RAYMOND WILLIAMS
1921–1988

Arguably the leading literary intellectual in Britain in the later twentieth century, Raymond Williams is best known for espousing the study of culture and society alongside that of literature. A committed socialist and political activist as well as a highly productive scholar throughout his life, he provided a model for those interested in investigating literature in terms of politics, ideology, and social history. He was a literary journalist and novelist; a prominent critic of drama, the novel, culture, and media; and one of the founding figures of British cultural studies and of media studies and communications. Arguing against traditional views that assume the autonomy of literature and its privileged cultural value, Williams analyzes it as a specific historical product, carrying class values.

The son of a railway worker, Williams grew up in a small farming village, Pandy, in Wales. A sense of class and place informs all his work, most visibly his novels, which depict working-class life and politics in Wales. In 1939 he entered Cambridge University on a state scholarship, where he became acutely aware of class distinctions; he was politically active in the Socialist Club and, for a short time, the Communist Party. In 1941 he left to serve in an artillery division of the British Army during World War II. He returned to Cambridge after the war, taking a degree in English in 1945. By that time he was married, with one small child and another on the way; so instead of accepting a postgraduate fellowship, he began teaching evening classes at Oxford in drama and fiction. His experience in adult education and his involvement with the Workers Educational Association helped convince him of the importance of literature's social and political contexts and of the need for a democratic, "permanent education." In 1961 he returned to Cambridge as a lecturer, and in 1974 a professorship of drama was created for him, a position he held until retiring in 1983. At Cambridge Williams not only wrote prolifically but taught a number of students—among them, STUART HALL and TERRY EAGLETON—who would themselves become important figures in literary and cultural studies.

Literary studies in England after World War II were dominated by "Cambridge English," strongly influenced by F. R. Leavis, a longtime professor at Cambridge and the editor of the leading critical journal of its day, Scrutiny. Extolling, in his famous phrase, "the Great Tradition," Leavis privileged literature above all other disciplines, as offering a special morally edifying force. In so doing, he followed MATTHEW ARNOLD, who in Culture and Anarchy (1869) claimed that the literary canon could provide a civilizing "sweetness and light" to society, in effect assuming the redemptive power previously enjoyed by religion. Williams desacralizes literature by setting it in its historical context and examining its social uses.

While engaging with history, sociology, and politics, Williams characteristically begins with literary analysis, often examining "keywords" of modern culture. In his masterwork Culture and Society, 1780–1950 (1958), whose title signals its revision of Arnold, Williams unfolds the history of culture, art, democracy, industry, and class. For example, culture, a term originally applied to agriculture, shifted in the eighteenth century to encompass "tending" the human mind, so that one might be a "cultured" or "cultivated" individual. In the course of the nineteenth century, the term came to mean a general classification of the arts and literature, implying a high social value. Williams connects these transformations to the rise of industrial capitalism; he himself adopts a broader definition, arguing in a famous passage that "a culture is not only a body of intellectual and imaginative work; it is also a whole way of life." Our selection, "Literature," from Marxism and Literature (1977), similarly examines literature. With the rise of industrial capitalism, a term once applied to any written material began first to designate more specifically works of the imagination,

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ulation, but rather the history of influence: that "which results from the event" and which from the perspective of the present constitutes the coherence of literature as the prehistory of its present manifestation.

XII

Thesis 7. The task of literary history is thus only completed when literary production is not only represented synchronically and diachronically in the succession of its systems, but also seen as "special history" in its own unique relationship to "general history." This relationship does not end with the fact that a typified, idealized, satiric, or utopian image of social existence can be found in the literature of all times. The social function of literature manifests itself in its genuine possibility only where the literary experience of the reader enters into the horizon of expectations of his lived praxis, preforms his understanding of the world, and thereby also has an effect on his social behavior.

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The relationship between literature and reader can actualize itself in the sensorial realm as an incitement to aesthetic perception as well as in the ethical realm as a summons to moral reflection. The new literary work is received and judged against the background of other works of art as well as against the background of the everyday experience of life. Its social function in the ethical realm is to be grasped according to an aesthetics of reception in the same modalities of question and answer, problem and solution, under which it enters into the horizon of its historical influence.

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It follows from all of this that the specific achievement of literature in social existence is to be sought exactly where literature is not absorbed into the function of a representational art. If one looks at the moments in history when literary works toppled the taboos of the ruling morals or offered the reader new solutions for the moral casuistry of his lived praxis, which thereafter could be sanctioned by the consensus of all readers in the society, then a still-little-studied area of research opens itself up to the literary historian. The gap between literature and history, between aesthetic and historical knowledge, can be bridged if literary history does not simply describe the process of general history in the reflection of its works one more time, but rather when it discovers in the course of "literary evolution" that properly socially formative function that belongs to literature as it competes with other arts and social forces in the emancipation of mankind from its natural, religious, and social bonds.

If it is worthwhile for the literary scholar to jump over his ahistorical shadow for the sake of this task, then it might well also provide an answer to the question: toward what end and with what right can one today still—or again—study literary history?

1969, 1970

then certain poems, novels, and plays of high cultural and social value. Williams argues that our contemporary sense derives not from the intrinsic, timeless aesthetic value of literary works themselves but from the ongoing capitalist specialization of society, and that literary forms and genres are determined by the social roles they play. He also examines the development of "national" literatures, which further demonstrates how society, culture, and art interconnect and how literature serves the dominant order. Williams thus challenges all idealizing notions of literature.

Williams responds specifically to the state of English studies of his time, but he also raises a perennial problem in literary theory—the definition of literature. Modern literary theorists often look to formal artistic features intrinsic in works, discerning what ROMAN JAKOBSON terms their "literariness" or "poeticity." Williams sees litera- ture instead as a shifting historical product—not a transcendent entity but a complex mutating human product linked with concepts such as literacy, imagination, taste, and beauty, all inflected by sociohistorical conditions. He also notes that criticism and its function have similarly mutated to reflect changing social roles.

Williams calls his theoretical approach "cultural materialism," at once invoking the Marxist focus on the economic means of production and emphasizing the role of culture. Stressing the complex interaction of culture and society, he investigates the material, historical factors that inform culture—part of society's "superstructure"— but he also shows how culture shapes society in an ongoing process, often contesting and resisting dominant modes of production.

Although Marxist and radical thought played a significant role in Anglo-American criticism during the 1930s, such approaches were largely shunned during the cold war, particularly in the United States. The New York Intellectuals, for instance, as the title of IRVING HOWE's *Politics and the Novel* (1957) suggests, were like Williams in joining the literary and the social; but they were avowedly anticommunist and anti- Marxist. It was not until the 1970s and 1980s, in part through Williams's influence and example, that Marxist and socialist ideas once again became accepted in literary studies.

Williams's work, as he remarks in *Culture and Society*, "has been classified under headings as various as cultural history, historical semantics, history of ideas, social criticism, literary history and sociology." While some critics complain about Wil- liams's style, which can be murky and ponderous, his disciplinary boundary-crossing made him a model for cultural studies. Conversely, his stress on the political signif- icance of literary works was criticized by more traditional scholars for falling outside the purview of literary studies proper. In a career extending the traditional boundaries of literary studies, Williams exemplifies the possibilities for combining literary work with committed politics, and literary criticism with social criticism.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Raymond Williams published more than thirty books and approximately six hundred articles during his lifetime, spanning a wide range, from drama, poetry, and novel criticism to cultural history and media studies to literary theory and political criti- cism. Williams's early books include *Reading and Criticism* (1950), *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot* (1952; rev. ed. as *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht*, 1968); and *Drama in Per- formance* (1954; rev. ed., 1968). He also published a textbook, *Preface to Film*, co-authored with Michael Orrom (1954). *Culture and Society, 1780–1950* (1958) — a key text for British cultural studies, is a good place to enter his work. Its sequels include *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1976; rev. ed., 1983), origi- nally planned as an appendix, and *The Long Revolution* (1961).

Williams helped pioneer media studies and the emerging discipline of communi- cations with *Communications* (1962; 3d ed., 1976); *Television: Technology and Cul- tural Form* (1974) is one of the first significant studies of that medium. He co-edited *May Day*

Manifesto, a response to the political events of the 1960s (1967; 2d ed., 1968), with his student Stuart Hall. Williams returned to literary criticism with *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence* (1970) and *The Country and the City* (1973).

Marxism and Literature (1977) is a good introduction to Williams's more theoretical considerations of culture and society. *Problems in Materialism and Culture: Selected Essays* (1980) elaborates his theory of "cultural materialism," and *Culture* (1981; retitled *The Sociology of Culture*, 1982) is a sequel to *Marxism and Culture*. A lengthy collection of interviews, *Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review* (1979), provides an accessible overview of his thought. His collections of occasional writings include *Writing in Society* (1984); the posthumous *The Politics of Modern- ism: Against the New Conformists*, edited by Tony Pinkney (1989), which includes a compelling interview of Williams by Edward Said; and *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism*, edited by Robin Gable (1989), which collects diverse essays. *What I Came to Say* (1990) offers a short political summation.

