

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Borders, Cultures, and Spatial Politics

The question is . . . what social effects effects are produced by the knowledges disseminated in the university, and by the manner of their dissemination.

—John Guillory, *Cultural Capital*

Since the 1987 publication of Houston Baker's ground-breaking study, *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*, and other equally seminal works on modernism and gender, such as Bonnie Kime Scott's *The Gender of Modernism* (1990), modernist scholarship has been increasingly characterized by revision, to an extent that threatens to bring about nothing short of a revolution in the field. Followed by such studies as James de Jongh's *Vicious Modernism* (1990), Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (1993), Walter Kalaidjian's *American Culture Between the Wars* (1993), and Michael North's *The Dialect of Modernism* (1994) among others, the exploration of the complex interrelationships between race and modernity begun in Baker's challenging work has become an important and challenging avenue in modernist studies, opening many new doors to cultural understanding of this time in literary history.

While all of these works have provided invaluable engagements with the glaring lacunae in modernist studies regarding the literary contributions to modern culture of both African-Americans and other black diasporic cultures, as well as other traditionally excluded and/or neglected groups, those that deal with race are largely limited to the study of black authors alone. Those among such studies that are not limited in this way also do not substantially explore the interrelationships between black and Euro-American cultural contributions, or investigate what such an analysis could bring to our understanding of roughly the first half of the twentieth century: a time of great upheaval and massive technological and cultural change, that would

seem radically to contradict the neat borders and boundaries by which it is commonly described.

In this book, I seek to broaden the cultural frame within which it is possible to study and understand modern culture, through expanding the examination of race and modernity beyond conventional borders. By reading the work of Marcel Proust, James Joyce and James Baldwin outside the traditional parameters within which their work has been primarily understood in relation to their nationality and/or race, I hope to establish the foundation for a larger vision of modern culture, one that would recognize the significance of instances of cultural multiplicity and hybrid identity in any more complete understanding of modernity. Reading James Baldwin's work in this context becomes, then, not an effort to prove that it has "modern" characteristics, or that it is "good enough" to be considered as such, but the endeavor to discover more directly what its *inclusion* can tell us about the processes of its *exclusion*. Such discussion must also, inevitably, raise the issues of canon revision and the proper and/or most efficacious means of bringing it about.

But approaching these issues from the oppositional perspective often put forward by conventional views of canon revision not only predetermines the avenues by which such issues may be investigated; it also leaves unexplored an underlying assumption of incommensurable cultural difference that exists on both sides of whatever issue, and by which "canonical" and "non-canonical" authors have often traditionally been separated. This assumption is difficult to examine, as it is naturalized because masked by the presupposition that the only way to address these issues is through analyzing them within a paradigm of inclusion or exclusion with regard to a seemingly self-evident canon of established authors. Thus, one of the most important concerns this book will explore is the way in which the problem of difference, as it is made manifest in this paradigm of inclusion and exclusion, actually figures as a hidden obstacle in canon revision. When the notion of cultural difference is articulated as incommensurable, it becomes nearly impossible to discover an equitable way to address the interpretive and epistemological difficulties raised by the act of canon revision, which is also often intimately concerned with the vagaries of cultural difference.

Reading on the Edge is concerned with precisely this issue, and its implications for the study of literary modernism within a broad vision of modern culture. In this study, I argue that although the recent revisionist trend in modern scholarship broadens our understanding of cultural possibility in the roughly first half of the twentieth century, it often fragments, rather than expands, our understanding of the modern, because it does not analyze the significance of intertextuality among modern works from disparate cultural contexts. This book asserts that in order to apprehend the true complexity of modern experience, we must read modernity "on the edge," that is,

against the critical trends and institutional structures that have not only engendered modernism as primarily a Euro-American cultural movement, but which have also encouraged the development of these various new and largely disconnected “modernisms.” I suggest that more profound connections between modern works from disparate cultural contexts do indeed exist, but that because they represent a cultural excess that is not easily assimilated to existing disciplinary classifications, these connections are often lost as we “read” modern experience into more conventional contexts. While the separate and distinct “modernisms” that reflect these contexts may certainly allow us to recognize the multiplicity of modern experience on the surface, they also simultaneously deny us the opportunity to examine its deeper implications for our understanding of modern culture as a whole. In its analysis of the problem of difference, then, this book thus moves beyond the binary opposition of inclusion/exclusion (by which efforts at canon revision are typically characterized)—goes over the edge, so to speak—in advancing a notion of cultural difference that deconstructs the traditional, oppositional understanding of “self” and “other” upon which Western culture has historically been based.¹ In doing this, it also explores a cultural construction that does not attempt to transcend cultural difference, subsuming that difference into what some might call a “culture of the same” which would deny any possibility of traditionally conceived authenticity. Rather, the concept of culture elaborated in this book does not participate in this oppositional framework at all.

Here, “reading on the edge” suggests the exploration and analysis of representations of cultural experience that exist beyond those to be found in conventional articulations of collective, ostensibly ethnically and/or racially pure, nationally-defined notions of identity. This book discusses instead the significance of racial and cultural hybridities whose intermixture places individual authors—in this case, Marcel Proust, James Joyce, and James Baldwin—and their cultural representations in various contexts more or less outside of pre-constructed traditional paradigms of authorized subjectivity and/or identity. Representations of such cultural experiences, if they are to be considered at all, must be (and, historically, have been) *read* into more conventional contexts, and all excess simply filtered out—in other words, silenced.

