

Introduction

Bottom Lines

William Shakespeare was an upstart. In 1592, in the first surviving notice of Shakespeare as a playwright, Robert Greene warned his friends—“those Gentlemen . . . that spend their wits in making Plaies”—about the perfidious ways of actors, of

those Puppits (I meane) that speake from our mouths, those Anticks garnisht in our colours. . . . Yes trust them not: for there is an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his *Tygers heart wrapt in a Players hide*, supposes he is as well able to bumbast out a blanke verse as the best of you: and being an absolute *Iohannes fac totum*, is in his owne conceit the onely Shake-scene in a countrie. O that I might intreate your rare wits to be employed in more profitable courses: & let those Apes imitate your past excellence, and never more acquaint them with your admired inventions. I know the best husband of you all will never prove an Usurer, and the kindest of them / all will never proove a kinde nurse: yet whilst you may, seeke you better Maisters; for it is pittie men of such rare wits, should be subject to the pleasures of such rude groomes. (Greenblatt et al. 3321–22)

As with much that concerns Shakespeare, scholars have speculated at length about the meanings of Greene’s words, the exact nature of which is not known. But whether Greene thinks Shakespeare an uneducated plagiarist or an ambitious egotist or a vicious exploiter of the labor of others, it is clear that the dying writer believes Shakespeare to be unworthy of his success and of his ability to associate with men like himself, a gentleman educated at Cambridge.

To us, Greene’s public attack and Henry Chettle’s equally public apology are more astonishing than either was to Elizabethans,¹ since William Shakespeare was not then the Bard of Avon, a cultural hero, whose works ground the literary canon in English. In the 1960s, A. L. Rowse described this first surviv-

ing reference to Shakespeare-the-writer as a “time-bomb which has gone on reverberating ever since” (97). Even in these less Bardolatrous times, critics continue to recognize the charge contained in Greene’s attack, calling it “a dig” or, more aggressively, “a slam” against the aspiring playwright (McDonald 15; B. Smith 4). Yet what interests me about this slam is a point commentators often note but seldom develop: Shakespeare *was* an upstart. Not a poet, not a man of the universities or of the court, and above all not a gentleman, Shakespeare was an actor who made his living outside the bounds of respectable and even licensed society: “masterless artificers, petty chapmen, vagabonds, sailors, criminals, players, and Puritans—all of them marginal figures in the Tudor-Stuart landscape—found themselves crowded together in the strange, extraterrestrial zone outside the walls . . . of the City” (Agnew 55).

What interests me, then, about Greene’s attack is not the impugning of Shakespeare’s character but rather the revelation of what we would call class bias among an intellectual elite; and also that the specifics of this bias persist among contemporary intellectual elites, including critics of Shakespeare. Today, for example, I read few literary or cultural critics who agree with the proposition that the market is a legitimate arbiter of success, and rewards the worthy; or that those without formal education are capable of making art, judgments about art, or, for that matter, judgments about public policy.

I propose to return to Shakespeare later in this chapter but before doing so, I must begin to confront the problem(s) of class, which I see as this book’s principal theoretical contribution to literary and cultural study. In fact, in addition to Shakespeare, the largest topics of this book are, first, the role of education in establishing and maintaining class distinction or inequality and, second, the existence, indeed the persistence, of class bias among intellectuals—a fear of the people and their judgments. But in pointing out Robert Greene’s affinity with, say, Wordsworth and Coleridge, or James and Eliot, or Forster and Woolf, or Adorno and Ransom, or Frow and Patterson, I do not wish to essentialize this characteristic of the class to which I belong, or to suggest, as Shakespeare’s Claudius says of death, “This must be so.” Indeed, although my thinking is structural, it is not determinist. To suggest that intellectuals are hemmed in by their subject positions or social roles, by what John Frow calls “the investments we have made in knowledge and its social relations” (131), would be to deny human agency in social construction, which I do not (cf. my “Agency”). It would be to deny that we and even others outside our profession, who look “with fresh eyes and nascent ambitions at the way things are done,” can and in fact do “propose changes and thereby initiate debates about ‘the purpose and

meaning of the activity’” we engage in (Fish, *Correctness* 23). And therefore it would be to undermine my point in writing this book about the contemporary critical reception of Shakespeare’s plays. That point, at its broadest, is that to help achieve the good society and—as I shall argue in my conclusion—to protect our own most important interests, intellectuals can and should take steps to reduce their own power by reducing the power of formal education over the lives and life chances of all people.

Thirty years of the “culture wars,” and specifically of debate in higher education about canons and admissions, has shown that unlike bias against women or racial minorities, bias against the working class and the poor is structurally useful and even necessary in the academy. Like John Guillory, I conclude that class bias in the academy cannot be easily eliminated. Although I support the study of working-class literature and culture in the academy and am pleased to see literary critics joining sociologists in giving attention to this work, I am skeptical—as Guillory is—about remedies for this bias based in a self-affirming identity politics that demands representation and inclusion, which have worked well if not perfectly for women and racial minorities. Guillory is skeptical about such remedies because he thinks it impossible within the academy to invoke a “self-affirmative . . . lower-class identity” (*Capital* 13). I think Guillory is right about this, but for the wrong reason, since he equates a lower-class identity with “the experience of deprivation per se” and implies that the “abolition of want” would abolish lower-class identities (13). But as sociologists, novelists, and essayists have shown, the abolition of want does not abolish lower-class identities. Thus, I would revise Guillory as follows: in the academy as we know it, the affirmation of a lower-class identity is hardly compatible with the affirmation of an (upper) middle-class identity, which is what higher education affirms. Working-class kids who succeed in the academy or subsequently in the professions are reconstituted and normalized as (upper) middle class. In the academy, working-class identity is not merely not affirmed, but actively erased.

