Recognizing Class

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“I HAD LEFT MY FAMILY BEHIND AND had no desire to return to it.”[1] In *Returning to Reims*, Didier Eribon, a queer theorist and biographer of Michel Foucault, reflects on his early life and his eagerness to forget that life, to sever all his ties to his past. Raised in a provincial town by parents who worked in factories and cleaned houses, he escaped to Paris at the age of twenty in order to make a life for himself as a writer and a gay man. “My coming out of the sexual closet,” he writes, “. . . coincided . . . with my shutting myself up inside what I might call a class closet” (*RR* 20). Estranged from the world in which he once lived, Eribon reflects on the indescribable sense of discomfort he now feels toward his parents’ ways of speaking and being, as they face each other across the chasm of class. He refuses to visit them for two decades; he does not attend his father’s funeral. “He only had months, and then days, to live, and yet I had made no effort to see him one last time. What would have been the point, really, since he wouldn’t have recognized me? It had, in any case, been years since we had recognized the other” (*RR* 13).

First published in France in 2009, *Retour à Reims* has been widely acclaimed and translated into numerous languages. A bestseller in Germany, it was also adapted into a play by the Berliner Schaubühne and performed in New York, Milan, Manchester, Girona, and elsewhere. Why has Eribon’s memoir attracted so much interest and admiration? The precision, clarity, and unsparing judgment of his prose is often remarked on; his laconic phrasing may call to mind the studied dispassion of literary precursors such as Albert Camus and the nouveau roman. Eribon’s life story has resonated especially strongly among readers who have moved across classes—not insignificant numbers, given the postwar expansion of higher education—with its potential to trigger shame about one’s background as well as pangs of guilt at experiencing such shame. And, finally, *Returning to Reims* has been hailed as a prescient analysis of the political landscape, including the rise of populism and the working-class shift to the right. “It seems easy to convince yourself in the abstract that you will never speak to anyone who votes for the

National Front," Eribon writes. "But how do you react when you discover that these people are part of your own family? What do you say? What do you do?" (*RR* 109).

In considering such questions, a glance across the Rhine proves enlightening. The most prominent figure of the contemporary Frankfurt School, Axel Honneth has devoted his life's work to analyzing struggles for recognition, including their ties to injuries of class. Is it possible to bring Honneth and Eribon into a common constellation, to trace affinities and moments of rapport between their writings? And can *Returning to Reims*'s portrayal of a divided self cast fresh light on the politics of recognition—its conflicting dimensions and unintended consequences—as well as the aesthetics of recognition, not just a theme but also a form of address or ambivalent appeal to its readers? To be sure, Eribon makes no mention of the Frankfurt School or any German thinkers besides Friedrich Nietzsche and Karl Marx. He even admits at one point, in a characteristically blunt remark: "I detested Germany, and the German language. I found them repulsive" (*RR* 170).[2] Instead, Eribon looks to Pierre Bourdieu to explain the social verdict of class as something that is "burned into the skin of our shoulder with a red hot iron at the moment of our birth" (*RR* 47). Bourdieu's legacy is clearly visible in Eribon's insistence that sociological thought demands an "epistemological break" with how ordinary people think about themselves (*RR* 47). Any analysis that puts their point of view at its center can only be misguided, he writes, in echoing their mystified relation to their practices and desires.

And yet the words that follow do not always fall into line with this austere injunction. As an example of "auto-analyse," a hybrid of literary memoir and sociological essay, *Returning to Reims* follows the general model of Bourdieu's own *Sketch for a Self-Analysis*.[3] However, Eribon strives repeatedly to capture how his parents saw themselves—and how he failed to see them. He reflects ruefully on the categories he imposed upon them, inspired by his youthful enthusiasm for Marxism. Its mythical idea of the working class, he remarks, had the effect of rendering their desires reprehensible. What could their eagerness to acquire a Formica table or an artificial leather sofa signify, after all, other than social alienation or a misplaced aspiration to join the middle class? Mystification, it turns out, can be created by theory as well as cleared up by it. Eribon has been criticized for a "sociological rationalism" that causes him to vaunt his own superior grasp of social mechanisms over his family's acceptance of its fate.[4] Yet such reproaches overlook the ruthlessly self-critical aspects of his memoir, as he tallies up his many misperceptions of his parents and owns up to his youthful belief that "I was more clear sighted than they were about their own lives" (*RR* 84). What *Returning to Reims* offers

is a many-sided study of recognition and misrecognition, rendered in lucid and pitiless prose and then spun outward toward broader reflections on class divisions, intellectual politics, and the lure of populism.

