
Winning the Culture Game: Prizes, Awards, and the Rules of Art

Author(s): James F. English

Source: *New Literary History*, Vol. 33, No. 1, Reconsiderations of Literary Theory, Literary History (Winter, 2002), pp. 109-135

Published by: [The Johns Hopkins University Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20057712>

Accessed: 25/04/2011 19:28

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=jhup>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



The Johns Hopkins University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *New Literary History*.

Winning the Culture Game: Prizes, Awards, and the Rules of Art*

James F. English

THERE IS NO FORM of cultural capital so ubiquitous, so powerful, so widely talked about, and yet so little explored by scholars as the cultural prize. Prizes and awards fairly dominate the cultural landscape these days, literally tens of thousands of them vying for our notice, lists of them appearing in every resumé, every promotional blurb, every feature story or obituary of practically anyone connected with the production of art.¹ Indeed, the sense that the cultural universe has become super-saturated with prizes, that there are more prizes than our collective cultural achievements can possibly justify, is the great and recurring theme of prize punditry. Gore Vidal says that in the U.S. there are more literary prizes than there are writers.² Peter Porter, the Australian poet, says there are so many prizes in his country that “there is hardly any writer in Sydney who has not won one.”³ A British novelist jokes about attending a “great literary function” in Bloomsbury where he turned out to be “one of only two fiction writers present never to have won a literary award,” and where the other such writer was managing to go undetected by laying claim to an award of his own invention—the “Pemberton-Frost Memorial Prize.”⁴ The author thus found himself in a perfect comic inversion of the normative prize scenario: a single loser emerging from a congested field of winners. The whole literary awards scene, as numerous commentators have observed, has come to resemble the “Caucus-race” of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, where the Dodo announces that “*everybody* has won, and all must have prizes.”⁵

This is not a specifically literary circumstance, of course, but a general feature of contemporary cultural life. Woody Allen’s character in *Annie*

*Versions of this article were presented at the 1997 Bard College English lecture series, organized by Craig Smith and Michele Frank; the 2000 Cultural Studies lecture at the College of William and Mary, organized by Chris Bongie; and the 2000 Theorizing in Particular lecture series at Kelly Writers House of the University of Pennsylvania, organized by Gregory Flaxman and Aaron Levy. I am grateful to the organizers and the audiences of these events. I would like to express gratitude, as well, to the Research Foundation of the University of Pennsylvania, which funded travel to London to conduct interviews and examine the Booker and Turner archives.

Hall (1977) remarks, apropos of the Grammys, that awards are being conferred for such doubtful cultural achievements that Hitler could get one for “greatest fascist dictator”—and the joke has become a staple in all the fields of culture from journalism to architecture. Everywhere we find the same mocking or disdainful complaint: “So many awards,” as a columnist reviewing a spate of new music awards shows puts it, “so little excellence.”⁶ But this joke, and the attitude it bespeaks of sneering indifference or condescension to the awards industry, seems to have prevented us from making any rigorous inquiry into the cultural logic in which prizes are today so inextricably embedded. It is, in fact, a residual joke, somewhat out of step with the contemporary, pitched along lines which are essentially modernist and which depend on a certain consensus and, you could say, an unproblematic faith among the actual producers of art regarding the distinction, indeed the opposition, between legitimate forms of artistic recognition on the one hand and mere bourgeois credentials or consecrations on the other. “Honors dishonor,” Flaubert famously said. But that resoundingly simple dictum no longer holds today, at least not in the way it did a hundred or even thirty years ago. This is not to say that the modern discourse of art in which prizes and prestige are figured as opposing terms has ceased to reverberate, or that it lacks any tactical utility within the sites of contemporary culture. On the contrary, it continues to resonate even with those of us who are presumed to know better, and it can still be wielded effectively in the academy as well as in the dailies. But the game called culture is played differently now than it used to be, with more diverse agents (institutional as well as individual agents) employing more complex and varied strategies. Those of us who are interested in what Pierre Bourdieu has called the rules of art would do well to put our habitual sneers aside and begin to inquire more systematically into the prize’s functioning, both in the narrow sense, as a piece of objectified symbolic capital (the sort of hard credential or qualification that is “to cultural capital what money is to economic capital”⁷) and, in a broader sense, as an instrument of exchange and conversion with its own particular rules of operation, its own class of operatives or functionaries, its own historical trajectory across the fields of culture. Just what value *do* prizes carry in the postmodern economy of cultural prestige, and how do they retain this value in the face of their seemingly numerous and powerful detractors?

By invoking Bourdieu, and employing from the outset a Bourdieuan terminology, I mean to indicate a certain level of agreement with his reflexive sociology of art and with the larger project he has called a general economy of practices—more agreement, certainly, than most American students of literary and cultural theory would be willing to

accept. It is not my purpose here to account for the rejection of Bourdieu among American literary scholars, as John Guillory has undertaken to do in a valuable article called “Bourdieu’s Refusal.”⁸ Nor do I intend to defend Bourdieu from his American critics, a task that is being judiciously performed by Loïc Wacquant and other practitioners of reflexive sociology.⁹ Unlike the true disciples, I would concede that Bourdieu’s economic model of cultural practice has failed to yield a very convincing theory of the subject, that he ultimately offers us an individual subject no less reduced in its agency to acquisitiveness and competition, and not much better articulated along axes of race, gender, or sexuality, than the Economic Man of neoclassical economics.¹⁰ I would nonetheless argue that this model deserves more attention than American culture critics have given it (particularly in connection with our attempts to reflect upon the changing circumstances of academic labor); that it lends itself more readily than may appear to feminist and postcolonial appropriations;¹¹ and that, with certain modifications, it can provide the best available theoretical framework within which to explore the institutions, instruments, and agencies of cultural prestige.

In conceptual terms, therefore, the present article is primarily engaged with the work of Bourdieu and his school. It aims, however, not simply to reproduce and elaborate but substantially to revise the relational map of the cultural field that reflexive sociology now offers us. This map is composed of what Bourdieu calls “circuits of legitimation,” systems of sponsorship, evaluation, and consecration by means of which power euphemizes itself as merit (as intrinsic and proper rather than imposed and arbitrary) and thereby secures its symbolic efficacy. In modern times, and especially with the rise of modern educational institutions, these circuits have become ever longer and more complex, assuring some “‘progress’ in symbolic efficacy” to offset the erosion of tyrannical power and of its direct (generally hereditary) transfer. But it is also this increasing dependency on increasingly remote and complex circulations of symbolic capital that has left the dominant groups susceptible to “subversive misappropriations” of that capital along the way. This familiar ambiguity or paradox of power, what Bourdieu calls the “relationship of dependence in and through independence that binds cultural power to temporal power,” has become especially vexed in recent decades, as the economy of artistic capital, for all its increasing complexity, has undergone a curious sort of selective demystification, a partial shedding of euphemisms. There has been a shift in the “illusio” of cultural practice, in the very ways that one finds it possible to believe in art and to articulate or deploy that belief, and this has forced the agents of cultural production—who remain, after all, committed to art—to become more self-conscious about their dependent independency

and to develop new, more ambiguous strategies or styles of play.¹² This shift has not gone unremarked, but critics have tended to construe it as a mere shedding of illusions or dismantling of ideology: in the face of ever more apparent truths about the mutual implication of aesthetic value and capitalist relations of power, the religion of Art has collapsed and the Artist-God has been dethroned. In some accounts, this demystification has been a general one; in other accounts, it has been mostly restricted to academics of left-critical orientation, and is only gradually working its way across terrains of presumed greater naivete. The actual situation is, I think, more complicated, both in terms of the status of the belief in Art and in terms of the interchange between academe and the wider society. As a particularly vivid and problematic instrument of legitimation, the prize can help us to clarify this new situation of the cultural field and so perhaps to identify, more successfully than Bourdieu himself has done, some forms of “subversive misappropriation” suited to the postmodern moment.¹³

I. The Booker Prize and the New Rhetoric of Prize Journalism

It is evident that for arts-page editors, book reviewers, and other journalists of culture (including, prominently, academic journalists), a certain internalized prohibition has long obtained in regard to warmly appreciative or openly supportive commentary on prizes and awards. The situation varies somewhat as we move along the art-entertainment spectrum, but there is a general attitude of mocking condescension which, particularly where prizes in the “legitimate” arts are concerned, is put to work in strategic accordance with the journalistic capacity for the production of *scandal*. Bourdieu has observed that “scandal is the instrument *par excellence* of symbolic action,”¹⁴ while Joan Shelley Rubin and Janice Radway have shown how the twentieth century’s most effective instruments of cultural exchange—those by means of which the fungibility or intraconvertability of (cultural, or cultural with noncultural) capitals has been facilitated and exploited—have produced, on the field where academe and journalism converge, a series of “scandals of the middlebrow.”¹⁵ Such scandals consist rhetorically of howls of outrage, fastened onto any particular gaffe or embarrassment of the moment, but ultimately directed at the mediating institution as such, which is accused of furthering the encroachments of the marketplace, or of politics, or of personal connections, onto the artistic field, and hence of diluting what ought to be pure cultural capital with economic, political, or social capital.