Criticism cannot effectively challenge its own privilege, the privilege of intellectual accomplishment, which, as I argue here, contributes significantly to class privilege in the contemporary world. To me it is hardly surprising that after thirty years of the culture wars, the profession is turning today toward matters literary. Not just the Association of Literary Scholars and Critics but Stanley Fish, Frank Lentricchia, Edward Said, and Elaine Scarry, among others, have sensed that, as K. Anthony Appiah observes, identity politics and even “theory for its own sake” have lost some of their luster: “*mirabile dictu*, there are more and more literary critics . . . who actually devote themselves to . . .

literature” (44). What we need in the profession, says Edward Said, is “a patient, scrupulous reading of texts; a detailed respect for the painstaking effort for clarity of utterance; a careful attempt, in R. P. Blackmur’s memorable phrase, to bring literature to performance” (3). Thirty years of the culture wars, then, have left criticism with a dilemma: our professional, indeed our intellectual self-interest, and the fact that class difference matters to both interests, is the limit beyond which we cannot go in promoting democracy or egalitarianism in the academy and consequently in society. This dilemma should not be explained away or ignored. Yet it is one whose importance we might also work to reduce. It is possible, I think, for academics to maintain our difference from the vast majority of society—to turn toward the literary, for instance—while reducing the elitism that traditionally has grounded it, the “general assumption on the part of academics that they are a superior breed” (Fish, *Correctness* 88).

Thorstein Veblen argued a century ago that, despite the appeals “made from time to time by well-meaning and sanguine persons” to “set aside the conventional aversion to labor,” the irksomeness of labor *and of those who labor* is “a cultural fact” for which there is no remedy “short of a subversion of that cultural structure on which our canons of decency rest” (“Labor” 201). I do not doubt that most intellectuals are “well-meaning and sanguine persons” whose pleas for tolerance and respect of all persons both within and without the academy have achieved the kinds of “fitful” positive results Veblen also acknowledges. It is important to respect that work. But Veblen is correct: giving respect to those who do “irksome” labor is impossible until “the cultural structure [is subverted] on which our canons of decency rest.”

It will not do to admit some number of working-class students to Harvard or Princeton in an attempt to turn them into versions of ourselves. The academy—and perhaps especially its humanists and artists—protects and perpetuates the cultural structure that guarantees the irksomeness of labor and of laborers. We cannot subvert it without subverting ourselves, but this is exactly what we should do: reduce the power of formal education to determine whether people will lead good lives. This means taking two courses of action: decoupling (to some extent) education and the formation of occupational opportunity; and decoupling (again, to some extent) education and the formation of cultural capital. By doing so we would undermine some, though certainly not all, of our interests as higher educators. What we would gain, I argue, is not an egalitarian society, which is not possible, but one that is considerably less stratified and unequal than today’s. And in addition, as I argue in my conclusion, we would protect what to my mind is our most important interest—the freedom to do intellectually challenging work.

Guillory hints at the importance of the former coupling when he argues that the multicultural canon “merely confirms the imaginary ego ideal of a newly constituted professional-managerial class, no longer exclusively white or male” (*Capital* 38), a fact Bruce Robbins celebrates as a victory against inequality: “from the moment when knowledge of rap music or rape statistics or the genealogy of the word ‘homosexual’ is measured on examinations and counts toward a degree, there has been some change, . . . in access to credentials” (“Politics” 373). True enough; but as many sociologists of education and work point out, a point I develop in chapter 2, educational credentials are at the heart of inequality in contemporary societies: “in capitalist societies, the . . . tendency toward equalization of educational opportunities has been accompanied by *greater, not lesser* inequality of income distribution” (Larson, “Power” 43). What Robbins celebrates—getting “one’s own experience reclassified as part of cultural capital” (“Politics” 373) or making knowledge of rap or disco music a predictor for success in law school—is, as Randall Collins argues, “an elitist reform that will have little effect on the economic prospects of the majority of women” or minorities, or working-class people generally (*Credential* 201).

Guillory implicitly recognizes the necessity of the latter coupling, arguing that we need to “disarticulate the formation of cultural capital from the class structure and the markets” (*Capital* 337). Guillory operates from the admirable premise that “*everyone* has a right of access to cultural works, to the means of both their production and their consumption” (*Capital* 54). For Guillory, such disarticulation would require us to socialize “the means of [literary] production and consumption,” which in turn would require us to change the way students are evaluated in educational institutions that distribute cultural capital unequally “by governing access to the means of literary production as well as to the means of consumption (the knowledge required to read historical works)” (*Capital* 340). The weakness of this proposal for reform has been noted by a number of reviewers, and frankly, such a judgment is implicit in Guillory’s own characterization of it as “only a thought experiment” (*Capital* 340). Most striking is the appearance of this plea for democracy or equality of access to higher education in a work whose rigor and style, as Robbins points out, “makes no pretense of user-friendliness beyond the academy” (“Politics” 370). Given the professionalized nature of Guillory’s discourse, its opacity, we may fairly judge, as Bill Readings does, that we are “entitled to a more pointed reflection on the politics of access” (324). My guess is that Guillory does not give us this reflection because he knows it would take him where he does not want to go, which is to acknowledge that very few people have the will or the

talents to do the kind of reading—or writing—he thinks everyone is or should be able to do. And acknowledging that fact might lead to another insight: to decouple the class structure and the formation of cultural capital, it is necessary, as I argue here, to decouple its formation and the educational system.

