deep language as an arena of verbal thought and imaginative feeling free from the restraints of "right thinking." "Every orthodoxy," writes Joel Weinsheimer, "must repress the questions that threaten it, and the new orthodoxy of suspicion must silence the classic," for it is the classicthe fulfillment of the aesthetic impulse of deep languagethat derives its vitality by continually suggesting other ways of seeing and hence of being in the world.

The recurrent cries for reshaping English studies need to be seen as part of the destiny of deep language to lose its mainstream standing in education, in the process becoming a coterie phenomenon. This essay is less concerned with reversing this trendit is likely irreversiblethan with muting the current celebratory tone now associated with curriculum reform. The deep attachment to the local that remains at the center of unreformed English studies remains a special way of knowing the world, one not sanctioned by public morality, hence not politically correct. To fall prey to contemporary efforts to dissolve reading and writing into mere categories of thoughtand not modes of beingis to be seduced by an enemy in the raiment of an ally. That we as English teachers should be leading the call for a new language use, a new literacy, free from the allurement and subversion of aesthetic entanglement can be seen as the final proof of the power of our enemythe cunning and the hubris of reason itselfand thus of our need, less to fight back with argument and counterargument, as I am doing here in this undoubtedly critical work itself, than to cling more tightly than ever (even, irrationally) to our traditions.

What we should do, therefore, is flee from the remedy of those like Berlin who would have us reformulate just what it is we do when we study English, replacing the deep empathic reading of great literature with serpentine arguments about the nature of reading and writing, the very arguments that constitute this overwrought treatise. "English studies," Berlin writes, "will then examine the textual practices of reading and writing in order to explore their roles in consciousness formation within concrete historical conditions" ("Literacy" 261). "All reification is a foregetting," Marcuse quotes from his two lifetime colleagues, Adorno and Horkheimer. Art, he addsand here for the last time we will again substitute deep language"fights reification by making the petrified world

speak, sing, perhaps dance" (73). It is the reality principle, Marcuse concludes, that "alleviates life" by nourishing forgetfulness, of past suffering as well as joy. How then are we to counter the allure of argument, than through acts of remembrance, than by doing what we have always done: singing our songs and reciting our tales, while leaving critical harangues like this to those few with a passion for tying and untying knots?

Is it anything but hubris that continues to hide from us the real meaning of the Cretan paradox: not that Cretans lie or that one particular Cretan may be telling the truth, but that as a species we are continually drawn to believe (if only temporarily and if only in our hearts) what our heads tell us does not exist and thus in one way or another is untrue, impossible, incorrect? If it is the truth that sets us free, then it must be a strange sort of truth indeed, for what is it but a form of truth about the physical world that enslaves us to the thankless and doomed task of providing for our protection and comfort by controlling nature, through planning and calculation as much as physical effort? What, then, is this other form of truth that really does seem to set us free from the drudgery and the limits of the present? It can only be a truth that delights in contradiction and paradox, in metaphor and poetry. It must be a truth big enough to contain both reform and attachment, both philosophy and poetry. It must be a truth that accounts for how we feel as well as how we think, for our desires as well as our thoughts, and thus a truth responsive to the real paradox at the center of our existencethat our wants are more likely whetted than slaked by our possessions.

It is the same paradox that locates the great expansion of the material world over the last two centuriesand our fierce resistance to itas the principal source of our deepening sense of ourselves as individuals who above all else seem to want most that which we do not yet have, or perhaps feel we once had and have now lost. The great struggle of modern education is the great struggle of the modern world: not that between the ruling middle class and those groups it has trampledand trampled many of the peoples of the world it surely hasbut that struggle *within* the middle class itself, to master its own insatiable impulse to understand and to control, to understand in order to control, both the world of objects and the inner world of thoughts. "If subjectivity," writes Marcuse, "is an 'achievement' of the bourgeois era, it is at

least an antagonistic force in capitalist society" (38). There is no easy renting of the two, no way either to preserve or discard the subjective without also keeping, if not capitalism, then the impulse for technological mastery of nature on which capitalism is basedand conversely, no way to counter the coarsening, brutalizing effect of technological efficiency without recourse to the psychic rewards of subjectivity.