Williams edited a number of anthologies on literary figures, drama, and commu- nications, and he regularly published fiction throughout his career, including a trilogy of working-class life in Wales, *Border Country* (1960), *Second Generation* (1964), and *The Fight for Manod* (1979). He also wrote short stories, plays, and television scripts.

The secondary literature on Williams's life and work is considerable. A compre- hensive biography, Fred Inglis's *Raymond Williams* (1995) presents a detailed and sometimes anecdotal picture of Williams's life. John and Lizzie Eldridge's *Raymond Williams: Making Connections* (1994) is a useful introduction to the many aspects of Williams's work. There are a number of important collections: *Raymond Williams: Critical Perspectives*, edited by his student Terry Eagleton (1989), gathers essays by Stuart Hall, Said, Eagleton, and others, as well as an interview Eagleton conducted with Williams; *Views beyond the Border Country: Raymond Williams and Cultural Politics*, edited by Dennis L. Dworkin and Leslie G. Roman (1993); *Cultural Mate- rialism: On Raymond Williams*, edited by Christopher Prendergast (1995), which presents sophisticated examinations by contemporary critics; and *Raymond Williams Now: Knowledge, Limits, and the Future*, edited by Jeff Wallace, Rod Jones, and Sophie Nield (1997), which looks at Williams's relevance to subsequent theory. The best single-authored account, John Higgins's *Raymond Williams: Literature, Marxism and Cultural Materialism* (1999), covers all Williams's work, from his early interest in drama to his political interventions.

Raymond Williams, edited by Eagleton, appends a chronological bibliography of all of Williams's writing, as well as a selected secondary bibliography. Higgins's *Raymond Williams*, published more recently, also includes a chronological bibliography of his writings and a good listing of secondary sources.

From Marxism and Literature

Part 1, Chapter 3

Literature

. . . is relatively difficult to see 'literature' as a concept. In ordinary usage it appears to be no more than a specific description, and what is described is then, as a rule, so highly valued that there is a virtually immediate and unnot- iced transfer of the specific values of particular works and kinds of work to what operates as a concept but is still firmly believed to be actual and prac- tical. Indeed the special property of 'literature' as a concept is that it claims this kind of importance and priority, in the concrete achievements of many

ment, it can hardly be examined or questioned at all from outside. If we are to understand its significance, and the complicated facts it partially reveals and partially obscures, we must turn to examining the development of the concept itself.

In its modern form the concept of 'literature' did not emerge earlier than the eighteenth century and was not fully developed until the nineteenth century. Yet the conditions for its emergence had been developing since the Renaissance. The word itself came into English use in the fourteenth century, following French and Latin precedents; its root was Latin *littera*, a letter of the alphabet. *Litterature*, in the common early spelling, *was* then in effect a condition of reading: of being able to read and of having read. It was often close to the sense of modern *literacy*, which was not in the language until the late nineteenth century, its introduction in part made necessary by the movement of *literature* to a different sense. The normal adjective associated with literature *was literate. Literary* appeared in the sense of reading ability and experience in the seventeenth century, and did not acquire its specialized modern meaning until the eighteenth century.

Literature as a new category was then a specialization of the area formerly categorized as *rhetoric* and *grammar*:[3] a specialization to reading and, in the material context of the development of printing, to the printed word and especially the book. It was eventually to become a more general category than *poetry* or the earlier *poesy*, which had been general terms for imaginative composition; but which in relation to the development of *literature* became predominantly specialized, from the seventeenth century, to metrical composition and especially written and printed metrical composition. But *literature* was never primarily the active composition—the 'making'[4]—which poetry had described. As reading rather than writing, it was a category of a different kind. The characteristic use can be seen in Bacon—"learned in all literature and erudition, divine and humane"—and as late as Johnson—"he had probably more than common literature, as his son addresses him in one of his most elaborate Latin poems".[5] *Literature*, that is to say, was a category of use and condition rather than of production. It was a particular specialization of what had hitherto been seen as an activity or practice; and a specialization, in the circumstances, which was inevitably made in terms of social class. In its first extended sense, beyond the bare sense of 'literacy', it was a definition of 'polite' or 'humane' learning, and thus specified a particular social distinction. New political concepts of the 'nation' and new valuations of the 'vernacular' interacted with a persistent emphasis on 'literature' as reading in the 'classical' languages. But still, in this first stage, into the eighteenth century, *literature* was primarily a generalized social concept, expressing a certain (minority) level of educational achievement. This carried with it a potential and eventually realized alternative definition of *literature* as 'printed books': the objects in and through which this achievement was demonstrated.

It is important that, within the terms of this development, literature nor-

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particular great works, as against the 'abstraction' and 'generality' of other concepts and of the kinds of practice which they, by contrast, define. Thus it is common to see 'literature' defined as 'full', central, 'immediate human experience', usually with an associated reference to 'minute particulars'. By contrast, 'society' is often seen as essentially general and abstract: the summaries and averages, rather than the direct substance, of human living. Other related concepts, such as 'politics', 'sociology', or 'ideology', are similarly placed and downgraded, as mere hardened outer shells compared with the living experience of literature.

The naivety of the concept, in this familiar form, can be shown in two ways: theoretically and historically. It is true that one popular version of the concept has been developed in ways that appear to protect it; and in practice do often protect it, against any such arguments. An essential abstraction of the 'personal' and the 'immediate' is carried so far that, within this highly developed form of thought, the whole process of abstraction has been dissolved. None of its steps can be retraced, and the abstraction of the 'concrete' is a perfect and virtually unbreakable circle. Arguments from theory or from history are simply evidence of the incurable abstraction and generality, of those who are putting them forward. They can then be contemptuously rejected, often without specific reply, which would be only to fall to their level.

This is a powerful and often forbidding system of abstraction, in which the concept of 'literature' becomes actively ideological.[1] Theory can do something against it, in the necessary recognition (which ought hardly, to those who are really in contact with literature, to need any long preparation) that whatever else 'it' may be, literature is the process and the result of formal composition within the social and formal properties of a language. The effective suppression of this process and its circumstances, which is achieved by shifting the concept to an undifferentiated equivalence with 'immediate living experience' (indeed, in some cases, to more than this, so that the actual lived experiences of society and history are seen as less particular and immediate than those of literature) is an extraordinary ideological feat. The very process that is specific, that of actual composition, has effectively disappeared or has been displaced to an internal and self-proving procedure in which writing of this kind is genuinely believed to be (however many questions are then begged) 'immediate living experience' itself. Appeals to the history of literature, over its immense and extraordinarily various range, from the *Mabinogion* to *Middlemarch*, or from *Paradise Lost* to *The Prelude*,[2] cause a momentary hesitation until various dependent categories of the concept are moved into place: 'myth', 'romance', 'fiction', 'realist fiction', 'epic', 'lyric', 'autobiography'. What from another point of view might reasonably be taken as initial definitions of the processes and circumstances of composition are converted, within the ideological concept, to 'forms' of what is still triumphantly defined as 'full, central, immediate human experience'. Indeed when any concept has so profound and complex an internal specializing develop-

1. That is, plays a role in the dominant system of ideas and beliefs of modern class-based societies that, according to Marxism, operates subliminally and makes us compliant subjects.

2. Williams names major works of prose and poetry: the *Mabinogion* (comp. 14th c.), a collec-tion of medieval Welsh tales; *Middlemarch* (1871-72), a novel by George Eliot; *Paradise Lost* (1667), an epic by John Milton; and *The Prelude* (1850), a long, autobiographical poem by WILLIAM WORDSWORTH.

3. Fundamental subjects in classical and medieval education (defined much more broadly than they are today).

4. In the word *poetry* is etymologically related to the Greek verb "to make," *poiein.*

5. Written of Milton in the *Life of Milton* (1779), by SAMUEL JOHNSON (1709–1784), the English essayist, poet, and lexicographer. "Learned in all literature . . .": a description of King James I in *The Advancement of Learning* (1605), by the English philosopher and statesman Francis Bacon (1561–1626).

mally included all printed books. There was not necessary specialization to 'imaginative' works. Literature was still primarily reading ability and reading experience, and this included philosophy, history, and essays as well as poems. Were the new eighteenth-century novels 'literature'? That question was first approached, not by definition of their mode or content, but by reference to the standards of 'polite' or 'humane' learning. Was drama literature? This question was to exercise successive generations, not because of any substantial difficulty but because of the practical limits of the category. If literature was reading, could a mode written for spoken performance be said to be literature, and if not, where was Shakespeare? (But of course he could now be read; this was made possible, and 'literary', by texts.)