In studying the implications of this for our understanding of Proust, Joyce, and Baldwin, this book reconceives the notion of exile in modern culture by redefining and then positing it as a new interpretive ground upon which to reconfigure conventionally accepted aesthetic and cultural differences their work in order to retrieve their previously unexplored similarities, silenced as part of that cultural excess that cannot easily be read within more narrowly defined cultural and linguistic disciplinary constraints. Exile is here broadly defined to include the alienation often brought about by the experi-

ence of oppression and/or exclusion as a result of, for example, race or sexual preference. Pictured as exiles—Joyce and Baldwin as expatriates, Proust as a long-term recluse, Joyce as a colonial subject, Proust and Baldwin as homosexuals—all three of these authors share, and evidence in their work, what I identify as an important yet neglected and distinctly modern characteristic: that of hybrid and/or multiple cultural identity. By focusing on the silenced and submerged intertextual meaning of the markers of such hybrid and multiple identity in these authors' work, *Reading on the Edge* disrupts the traditional divide between Euro-American modernism and its "others," thereby enlarging our understanding toward a more comprehensive, and transformative, vision of modern experience and culture.

This book thus reads culture "on the edge" because it delves into the voiceless silence of cultural excess—into those cultural locations of identity that are, for the most part, voiceless because not centered in constellations of authorized group identity,² and which have, therefore, remained culturally unauthorized, unsanctioned, and illegitimate, and, above all, mute; or, if such an identity participates in more than one authorized collective group identity by virtue of multiple cultural locations,³ its voice is often fractured along the fault lines that differentiate and divide these collective identities. To "read on the edge" in this instance means to risk the denial of fracture—to derive concepts of "self" and "identity" from a ground characterized by multiplicity, hybridity, changeability and instability, as opposed to what Paul Gilroy would call a kind of "ethnic absolutism,"⁴ or the positing of a solid, often essentialized, ostensibly stable ground upon which readings of singular, racially and/or ethnically pure notions of "self" and "identity" may be constructed. This is not to say that the present text's reading of "self" and "identity" is the "right" one and the other (or any other) reading the "wrong" one. It is to say, however, that the powerful attraction of the latter type of reading is often so forceful as to utterly silence notions of "self" and "identity" derived from any other type of ground. To "read on the edge" is thus to read the cultural significance of that silence.

Such cultural experiences and representations as those described in relation to the three authors to be studied here might necessarily be perceived as individual and particular from a more conventional cultural perspective. Yet, in terms of their mutual silencing, they may also be perceived as very much collective—albeit not in the traditional sense of collectivity—if viewed from a non-conventional cultural perspective that would recognize the existence in multiple cultural contexts of a cultural level such as this one. Using the metaphor of a cliff, then, this book suggests the cultural and interpretive limit beyond which it is no longer "safe" to go—beyond which, epistemologically, there is, seemingly, nothing but the open air—or, perhaps, in the eyes of many cultural conservatives, beyond which there is only a form of

pluralist anarchy, confusion and dangerous amalgamation, in which true “culture” becomes an anomaly and what some would call the multicultural onslaught erases all possibility of collective historical identity.⁵

In this book, I am interested specifically in the way in which these issues relate to the articulation of cultural difference found in the twentieth-century notion of modernity through its transformation into those knowledges I have identified as the interpretive readings that have served, from the late 1980s to the present time, to create numerous “modernisms”—each its own separate, culturally distinct modern understanding—rather than a comprehensive rearticulation of the modern experience itself. My primary interest is in the process by which such readings are then disseminated in the university, becoming the sanctioned mode by which our understanding of the modern is apprehended (or the production of culture).⁶ I have called this process the “politics of cultural space.” This notion encompasses the cultural “spaces” created by sanctioned “readings” of texts, yet it also encompasses an important, yet largely hidden aspect of silencing within such readings: underlying assumptions of incommensurable difference located in the geographical, national, racial, ethnic and gender foundations of conventionally defined collectivities, which then become the authorized objects of study around which literary canons are produced, canonicity determined, canon formation achieved and legitimized, and knowledges about them thus disseminated through the university. This book is, then, also largely about how the problem of incommensurable difference figures in cultural understanding, as well as how this has functioned in the production of our notions of literary “culture” itself, in the formation, legitimization and dissemination of the canons by which such cultural understanding is normally apprehended. In the case of literary modernism and modernity, this has resulted in a fracturing of our understanding of the modern along strictly drawn lines of cultural difference that deny and/or distort the pervasiveness of modern experience and its inherent propensity to bulge across such borders.

Through examining this cultural process, or the politics of cultural space, it becomes possible to analyze much more closely the significance of the aforementioned assumption of incommensurable difference that often lies silently at the heart of both sides of the debate on canon revision. Within the production of culture, an activity that lies at the heart of the politics of cultural space, there exist a number of actors: the scholar-critic, the reader (both professional and ordinary), the text, and the university. Traditionally, the production of culture in English studies has focused on the meanings generated by the text and fleshed out in our readings of particular texts: in the national literature context this has focused on the linguistic permutations of the text alone; in the context of comparative literature, it has focused on this in addition to the particular problems of polyglossia and translation,

and the cultural frameworks of texts from several languages. Each context, however, has traditionally ignored the potential influence on our readings of the political, historical, sociological, and/or psychological contexts of the text, viewing these as a substantial deemphasis on the specifically “literary” value of whatever text in question, which should be able to stand on its own.