That is to say, people already have access to the means of cultural and even literary production and consumption and are producing and consuming culture and literature all the time. The problem is that what they produce and consume is devalued by institutions of education and of higher education in particular, as part of the process of creating cultural capital or a hierarchy of taste, as I argue in chapter 4. Rather than socialized education, which even Guillory admits is utopian, what we need and can achieve is more cultural democracy. Not necessarily antiliterary, cultural democracy would require only a definition of the aesthetic or the literary that is broader than the definition rooted in disinterest, which has grounded our work for almost two centuries (Woodmansee; Levine; Tompkins). Literature is not timeless or fixed, and to undermine what Martha Woodmansee calls “the interests in disinterestedness” is not to undermine the literary (11).

Guillory’s failure is not just that he proposes a utopian solution to a difficult and important problem. More significantly, he proposes a solution that, if enacted even on a nonutopian scale, would enhance rather than reduce the power of educational achievement over peoples’ lives. He proposes a solution that is professionally self-interested, not only in that enabling everyone to read Virgil or Machiavelli or Mill would require an enormous capital investment in education but also since more education would reduce friction between the working class and intellectuals. For it is the case, as sociologists have long pointed out, that the best predictor of liberalism on social and cultural issues is number of years of schooling. Today, the highly educated are “explicitly schooled in the culture of tolerance and pluralism” (Brint 98), but almost fifty years ago David Riesman and Nathan Glazer recognized in intellectuals’ defense of civil liberties an issue that would not appeal to “the uneducated masses,” for the “practice of deference and restraint . . . is understood and appreciated only among the well-to-do and highly educated strata” (78; Brint 86–87, 97–103; Croteau 195–96). Thus, as I conclude in chapter 5, it is not surprising that “more education” is promoted repeatedly by left or liberal intellectuals and politicians as an appropriate solution to both unemployment and underemployment, the part-time and contingent work that since deindustrialization has become normalized.

To consider that education might be decoupled effectively from both the formation of cultural capital and the formation of occupational opportunity is

to recognize that the “social relations” implicit in the acquisition of knowledge are not everywhere the same. The uses of education in France, described by Pierre Bourdieu in *Distinction*, translate well but not exactly in North America. In the United States, the uses of education today are vastly different from what they were at the turn of the nineteenth century. In sixteenth-century England, the humanism that supplanted scholasticism served interests and privileged talents different from those that had been served and privileged before. The humanist school “neither signified an already-existing class system nor simply reproduced it; it helped reform both the ruling and the subaltern classes along the lines of a proto-bourgeois model” (Halpern, *Poetics* 26). Five years before Richard Halpern’s analysis, Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine offered only a slightly different reading of this development, suggesting that

the older system had fitted perfectly the needs of the Europe of the high middle ages, with its communes, its church offices open to the low-born of high talents and its vigorous debates on power and authority in state and church. The new system, we would argue, fitted the needs of the new Europe that was taking shape, with its closed governing elites, hereditary offices and strenuous efforts to close off debate on vital political and social questions. It stamped the more prominent members of the new elite with an indelible cultural seal of superiority, it equipped lesser members with fluency and the learned habit of attention to textual detail and it offered everyone a model of true culture as something given, absolute, to be mastered, not questioned—and thus fostered in all its initiates a properly docile attitude towards authority. (xiii–xiv)

One could multiply examples and appeals to authority, and span the history of education in doing so, but suffice it to say that education serves and education privileges, but different kinds of education serve and privilege differently. Without doubt, structure matters, but so does policy.

It is not controversial to say that in the United States, the most important developments in education since 1960 have been efforts to serve and privilege new kinds of students. As Richard Ohmann observes, a point to which I return in chapter 5, the state and its many agencies, including education, became in the 1960s the “arena of struggle over entitlements” as “blacks, women, Latinos, etc.” were fixed as “social categories . . . by whose fortunes the legitimacy of the social order would in part be measured” (“PC” 15). The intervening years have shown that subordinate groups like women and blacks who mobilized politically and gained recognition as such official social categories—as, in the terms

of this book, status groups—were able to gain increased access not just to community colleges but also to elite colleges and universities, where power and opportunity lie. At the same time, subordinate groups—like the working class—who did not mobilize politically and who were not “recognized as official social categories” did not gain similar access to elite institutions but remained pooled in institutions at the bottom of the hierarchy of higher education (Karen 210; Jacoby).

What the intervening years also have shown is that necessary to both subordinate groups’ successful mobilization and their successful recognition is a *receptiveness* to their claims among privileged groups, as no doubt female and African-American activists would agree. Since the 1960s, receptiveness to the claims of women and racial minorities has been strong in higher education, and within the professional association to which I and most literary critics belong, the Modern Language Association of America. Receptiveness to the claims of the working class has been correspondingly weak, a fact made clear for literary critics in 1993 when Guillory published *Cultural Capital*. In June of that year, Janet Zandy, of the Rochester Institute of Technology, also discovered the weakness of the MLA’s receptiveness to the claims of class. Zandy was informed by the director of convention programs for the MLA, Maribeth T. Kraus, that her proposal to establish a permanent MLA discussion group on working-class literature, a proposal supported by 160 members of the association, had been rejected by the Program Committee and the MLA executive council. Currently active discussion groups in the MLA include groups on Arthurian literature, on Sephardic studies, and on the two-year college; 1997 saw the addition of a discussion group on disability studies. And yet Kraus informed Zandy that the proposal was rejected because it did not offer a definition of class that could clearly identify a set of working-class literary texts (Kraus).