Debates about recognition, meanwhile, lie at the heart of contemporary German critical theory, while receiving scant attention from literary scholars. The Frankfurt School crops up frequently in literary studies, yet it does so as an intellectual formation preserved in amber: Weimar, Germany and its aftermath. The figures cited are Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, sometimes Georg Lukács or Ernst Bloch. But what about the thought that followed? Since the early 1980s, remarks Walter Erhart, Frankfurt School theory and literary studies have traveled along separate paths.[5] While Erhart is writing about Germany, the point holds even more strongly in the English-speaking world. Things started to go downhill with Jürgen Habermas; while his early book on the public sphere was taken up by literary historians, the later writings fell on stony ground. His excoriation of poststructuralism in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* did not help things along; Habermas's name soon became associated, as Amanda Anderson remarks, with "plodding style, an embarrassing optimism of the intellect, and dangerous complicity with the Enlightenment."[6] Meanwhile, Honneth, a highly influential figure in social and political thought who took over Habermas's chair at the Goethe University in Frankfurt, has received virtually no uptake in literary studies, nor have other key thinkers such as Hartmut Rosa, Rahel Jaeggi, or Robin Celikates. The reasons for this stalled conversation between literary studies and German critical theory, I've argued, are not just diverging ideas but also sensibilities and styles of thought.[7]

While ranging widely across the terrain of philosophy and the social sciences, Honneth has often espoused what he calls an "empirically grounded phenomenology" that is oriented toward injuries of class.[8] Invoking E. P. Thompson and Richard Hoggart, he sees class relations as interlaced with sentiments of injustice that take the form of struggles for recognition. Feelings of shame, indignation, or humiliation possess a cognitive as well as emotional aspect; failures of acknowledgment can serve as affective sources of knowledge. And here the affinities between Eribon and Honneth come into view. *Returning to Reims* fleshes out in a striking series of autobiographical vignettes how such forms of recognition and misrecognition are *lived*: how a paralyzing sense of shame casts a shadow over a chance meeting with one's grandfather on the streets of Paris; why the seemingly harmless act of reciting a poem to one's mother can call forth a vituperative torrent of resentment and rage. These vignettes ricochet out of the frames in which they are placed: they serve as potent distillations of lived inequality and disrespect that assail

readers with the explosive force of moral feelings. And they are inter-
woven with trenchant remarks about the chasm between the knowledge
class and the white working class, as a conflict of sensibilities, beliefs,
and values. Eribon does not just rail against conditions of poverty and
material deprivation. His memoir also takes issue with the self-image of
academic thought, testifying to the need for an expanded moral and
political vocabulary.

The Fortunes of Recognition

Interest in recognition was kick-started in the 1990s by Charles Taylor's
widely cited essay on the defining role of recognition in political and
cultural life. The hierarchical notion of honor has yielded, according to
Taylor, to a distinctively modern idea of universal dignity: the belief that
all human beings, by virtue of their humanity, are entitled to respect.
Yet alongside this notion of equality have arisen proliferating demands
for the recognition of differences, evident, for example, in social move-
ments based on ethnicity, race, or gender. In a series of influential essays
written at the turn of the century, Nancy Fraser contrasts this politics of
recognition to a politics of redistribution, as overlapping yet analytically
distinct concerns. Far more attention is paid to lamenting cultural harms
and celebrating cultural difference, she contends, than to protesting the
dramatic rise in economic inequality.[9]