The middle class is not just another ruling class, one that in Berlin's words acts like all ruling classes in making certain that their members are "adept at the signifying practices that ensure the continuance of their power" ("Composition" 116). Modern reading and writing practices have a deep historical connection to powernot an arbitrary one. The subject of English as it has emerged this century has been and remains inextricably bound to the struggle to control the world, not as a mere style of expression favored by one class and easily replaced by the linguistic preferences of another, but as a critique sustained over generationsour inner dialogue, as it wereof the very historical entity we are in the process of becoming. Without our extraordinary power to control nature, there would be little motivation to control ourselves, little motivation to understand ourselves in terms of who we might have been or yet might be. Without the power to alter the world (what many rightly see as our destruction of it), there would be little reason to think so hard about rebuilding it. All people plan and dream, but it is the palpable sense of our own constructive powera power that many feel may be either on the wane or at least quickly moving beyond our controlthat leads us to spend long hours giving verbal form to those plans and dreams, in turn, to treat as a cultural and educational norm, in the grasp of all people, a level of deep interaction with writing that only the rare few can attain, and perhaps not even they.

Hence the essential paradox at the core of English studies this century: that the deep language of literature expresses the longing and desire of an historical moment that has obtained much through its efforts, and yet remains deeply dissatisfied with all it has wrought. Ohmann and Steiner are right to be skeptical about the value of the humanities in directing people to come to the right side of moral conflictsjust as educational critic Frank Smith is right to assert that with regard to literacy itself, he "can no longer regard the benefit of its acquisition as axiomatic" (v). But here

Smith, like Steiner, Ohmann, and Socrates in his words to Glaucon that were cited at the opening of this essay, is assuming that we are primarily attracted to language to solve problems, to correct the worldand not as seems more likely the case, that we are attracted to language as a primary means of expressing our anguish, our deep disappointment, concerning the inadequacy of language itself.

Socrates is wrong in his words to Glaucon: there is more to life than being rightor, stated differently, we are never finally right, never right in such a way that we have no more deliberation, no more uncertainty, no more dissatisfaction haunting us. As John Stuart Mill cautions about Comte and the appeal of absolute reason, "When mankind have enlisted under his banner, they must burn their ships" (180). In an age of nonstop talk, fervid opinions, and instant informationwhere it is all too easy to express our concerns gliblythe literate text long at the center of English studies remains a sturdy, if slightly unfashionable, vessel for the prolonged, intense personal exploration of our dissatisfaction, individual and collective. In the end, it is this dissatisfaction, with the world and with ourselves, this desire to resist the given (even when it is safe and reassuring) for the uncertainty of the possible, that is, this desire for the imaginary, from which deep language springs.

The desire to control the world expressed in critical practice, as Vico noted long ago, is thus a secondary human experience, itself based on other, less rational desiresespecially the sense of fear and wonderment at the immense world that lies just beyond our control. Beyond the safety and comfort that comes from our control of the world, Vico contends, lies a metaphysic neither rational nor abstract, but one animated by "robust sense and vigorous imagination" (*New Science* §375). The false sense of physical safety from calamitous and unexpected circumstanceso characteristic of technologically advanced modern life, the safety from bodily harm, and ultimately from death itself, that we demand from our engineers and doctors and even politiciansis in the final analysis hardly a boon to deep language. As individuals, Max Weber argues, we actually know very little about our world, far less than preindustrial peoples. "The increasing intellectualization and rationalization does *not*, therefore, indicate an increased and general knowledge of the conditions under which one lives," he concludes, but only a false and ultimately shallow sense of security found in the confidence in

experts, the sense that others (some vaguely defined, impersonal *we*) are in the process of "master[ing] all things by calculation" ("Science" 139), freeing us from having to know anything ourselves or, more importantly, from that direct experience of the incalculable, of death itself, from which all true wisdom derives.