There is little need to document this line of commentary with regard to cultural prizes, since it is familiar to us all. It appears, in fact, that although its specific forms and ideological functions have changed, such commentary is as old as prizes themselves—as old, at any rate, as the classical drama prizes of the fifth century B.C.—and that scandal, or the threat and promise of scandal, is constitutive of prizes as we know them.¹⁶ What I want to discuss here is the postmodern form of this constitutive threat, the gradual shift of prize commentary in recent years onto a register of *mock-scandal*, whereby the prize can continue to occupy, discursively, the place of the illegitimate, the embarrassing, the scandalously middling institution of culture—a place with which no “serious” critic or artist wants to be too firmly associated—while securing in fact an even greater symbolic efficacy not only among the mass consumers of art but among the most specialized producers, the serious (academic) critics and artists themselves.

In describing this change in the commentary on prizes, I will focus initially on Britain’s Booker Prize for Fiction. It is no secret that the success of the Booker Prize—its seemingly magical power to attract the attention both of the broad book-reading public and of the most critically respected British novelists—is bound up with the annual flurry of scandal that attends it in the dailies and in the literary press. Founded in 1968 as the brainchild of Tom Maschler, a rising young celebrity-editor at Jonathan Cape, under the sponsorship of Booker Brothers (today Booker PLC), then a postcolonial agribusiness company seeking to diversify domestically and to improve its public profile, the prize was not in fact well positioned to succeed.¹⁷ It lacked, for one thing, the important symbolic distinction of being the oldest book prize in Britain. Not only were there continuous prizes dating back half a century (the James Tait Black and the Hawthornden), but there were already other newcomers, such as the *Guardian* Fiction Prize, which had been founded in 1965, and the Silver Pen fiction prize, which had been announced earlier in 1968. While the Booker’s cash value (£5000) was somewhat higher than others initially, this has not remained the case and was never a very significant differentiating marker.¹⁸ Nor was the Booker on any account remarkable for its professed criteria or aims: it was a Novel-of-the-Year award of the most generic sort, one more would-be *Prix Goncourt*.¹⁹ Though the Booker organization would deny this today, the whole venture was very close to folding within just a couple of years of its launch. The private correspondence and the minutes from committee meetings of 1970 and 1971 read like the black-box transcript of a crashed plane: publishers were threatening to stop nominating books; people invited to serve as judges were routinely declining to do so; Maschler insisted on acting like the chair of the management committee,

while the actual chair resigned; the Book Trust was abruptly brought in to assume administrative responsibility (though they had never administered a prize); and the sponsor, though committed to an initial seven years of funding, was already making sounds of an early exit.²⁰

But what happened instead is that the Booker began, in 1971, to deliver a series of annual scandals, the best known of which is that of John Berger's rude acceptance speech in 1972, when Berger, enjoying the celebrity attendant on his *Ways of Seeing* series for the BBC, stood before the assembled Booker executives, denounced their corporation as a colonialist enterprise built on the backs of black plantation workers in Guyana, and declared that half his prize money would be donated to the London branch of the Black Panthers.²¹ This incident alone gave an enormous boost to the Booker's public profile, but it had been prepared for by the intemperate behavior of another (in this case *right-wing*) television celebrity, Malcolm Muggeridge, the year before, and it was reinforced by another politicized, anti-Booker acceptance speech by J. G. Farrell the following year. By early 1974, after these three successive scandals, two of them powerfully leveraged by the cross-over with television and the third virtually guaranteeing that the other two would be revisited and the whole sequence retraced in all the arts pages, the tone of frustration had entirely disappeared from the committee's minutes. They were congratulating themselves on "very satisfactory" results, and particularly on the fact that "publicity for the prize has now gained its own momentum."²² Press coverage, which had risen to about fifty stories in 1971 and two hundred in 1972, had risen again in 1973;²³ publishers had stopped complaining about the entry fees, prestigious judges had become easier to find, and Booker PLC happily renewed the seven-year sponsorship agreement. Within two more years, the BBC had decided to televise the award ceremony, a development which in turn led the Organizing Committee to revise its procedures along more Oscar-like lines, such that the judges' decision could be kept absolutely secret and the shortlisted authors could be assembled, under conditions of maximum anxiety and close public scrutiny, to endure the announcement. This "celebrity sadism," as one commentator called it, ensured that incidents of scandalous misbehavior (Rushdie pounding his fists on the table, saying the judges know "fuck all" about literature, and so on) would be even more regular, and could be even more eagerly anticipated; journalists covering the Booker would always have "cultural" material of just the sort they require.²⁴ Just a decade after its near-collapse, the Booker outstripped all other British literary prizes combined in terms of the sheer volume of publicity, renown, and book sales it could generate for its winner. Even to be shortlisted for the Booker was a distinction of greater value—symbolic as well as monetary—than any

other prize could muster. To win it, as Thomas Keneally's editor said when Keneally received the 1982 prize for *Schindler's Ark*, was "like an avalanche hitting you all at once."²⁵

It is well known that the postwar decades have seen a general reshaping of the relationship between journalistic and cultural capital, between celebrity and canonicity.²⁶ Starting in the early 1970s, prize sponsors and administrators—particularly in fields that enjoy programming time on television, as literature does in England, France, and to a lesser degree the U.S.—became adept exploiters and manipulators of this relationship. The Booker's chief administrator, Martin Goff, who should be regarded as a major figure in the history of prizes, was fully and actively complicit in exploiting the association of the Booker with scandal, wagering that the prize stood to reap the greatest symbolic profit precisely from its status as a kind of cultural embarrassment. Goff could see that each new scandal provoked objection not just to a particular jury decision or management policy but to the very existence of the prize. The Booker's critics do not simply weigh in on one side or the other of a given evaluative controversy, but use each controversy to rehearse the more fundamental dispute over the Booker Prize itself.²⁷ In the *Times*, the Booker has been dismissed as "rubbish,"²⁸ mere "razzmatazz, . . . a laughing stock," "an annual rusty nail . . . hammered in the coffin of fiction."²⁹ The *Daily Telegraph* has called it "an embarrassment to the entire book trade."³⁰ And the *Economist* has pronounced it "a sad and shoddy farce," adding that it is high time "for the backers to call it a day."³¹ Such wholesale denunciations, appearing in the most powerful journals, are clearly not an unhappy side effect of the promoters' publicity strategy, but a central aim. It is the charge of fundamental, irremediable illegitimacy that keeps the prize a focus of attention, increasing its journalistic capital, *and* speeds its accumulation of symbolic capital, or cultural prestige. Far from posing a threat to the prize's efficacy as an instrument of the cultural economy, scandal is its lifeblood; far from constituting a critique, indignant commentary about the prize is an index of its normal and proper functioning.

Until quite recently, however, there has not been much room in the game to acknowledge this simple fact of complicity or convergence of interests between the more or less lofty and disdainful cultural commentators and those who have a direct stake in promoting the prize and enlarging its cultural role. Instead, commentators tended, misleadingly if not disingenuously, to describe the relationship between the Booker's increasingly privileged cultural position and its perceived scandalousness as a paradoxical one, the prize having miraculously succeeded "in spite of" all the outraged and scandalized book critics.³² The tendency of commentators automatically to describe the situation in this way, as a

strange deviation from the proper and expected course of things, has depended on their misapprehension of the economy of cultural prestige and of their own place in that economy. Arts editors, book reviewers, and academics who write for the newspapers or do book-chat on TV are by no means perfectly opposed to the sponsors and administrators of prizes, nor, where the two sets of interests do diverge, would the writers stand to gain by driving prizes off of the cultural field altogether. Prizes are as useful to them as to the sponsoring corporations and societies, of which in many cases they are members or proxies. Apart from being a means of derivative consecration for journalist-critics themselves (since members of this fraction often receive the symbolically subsidiary but structurally primary honor of being asked to serve as nominators or judges), prizes have traditionally been useful in providing regular occasions for journalist-critics to rehearse Enlightenment pieties about “pure” art and “authentic” forms of greatness or genius, and thereby to align themselves with “higher” values, or more symbolically potent forms of capital, than those which dominate the (scandalously impure) prize economy as well as the journalistic field itself. Such rehearsals, I should add, do nothing to discredit the cultural prize, and in fact serve as a crucial support for it in as much as they help to keep aloft the collective belief or make-belief in artistic value as such, in the disinterested judgment of taste, the hierarchy of value or prestige that is not a homology of social hierarchies, not a euphemized form of social violence. Like the magazine profiles of “great writers on vacation” memorably described by Roland Barthes in *Mythologies*, journalistic coverage of prizes serves by its very emphasis on the banal, the social, the petty side of cultural life to reinforce belief in the higher, “intrinsically different” nature of artists and artistic value.³³ The prize depends on this collective belief since its own currency, however tainted or debased, is understood to derive from this other and purer form, which stands in relation to the economy of cultural prestige as gold did to the cash economy in the days of the gold standard: a perfectly magical guarantor of an imperfectly magical system.

