as the "testament of tradition" - Harry Levin), ironically, in confrontation with all the medias business (to show how literature is still vital and unique as a means of denouncing the catastrophic state of the world: Rushdie, Fuentes, Galeano, Balestrini; to recall the mysterious and "human" dimension of the *Lebenswelt*: Saramago, J. Benet, Calvino, Perec). Finally to study it concurrently anthropologically, culturally, ethnologically: as one of the social activities not of the "Geist," but of the individuals who from time to time decide to think in letters and in narratives.

Université de Montréal

MARJORIE PERLOFF

The Return of the Repressed

In a provocative essay called "Cultural Criticism and the Politics of Selling Out," appearing in issue #2 of the new *Electronic Book Review* (www.altx.com.ebr), Michael Bérubé, himself an important cultural critic, worries about an "academic left whose chief function is to analyse and interpret the formation of the hegemonies that are actually being formed by our counterparts on the right." "I fear," Bérubé remarks with reference to Fredric Jameson's critique in *Social Text* of Tony Bennett's essay "Putting Policy in Cultural Studies," "an intellectual regime in which cultural studies is becoming nothing more than a parasitic kind of colour commentator on the new authoritarian populism of the Age of Gingrich, too busy dissecting the postmodern eugenicist-libertarian-cybernetic-fundamentalist Right to be of any use in actually opposing it" (10).

What makes Bérubé and other "Cultural Studies" advocates so uneasy is the growing recognition that *our* (i.e., the academy's) critique of the public sphere is in fact being read and discussed nowhere but in the academy itself. There is an important lesson here for Literary Studies, a field increasingly threatened, we all know, by financial cutbacks, lack of government and public support, and a dismal job market. But here it is less a question of Left versus Right ideology than of the recognition that even as English and Comparative Literature departments and Humanities Centres have turned their backs on "mere" literary or art studies, those studies are resurfacing *outside the walls* of the university. A concern for poiesis, I want to suggest here, can never be eradicated; if the university will not accommodate it, as is now too often the case, it inevitably moves elsewhere.

Let me begin with a personal anecdote. When my daughter Carey Perloff took over the directorship of the American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco four years ago, she instituted a series of symposia to accompany each production, a series for which she even received a sizable grant from the NEH. The symposia are usually on Monday evenings when the theatre is dark and are free to the public; additional discussion groups occur after particular performances. For *The Tempest*, for example, Carey invited Stephen Greenblatt (Berkeley) and Harry Berger (Santa Cruz) to speak; for Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia*, Katherine Hayles (UCLA) addressed the issue of chaos theory and narrative structure; for Euripides' *Hecuba*, the symposium included law professor Jeremy Waldron (Boalt), classicist Helena Foley (Barnard), and the anthropologist Martin Bernal (Cornell). And so on, I myself am shortly going to be on a panel discussing the new "language" theatre with poet-dramatist-novelist Mac Wellman and poet-dramatist-publisher Douglas Messerli, in conjuction with the production of Eric Overmyer's *Dark Rapture*.

Very few scholars turn down the invitation to speak at ACT even though the honorarium is small, evidently because they are pleased to have a chance to address a non-academic audience. And on these occasions, the theatre has been packed. People — lawyers, physicians, business executives, Silicon valley types, students, artists, actors, designers — will sit for hours just to argue for and against ACT's interpretation of Caliban's role in *The Tempest*, about the use of mathematical models in determining the plot line of *Arcadia*, or about the efficacy of Paul Schmidt's hypercolloquial translation of Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*. The discussion, in other words, deals with those "literary" issues we used to discuss in the classroom — issues which are now considered hopelessly *passé* by an "enlightened" professoriat that has abandoned genius theory, concepts of literary value, and the pleasure principle, in its zeal to unmask the oppressiveness of various discourses, of defining subject position and agency in the writings of the marginalized, and so on.