The effort to reform English studies, to make it more critical, is incontestably part of the process that Weber calls the "disenchantment of the world." The path back to our origins would thus seem to lie in the other directionthe world's reenchantment, less through a simplistic rejection of critical practice than in recognizing our need of going beyond its limitshaving the courage, as it were, to recognize the limits of human knowledge and the limits of human control of the natural world generallyand yet our still having the courage to venture beyond those limits, especially in our reading and writing, venturing finally into those areas of our collective human experience where we have neither complete knowledge nor complete control. All true knowledge, Vico argues, begins in this recognition of ignorance, expressed bodily as fear of the unknown. "What draws the reader to the novel," writes Walter Benjamin, "is the hope of warming his shivering life with the death he reads about" (101).

Teacher and essayist Bailey White seems to have stumbled upon the pedagogic foundation of this founding insight of deep language in struggling to teach reluctant first-graders how to read. The approved method she tried initially entailed leading children slowly and safely through a tightly controlled verbal world: children would memorize lists of words, and, when they had mastered a dozen or so, would read a "story" composed from those words. A safe world but an unproductive one, as the students completed the steps correctly but still could not read and had no understanding of the nature of reading. In frustration, White discarded the safety of basal readers for a totally unexpected, but direct way of leading her children into the world of deep language: introducing her students to stories of maritime disasterssea-chants, ballads, and eventually books themselves filled with tales of sudden, terrible death at sea, of the horror of men, women, and even children themselves swept away and drowned. "Give me a man overboard or a good sinking ship," she quips, "and I can teach a half-witted gorilla to read" (170).

It is as if here, in modern-day, rural Georgia, a teacher is being guided by the voice of Vico: his insight, that of all things, "It was

fear which created gods in the world; not fear awakened in men by other men, but fear awakened by themselves" (*New Science* §382). Our ultimate struggle is less with each other, as reformers too often suggest, than with the world at large and understanding our place in itwith our inability ever to comprehend that place fully and, more basically, with the abiding recognition that, despite all our efforts, this strange world remains the site of our death. "The fatality of [our] nature," writes Nietzsche in "The Four Great Errors," "cannot be disentangled from the fatality of all that which has been and will be" (*Twilight of the Idols* §8; *Reader* 211). Our primary source of wisdom lies in our efforts to gain insight into, and momentary control over, the physical limits of life itself, of our own life.

What strange creatures we are, concludes Vico at the end of his greatest work, *The New Science*governed as we are by a "mind often diverse, at times quite contrary." Our base instincts carry men consistently in one directiontoward "bestial lust and abandon[ing] their offspring"and yet we "inaugurate the chastity of marriage." Over and over again, history points to massive, self-imposed destruction, and yet our "remnants flee for safety to the wilderness, whence, like the phoenix, they arise again" (§1108). What Vico here echoes is the founding belief of deep language itself: that the defining human story is not one of linear progress but of episodic, possibly recurring, triumph. And of all the tools that Vico sees humans marshaling for such regular effort, none compares to our ability to imagine and create with languagea gift, like the awe that struck Bailey White's first-graders, that at once conveys all of human culture in a microcosm: the recognition of the mortality that we can never finally overcome, coupled with a sense of accomplishment at being able to see, if only in a flash of insight, what otherwise remains hidden.

It is neither reason, thought, nor logic but that which needs to remain at the center of language studythe verbal imagination, what Vico calls "phantasy"that enables us to escape Agamben's prison of representation. "It is phantasy," Vico writes in his first Inaugural Oration, "that makes present to our eyes lands that are very far away, that unites those things that are separated, that overcomes the inaccessible, that discloses what is hidden and builds a road through trackless places" (*On Humanistic Education* 43). Yet as Vico indicates in this same oration, what a strange, yet

ordinary, experience this is, this escaping mimetic representation for a dreamlike wandering in words, a naming of the unknown by means of the power of metaphor:

> The poets celebrate [the will's] power and efficacy and with the help of phantasy dedicate themselves completely to grasping sublime and noble things. And after setting down those verses by effort of the will, exhausted, they realize that the inspiration of the spirit, like a soft wind, has ceased. They now barely recognize their own work and suppose it to be the product of some higher mind. (50)

Deep language, as described by Vico here, confirms the experiences all of us repeatedly have: that texts imbued with poetic or metaphorical power grant us insight into knowledge of the world that is otherwise denied us. In the throes of deep language even authors have a sense of the world otherwise denied to them.

