Parody as Cultural Memory in Richard Powers's *Galatea 2.2*

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Linda Hutcheon reminds us that the prefix *para-* in parody actually has two meanings: against and beside. Parody, then, is not always a form of satire, and it can often be a form of sympathy. While satirical parody aims at ridiculing the work it mimics, the kinder imitation of sympathetic parody opens up the possibility of a subtler commentary, whose import can go beyond the work being imitated. Richard Powers's novel *Galatea 2.2* nicely illustrates this possibility: by gently parodying the Pygmalion myth, it builds up a critique of the state of literary studies in the late twentieth century and their long-standing quarrel with the sciences.

Literary studies are in a crisis, whose causes are frequently held to be the rise of theory and the attacks against the canon.[1] Powers, however, joins the few critics who see the impasse of literary scholarship as part of a larger crisis of knowledge in the age of information. In addition to supporting this broader perspective, he makes us see that, for a long time now, literary studies have had a problem where the very definition of knowledge is concerned. His question is, 'what does it mean to know literature?' and the answer is far from simple. By mocking literary studies, the novel exposes the fragmentary nature of such knowledge, but at the same time it uses parody as an integrative force. For while the parody's satirical darts seem to take down the whole literary enterprise, the way in which it is achieved, mostly through quotation, works to preserve and revitalize that which it criticizes.

The novel does not only rework the myth of Pygmalion as the title suggests, but also its other famous literary parody written by Bernard

Shaw. The double target partly accounts for the two protagonists: the scientist, Philip Lentz, a modern day Pygmalion, who wants to breathe life into an artifact, and Richard Powers himself, a writer and literary scholar, who assumes Professor Higgins's role of teaching the unlikely subject to speak. Even more ambitious than Higgins, Powers wants to teach the network to read literature as well. Galatea/Eliza is called Helen in the novel, and she is neither a work of art nor a flower-girl with higher aspirations, but a computer network designed to simulate the human mind. As in Shaw's play, there is a bet: Lentz will build the network, and with Powers's help, teach it literature in ten months. The test will be a comprehensive Master's exam in English literature, and the network will compete with an actual student. The scientists betting against Lentz will have to determine which response came from the human subject and which came from the machine.[2]

Parody defines itself through a difference from the original, which ensures its critical distance, and Powers's substitution of a computer network for the work of art in the myth seems to direct the critique at technical progress. However, the network also replaces the human being who in Shaw's satire offers herself as material for Higgins's doubtful art. The correspondence of the network to Shaw's human character enables Powers to turn his critique to the humanistic endeavor of teaching literature without losing focus on technology. On the contrary, the technical challenge reveals the set of problems overwhelming literary studies.

Teaching literature starts with teaching the language, a task which may prove as difficult for the computer network as it was for the very human Eliza in Shaw's play. In this case, Powers's imagination does not stretch reality too much. Since mastering language appeared to be the highest function of the mind, the attempts to simulate human intelligence, starting in the 1950s, focused on various linguistic theories.[3] The analogy between humans and machines implied in these efforts has been haunting science fiction ever since creating intelligent machines became a possibility.[4] In *Galatea 2.2*, the analogy brings to

the surface the dichotomy between an affective and a scientific approach to literature, which in turn can be traced to the split between humanities and sciences.

The doubling of the hero also helps Powers illustrate this division, which C. P. Snow had diagnosed in his lecture "The Two Cultures."[5] Like C. P. Snow, Richard Powers is both a writer and a scientist. In the novel, however, he defends the humanities against Lentz's scientific views. Their initial theoretical discussions reveal not only the basics of the split but also the inner divisiveness of literary criticism. Lentz indulges the scientist's disdain for the humanities, when he asks Powers: "What passes for knowledge in your so-called discipline? What does a student in English have to do to demonstrate acceptable reading comprehension?" (43). Lentz's attitude is in itself parodic: he fairly approximates the prejudice that science is useful, whereas humanities are superfluous disciplines, unable to define themselves.[6] Powers responds in kind, with the self-consciousness of the humanist caught peddling fraudulent knowledge: "Not a whole hell of a lot. Take some classes. Write some papers" (43). Of course, this self-deprecation also implies a sense of superiority, which surfaces in the next discussion.

