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*HIDDEN AGENDA:  
PIERRE BOURDIEU AND TERRY  
EAGLETON.*

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper explores hitherto unacknowledged similarities between Bourdieu and Eagleton, particularly in their recent critiques of modernism. While both theorists display open and vital differences over the question of ideology, their work in the 1990s shows a striking convergence which, this paper argues has a common lineage in their debt to Lucien Goldmann and Walter Benjamin. The convergence is explored more specifically through close readings of Bourdieu's **The Rules Of Art** and Eagleton's **Heathcliff and the Great Hunger**.

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## **HIDDEN AGENDA: PIERRE BOURDIEU AND TERRY EAGLETON**

### **JOHN ORR**

On the face of it, Pierre Bourdieu and Terry Eagleton are worlds apart, coming from very different traditions, French sociology and English literary criticism. While both admire the work of the other and they have appeared together publicly in 1991 at the ICA in mutual discussion, that discourse highlights a clear degree of philosophical difference. (Bourdieu & Eagleton, 1992) Eagleton has staked much on his intellectual renewal of ideology-critique, yet Bourdieu firmly rejects ideology as a primary concept in favour of the concepts of "doxa" and "symbolic power". (Bourdieu, 1991) The stand-off has affected in particular their respective work on literature and culture which they barely discuss at the ICA meeting at all. Absurdly Bourdieu does not even appear in Eagleton's reader on Marxist literary theory. (1995: Eagleton and Milne) Yet if we look more closely there are key affinities. The intellectual range of both writers has always been vast but of the two, Bourdieu's is more immense. He is, among other things, art historian, anthropologist, philosopher of language, connoisseur of Flaubert, empirical researcher and finally in **Distinction** expert in the nuanced class differences of French cuisine. (1984: Bourdieu) Eagleton's expansion out of the narrow frame of English literary criticism has been achieved partly in the shadow of the late Raymond Williams but now encompasses, at the very least, politics, sociology, history and the philosophy of aesthetics. In literature itself, Eagleton's interest are by far the broader. Whereas Bourdieu is distinctly Francophile, Eagleton has always used, like Franco Moretti, a broad comparative and European frame for literary analysis. Bourdieu's analysis is largely contextual. Eagleton combines context with close reading. Despite this Eagleton is closer to the revision of the Marxian tradition undertaken by Bourdieu than Williams who for many might provide a more natural yardstick of comparison. After Williams's death, that affinity has crystallised but gone unnoticed. In understanding the radical post-Soviet revision of the Marxian analysis of culture, however, the link is crucial.

In the 1990s a post-Soviet Europe and the official end of the Cold War have created a major crisis in Marxian analysis which Williams did not live to experience and yet out of this, I want to argue, both Eagleton and Bourdieu have published their most important work on culture and modernity. Bourdieu's **The Rules of Art** was published in 1992, Eagleton's **Heathcliff and the Great Hunger** in 1995. In the same period, other striking similarities have emerged through

the English translations of Bourdieu's work in the 1970s and 1980s. Both engage in a neo-Marxian critique of aesthetics which is implacably hostile to Kant and to his twentieth century successor, Hans Georg Gadamer. (Bourdieu, 1984:250-1, 485f; Eagleton, 1990:70-100; 1996:61-7) Both sustain a radical critique which confronts Heidegger and his modishness, Bourdieu voraciously tearing apart the German's political ontology. (Bourdieu, 1988; Eagleton, 1990:288-315) Both have transformed their critique of literature by reading, in complementary ways, the essays of Walter Benjamin. (Eagleton 1981; Fowler, 1997:89-92) Yet Benjamin's importance in the delicate process of rewriting cannot be understood without the extent of an earlier imprint on their sociology of literature - that of Lucien Goldmann. It is an imprint which both would now be reluctant to acknowledge, but **The Hidden God**, Goldmann's study of Pascal, Racine and Jansenism in the birth of Absolutist France is a crucial marker for their transformed visions of late nineteenth century culture and more crucially, of modernity itself.

Of course an immediate **caveat** can be issued, stressing differences which appear to be vital. In the late 1970s Eagleton nurtured a Leninist infatuation with the philosophy of Louis Althusser and the criticism of Pierre Macherey while Bourdieu was engaged in keeping his distance from Althusser's militant anti-humanism through his original theorising of the **habitus** as a structural and organising principle of existence which reinstates the subject within framework of an objectified social world. (Bourdieu, 1990; Brubaker, 1993) Despite this early divergence Goldmann remained a driving force behind both writers. Bourdieu's genetic sociology is clearly indebted, as Bridget Fowler has noted, to Goldmann's genetic structuralism. (1997: 87-9) Eagleton's early literary monograph on the Brontes, to whom he returns at the start of **Heathcliff and the Great Hunger** is inspired by Goldmann's conceptualising of the bourgeois world-vision in modern writing. We might want to say therefore that the hidden agenda of both is Goldmann's **The Hidden God**.(Goldmann,1964) For sure, its dissection of philosophy and drama in the early bourgeois age underpins their discourse of literary writing at the inception of bourgeois modernity. For Bourdieu, Baudelaire, Flaubert and Manet are the heroic modernists working against the grain of an industrialising and modernising France. For Eagleton, the Irish Renaissance is not purely literary but overtly cultural and political, giving birth to an "archaic avant-garde", a living contradiction which signals impending national

uprising and the breakdown of British rule. Seen this way, the nature Irish movement undermines received definitions of high-modernism and the avant-garde. But there is a more fundamental point of contact. In both instances, French and Irish, artistic opposition to the polity embodies two key elements of Goldmann's vision. These two elements operate not only through the artwork both also the critical discourse which takes the artwork as its object. In both cases, it is a Pascalian **wager** on the future coupled with an aesthetic of **refusal**, refusal of the living present within the oppositional group, the Jansenists of Port-Royal or the circles of the Irish avant-garde. This fusion of wager and refusal is also present in the critical theorist who always wishes to reject the present and stake a wager on the future. The world of the detached artist is mirrored in the world of the radical critic.