In any event, the longstanding fiction that scandalized commentators stand outside of and in opposition to the cultural-prize game—in a stance of independent critique rather than “dependent independency”—has finally begun in recent years to give way. Increasingly one finds these writers, journalists and academic critics alike, acknowledging a prize’s dependency on denunciation by “independent” writers such as themselves, its need to be represented by them as a scandalous and degrading instrument of cultural manipulation. Mark Lawson, a book-review editor at the *Independent* who has himself served as a Booker judge and been involved in more than one Booker scandal, observed in 1994 that the

function of the Booker Prize is not simply “to promote the cause of serious fiction . . . [but] to provoke rows and scandals, which may, in due course, promote the cause of serious fiction.”³⁴ Richard Todd, an academic who in 1996 published an entire book on the Booker Prize, dismisses as “fatuous” the kind of “highbrow literary” denunciations that have been directed at the prize, and he takes it as “surely evident” by now that the prize’s loftiest critics are its best allies, that the Booker thrives “precisely by ‘getting it wrong’” (as it cannot fail to do) in the eyes of so many established experts (*CF* 64).

Alongside this new readiness to acknowledge the smooth working relationship between cultural prizes and their critics, we find more and more a kind of playful or reflexive prize commentary in which “scandal” seems to circulate in scare quotes, with winks and nudges passing between the ostensibly scandalous artist or jury member, the ostensibly scandalized critic, and the reader. The whole event is seen as being pinned on what a chair of judges at the NCR Non-Fiction Prize called “the hope that there might be a row in inverted commas.”³⁵ Doubtless a certain conscious duplicity or jocularitas has always been observable in coverage of the Booker (and in British cultural journalism generally), but it has become far more conspicuous over the past decade, with fewer critics sounding the note of sincere outrage and more of them openly *playing around* with “scandals” that are at least partly of their own invention. Geraldine Brooks, in an account of the 1992 award dinner, recalls the feeling of disappointment as things wound down without an embarrassment or a controversy. The judges that year failed even to choose an outright winner, dividing the prize between Barry Unsworth and Michael Ondaatje; the evening seemed flat, anticlimactic, given over to timidity, compromise, and decorum. But soon after the two winners made their acceptance speeches, Ian McEwan, a shortlisted also-ran for the second time, took his publishing entourage and left the Guildhall. Brooks seized eagerly on this gesture. “Is it possible?” she wrote. “Yes! He’s walking out! Before the closing speech and the toast to Poor Salman, Who Can’t Be With Us! . . . What a relief. The Booker Prize for 1992 will have its scandal after all.”³⁶

This new rhetoric of amused complicity in the manufacture of scandal is an instance of what Bourdieu calls a “strategy of condescension,” a strategy that enables one to enjoy both the rewards of the game and the rewards due to those who are seen as standing above the game.³⁷ It does not permit of outright denunciation or implacable opposition, except as a kind of put-on, a form of trash-talk, ritual insults within the bounds of a game; it does not allow one to say explicitly and in all seriousness that, as a “literary critic” or “intellectual,” one is above such stakes as are at issue in the prize economy. It does still enable one to gesture toward that

imaginary separate space on which the ideology and institution of modern art have been predicated, the space outside of all economies, where artistic genius is a gift rather than a form of capital and where the greatness of great art is beyond all measure or manipulation except by the sure determinations of (homogeneous, empty) Time.³⁸ But the gesture, which is in any case no longer obligatory, seems more and more often to be oblique, apologetic, ironized. It has come to involve a certain acknowledgment, though always a partial and incomplete acknowledgment, that this “world apart” is a matter of collective make-believe. What used to be describable as the “sincere fiction” informing commentary on prizes, and indeed underpinning the entire economy of cultural prestige—the fiction of socially unmediated aesthetic value—does remain in place as a kind of necessary predicate. But this new (or rather, newly dominant) rhetoric suggests new difficulties in the very problematic of *sincerity* as it applies in such instances. What Bourdieu calls the “illutio” of literature—the fundamental belief in the literary game and in the value of its stakes—has been complicated or compromised by something that is neither a perfect lucidity regarding “the objective truth of literature as a fiction founded on collective belief” nor a radical disillusionment from which literary practice can only seem a form of “cynical mystification or conscious trickery” (RA 274).³⁹ We are, rather, dealing with a kind of suspension between belief and disbelief, between the impulse to see art as a kind of ponzi scheme and the impulse to preserve it as a place for our most trusting investments. Under these circumstances, cultural prizes can be, at one and the same time, both more dubious—more of a joke—than they used to be, and more symbolically effectual, more powerfully and intimately intertwined with processes of canonization.

II. Strategies of Condescension, Styles of Play

While the Booker is possibly the most talked-about of high-cultural prizes, its relationships to criticism, scandal, and the field of journalism are largely unexceptional. Even in fields of culture to which the press pays far less attention than it does to literature, when a prize makes the news it is generally due to some “scandal” which takes the same basic form—the increasingly (though never perfectly) parodic or *insincere* form—as those connected with the Booker. Indeed, we find other prizes more and more often being compared to the Booker, usually in order to suggest the “Bookerization” of the whole cultural-prize phenomenon.⁴⁰ So that when a “scandal” or “row” breaks out in connection with some literary or arts prize these days, those who attack and denigrate or

embarrass the prize are less likely to be perceived as acting within the long tradition of sincere animosity between artists and bourgeois consecrations—artistic freedom fighters on the old model of art versus money—and more likely to be seen as players in a newer cultural game whose “rules” and “sides” are rather more obscure and of which the Booker happens to be the best known, and hence the most generic, instance.

Let’s consider, for example, the scandals of refusal that periodically, and memorably, interrupt the regular ceremonies at which prizes are awarded and received. Award ceremonies are rituals of symbolic exchange, requiring of all participants acknowledgement of and respect for the conventions attendant upon the giving and receiving of gifts. Any display of indifference or ingratitude on the part of the honored recipient must be calculated with great care or it will provoke the indignation not only of the presenters of the prize, but of the entire participating community (including, for example, the other nominees as well as all past recipients). For this reason it has always been difficult to profit, in symbolic terms, by refusing a prize outright. Traditionally, in order to do so, one had to have already accumulated a wealth of symbolic capital of the sort that would be regarded as virtually nonfungible with prizes, awards, and trophies: the sort, that is, which accrues not to just any recognized aesthetic innovator but only to those who are also resolute social oppositionists or heretics, “old-style intellectuals” in Bourdieu’s sense (*FE* 52). These are artists who have deployed the prestige, or symbolic capital, granted them in their particular and more or less discrete fields of production in a broader “mission of prophetic subversion,” a political mission in which the existing social order has been consistently denounced, and the rewards it places within reach consistently rejected, in the name of autonomy (*RA* 129–31). And even for these symbolically powerful figures, refusing a prize was always a delicate and risky maneuver. Sartre’s exemplary refusal of the Nobel in 1964 was seen by him as an unfortunate entanglement, which he had tried to ward off in advance by asking the Swedish Academy to remove his name from the list of candidates. Had the Academy’s Secretary not misplaced Sartre’s letter, in which it was tactfully explained that a lifetime of refusing all such awards (Soviet as well as Western) would be compromised by any special exemption for the Nobel, the entire affair would have been averted. In the event, Sartre was as low-key and apologetic as possible about refusing the prize. Nevertheless, his refusal was widely regarded as an act of tremendous symbolic violence—and rightly so.⁴¹ After all, Sartre could have taken the route of George Bernard Shaw, accepting the prize reluctantly, tactically, keeping none of the substantial monetary award for himself; he might have exploited

the high-profile occasion of the acceptance speech to focus attention on those to whom he would be redistributing the money. By refusing even this much contact with the Nobel, Sartre was maximizing the barriers of exchange, the “trade barriers” of the symbolic economy, between his cultural capital—his specific importance and value as an artist and intellectual—and the capital that the Academy held out to him. In his view, such an exchange transaction would be so catastrophically to his disadvantage, so ruinous of his symbolic wealth, that the Academy’s proffered “gift” was in effect a Trojan one.