The MLA blames Zandy; her proposal did not define the concept of class so as to easily identify working-class literature. Having seen Zandy’s proposal, I cannot help but suspect some disingenuousness in the MLA’s criticism of it: one could make the same criticism about Karl Marx who, it is now clear, did not adequately define class so as to easily identify the flow of history. In the case of studying working-class literature within the institutional context of the MLA, moreover, the burden of definitional proof would seem to be low: working-class literature is literature by or for—or even about—members of the working class. The definition of working class would seem to be little more difficult than the definition of any other kind of literature to be addressed by MLA discussion groups—Canadian, Celtic, Hebrew, Jewish-American, Slavic, and so on. Such definitions are working definitions, and questions arise con-

tinuously about whether a given author or work “fits” into a given category of literature.

This is not to say, however, that literary critics can or should dispense with an attempt to define the concept, or to understand its history, a point to which I turn next. Before doing so, I must claim that the MLA’s response to Zandy’s proposal reveals more than just unreceptiveness to the claims of class: the unreceptiveness itself is rooted in a class bias that is inherent in the professional study of literature, as well as in higher education more generally.

Part—but only part—of the reason why class is often invoked but rarely invoked seriously is that, as the MLA observes, the concept is difficult both to define and to apply. Complex and difficult debate about how to define class has existed since the nineteenth century, and no one—not Marx or Max Weber early on, or Erik Olin Wright or Pierre Bourdieu today—can claim to have gotten it right. Yet precisely because class is not, say, the second law of thermodynamics, those of us attempting to cross disciplinary boundaries to discuss the relationships of “class” to literature and literary production, should, I think, grapple with at least the principal points of debate in sociology: is class determined by one’s role in capitalist production? Or is class determined as well—or perhaps even more so—by educational or cultural achievements? Is class a measure for potential conflict in society? Or is class rather a way to describe a social hierarchy? How is class reproduced? Are there only two classes? Or three? Or four? Does class matter? Answers to these questions will vary, and no set of answers will satisfy everyone, but to answer the questions means entering the debate. It means coming to terms with the legacies of both Karl Marx and Max Weber, a task sociologists have struggled with since before the turn of the last century.

Since a precise definition of class is unwieldy, likely to be outmoded—or disputed—tomorrow, I wish in discussing class to follow Guillory’s lead and to “construct . . . the concept through the contexts of its deployment” (*Capital* 341 n. 1). Nevertheless, it is clear that the concept is useful to the extent that it explains, or helps to explain, inequality or stratification; and that in this regard, the problem confounding most theorists is the relationship between economic and cultural determinants of class. A corollary problem is to identify the class position of intellectuals. Regarding the former, Guillory has recognized the need to bring together Marx and Weber and, as I do here, concludes that “the most obvious way to resolve such a theoretical tension would be to redefine class in such a way that it assumes both economic and cultural constituents” (“Intellectuals” 124). Other writers offer different solutions. For example, accepting the Marxian notion that two classes exist in conflict, Alvin W. Gould-

ner sees the possessors of cultural capital, whom he calls the New Class, as the historical *successor* to the propertied bourgeoisie (20–21). Frow, in contrast, acknowledges the burgeoning power of the New Class but continues to insist “that there are other and more decisive powers” than knowledge (120), specifically, “ownership of the means of production” (125). James Livingston disagrees with both, suggesting contra Frow that corporate capitalism and consumer culture have moved us “beyond the proprietary stage of capitalism” and thus “beyond a society defined by relations of production” (85, 118). But, contra Gouldner, Livingston does not redefine class in terms of the possession of cultural capital; in Livingston’s view, as the emphasis in economics shifts from production to consumption, “class gives way . . . to alternative principles of social organization such as race and gender” (78). For Livingston, class must “recede” in importance as a principle of social organization in a society where “consumption and its connotations . . . matter more than production and its requirements” (78, 77).

What is peculiar in Livingston’s analysis, especially given its focus on the late nineteenth century, is the absence of Weber: Weber called status groups what Livingston calls “alternative principles of social organization” rooted in “consumption and its connotations.” As I explain in chapter 3, Weber describes stratification by status as the distribution of prestige in a society; and a claim of social prestige is based primarily in “a specific *style of life*” (932, 927, and *passim*). For Weber, the contrast between a class and a status group is, among other things, the difference between “production and consumption. Whereas class expresses relationships involved in production, status groups express those involved in consumption, in the form of specific ‘styles of life’” (Giddens 43–44).

Status groups antedate classes, and Livingston is correct to suggest that “class was determined by the development of capitalism” (78). But the development of classes never eliminated the power of status groups; and the development of consumer culture will not eliminate the power of class.² As Anthony Giddens explains, “the point of Weber’s analysis is not that class and status constitute two ‘dimensions of stratification’, but that classes and status communities represent two possible, and competing, modes of group formation in relation to the distribution of power in society” (44). This distinction Guillory acknowledges as well: in the academy’s culture wars, the “equation of gender, race, and class as commensurable minority identities effaces” precisely the structural “distinction between class and *status*” (*Capital* 13).

Livingston’s argument about class works not only because he occludes the Weberian argument about status but also because he subscribes to a Marxian

definition of class, one linked to production and in which there are two classes of people, the propertied and the propertyless. But Weber, who theorized class in terms of market capacities and life chances, insisted upon distinctions within the propertied class and within the propertyless. And within both, skill and education are two sorts of capital that in class terms decisively distinguish their possessors from those who possess property or worse, only their unskilled labor. Accordingly, class theories fall into the Weberian rather than into the Marxian tradition when they recognize three or more classes and base class difference not only on property but on education and skill.