Let us look once more at Goldmann in his study of Pascal and Racine. Pascal's belief in God is at once a wager on a Being both absent and present at the same time, a necessary salvation from the sustained terror of infinite spaces. The world's catastrophes show no evidence of his Existence, and yet his power is source of all epistemology and piety in the human realm. The Pascalian wager is an activated form of faith, of acting as if God exists in spite of his absence from the daily world but it leads in the Jansenist circles to a pronounced asceticism in the search for Grace. Goldmann faces here the same dilemma as Weber in his reading of Calvinist fundamentalism. At origin the rejection of the present world is so fundamental it seems to provide no basis for an embryonic world-vision of a emergent group or class. This happens only through the progressive moderation of the foundational belief. Mediations are vital components of alteration, the compromise with emergent class interests, the intrigues of power. Jansenism must change or die, as Calvinism also found out. Yet what entranced Goldmann was the historic point of purity of the refusal of the world, embodied in the tragic refusal of Racine's heroines to face the world of profane husbands and lovers or submit to their political power. Despite Goldmann's concern with the antagonisms between the intendants and the **noblesse de robe**, and that nuanced reading of class fractions which recalls Marx's writings on the 1848 revolutions, the more unmediated relationship is surely with the field of political power. Religious heresy is above all political, and what makes Goldmann's reading of tragedy more germane than ever is recent speculation on Marlowe and Shakespeare's links to the Catholic

Recusants of late Elizabethan England. Heresy becomes a vantage-point for glossing the complex relationships of perfidy and power. (Nicholl, 1992; Wilson, 1997) Where Racine's open poetics are those of refusal and finality, Shakespeare's hidden agenda contains disguise, banishment, exile, the trading of identities and in Hamlet the active powers of indecision. The tragic repudiation of the game had as it were already been superseded by new dramatic forms of tragic game-playing, positing the choice of relationship to the field of power in post-classical tragedy. Either you played to lose, or you did not play at all.

Eagleton finds his English equivalent of tragic refusal initially in novel form. That refusal is equally coloured by religious heresy, this time by the Puritan subtext of Samuel Richardson's **Clarissa**. (Eagleton, 1982) Anachronistically underwritten by the militant feminism of the 1980s, this both limits and recharges Eagleton's discourse after the polemical impasse of Althusser. On the one hand, his Clarissa is too informed by a very different kind of female resistance to patriarchy in his own epoch. On the other hand, feminism helps to crystallise a key point of gender resistance in the rise of the English novel which has much wider implications. Just as Phaedra and Andromaque are female allegories of tragic refusal, so Eagleton's Clarissa is a re-enactment of the topos of refusal at the start of a new literary form, an evolutionary narrative of unsuccessful resistance to rape, a sublimation in the style of Goldmann's ironic reverse appropriation of Freud, of the politico-religious into the intimate-erotic, a sexualisation of faith and power, rather than empowerment of sexuality. For Eagleton in the late twentieth century it became possible to read it as a sexual politics **avant la lettre**, the novel as a genre of positive moralising which can assume the ethical high-ground. An exemplary narrative, however, is no longer a tragic one so that paradoxically Clarissa's defensive but righteous virtue vitiates the tragic element in her fate, as does the unconvincing ending to the novel.

By the same token, Bourdieu takes on the topos of tragic refusal but in a later age and in a more ambitious way. For Richardson in mid-seventeenth century, refusal would have been a subterranean strategy sublated in Clarissa's predicament but in Flaubert in the mid-nineteenth it becomes an open slogan and an aesthetic philosophy as well as a literary conceit. Here Bourdieu

simultaneously recreates Flaubert and his quasi-biographical hero of **Sentimental Education**, Federic Moreau, in the image of Goldmann's Andromaque. At the same time, this is a **post-tragic** refusal of the world. Federic enters that world and plays its social games with distance and disdain. Likewise he survives the revolutionary turmoil of 1848 which he witnesses so assiduously in self-conscious echo of his author's own witnessing. Survival and disdain mark out not reaction or betrayal, the knee-jerk reaction of the orthodox Lukacs, but a new aesthetic of disengagement. In Flaubert the writer's aesthetic is ascetic or it is nothing. For Bourdieu, 1848 is the genesis of modernity signified by the subversions of its Artistic other, modernism, which does **not** reflect the immanent tendencies of the bourgeois world-vision in artistic terms, as it would in Goldmann's formula which he rejects (1992:202). Rather it challenges the very self-constitution of such a vision, clawing away at its foundations in the key period before all forms of modern art in France become prone to consumption by their bourgeois patrons as indispensable forms of cultural capital. That is to say, before they become constituted by a discriminating bourgeois public as aesthetic objects of desire. Beyond reception, Baudelaire and Flaubert have the same historic function for Bourdieu in the evolution of French society as the Irish Revival has for Eagleton in the context of the British state. They generate a maverick modernism which perversely opposes the doxa of a progressive modernity, which signifies a localised but decisive rupture within the bourgeois world. In each case the terms upon which it does so are radically opposed. In Eagleton it is national rupture premised on cultural periphery and the division of landmass. In Bourdieu it is metropolitan in the centralising tradition of French polity and culture. The struggle over modernity is also a struggle over the soul and topography of Paris.