But the drive to produce, participate in, enjoy, and understand art-making is not that easily repressed. Even as literature departments no longer offer courses that allow for discussion of the problems of translating Chekhov for a contemporary audience or sponsor anything like an open forum in which students might discuss, say, the meaning of "magic" in *The Tempest*, the venues have moved elsewhere. At ACT, when the symposium is over, the audience (an audience, incidentally, racially and ethnically quite mixed, reflecting, especially, San Francisco's large Asian-American population) seems to be quite disappointed; there are still hands up, people waiting to express themselves on this or that issue.

Or, to take quite a different example, consider the recent success of the Vermeer exhibition at the National Gallery in Washington, D.C. Here is an item from the New York Times for February 19, 1996:

> At 9 P.M. on Saturday, Feb. 10, a line started forming outside the National Gallery of Art in Washington. The visitors were determined to see the blockbuster Vermeer exhibition when it opened for its final day at 11 the next morning. The museum reported that the 14-hour wait was the longest recorded for any exhibition there.
> "People came with pup tents, mattresses and futons," said Deborah Ziska, a spokeswoman for the National Gallery. There was a continuous candlelight chess game going, and even someone selling a T-shirt that read 'I Survived the Vermeer Line.'".... The show attracted a total of 327,551 visitors [during a 70-day run].... the Vermeer catalogue ($19.95 in paperback; $45, hard-cover) has become a best-seller, setting a record with 55, 498 copies. (*New York Times*, 19 Feb. 1996, B4).

How do we explain this phenomenon? We can attribute some of the fuss to publicity, to the media presentation of the show as the "one and only" chance to see so many of the extremely rare Vermeers in one place at one time. But publicity cannot account for the fact that people — again, all sorts of people — lined up for weeks at 5:30 A.M. in sub-zero temperatures just to get into the museum and see twenty-two small paintings that have neither the sex appeal of Mapplethorpe nor the splashiness of such blockbuster shows as the "Treasures of Tutamkhamun."

On the day I attended in early January, the crowd, once inside the building, was curiously subdued and reverential. People patiently waited their turn to stand in front of the *View of Delft* (the painting Proust's Swann wanted to see so badly when he was on his deathbed that he kept dreaming of the little yellow patch in the lower left and how gorgeously it was painted), just to concentrate what seems at first glance an ordinary seventeenth-century Dutch townscape — silhouette of red and brown brick houses and church steeples along a nondescript waterfront.

At Stanford, I don't believe we have had a course on Vermeer on the books in years. Indeed, single-artist courses are considered hopelessly tacky *vis-à-vis* such offerings as "Disciplining the Female Body in Surrealist Photography" or "Abstract Expressionism, Pop, and the Commodity Fetish." But somehow the "public," with its camp stools and pup tents was lined up around Constitution Avenue waiting for Vermeer. It is a phenomenon that should, to say the least, give us academics pause.

And this brings me to the consideration of poetry studies in the late nineties. Those of us involved in the poetry world know that within the academy, especially the Ivy League academy, the study of poetry is considered largely retro and elitist, it being more difficult to pinpoint political and ideological issues in poetry than in fiction, not to mention cultural theory. For every course that actually studies the works of specific poets, there must be dozens that study the theories of Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Judith Butler and Cornel West.

But a specter is haunting these cultural / postcolonial / gender studies classrooms, the specter of poetry. My colleague Robert Harrison and I are currently teaching an undergraduate Humanities Honours seminar on those two DWEM poets Baudelaire and Rimbaud. The course has no particular "angle" and is not designed to illustrate any particular hermeneutic approach; we are simply reading, with as much care as possible to the complexities and aporias of these difficult texts, the poems themselves. The first day forty-five students showed up, including a large number of graduate students, all insisting that they badly wanted to take just this class. Weeding out the applicants, we ended up with a group of twenty-eight, including about ten grad students in fields as diverse as Philosophy, Psychology, and Slavic Studies. It has been an exciting class but sometimes discouraging when we realise how little background our students have. Thus a very bright and successful senior Modern Thought and Literature major came in to see me to explain his less

than outstanding performance thus far. "Baudelaire," he told me, "is the first poet I have ever read."