It was nineteenth-century German humanist Wilhelm von Humboldt who located the essence of language "on the boundary between the expressible and the inexpressible" and who assigned to it the goal of "push[ing] back still further this boundary" (qtd. in Ricoeur 176), thus capturing the basic trope at the heart of deep language, if not life itself, for all of us, adults and first-graders alike: using familiar words to describe an unfamiliar world. "Where language stops," writes Agamben, "is not where the unsayable occurs, but rather where the matter of words [that is, real words or deep language] begins. Those who have not reached, as in a dream, this woody substance of language, which the ancients called *silva* (wildwood), are prisoners of representation, even when they keep silent" (*Idea* 37).

Thus it should be clear why, at some crucial level of their lives, lovers of deep language will always resist efforts to reform the world: they are too consumed instead with trying to understand it, too consumed by struggling with a world that in crucial ways remains as mysterious and as strange todayeven armed as we are with the most advanced tools of technology and reasonas it did to our earliest ancestors. "And is it not just the overwhelming phenomenon of our historical experience of ourselves," Gadamer asks, "that the individual with his plans, actions, hopes, disappointments, and desperations is active and alive without really

knowing in the end what he is accomplishing and doing with respect to history as a whole and for society as a whole" (*Reason* 36)? Language, history, thought itself are all conditions of our existencetools of understanding surelybut tools that remain deeply implicated in our sense of belonging in the world, in all aspects of our existence that make up our fundamental condition of preunderstanding, of being in the world we are trying to understand, after the fact as it were. "History," Gadamer concludes, "consists precisely of the fact that we do not realize what is happening to us and that nevertheless we are involved in this play, each one in his place or . . . each one looking for and not finding a place from which one could actively and transformatively work on a bad reality."

That we remain strangers in the world we inhabit, using familiar words to describe what must forever remain unfamiliareven when we describe the parts of our lives that seem most familiarforms the defining experience of English studies and, quite possibly, of a humanistic education generally. While this work has focused throughout on language study and the limits of a certain kind of critical analysis, the issues raised here may well apply more broadly across the curriculum. We live in a world that often has trouble seeing value of any sort beyond the skills required for the technical mastery of processes and as such remains in deep denial about our need for sustained humility in recognizing the many limits that surround all human endeavors. The constant effort to reform the English curriculum, for all its resistant impulses, too often presents itself as just one more problem-solving technique, even worse, presents itself as *the* solution to all our educational problems, thereby failing to fulfill the one great educational need of the presentmaking the experience of these limits palpable.

A world ignorant of limitsor, more likely, overly proud of its technological prowesswould have little need for a language or an education of limits. Were we not thrust into such a difficult situationwere we, for example, confronted with the task of understanding a world we did not inhabit or a world with clearly defined limitsthere would be little need for deep language. Yet without an abiding sense of our own limits, without a wonder for the unknown, we would remain truly ignorant of the depths of our ignoranceconfusing real knowledge of the world with the objects that we actually encounter in the woods and not with what remains

forever just beyond our kenthe "flight of invisible animals" (108) to which Agamben refers.

This monograph, in working to tear down the objectifying, quasi-scientific facade of critical thinking, generally by means of its own kind of destructive criticism, takes the form more of a diagnosis than of a corrective. Perhaps more than such a sustained critique, what we are really in need of is a different sort of work, a sequel still focusing on how we can teach ourselves to think critically, but this time, thinking critically in a different, more complete sense, thinking critically (in accord with Vico's voice) with our whole bodiesa sequel that shows us how to think with our hearts and not just our minds, how to think like poets and architects with our imaginations, like actors and singers, with our voices, like sculptors and woodworkers, with our hands, and, like the most critical of all thinkers, athletes and dancers, with our whole bodies. What awaits is a complementary, still-to-be-written primer on reading and writing instruction for a new century, a primer that reaches beyond present concerns with resisting reform, to what may well be the key to our futureembracing tradition.

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