Here Honneth strikes out on his own. Rather than being a recent
trend that is tied to multiculturalism and recent social movements—as
Fraser assumes—the desire for recognition is a basic human need, even
as it takes on historically variant forms. Recognition involves far more
than a politics of difference. Because a sense of self is always formed in
relation to others, all human beings seek to be acknowledged by others
and are vulnerable to slights and expressions of disrespect. Honneth
vigorously disputes Fraser's equation of recognition with *public demands*
for recognition—such as the highly visible transformation of attitudes
to gender and sexuality over recent decades. The current absence of an
equally compelling language around class does not mean that a long-
ing for recognition is lacking among the working class, the precariat,
the poor. (Here we may be reminded of Carolyn Steedman's evocative
biography of the dreams and desires, envy and anger, of her working-
class mother. Her sense of the terrible unfairness of things, Steedman
writes, could not be translated into an available political language.)[10]

Honneth is also sparring with a vision of class as purely a matter of
economic interests—as if such interests had a self-evident reality that

could, of themselves, propel history forward. Economic inequality, he insists, only carries meaning in relation to moral intuitions: perceptions of injustice and the indignation, resentment, or anger they inspire. Questions of redistribution, in this sense, are always tangled up with struggles for recognition. Honneth is *not* implying that verbal acknowledgement can substitute for money (a strategy that is often cynically deployed by corporations to underpay their workers by distributing "employee of the month" awards rather than raises.) The point, rather, is that economic exploitation is experienced as a patent affront to fairness and a sense of self-worth, such that material and symbolic recognition are inextricably intertwined.

In classic Marxism, class is not an identity akin to gender or race but an economic relation; the goal is not to acknowledge the working class but to abolish it. What this overlooks, however, is that class relations are never just "structural." To what extent can one wholeheartedly will the extinction of one's own way of life, an existence that may be experienced as constrained and riven by deprivation, but also as a source of felt belonging—of memory, identity, and personal history? That social mobility can be experienced as a painful dislocation—a loss as well as a gain—suggests that class is far more than just an economic category. Are class identity and attachment really nothing more than traps in the long revolution toward classlessness, wonders Lisa Henderson? Recognizing class, she argues, can be a vital reparative gesture.[11]

As Henderson notes, theories of recognition have received little uptake in literary and cultural studies. The two most frequently cited parables of literary theory—Jacques Lacan's account of the mirror stage and Louis Althusser's anecdote of being hailed on the street by a police officer—became the cornerstones of received wisdom; recognition was downgraded to misrecognition or political subjection. While recognition can certainly fail or misfire—as we will soon see—the full-scale dismissal of recognition as a normative concept and source of value failed to account for its phenomenological complexity, its varying political meanings, or its literary reworkings.[12] Meanwhile, the strenuous rethinking of recognition in social and political theory in recent decades failed to cross over into literary studies. Such efforts were spurred by the conviction that models of selfhood in poststructuralist thought were simply too thin: unable to offer adequate explanations of how people act, reflect on, and question their circumstances, even as they are also formed by them. Theories of recognition push back against the rational, autonomous individual of liberalism on the one hand, and the flattening of persons into effects of linguistic or ideological structures on the other.[13]

Other disciplinary differences have impeded the traffic of ideas be-
tween the humanities and the present-day Frankfurt School. The latter's
fixation on the question of universal or context-transcending criteria,
for example, may strike many literary critics as being perplexing if not
problematic: a matter of scratching where it does not itch, to snag a
phrase from Richard Rorty. Moreover, the leaden gravity that often
characterizes contemporary German thought, along with a language
that can seem naively therapeutic ("healthy self-esteem"), questionably
medicalized ("social pathologies"), or inadmissibly confident about its
own judgements ("distorted rationality") is unlikely to appeal to literary
critics. Increasingly "sociologized" in its form as well as its content, Ger-
man critical theory no longer registers on the radar of literary scholars.