Goldmann's "wager" was unexpectedly made topical by the spontaneous uprisings of '68, which Lyotard has recently termed "the last great historic adventure" of modernity. In New Wave cinema, **les evenements** marked the emergence of a new Maoist Jean-Luc Godard, but one of the most fascinating postscripts came from his more conservative associate, Eric Rohmer. In Rohmer's 1969 film **My Night with Maud**, Goldmann's thesis is cryptically invoked in drunken cafe conversation by the Marxist friend of Jean-Louis Trintignant, a prim Catholic hypocrite whom Rohmer gently mocks. The pair manage to argue over Pascal and Marx in Goldmannesque terms without mentioning Goldmann or the political events of the

previous year. Rohmer's conscious double omission of Paris- for the film is set in Clermont-Ferrand not on the Left Bank -is far from obvious since for the viewer the pair are also arguing over the same woman, Maud, doctor and divorced mother who is the object of their erotic attention. Conversation thus becomes power discourse and it is apt for Rohmer, the Catholic director ironising the search for Grace, that Trintignant, the Catholic faux naïf, should win both battles, the sexual and the ideological, so unconvincingly. '68 thus becomes a marker of rise and fall of a revolutionary discourse, of the seamless interplay of its vitality and entropy. In the wake of that abortive wager on history Eagleton and Bourdieu both sought out earlier revolutionary situations as a yardstick by which to measure the adventures of the subversive artwork, situations whose revolutionary natures, 1848 Paris, 1916 Dublin, are shrouded in ambiguity. Of course time and place are different, and the choice of different histories is in part biographical. Bourdieu was the provincial son who came from the rural South-West to metropolitan Paris. Eagleton was born in the north of England to Irish Catholic parents. Yet for both '68 is the shadow which still haunts and prompts in the 1990s their readings of culture as a passage out of Marxism still indebted to Marx himself.

## II.

In the age of an impure aesthetic when writing has a greater academic cachet than fiction or philosophy, when the novel appears to be a consumer's feast and not a producer's art, when the Western canon is proclaimed under threat but is not really under threat, and when most writing anyway has become a poor sibling of the moving image, it seems strange that Bourdieu persists in unmasking the conceit of a pure aesthetic which no longer exists. In the decade before **The Rules of Art** it seemed indeed that Bourdieu's fixated unmasking of the pure artwork was in danger of succumbing to petit-bourgeois **Schadenfreude**. Moreover, it posed more questions than it answered. Once he has exposed the charisma of the great artist as a glaring act of consecration by adoring critics, by connoisseurs trading in the stock-exchange of cultural capital, does it get us any further in our understanding of the artwork itself? The answer is yes and no. In **The Rules of Art** Bourdieu decisively modulates his argument, and in doing so snatches victory, it can be argued out of the jaws of a reductionist defeat. Here the fragile

equation of Durkheim with Weber works for once and kickstarts his discourse into new dimensions. For just as the aesthetic object of desire is changed and changed utterly by the collective act of consecrating (Durkheim), so the charisma of the creative "genius" must endure the temporal curse of evanescence (Weber). For Bourdieu, perversely, the artist consecrated is the artist desacralised, and the artwork stripped of its aura by its retro-celebrity. At its most extreme, this new pattern is imprinted on the passage of all cultural destinies in the modern age. Critical rapture is the kiss of the death and for that very reason critical criticism must return to source.

There are previous echoes of this, very strong ones, in Adorno and Benjamin whose work feeds into Bourdieu's radical aesthetic. Yet historical evanescence which becomes the model of what happens to the heroic modernism of Baudelaire, Flaubert and Manet in following generations is framed differently. When the art trio are finally found acceptable, they quickly become big cultural commodities. Consequently their aesthetic refusal of modernity is recuperated through cultural acclaim in which the connoisseurs of art stage-manage the games amateur consumers are teased into playing. This is a radical shift of focus from the previous work where the artist is often seen as little more than a structural sign, a pivotal point in the artistic field where all extraneous factors - social, cultural, political, converge. The act of endowment which he calls, quoting Benjamin, "the fetish of the name of the master", was a ritual naming of that which is distinctive, a conferring of personal signature upon on a collective product. To write of someone as distinctive - and Bourdieu has analysed in detail the many social meanings of distinction- is to endow a work with cultural capital which can be circulated among potential consumers. It may celebrate art but it also opens up the market for symbolic goods. In **The Rules of Art**, however, the discourse shifts the balance back towards the author of the artwork, but only under key conditions. In France those conditions constitute the genesis of modernism out of modernity as its monstrous artistic Other. The begin with the trials and tribulations of the Three Figures on the Cross, Baudelaire as Poetry, Flaubert as Fiction and Manet as Painting who are censored, tried in court or out of it, and greeted in their lifetime by public opprobrium. Bourdieu thus reconstitutes the artwork by historicising it. If New Testament crucifixion is invoked it is because Old Testament parable underlies it. The Terrible Three emerge at that very moment when history offers up the chance of parallel celebration and

deformation, recognition and transmutation into base commodity. If crucifixion signifies redemption, it also invokes the Fall. 1848 is the start of the modernist heroic made possible by an autonomous field of art, but also the parable of its Fall since it is the start of a system of cultural capital which devours it. In the seeds of its autonomy lies its own destruction.