In 1964, it was still possible to occupy a position on the cultural field from which such a sincere and implacable refusal made symbolic sense. The field was still understood to conform in a broad way to what we habitually think of as the high-culture/mass culture opposition, or what in Bourdieu’s terminology is the “dualist structure” that has prevailed since the nineteenth century. It was characterized, that is to say, by its two subfields of cultural production: the restricted field, in which avant-garde artists produced art for one another and for university intellectuals (“a field that is its own market, allied with an educational system which legitimizes it”), and the extended field, in which artists of more conventional habitus produced for a wider public of bourgeois art-lovers and, later, for a mass-entertainment audience (“a field of production organized as a function of external demand, normally seen as socially and culturally inferior”).⁴² And a field structured in this way was still capable of producing prophetic-subversive intellectuals more or less on the model of Zola, who could put their symbolic capital, initially hard won on the restricted field, to work politically by linking autonomy with truth. Even in the early 1970s, there was clearly some measure of symbolic efficacy in such refusals if the artist declining the award was sufficiently admired by others in the field: the Academy Award refusals of George C. Scott, Marlon Brando, and Luis Buñuel come to mind. These figures could rely on their peers approvingly to recognize the maneuver as, in Scott’s terms, the best means of sustaining one’s “real commitment to the legitimate theater,” that is, to the purest or most autonomous subfields of art, in the face of a relentlessly expanding general field on which all events and activities of production were made to accord with the logic of commerce, were “contrived,” as Scott put it, “for economic reasons.”⁴³ But by the time Thomas Bernhard writes, in a 1982 memoir, of his own decision in the 1970s not to accept any more literary awards, on the grounds that for the serious artist, “receiving a prize is nothing other than having one’s head pissed upon,” this Flaubertian posture seems already a self-consciously dated and curmudgeonly one, Bernhard’s novelistic representation of a traditional artist-intellectual who finds himself out of place and strategically at a loss

on the contemporary field.⁴⁴ Bernhard himself had in fact resumed accepting awards by then, just as George C. Scott had taken to attending the Academy Awards ceremony. For either to have done otherwise, to have maintained the position of incorruptible refusenik or prophetic subversive, would likely have made him appear not more authentic or serious as an artist but more out-of-date, more plainly part of an earlier generation of artists whose positions had been voided and tactics superseded.

One can still refuse a prize, of course, but the refusal can no longer be counted upon to reinforce one's artistic legitimacy by underscoring the specificity or the properly autonomous character of one's cultural prestige, its difference from mere visibility or "success." On the contrary, the scandal of refusal has become a recognized device for raising visibility and leveraging success. When Julie Andrews refused a nomination for a 1996 Tony Award, no one even considered taking the gesture seriously as an attack on the Tonys, much less as a defense of the integrity or autonomy of the "legitimate theater." Instead, it was seen as a media event carefully "staged" by Andrews, "the biggest star on Broadway, playing in one of its biggest-grossing hits," and intended "to help [her] show" attract even more paying customers. The media "scandal" surrounding her refusal, despite its involving many disparaging observations about the commercialism of the Tonys, was widely recognized as doing those awards far more good than harm in terms of their future capacity to produce visibility and put it into cultural circulation. As Peter Marks expressed it in *The New York Times*, Andrews's action succeeded in "doing what Broadway publicity agents thought was the impossible . . . turn[ing] the Tony Awards into a tabloid story"—an outcome that "did not displease some involved with the promotion of the Tonys."⁴⁵ Indeed, the televised Tony Awards ceremony that year opened with Julie Andrews jokes and seemed to have been consciously and happily orchestrated around the mock-scandalous fact of her absence.

Being already a recognized move in a game characterized by insincere or duplicitous antagonisms, the refusal of a prize can no longer register as a refusal to *play*. Nor can the reluctant player make appeal to some proper home on the cultural field where such games are unknown and where the symbolic money that prizes represent is no good. The artists, writers, and intellectuals who today are major holders of symbolic capital, those whom the culturally esteemed themselves esteem, have for the most part left the task of denouncing prizes to journalists and old-guard humanities professors while taking the game up themselves more tactically. A transitional moment, perhaps, was Thomas Pynchon's famous acceptance of the National Book Award for *Gravity's Rainbow* in

1974. At that time, Pynchon was certainly still capable of refusing a major prize outright, as he did in a deliberately “rude” letter declining the 1975 Dean Howells Medal of the American Academy of Arts and Letters (“I don’t want it. Please don’t impose on me something I don’t want”).⁴⁶ And, more recently, he has shown himself willing to accept such an award with no display of reluctance, as he did the MacArthur “Genius” Award in 1989. An ambiguity of position between these two extremes was nicely captured by his handling of the National Book Award, for which he sent the professional comic Irwin Corey to accept on his behalf. Corey, in character as “Professor Irwin Corey,” offered by way of an acceptance speech an incomprehensible amalgam of academic jargon and nonsense, bewildering most of those in attendance at the award ceremony and annoying many. This was not exactly a way to renounce the symbolic and material profits associated with the prize. The event increased Pynchon’s specific visibility as an “invisible” recluse writer, thereby augmenting both his celebrity and his special symbolic position as an artist who shuns celebrity (a position he shares with Salinger).⁴⁷ The event also increased the sales of his (academically acclaimed but commercially resistant) novel, enabling an imposition of specifically academic preferences on the broader book market. Professor Corey’s appearance also brought visibility and symbolic stature to the prize itself, which by selecting Pynchon as its winner and securing his acceptance (even on comic terms) gained some ground in its originary and ongoing struggle to unseat the Pulitzer as America’s most legitimate book prize—that is, as the prize most closely aligned with the academically legitimated hierarchy of literary value. (The Pulitzer jury had proposed *Gravity’s Rainbow* as its sole nominee that year, but, in a “scandalous,” though amply precedented, imposition of its heteronomous constraints, the Pulitzer’s governing board had rejected the jury’s choice, calling the novel “obscene” and “unreadable,” and voting not to award a prize at all.)⁴⁸ At the same time, however, Pynchon clearly made of the award ceremony a kind of parodic version of itself, a false or pretended exchange, a simulation of a consecration, an event which, however well it succeeded in accomplishing its purposes, could not quite be taken seriously. His tactics thus suited the postmodern circumstances of the prize—its paradoxically increasing effectivity and decreasing seriousness—as well as prefiguring the whole range of mock-prizes, antiprizes, and flippant pseudoprizes which have symptomatically come to shadow and even to merge with the prize industry proper.

In connection with this latter point, we might briefly consider the two Scottish conceptual artists Bill Drummond and Jimmy Cauty, who, as the pop music duo KLF, had a string of hit records in the early 1990s, but then, in 1993, refashioned themselves the K Foundation and announced

their sponsorship of a new £40,000 prize for the artist who had produced the year's worst work of art. Their award announcement was timed to follow immediately after the presentation of the (merely £20,000) Turner Prize, the so-called "Booker Prize of British art," and they named as their winner the very artist who had just been awarded the Turner, the sculptor Rachel Whiteread. Whiteread even felt compelled to accept the Worst Artist prize so that she could donate the money to charities rather than give Drummond and Cauty the opportunity to make good on their threat to burn the unclaimed cash on the spot. The whole affair clearly mocked the Turner Prize and its sponsors at the Tate Gallery, on whose steps the K Foundation Award was presented. (Drummond and Cauty had hoped to implicate the Tate even more directly, by offering the museum their own work *Nailed to the Wall*—£1 million of KLF pop-music proceeds nailed to a wall—while threatening to burn the entire million if the Tate refused to accept and exhibit this "gift." But, on advice of their solicitor, they rejected this plan in favor of simply burning the work unexhibited in 1994, documenting the act in an hour-long silent film called *Watch the K Foundation Burn a Million Quid*, which they later screened before various nontraditional audiences, such as rival football team supporters, at venues ranging from jails to pubs to art center canteens.⁴⁹)

But this was a curious kind of mockery, quite different from a simple denunciation or an act of straightforward antagonism. Part of what the Foundation succeeded in demonstrating was that their own Worst Artist prize wasn't really much different from the Tate's Best Artist prize, that best and worst, most serious and most frivolous, most legitimate and most commercial, were no longer readily mappable binaries, that the presumed dualist structure of the cultural field, while still alive discursively, had been fundamentally scrambled. The artists themselves, after all, were *both* ultracommercial pop stars, named Best British Band at the previous year's industry-sponsored Brit Music Awards (the equivalent of America's Grammys), *and* fringe avant-gardistes of the conceptual art world, producing, out of the "material" of their own pop stardom, works which had no apparent commercial value at all. Their antics suggested that the Turner Prize was already a mock prize, a booby prize, a joke; but also, just as significantly, that their mock prize was for real, imperfectly distinguishable from economic instruments such as the Turner: it, too, was an instrument for converting "heteronomous capital" (money from the mass market) into specific symbolic capital (stature in the legitimate art world) by way of journalistic capital (visibility, celebrity, scandal).