Once exposed, however, this student and others like him catch the bug. And the predisposition, I would argue, is always ready there because the live poetry scene *outside* the university is currently so exciting and engaging. In New York and San Francisco, readings of new and experimental poetries are jammed. In New Hampshire, Roman Huk is currently organizing "Assembling Alternatives: An International Poetry Conference / Festival" held in late August 1996 that promised to be, like the Robin Blaser festival held in Vancouver in 1995, a major event. Roman Huk is a professor at the University of New Hampshire, but she has organized the festival largely on her own steam, found funding (non-university) for some of the foreign poets, and the rest of us were to pay our own way. Was it worth it? Well, it was a chance to hear and talk with Charles Bernstein, Johanna Drucker, Steve McCaffery, Nathaniel Mackey, Joan Retallack, Tom Raworth and Denise Riley from the UK, and poets from as far away as Taiwan and Tasmania. What more could one want?

One of the subjects discussed in New Hampshire is, in Huk's words, "How changing poetries in new cultural contexts force us to rethink old debates about the subject, reader, and politics of form." One would think this topic would be of central interest to Comparative Literature faculties and students, but, at least at my own university, poetry has, on the contrary, been made as invisible as possible. Indeed it is fair to say that poetry (literature in general) is only permitted to appear in "and" and "in" constructions, as in the ubiquitous conference title "Literature *and* the Law," or the journal article title "Interrogating Domestic Ideology *in* American Women's Poetry" (the lead essay in the Winter 1995 issue of *American Literary History*). But the idea of *poetry* as a language construct, poetry as delight, poetry as itself a form of knowledge rather than as a conduit for domestic or any other ideology is rejected by most academies.

Accordingly, poetry must — and does — move out into the streets — or, more accurately, out onto the electronic SuperHighway. Bob Holman's poetry slams at the Nyorcan Café may not convey the best that is known and thought in the world, but their energy and vitality testify to the simple fact that the "public" — a sizable public — do care about poetry. The Electronic Poetry Center at Buffalo, now read around the world on the Internet, is an amazing facility; every day I am astonished by newcomers from nations around the globe who are participating in the conversation. Individual professors like Al Filreis at Penn (see his Home Page) have brought serious postmodern poetries to classes of engineers and Wharton School business students. Or again, take the activity on the John Cage List (Silence@bga.com). On February 8, 1996, the following posting appeared:

> I'm a 17-year-old music student from the UK. As part of my A level examination (June 1997) coursework I have to write a dissertation on anything musical. However, after hearing some of Cage's works (Amores is one of the set works) I was really enchanted, and decided to try and find out as much as I could about him. I also decided that it would be great to make him the subject of my coursework (not to mention different — everyone else writes about Bach chorales, and Freddie Murcury apparently!). Anyway, after finding minimal information in encyclopedias etc., I decided to 'surf the net' to see what I could find. Imagine my delight when I discovered a whole mailing list dedicated to him!!!

And, having raised various issues about Cage and Zen Buddhism, the writer signed off as "Helen."

I found Helen's posting extremely moving in its sense of discovery. She isn't, evidently, listening to Cage's music because it's fashionable: in the UK, let us remember, Cage continues, at least in the pages of leading periodicals like *The London Review of Books*, to be regarded as somewhat of a hoax: the American who wrote a piece for piano consisting of four minutes and thirty-three seconds of silence! And even in the United States, one will not find Cage's work figuring much in the university curriculum, certainly not in English and/or Cultural Studies departments. So seventeen-year-olds who are interested will increasingly turn elsewhere — most probably, like Helen, to surfing the net.

It will be objected, of course, that British secondary-school students who take A levels are already an elite group even as it will be objected, by some readers of this essay, that ACT patrons, National Gallery goers, and those who attend avant-garde poetry festivals belong to a particular elite. My reply to this is simple. The left intellectuals to whom Bérubé refers — say, Fredric Jameson critiquing Tony Bennett's "Putting Policy into Cultural Studies" in *Social Text* — are not exactly writing for the larger public either. They are writing for one another, refining specific points in what is an ongoing and increasingly arid neo-Marxist argument. Indeed, the special skills and knowledge required to read such an article are at least as "elitist" as the knowledge required to discuss a performance of a Chekhov play or a poem by Susan Howe. And it can be argued that if we really do want to produce some kind of rapprochement with "the public," perhaps it is time, not to "sell out," as Bérubé fears he is doing when he lets the *New Yorker* editor cut and rearrange his prose, but to ask ourselves what our training in literary theory, history, and criticism actually enables us to do for the sizable public that is finding it cannot, after all, do without the pleasures of the text.