Bourdieu here shows his debt to Goldmann and his rejection of him. In reading Flaubert's **Sentimental Education** he links the text to the literary field and then to the field of power much as Goldmann had done in his study of Port-Royal, but subversive writing is no longer the reflection of a world-vision of an emergent social class. Rather it is a refraction of a complex field of social possibilities which marks out the aesthetic of the **illusio** as the dominant (and genetically Flaubertian) form of modern fiction. Here placing Flaubert in history as Bourdieu does, by placing **Sentimental Education** within the socio-spatial topography of 1840s Paris is to rescue Flaubert from the impasse of the pure aesthetic which Flaubert himself had propagated, by placing himself squarely within the realm of the social. Durkheim famously suggested that in worshipping God we worship society. Here Bourdieu shows his Durkheimian credentials. For he implies in that in worshipping Flaubert we do much the same thing.

Bourdieu's fascination with Flaubert as heroic modernist is a fascination with the material legacy of a creator of imaginary worlds who reproduces in vivid detail the illusion of the real, a sense of time and place both autonomous and unique. That he should chose the one major text of Flaubert which is both contemporary and Parisian, which combines the panoramic canvas of the city with the lure of illusory social ascent, speaks volumes about his own method of textual reading. If context is inherently social, which how he looks at the active heresies of Baudelaire in Paris at the same time, then the textual reading which he finds most comforting is the one which readily opens out onto key elements of modernity, which charts movement not stasis and explores intersecting social networks rather than Flaubert's other literary worlds of the reclusive, the ascetic and the exotic. The moves that he makes here are conscious ploys in the critical arena. He moves against the fashion of seeing in Flaubert the purity of literary form or his work enacting, as Sartre claims, the psychodrama of his own provincial life as "the idiot of the family", neurotically refusing his father ambitions for him and consciously failing to emulate the conformist trajectory of his older brother. (Sartre, 1981) While Sartre considered Flaubert's

impersonality aesthetic to be a form of bourgeois bad faith illuminated in the trial of the book of **Madame Bovary** Bourdieu sees as it a profound springboard for the artistic confrontation with the social at the moment of modernity.

Equally Bourdieu stakes out a version of the social artwork which differs from two the opposed versions of mimesis in Erich Auerbach and Rene Girard. (Auerbach, 1968; Girard, 1976). Highlighting the role of the **illusio** in Flaubertian narrative as opposed to representational perspective, he argues that Flaubert's singularity arises because 'he produces writings taken to be "realistic" (no doubt by virtue of their object), which contradict the tacit definition of "realism" in that they are written, they have "style". ' This stylistic framing is echoed in Bourdieu's attraction to one of Flaubert's most intriguing aphorisms turned oxymoron "Write the mediocre well." (1992:91-4) There is a case for saying Flaubert writes the mediocre better in **Madame Bovary** than he does in **Sentimental Education**. In the former the aesthetic is not treated as object since in Emma's circle there are few would-be aesthetes. Yet Bourdieu critiques the aesthetic as necessarily reflexive, occurring simultaneously inside and outside the text, in the play-off between Flaubert's letters and his fiction, for example, as contiguous forms of writing. Aesthetic aspirations and illusions are incorporated reflexively in the Parisian novel precisely because of the firm hold upon the social which lies in its diurnal detail. The fusion of style and banality is crucial, for it creates the possibility of a "realist formalism" which both transcends and destroys a binary opposition inhibiting the modernistic impulse and which he attributes to the doxa of the dominant culture. Here one can reread through Flaubert the cultural formation of the modern bourgeois world-view as a schizoid mind-set where there is little ideological consensus, in which the cultural is seen exclusively as a useful artefact or exclusively as a pure aesthetic.

The break with the homogenising Goldmann could not be clearer as Bourdieu meticulously charts the cultural histories of these polarising movements, of utilitarians demanding a purely social function out of the artwork, romantics claiming its pure transcendence of the social. Flaubert consciously steers between both extremes to make the literary form an artistic challenge to the conventions of tradition and the ideals of progress. In that respect, Bourdieu's reading builds upon Girard's formidable theory of the modern novel. For