Indeed, there has been as much comical play, or playing around, with the different forms of capital and their intraconvertibility by recipients of the Turner Prize as by the K Foundation. Two years after Whiteread

won the Turner, the award went to Damien Hirst for his now famous work of mutilated, formaldehyde-immersed cow and calf carcasses, “Mother and Child, Divided.” Hirst played his win for all it was worth, giving the press some scandalous sound bytes: “it’s amazing what you can do with an E grade in A-level art, a twisted imagination, and a chainsaw.”⁵⁰ And the press dutifully mounted a great show of outrage, calling the award “an odious and disgusting scandal” and (in reference to the ongoing beef panic) a case of “mad-judges disease.”⁵¹ Much of this was certainly play-acting. Hirst’s win was among the least surprising, least newsworthy events of the year: he’d been short-listed twice already, and was rated a prohibitive 4–5 favorite by the bookmakers at William Hill (which offers odds on all the major prizes as part of its “culture file”). The arts editors who wrote of the event in tones of shock and horror were simply advancing their interests in an ongoing factional struggle between the so-called “New” British art and the defenders of tradition. The sheer hyperbole of the rhetoric (Hirst’s work was said to have “the aesthetic value of a bucketfull of spittle”⁵²) suggests again that the “scandal of the middlebrow” in which modern cultural prizes have always been implicated has become a highly self-conscious game of positions, journalist-critics seizing on the prize as a way to reanimate flaccid oppositions between art and money, culture and society, fortifying their own positions with reference to an inadequate but still habitual binaristic scheme. In these journalistic *games* of scandal, the defense of art for art’s sake is mounted not by a determined avant-garde willing to make longterm investments (that is, willing to labor penniless and in obscurity for decades toward the goal of ultimately prevailing on the field of production), but by the most comfortably established artists and the most risk-averse journalist-critics—even and especially those who are underwritten by, and whose habitus brings them into accordance with, the increasingly active cultural wing of the corporate right. (We find, for example, Hilton Kramer, chief art-lackey of the Olin Foundation, among the anti-Turnerites.⁵³)

Without disappearing, the modern discourse of autonomy has become a tactical fiction, or at least an imperfectly sincere one, most often and most effectively deployed in the interests of reaction. It is thus a treacherous if not a hopeless tool for the young or avant-garde or minority artist seeking specific legitimacy. What we see in the most recent awards scandals is that these latter artists have been forced, not to relinquish their interest in autonomy properly understood—that by definition cannot happen—but to pursue it by means of strategies of differentiation, styles of play, which defy a simple dualistic, two-axis/four-quadrant geography of cultural positions—a geography in which autonomy can only appear as a kind of safe corner and sanctuary for

artists as such. To take an example closer to home, Toni Morrison has over the last decade been perhaps the most active and enthusiastic collector of literary awards, lobbying for them and openly embracing them as a form of “redemption.”⁵⁴ Even by contemporary standards, she seems to have abandoned too completely the protocols of condescension. But it would be a political error to join with those who have condemned this behavior as a scandal and an embarrassment, or to imagine that by chasing prizes Morrison has abandoned the pursuit of autonomy. In fact this is precisely the pursuit she is carrying out, by means of a strategy within which an extravagant *overvaluation* of prizes (positioning them as “the keystones to the canon,” for example, or the supreme form of literary “validation”) has a tactical function.⁵⁵ By virtue of her Pulitzer and her Nobel, Morrison has gained considerable symbolic leverage against the organized cultural right, which has not only done everything in its power to resist the rising prestige of African-American literature in general, and its expanding place within the university curriculum in particular, but has since the mid-80s launched campaigns specifically against Morrison.⁵⁶ Those who have thundered against Morrison’s strategy as an embarrassment to literary culture, a scandalous capitulation, are playing the culture game according to rules that no longer apply, misconstruing the nature of the contemporary struggle for autonomy—a multivalent struggle of positive engagements—and hence blundering into a position from which they can only assist their cultural and political antagonists.⁵⁷ They are ill-equipped to recognize or appraise the tactical dimension of Morrison’s relationship to prizes—its deployment as “strategic misappropriation”—and therefore ill-equipped to develop winning strategies of their own.

III. Instruments of Intraconversion and the Task of Cultural Sociology

Bourdieu’s work has the distinct merit of recognizing the continued urgency of the problem of cultural autonomy, a structural problem involving the relation of cultural and intellectual labor to economic, social, and political capital which he has rightly insisted on approaching reflexively, that is, as it impinges on our own dispositions and practices as academics. But, like those who continue to advocate a posture of indifference or refusal toward cultural prizes, Bourdieu tends to conceive the quest for autonomy, whether pursued collectively or individually, in negative terms, as a matter of refusing gifts, withholding investments, renouncing profits. These terms have less and less relevance to the scene of contemporary cultural production, which requires



more positive or appropriative strategies of engagement. Special esteem—with the potential for increased symbolic leverage—no longer accrues to the artist whose practice is consistently governed by the law of renunciation. Forgoing the material and symbolic profits once associated with “mass” or (especially) “middlebrow” culture, or with socially and politically “compromised” cultural fractions, does not enlarge one’s credit or raise one’s standing among other producers.

Nor is this simply because money has “penetrated” ever deeper into once independent portions of the cultural field. Even if we understand independence in this sense to be one particular historical form of interdependence, the preferred Bourdieuan metaphor of penetration tends to suggest a field composed of two discreet zones, respectively dominated by artistic and economic capital, which address each other across a single and definite, if increasingly permeable, barrier: a contact zone where the old struggle between art and commerce is carried out. This cartography must be set aside. The different forms of capital are actually caught up in the process of intraconversion, of exchange or translation from form to form, *at every point of the field simultaneously* and at variable rates whose negotiation is always part of this process, being carried out by every player in every position. One pursues an interest in autonomy today not by seeking out some ever-narrower margin of the field that remains uncolored by money, by politics, by ethnic or geographic favoritism, but by seizing and managing as advantageously as one can the various and spatially scattered cultural instruments whose primary purpose is the negotiation of capital conversions. Prizes have proliferated in the last quarter century precisely because they have proved so irresistibly well suited to this task: not simply to facilitating exchange between cultural and noncultural capital—enabling the holders of money or political power or social connections to appropriate cultural prestige for their own purposes and the holders of prestige-among-artists to “cash in” their specific consecrations—but to facilitating negotiation of the very rates and barriers of such exchange, negotiations which define the true stakes of the game. Prizes have, to be sure, provided opportunities for the holders of noncultural assets (wealth, social connections, political power) to drive down the value of cultural assets relative to noncultural ones. But they have also provided certain opportunities for those “serious” artists and writers who know how to work with the nonseriousness of the contemporary awards scene to enlarge the scope of their own authority, to leverage their (always dominated) positions on the field of power, and so to achieve greater subversive efficacy.

It may well be that, were we somehow able to perform the necessary calculus, we could confirm the almost universal truism that the tremen-



dous proliferation of cultural prizes has done more to further the consolidation and homogenization of capitals than to enlarge the endowments of artists *as artists*, much less to advance the cause of cultural democratization. But we are a long way from being ready to make such a reckoning. What is needed in the meantime are not more pronouncements about which side is winning or losing the great game, but more careful study of the game itself—a game which is in any case not to be understood as involving *two* sides or *two* teams. In particular, we could use some close study of the concrete instruments of exchange and conversion whose rise is perhaps the most conspicuous feature of our recent cultural history. Along with cultural prizes, these would include many new forms of corporate patronage and sponsorship (the underwriting of museum shows and public-radio broadcasts, the inviting of “public intellectuals” to lucrative executive conferences, the supporting of “independent” filmmakers with product-placement deals, and so on). They would include also the well-funded think tanks and philanthropic foundations and humanities centers that have sprung up both on and off university campuses; the *U.S. News and World Report*-style lists and rankings that now cover every imaginable cultural producer or product; the ubiquitous “festivals” of art, film, and music; the book clubs sponsored by booksellers and promoted on television; and many others. Like prizes, these phenomena have generated a good deal of journalistic coverage and comment, but scholars have barely begun to study them in any detail, to construct their histories, gather ethnographic data from their participants, come to an understanding of their specific logics or rules and of the different ways they are being played and played with.

This is the immediate task for those of us who wish to understand the new conditions under which we are performing our various cultural labors. It is not only a sociological as opposed to a narrowly interpretative or theoretical task, but also necessarily a reflexive one, requiring of us systematic attendance to the symbolic and material bases of our own habitual dispositions—including, for many of us, our habitual postures of condescension or refusal both toward these specific cultural phenomena and toward the sociological approach to culture in general—an approach which, recent contributions notwithstanding, remains *embarrassingly* crude from the vantage of literary-critical refinement.