Lentz continues to put down literary studies, partly because he wants to minimize his task, partly because he wants to irritate Powers, and Powers continues to underestimate the "engineer's" capacity to grasp literary matters: "'What do literary theorists say about reading books these days?'" asks Lentz. And Powers comments silently: "As if I could paraphrase for him, in an afternoon. As if, armed with my paraphrase, he might tack on a couple of preprocessing, feed-forward subsystem nets that would address any conceivable problem" (91). Later discussions follow the same pattern. Powers is uneasy with Lentz's way of solving problems, because for him, the problem of literature cannot really be summed up by any theory. And although he rejects Lentz's theories of human intelligence, because they seem reductive, he agrees with him that current approaches to literature are reductive as well. To Lentz's query, he responds with a par-

ody of a theoretical lecture: "Well, let's see. The sign is public prop-
erty, the signifier is in small-claims court, and signification is a total
land grab. Meaning doesn't circulate. Nobody's going to jailbreak the
prison house of language" (91). The mixture of linguistic and eco-
nomic terms here, together with the hardly veiled allusion to Frederic
Jameson, pokes fun at the way literary theory distances itself from its
object. Warped by economic and social considerations, and inflated
with linguistic terminology that degenerates into jargon, the talk
about literature becomes easy to mimic, as Lentz is quick to point out,
speaking about their project: "We just have to push 'privilege' and
'reify' up to the middle of the verb frequency lists and retrain. The
freer the associations on the front end, the more profound they're
going to seem upon output" (91). Indeed, many students of literature
push "privilege" and "reify" to the middle of their verb frequency
lists and free-associate with the result of seeming profound upon
output.[7] Such approaches amount to a set of gimmicks, as easy to
simulate in a computer as they are to parody.[8]

   In the course of teaching Helen literature, however, Powers is con-
fronted with all the difficulties inherent in the task. For literature does
not make sense automatically, in the way the bits of information do
for Lentz. Literature takes language to the second power. If clarity is a
utopian ideal approximated by computer programs, in literary lan-
guage, as Powers puts it paraphrasing Hamlet, "readiness [is] context
and context [is] all" (174). Context extends beyond language in the
social and corporeal life of the people who speak it, and this extension
beyond the strictly intellectual domain is the source of literary com-
plexity. While Lentz thinks he already owns the formula for human
cognition, Powers is overwhelmed by his task:

> Suppose we read it the line 'He clasps the crag with crooked hands' [...]
> Then we would have to tell it about mountains, silhouettes, eagles, aeries.
> The difference between clasping and gripping and grasping and gasping.
> The difference between crags and cliffs and chasms. Wings, flight. The fact
> that eagles don't *have* hands. The fact that the poem is not really *about* an ea-
> gle. We'll have to teach it isolation, loneliness... [...] ...how a metaphor

works. How nineteenth-century England worked. How Romanticism didn't work. All about imperialism, pathetic projection, trochees…. (85-86)

Here, Powers deliberately collapses all kinds of approaches to literature together in order to create a rather exaggerated image of his task and to counter Lentz's prediction that, for the network, "[k]nowledge will be a by-product of the shape its weight-landscape takes" (86). While Lentz thinks that the brain is a glorified Turing machine,[9] and "comprehension and appropriate response are often more on the order of buckshot" (86), Powers considers the complexity of knowledge, the relatedness of anything to everything, and he arrives at the inevitable conclusion that, in order to know anything at all, one must necessarily know everything. The total quality of "knowledge," he believes, surfaces in the mere attempt to understand the one line in a poem by Tennyson.

The utopian notion of total and integrated knowledge is stronger in the domain of literature than it is in the sciences. Not surprisingly, the most salient expression of the knowledge crisis discussed in so many theoretical books on postmodernism is the curriculum war waged in the domain of literature.[10] The decline of interest in literature as an object of study is painfully obvious to everyone, but the reasons for it elude most commentators. In a book suggestively titled *Who Killed Shakespeare?* Patrick Brantlinger attempts to examine all the possible reasons why teaching English literature has changed in recent decades. While previous commentators, like E. D. Hirsch or Allan Bloom, put the blame for what they perceive as the decline of humanistic studies on the opening of the canon and the rise of theory, Brantlinger realizes that the crisis of literature is part of a larger one:

> The argument that cultural studies are becoming hegemonic in higher education pales before the emergence of two interconnected interdisciplinary enterprises, "cognitive science" and "informatics." At my university over the last couple of decades, a high-powered group of computer scientists, psychologists, philosophers, linguists, and mathematicians have united around work on artificial intelligence. (156)

Brantlinger represents a new trend in the debates around literary studies' loss of currency, which finally recognizes the importance of technology in this process. For the emergence of departments of "informatics" in various universities is only the by-product of the dominance computers have achieved, not only in the technical and economic domain, but also in culture as a whole. Because the possibility of building artificial intelligence questions the very definition of knowledge, it touches upon all the domains of intellectual activity. As Jean François Lyotard points out, "[t]he scenario of the computerization in the most highly developed societies allows us to spotlight (though with the risk of excessive magnification) certain aspects of the transformation of knowledge" (7). By "scenario of computerization" Lyotard means the penetration of ideas developed by the relatively new science of cybernetics into all domains of cultural life. A general crisis of knowledge results from its transformation into a commodity called information. Literature, which sciences had long tried to discredit as irrelevant (if at all) knowledge, seems to be a natural victim in the triumph of information.