At one level the definition indicated by this development has persisted. Literature lost its earliest sense of reading ability and reading experience, and became an apparently objective category of printed works of a certain quality. The concerns of a 'literary editor' or a 'literary supplement' would still be defined in this way. But three complicating tendencies can then be distinguished: first, a shift from 'learning' to 'taste' or 'sensibility' as a criterion defining literary quality; second, an increasing 'specialization' of literature to 'creative' or 'imaginative' works; third, a development of the concept of 'tradition' within national terms, resulting in the more effective definition of 'a national literature'. The sources of each of these tendencies can be discerned from the Renaissance, but it was in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that they came through most powerfully, until they became, in the twentieth century, in effect received assumptions. We can look more closely at each tendency.

The shift from 'learning' to 'taste' or 'sensibility' was in effect the final stage of a shift from a para-national scholarly profession, with its original social base in the church and then in the universities, and with the classical languages as its shared material, to a profession increasingly defined by its class position, from which essentially general criteria, applicable in fields other than literature, were derived. In England certain specific features of bourgeois development strengthened the shift; the 'cultivated amateur' was one of its elements, but 'taste' and 'sensibility' were essentially unifying concepts, in class terms, and could be applied over a very wide range from public and private behaviour to (as Wordsworth complained) either wine or poetry. As subjective definitions of apparently objective criteria (which acquire their apparent objectivity from an actively consensual class sense), and at the same time apparently objective definitions of subjective qualities, 'taste' and 'sensibility' are characteristically bourgeois[6] categories.

'Criticism' is an essentially associated concept, in the same development. As a new term, from the seventeenth century, it developed (always in difficult relations with its general and persistent sense of fault-finding) from 'commentaries' on literature, within the 'learned' criterion, to the 'conscious exercise of 'taste', 'sensibility', and 'discrimination'. It became a significant special form of the general tendency in the concept of literature towards an emphasis on the use or (conspicuous) consumption[7] of works, rather than on their production. While the habits of use or consumption were still the criteria of a relatively integrated class, they had their characteristic strengths as well as weaknesses. 'Taste' in literature might be confused with 'taste' in everything else, but, within class terms, responses to literature were notably integrated, and the relative integration of the 'reading public' (a characteristic term of the definition) was a sound base for important literary production. The reliance on 'sensibility', as a special form of an attempted emphasis on whole 'human' response, had its evident weaknesses in its tendency to separate 'feeling' from 'thought' (with an associated vocabulary of 'subjective' and 'objective', 'unconscious' and 'conscious', 'private' and 'public'). At the same time it served, at its best, to insist on 'immediate' and 'living' substance (in which its contrast with the 'learned' tradition was especially marked). It was really only as this class lost its relative cohesion and dominance that the weakness of the concepts as concepts became evident. (And it is evidence of at least its residual hegemony[8] that criticism, taken as a new conscious discipline into the universities, to be practised by what became a new para-national profession, retained these founding class concepts, alongside attempts to establish new abstractly objective criteria. More seriously, criticism was taken to be a natural definition of literary studies, themselves defined by the specializing category (printed works of a certain quality) of literature. Thus these forms of the concepts of literature and criticism are, in the perspective of historical social development, forms of a class specialization and control of a general social practice, and of a class limitation of the questions which it might raise.

The process of the specialization of 'literature' to 'creative' or 'imaginative' works is very much more complicated. It is in part a major affirmative response, in the name of an essentially general human 'creativity', to the socially repressive and intellectually mechanical forms of a new social order: that of capitalism and especially industrial capitalism. The practical specialization of work to the wage-labour production of commodities; of 'being' to 'work' in these terms; of language to the passing of 'rational' or 'informative' 'messages'; of social relations to functions within a systematic economic and political order: all these pressures and limits were challenged in the name of a full and liberating 'imagination' or 'creativity'. The central Romantic assertions, which depend on these concepts, have a significantly absolute range, from politics and nature to work and art. 'Literature' acquired, in this period, a quite new resonance, but it was not yet a specialized resonance. That came later as, against the full pressures of an industrial capitalist order, the assertion became defensive and reserving where it had once been positive and absolute. In 'art' and 'literature', the essential and saving *human* qualities must, in the early phase, be 'extended'; in the later phase, 'preserved'.

Several concepts developed together. 'Art' was shifted from its sense of a general human skill to a special province, defined by 'imagination' and 'sensibility'. 'Aesthetic', in the same period, shifted from its sense of general perception to a specialized category of the 'artistic' and the 'beautiful'. 'Fiction' and 'myth' (a new term from the early nineteenth century) might be seen from the dominant class position as 'fancies' or 'lies' but from this alter-

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6. Middle-class (as distinguished from aristocratic, working-class, and unemployed, criminal, etc.).

7. "Conspicuous consumption" is a term applied by the American sociologist Thorstein Veblen in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899) to the lavish spending by the modern leisure class designed to enhance their status.

8. 'Domination; also an allusion to "cultural hegemony," a Marxist concept developed by the Italian philosopher ANTONIO GRAMSCI (1891–1937), which refers to the manufactured consent that legitimates a dominant group and unifies a society.

native position were honoured as the bearers of *'imaginative'* truth'. 'Romance' and 'romantic' were given newly specialized positive emphases. 'Literature' moved with all these. The wide general meaning was still available, but a specialized meaning came steadily to predominate, around the distinguishing qualities of the 'imaginative' and the 'aesthetic'. 'Taste' and 'sensibility' had begun as categories of a social condition. In the new specialization, comparable but more elevated qualities were assigned to 'the works themselves', the 'aesthetic objects'.

But there was still one substantial uncertainty: whether the elevated qualities were to be assigned to the 'imaginative' dimension (access to a truth 'higher' or 'deeper' than 'scientific' or 'objective' or 'everyday' reality; a claim consciously substituting itself for the traditional claims of religion) or to the 'aesthetic' dimension ('beauties' of language or style). Within the specialization of literature, alternative schools made one or other of these emphases, but there were also repeated attempts to fuse them, making 'truth' and 'beauty', or 'truth' and 'vitality of language', identical. Under continuing pressure these arguments became not only positive assertions but increasingly negative and comparative, against all other modes: not only against 'science' and 'society'—the abstract and generalizing modes of other 'kinds' of experience—and not only against other kinds of writing—now in their turn specialized as 'discursive' or 'factual'—but, ironically, against much of 'literature' itself—'bad' writing, 'popular' writing, 'mass' culture'. Thus the category which had appeared objective as 'all printed books', and which had been given a social-class foundation as 'polite learning' and the domain of 'taste' and 'sensibility', now became a necessarily selective and self-defining area. Not all 'fiction' was 'imaginative'; not all 'literature' was 'Literature'. 'Criticism' acquired a quite new and effectively primary importance, since it was now the only way of validating this specialized and selective category. It was at once a *discrimination* of the authentic 'great' or 'major' works, with a consequent grading of 'minor' works and an effective exclusion of 'bad' or 'negligible' works, and a practical realization and communication of the 'major' values. What had been claimed for 'art' and the 'creative imagination' in the central Romantic arguments was now claimed for 'criticism', as the central 'humane' activity and 'discipline'.

This development depended, in the first place, on an elaboration of the concept of 'tradition'. The idea of a 'national literature' had been growing strongly since the Renaissance. It drew on all the positive forces of cultural nationalism and its real achievements. It brought with it a sense of the 'great' ness' or 'glory' of the native language, for which before the Renaissance there had been conventional apology by comparison with a 'classical' range.[9] Each of these rich and strong achievements had been actual; the 'national literature' and the 'major language' were now indeed 'there'. But, within the specialization of 'literature', each was re-defined so that it could be brought into identity with the selective and self-defining 'literary values'. The 'national' identity, which literature' soon ceased to be a history and became a tradition. It was not even theoretically, all that had been written or all kinds of writing. It was a

selection which culminated in, and in a circular way defined; the 'literary values' which 'criticism' was asserting. There were then always local disputes about who and what should be included, or as commonly excluded, in the definition of this 'tradition'. To have been an Englishman and to have written was by no means to belong to the 'English literary tradition', just as to be an Englishman and to speak was by no means to exemplify the 'greatness' of the language—indeed the practice of most English speakers was continually cited as 'ignorance' or 'betrayal' or 'debasement' of just this 'greatness'. Selectivity and self-definition, which were the evident processes of 'criticism' of this kind, were, however, projected as 'literature' itself, as 'literary values' and even finally as 'essential Englishness': the absolute ratification of a limited and specializing consensual process. To oppose the terms of this ratification was to be 'against literature'.

It is one of the signs of the success of this categorization of literature that even Marxism has made so little headway against it. Marx himself, to be sure, hardly tried. His characteristically intelligent and informed incidental discussions of actual literature are now often cited, defensively, as evidence of the humane flexibility of Marxism, when they ought really to be cited (with no particular devaluation) as evidence of how far he remained, in these matters, within the conventions and categories of his time. The radical challenge of the emphasis on 'practical consciousness' was thus never carried through to the categories of 'literature' and 'the aesthetic', and there was always hesitation about the practical application, in this area, of propositions which were held to be central and decisive almost everywhere else.