In this book, I study this process, the politics of cultural space, as it relates to literary modernism and modernity from these two perspectives—that of the national literatures, and that of comparative literature. This double-edged point of view is necessary for three reasons. First, the problem of “difference” figures differently in each of these two contexts. While the national literatures (in this case that of English) have in large part excluded cultural difference by the singular nature of their object of study,⁷ comparative literature has traditionally embraced such difference, in its emphasis on multilingual, multicultural study across disciplinary boundaries, and in its advancement of the notion of *Weltliteratur*, or “world literature,” in which such difference is to be transcended in seeking to achieve the broader goals of unity and human understanding.

Second, the process that I have identified as the politics of cultural space is particularly conflictual in the subfield of literary modernism and modernity. Here, in addition to the conflicts represented in the debate on canon revision, the national literatures and comparative literature meet and clash in a more pointed conflict concerning how each will articulate the cultural space of modernity—something to which we will return in more detail in chapter 2.

The third reason for discussing the problem of difference from these two perspectives has to do with how it figures more generally in twentieth-century literary studies. The twentieth century saw the professionalization first of English literature, then, in the 1920s, that of American literature, then after World War II, that of comparative literature.⁸ In the early part of the century, the institutionalization of mainstream Euro-American literary modernism⁹ in North American universities created a number of interpretive and epistemological difficulties that are still being debated today, as we shall discuss further in chapter 2. In the early 1970s, the institutionalization of African-American literature and of women’s literature and feminist theory in North American universities helped to bring about an unprecedented change in the way in which the role of literary studies in the production of culture is perceived, the way in which those involved in it do their work, and the range of cultural representations available for consumption to the ordinary reader, and for study to the scholar-critic. The early and mid-nineteen-nineties have brought an even greater challenge—the pressure to re-create comparative literature’s traditional notion of *Weltliteratur* on a truly global scale, as the need to make sense of the influx of literatures and epistemologies from previously colonized

countries and the literary voices of oppressed or marginalized peoples within the borders of what have traditionally been represented as culturally homogeneous nation-states began to demand a radical alteration of the traditional map of literary studies in all fields and languages.¹⁰

This explosion has had (and will have) the effect of opening up an even broader array of literary materials to the ordinary reader, but in the discipline of English literature, it has also only heated up the intensity of the ongoing debate on canon revision. For both comparative literature and the national literatures, the issue has now become the proper place of a relatively new literary approach, that of cultural studies,¹¹ both in their fields and in the university. The debate on cultural studies, which hinges very closely on that of canon revision, is extremely wide-ranging, far too expansive for sustained analysis in the present discussion. It will suffice here to suggest the most important points of differentiation between comparative literature and the national literatures with regard to the issue, as well as how each perspective is currently approaching it, before continuing to elaborate on the scope of this book.

“CULTURAL” STUDIES/“CULTURE” STUDIES

Broadly, cultural studies¹² is a critical construct that arises from the desire to bring the external cultural context, long held at loggerheads with the study of literature, back into its purview. It has its origins in the Birmingham School in Britain, influenced by such scholar-critics as Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy, but in its North American form it is substantially different from the British one. While in Great Britain “cultural studies” grew out of the analysis of the cultural representations of the British working class, the American version, which some are calling “culture”¹³ rather than “cultural” studies, seems to be a conglomeration of a number of approaches, most of them theoretical—among these are feminist theory, black studies, deconstruction, psychoanalytic theory, Marxist theory, gay and lesbian theory, postcolonial theory, and discourse analysis. As the great variety of perspectives listed here would suggest, there are potentially any number of culture/cultural studies approaches at any given moment (one of the most important problems many more traditional critics may have with this burgeoning area of literary study), focusing on any number of cultural representations in any number of literary historical periods.

They are all, however, united in the commitment to studying literary texts as involved in complex and interrelated social systems, consisting of authors and their texts, readers, teachers, students, and culture and its institutions.¹⁴ Those who adopt culture studies approaches “maintain that literary texts are always cultural texts and that readers read differently according to

the cultures from which they derive their identities.”¹⁵ This suggests, however, a very important shift in the way in which the object of literary study is perceived, as those involved in teaching, studying, and considering literature from this perspective would also primarily “see themselves . . . as interrogating cultural phenomena rather than elucidating literary masterpieces.”¹⁶

CULTURE STUDIES AND NEW CRITICAL CULTURE

Viewed from a literary historical perspective, it becomes very easy to understand how an approach such as that of culture/cultural studies might seem especially problematic from a traditional point of view, one that would perhaps emphasize an understanding of literature as the revered repository of national cultural heritage. When English literary studies was still in the process of being professionalized in the early to mid-twentieth century, its institutionalization in the university took place in tandem with just such a view as this—that of the New Criticism—which, in its focus on the formal properties of the text (although it did not in itself espouse the development of a nationally defined culture) also lent itself very well to the endeavor to create a notion of homogeneous national culture through literary understanding.¹⁷ In emphasizing “close reading” and the separation of literary art from socio-historico-political concerns, the New Criticism “provided an attractive model for studying literature because it concentrated on single works (usually a poem), seemed to require no knowledge of historical context or of an author’s biography or other works, and did not force readers to consider complex, ambiguous relations between literature and social experience.”¹⁸