Some of Honneth's arguments, nonetheless, may hit uncomfortably
close to home—including his reckoning with his predecessors. While
conceding that the work of Adorno is philosophically ambitious, for
example, Honneth contends that it is *sociologically barren*: that is to say,
it turns its gaze away from the empirical complexity and messiness of
the social world. Denouncing a closed circuit of capitalist domination—
while portraying the masses as pacified and benumbed by the culture
industry—Adorno pins his hopes on the esoteric artwork as the sole
remaining source of resistance. In consequence, remarks Honneth, the
entire sphere of everyday language and practice is excluded. Could one
not say that a similar stance defines much of literary studies? Endless
encomia to the radical, dissident, or transgressive impulses of literary
works are encircled by a stance of ironic knowingness or overt antagonism
toward the sphere of everyday life and common sense beliefs. Imputing
an oppressive sameness to society has long been a defining move among
literary critics: a necessary foil for accentuating literature's difference.[14]

Not only Adorno but also Habermas pitch their thinking at too great
a distance from everyday experience, according to Honneth. Such a
charge might seem likely to rebound on the accuser, given Honneth's
penchant for a dense and abstract style of philosophizing. The force
of his reproach, however, extends beyond matters of style to target
the failure of both theorists to do justice to the affective and moral
convictions of daily life. Here his thought draws inspiration, as I've
noted, from the empirical work of Thompson and Hoggart and their
accounts of lived experiences of class inequality. Honneth's brand of
social philosophy is oriented toward norms that are already embedded
in ordinary forms of thought, feeling, and action. "How is it," Honneth
asks, "that the experience of disrespect is anchored in the affective life
of human subjects in such a way that it can provide the motivational
impetus for social resistance and conflict?"[15] The ubiquity of the desire

to be recognized—whether or not it is vocalized—serves as the bridge that connects critical theory to everyday moral experience. The former, Honneth insists, must take its orientation from the latter, rather than priding itself on its aloofness from the world around it.

It is on this issue that Honneth disagrees most emphatically with his predecessors. In contrast to Adorno—and his present-day avatars—Honneth steers clear of capitalism-as-body-snatcher scenarios; to portray one's fellow human beings as voided of agency and unwittingly controlled by social forces is to enact the very dehumanization one claims to diagnose. Rather, he shares with French sociologist Luc Boltanski the conviction that critical consciousness is *ordinary*, part of daily life rather than estranged from it. It is only via attention to everyday struggles over recognition—even if submerged or ambivalent—that scholars can adequately reckon with conditions of injustice. Honneth offers a way of thinking, his followers contend, that is theoretically sophisticated yet phenomenologically credible in fleshing out the normative criteria that underlie political struggles.[16] In this respect it proves highly relevant to engaging the hidden and visible injuries of class.

To clarify how literature can illuminate these debates, we need to disentangle the various strands of recognition. In social and political theory, recognition is usually taken to mean acknowledging an identity—as defined by structural factors of gender, race, class, or sexuality. Yet recognizing can also refer to a psychological act of apprehending, such as recognizing that one's made a mistake, or of identifying, as when one sees aspects of oneself in a fictional character.[17] These aspects are often intertwined, in ways that bear directly on the affective and ethical complexities of recognition. Recognition does not simply ground cognition, as Honneth at one point remarks. It is also affected by it.[18] Knowledge and acknowledgment are interdependent. If we strive to be recognized, after all, what do we want to be recognized *for*? Such a question brings into play the specifics of our self-understanding, as it speaks to our relations with others. Being acknowledged without being known—without being *seen* for what we hold ourselves to be—can be deeply dispiriting. And yet, while others may not recognize us as we recognize ourselves, our own sense of self also fluctuates over time and is, of course, far from infallible.

Theories of recognition sometimes make it sound like a substance that can be doled out or withheld by others, something that we do or do not possess. As Honneth's Hegelian language suggests, however, recognition is a *struggle*: an ongoing and interactive process in which all the participants are implicated. After all, writes Cillian McBride, "your recognition only matters to me, if I have already recognized you."[19] People disagree

about the extent to which they want to be acknowledged by others (see, for example, queer distrust of assimilation into mainstream society) and what forms such acknowledgement should take. Here, swiveling between the poles of what he calls distorted recognition and healthy esteem, Honneth evinces little interest in the—far more prevalent and surely more interesting—shadings in between: the ambivalent attitudes and conflicted feelings that often characterize our relations to others as well as to ourselves. An attempt at acknowledgement—even if undertaken with good intent—may be perceived as graceless or condescending. And if a person chooses to disidentify with social categories they're associated with—around gender, sexuality, race, or class—an acknowledgment of such categories by others may feel like an affront rather than an affirmation. As Paddy McQueen remarks, Honneth leaves little room for the possibility that we might struggle against recognition as well as for it, or that we might be recognized in different and perhaps incompatible ways.[20]