When such application was eventually made, in the later Marxist tradition, it was of three main kinds: an attempted assimilation of 'literature' to 'ideology', which was in practice little more than banging one inadequate category against another; an effective and important inclusion of 'popular' literature—the 'literature of the people'—as a necessary but neglected part of the 'literary tradition'; and a sustained but uneven attempt to relate 'literature' to the social and economic history within which 'it' had been produced. Each of these last two attempts has been significant. In the former a 'tradition' has been genuinely extended. In the latter there has been an effective reconstitution, over wide areas, of historical social practice, which makes the abstraction of 'literary values' much more problematical, and which, more positively, allows new kinds of reading and new kinds of questions about 'the works themselves'. This has been known, especially, as 'Marxist criticism' (a radical variant of the established bourgeois practice) though other work has been done on quite different bases, from a wider social history and from wider conceptions of 'the people', the language, and the nation'.

It is significant that 'Marxist criticism' and 'Marxist literary studies' have been most successful, in ordinary terms, when they have worked within the received category of 'literature', which they may have extended or even revalued, but never radically questioned or opposed. By contrast, what looked like fundamental theoretical revaluation, in the attempted assimilation to 'ide-

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9. That is, not simply the works of Greek and Roman writers but the very languages in which they wrote were thought superior to anything that contemporary writers could achieve in the vernacular (defended by such writers as JOACHIM DU BELLAY, ca. 1522–1560).

† On the literary and aesthetic writings of the social, economic, and political philosopher KARL MARX (1818–1883); see above.

ology', was a disastrous failure, and fundamentally compromised, in this whole area, the status of Marxism itself. Yet for half a century now there have been other and more significant tendencies. Lukács[2] contributed a profound revaluation of 'the aesthetic'. The Frankfurt School,[3] with its special emphasis on art, undertook a sustained re-examination of 'artistic production', centred on the concept of 'mediation'. Goldmann[4] undertook a radical revaluation of the 'creative subject'. Marxist variants of formalism undertook radical redefinition of the processes of writing, with new uses of the concepts of 'signs' and 'texts',[5] and with a significantly related refusal of 'literature' as a category. The methods and problems indicated by these tendencies will be examined in detail later in this book.

Yet the crucial theoretical break is the recognition of 'literature' as a specializing social and historical category. It should be clear that this does not diminish its importance. Just because it is historical, a key concept of a major phase of a culture, it is decisive evidence of a particular form of the social development of language. Within its terms, work of outstanding and permanent importance was done, in specific social and cultural relationships. But what has been happening, in our own century, is a profound transformation of these relationships, directly connected with changes in the basic means of production. These changes are most evident in the new technologies of language, which have moved practice beyond the relatively uniform and specializing technology of print. The principal changes are the electronic transmission and recording of speech and of writing for speech, and the chemical and electronic composition and transmission of images,[6] in complex relations with speech and with writing for speech, and including images which can themselves be 'written'. None of these means cancels print, or even diminishes its specific importance, but they are not simple additions to it, or mere alternatives. In their complex connections and interrelations they compose a new substantial practice in social language itself, over a range from public address and manifest representation to 'inner speech' and verbal thought. For they are always more than new technologies, in the limited sense. They are *means of production*, developed in direct if complex relations with profoundly changing and extending social and cultural relationships: changes, elsewhere recognizable as deep political and economic transformations. It is in no way surprising that the specialized concept of 'literature', developed in precise forms of correspondence with a particular social class, a particular organization of learning, and the appropriate particular technology of print, should now be so often invoked in retrospective, nostalgic, or reactionary moods, as a form of opposition to what is correctly seen as a new phase of civilization. The situation is historically comparable to that invocation of the divine and the sacred, and of divine and sacred learning, against the new humanist concept of literature, in the difficult and contested transition from feudal to bourgeois society.

What can then be seen as happening, in each transition, is a historical development of social language itself: finding new means, new forms and then new definitions of a changing practical consciousness. Many of the active values of 'literature' have then to be seen, not as tied to the concept, which came to limit as well as to summarize them, but as elements of a continuing and changing practice: which already substantially, and now at the level of theoretical redefinition, is moving beyond its old forms.

1977

2. GYÖRGY LUKÁCS (1885–1971), Hungarian Marxist literary critic and philosopher.
3. A group of critics associated with the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research in Germany; influenced by Marxism, they focused on social and cultural criticism of modern society. Major members include MAX HORKHEIMER (1895–1973) and THEODOR ADORNO (1903–1969), French Marx-

ist sociologist and critic; on the "creative subject," see especially *Cultural Creation in Modern Society* (1971).
5. Terms associated with semiotics and with structuralist critics (e.g., ROLAND BARTHES), who expanded the analysis of "texts" beyond what is written.
6. That is, in audio recording, radio, film, and television.

FRANTZ FANON
1925–1961

A leading third world intellectual whose work helped inspire the struggle against colonialism and ground theoretically the subsequent growth of postcolonial culture, Frantz Fanon was one of the most influential thinkers of the twentieth century. Though born in the French Antilles, he had particular impact in Africa, where his writings undergird the works of important anticolonial writers, such as Kenya's NGUGI WA THIONG'O and Senegal's Ousmane Sembène. During the 1950s and early 1960s, Fanon's various writings, especially *Les Damnés de la terre* (1961; trans. 1963, *The Wretched of the Earth*), elaborated with passion on the historical conditions of anticolonial struggle. Significantly, Fanon articulated the role to be played by intellectuals in this struggle, offering stern (and prescient, as it turned out) warnings of the difficulties that would face emerging African nations once independence had been won.

Born to a middle-class black family on the island of Martinique, then a French colony, Fanon grew up amid descendants of African slaves brought to the Caribbean to work on the island's sugar plantations. As a teenager, he became intellectually attuned to the problems of colonialism and racism. He was politically active, participating in the guerrilla struggle against the supporters of the pro-Nazi French Vichy government. After the Free French forces gained control of Martinique in 1943, Fanon volunteered to go to Europe to fight. He emerged a decorated war hero, and he stayed in France to complete his education and train as a psychiatrist in Paris and Lyons. There he found that his service to the French state made no difference to the whites around him, who regarded black French subjects like himself as the *Other*— as alien and inferior, yet frightening and dangerous. He came to understand that despite his intelligence, high level of education, and mastery of the French language, he was regarded not as a human being, but as a specimen of an exotic and savage race, viewed through stereotypes developed over centuries of racial prejudice.

While in France, Fanon began his writing career, publishing his first book in 1952: *Peau noire, masques blancs* (trans. 1967, *Black Skin, White Masks*), which describes Fanon's growing awareness of racism in France. The work, personal and lyrical, shows the strong influence of Fanon's psychiatric training, as he concentrates primarily on the impact of racism and colonialism on the black psyche. It also engages in a critical dialogue with French existentialism, particularly that of JEAN-PAUL SARTRE, and exhibits the influence of the *négritude* movement (which called in the 1940s and 1950s for a distinctive black cultural identity rather than complete assimilation into French culture). Indeed, one of the leaders of that movement, Aimé Césaire, had been

of us and rooms of our own; if we have the habit of freedom and the courage to write exactly what we think; if we escape a little from the common sitting-room and see human beings not always in their relation to each other but in relation to reality; and the sky, too, and the trees or whatever it may be in themselves; if we look past Milton's bogey,[8] for no human being should shut out the view; if we face the fact, for it is a fact, that there is no arm to cling to, but that we go alone and that our relation is to the world of reality and not only to the world of men and women; then the opportunity will come and the dead poet who was Shakespeare's sister will put on the body which she has so often laid down. Drawing her life from the lives of the unknown who were her forerunners, as her brother did before her, she will be born. As for her coming without that preparation, without that effort on our part, without that determination that when she is born again she shall find it possible to live and write her poetry, that we cannot expect, for that would be impossible. But I maintain that she would come if we worked for her, and that so to work, even in poverty and obscurity, is worth while.

1929

Professions for Women[1]

When your secretary invited me to come here, she told me that your Society is concerned with the employment of women and she suggested that I might tell you something about my own professional experiences. It is true I am a woman; it is true I am employed; but what professional experiences have I had? It is difficult to say. My profession is literature; and in that profession there are fewer experiences for women than in any other, with the exception of the stage—fewer, I mean, that are peculiar to women. For the road was cut many years ago—by Fanny Burney, by Aphra Behn, by Harriet Martineau,[2] by Jane Austen, by George Eliot—many famous women, and many more unknown and forgotten, have been before me, making the path smooth, and regulating my steps. Thus, when I came to write, there were very few material obstacles in my way. Writing was a reputable and harmless occupation. The family peace was not broken by the scratching of a pen. No demand was made upon the family purse. For ten and sixpence one can buy paper enough to write all the plays of Shakespeare—if one has a mind that way. Pianos and models, Paris, Vienna, and Berlin, masters and mistresses, are not needed by a writer. The cheapness of writing paper is, of course, the reason why women have succeeded as writers before they have succeeded in the other professions.