After all, literary academics can be among the least adept, the least effective players on the contemporary cultural scene—weighted down as to some degree we have to be with dispositional freight or embodied capital that, while traditionally enlisted in the service of “culture,” is poorly suited to the strategic challenges that face cultural workers today. However unsatisfactory we may find Bourdieu’s own position on the politics proper to intellectual labor,⁵⁸ he is right about one thing: if we

are to come up with politically sound cultural strategies and to put them effectively into play, we need more than new ways to deploy our habitual dispositions toward culture, money, and power. We need a new model of the field of cultural production in terms of which these very dispositions can themselves be scrutinized and transformed.

The sort of model I have in mind would owe much to Bourdieu, certainly, but would resist any division of social space into two preexisting sides, two proper positions or placements, between which the originary “double discourse of value” plays out its ostensibly permanent antagonisms.⁵⁹ It would sustain, more than Bourdieu has been willing to do, an emphasis on tactics, on the many forms of provisional and witty alliance, duplicity, and double-dealing that characterize effective instances of contemporary cultural agency, on the fluid and improvisational practices of intraconversion that defy any reduction to simple laws of opposition between properly commercial and properly cultural interests. It would answer, that is, to de Certeau’s powerful critique of Bourdieu in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, where de Certeau laments the eclipse, behind the grand “sociological” design, of the very “hero” of Bourdieu’s brilliant and meticulous “ethnological studies,” a hero characterized above all by a “sly multiplicity of strategies.”⁶⁰ Our aim, however, should not be simply to dispense with Bourdieu’s “sociological system” in favor of his “ethnological particularities.” We should undertake rather to unfold his sociological theory of habitus/field within a de Certeauian conception of social space as “*practiced place*” (52, 117).

Unlike the social geography figured in Bourdieu’s statistical “maps,” the *practiced place* is not merely a relational order or pattern “in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence.” It is a “polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities,” produced in and through practice, “composed of intersections of mobile elements . . . [and] in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it” (117).⁶¹ A sociological model that understands cultural fields as practiced places in which our own intellectual practice is fully implicated would, to be sure, deprive us of traditional socio-cartographic techniques and even of settled certainties as to who our cultural allies and enemies are and where exactly they may be found. But by the same token, such a model could liberate us from certain presumed proprieties of position and role, opening the way both to more critical reflection on our habitual orientations and to more innovative, more optimistic deployments of the instruments at our disposal. It could assist us in coping with the new temporality of culture, the rapidity of movement that, by introducing ever more pronounced discontinuities between habitus and field, assures the ever more glaring anachronicity of our training and background, and thus rewards our

opportunism more richly than our perseverance. It could, in short, afford us some slight but welcome competitive advantages in the game called culture—even while it complicates the very problematic of “winning.”

UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

NOTES

1 Though the enormous growth in cultural prizes is evident enough, it is difficult to document the trend at all precisely—in part because, since the early 1970s, the growth has been too rapid to allow a reliable tabulation, and in part because both *culture* and *prize* are such blurry, uncertain categories. (Should one include bake-offs and beauty contests? Awards in advertising, fashion, style? Elementary-school art prizes?) The standard reference work, *Awards, Honors & Prizes* (ed. Valerie J. Webster [Detroit, 2000]), now in its 16th edition, has gone from a manageable three-hundred-page index of about eighteen hundred prizes in 1969 (approximately a third of them “cultural” prizes in the narrow sense of the term, that is, concerned explicitly with the production of “art”) to a massive two-volume, multi-thousand-page, small-print affair today, adding new prizes in recent years at the rate of about one every six hours, though certainly leaving out many more than it registers. The digital news database of Lexis/Nexis absorbs so many stories about prizes that in the mid-1990s the service opened a separate file library devoted entirely to coverage of the major arts and entertainment awards, most of which awards now have multiple World Wide Web sites focused on them as well. The International Congress of Distinguished Awards, which was founded in 1991 in a futile effort to control and regulate this chaotic scene by separating the “distinguished” prizes from the wannabes, counts more than a hundred prizes carrying six- and seven-figure cash awards, and its Chairman, Larry Tise, told me in 1995 that he would estimate the total number of prizes devoted to literature and the arts at well over one hundred thousand.

2 David Lehman, “May the Best Author Win—Fat Chance,” *Newsweek*, 107 (21 April 1986), 82.

3 Qtd. in Karen MacGragor, “Traumas, Triumphs,” *Times Higher Educational Supplement*, 3 November 1989, 14.

4 AN author, “Success and the Other-Author,” *Times* (London), 14 July 1986, 12.

5 Lewis Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, 30th edition (Pittsburgh, 1994); quoted in this context, for example, by Christopher Hitchens, “These Glittering Prizes,” *Vanity Fair*, 56 (January 1993), 20. By 1866, when Carroll wrote *Alice*, the American term “caucus,” meaning a gathering or meeting for purposes of political deliberation, had just begun to circulate in Britain as a term of opprobrium to designate an inner circle or cabal (within the opposing party) that aimed to manipulate or fix a political election by shutting out nonmembers of the inner group. Carroll’s choice of this term to associate with the universal distribution of prizes is apt, since even their seemingly radical democratization (“all must have prizes”) has not prevented prizes from being attacked as essentially rigged political affairs, controlled by corrupt elites.

6 Greg Dawson, “Last Thing TV Needs is Another Award Show,” *Orlando Sentinel Tribune*, 11 June 1992, E1.

7 Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, tr. Richard Nice (Cambridge, 1977), p. 187.

8 John Guillory, “Bourdieu’s Refusal,” *Modern Language Quarterly*, 58 (1997), 367–99.

9 Loïc J. D. Wacquant is Bourdieu’s most important American disciple, co-author with

Bourdieu of *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago, 1992). See in particular Wacquant's "Bourdieu in America: Notes on the Transatlantic Importation of Social Theory," in *Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Craig Calhoun, Edward LiPuma, and Moishe Postone (Chicago, 1993), pp. 235–62.

10 A concise statement of this critique is Amy Koritz and Douglas Koritz's, "Symbolic Economics: Adventures in the Metaphorical Marketplace," in *The New Economic Criticism: Studies at the Intersection of Literature and Economics*, ed. Martha Woodmansee and Mark Osteen (New York, 1999), pp. 408–17.

11 In particular, the theory of relationship between field and habitus (or embodied, incorporated cultural capital), which Bourdieu has always treated as a sort of "corporeal complicity" between "the socialized agent and the social field," a disposition of the body to maintain its position within a structure of domination, might lend itself to more complex and optimistic reformulations in the hands of feminist, minority, or postcolonial critics, just as Foucault's work on the relationship between the subject and disciplinary regimes has done. One such reformulation was proposed by Toril Moi in "Appropriating Bourdieu: Feminist Theory and Pierre Bourdieu's Sociology of Culture" (*New Literary History*, 22 [1991], 1017–49), which appeared about the same time that Bourdieu's emphasis on the (gendered) body began to register as a radical departure within the discipline of sociology—as discussed, for example, by Chris Shilling ("Educating the Body: Physical Capital and the Production of Social Inequalities," *Sociology*, 25 [1991], 653–72). Few, however, have followed Moi's lead. Attempts to articulate the theory of habitus and field with postcolonial theory have been even rarer, and generally more critical than appropriative of Bourdieu's work. See, for example, David Polumbo-Liu's introduction, "Unhabituated Habitués," in *Streams of Cultural Capital: Transnational Cultural Studies*, ed. Polumbo-Liu and Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht (Stanford, 1997), pp. 1–22. The quotations above regarding corporeal complicity are taken from "How Can 'Free-Floating Intellectuals' Be Set Free," a 1980 interview with Didier Eribon reprinted in Bourdieu, *Sociology in Question*, tr. Richard Nice (London, 1993), pp. 41–48, esp. 46.

12 On the "illusio," see Bourdieu, "Belief and the Body," *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford, 1990), pp. 66–79, esp. 67; and "Da Capo: Illusion and Illusio," *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, tr. Susan Emanuel (Stanford, 1996), pp. 331–36; *Rules of Art* hereafter cited in text as *RA*.

13 All quotations in this paragraph are taken from the section called "The Lengthening of the Circuits of Legitimation" in part five of Bourdieu, *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power*, tr. Lauretta C. Clough (Stanford, 1996), pp. 385, 387.

14 Bourdieu and Hans Haacke, *Free Exchange* (Stanford, 1994), p. 84; hereafter cited in text as *FE*.

15 Joan Shelley Rubin, "The Making of Middlebrow Culture" (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1992); Janice Radway, *A Feeling For Books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste and Middle-Class Desire* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1997). There are many important parallels between the book club and the American book-prize industry, both of which emerge in the years following the first world war and are immediately subjected to clamorous criticism from the gatekeepers of high culture (and especially from those gatekeepers whose own positions on the cultural field are not altogether firmly established). But while the mail-order book club is clearly well past its heyday, the literary prize, for reasons I am attempting to clarify, has continued its curious ascendancy.