Recognition, in short, is always entangled in the thicket of interpretation.[21] And here literature presents itself as an exceptionally rich field for parsing its varieties and vagaries. While it often portrays sparks of affinity and connection across social divides, literature can also highlight the opacity of persons and the fundamental limits of their accessibility to each other. (Think, for example, of the countless misprisions and misrecognitions of tragedy, of characters misreading and misjudging each others' motives in realist novels, or the throng of unreliable narrators in modernist fiction.) Meanwhile, the experience of having a split or divided consciousness—evident, for example, in stories of class mobility—is likely to exacerbate the uncertainty about what, exactly, one wants to have acknowledged. Yet theories of recognition pay little attention to this remarkably rich and varied fictional repertoire. When Honneth, for example, occasionally gestures toward literary works in his recent publications, they are treated as token illustrations of ideas that have already been worked out elsewhere.[22]

Literary works, moreover, do not simply portray struggles over recognition; they also *enact* them. Via a bid for understanding from readers, a writer may seek an acknowledgement that is being withheld elsewhere. An aesthetic tie can compensate for an absent social tie—or call it into being. This doubleness characterized the literary aspect of what I've called a feminist counterpublic sphere: the emergence, in the late 1960s, of a zone of animated debate over newly contentious questions of gender and sexuality. Even as it railed against the failure of men to fully see women, feminist fiction forged new bonds between female authors and readers and helped to bring about collective forms of recognition. Writing was not a secondary or peripheral event, an addendum to a real politics

that was taking place elsewhere. Rather, it disseminated influential nar-ratives—of Bildung and escape, of confession and self-creation—that shaped what it meant to think of oneself as a feminist.[23]

Literature, like other cultural forms, is thus a key *mechanism* of rec-ognition, one of the ways in which it is actualized. In everyday debates about the status of women and minorities, for example, people point to specific novels, films, television shows, and memoirs, arguing passionately over their meanings and political import. A widely read memoir such as Eribon's articulates a demand for recognition that knots together the personal and political. It affords a richer description of class-based deprivation than conventional sociological accounts: not just that it ex-ists, but *how* it permeates one's being in the world, affects one's body, and enters into one's soul. In doing so, *Returning to Reims* has inspired commentary, newspaper columns, and hundreds of *Goodreads* reviews; it triggers conversation and reflection, pain and insight; it assembles a substantial readership. It makes certain things happen. Yet what kinds of things? And how are such processes of literary recognition affected by divisions of education and class? It is highly improbable, Eribon remarks, that those he writes about in his memoir will ever read his words. "When people write about the working class world," he writes, "it is most often because they have left it behind" (*RR* 92).

Cleaved

Returning to Reims opens with Eribon visiting, for the first time, the modest housing estate where his parents have lived for twenty years. Moving back and forth between his childhood and the present, he reflects on his hatred of his father, his tamping down of his own past, and his searing sense of class shame. He pieces together the early life of his parents and reflects on how their lives were scripted in advance by the milieu into which they were born. He looks back on his growing distance from his family—motivated in large part by his sexuality—and his desperate turn to education as a means of escape. And he wonders why his family who, like other members of the French working class, were longstanding supporters of the Communist party have switched their allegiance to the National Front.

The writings of others are threaded through the pages of *Returning to Reims,* along with acknowledgements of how lived experiences of class are affected by race and gender. As he looks back on his relationship to a father he loathed, Eribon invokes the work of James Baldwin. "I began to realize that everything my father had been, which is to say everything

I held against him, all the reasons I had detested him, had been shaped by the violence of the social world" (*RR* 30). He recognizes aspects of his own trajectory in Annie Ernaux's descriptions of the class divide between herself and her parents, sharing the same "disconcerting experience of being both at home and in a foreign country" (*RR* 25). In a memoir by John Wideman, he discerns parallels to his own estrangement from his brother, whom he does not see for thirty-five years. How could the paths of sons raised in the same household diverge so dramatically? "What I wanted could be summed up like this: not to be like him" (*RR* 105). Only when his memoir is almost complete does Eribon allow himself to read Raymond Williams's *Border Country*—fearing it will seize too great a hold over his imagination and his efforts to document his past. On reaching its end—where an educated and estranged son witnesses the death of his father after a tentative reconciliation—Eribon writes: "Was I about to cry? . . . Over whom? The characters in the novel? My own father? I thought of him with a sense of heartache, and regretted that I hadn't gone to see him, that I hadn't tried to understand him" (*RR* 238). The discrepancy between the two halves of his father's life—a tyrant within the home; an exhausted and exploited figure outside it—is now more clearly visible to him.