But to tell you my story—it is a simple one. You have only got to figure to yourselves a girl in a bedroom with a pen in her hand. She had only to move that pen from left to right—from ten o'clock to one. Then it occurred to her to do what is simple and cheap enough after all—to slip a few of those pages into an envelope, fix a penny stamp in the corner, and drop the envelope into the red box at the corner. It was thus that I became a journalist; and my effort was rewarded on the first day of the following month—a very glorious day it was for me—by a letter from an editor containing a cheque for one pound ten shillings and sixpence. But to show you how little I deserve to be called a professional woman, how little I know of the struggles and difficulties of such lives, I have to admit that instead of spending that sum upon bread and butter, rent, shoes and stockings, or butcher's bills, I went out and bought a cat—a beautiful cat, a Persian cat, which very soon involved me in bitter disputes with my neighbours.

What could be easier than to write articles and to buy Persian cats with the profits? But wait a moment. Articles have to be about something. Mine, I seem to remember, was about a novel by a famous man. And while I was writing this review, I discovered that if I were going to review books I should need to do battle with a certain phantom. And the phantom was a woman, and when I came to know her better I called her after the heroine of a famous poem, The Angel in the House.[3] It was she who used to come between me and my paper when I was writing reviews. It was she who bothered me and wasted my time and so tormented me that at last I killed her. You who come of a younger and happier generation may not have heard of her—you may not know what I mean by The Angel in the House. I will describe her as shortly as I can. She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it—in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all—I need not say it—she was pure. Her purity was supposed to be her chief beauty—her blushes, her great grace. In those days—the last of Queen Victoria—every house had its Angel. And when I came to write I encountered her with the very first words. The shadow of her wings fell on my page; I heard the rustling of her skirts in the room. Directly, that is to say, I took my pen in my hand to review that novel by a famous man, she slipped behind me and whispered: 'My dear, you are a young woman. You are writing about a book that has been written by a man. Be sympathetic; be tender; flatter; deceive; use all the arts and wiles of our sex. Never let anybody

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8. Milton, with his unhappy first marriage, his campaign for freedom of divorce, and his deliberate subordination of Eve to Adam in *Paradise Lost*, was and often still is held to be (not altogether accurately) an example of what the present age calls a "male chauvinist" attitude to women.

1. "A paper read to the Women's Service League"
[Woolf's note].

2. Fanny Burney (1752–1840) was the author of *Evelina* and other novels; Mrs. Aphra Behn (1640–1689) was a writer of romances and plays; Harriet Martineau (1802–1876) was an economist, journalist, and novelist.

3. By Coventry Patmore (1823–1896), published 1854–62.

guess that you have a mind of your own. Above all, be pure.' And she made as if to guide my pen. I now record the one act for which I take some credit to myself, though the credit rightly belongs to some excellent ancestors of mine who left me a certain sum of money—shall we say five hundred pounds a year?—so that it was not necessary for me to depend solely on charm for my living. I turned upon her and caught her by the throat. I did my best to kill her. My excuse, if I were to be had up in a court of law, would be that I acted in self-defence. Had I not killed her she would have killed me. She would have plucked the heart out of my writing. For, as I found, directly I put pen to paper, you cannot review even a novel without having a mind of your own, without expressing what you think to be the truth about human relations, morality, sex. And all these questions, according to the Angel of the House, cannot be dealt with freely and openly by women; they must charm, they must conciliate, they must—to put it bluntly—tell lies if they are to succeed. Thus, whenever I felt the shadow of her wing or the radiance of her halo upon my page, I took up the inkpot and flung it at her. She died hard. Her fictitious nature was of great assistance to her. It is far harder to kill a phantom than a reality. She was always creeping back when I thought I had despatched her. Though I flatter myself that I killed her in the end, the struggle was severe; it took much time that had better have been spent upon learning Greek grammar; or in roaming the world in search of adventures. But it was a real experience; it was an experience that was bound to befall all women writers at that time. Killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer.

But to continue my story. The Angel was dead; what then remained? You may say that what remained was a simple and common object—a young woman in a bedroom with an inkpot. In other words, now that she had rid herself of falsehood, that young woman had only to be herself. Ah, but what is 'herself'? I mean, what is a woman? I assure you, I do not know. I do not believe that you know. I do not believe that anybody can know until she has expressed herself in all the arts and professions open to human skill. That indeed is one of the reasons why I have come here—out of respect for you, who are in process of showing us by your experiments what a woman is, who are in process of providing us, by your failures and successes, with that extremely important piece of information.

But to continue the story of my professional experiences. I made one pound ten and six by my first review; and I bought a Persian cat with the proceeds. Then I grew ambitious. A Persian cat is all very well, I said; but a Persian cat is not enough. I must have a motor-car. And it was thus that I became a novelist—for it is a very strange thing that people will give you a motor-car if you will tell them a story. It is a still stranger thing that there is nothing so delightful in the world as telling stories. It is far pleasanter than writing reviews of famous novels. And yet, if I am to obey your secretary and tell you my professional experiences as a

novelist, I must tell you about a very strange experience that befell me as a novelist. And to understand it you must try first to imagine a novelist's state of mind. I hope I am not giving away professional secrets if I say that a novelist's chief desire is to be as unconscious as possible. He has to induce in himself a state of perpetual lethargy. He wants life to proceed with the utmost quiet and regularity. He wants to see the same faces, to read the same books, to do the same things day after day, month after month, while he is writing, so that nothing may disturb or disquiet the mysterious nosings about, feelings round, darts, dashes, and sudden discoveries of that very shy and illusive spirit, the imagination. I suspect that this state is the same both for men and women. Be that as it may, I want you to imagine me writing a novel in a state of trance. I want you to figure to yourselves a girl sitting with a pen in her hand, which for minutes, and indeed for hours, she never dips into the inkpot. The image that comes to my mind when I think of this girl is the image of a fisherman lying sunk in dreams on the verge of a deep lake with a rod held out over the water. She was letting her imagination sweep unchecked round every rock and cranny of the world that lies submerged in the depths of our unconscious being. Now came the experience that I believe to be far commoner with women writers than with men. The line raced through the girl's fingers. Her imagination had rushed away. It had sought the pools, the depths, the dark places where the largest fish slumber. And then there was a smash. There was an explosion. There was foam and confusion. The imagination had dashed itself against something hard. The girl was roused from her dream. She was indeed in a state of the most acute and difficult distress. To speak without figure, she had thought of something, something about the body, about the passions which it was unfitting for her as a woman to say. Men, her reason told her, would be shocked. The consciousness of what men will say of a woman who speaks the truth about her passions had roused her from her artist's state of unconsciousness. She could write no more. The trance was over. Her imagination could work no longer. This I believe to be a very common experience with women writers—they are impeded by the extreme conventionality of the other sex. For though men sensibly allow themselves great freedom in these respects, I doubt that they realize or can control the extreme severity with which they condemn such freedom in women.

These then were two very genuine experiences of my own. These were two of the adventures of my professional life. The first—killing the Angel in the House—I think I solved. She died. But the second, telling the truth about my own experiences as a body, I do not think I solved. I doubt that any woman has solved it yet. The obstacles against her are still immensely powerful—and yet they are very difficult to define. Outwardly, what is simpler than to write books? Outwardly, what obstacles are there for a woman rather than for a man? Inwardly, I think, the case is very different; she has still many ghosts to fight, many prejudices to

overcome. Indeed it will be a long time still, I think, before a woman can sit down to write a book without finding a phantom to be slain, a rock to be dashed against. And if this is so in literature, the freest of all professions for women, how is it in the new professions which you are now for the first time entering?

Those are the questions that I should like, had I time, to ask you. And indeed, if I have laid stress upon these professional experiences of mine, it is because I believe that they are, though in different forms, yours also. Even when the path is nominally open—when there is nothing to prevent a woman from being a doctor, a lawyer, a civil servant—there are many phantoms and obstacles, as I believe, looming in her way. To discuss and define them is I think of great value and importance; for thus only can the labour be shared, the difficulties be solved. But besides this, it is necessary also to discuss the ends and the aims for which we are fighting, for which we are doing battle with these formidable obstacles. Those aims cannot be taken for granted; they must be perpetually questioned and examined. The whole position, as I see it—here in this hall surrounded by women practising for the first time in history I know not how many different professions—is one of extraordinary interest and importance. You have won rooms of your own in the house hitherto exclusively owned by men. You are able, though not without great labour and effort, to pay the rent. You are earning your five hundred pounds a year. But this freedom is only a beginning; the room is your own, but it is still bare. It has to be furnished; it has to be decorated; it has to be shared. How are you going to furnish it, how are you going to decorate it? With whom are you going to share it, and upon what terms? These, I think are questions of the utmost importance and interest. For the first time in history you are able to ask them; for the first time you are able to decide for yourselves what the answers should be. Willingly would I stay and discuss those questions and answers—but not tonight. My time is up; and I must cease.