The diminishing importance of the humanities and the growing prestige of computer-oriented research debated by Brantlinger are central to Richard Powers's novel, and his choice of a computer network as a counterpart to Galatea/Eliza could well be motivated by his desire to show why literature lost its stature. His alter ego holds a position in a huge Center for cognitive science, where he is the token humanist. The description of the Center reveals the economic privilege of the science departments: "The Center possessed 1,200 works of art, the world's largest magnetic resonance imager, and elevators appointed in brass, teak, and marble. The English Building's stairs were patched in three shades of gray linoleum" (75). Materiality reflects ideology. In a culture where technology reigns supreme, a discipline that could do with even the most elementary tools becomes a poor relative tolerated out of charity.

The low-tech needs of literature defy the definition of knowledge promoted by techno-science. But the differences go deeper. Unlike the

sciences, which distinguish knowledge from its object, literature can function both as knowledge (a way to know) and as an object to be known (the knowable). The rise of theory is a response to the dismissal of literature by the dominant scientific orientation in matters of knowledge. Theory regards literature as a knowable object, much in the way science regards nature. In his book, Brantlinger reminds us that theory rose against the hegemony of New Criticism. But New Criticism itself was a theoretical platform that "offered literary scholars a united front, an intellectual hegemony with distinct disciplinary boundaries" (48). Literary scholars needed such a front in order to compete with scientific notions of knowledge. In spite of these developments though, literature resists its transformation into an object and persists in claiming its status as knowledge, hence the many controversies surrounding its teaching.

The dilemmas that Richard Powers faces when teaching literature to the artificial intelligence result thus from the questionable status of literature as knowledge. His basic question, 'what does it mean to know literature?' resurfaces at crucial moments in the development of the action. As the deadline of the test approaches, Powers "feeds" a large amount of reading into Helen's memory: "We gave her a small library on CD-ROM, six hundred scanned volumes she might curl up with. This constituted a form of cheating, I suppose. An open-book exam, where a human, in contrast, had to rely on memory alone" (246). Here, the difference between machine memory and human knowledge comes into play. Machine memory is inert, good only for retrieval: "Helen didn't *know* these texts. She just had a linear, digital array where she might go look them up. A kid with her own computer. A front-end index hasher helped her locate what she looked for. She could then place the complete text on her own input layers for mulling over" (246). While the digitized memory is at best a prosthetic, the "mulling over" is a type of active memorization, which, unlike the instant feeding of data, implies developing a complex network of associations, as well as cementing an affective bond. But

this is not exactly what theorists would mean by 'knowledge' of literature.

Powers's insistence on memory relates to his reluctance to look at literature as a knowable object, the way a scientific approach would, and harkens to a pre-theoretical age. His whole education actually pre-dates and precludes theory. A student in physics, Powers transfers to literature "because of one man, the incomparable Taylor" (64). His tie to Taylor is personal and emotional, and the latter teaches him to love rather than dissect literature. In a different way, and without claims at being a scholar, Powers's father also gives him an example of knowing literature by loving it. Though the father is interested in poetry that would be beneath the academic standard, he recites poems with such passion that he stirs feeling in his cultivated son. Even the department of English evokes sentiment, as Powers describes it in contrast with the cognitive science Center: "But the building left me edgy as well. The edginess of the erotic. The scent of those halls went down my throat like a tracheotomy tube. English light flushed me with desire, a desire awakened by the memory of itself, wanting nothing more desperate than to be put back to sleep" (75). In these musings, Powers reveals what for him is the essence of literature, its difference from any other types of knowledge, and its reason to exist. The medical imagery, probably intentional, demonstrates the impossibility of diagnosing love. When it comes to literature, feeling plays as large a part in the way to know as it does in the nature of the knowable.