Indeed, the current “crisis” about whether class is a useful concept for literary analysis arguably results from critics’ failure to attend seriously to theoretical and empirical work on class and stratification outside the Marxian tradition. This theoretical narrowness results in the failure to distinguish class from status, such that, as I argue in chapter 3, the two terms become synonyms in many cases, allowing for slippage and imprecision in describing the workings of inequality and difference. In addition, the focus on Marxian theory disables frank assessment of the middle class and, in particular, of the New Class of intellectuals. Confusion results especially, I think, from the fact that education and its institutions and practitioners affect both class hierarchies and status hierarchies. That is, class is associated with production and thus with markets, and status is associated with consumption and thus with cultural groups; but education—and higher education in particular—affects the construction of both in complicated ways. Education affects production, for example, through the implementation of scientific management or technical expertise; it affects consumption through the implementation of taste. Whether cultural capital is a historical successor to financial capital or just another kind of capital, and whether the class hierarchy is separate from or overlaps with or doubles the status hierarchy³—all these are empirical questions that remain open. But it is clear that in modern market societies, education is doubly oppressive to the vast majority of people, making their jobs worse—flipping burgers—and judging as poor their choices as consumers—eating what they flip.

Wai-Chee Dimock and Michael T. Gilmore explain their attempt to rethink class for literary studies as just such a response to “the imminent demise of Marxism, evidenced by the collapse of the Soviet Union and Eurocommunism,” a demise that

would seem to mark the demise as well of “class” as a category of analysis. How can we continue to use the word with any sense of political efficacy,

when its instrumental expression—"class struggle"—has ceased to be a vital historical force? And how can we continue to use the word with any sense of analytic authority, when the privileged subject of that analysis—the "working class"—has thus far shown no sign of being a privileged locus of agency, so that the vocabulary of class has come to seem no more than a flat description, a matter of taxonomy, shorn of the animating coloration of will and necessity, incipience and dialectic? (1)

The Marxian coloration of this is surely obvious. Dimock and Gilmore indicate that for most literary critics "class" had stable meanings until very recently, meanings entirely bound up with Marxism and now shaken by Marxism's failures. Unfamiliar with, and in some cases contemptuous of debate in sociology and economics, many critics seem to have gotten the causal relationship backward: as if "class" came into being with Marx, rather than, arguably, the other way around. Marx offered an alternative to interpretations of class and capital posited by the classical political economists, but he was not the only thinker to do so, and literary critics have largely ignored what many though not all Marxists dismissively refer to as bourgeois sociology, the tradition of analysis I have been discussing, with roots in the work of Weber and Durkheim, among others. If the collapse of the Soviet Union unsettles the hegemony of Marxian understandings of class within literary criticism, allowing us to see class as "itself an analyzable artifact . . . to be scrutinized, contextualized, critiqued for its commissions and omissions" (Dimock and Gilmore 2), this is all very much to the good. It is also a richly ironic example of superstructure following base.

Equally obvious in Dimock and Gilmore's lines is an attempt to represent—if I may indulge such a notion—the communal or general mind of the profession, a profession that is hugely disappointed by the working class, which "failed in its historical mission of emancipation" (Laclau and Mouffe 169). As I shall suggest in the chapters to follow, particularly chapters 2 and 5, working-class kids know very well what are the consequences of disappointing your teachers by failing to subscribe to or internalize the norms of (upper) middle-class culture: punishment and, ultimately, reassignment to the working class. Normally, of course, working-class kids don't fail History; they fail courses in history, or they fail to subscribe to the rules of grammar, or they fail to attend in class to anything the teacher says. But for the working class as a whole, the consequences of failing History are quite similar to the consequences of an individual working-class kid's failing a course in history: Is it coincidence—or irony—that the exclusion since the late 1960s of the working class from left and liberal political and social agendas, including those institutionalized in the

Democratic Party (or the MLA, for that matter), follows hard upon the working class's failure as an emancipatory force and its subsequent resistance to some parts of those agendas, including, for example, busing, welfare, immigration, affirmative action, or gay rights?

Such estrangement makes it difficult to accept at face value Robbins's criticism of Guillory for adopting a concept of class that, he claims, "allows for no active relationship between classes, no pressure from below, no hegemonic concession from above, no dynamic of articulation whereby fractions of different classes enter into and fall out of alliance with each other." Nevertheless, let's take Robbins seriously: what this means, according to Robbins, is that "unlike Marx or Gramsci," neither Guillory nor Bourdieu allows "that professionals and nonprofessionals might ever have common rather than merely local interests." Because each insists that professionals and the working class hold different interests, neither Guillory nor Bourdieu offers him a "real politics for professional academics" but only "another means of humanistic self-flagellation" ("Politics" 374).

That Robbins is disappointed to read another account of his responsibility for inequality is not surprising. Nor is it surprising that in order to avoid self-flagellation, he marshals his substantial intellectual resources to posit intellectuals and professionals as groups committed to social and economic equality. To be sure, the "politics of the alibi," as Frow calls it, "whereby intellectuals claim the right to speak from a position of relative power on behalf of the powerless and the dispossessed" (168), has a long and distinguished history among intellectuals, the current version of which, according to Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse, begins with Marx himself, who protected his theory of capital by concealing the plain fact that in "modern cultures the people in charge are always literate people who determine what literacy is, how one acquires it, and therefore who has access to the specific knowledge and privileges accompanying it (138). Or as Bourdieu puts it, making the same point rather more broadly, "the celebrated 'universal class,' be it Hegel's Prussian bureaucracy or Marx's proletariat, was never more than a straw-man for intellectuals who designated themselves as the ultimate judges of universality in their designation of the 'universal class'" ("Corporatism" 109).