1942.

From A Sketch of the Past[1]

[Moments of Being and Non-Being]

—I begin: the first memory.

This was of red and purple flowers on a black ground—my mother's dress; and she was sitting either in a train or in an omnibus, and I was on her lap. I therefore saw the flowers she was wearing very close; and

[1] The autobiographical essay from which this extract is taken was published in *Moments of Being*, ed. Jeanne Schulkind (1978). Woolf began it on April 18, 1939, as a relief from the labor of writing *Roger Fry: A Biography* (1940). The last date entered in the manuscript is Nov. 17, 1940, some 4 months before her death. Under the shadow of approaching war, she gropes back for the bright memories of childhood, especially those associated with the Stephens' summer home, Talland House, at St. Ives in Cornwall, the setting for her novel *To the Lighthouse*.

can still see purple and red and blue, I think, against the black; they must have been anemones, I suppose. Perhaps we were going to St Ives; more probably, for from the light it must have been evening, we were coming back to London. But it is more convenient artistically to suppose that we were going to St Ives, for that will lead to my other memory, which also seems to be my first memory, and in fact it is the most important of all my memories. If life has a base that it stands upon, if it is a bowl that one fills and fills and fills—then my bowl without a doubt stands upon this memory. It is of lying half asleep, half awake, in bed in the nursery at St Ives. It is of hearing the waves breaking, one, two, one, two, and sending a splash of water over the beach; and then breaking, one, two, one, two, behind a yellow blind. It is of hearing the blind draw its little acorn[2] across the floor as the wind blew the blind out. It is of lying and hearing this splash and seeing this light, and feeling, it is almost impossible that I should be here; of feeling the purest ecstasy I can conceive.

I could spend hours trying to write that as it should be written, in order to give the feeling which is even at this moment very strong in me. But I should fail (unless I had some wonderful luck); I dare say I should only succeed in having the luck if I had begun by describing Virginia herself.

Here I come to one of the memoir writer's difficulties—one of the reasons why, though I read so many, so many are failures. They leave out the person to whom things happened. The reason is that it is so difficult to describe any human being. So they say: "This is what happened"; but they do not say what the person was like to whom it happened. And the events mean very little unless we know first to whom they happened. Who was I then? Adeline Virginia Stephen, the second daughter of Leslie and Julia Prinsep Stephen, born on 25th January 1882, descended from a great many people, some famous, others obscure; born into a large connection, born not of rich parents, but of well-to-do parents, born into a very communicative, literate, letter writing, visiting, articulate, late nineteenth century world; so that I could if I liked to take the trouble, write a great deal here not only about my mother and father but about uncles and aunts, cousins and friends. But I do not know how much of this, or what part of this, made me feel what I felt in the nursery at St Ives. I do not know how far I differ from other people. That is another memoir writer's difficulty. Yet to describe oneself truly one must have some standard of comparison; was I clever, stupid, good looking, ugly, passionate, cold—? Owing partly to the fact that I was never at school, never competed in any way with children of my own age, I have never been able to compare my gifts and defects with other people's. But of course there was one external reason for the intensity of this first impression: the impression of the waves and the acorn on the blind; the

[2] I.e., the acorn-shaped button on the end of the blind cord.

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Wittig is the author of four novels that have been influential for feminist theorists: *The Opoponax* (1964; trans. 1966); *The Guérillères* (1969; trans. 1971); *The Lesbian Body* (1973; trans. 1975); and *Across the Acheron* (1985; trans. 1987). She also published with Sande Zeig *Lesbian Peoples: Material for a Dictionary* (1976; trans. 1987). *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*, a collection of Wittig's essays (mostly written in English for *Feminist Issues*), was published in 1992. Excerpts of Wittig's early works are included in *The New French Feminisms* (ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, 1980).

For biographical information on Wittig, see the useful entry by Jeannelle Laillou Savona in *Feminist Writers* (ed. Pamela Kester-Shelton, 1996). Most critical writing on Wittig has focused on her fiction. Alice Jardine's "Pre-Texts for the Transatlantic Feminist," *Yale French Studies* 62 (1981), and Hélène Vivienne Wenzel's "The Text as Body/Politics: An Appreciation of Monique Wittig's Writings in Context," *Feminist Studies* 7 (1981), are two of the earliest theoretical considerations of Wittig's work to appear in English. Teresa de Lauretis examines Wittig's lesbian materialism in "Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation," *Theatre Journal* 40 (1988). Diana Fuss's chapter on Monique Wittig in *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature, and Difference* (1989) and Judith Butler's in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) include important discussions of Wittig's contribution to the essentialism debate. Erika Ostrovsky's *Constant Journey: The Fiction of Monique Wittig* (1991) charts the relationship between fiction and theory in Wittig's writing. For an analysis of Wittig as a lesbian theorist, see Dianne Chisholm's "Lesbianizing Love's Body: Interventions and Imaginings of Monique Wittig," in *Reimagining Women: Representations of Women in Culture* (ed. Shirley Neuman and Glennis Stephenson, 1993), and Renate Gunther, "Are Lesbians Women? The Relationship between Lesbianism and Feminism in the Works of Luce Irigaray and Monique Wittig," in *Gay Signatures: Gay and Lesbian Theory, Fiction, and Film in France, 1945–1995* (ed. Owen Heathcote, Alex Hughes, and James S. Williams, 1998). For a bibliography of works by and about Wittig, see *French Feminist Thought: Michèle Le Doeuff, Monique Wittig, Catherine Clément: A Bibliography*, edited by Joan Nordquist (1993).

Monique Wittig

One Is Not Born a Woman

A materialist feminist[1] approach to women's oppression destroys the idea that women are a "natural group": "a racial group of a special kind, a group perceived as natural, a group of men considered as materially specific in their bodies."[2] What the analysis accomplishes on the level of ideas, practice makes actual at the level of facts: by its very existence, lesbian society destroys the artificial (social) fact constituting women as a "natural group." A lesbian society[3] pragmatically reveals that the division from men of which women have been the object is a political one and shows that we have been ideologically rebuilt into a "natural group." In the case of women, ideology goes far since our bodies as well as our minds are the product of this manip-

ulation. We have been compelled in our bodies and in our minds to correspond, feature by feature, with the *idea* of nature that has been established for us. Distorted to such an extent that our deformed body is what they call "natural," what is supposed to exist as such before oppression. Distorted to such an extent that in the end oppression seems to be a consequence of this "nature" within ourselves (a nature which is only an *idea*). What a materialist analysis does by reasoning, a lesbian society accomplishes practically: not only is there no natural group "women" (we lesbians are living proof of it), but as individuals as well we question "woman," which for us, as for Simone de Beauvoir, is only a myth. She said: "One is not born, but becomes a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine."[4]

However, most of the feminists and lesbian-feminists in America and elsewhere still believe that the basis of women's oppression *is biological as well as historical*. Some of them even claim to find their sources in Simone de Beauvoir.[5] The belief in mother right and in a "prehistory" when women created civilization (because of a biological predisposition) while the coarse and brutal men hunted (because of a biological predisposition) is symmetrical with the biologizing interpretation of history produced up to now by the class of men. It is still the same method of finding in women and men a biological explanation of their division, outside of social facts. For me this could never constitute a lesbian approach to women's oppression, since it assumes that the basis of society or the beginning of society lies in heterosexuality. Matriarchy is no less heterosexual than patriarchy: it is only the sex of the oppressor that changes. Furthermore, not only is this conception still imprisoned in the categories of sex (woman and man), but it holds onto the idea that the capacity to give birth (biology) is what defines a woman. Although practical facts and ways of living contradict this theory in lesbian society, there are lesbians who affirm that "women and men are different species or races (the words are used interchangeably): men are biologically inferior to women; male violence is a biological inevitability . . . ."[6] By doing this, by admitting that there is a "natural" division between women and men, we naturalize history; we assume that "men" and "women" have always existed and will always exist. Not only do we naturalize history, but also consequently we naturalize the social phenomena which express our oppression, making change impossible. For example, instead of seeing giving birth as a forced production, we see it as a "natural," "biological" process, forgetting that in our societies births are planned (demography), forgetting that we ourselves are programmed to produce children, while this is the only social activity "short of war"[7] that presents such a great danger of death. Thus, as long as we will be "unable to abandon by will or impulse a lifelong and centuries-old commitment to childbearing as *the* female creative act,"[8] gaining control of the production of children will mean much more than the

1. Christine Delphy, "Pour un féminisme matérialiste," *L'Arc* 61 (1975). Translated as "For a Materialist Feminism," *Feminist Issues* 1, no. 2 (winter 1981) [except as indicated, all notes are Wittig's].