It is important to note here that the institutionalization of Euro-American literary modernism in the North American university also came about at this fortuitous moment. Although at first it took a somewhat different tack in terms of its relation to established literary culture,¹⁹ nevertheless, its arcane language and obscure forms lent themselves quite easily to the classroom endeavors of the New Critical scholar-critic. With his or her superior literary and cultural knowledge and New Critical techniques, such a scholar-critic was invested with the sacred task of explication, of helping students through the painstaking and laborious process of deriving meaning from difficult texts, guiding them through the experience of epiphany. From its advent never understood to possess the potential to instill traditional, collective cultural values, Euro-American literary modernism was viewed askance in the university until nearly midcentury, surviving until then largely through the critical efforts of many of its own proponents, such as T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Ford Madox Ford, and Virginia Woolf.²⁰

But in the framework of the New Criticism, Euro-American literary modernism offered a different kind of cultural value than that established in

and for the traditional role of literature—one of near reverence for the “genius” of the modern author, and the seemingly superhuman erudition of the scholar-critic who could so skillfully unlock the doors to the endless and profound pearls of meaning hidden deep within the modern text (an issue to which we will return in both chapters 2 and 4). However, as concerns the institutionalization of Euro-American literary modernism in connection with the New Criticism, I also want to suggest something else: that these two literary phenomena linked so well precisely *because* the New Criticism helped to separate art from society at a very problematic and war-torn era in world history, when it could indeed have seemed that analysis of the socio-historico-political events and conditions behind modern texts could bring nothing but the knowledge of a worldwide and seemingly permanent exodus from the aesthetic, nationalistic, and/or moral values that literature had historically been construed to represent. Euro-American literary modernism is thus often put forward as a moment when salvation was sought through art, when Euro-America looked at its troubled cultural history and retreated into a utopic world of aesthetic beauty, in which artistic experimentation would serve not only to make sense of the horrors of modern society, but would also restore some of the moral values that it had lost.²¹

NEW CRITICISM AND THE SOCIOCULTURAL ROLE OF THE UNIVERSITY

Outside of its relation to Euro-American literary modernism, however, the New Criticism was, as previously mentioned, quite instrumental in helping to bring about some of the larger cultural goals of literary study within the university, most importantly those having to do with cultural homogenization, and its underlying emphasis on national affiliation.²² Thus, literature could be studied in the form of nationally defined “canons,” each text included on whatever canon having gained that status as a result of its having withstood the test of time and thereby proving itself deserving of such honor, or due to the degree of its “national representativeness”—its representation of the values considered important to the formation and cultural establishment of the national identity in question. Each text in this framework would be considered a literary masterpiece, as Jonathan Culler describes in a recent book:

One [must] . . . [consider] the models by which universities operate and how they may affect critical writing. The first makes the university the transmitter of a cultural heritage, gives it the ideological function of reproducing culture and the social order. The second model makes the university a site for the production of knowledge. . . . The New Criticism succeeded as well as it did, one could argue,

because it could function as a way of making the literary heritage accessible to a growing and more diversified student body entering universities. . . . It gives criticism the role of interpreting the canon, elucidating the 'core' knowledge to be conveyed.²³

Although I would add here the consideration of critical *reading* in this regard as well, it would seem that this is precisely one of the most pressing difficulties in the debates on canon revision and culture studies, in all concerned fields and disciplines, one which is also not often articulated in conjunction with arguments either pro or con on either of these issues. If the controversy surrounding culture/cultural studies and its concomitant emphasis on canon revision is really a discussion of the cultural function of the university in literary studies, as well as its larger role as a societal institution, then the issues at the core of the debate must certainly be understood as going much deeper than simply the question of whether or not literary canons are (or should be) culturally representative. These two perspectives not only describe radically different notions of the cultural significance of the university.²⁴ They also describe radically different processes of cultural production, whose effects filter down into all aspects of critical, cultural, and educational endeavor: research and analysis, reading and interpretation, critical and pedagogical methodology. In light of Culler's articulation of the role of the university in this context, those whose attitudes fall on either side of the debate are, in effect, working and reading—producing culture—side-by-side in two symbolically different universities.

Thus any in-depth discussion of these issues, in whatever context, cannot easily proceed without specifying its goals and methodology at the outset. Although not in entire agreement with every aspect of the culture/cultural studies model, the present discussion adheres more closely to this model of the university and its processes of cultural production than it does to the traditional one, particularly in terms of its reading of literary modernism and modernity, which seeks to widen the range of cultural consideration in that context.²⁵ As such, this study is also concerned specifically with the way in which the debate on canon revision and culture studies impacts the role of comparative literature in its study of the modern. This is demanded not only because of the comparative nature of much extant literary analysis of modernism and modernity, but also because of the increased emphasis on comparatism within the culture studies paradigm.

This focus points again to one of the central premises of this book: that the literary profession is currently undergoing a radical transformation, what Gilroy has called a politics of transfiguration,²⁶ that seems to center on an impasse in literary critical endeavor, between the study and analysis of "literariness," or the particular properties that pertain expressly to "literature," and that of culture itself. Comparative literature, its goals and

methodology, lies at the nexus of this change. Although many of its proponents are very much in disagreement with the alterations sought in the field at the behest of cultural studies approaches, many others find such change invigorating, and believe it can only give the field a renewed vigor and added importance in the literary critical profession.²⁷

The traditional model of the university and its processes of cultural production would, however, seem to uphold this particular notion of value, not just with regard to texts, but also with regard to notions of national and cultural identity. Those comparatists who would uphold this value, who would respect and revere the authority of tradition above all else, would perhaps also find any attempt to view the situation from a different perspective iconoclastic and subversive, and those involved in putting forward such perspectives rude despoilers of cultural and national heritage, whatever that cultural and national heritage may be. Yet for many others who find themselves increasingly presented with the need to engage in comparative endeavors, the refusal to consider the full significance of these new perspectives also seems to make of the traditional model a somewhat closed system, one which would continue on into the future in a seemingly timeless stasis of almost nostalgic belief.