Like Weber, writers such as Bourdieu, Gouldner, Guillory, or Armstrong and Tennenhouse shift the locus of power from capital toward cultural capital, toward intellect. And if, as Robbins complains, such writers insist on seeing the classes formed thereby as holding largely incompatible interests, it is arguable that in doing so and regardless of whether they subscribe to a two-class model of stratification, these writers nevertheless remain to some extent within the

Marxian tradition. For certainly it is the case, as Ralf Dahrendorf explained decades ago, that

however one may interpret, extend, or improve Marx, classes in his sense are clearly not layers in a hierarchical system of strata differentiated by gradual distinctions. . . . *Class* is always a category for purposes of the analysis of the dynamics of social conflict and its structural roots. (76)

For Marx, class is an analytic concept useful in understanding social conflict and the possibilities for organized action by a group. A class, according to Peter Berger, has “vested interests in common, interests that must always be pursued *against* other interests” (52).

Several recent writers—Bourdieu in “The Corporatism of the Universal,” Frow in *Cultural Studies and Cultural Value*, and Guillory in “Literary Critics as Intellectuals”—acknowledge this point, an acknowledgment enhanced, in my view, by each writer’s equally strong recognition that political conflicts and divisions are to be found within this class of intellectuals (that is, within the New Class, as Gouldner put it, or the professional-managerial class, as Barbara and John Ehrenreich put it). Empirical research suggests that “far from becoming filled with ‘tenured radicals,’ the professoriat has included an increasing number of self-described conservatives in the 1980s and a declining proportion of liberals,” *especially* on economic issues, issues about which, like others in the upper middle class, we continue to offer opinions significantly more conservative than those offered by the working class (Brint 154, 86–87, 97–103; Croteau 195–96). Further, the 1980s have made it clear that such divisions exist not only between, say, economists and philosophers but also between literary critics, with Allan Bloom criticized by his peers as roundly as if he were Ronald Reagan. That conservative political positions are held by literary critics as well as by engineers undermines the construction of the intellectual “as innately progressive, always potentially subversive” and furthermore reveals the “covert elitism” such a construction entails (Guillory, “Intellectuals” 111, 121).

This “covert elitism” is easy to detect: the claim of autonomy, a class interest usually described more grandly as the ability to speak truth to power, allows certain intellectuals to claim that their political judgments are similarly autonomous—objective and disinterested and therefore superior to the judgments of other, interested parties. Frow, for example, invokes a class interest to promote political desire: “there are clear limits to the extent to which it is possible for intellectuals to associate themselves with anti-intellectualism; and there are limits to how far they can or should suspend their critique of, for

example, racism, sexism, and militarism” (158). The effect—and perhaps the intent—of this sequence is to link intellectualism with “the critique of . . . racism, sexism, and militarism,” thus requiring assent for the latter to follow naturally upon assent for the former. Needless to say, many intellectuals will resist the flow of Frow’s rhetoric, without sacrificing their intellectuality, or even their opposition to sexism or racism, a point Guillory or Steven Brint might make as well.

Given that, as Frow himself makes clear, there is no escape from interestedness, it is arguable that intellectuals should distinguish even more carefully between class interests and political desire, between, for example, an autonomy that is essential to our work and an end to sexism in, say, the Catholic Church that is not. For ourselves as intellectuals, such focusing can only be beneficial: cloaking a political agenda behind a supposed disinterestedness ultimately discredits both the agenda and our actual interests. Furthermore, that intellectuals and the working class hold different and sometimes opposing interests in both economic and social policy, and that occasionally they do battle over those interests, does not disable a “real politics for professional academics,” as Robbins claims. Indeed, conflict over interests is perhaps a stronger condition for such a politics than are common interests. Common interests offer intellectuals and workers the opportunity to work as a coalition, which in practice means that intellectuals dominate the proceedings and give up nothing. As Frow concedes, when confronted by a disagreeable set of criteria for judgment, the standard maneuver of those vested in high culture and its institutions has been to impose their own, more agreeable set of criteria, precisely because they “have . . . the power to do so” (151). Conflict over interests offers the opportunity for intellectuals to compromise, the opportunity for us to give and take rather than merely dictate.

As promised and to help conclude this chapter, let me return briefly to Shakespeare; that is, forward to the past. Toward the end of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Theseus, Duke of Athens, wonders how his court shall “wear away this long age of three hours / Between our after-supper and bed-time?” (V.i.33–34). Offered a list of ready entertainments, the Duke settles his curiosity upon “A tedious brief scene of young Pyramus / And his love Thisbe, very tragical mirth” (ll. 56–57), a play Philostrate, the Master of the Revels, immediately describes as indeed tedious and brief, and very tragical mirth:

A play there is, my lord, some ten words long,
Which is as brief as I have known a play;

But by ten words, my lord, it is too long,
 Which makes it tedious; for in all the play
 There is not one word apt, one player fitted.
 And tragical, my noble lord, it is,
 For Pyramus therein doth kill himself;
 Which, when I saw rehears'd, I must confess
 Made mine eyes water; but more merry tears
 The passion of loud laughter never shed.

(ll. 61–70)

Although Philostrate's critical judgment fails to convince Theseus to choose another entertainment, his emphasis on propriety, taste, and style foreshadows the responses to the play that will be offered by the assembled audience of Theseus's court: both play and players, the aristocrats tell us, are ungoverned, disordered, uncouth, childlike, and error-ridden (ll. 123, 125, 353, 122, 237). *Pyramus and Thisbe* is the work of "hard-handed men . . . / Which never labour'd in their minds till now," and it is, as Hippolyta concludes, "the silliest stuff that ever I heard" (ll. 72–73, 207).