What kind of recognition is at play here? It might seem, at first glance, to involve a sense of personal identification rather than political acknowledgment. In reading Wideman and Williams, Eribon glimpses aspects of his own life: not simply reflected but reconfigured and thus seen anew. In an anguished self-reckoning, he responds to their words as crystallizing something of his own being in the world. In being represented in this way, however, personal details are also rendered public and afforded a broader salience. They are legitimated as worthy of wider attention—as counting. Recurring patterns become visible across individual differences; the books he is reading and the memoir he is writing highlight such patterns—of schism and shame, of longing for respect and its denial—and call for attention to overlooked lives. Recognition as self-knowledge and recognition as a demand for political acknowledgment meld together, sustained by the formal and rhetorical features of the genre of auto-analyse: its juxtaposition of poignant or telling detail with social diagnosis.

Returning to Reims resonates with Honneth's claims about the relevance of moral feelings—anger, disappointment, the desire for dignity, resentment at unfairness—to injuries of class. And, like Eribon, Honneth underscores the absence of a viable public discourse around these lives; class-specific experiences of deprivation, he remarks, nowadays receive little attention in the media.[24] We might see *Returning to Reims*, then, as

not just depicting but also enacting a claim for recognition—as not just descriptive but performative. In reflecting on and reassessing his past, Eribon's memoir is asking something of its readers.

But what exactly is it asking? And can the act of writing, in any meaningful sense, redress or compensate for the forms of misrecognition it depicts? Fundamental to Honneth's thought is a distinction between three facets of recognition: love, respect, and esteem. "Love" refers to life-defining emotional bonds with a handful of others: early attachments to parents or later ties to lovers, close friends, or children. "Respect" relates to the sphere of rights: forms of universal recognition that are institutionalized in principle, if not always in practice, such as equal treatment under the law. And "esteem" speaks to forms of being-with-others that exceed the sphere of personal intimacy as well as the impersonal realm of formal equality: individuals' hope that their distinctive qualities and achievements will be appreciated by others.

Questions of respect—and lack of respect—push persistently to the fore in *Returning to Reims*: the harsh reminders that one does not count, that one is not of equal value, that one does not have rights. "I cannot help but see an infernal machine in the school system . . . rejecting the children of the working class, perpetuating and legitimating class domination" (*RR* 115). Eribon drives home how such inequality is sanctioned and reproduced; how students are sorted and ranked according to their background, their clothes, their manner of speaking. Such patterns are repeated throughout the course of a life, as certain groups are sentenced, without appeal, to a future of material hardship and physically exhausting work. Looking at his mother's body, stiffened by decades of repetitive labor, Eribon writes: "I can't help but be struck by what social inequality means concretely, physically. Even the very word 'inequality' seems to me to be a euphemism that papers over . . . the naked violence of exploitation" (*RR* 80).

And yet denouncing inequality can also run the risk of diminishing the unequal. One of the striking features of analyses of class, Steedman remarks, is their denying of a complicated selfhood to those in material distress. To read Hoggart's *Uses of Literacy*, for example, is to see "pain, loss, love, anxiety and desire . . . washed over with a patina of stolid emotional sameness."[25] Steedman sets up a revealing contrast between the portrait of a young watercress seller by Victorian reformer Henry Mayhew and Freud's case study of Dora. While Freud pores over the psychic conflicts of his upper-middle-class patients in exhaustive detail, the working poor appear in history as little more than ciphers, their inner worlds entirely lost to view. Similarly, Bourdieu has been criticized for imputing to the subordinate a placid acceptance of their

fate, as if they were little more than interchangeable cogs in an infernal machinery of social reproduction. When it comes to the working class, the categories of sociology often trump those of psychology, drowning out any acknowledgment of individuality or distinctiveness.