This emotional power of literature relates to both oral recitation and memory. Powers admires his professor because, "*he* could recite the bulk of those pieces verbatim. In the dark" (142). His unsophisticated father shares the same capacity to recall the poems he loves. For Taylor, memory equals civilization: "Taylor could recite all the way back to the foundations. We would not be civilized until we could remember" (193). Memory is also the motor of emotion: "And everything Taylor had long ago alerted me to circled back on the primacy of narrative desire. Desire, he taught me, was the voicegram of memory"

(75). "Voicegram," although a technically sounding coinage, relates memory with presence and speech. The very production of emotion lies in oral re-actualization.

Literature has a quality different from other types of knowledge, because voice, emotion, and memory are therein intertwined. This is, of course, not Powers's discovery. In *Preface to Plato*, Eric A. Havelock (46-47) addresses precisely this intertwining, when he argues that it was the emotional power of oral recitation that made Plato banish the poets from the republic. For that nascent age of reason, emotion and memorization were the enemies. The emotionalism, the appeal of voice and memory, as well as the rhythm of recitation, Havelock argues, show that literature relates to the social body in a way no other kind of knowledge does.

Articulated language develops in relation to other people, and until the invention of writing, so does knowledge. Havelock's argument is that in pre-literate societies, what we now call literature served as a mnemonic device to preserve and perpetuate a common knowledge. This was *paideia* tribal knowledge—some practical, some philosophical—to be transmitted to the new generations through repeated cycles of learning. *Paideia* is literally transmitted through human interaction, through memorization and recitation, and it implies both a social and personal bond.

Powers witnesses the formation of *paideia* in Holland, where he had followed the woman he loved, and the episode is not without significance for his meditation on the role of literature as knowledge. For the inhabitants of the Dutch village,

> Things meant what their telling let them. The war, the mines, the backbreak harvest, legendary weather, natural disasters, hardship's heraldry, comic come-uppance for village villains, names enshrined by their avoidance, five seconds' silence for the dead: the mind came down to narration or nothing. ... I was watching the growth of group worldliness, collective memory. (187-88)

As one who learned the language from "the weirdness of print," Powers is impressed by the live quality of the knowledge that is being

built under his eyes. "Where I came from," he remarks, "the very idea provoked puzzlement or political suspicion" (188). He speaks, of course, from the point of view of a culture of print, where collective beliefs are called 'mythology,' and where narrative is simply an object of study.

That the oral productions used once as mnemonic devices for the *paideia* should end up becoming literary works printed in books is a twist of history that also changed what we mean by knowledge. As Florian Brody points out, "In Western culture, books contain knowledge that can be shared, sold or bought. Information is a commodity, independent from man—a radical shift from the antique model that posited memory as the primary container of knowledge, inseparable from the human mind" (Brody 142). Unlike other commentators, who relate the shift from knowledge to information to the rise of computers, Brody places it at the beginning of print. The book was the first large-scale artificial memory, and the first means of separating knowledge (literature) from human interaction.

Dissociated from its traditional carrier—the mind of a human being—literature has arrived at a point of overload. The emerging consciousness that is Helen realizes that books are headed for disaster: "Always more books, each one read less. [...] The world will fill with unread print. Unless print dies" (291). While listening to the machine's comment, the inevitable conclusion that "history will collapse under its own accumulation" springs to Powers's mind, and this is a conclusion that applies to the situation of literature today. Its totality, if anyone ambitioned to learn it, would break human memory, whether individual or collective.[11] Powers's father is able to recite his favorites, only because his list is very short. By contrast, Taylor 'knows' a lot more literature, but his way of both activating this knowledge and transmitting it is quotation. Although Powers declares that "[Taylor] had read all the books" (144), what he best remembers from Taylor's classes are selected quotations from what his professor considered the best works of literature.

Quotation becomes, for Powers, the way to 'know' literature. While reading, he actively seeks quotable passages. But as he scavenges his readings for great words to remember and writes them in a reading diary, something strange happens. He notices that all quotations are from the beginnings of books and ponders: "Perhaps writers everywhere crowded their immortal bits up toward the front of their books, like passengers clamoring to get off a bus. More likely, reading, for me, meant the cashing out of verbal eternity in favor of the story's forward motion. Trapping me in the plot, each passing line left me less able to reach for my notebook and fix the sentence in time" (96). Selecting quotations turns the work into fragments and spoils its total effect. Literature resists this fragmentation, but carving out the passages remains the reader's only way to 'fix them in eternity,' or at least in his personal memory. If it is possible to learn literature at all, quotation is the way.

