

# Studies in Twentieth Century Literature

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Special Issue on  
*The Legacy of Althusser*

Guest Editor  
Philip Goldstein

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Philip Goldstein	

*Abstract.* Scholars have emphasized the scientific and the rationalist features of Althusser's work, but few have noted its post-structuralist aspects, especially its Foucauldian accounts of discourse and power. In the early *Pour Marx*, Althusser divides ideological practices from objective science and theoretical norms from empirical facts; however, in several later essays Althusser repudiates his earlier faith in theory's normative force as well as his broad distinction between science and ideology. He argues that every discipline establishes its own relationship between its ideological history and its formal, scientific ideals. This argument, together with Althusser's earlier rejection of totalizing approaches, establishes important parallels with Foucault's archaeological studies. The literary theory of Tony Bennett, who develops a Foucauldian critique of traditional and Marxist aesthetics, illuminates the rich implications of these parallels for cultural analyses. (PG)

Literature in the Abstract: Althusser and English Studies in England	27
David Margolies	

*Abstract.* Althusser's work arrived just when the disintegrating liberal consensus was shaking the ivory towers of the university. Students protested the war in Vietnam as well as the policies of the university. Althusser offered an understanding of this corrupt world and its distorted self-image. These theories provided an exciting new totalization in which life had meaning and intellectuals, a vital role. In literary studies, students and lecturers assumed that works of literature were anti-scientific, preservers of the status quo, without genuine knowledge. Disillusioned,

these students and lecturers condemned Literature as an institution and ignored the individual work. To stop teaching the dominant ideology, they found redemption through abstraction—general principles, abstract structures. Academics found it attractive to raise barricades in the mind, not the street. Althusserian ideas showed lecturers and students that what was thought to be a purely literary or factual matter of aesthetic appreciation was really ideological and political, but the arrogance of the Althusserians, who recognized no theory before Althusser and no value in empirical experience, offended potential allies. (DM)

## Ideology Takes a Day Off: Althusser and Mass Culture

Chip Rhodes

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*Abstract.* As theories of mass culture that focus on empowerment, use value and utopian bribes have become increasingly popular, Althusser's groundbreaking work on structural causality and ideology has been left aside because of its alleged inability to account for social resistance. This is unfortunate because such Althusserian concepts still provide the most productive foundation for a Marxist approach to mass culture that avoids both unwitting apologetics and facile, ethical critiques. Nevertheless, many of Althusser's theoretical claims are in need of revision. As the film *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* implicitly suggests, Althusser's distinction between ideology and the aesthetic no longer holds in consumer-oriented capitalism. In addition, the film undermines Althusser's assertion that the schools are the most powerful ISA under capitalism, suggesting instead that mass culture now fulfills this function under late capitalism. Moreover, this reshuffling of the ideological hierarchy necessarily produces a fresh set of concrete, historically specific contradictions. These contradictions, in turn, provide new possibilities for resistance and social change. (CR)

## Response to Ideology Takes a Day Off: Althusser and Mass Culture

Janet Staiger

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*Abstract.* Chip Rhodes defends Althusser's scientific belief that the subject is a bearer of structures and opposes the humanist claim that the subject functions independently of its contexts. However, recent work in cultural studies examines how identity is constructed and allows us to reconcile the scientific and the humanist view. Ideological interpellation may define our subject positions but we are still able to refuse them. For instance, Rhodes' account of "Ferris Bueller's Day Off" assumes that the subject is a fully interpellated, adolescent, Anglo, middle or upper class, heterosexual male. However, the film also offers various oppositional subject positions, including adolescent female or Hispanic, working class youth. (JS)

## Althusser's Mirror

Carsten Strathausen

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*Abstract.* Jacques Lacan significantly influenced Althusser's accounts of ideology and the subject. Althusser's belief that science is a discourse without a subject parallels Lacan's belief that in the Symbolic Order the Subject and the Other are alienated. Althusser's account of interpellation, which explains how ideology recognizes individuals as subjects, takes for granted Lacan's notion of the mirror stage. Althusser repudiates the plenitude of the subject, whose interpellation conceals its lack; Lacan shows that the subject's failure to express itself in language makes the subject a void. However, Althusser, whose subject is too much like Lacan's ego, fails to distinguish between the "I" of the split subject and the "ego" of the subject's imaginary self-identity. What is more, Althusser rejects the self-consciousness implied by the subject's lack of plenitude and its suturing interpellation. (CS)

## Father Knows Best

Judith Roof

75

*Abstract.* In his essay, "Althusser's Mirror," Carsten Strathausen reveals the paternal politics inherent to any gesture of appropriation. Molding Lacan to an Althusserian mirror, Strathausen demonstrates parallels between Lacan's mirror stage and Althusser's interpellated subject. The resemblance, created through what Strathausen suggests is Althusser's mis-reading of Lacan, reveals their mutual influence. The question of influence, however, becomes an issue of tradition Althusser links to a politics of legitimacy and right he associates with a figure of paternity. While the process of filiation would seem to extend from Lacan to Althusser in the logic of the mirror employed by Strathausen to renew Marxist thought, Althusser also situates himself as the father to a Lacan he is attempting to salvage from the ignominy of illegitimacy. (JR)

## Text and Subject Position after Althusser

Antony Easthope

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*Abstract.* Althusser's achievement is that he redefined Marxism. He reconceptualizes history and totality in terms of different times, construes knowledge as the outcome of a process of construction, and interprets subjectivity as an effect of ideology and unconscious processes. Unfortunately, Althusser's functionalist view of ideology claims that the subject recognizes itself as a subject because it duplicates—reflects—an absolute subject. However, Lacan's notion of the mirror stage remedies this fault. Lacan's subject always misrecognizes itself in a process of contradiction that threatens the stability of any given social

order. Moreover, unlike Foucault's subject, which is limited in that subjectivity is folded back into a vaguely expanded notion of "power," this revised Althusserian subject allows careful reading of texts. The critic does not simply read against the grain; he or she exposes the multiple points of identification offered the reader. For example, Wordsworth's "The Solitary Reaper" installs the reader in multiple positions: a devotee of high culture and the national canon, a lover of the verbal signifier and its play, a consumer of confessional discourse, and a masculine "I" desiring a laboring, singing woman. (AE)

## Althusser, Foucault, and the Subject of Civility

Toby Miller

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*Abstract.* This paper seeks to paint a picture of how discernible links between Althusser and Foucault can assist us to theorise the life of cultural subjects inside established and emergent liberal-capitalist states. Althusser's querying of a humanistic foundation to political philosophy and the social contract is connected to Foucault's contention that modernity invented the subject as a centre of inquiry and that centre became the site constructing obedient citizens. (TB)

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Eric Collum

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