The cultural “representativeness” of the literary canon, in this instance, comes to pose a glaring question: Representative of what, and of whom? Beyond comparative analyses, those who would uphold the traditional model of the university have often viewed this question as an attack or as a threat to their integrity and beliefs, and have rightfully sought to defend them. Those who would react against the loud and angry backlash, would equally as staunchly defend their right to be heard. But those who would stand apart from either of these poles, whether in- or outside the domain of comparative literature, would also pose a related and still equally important question—and one to which no attention has been given in the current debate. What cultural space should those authors, readers, educators, and students inhabit whose cultural representations and/or cultural backgrounds do not fit completely within the framework of values that the traditional model of the university, and the traditional sides in the polarized debate on canon revision and otherness within it, would represent?

THE POLITICS OF CULTURAL SPACE

The conflict between this question and the bifurcated debate on canon revision and culture studies (which is conflictual enough in itself) forms the crux of this book’s elaboration of what I have called the politics of cultural space and its particular reading of literary modernism and modernity.²⁸ Space, in the form of geography, is one of the silenced aspects of the knowledges of

literary culture disseminated in the university. The national literatures maintain a symbiotic relationship to geography through their connection to geographical spaces or territories in the form of recognized nation-states, whose political cohesion and territorial boundaries serve to authorize them as legitimate entities. It is also this recognized division that forms the foundation of comparative literature, something to which we will return in more detail below.

Although ethnically, racially, and/or gender-determined constellations of group identity do not always adhere perfectly to the more traditional model of cultural knowledge about a nation-state, they imply this structure through their emphasis on a single aspect of cultural identity, the fact of "blackness," or the fact of "femaleness" or "genderedness" in various cultural contexts. Part of the traditional argument on canon revision is that there is at the present time implied geographical space in the university for the literary representations of only certain politically authorized entities, while a vast range of others remain outside its purview. Traditionalist arguments counterposed to this view would maintain that it is not possible to teach everything without sacrificing quality, depth and/or breadth of knowledge. Therefore there are, necessarily, some things that we just will not be able to teach.²⁹ Nontraditionalist arguments would maintain that this is not an answer to their overriding question. And while the oppositional debate continues on, each side firmly entrenched in its own position, the voices of those whose cultural experiences and cultural representations do not fit in *either* camp are muffled in the din.

CULTURE STUDIES, CANON REVISION, AND CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION

The impetus for a reconsideration of the deeper cultural significance of this debate is not hard to find, and it is also what has formed the major impetus toward change on both sides of the issue. The world is changing before our very eyes. Changing too slowly, perhaps, for some, but changing just the same. In the course of the 1990s, we saw the demise of old worldviews, the fall of old dividing lines, the redrawing of national and territorial boundaries, the birth of new nations and the disintegration of old ones. In *Reading on the Edge*, I am primarily interested in the sociocultural implications of this world-change, in terms of how the increasing proximity of individuals to those whom they would traditionally have considered "other" can alter (and is altering) the social and cultural constructs in which the social identity projecting the notion of "otherness" is formed. In other words, the significance of these changes is that as the boundaries between cultures become increasingly blurred, what happens to our notion of "culture"³⁰ itself? How

must our traditional conception of “culture,” of what it means to be “cultured,” change in keeping with the changing social realities of our world?

James Clifford explains this situation in terms of an alteration in our understanding of what Stephen Kern has called “geopolitical”³¹ space, a perceptible shrinkage caused in large part by the twentieth-century’s technological onslaught:

This century has seen a drastic expansion of mobility, including tourism, migrant labor, immigration, urban sprawl. More and more people “dwell” with the help of mass transit, automobiles, airplanes. In cities on six continents foreign populations have come to stay. . . . The “exotic” is uncannily close. Conversely, there seem no distant places left on the planet where the presence of “modern” products, media, and power cannot be felt. An older topography and experience of travel is exploded. One no longer leaves home confident of finding something radically new, another time or space. Difference is encountered in the adjoining neighborhood, the familiar turns up at the ends of the earth. . . . “Cultural” difference is no longer a stable, exotic otherness; self-other relations are a means of power and rhetoric rather than of essence. A whole structure of expectations about authenticity in culture and in art is thrown in doubt.³²

Here Clifford identifies the second of the present text’s major premises: that the relationship between power and our traditional notions of literary culture is not effaced, but palpable, and that it replicates, on a symbolic level, imperial relations of power and cultural dominance in the material world. Through “reading on the edge,” through unearthing and examining how power is operative in the critical act, we can begin to understand more clearly the impasse represented by the problem of difference in canon revision, and, perhaps, even begin to move beyond it. Polarized, the debate on canon revision makes only one advance possible: the substitution of nontraditional, revised canon B for traditional canon A, something that would simply serve to re-create the whole systemic difficulty all over again, albeit from a different perspective. This threat of substitution also underlies much of the backlash against revision. It would seem, then, that this becomes perhaps the most important question with regard to the cultural problems facing literary study at the birth of a new century. How are we to avoid the problem of substitution in the act of revision? This is a truly vexed problem, and one that also throws the operations of power in cultural production, or the politics of cultural space, into bas-relief.³³