None of this is to suggest that literary studies can or should go back to what they were in the "good old days." The historical study of the canon —

a fixed number of set texts submitted to set methods of interpretation — is clearly a thing of the past. But what is not a thing of the past — and this is where I differ from many of my colleagues — is literature itself, however differently "literature" may manifest itself in the information age. The first step toward "saving" our discipline at a time of public indifference and draconian budget cuts is to turn our attention to the radical literature and art works actually being produced at the present time — from the video works of Bill Viola to the theatre works of Mac Wellman and Susan-Lori Parks, to the "conceptual" poetries of Lyn Hejinian, Charles Bernstein, and Steve McCaffery. Exposure to these works will, in turn, send students back to the relevant sources: McCaffery's work, for example, contains many echoes of Renaissance English literature, even as Hejinian *Oxota* is a postmodern version of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*. I can conceive of an imaginative curriculum, adjusted, I would hope, to fit the needs of the individual student, that would allow for broad and exciting literary study across periods, national literatures, and genres. But it will not happen until we stop apologizing for our discipline, stop trying to turn it into pseudo-economics or politics and recognise that, however thoroughly we may want to revise traditional paradigms for literary study, *literature* itself — that elusive entity that, as Wittgenstein repeatedly remarked, cannot be defined even though we recognise it easily in its individual manifestations — shows no signs of going away.

Stanford University

MIGUEL TAMEN

The Economics of Criticism

Criticism is a way of dealing with language, and it has been respectable for quite some time now. Respectability comes with acknowledged usage, and such usage determines what criticism is worth. There is then a whole economics of criticism. By "economics" I mean a set of domestic laws. Since criticism is a way of dealing with language, the economics of criticism has less to do with matters of money (although money matters, of course) than with a set of homely precepts concerning language. Unhappily, I can only briefly mention two crucial aspects of criticism. (The first one will, however, reemerge towards the end of this essay).

This first aspect is one which defines language in terms of kind and *specific* kinds at that. This means, among other things, that criticism has always been special-language criticism - or *art* criticism (I include here literary criticism proper). The problems of the limits of a given language, as well as of the limits of discourse have therefore been crucial to criticism from its very beginnings. When in the late 1760s Kant was looking for a name for the kind of philosophy he was interested in, he called it "criticism." The reason was perhaps that Kant recognized that art criticism had been in a roundabout sort of way taking care of what for Kant was the ultimate philosophical business: an investigation into the limits of some thing (later on in his life, however, Kant compared literary critics to cooks, a comparison which is hardly complimentary).

The second crucial aspect is the relationship between the economics of criticism and the economics of installments. It is important to remember that literary criticism is a twentieth-century phenomenon. Although one does find collections of disparate articles, essays, prefaces and footnotes before 1900, it is hardly of the same ilk. This means that, contrary to philosophy, concerns with a unified doctrine were foreign to critics. Dr. Johnson's critical doctrine is a side effect of the somewhat later genre of the historiography of criticism (Dr. Johnson, of course, had general ideas about language, about literature, and about art, but he, like Sainte-Beuve, or Friedrich Schlegel, had the more pressing obligation of telling the truth every other week).

If criticism is a way of dealing with language, and if criticism came to be a respectable way of doing so, then there is probably a way of making language respectable. Since the respectability of criticism is its very use, it follows that *useful* language be the object of language criticism. There is a paradox here, for when art is and has been compared to language, art is and has been typically described as useless language. Some followers of Kant, however, established the intriguing possibility of a useless something's being useful by virtue of its very uselessness. Shortly thereafter, criticism and