2. Colette Guillaumin, "Race et Nature: Système des marques, idée de groupe naturel et rapports sociaux," *Pluriel*, no. 11 (1977). Translated as "Race and Nature: The System of Marks, the Idea of a Natural Group and Social Relationships," *Feminist Issues* 8, no. 2 (fall 1988).

3. I use the word *society* with an extended anthropological meaning; strictly speaking, it does not refer to societies, in that lesbian societies do not exist completely autonomously from heterosexual social systems.

4. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* [trans. H.M. Parshley] (New York: Bantam, 1952), p. 249. [BEAUVOIR (1908–1986), French novelist, philosopher, and feminist—editor's note.]

5. Redstockings, *Feminist Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1978), p. 18.

6. Andrea Dworkin, "Biological Superiority: The World's Most Dangerous and Deadly Idea," *Heresies* 6 (1989): 46.

7. Ti-Grace Atkinson, *Amazon Odyssey* (New York: Links Books, 1974), p. 15.

8. Dworkin, op. cit.

mere control of the material means of this production: women will have to abstract themselves from the definition "woman" which is imposed upon them.

A materialist feminist approach shows that what we take for the cause or origin of oppression is in fact only the *mark*[9] imposed by the oppressor: the "myth of woman,"[1] plus its material effects and manifestations in the appro-priated consciousness and bodies of women. Thus, this mark does not pre-date oppression: Colette Guillaumin[2] has shown that before the socioeconomic reality of black slavery, the concept of race did not exist, at least not in its modern meaning, since it was applied to the lineage of fam-ilies. However, now, *race*, exactly like *sex*, is taken as an "immediate given," a "sensible given," "physical features," belonging to a natural order. But what we believe to be a physical and direct perception is only a sophisticated and mythic construction, an "imaginary formation,"[3] which reinterprets physical features (in themselves as neutral as any others but marked by the social system) through the network of relationships in which they are perceived. (They are seen as *black*, therefore they *are* black; they are seen as *women*, therefore, they *are* women. But before being *seen* that way, they first had to be *made* that way.) Lesbians should always remember and acknowledge how "unnatural," compelling, totally oppressive, and destructive being "woman" was for us in the old days before the women's liberation movement. It was a political constraint, and those who resisted it were accused of not being "real" women. But then we were proud of it, since in the accusation there was already something like a shadow of victory: the avowal by the oppressor that "woman" is not something that goes without saying, since to be one, one has to be a "real" one. We were at the same time accused of wanting to be men. Today this double accusation has been taken up again with enthusiasm in the context of the women's liberation movement by some feminists and also, alas, by some lesbians whose political goal seems somehow to be becoming more and more "feminine." To refuse to be a woman, however, does not mean that one has to become a man. Besides, if we take as an example the perfect "butch," the classic example which provokes the most horror, whom Proust[4] would have called a woman/man, how is her alienation different from that of someone who wants to become a woman? Tweedledum and Tweedledee.[5] At least for a woman, wanting to become a man proves that she has escaped her initial programming. But even if she would like to, with all her strength, she cannot become a man. For becoming a man would demand from a woman not only a man's external appearance but his con-sciousness as well, that is, the consciousness of one who disposes by right of at least two "natural" slaves during his life span. This is impossible, and one feature of lesbian oppression consists precisely of making women out of reach for us, since women belong to men. Thus a lesbian *has* to be something else, a not-woman, a not-man, a product of society, not a product of nature, for there is no nature in society.

9. Guillaumin, op. cit.
1. Beauvoir, op. cit.
2. French sociologist and feminist theorist (b. 1934), author of *Racism, Sexism, Power, and Ide-ology* (1995) [editor's note].

4. Marcel Proust (1871–1922), French novelist [editor's note].
5. Proverbial names for indistinguishable entities, personified as two brothers in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass* (1872) [editor's note].

The refusal to become (or to remain) heterosexual always meant to refuse to become a man or a woman, consciously or not. For a lesbian this goes further than the refusal of the *role* "woman." It is the refusal of the economic, ide-ological, and political power of a man. This, we lesbians, and nonlesbians as well, knew before the beginning of the lesbian and feminist movement. How-ever, as Andrea Dworkin emphasizes, many lesbians recently "have increas-ingly tried to transform the very ideology that has enslaved us into a dynamic, religious, psychologically compelling celebration of female biological poten-tial."[6] Thus, some avenues of the feminist and lesbian movement lead us back to the myth of woman which was created by men especially for us, and with it we sink back into a natural group. Having stood up to fight for a sexless society,[7] we now find ourselves entrapped in the familiar deadlock of "woman is wonderful." Simone de Beauvoir underlined particularly the false consciousness[8] which consists of selecting among the features of the myth (that women are different from men) those which look good and using them as a definition for women. What the concept "woman is wonderful" accom-plishes is that it retains for defining women the best features (best according to whom?) which oppression has granted us, and it does not radically ques-tion the categories "man" and "woman," which are political categories and not natural givens. It puts us in a position of fighting within the class "women," not as the other classes do, for the disappearance of our class, but for the defense of "woman" and its reenforcement. It leads us to develop with complacency "new" theories about our specificity: thus, we call our passivity "nonviolence," when the main and emergent point for us is to fight our passivity (our fear, rather, a justified one). The ambiguity of the term "feminist" sums up the whole situation. What does "feminist" mean? Femi-nist is formed with the word "femme," "woman," and means: someone who fights for women. For many of us it means someone who fights for women as a class and for the disappearance of this class. For many others it means someone who fights for woman and her defense—for the myth, then, and its reenforcement. But why was the word "feminist" chosen if it retains the least ambiguity? We chose to call ourselves "feminists" ten years ago, not in order to support or reenforce the myth of woman, nor to identify ourselves with the oppressor's definition of us, but rather to affirm that our movement had a history and to emphasize the political link with the old feminist movement.

It is, then, this movement that we can put in question for the meaning that it gave to feminism. It so happens that feminism in the last century could never resolve its contradictions on the subject of nature/culture, woman/society. Women started to fight for themselves as a group and rightly considered that they shared common features as a result of oppression. But for them these features were natural and biological rather than social. They went so far as to adopt the Darwinist theory of evolution. They did not believe like Darwin, however, "that women were less evolved than men, but they did believe that male and female natures had diverged in the course of evolu-tionary development and that society at large reflected this polarization."[9]

6. Dworkin, op. cit. [Dworkin (b. 1946), American feminist writer known for opposition to pornogra-phy and claim that there is no such thing as con-sensual (heterosexual) sex—editor's note].
7. Atkinson, p. 6: "If feminism has any logic at all, it must be working for a sexless society."

reality in ways congruent with the interests of the dominant orthodoxy rather than in ways that reflect an individual's class interest [editor's note].
9. Rosalind Rosenberg, "In Search of Woman's Nature," *Feminist Studies* 3, nos. 1/2 (1975): 144. [Charles Darwin (1809–1892), English natural

knowledge, the "pure" consciousness. All that thinks per se, before all experience, has ended up in the garbage can of history, because it claimed to exist outside matter, prior to matter, and needed God, spirit, or soul to exist in such a way. This is what is called "idealism." As for individuals, they are only the product of social relations; therefore their consciousness can only be "alienated." (Marx,[3] in *The German Ideology*, says precisely that individuals of the dominating class are also alienated, although they are the direct producers of the ideas that alienate the classes oppressed by them. But since they draw visible advantages from their own alienation they can bear it without too much suffering.) There exists such a thing as class consciousness, but a consciousness which does not refer to a particular subject, except as other subjects of their class, all sharing the same consciousness. As for the practical class problems—outside of the class problems as traditionally defined—that one could encounter (for example, sexual problems), they were considered "bourgeois" problems that would disappear with the final victory of the class struggle. "Individualistic," "subjectivist," "petit bourgeois," these were the labels given to any person who had shown problems which could not be reduced to the "class struggle" itself.

Thus Marxism has denied the members of oppressed classes the attribute of being a subject. In doing this, Marxism, because of the ideological and political power this "revolutionary science" immediately exercised upon the workers' movement and all other political groups, has prevented all categories of oppressed peoples from constituting themselves historically as subjects (subjects of their struggle, for example). This means that the "masses" did not fight for themselves but for *the* party or its organizations. And when an economic transformation took place (end of private property, constitution of the socialist state), no revolutionary change took place within the new society; because the people themselves did not change.