In this book, I argue that it is precisely this problem of substitution that not only covertly impedes the process of revision, but it also obfuscates and/or silences alternative ways of being and knowing, new and different

perspectives on culture and cultural experience from which much could be learned about the cultural complexities now facing us in contemporary life. By analyzing the underlying processes of cultural production in terms of the notion of the politics of cultural space, we can gain a clearer understanding of why the debate on canon revision seems to be caught in a never-ending seesaw of pushing and pulling wills, and how perhaps to avoid simply substituting a new cultural problematic for an old one. To “read on the edge” in this instance is to read *beyond* cultural difference as an oppositional framework, and to read instead how this oppositional framework functions. It is to read for an understanding of “difference” itself not as incommensurable, but as the necessary ground for the creation of new constellations of group existence, and for beginning to understand the cultural locations of many of the new and often multiple identities (as revealed in their cultural representations) currently clamoring for recognition. It is to seek knowledge and understanding in the potential evidenced within cultural transformation.

CULTURE STUDIES, CANON REVISION, AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF CULTURE

In the cultural framework that Clifford describes, new understandings of the distinction and relation between “self” and “other,” new conceptions that would rearticulate difference in ways that would open possibilities for cultural rapprochement, rather than closing them off before they have a chance even to begin, become increasingly necessary. The difficulty facing the development of such possibilities is that, as an important factor in many articulations of imperial ideology, culture—specifically, literary culture—comes to represent (viewed through the politics of cultural space) one of the ways by which that ideology, as contained in written form, may be inculcated into the dominated masses³⁴—and thereby close off possibilities for cultural knowledge and exchange that might otherwise exist. But, as aforementioned, one of the most important aspects of this often ideological use of culture is also the assumption of a certain kind of racial and cultural purity,³⁵ something which, in Clifford’s new world, is also becoming more and more difficult to assert, as proximity threatens to reduce the traditional distinction between “self” and “other” to a mere play of words. By this, however, I do not mean to suggest that culturally, all are slowly becoming slightly differing versions of the “same”; rather, the traditional means of differentiating “self” from “other” no longer has the same credence as before, and is not always applicable in each and every cultural situation.

This book asserts that the ideal of “culture,” at least of literary “culture” as we have come to define it, may not only be to represent the inviolate repository of “the best that is thought and said” of a given people—some-

thing that has conventionally been taken as the most important arbiter of “canonicity,” or the way in which eligibility for canonical inclusion is determined. Rather, in examining the traditional idea of literary “culture” in the university by analyzing the very terms on which its existence is founded, that is, notions of “canon,” “canonicity,” and “canonization”—in “reading on the edge,” exploring such culture in terms of the politics of cultural space and thereby moving beyond its canonical foundational structure—I seek to reveal our traditional conceptions of such “culture” as potentially problematic—especially in the current cultural climate. This is not intended to suggest that there is nothing useful and/or valuable about the traditional boundaries established in literary studies and the knowledges produced within their domain. But when such knowledge becomes the only *acceptable* knowledge, when new pathways are ignored, negated or closed off because they do not substantially contribute to knowledge in a given, preestablished discipline or field, then these boundaries become quite unsettling because in this scenario, they may be seen to inhibit, rather than to facilitate, the ongoing process of intellectual discovery.³⁶

What I am describing here is precisely the situation with which this text’s reading of Marcel Proust, James Joyce, and James Baldwin is confronted. Because it crosses a number of established disciplinary boundaries, this book cannot automatically be categorized as a study that contributes solely to any one of them. As a result, it must be characterized, if it is approached from a traditional point of view, as a comparative study. On close examination, however, this book will resist attempts to classify it as such, at least not in the traditional sense, largely because it does not express as its primary goal the desire simply to provide a study of contrasts, comparisons, and/or interrelationships, nor does it posit itself as a study of influences. Most important, it does not focus on the historical Eurocentric emphasis of comparative literature. Though it does compare and contrast the work of Proust, Joyce, and Baldwin, its examination of the interrelationships between these three authors not only broadens (as would a comparative study) our horizon of cultural understanding with regard to their literary achievements, but produces at the same time a subtle critique, one of the relation to literary modernism and modernity of those disciplines established as the national literatures, as well as that established as comparative literature.

This critique is evidenced in what may be discovered by “reading the edge” between traditional conceptions of the national literatures and comparative literature and the problem of difference as articulated within them, as revealed in (1) the present text’s examination of culture; (2) the way each of these domains has read Euro-American literary modernism; and (3) the relation between this text’s revision of literary modernism and modernity and traditional conceptions of the same.