Quotation is also the way to 'teach' literature. Richard Powers delivers literature to his unwitting pupil in the form of an impressive number of unrelated passages from various authors. The only entire works that Helen 'learns' are those fed wholesale from CD ROM. Powers is aware that quoting reduces the body of literature-as-knowledge to fragments. More painfully, perhaps, he knows that the process of fragmentation had started long before him, for he often sneers at the scientists, who are able to quote from obscure Renaissance poems, simply because they read the lines quoted at the beginning of a scientific paper. He mentions Bartlett's *Dictionary of Familiar Quotations* several times to suggest that the non-literati have no knowledge of the actual works. On the other hand, the novel itself looks like a Bartlett's without a key. Although Powers seems to see the quoting as a sad compromise, he has no other alternative in his own attempt to teach literature to both Helen and his readers.

There are some obvious reasons for Powers to use quotations. First, the narrator is a writer and scholar of literature, for whom speaking naturally includes the words of other writers. Here is how he contemplates his depression after he finished writing a book: "after I paid my

Pied Piper account, nothing waited for me on the far side of the story's gaping mountain. Nothing but the irremediable Things as They Are" (10). While the first sentence alludes to his book, *Operation Wandering Soul,* which is itself full of allusions, the afterthought following it falls into the formulaic subtitle of William Godwin's novel *The Adventures of Caleb Williams,* which does not fail to resonate with the familiar refrain of Wallace Stevens's *The Man with the Blue Guitar.* The unmarked words are not only an indication of the author's intimacy with other texts but also an invitation to see quotation as part of the fabric of language. It is as if Powers could not express himself beyond literary allusion. For instance, when deciding to call Helen's contestant, he says: "I forced the moment to its crisis" (300). He is indeed in the same situation as Prufrock, because he is infatuated with the student in question, but he is using the poem's words as if there was no other way to express what he feels. Not surprisingly, Helen also expresses herself through quotation. After a bomb scare that threatens to destroy the whole network, Lentz asks the smart machine: "Were you frightened yesterday, Helen?" And Helen answers with a line from *Antony and Cleopatra,* "Frightened out of fear." Whether this proves the artificial intelligence can match the human or that human intelligence is, in Lentz's words, "not that bright" is up to the reader to decide. One can read the quotations as either marks of erudition or as signs of linguistic poverty, but one can also easily ignore them since, coming as naturally as they do out of the characters' mouths (or microphones), they are engulfed by the context, as it were.

Some quotations do appear without any relation to the context, on the many occasions when the group of scientists involved in the bet quiz each other on literary knowledge. Recognizing a quotation, Powers explains to Lentz, is what examinations in literature are about: "We'd do two hours of IDs. You know. 'Hand in hand with wandering steps and slow...' Name the author, work, location, and significance" (43). This use of quotation has parodic value, since it mimics and mocks the way literature is taught and popularly understood.

The same parody of pedagogy appears in the quotations that Powers reads to Helen. As any conscientious literature professor, Powers tries to explain the machine the higher meanings of the works, but he is always amazed by the lower level misunderstandings. For instance, when he reads her a fragment of a Rossetti poem, Helen asks what "Sing no sad songs for me" means. After the many explanations Powers comes up with, Helen asks her real question: "How do you sing?" (198). We may wonder, how many times, when teaching students the complicated metaphysical sense of some literary work, we may leave them still puzzled, because they had no experience of what may appear to us as a trivial detail.

But there is a subtler kind of parody in the unmarked quotations used as ordinary words or paraphrased to fit the context of the novel. Most often, and in keeping with the main line of the parody, which makes the machine play the role of a human being, Powers uses famous quotations in modified form to explain or perhaps to understand technical details: "A network should not seem but be" (196), or "silicon was such stuff as dreams might be made on" (246) are examples where the literary meets the technical. The fragmentation of the quotation is double: it is not only taken out of its initial context, but its very fabric is pierced by the adjusting touches that fit it into the new one. In this artifice, we may see an integration of the humanities with techno-science on the level of the smallest linguistic particles.

The changed, but still recognizable, quotations create parodic and ironic effects. Here is how Powers describes Lentz's efforts, for instance: "He'd wanted the whole simulation to be self-generating, self-modifying, self-delighting, self-allaying, self-affrighting" (153). The line from Yeats follows naturally, and without introduction, adding a tinge of irony to the emotional power of the original poem. Yeats' words are not changed in any way, but the recontextualization creates a parodic effect. From the technical "self-generating, self-modifying," the sentence jumps to the very human "self-delighting, self-allaying, self affrighting" with the entire spiritual and metaphysical load that Yeats gave it. Its irony consists precisely in the closeness

of the two otherwise opposite registers, the machine so very close to
being human.