16 The best account of the carping about corrupt or inept judging, favoritism, and so forth, that typically followed the announcement of prizewinners at the Attican "Great Dionysia" festival remains that of the nineteenth-century historian A. E. Haigh, *The Attic Theatre: A Description of the Stage and Theatre of the Athenians, and of the Dramatic Performances at Athens*, third edition (Oxford, 1907). It is clear that the Athenian Council, which

administered these festivals, understood from the outset that the legitimacy of the judges and of their judgments would be subject to challenge and that corruption scandals would be integral to awards. As Haigh details, they established elaborate protocols governing the selection of judges and the recording of votes. Council members were not themselves eligible to serve as judges. Rather, representatives from each of the ten Attican tribes brought forward to the Council a slate of nominees (conforming to certain general rules of eligibility) from their particular tribe. The name of each nominee was put on a slip of paper, which was then put into an urn corresponding to the nominating tribe. The ten urns were kept under lock and key until the eve of the festival, at which point, in a ceremony attended by all the nominees, one name was drawn from each urn. These ten men, the “preliminary judges,” were then required to judge all the plays and submit their ranked lists to the Council at the conclusion of the festival. Even this was not the end of the process, however. Once again an urn was brought out. The ten judges’ sheets were placed in the urn, and just five withdrawn at random, these five becoming public documents and serving as the basis for awarding the prize, while the other five were destroyed unseen. This elaborate, yet always ineffective, series of contrivances, designed to convey the most perfect appearance of autonomy and impartiality, in fact called attention to the unavoidable threat of scandal and ensured its permanent lodging within the institutional apparatus of the prize. Our own cultural prizes engage in similarly duplicitous rituals of selection and secrecy which guarantee not that the awards are legitimately decided but that the scandal of illegitimacy will always be lurking in the auditorium or banquet hall of their presentation: the somber-looking representatives from Pinkerton or Pricewaterhouse, for example, standing in the wings with their specially sealed envelopes.

17 For the financial details of Booker’s sponsorship of the prize, which grew out of their so-called “Artists’ Services” division, see John Sutherland, “The Bumpy Ride to the Booker, 1981,” *Times Higher Education Supplement*, 30 October 1981, 11, and Richard Todd, *Consuming Fictions: The Booker Prize and Fiction in Britain Today* (London, 1996), pp. 62–64; hereafter cited in text as *CF*.

18 The relationship between a cultural prize’s monetary and symbolic values is by no means perfectly inverse, but neither is it direct. (Witness the flop of the Turner Tomorrow Award, a \$500,000 prize for “visionary fiction” launched by Ted Turner in 1995 and almost universally ignored.) If there is some symbolic advantage to being the prize with the highest cash value on a given field, the Booker forfeited this advantage in the 1980s. The NCR, founded in 1988, has always been worth a bit more than the Booker, as has the Orange Prize for Fiction by Women, founded in 1996—and the IMPAC Dublin literary prize, founded in 1995, carries a cash award of £100,000. It is true that none of these is in direct competition with the Booker, since the former is a non-fiction prize and the latter two are open to non-British novelists. But even among the British-only fiction prizes, the Trask, the Whitbread, and the *Sunday Express* have all offered more cash than the Booker in recent years.

19 In fact, Maschler has said quite explicitly that he modeled the Booker on the Goncourt; see Maschler’s recollections of the prize’s genesis, “How It All Began” in *Booker 30: A Celebration of Thirty Years of the Booker Prize for Fiction, 1969–1999*, ed. Booker PLC (London, 1998), pp. 15–16. There is no space here to trace out the special logic of imitation and differentiation at work in the history of cultural prizes and the seemingly insupportable redundancies it has produced. I will simply note that, just as the most successful of the Goncourt’s domestic imitators has been the feminist *Prix Femina*, so the most successful domestic imitator of the Goncourt’s most successful foreign imitator (that is, the most successful of the so-called “Baby Bookers” within Britain) has been the Orange Prize for Fiction by Women: a kind of double-imitation of an imitation.

20 Documents pertaining to the administration of the prize in these years are housed in

the uncatalogued Booker archive of the Book Trust in London. I am grateful to Sandra Vince and Russell Pritchard of the Book Trust, as well as to Martin Goff, for granting me access to this archive and assisting me in my research.

21 The full text of Berger's speech was printed in the *Guardian*, 24 November 1972, 12.

22 Minutes of the Organizing Committee meeting, 8 January 1974, Booker archive, Book Trust.

23 These counts are based on the clipping files in the Booker archive.

24 Bryan Appleyard, "Glittering Prizes and a Game Called Celebrity Sadism," *Sunday Times*, 21 October 1990. Christopher Hope, a South African writer shortlisted in 1992, vividly described the ethos of the award banquet from the vantage of the also-ran: "the TV cameras get into your earhole and watch you push food around your plate while you get slagged off" (quoted by Geraldine Brooks, "No Civility, Please, We're English," *Gentleman's Quarterly* [February 1993], 58).

25 Patricia Miller, "Booker Triumph 'Like Avalanche Smothering You,'" *Sunday Times*, 24 October 1982.

26 The classic denunciation of these tendencies is Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (New York, 1964), pp. 45–76, 118–80. A more ambitious and less tendentious study of contemporary celebrity culture and its place in the long history of fame is Leo Braudy, *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and its History* (New York, 1986). A recent study of the specifically literary dimension of celebrity culture is Joe Moran, *Star Authors: Literary Celebrity in America* (London, 1999); hereafter cited as *SA*.

27 I do not mean to suggest that the individual scandals are of no interest in themselves or that they perform no significant cultural work apart from that of supporting through pseudo-critique the institution of the cultural prize. On the contrary, through the annual convulsions around the Booker, critics have pursued the most urgent struggles animating the scene of British literature. Some of these disputes have been convincingly read by Graham Huggan, for example, as expressions of a tension between two competing systems of postcolonial value in contemporary Britain: the symbolic system of "postcolonialism" within which long-marginalized literatures are finally achieving significant consecration, and the commercial system of "postcoloniality" within which this very consecration functions as a device to assure that such literatures are kept available for further imperial appropriation. (See Huggan, "Prizing 'Otherness': A Short History of the Booker," *Studies in the Novel*, 29 [Fall 1997], 412–33; and "The Postcolonial Exotic: Rushdie's 'Booker of Bookers,'" *Transition*, 64 [1994], 22–29.) My own aim, though, is to consider the effects of these sorts of controversies in aggregate, in relation to the broader cultural logic that assures their continued production irrespective of any specific content.

28 Philip Howard, "Curling Up With all the Bookers," *Times* (London), 19 October 1982, 12.

29 E. J. Craddock, "Why the Booker Prize is Bad News for Books," *Times* (London), 7 October 1985, 15.

30 Susannah Herbert, "The Night Booker Became a Dirty Word," *Daily Telegraph*, 13 October 1994. Herbert is here quoting Bing Taylor, general marketing manager of W. H. Smith's book department—but as the headline suggests, she takes essentially the same view as he.

31 "Who Needs the Booker? The Sorry State of a Literary Prize," *The Economist* (21 October 1989), 101.

32 Anthony Thwaite, "Booker 1986," *Encounter* (February 1987), 32: "In spite of the jibes about 'hype' and 'ballyhoo,' etc., that go with the Booker Prize . . . [it is] internationally recognized as the world's top fiction prize."

33 Roland Barthes, "The Writer on Holiday," *Mythologies*, tr. Annette Lavers (New York, 1973), p. 30.

34 Mark Lawson, "Never Mind the Plot, Enjoy the Argument," *Independent*, 6 September 1994, 12.

35 This was the Tory minister Alan Clark, who chaired the (scandalously) fractious jury for the 1995 NCR prize. "They didn't put me in for my taste and discernment in this field," Clark observed in a post-ceremony interview. "I was put on the committee in the hope that there might be a row, in inverted commas, and that I might be controversial and this would attract publicity to the whole affair." See Julia Llewellyn Smith, "They Invited Me Hoping For Controversy," *Times* (London), 6 May 1995, Features Section.

36 Brooks, "No Civility, Please," 62. Rachel Kerr, publicity director for Cape, later issued a statement denying any scandalous intention on the part of McEwan or his entourage, saying that they had simply gotten mixed up about the order of events and had gone off to a post-Booker gathering at the house of Tom Maschler. This explanation was received skeptically. See the "Times Diary," *Times* (London), 15 October 1992.

37 Bourdieu, "Price Formation and the Anticipation of Profits," *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. John B. Thompson, tr. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge, Mass., 1991), pp. 67–72.