Girard the dilemma of the modern heroic self lay in the delirium of mimesis, of imitation of the desired and desirable other, the role-model to which one strives much as Don Quixote had strived absurdly to uphold the fiction of chivalry in a world bereft of it. Mimetic desire lies in imitation of the world past but also of the present other. Just as **Sentimental Education** imitates and surpasses Rousseau's **Confessions** and Stendhal's **Red and Black** so Frederic mimics the fate of Rousseau and Stendhal's young ambitious males by falling in love, as they do, with an older woman who also acts as a surrogate for the absent mother. As Girard shows, such literary tropes here are common throughout European fiction of the period and they are linked to the ambitions of social ascent and material success. (1976: 21-220) Flaubert takes this one stage further in Bourdieu's reading. The forms of mimesis lead on to rivalry not only in love, with the contest between husband and lover, but also in the social variations of mimetic desire. Not only does Frederic fall in love with Madame Arnoux, he belongs to a male social circle where rivalry is linked to political belief and social ambition. Girard's formal rendering of mimetic rivalry is here fleshed out by Bourdieu's readings of social variation as each rival in the circle, always looking over his shoulder the others, undergoes his own "sentimental education" which cathects different ideals, pathologies, aspirations and fates in the force-field of the narrative. This lateral spread of rival associates who are all in some respect versions of the hero but also at odds with him dovetails with the intrigues of passion where the key amours of Moreau's life, Madame Arnoux, Rosanette and Madame Dambreuse form an eternal triangle on which the points are interchangeable. Vain and brittle, Moreau confuses in his imagination the image and residence of the courtesan he possesses with those the married women he desires as social acquisitions.

Rather than just forging a specific representation of reality through innovation in style, Flaubert forges a specific **illusio**, or fundamental belief in reality, where language structures the **illusio** itself. (1992:227-31) Here writer, hero and reader form a tight reflexive circle. At the start this is mimetic. One author copies another, one hero moulds himself upon the past heroes of literature or of history while the reader, in the act of reading, simulates simultaneously both the actions of the heroine and the author's act of writing her into the texture of the tale. Bourdieu concludes his argument thus:

"...In coming back tirelessly from **Madame Bovary** to **Bouvard and Pecuchet** via **Sentimental Education** to characters who live life as a novel because they take fiction too seriously, for lack being able to take the real seriously, and who commit a "category error"

totally similar to that of the realist novelist and his reader, Flaubert reminds us that the propensity to grant the status of reality to fictions (to the point of wanting the reality of existence to conform to fiction, as do Don Quixote, Emma or Frederic) perhaps finds its foundation in a sort of detachment, an indifference, a passive variant of the stoical ataxaria, which leads to seeing reality as illusion and to perceiving the **illusio** in its truthfulness as a well-founded illusion, to take up once more the expression Durkheim uses about religion." (1992: 334-5.)

The **illusio** is profound in Flaubert, he contends, because like William Faulkner he mobilises the most profound structures of the social world which correspond to the mental structures of reading, structures which are not explicit as in scientific discourse but implicit in a story where they are veiled and unveiled at the same time. In the way that fiction as an imaginary conceals, so the critique as materiality must unveil, but it can do so only under certain conditions. The critic's task is not to consecrate the work as act of genius but to expose its complex powers of dissimulating. Here there is a crucial homology. In **Sentimental Education** it lies in the game-playing dissimulation of Flaubert, the author, who seeks the reality of the Second Empire as a vain illusion and takes refuge in the ascetic detachment of the radical aesthete, and his fictional anti-hero Federic who pursues the imitation of life by living it out as self-conscious repetition of the passion of great fictions, since the endless game-playing in his own circle is seen by him an exercise in futility. Yet this conceit of fiction-as-detachment empowers him precisely in that game-playing of everyday life whose futility otherwise makes him feel impotent. Flaubert's authorial detachment leads to the modernist art of the next century and the impersonality of the Joycean writer paring his fingernails where Federic's emotional detachment had led to social paralysis. The split is later preserved reflexively in Joyce's doubling of Dedalus, the future artist destined to leave dirty Dublin with Bloom the entropic bricoleur doomed to remain there. Finally the moment of impersonality founded in the figure of Flaubert and his writing is also, reflexively, the model of scientific impartiality for the modern observer, including Bourdieu himself. The analytical precision and refusal of value-judgment necessary for the launching of modern science, both natural and social, during the Second Empire resides for Bourdieu in Flaubert as much as it does in Comte, Taine or Durkheim. In his reprise of this myth of genesis Flaubert is the founding figure of the discourse of modernity, its veiling as fiction and its unveiling as science. Conveniently, Bourdieu as polymathic sociologist then becomes a future beneficiary. In the world according to Bourdieu, Bourdieu in effect is Flaubert's future double.

### III.

For Terry Eagleton fiction's constellations of tragic refusal are pointers to the transformation of British society and the field of power in the United Kingdom. Three dominate his culture critique. In 1748 the rape of Clarissa highlights the ironies of the historic alliance between landed aristocracy and new bourgeoisie which Clarissa's rejection of Lovelace fictionally subverts. This, in turn is the Puritan author's symbolic discharge of his the defeat of his religion's radical promise which had foundered on the collapse of Cromwell's Commonwealth one hundred years earlier. A hundred years after **Clarissa** the contradictions of rural class form the tragic bedrock of **Wuthering Heights**, and here sexual status is reversed, Cathy as the yeoman's daughter, Heathcliff as the dark-skinned orphan found on the streets of Liverpool. Heathcliff's destructive ascent marks out social mobility not as a vessel of the civilising influence of bourgeois society but the laying bare of capitalist brutality which begins exploiting cultural capital and ends by sending it into reverse. Finally the Bronte's Irish connection is self-consciously mythologised as the launching pad for Eagleton's own critical wager, his reading of Irish fiction's omission of the Great Hunger from its pages as an aporia which paradoxically fuels cultural transformation in the colony-within-the Kingdom.