Louis Montrose is correct to conclude that at the turn of the seventeenth century, the "ideological positioning" of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and of its play-within-the-play "is more complex and more equivocal than can be accommodated by the terms of an elite/popular opposition" (*Playing* 198). On the one hand, *Dream* mocks or burlesques the efforts of the amateur thespians. This mockery is part of a strategy of professionalization, by which Shakespeare distinguishes "the mechanicals' art from that of the Lord Chamberlain's Men." At the same time, such professionalization itself is encouraged by the Elizabethan regime as part of its strategy to suppress "performances of the civic Corpus Christi plays and . . . other forms of popular pastime" (*Playing* 196, 182). On the other hand, *Dream*'s mockery of Bottom, Quince, Snug, and the rest of the amateur players works to parody the professional actors' own "relationship to their patrons and to the state" and thus to distance the professional theater from "the pressures and constraints of aristocratic and royal patronage" (*Playing* 196, 205).

Yet even if "Shakespeare is no more clearly aristocratic in his biases here than he is plebian" (Montrose *Playing* 196), the oppositions invoked by the aristocrats in response to the mechanicals' work—mind/body, order/disorder, adult/child, governed/ungoverned, and refined/uncouth, to which we might add elite/popular—have displayed remarkable staying power and serve nicely to characterize elite assumptions about "rude mechanicals" even in late-twen-

tieth-century America, as I hope the following chapters will demonstrate. Not timeless or universal, these binaries yet seem to be necessary to how elites construct themselves and their power, whether the elite is composed of aristocrats who insist upon traditional prerogatives based on blood and title or of professionals who insist upon prerogatives based on achieved intellectual expertise or ethical disinterest.

In 1934, John Dewey observed: “Auguste Comte said that the great problem of our time is the organization of the proletariat into the social system” (344). And then he added: “the remark is even truer now than when it was made.” My sense is that the remark remains at least as true today. Certainly it is the case, as Guillory convincingly argues, that within the academy, and “within the discourse of liberal pluralism” more generally, the invocation of class, of the proletariat, as part of a multicultural holy trinity is an “empty” gesture (*Capital* 14). In writing this book, I have attempted to understand why this is so, and why the intellectual culture that trained me and in which I now work training others, an intellectual culture that nowadays values diversity and pluralism above almost all other virtues, despises people like the working-class people I grew up with. Such a desire is not simply personal or local, although my personal history informs each of these essays and sometimes emerges in them as anecdote or story, in characteristic postmodern fashion (cf. Simpson). Rather and more importantly, it is a desire to understand what passes for truth in literary study today, why some questions are asked and answered, and others are not.

Like this chapter, each of the chapters to follow originates in an interrogation that puts social class at the center of the analysis, and not just the issue of class in Shakespeare’s plays or in early modern England, but the issue of class in the academy and in this society today. Shakespeare has indeed hit the “big time” in contemporary culture, and as Michael Bristol argues, in the United States “every expression of interest in Shakespeare, both amateur and professional, is . . . an unambiguous sign of cultural advancement” (*Big* 3; *America* 1). To get at the meanings of this sign, and thereby to contribute to a needed reexamination of class as an analytic concept in literary and cultural study, I bring together a range of theoretical and empirical work on class, some of it unfamiliar to literary critics. This work also allows me to enter an ongoing debate about the politics of academic literary study and of the academy more generally, and I offer here a point of view that builds upon even as it challenges work on this topic by John Guillory, Evan Watkins, John Frow, Bruce Robbins, and Stanley Fish. For these reasons—and not just because Shakespeare remains central to literary and cultural work in English—I hope to find readers whose specialties are not necessarily Shakespeare or early modern English literature or indeed

who are not academics at all.⁴ I search here for a usable past, one that helps all of us to envision and achieve a better future.

Beginning in the early modern period and continuing to this day, three institutions principally offer individuals the opportunity to improve, via success, or worsen, via failure, their lots in life: educational institutions, economic institutions, and political institutions.⁵ I propose to assess some of the ways these institutions manage inequality by reading each through a Shakespearean text: in chapter 2, pairing educational institutions with *The Tempest*; in chapter 3, pairing economic institutions with *Timon of Athens*; and, in chapter 4, pairing political institutions with *Coriolanus*. I propose that these institutions manage inequality variously, and that each privileges or devalues certain kinds of behavior and hence privileges or devalues certain kinds of persons. These institutions, therefore, produce interested parties, and to the extent that these interests are incompatible, so too are not only the institutions but also their aficionados and loyalists. Obviously, since all of these institutions produce all of us, divided loyalties can and will exist and persist within individuals. Still, some of us define ourselves in terms of one institution more than another, and therefore some of us may align ourselves rather more exclusively with the values and interests of that institution. Thus, in chapter 5, I offer an example of the strengths of such loyalties today and focus—via a discussion of the pastoral and enclosure—on the politics of contemporary land-use, of leisure and environmentalism, in Ashland, Oregon, the home of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. And in my conclusion I attempt to place this book’s arguments within a larger debate about loyalties, one that has erupted recently between what have been called the “social” Left and the “cultural” Left, and that extends to the nature of professional life in the university.

I am interested in how these institutions appear not just to intellectuals but also to working-class people. Looked at from both perspectives, it is clear why intellectuals and working-class people find themselves at loggerheads: intellectuals consistently promote political and educational institutions as ways to solve society’s ills, and workers perceive political and educational institutions as potentially hostile to their interests and needs. Since the end of World War II, intellectuals have proposed cultural solutions—diversity, tolerance—to social problems, and workers have proposed, or at least wanted, economic solutions—higher wages, lower taxes, a more favorable distribution of wealth. I do not deny the history of radical thought and activity among the working class; nor do I deny the potential importance of both education and government in securing workers’ interests. But generally speaking, workers see that

the solution to their problems is a job with a decent wage and the opportunity to purchase goods at a decent price.