38 The phrase "homogeneous empty time" is of course Walter Benjamin's, from the thirteenth of the "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, tr. Hannah Arendt (New York, 1969), p. 261. Appeals to Time as an arbiter magically disconnected from history and society are everywhere in the commentary on literature and arts prizes. A typical example is Phillip Howard, "And Thundering in to the Final Page . . .," *Times* (London), 19 October 1982, 12: "The only objective judge of literature is Time. . . . Let us not pretend that [winning a prize] means anything about [a book's] literary value in the long eye of history." From the obvious, and often triumphantly catalogued, gaps between the rosters of past prize-winners and the contemporary canon, critics erroneously infer that prizes have nothing to do with the patterns of canonicity that emerge later on; that other hierarchies of value, such as those that obtain in higher-educational curricula, have tended to be more accurate predictors of later symbolic success than prizes are; and, above all, that the long-term process of literary valuation operates independently of the interests and flows of social, economic, and political capital.

39 For Bourdieu, this persistence of belief in disbelief is scarcely imaginable, appearing only as a special complication or nuance in the habitus of the most refined and reflexive authors: his example is Mallarmé. But in fact this seems to be an increasingly general circumstance of the illuso, and if such terms as naivete and cynicism were ever adequate to describe the relationships between cultural agents and the cultural field, they certainly are not so today.

40 Even in America the charge of Bookerization is a familiar one; see, for example, David Lehman's account of the Bookerization of the National Book Awards, "May the Best Author Win—Fat Chance" (cited above). According to Lehman, Barbara Prete, who was in charge of these prizes back in the mid-1980s when they were struggling along under the name American Book Awards, made a number of trips to London to study the way Martin Goff and the Book Trust administered the Booker Prize. One result of these visits was Prete's decision to begin announcing a shortlist of nominees some weeks prior to the announcement of a winner. If this adoption of a Booker practice was intended to produce Booker-style publicity, as Lehman suggests, it succeeded. In 1986, the first year of the new system (and the last year the awards were called the American Book Awards), one nominee, Peter Taylor, angrily withdrew when the name of the winner (E. L. Doctorow, for *World's Fair*) was leaked prematurely. Though Taylor would presumably have accepted the prize if he had won, he said it was too demeaning to be put publicly in the position of an also-ran. The next year saw the even larger scandal, mentioned below, involving open lobbying for Toni Morrison's *Beloved*; Morrison's partisans challenged the NBA jury for

overlooking her masterpiece in favor of *Paco's Story*, a war novel by a little-known white male author named Larry Heinemann. Rather than defending their selection, the National Book Foundation conceded problems in the way the NBA was judged, and promptly overhauled the jury format, increasing the number of judges from three to five. See "NBA Names Judges for 1988, Increases Fiction Jury to Five," *Publishers Weekly*, 234 (August 12 1988), 320.

41 A good, brief account of the affair can be found in Annie Cohen-Solal, *Sartre: A Life* (New York, 1985), pp. 444–49.

42 Bourdieu, "The Market of Symbolic Goods," tr. R. Sawyer, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (New York, 1983), p.130. Since this essay's original appearance in 1971, Bourdieu's analysis of the logic of relation between the field of restricted production and the field of general production has undergone some refinements, particularly as regards the differing temporalities ("modes of ageing") of the two fields. For the most recent version, see "The Market for Symbolic Goods," *Rules of Art*, pp.141–73.

43 Mason Wiley and Damien Bona, *Inside Oscar: The Unofficial History of the Academy Awards*, 4th ed. (New York, 1993), p. 447.

44 Thomas Bernhard, *Wittgenstein's Nephew: A Friendship*, tr. Ewald Osers (London, 1986), p. 78.

45 Peter Marks, "Adding Drama to Musical, Andrews Spurns a Tony," *New York Times*, 9 May 1996, A1, B6.

46 A section of the letter appears on the San Narcisco Community College *Thomas Pynchon Homepage* at <http://www.pynchon.pomona.edu/bio/facts.html> (July 2000).

47 The cases of Salinger and Pynchon, and, more generally, the capacity of the literary star system to translate absence or refusal into stardom, recognizing silence as a sign or even a device of celebrity, are discussed by Moran, *Star Authors*, pp. 54, 64–66.

48 "Pulitzer Jurors Dismayed on Pynchon," *New York Times*, 8 May 1974.

49 Lynn Cochrane, "Fans to Watch £1m Go Up In Smoke for Glaswegian Football Fans," *The Scotsman*, 4 November 1995; Robert Sandall, "Money to Burn," *Sunday Times*, 5 November 1995. The whole sequence of events is documented in *K Foundation Burn a Million Quid*, ed. Chris Brook (London, 1998), pp. 5–30.

50 "Damien Hirst is Unanimous Winner of the Turner Prize," *Daily Telegraph*, 29 November 1995.

51 "Prize Idiots: The Turner Prize Award," *Daily Mirror*, 30 November 1995.

52 "A Turner for the Worse," *Daily Telegraph*, 29 November 1995.

53 Founded in 1982, *The New Criterion* has been consistently supported by six-figure donations from the John M. Olin Foundation, along with contributions from some of the other major right-wing corporate foundations. Indeed, Kramer, who has been the journal's editor since its inception, initially had his editorial office in the Olin Corporation headquarters. Haacke and Bourdieu discuss Kramer's cultural role in *Free Exchange*, pp. 52–54.

54 "Morrison, duCille, Baquet, Pulitzer Prizewinners," *Jet*, 74 (18 April 1988), 14.

55 These extravagant terms were integral to the lobbying effort for Morrison's 1988 Pulitzer, which was launched soon after she was passed over for both the NBA and the NBCCA. A paid advertisement appearing as an open letter in the *New York Times Book Review*, signed by June Jordan, Houston Baker, and forty-six other black writers and academics, referred to the Pulitzer and the NBA as the "keystones to the canon of American literature" ("Black Writers in Praise of Toni Morrison," *The New York Times Book Review*, 24 January 1988, 36). Jordan, who had first met with Morrison to discuss the possibility of undertaking this sort of preemptive media campaign, was quoted as saying that Morrison was wounded by her failure to win the NBA and "was having doubts about her work," since "the awards are the only kind of validation that makes sense in the literary

world" (Elizabeth Kastor, "'Beloved' and the Protest," *Washington Post*, 21 January 1988, B1).

56 There is little doubt that the journals of the cultural right were attempting to prevent Morrison from winning the Pulitzer for *Beloved*. *The New Criterion* ran a Morrison-bashing piece perfectly timed to coincide with the decision-making of the NBCC and Pulitzer judges: Martha Bayles, "Special Effects, Special Pleading" (January 1988), 34–40; and so did *Commentary*: Carol Iannone, "Toni Morrison's Career" (December 1987), 59–63. Indeed, Iannone, who would go on to be George Bush's alarmingly underqualified nominee for the top post at the National Council on Humanities, devoted a good share of her literary journalism to attacks on Morrison, Alice Walker, and other prize-winning minority authors. In 1991, when she was positioning herself for the NCH nomination, she published a full-scale denunciation of book prizes called "Literature by Quota" (*Commentary*, 91 [March 1991]), in which Morrison's Pulitzer served as a prime example of judges' willingness to assuage their white guilt by "sacrificing the demands of excellence to the 'democratic dictatorship of mediocrity'" (53).

57 Examples include George Christian, who said the lobbying had made Morrison "a figure of fun" ("Literature Needs a Triple Crown," *Houston Chronicle*, 7 February 1988, 20) and Christopher Hitchens, ("Those Glittering Prizes"), who characterized Morrison as a writer who, for the sake of a book prize, would "jump through hoops that ought to embarrass even a hardened Oscar seeker."

58 Even to those who share some of Guillory's misgivings about the prevalence in the American academy of "a social theory that speaks of change only as an effect of socially transformative agendas" ("Bourdieu's Refusal," 369), Bourdieu's own political agenda, which largely consists of defending the integrity and relative impenetrability of one's particular intellectual field, can seem rather timid. My point is not that we need to discount the potentialities of conscious political agency to the extent that Bourdieu appears to do, but that as conscious political agents we are in need of the kind of *strategic* knowledge that at this juncture a (modified) reflexive sociology seems best capable of producing.

59 On the "double discourse" of economic and aesthetic value, see Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Contingencies of Value: Alternative Perspectives for Critical Theory* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988), pp. 30–35, and John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago, 1993), pp. 269–340.

60 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, tr. Stephen Rendall (Berkeley, 1984), pp. 51, 58; hereafter cited in text.

61 For his lucid account of the politics of space and location in de Certeau, I am indebted to Daniel Punday, "Derrida in the World: Space and Post-Deconstructive Textual Analysis," *Postmodern Culture*, 11 (September 2000), <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/pmc/v011/11.1punday.html>