Eagleton's fracturing of Goldmann's world-vision had begun in his earlier reading of **Wuthering Heights**, but in a curious way. He pointed rightly to the fragile nature of Goldmann's Lukacsian distinction between partial vision as a falsely conscious ideology and the coherent, structured and totalising belief-system he calls world-vision. Yet the Anglo-Irish critic uses that distinction to divide the two Brontes, attributing to Charlotte's texts an ideological function of mythically resolving contradictory interests at the pragmatic level of daily coherence while crediting Emily's novel with the power of a universalising text transcending the conflicts it portrays in the creation of a timeless myth of nature. (49) That transcendence is only achieved, however, by exhausting in its narrative form the endless possibilities of class hatred. (Eagleton, 1975: 49) **Wuthering Heights** becomes an artistic **Aufhebung**, a fictional transcendence of history almost by default. Just as Goldmann had attributed the power of Racine's vision to the

transmutation of the hidden Jansenist God into the field of the Pagan deities of classical tragedy, in particular the figure of the Sun, so Eagleton connects the romantic structure of feeling in **Wuthering Heights** to a primal pre-modern source, antedating the nineteenth century opposition noted by Williams of pastoral rebel and English commercial society. This clears the way for the entry of Benjamin's cryptic philosophy of history where **constellation** is the call to a buried past obliquely signifying a future which cannot be fully imagined. The Anglo-Irish critic sees this very differently from Bourdieu's homing in on the diurnal metropolis, itself inspired by Benjamin's arcades project and his reading of Baudelaire. It entails, by contrast, a radical displacement to the cultural margin which deconstructs the myth of the "primitive", which is precisely how Ireland was then perceived in the late Victorian mind-set. The Irish revival is not only a symbolic riposte to the clichés of backwardness, but a swift overtaking of English metropolitan culture itself.

Concern with myths of the primitive lies at the heart of Eagleton's Pascalian wager in **Heathcliff and the Great Hunger** which crudely put, can be called taking a chance on Emily. If Bramwell Bronte **had** discovered an Irish orphan on the streets of Liverpool in August 1845 who was a victim of the Hunger, then the trauma of the Bronte's Irish heritage would be invoked as an unexpected return of the repressed charging the force-field of Emily's tragic text. Eagleton admits, however, that the dating was all wrong. (1995:3) Moreover, even if an orphan was found, even if he was Irish, how can we prove that Heathcliff was Irish any more than we can prove that Lady Macbeth had sixteen children? As a close reader of Milan Kundera's reflexive poetics of irony and estrangement, Eagleton is surely setting up here his critical gamble on the historical meaning of Irish art. It **has** to signify in order that he can theorise, that is, on the metanarrative level to which Marxist theory categorically commanded him. Where Bourdieu's strategy of reading Flaubert emerges organically from his previous discourse of modernity in general, Eagleton is still haunted by implicit hiatus, the tell-tale gap between eclectic theorising which surfs between ideological positions, and the drive of practical criticism which provides crucial override. Having seen the weakness in Goldmann, but failed to ingest the productionist metaphysics of Althusser and Macherey, he turned to Benjamin to find a way out of the impasse. Yet the "Marxist rabbi" as he called him was too elliptical, Talmudic and eclectic to provide the magic cornerstone of revolutionary critique which eluded him. He is thus driven to fuse

Benjamin's historical anti-historicising of art with Goldman's critique which he never abandoned, in a specific context which calls up his own ancestry. Summoning up all the traces of complex reading in his Oxbridge career, Eagleton seeks final resolution in the Irishness of the Irish. But through the vital wager on Emily Bronte the connection to English writing remains as an allegory of openness. It is a tactical allegory to ensure the door is never closed.

The Irish Revival is a double displacement in time and space, its tragic vision very different from either the Jansenist vision of Racine or the petrified allegories of baroque German drama, the **Trauerspiel** which obsessed Benjamin, the one emerging at the start of absolutist rule, the other towards its end. (Benjamin, 1977) By contrast Ireland's anomalous position in the politics of the modern European state is deceptively decentered. It was a backward economic colony incorporated within the Union, its oddity highlighted in the Victorian age by the sheer volume of British colonies being firmed up or added on in distant continents. This unique situation fuels theoretic device. The wager, the refusal and the constellation all coalesce here in a theory of cultural overtaking too vast in detail and complexity to summarise here. Suffice to say, its key moments of discourse are those of the Great Hunger, the persistent anti-realism of the Irish novel and the art and politics which spring from 1916. All are deeply interconnected. The durée of the novel links the Hunger it predates to the Uprising it outlasts while the Uprising itself can be construed as oblique payback for the earlier ravages of famine just as Trotsky saw the October revolution as part revenge for the destruction of the Paris Commune.