For women, Marxism had two results. It prevented them from being aware that they are a class, and therefore from constituting themselves as a class for a very long time, by leaving the relation "women/men" outside of the social order, by turning it into a natural relation, doubtless for Marxists the only one, along with the relation of mothers to children, to be seen this way, and by hiding the class conflict between men and women behind a natural division of labor (*The German Ideology*). This concerns the theoretical (ideological) level. On the practical level, Lenin,[4] *the* party, all the communist parties up to now, including all the most radical political groups, have always reacted to any attempt on the part of women to reflect and form groups based on their own class problem with an accusation of divisiveness. By uniting, we women are dividing the strength of the people. This means that for the Marxists women *belong* either to the bourgeois class or to the proletariat class, in other words, to the men of these classes. In addition, Marxist theory does not allow women any more than other classes of oppressed people to constitute themselves as historical subjects, because Marxism does not take into account the fact that a class also consists of individuals one by one.

The failure of early feminism was that it only attacked the Darwinist charge of female inferiority, while accepting the foundations of this charge—namely, the view of woman as 'unique.'" And finally it was women scholars—and not feminists—who scientifically destroyed this theory. But the early feminists had failed to regard history as a dynamic process which develops from conflicts of interests. Furthermore, they still believed as men do that the cause (origin) of their oppression lay within themselves. And therefore after some astonishing victories the feminists of this first front found themselves at an impasse out of a lack of reasons to fight. They upheld the illogical principle of "equality in difference," an idea now being born again. They fell back into the trap which threatens us once again: the myth of woman.

Thus it is our historical task, and only ours, to define what we call oppression in materialist terms, to make it evident that women are a class, which is to say that the category "woman" as well as the category "man" are political and economic categories not eternal ones. Our fight aims to suppress men as a class, not through a genocidal, but a political struggle. Once the class "men" disappears, "women" as a class will disappear as well, for there are no slaves without masters. Our first task, it seems, is to always thoroughly dissociate "women" (the class within which we fight) and "woman," the myth. For "woman" does not exist for us: it is only an imaginary formation, while "women" is the product of a social relationship. We felt this strongly when everywhere we refused to be called a "*woman's*" liberation movement." Furthermore, we have to destroy the myth inside and outside ourselves. "Woman" is not each one of us, but the political and ideological formation which negates "women" (the product of a relation of exploitation). "Woman" is there to confuse us, to hide the reality "women." In order to be aware of being a class and to become a class we first have to kill the myth of "woman" including its most seductive aspects (I think about Virginia Woolf[2] when she said the first task of a woman writer is to kill "the angel in the house"). But to become a class we do not have to suppress our individual selves, and since no individual can be reduced to her/his oppression we are also confronted with the historical necessity of constituting ourselves as the individual subjects of our history as well. I believe this is the reason why all these attempts at "new" definitions of woman are blossoming now. What is at stake (and of course not only for women) is an individual definition as well as a class definition: For once one has acknowledged oppression, one needs to know and experience the fact that one can constitute oneself as a subject (as opposed to an object of oppression); that one can become *someone* in spite of oppression, that one has one's own identity. There is no possible fight for someone deprived of an identity, no internal motivation for fighting, since although I can fight only with others, first I fight for myself.

The question of the individual subject is historically a difficult one for everybody. Marxism, the last avatar of materialism, the science which has politically formed us, does not want to hear anything about a "subject." Marxism has rejected the transcendental subject, the subject as constitutive of

1. Ibid., p. 146.
2. English writer (1882–1941). The reference is to WOOLF's "Professions for Women" (lecture, 1931; published 1942); the "Angel" is the Victorian ideal of self-sacrificing womanhood [editor's note].
3. KARL MARX (1818–1883), German economic, social, and political philosopher; *The German Ideology* was written in 1845–46 and published in 1932 [editor's note].
4. V. I. Lenin (1870–1924), Marxist revolutionary leader and theorist of the Bolshevik revolution and first head of the new Soviet government [editor's note].

Class consciousness is not enough. We must try to understand philosophically (politically) these concepts of "subject" and "class consciousness" and how they work in relation to our history. When we discover that women are the objects of oppression and appropriation, at the very moment that we become able to perceive this, we become subjects in the sense of cognitive subjects, through an operation of abstraction. Consciousness of oppression is not only a reaction to (fight against) oppression. It is also the whole conceptual reevaluation of the social world, its whole reorganization with new concepts, from the point of view of oppression. It is what I would call the science of oppression created by the oppressed. This operation of understanding reality has to be undertaken by every one of us: call it a subjective, cognitive practice. The movement back and forth between the levels of reality (the conceptual reality and the material reality of oppression, which are both social realities) is accomplished through language.

It is we who historically must undertake the task of defining the individual subject in materialist terms. This certainly seems to be an impossibility since materialism and subjectivity have always been mutually exclusive. Nevertheless, and rather than despairing of ever understanding, we must recognize the *need* to reach subjectivity in the abandonment by many of us to the myth "woman" (the myth of woman being only a snare that holds us up). This real necessity for everyone to exist as an individual, as well as a member of a class, is perhaps the first condition for the accomplishment of a revolution, without which there can be no real fight or transformation. But the opposite is also true; without class and class consciousness there are no real subjects, only alienated individuals. For women to answer the question of the individual subject in materialist terms is first to show, as the lesbians and feminists did, that supposedly "subjective," "individual," "private" problems are in fact social problems, class problems; that sexuality is not for women an individual and subjective expression, but a social institution of violence. But once we have shown that all so-called personal problems are in fact class problems, we will still be left with the question of the subject of each singular woman—not the myth, but each one of us. At this point, let us say that a new personal and subjective definition for all humankind can only be found beyond the categories of sex (woman and man) and that the advent of individual subjects demands first destroying the categories of sex, ending the use of them, and rejecting all sciences which still use these categories as their fundamentals (practically all social sciences).

To destroy "woman" does not mean that we aim, short of physical destruction, to destroy lesbianism simultaneously with the categories of sex, because lesbianism provides for the moment the only social form in which we can live freely. Lesbian is the only concept I know of which is beyond the categories of sex (woman and man), because the designated subject (lesbian) is *not* a woman, either economically, or politically, or ideologically. For what makes a woman is a specific social relation to a man, a relation that we have previously called servitude,[5] a relation which implies personal and physical obligation as well as economic obligation ("forced residence,"[6] domestic cor-

5. In an article published in *L'Idiot International* (mai 1970), whose original title was "Pour un mouvement de libération des femmes" (For a Woman's Liberation Movement).
6. Christiane Rochefort, *Les stances à Sophie* (Paris: Grasset, 1963).

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vée, conjugal duties, unlimited production of children, etc.), a relation which lesbians escape by refusing to become or to stay heterosexual. We are escapees from our class in the same way as the American runaway slaves were when escaping slavery and becoming free. For us this is an absolute necessity; our survival demands that we contribute all our strength to the destruction of the class of women within which men appropriate women. This can be accomplished only by the destruction of heterosexuality as a social system which is based on the oppression of women by men and which produces the doctrine of the difference between the sexes to justify this oppression.

1981

SANDRA M. GILBERT

b. 1936

SUSAN GUBAR

b. 1944

Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) is a landmark of 1970s American feminism. The book encapsulates both the strengths and limitations of that first decade of "second-wave feminism." (First-wave feminism produced the Declaration of Women's Rights of 1848 and culminated in the ultimately successful campaign for female suffrage during the early twentieth century.) An outgrowth of the civil rights and student protest movements of the 1960s, second-wave feminism has proved to be among the most durable of the sixties' legacies. In its initial phase, contemporary feminists were pulled between its separatist and assimilationist tendencies. They debated whether women were better off disavowing the given order altogether, choosing instead to form their own communities, or striving for equal treatment within patriarchal institutions while working to reform them. *The Madwoman in the Attic* reflects the pressures from both sides. All parties to the dispute, however, assumed that every woman shares a set of similar experiences and that patriarchy—the male-dominated social order—is everywhere essentially the same. These assumptions became problematic later on, and they have been challenged by feminists such as BARBARA SMITH, BELL HOOKS, GLORIA ANZALDÚA, and JUDITH BUTLER.

Born in New York City, Sandra M. Gilbert attended Cornell University, where she was active in undergraduate literary circles. She received her M.A. from New York University and her Ph.D. in English literature from Columbia University. The author of six books of poetry along with her literary criticism, Gilbert has taught at California State University at Hayward, Indiana University, Princeton University, and the University of California at Davis. She and Susan Gubar (who was also born in New York City, and received her Ph.D. from the University of Iowa in 1972) met in 1973; both were young professors at Indiana University, where Gubar continues to teach. *The Madwoman in the Attic* grew out of the course in women's literature that the two team-taught. Gilbert and Gubar have continued to collaborate, while also writing single-authored books. They were jointly named *Ms.* magazine's "Woman of the Year" in 1986 for their work as editors of *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women.*

Building on the earlier 1970s feminist books by Ellen Moers and Elaine Showalter, *The Madwoman in the Attic* develops the notion that women writers can be understood as a group—and understood as "participat[ing] in a quite different literary subculture from that inhabited by male writers." Such separation is ambiguous: "exhilarating" at its best, "profoundly debilitating" at its worst. Gilbert and