It was largely for this reason that Lenin theorized and implemented the leadership of an intellectual vanguard: workers do not see the need for revolution because their interests are addressed very well by the efforts of trade unionism (May 21). According to Gouldner, Lenin understood that “socialism could not be spontaneously created by the proletariat” precisely because Marxism was not their movement: “Marxism was the creation of educated intellectuals” and reflected their consciousness, not that of workers or peasants. After all, Gouldner aptly reminds us, “Marxism itself was made . . . by the son of a minor Prussian bureaucrat and the son of a multi-national industrialist, both of mandarin culture” (76–77).

Workers favor markets and capitalism because, as I will argue in chapters 3 and 4, these institutions promote “a widening of opportunity rather than the maintenance of privileges” (Tawney, *Usury* 135). Intellectuals favor education and politics because we must insist, finally, on the maintenance of privileges. For us, as Frow contends, “there is no escape from the consequences of possession of cultural capital, just as there is no way of getting outside the game of value judgement and the game of cultural distinction” (168–69). Some of us may try to do so, and some of us may be perfectly correct in our attitudes toward the working class: more concerned with the negative effects of NAFTA on jobs than with its positive effects on our TIAA-CREF accounts—and willing to sacrifice the latter; able to accept that Reagan Democrats had legitimate reasons for abandoning the Democratic Party—and willing to change the policies that led to their leaving; and convinced, with Herbert J. Gans, that when it comes to culture, “every one is entitled to choose what he or she considers good” (“Popular” 20), even when those choices include professional wrestling, representational art, and the clothes sold at Wal-Mart.

Some of us may even act on our attitudes and in ways more significant than just voting, by giving time and money to various political causes, for example. Nevertheless, along with Brint and Fish, I think it important to distinguish between the political effects of our various social roles. Fish states flatly that “academic work is one thing and political work another” (*Correctness* 93), but Brint develops the distinction, suggesting that “the institutions staffed by liberal professionals may have one sort of political import, while the people who make them up, in their activity as private citizens, may have quite another” (97). Such a “contradiction” between the personal and the professional is perfectly normal, and many of my friends and colleagues live with it daily, but just

as many, if not more, do not seem content to do so. Robbins, for example, wants oppositionality to be constitutive not just of his self but of his professional role as well: he wants to be an agent of critique from inside the gates of the institution (*Vocations* 55).

My difficulty with this desire is partly semantic: what does oppositionality or critique mean in this instance? Here I would echo Fish, who insists that as long as we labor within the gates, “the changes we might make will be in the nature of modifications rather than ruptures” (*Correctness* 101). Modifications not ruptures, or perhaps we might say, reform not revolution. If this is in fact the case, then the question is whether for Robbins oppositionality or critique means reform and modification or revolution and rupture. If the latter, then such oppositionality is impossible, doomed to failure, as Fish persuasively argues. If the former, then oppositionality or critique is not very oppositional, and while puffing up reform in such a manner may fool other academics or intellectuals, it does not fool workers or other marginalized folks who recognize such moves as typical: workers know, says Raymond Williams, that our “one identifiable activity seems to be using words or statistics to confuse or screw you” (*Hope* 144).

Still, let us grant Robbins the possibility or even the actuality that, in Nancy Fraser’s words, “the radical academic is not an oxymoron” (cited by Robbins, *Vocations* 55). The problem remains that such people are and always have been a minority. As Williams points out, “most intellectuals, even now after changes in education, either come from or soon identify with the ruling or privileged classes” (*Hope* 144). Despite their expansion, educational institutions are “still deeply distorted by the effects of class and privilege” (*Hope* 145), and they remain distorted for reasons having to do with their structure, as I argue in chapter 2: “bringing new grist to your mill does not in itself alter the basic manner of its operation” (Fish, *Correctness* 101). And therefore, concludes Williams, who speaks “*from the inside, from my own real world,*” the fact of the matter is that workers and “the labour movement [*do*] *not distrust intellectuals and educators nearly enough*” (*Hope* 145; emphasis added).

Williams himself is exemplary, an intellectual of great wisdom and courage, bred in the working class. And for many of today’s left intellectuals “he will remain . . . an alibi,” as one of the anonymous readers of this manuscript suggests. That my reader is correct, I have little doubt, but I dare say Williams himself would be horrified—might even, perhaps, turn in his grave—to learn that part of his legacy is to provide an alibi for intellectuals who *need* to believe, with Robbins, “that what we do is meaningful,” that “oppositional work” is con-

ceivable within the professions, and thus that the “professions are not, in Shaw’s phrase, conspiracies against the laity” (*Vocations* x, 91).

Robbins admits that what he does in *Secular Vocations* includes “an element of personal apologia” because “when lower-middle-class values join with an elite education to produce some form of academic leftism, as they have for me and many others . . . the embarrassments of possessing expertise in a deeply unjust society cannot be wished away” (x). My work here is not an apologia but rather an expression of guilt, perhaps even of survivor’s guilt, and it, too, cannot be wished away. My guilt carries with it not embarrassment, which disappeared years ago when I left my hard-hat, blue-collar neighborhood, but rather a complex mixture of anger, shame, and pride. This book, however, is not memoir; it does not recount nor does it depend upon “the personal history that brought [me] into this arena of evidence” (Fish, *Correctness* 95). Rather and *pace* Fish’s defense of the protocols of literary professionalism, this book is the result of many years of thinking, which has been disciplined—perhaps not enough—by the norms of my profession (*Correctness* 94–95, 47–48). I believe my conclusions to be true, but I do not expect my readers to agree with all I say here, and I know it is not for me to decide whether Robbins’s conclusions or mine (or Fish’s or Guillory’s) are closer to the truth, closer to being correct about whether (literary) professionalism today is or is not a kind of conspiracy against the laity. But I offer here for your consideration a case that, for better or worse, it is.