In its reading of literary modernism and modernity, this book posits Euro-American modernism as an early twentieth-century artistic and intellectual movement which, in its comparative aspect, is in direct conflict with the goals and premises of the national literatures and which, in terms of its cultural excess, or all that has been read (interpreted) out of it, is also at odds with the traditionally Eurocentric goals and premises of conventional comparative literature. Traditional formulations of Euro-American literary modernism have articulated it in two ways, as will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 2. The first is as a short period of time in a much larger, national literary tradition, which is how it is inscribed in relation to the national literary traditions; the second is as a sort of subcanon of early twentieth-century literature called “international modernism,”³⁷ whose works are largely disconnected from local or national affiliation, existing in an almost timeless state of “transcendental homelessness,” in which capacity it has also been necessarily linked to comparative literature.³⁸

In this study I presume the canon of international modernism—basing this, to be sure, on a comparatist assumption of the role of influences, cultural and or literary, on the authors whose work comprises this canon. Though this assumption (as one of this text’s core foundations) could, however, be characterized as comparative, its relation to comparative literature proper is uneasy, because due to its emphasis on the multiple ground of “self” and “identity,” the position of this book on the question of nationality and its relation to the literary product is incompatible with accepted notions of nationally conceived identity,³⁹ while more traditional notions of comparative literature view the question of such identity in nationality as a founding premise, as Claudio Guillén points out:

La Literatura Comparada es un proyecto plausible desde el momento en que, por una parte, hay una pluralidad de literaturas modernas que se reconocen a sí mismas como tales y, por otra, la Poética unitaria o absoluta cesa de ser un modelo vigente. Nos hallamos entonces ante una fecunda paradoja histórica. El nacionalismo ascendente es lo que cimentará un internacionalismo nuevo.

Comparative literature becomes a plausible project when two events occur: one, when a large number of modern literatures—literatures that recognize themselves as such—come into existence; and two, when a unitary or absolute poetics ceases to be an accepted model. We then find ourselves before a fruitful historical paradox: the rise of nationalism will lay the foundation for a new internationalism.⁴⁰

Guillén is writing in the context of what he describes as the complete disintegration of the notion of a cultural concept that was based on the idea of lit-

erature as representing one whole sanctified by a consensus erecting a “cluster of masterworks.”⁴¹ By the end of the eighteenth century, this notion of literature had entirely collapsed, leaving behind what Guillén identifies as a “multiverse,” composed of all of the cultural elements previously denied by the notion of literary culture as a representation of a single unified tradition.⁴² In this sense, then, traditional formulations of comparative literature as a discipline needed to posit a certain kind of nationalism at its base, if only in order to justify the comparative mode; the only way to escape this reliance on nationalism and yet remain within the bounds of the discipline has been to suggest, as Guillén does in the first part of his book, that comparative literature “involves the systematic study of supranational assemblages.”⁴³ What he means by this is that he desires, within comparative literature, “to go beyond cultural nationalism, beyond using literature in nationalistic ways, out of narcissistic instincts, for ideological ends.”⁴⁴ “I dream,” he writes, “. . . of a ‘world literature.’ (But what world? what worlds?)”⁴⁵ By disconnecting the “national” and therefore “ideological” from the “comparative,” Guillén is able to approach a level of “supranationality” that will, he feels, enable him to write about literature with more general, more wholly humanist goals in mind.

Yet in so doing, Guillén also removes the literary from the material and the social, going beyond the world itself in his desire to achieve another world on the higher level of literary communion. While this traditionally comparative, utopic view certainly had its place in the devastation that represented the aftermath of World War II, when comparative literature was first instituted as a field in North America, it is also problematic, as is to be seen in Guillén’s questions, “But what world? what worlds?” Whose worlds have been and will be represented in that higher world of literary communion? While the multiple and polyglot emphasis of traditional comparative literature has subtly critiqued the singularity and monolingualism of the national literatures, it has yet, in its reliance on those self-same national literatures in the act of comparison, traditionally emphasized the same overtly Euro-American purview of many of those literatures. As a result, it also, in its traditional form, puts forward much the same perspective as do the national literatures on the issues of canon revision and culture studies.⁴⁶

By contrast, this book assumes an alternative cultural space that is authorized neither by a relation to a single geographical territory nor a relation to any single collective identity because having simultaneous existence in multiple cultural circumstances, existing within multiple geographical territories, in multiple temporal frames. Thus, the cultural space asserted here is largely symbolic, at least in traditional terms. Its principle characteristic is multiplicity, rather than singularity—yet a certain similarity⁴⁷ of cultural experience.⁴⁸ Therefore, it does not transcend difference, and it does not create

from difference a utopic unity of cultural understanding that completely effaces it in the pursuit of general humanitarian goals. Rather, it views difference *itself* as the common denominator, as opposed to understanding *differentiation* as a necessary condition to deriving commonality, for example, a and b are not x , therefore, counterposed to x , a is equal to b .

Viewed from this perspective, it becomes obvious that canon revision in this instance can no longer be about inclusion or exclusion, but, rather, must be about our understanding of “culture” itself—in terms of its production and dissemination as knowledge in the university. In this broader context, it also becomes clear that discussion of “inclusion” and/or “exclusion” can reveal only half of the picture with regard to the cultural implications of the debate on canon revision and culture studies. The other half has to do with what lies beyond that discussion, the cultural locations that yet exist in the silent (and silenced) cultural space(s) masked by that more visible debate, and the institutional processes by which this masking is itself institutionalized. This book is an attempt to understand this hidden, silent, and/or silenced half as it relates to literary modernism and modernity.