The paucity of the Hunger in Irish writing up until 1950 echoes a more recent trauma which still engages us. Adorno's famous dictum "No poetry after Auschwitz" is surely a key model for the Irish discourse. Eagleton is quick to dismiss the propaganda of the Hunger-as-Genocide and patient in his sifting of its complex causality without absolving the British of blame. (1995: 13-14, 61-3) Yet the trauma of the Hunger as too unspeakable and too horrible to portray echoes debates on the representation of the Holocaust, a debate still very much alive in Claude Lanzmann's film **Shoah**. Eagleton claims the ambiguous response to the Hunger left a permanent mark on Irish writing. There was no Irish **Middlemarch** because stable living and total seeing did not coincide, as they did in George Eliot's England (1995:150f). Instead sudden

catastrophe, which returns in 1916 under a different guise, may have had the opposite effect sending writers into a defensive posture where they idealise Irish peasant life in response to external stereotypes of barbarism. At this point, one senses Eagleton is far happier with Irish literature in this period than he is with its English counterpart. His strident yet confused readings of Eliot and Dickens in **Criticism and Ideology** (1976) had previously suffered from an Althusserian fixation on finding ideology in every literary sign. Such weakness invariably put paid to his ideological project, grandiose and self-deluding, of displacing not only the Leavisite Great Tradition but in true Oedipal mode **its** replacement, the critical theory of his mentor Raymond Williams. Thankfully, despite the odd polemical blast, he never went back. To be admiring we could say that he had discovered something more powerful. To be cruel we could say this earlier wager, the ideology critique, had failure written all over it, something the critic tacitly confirms in his later plural readings of ideology. (1996:11) In other words the wager on Ireland is the **second wager** because the wager on England had failed.

In his ambitious overview of Irish anti-realism, Eagleton foregrounds two key factors. Firstly he situates narrative form in the life-worlds of the Anglo-Protestant diaspora through the very fact of colonial predicament. Cultural isolation bespeaks absurd perspective, the multiple obsessions with the Gothic and the fantastic, for instance in Bram Stoker's **Dracula**, and finally with the esoteric reaches of theosophy which entranced Shaw and Yeats. In Ireland the colonial and the divine became fatally fused. By contrast, it would make little sense for Bourdieu to foreground the Protestant ambience in the provincial setting of the French novel north of Paris, an equation neatly taking in Flaubert, Gide, Proust and Romain Rolland. The second factor is more fundamental. The Anglo-Protestant diaspora paves the way for an avant-garde formation in Irish writing which is anti-mimetic, a "curiously hybrid artistic form, **non-realist** representation, art faithful to an action which is itself realistically improbable..." (1995:305) The linking of politics and form which follows is breathtaking but the suspicion lingers that Eagleton has got the equation the wrong way round. True the very idiom of Hiberno-English, as many critics have noted, centres in the play upon language prompted by the impulse of buried translation where the joke, the exaggeration and the tall tale readily take over as surplus signifying, in other words as humorous blether. But though this violates strict mimesis in every day discourse, in art it becomes the basis for something more profound, the rupture with

representational form. In this instance the key violation is not of mimesis - everyone sees through Christy Mahon's boasting in the end- but of perspective itself.

Let us take some key instances. Joyce, Synge, Yeats and O'Casey can all be mimetic to a precise point. In all his fiction, Joyce's Dublin is reproduced with exact topographies of time and place while Synge's stage directions for **Riders to the Sea** exactly reproduced the size of a fishing family's cottage on the West Coast. O'Casey's intimate knowledge of the North Dublin tenement is impacted into the design of its dramatic space and the body language of its stage inhabitants. In his famous poem on the Uprising "Easter 1916" Yeats attempts, as Eagleton is well aware, to forge the creation of myth of an immediate present by reiterating the names of its dead leaders (1998: 351-2). At the same time the poem intends a mythic perspective and not, as Eagleton notes, an analytic commentary. Through its resort to tragedy and myth, the archaic avant-garde breaks down representational perspective as much as their surrealist or expressionist counterparts in Europe. But it does so only through the epiphanic nature of its mimetic powers. (Orr, 1987:13-16, 163-8) That Eagleton gets things the wrong way round matters less because at least he sees the vital separation of mimesis and representation other critics wrongly conflate, and also sees the rupture in a particular perceptive way which echoes the reading by Raymond Williams of modern tragedy. Irish writing foregrounds an impossible idealism which splinters under the pressures of an unbearable history in two opposing directions. In passing, it itemises precise aspects of its own history in a pure, incandescent language but in the long run seeks out national totality in myth, ancestry and the endowment of the diurnal voice with the sacredness of poetic style. Yet still, in spite of such schizoid tendencies, it creates unity of form. This minor miracle can lead us to only one conclusion. The Irish Renaissance has its own, very Irish, Renaissance perspective. Eagleton mistakenly sees the Irish avant-garde as soldiers in "the war...between naturalism and Nietzsche". (1995: 305-9) In fact they make that war redundant.