Linda Hutcheon mentions that quotation is "probably the most fre-
quently suggested analogue to modern parody" (40). It is therefore
not surprising to see the parodic effect of Powers's use of so many
fragments of other works. But the fragment also has the virtue of
evoking the whole, and by quoting, Powers connects us to that im-
possible-to-reach totality of knowledge-as-literature. The reason why
a line is quoted is that one reader has found in it something that spoke
to him or her in a particular way. This openness to the reader's inter-
pretation enables the quotation to survive its wrenching from the
original context. It is true that the new context is parodic and the
effect of quoting is parody as well, but the stability of the novel's
context integrates the fragments and makes them significant. If our
age's fate is to perpetuate literature in fragments, then parody has the
distinct honor of being the great preserver. The subtle layering of
parodies, as well as the way they relate to each other in Powers's
novel, achieves thus a purpose contrary to his overt critique of literary
studies. For in spite of the tragic end (the network shuts itself down
because it cannot deal with the horror of being human), Powers offers
us a means to preserve, study, and love literature in parodies like his
own *Galatea 2.2.*

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NOTES

[1]The most famous commentaries on the state of education in the US made by E.
D. Hirsch (146-215) and Allan Bloom (243-98; 336-82) found that the canon of
"great books" was in danger because of the emphasis on cultural diversity.

[2]The model for this contest is the Turing test. Alan Turing (1912-54), a British
mathematician, devised a blind test in which a person would ask questions and
receive answers in writing. If a computer managed to fool the person into think-
ing the answers came from a human being, then it could be declared intelligent.

[3]*The Handbook of Artificial Intelligence* gives the following definition: "Artificial
Intelligence is the part of computer science concerned with designing intelligent

computer systems, that is, systems that exhibit the characteristics we associate with intelligence in human behavior--understanding language, learning, reasoning, solving problems, and so on" (Barr 3).

Among the linguists cited in cybernetics are Noam Chomsky, Jerry Fodor, J. Katz, and others. Often the linguistics spills into philosophical issues related to cognition and representation. John Searle started a whole controversial new trend in thinking about language by opposing the idea that it can be computerized.

[4]For a full study of this analogy, see N. Katherine Hayles.

[5]C. P. Snow's lecture on the two cultures was delivered in 1959 when the Cold War was still raging. In the lecture, he deplored the separation between the humanities and the sciences. He found the ignorance of science by the literary intellectuals and the ignorance of culture by the scientists equally damaging to education and society in general. Later the lecture was published in a book together with a follow up essay.

[6]Following a conversation with a scientist, Wendy Steiner infers that "most scientists see the dilemmas of literary critics in this post-post-structuralist moment as irrelevant to their practice, and, finally, as intellectually embarrassing. But we in the business are still hopeful that our academic discipline can continue, even if its practitioners agree on virtually nothing" (78).

[7]In an instance of live criticism imitating its own parody, only a year after the publication of *Galatea 2.2*, Frank Lentricchia declared that, "what is now called criticism is a form of Xeroxing" (66).

[8]One can take note that this parody directed at what Lentz calls "lit-critters" is less sympathetic. In an ultimate act of subversion of lit-crit, Powers makes himself a character in the novel lending not only his name but also his biography to this figment of his own imagination. Most critics have a hard time speaking of character/narrator and author. N. Katherine Hayles (261) decides to call the hero Rick and refer to the author as Richard Powers, ignoring the possibility that the collapse of the difference may be intentionally directed at those who have only too easily accepted "the death of the author."

[9]See note 2.

[10]Powers is aware of the disputes surrounding the literary canon and carefully chooses characters to represent all sides. As a character in his own novel, he represents the old fashioned faction, who has been taught according to a comprehensive list of books similar to the one E. D. Hirsch made up. The rival he chooses for Helen, a graduate student, is a product of a new kind of education in literature, where theory reigns supreme. Helen herself may represent the naïve student who does not quite know what she is being taught. There are also the scientists involved in the project, whose various ways of knowing and appreciating literature and language become significant.

[11]Wendy Steiner confesses as much about herself and her colleagues: "The list of canonic texts from which doctoral students in English at my university select

fifty for their oral examinations has expanded to five hundred. After some faculty members pled for a reduction on the grounds that they had not read all of this purportedly essential canon, our students agreed to reduce the number to four hundred. None of us has yet read them all" (85).

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