Doing so will necessitate a certain transformation in our cultural understanding not only of literary modernism and modernity, but of its relation to the work of Proust, Joyce, and Baldwin. Through exploring this hidden and silenced half in relation to these three authors by rereading the traditional Euro-American modernist notion of exile and establishing it as a new interpretive ground on which to reconfigure conventionally accepted aesthetic differences in their work, this book seeks to reveal their previously unexplored similarities, and their silent (and silenced) cultural locations.⁴⁹ Here, exile is broadly defined to include the voiceless alienation often brought about by the experience of oppression as a result of, for example, race or sexual preference. Accordingly, this discussion puts forward a reading of literary modernism and modernity that provides the possibility of understanding the work of these authors from a perspective other than that offered by a prior assumption of their separation by an essentialized, incommensurable cultural difference.

What I am describing, however, is not simply a reelaboration of the commonplace themes of the “artist in exile” or the alienated Romantic hero. The situation of the authors in question and their relation to the concept of exile here expounded is far more complex than that of the alienation experienced by either of these traditional literary and artistic figures. The “artist in exile” may be viewed as rebellious and nonconformist, but he or she is still basically a creation derived from the status quo, because resentment against it forms the basis of his or her antitraditional leanings. The latter might be described as the alienation of a child who threatens to run away from home, not heeding, at the moment the threat is made, the reality of the situation, which is that he or she has the means neither to go far nor to stay

away long. A child in such a situation will also nurture his or her feelings of resentment in order to fuel the escape, and must therefore continually invoke, in his or her imagination, the home from which he or she is alienated. Thus, rather than being truly alone, he or she is accompanied by a presence which, though rejected, is yet a presence.

In both of these situations of alienation, resentment is a strong motivating force. Yet this is not the case for any of the authors under consideration here. While these authors might seek to represent previously unexplored aspects of cultural experience, it is not done with resentment. It is done more with a sense of separateness, from a sense of self that is solipsistic, derived from being fully aware of having gone beyond any sense of connection with conventional norms, as Marino explains:

The modern creator searches for himself by explaining himself and explains himself by self-analysis. Way back, Rivarol accused Rousseau of writing "without consciousness." It is certain that the Romantic writer does not know his own secret. For him the mystery of creation is still whole and impenetrable. It is precisely this enigma, felt to be a serious insufficiency, that the modern spirit eliminates, and extirpates by the roots. It *knows* what it is doing.⁵⁰

What is important here is this quality of "consciousness"—moreover, in the case of these authors, each creating his art in the crucible of his own form of exile, the quality of *self-consciousness*. Unlike the Romantic hero, who experiences his alienation from society as a thing apart from him- or herself, the traditional Euro-American modern hero is often a narcissistic rendering of aspects of the modern writer's life, discovered through and created by the author's encouragement, and embracement, of such alienation. As a result, such writers become linked by a shared condition of both artistic and social exile. Thus, it is here that traditional readings of Euro-American modernism and the rereading of literary modernism and modernity here undertaken converge: in the fact and implications of exile.

This still does not, however, fully explain the importance of the issue of self-consciousness in the texts to be considered in this study, or the full significance of the concept of exile as it is here presented, something that may only be understood through a discussion of the way in which the two are related. First, it is necessary to view the concept of exile not just as something in which the authors here discussed participate, but as something that is also descriptive of their individual lifestyles. While it is easy to understand how one might consider James Joyce an exile under the definition of the term as explained to this point (his problematic relationship to the political situation in Ireland near the beginning of the twentieth century caused him to choose to spend most of his life in France and Italy), what of the other two authors?

This argument requires a willingness to understand exile as an instance of rupture with the social group into which an individual was born, whether voluntary or involuntary. Such rupture does not have to be defined solely as a physical rupture involving geographic relocation, but must, however, be radical. Physical rupture, for example, may also be described simply as a withdrawal, as in the case of Proust who, after the death of his mother in 1905, became a recluse in his cork-lined room while writing *A la recherche du temps perdu*.

James Baldwin represents a life situation of exile resulting both from involuntary and voluntary rupture. Endowed from birth with intellectual capabilities that surprised many of those by whom he was surrounded, Baldwin found himself unable to adjust to the condition of being black in America (a circumstance that served to alienate him from the mainstream of both black and white cultures) during the first half of the twentieth century, and he subsequently left the country for France before the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement, where he lived for much of the remainder of his life.

In each of the above situations, it is clear that social and artistic exile had a major impact on the lives of these authors, and it is only through this impact that the significance of the relation between exile and self-consciousness in their literary works may be properly comprehended. Thus, it may be seen that these authors are linked in two ways: (1) through a voluntary act of commitment toward a type of artistic representation that embraces a number of nontraditional cultural ideas and (2) through a shared life situation of voluntary or involuntary exile. Though the first type of linkage is certainly important to an understanding of the significance of exile in modern literature to be examined in this book, it is, finally, the second type of linkage that forms the crux of the matter. Because this study describes a new cultural space within which to consider the notion of literary modernity, as well as both old and new texts to be considered its representatives, it also becomes possible to introduce within it alternative ways of thinking about the notion of "value" and how it relates to literary texts in institutional contexts. Through this, I argue, social value in "modernist" literary representation is determined not solely as the evidence of a text's contribution to a nationally defined culture or to a Euro-American "high" (international) modernist tradition, but by the relation of self as represented in the text to what it *perceives* as valuable, and the way in which the self and such perceived value interact with the larger social world of which the protagonist(s) is (are) a part.

This new consideration of the notion of "value" takes place in terms of what I have called the "romance of exile." The notion of romance here brings to the fore the divided, seemingly unreal nature of reality in exile, a reality that is perennially hybrid because always intertwined with another, perpetually questioned because constantly compared, and never fully assim-