#### IV.

The shift from Goldmann to Benjamin is also a loop since the key terms in **The Hidden God** are to be found, less theorised, in Lukacs's early **Soul and Form** which parallels Benjamin's search for an authentic route out of the impasse of German idealism in the twentieth century. The wager and the constellation thus ran in tandem without knowing it until they

became linked more self-consciously in the current decade. This realignment in cultural method also provides a crucial encounter at the crossroads of contemporary theory. It is a key alternative to the myth of postmodernity, dehistoricising Marx without forgetting his legacy, refusing to throw the baby out with the bathwater. Eagleton sees 1916 much as Bourdieu sees 1848. In fact he sets the dates side by side when he says of the Uprising and the civil war, that its vivid intertextualities of politics, belief and art were like the events of 1848 and after as seen through the eyes of Marx "...Inherently fictive and theatrical, full of panache and breathless rhetoric and historical cross-dressing rising to an exuberant crescendo before sinking back, like some prolonged binge, into the crapulousness of daily life." (1995: 305) This is also the verdict, en passant, of Federic Moreau whose subsequent disdain for revolution in general matched Marx's disdain for this revolution in particular. This in a word is the pathos of tragic farce diagnosed as a structure of experience in the **18th Brumaire** and stylised as a structure of feeling in **Sentimental Education**. That history should repeat itself in this way is both tragic and farcical at the same time.

Yet tragic farce is what gives birth and then rebirth to modernist form. This of course is plural form, casting Baudelaire and Yeats as poets, Flaubert and Joyce as novelists, Manet as painter, Synge and O'Casey as playwrights. While Bourdieu's assiduous contextualising of Baudelaire's contemptuous desecration of good taste fills out the Benjamin's textual reading of Baudelaire the poet of '48 who simultaneously sees himself as revolutionary and reactionary, perpetrator and victim, torturer and tortured, Eagleton's reading of Yeats' "Easter, 1916" places that same contradiction at a mythopoetic level where Yeatsian revolutionaries can be heroes and villains, flesh and ghost, in the same breath. Bourdieu, while contextualising Benjamin also displaces him and for good reason. Baudelaire is the poet of the fragment, Flaubert the novelist of the metatext whose ironising of history can parallel the deadpan discourse of the sociologue. One feels too that Bourdieu would also have plenty to say about the James Joyce T-shirts now littering the trails of literary Dublin, just as De Valera would be left speechless as he turned in his grave. The period of opprobrium followed by the age of consecration applies as much to Irish and it does to French art. Yet of the two critics, Bourdieu is perhaps more exact in assessing the consequences. The feature of bourgeois autonomy in the field of art is this. The modern artist must desecrate the world in order to be consecrated in art. Here Benjamin is put

into reverse. Aura is inseparable from desecration, its liquidation inseparable from consecration. Flaubert-Joyce - what's in a name?- imprimatur of genius becomes an icon among commodities in a world where cultural tourism is not so much a pilgrimage as a state of mind.

Both critics challenge the myth of postmodernity but in different ways, Bourdieu by largely ignoring it, Eagleton by excoriating it. For Bourdieu it can only be an attenuation of cultural capital in a consumerist age, an inflation of the market for symbolic goods he had already identified. Perhaps his weakness here is to ignore what Adorno spotted so astutely much earlier, the predilection among the highly educated for sophisticated kitsch which has increased rather decreased in the last three decades. His strength is in spotting however the narrower intellectual fix on Gadamerian "hermeneutic narcissism" in which both author and reader are largely mirrored versions of academic critics talking to other academic critics. (1992: 306-9) By contrast, his readings of Flaubert and Faulkner see the reflexive game-playing element in the author-reader relationship not as the mere vanity of a depthless ludic pursuit, but as a fundament of style, the artistic means by which the reader is drawn into a created history with its own mythologising of origin, the **illusio** which it is the reader's challenging task to unmask. (1992: 333-6) The reader-critic must use a different but complementary language to show both the power and limit of artistic invention. This is surely to be preferred, say in looking at the work of Toni Morrison, to the postmodern double-shuffle where most of the time style is a matter of depthless game-playing in which nothing is said, but all of a sudden if an author is female or black or both, the authenticity of experience is invoked by magic incantation to explain the text away.

Eagleton is brilliantly polemical in his denunciation of the sloppy habits of postmodernist life-style. In reviling the worst excesses of this pseudo-culture, however, Eagleton makes an unnecessary compromise. He grants to postmodernity the status of the era of the present. This goes much further than his ideology-critique which sees in the rhetoric of postmodern decentering a key homology with the amoral hedonism of the market or, taking the rhetorics one by one, a set of vacuous modish forms which signify the dumbing-down of present culture. The question then is, why is postmodernity a key concept for understanding our culture while self-proclaimed postmodernists are incapable of its defining critique? The subtext here is of course, the crisis of Marxism. Eagleton's generosity towards

Fredric Jameson as a Marxist who rescues postmodern critique for the critical Marxist project contrasts with his absolute dismissal of the prevalent forms of postmodernism which do anything but. Sometimes the petulant tone of **The Illusions of Postmodernism**(1996) gives the impression of an anxious guru rapidly chasing after disciples who are busy deserting him. Reading between the lines one senses that Eagleton, as for Habermas, modernity remains an incomplete project. The further truth, less palatable, is that since the fast changing world of capital is here to stay and not to be overthrown except by itself, or by nuclear catastrophe, it will always be incomplete. Here the wager, the constellation and the refusal dramatise the plight of incompleteness in new and powerful ways for any discourse. The legacy of Benjamin and Goldmann remains. But equally the artworks which are part of such discourse and define it, derive their tragic structures of feeling less from the pathos of lost opportunities than from a more primal recognition. Completion is itself a myth, but one which will never go away.

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