Honneth's third aspect of recognition speaks to this very question: social esteem as it relates to individuality, dignity, and a person's specific traits. The withholding of such esteem can leave permanent scars: being othered, condescended to, treated as invisible, or insulted. Eribon is overcome by a surge of anger when his progressive Parisian friends talk flippantly or mockingly about the working class. "When people speak this way about the concierge, that's my grandmother; or the factory worker, that's my grandfather; and the cleaner, my mother."[26] Yet he also comes to internalize the judgements of his friends and to feel much of this same disdain: "I was ashamed of my family, of their habits, even of the way my mother pronounced words."[27] When he happens to bump into his grandfather, a window cleaner kitted out with an unwieldy array of tools and ladders, on the streets of Paris, he feels mortified. What if any of his friends were to catch sight of him and ask him who he was talking to? How would he respond? What kind of excuse or explanation could he possibly give? An everyday conversation between two family members is overdetermined by the anticipation of a censorious or mocking class gaze. Eribon is paralyzed by the shame vividly invoked by Jean-Paul Sartre: "I *am* indeed that object which the Other is looking at and judging."[28] He cannot help but judge his grandfather, even as he is terrified of being condemned by others.

What resonates in the writings of Baldwin and Williams is not just their portrayal of material hardship or social mobility. More fundamentally, Eribon recognizes a shared failure of recognition: an inability to acknowledge the individuality and dignity of one's parents that is fueled by class-based shame. His accounts of this failure are detailed and unsparing. Later in life, for example, his father is promoted to a factory supervisor and gains a tangible sense of pride and self-worth in his new position. The young Eribon, meanwhile, finds the whole thing "laughable" (*RR* 51); he cannot understand why his parents are so eager to improve their situation in a way that seems miniscule in his eyes, even while being extremely important in theirs. He has already—mentally— taken leave of his family, cultivating, he writes, a sense of superiority toward the world in which he grew up.

Here Eribon is not just describing patterns of domination à la Bourdieu but underscoring his parents' yearning to *count*: a longing for esteem that he recognizes only in retrospect. At one point, he conjures up a childhood scene of humiliation that is burned into his memory. On days when

schools were closed, his mother would take him and his brothers along with her when she cleaned houses. He retains a vivid memory of seeing his mother being scolded by her employer for her unreliability—in what he calls a horrible tone of voice—and feeling terrified when she burst into tears. It is through the accumulation of such episodes, he writes, that the lowness of one's social status is driven home. Class is laden with moral feelings as well as political meanings; it is felt by those who live it in terms of its *wrongness* and thus as an "ought" as well as an "is." Such feelings do not only reflect an existing identity or mark a position in the social field. Crucially, they also convey a normative judgment that highlights the gap between what is and what should be, that allows the unfairness of working-class lives to become visible.[29]

Yet in what sense, we might wonder, does *Returning to Reims* voice a demand for recognition? Eribon, after all, is not looking for warm-hearted affirmations of a class identity from which he is irrevocably estranged. And while he recollects the youthful desires and romantic attachments that propelled him to identify as queer, this identification required him, he writes, to become a class traitor. *Returning to Reims* dwells in the "melancholy related to 'a *split habitus*'"—the malaise of living in incompatible worlds without being at home in either (*RR* 12). The phrase "habitus clivé," borrowed from Bourdieu, captures this sense of being cleaved or divided in two.[30] This melancholy is not just a result of prejudices that can be corrected or stereotypes to be rooted out, temporary obstacles in a steadily unfolding story of historical progress. Rather, it points to substantive conflicts—of values, beliefs, ways of life—between the worlds of the French working class and Parisian intellectuals that seem impossible to reconcile.

To be sure, a certain act of acknowledgment is taking place: Eribon confronts his past while also asserting its larger moral and political weight. Yet the longing for recognition has loosened itself from the "positive identity formation" that is often invoked by Honneth and his followers. The very attempt to get over a diffuse sense of malaise, writes Eribon, only redoubles its force: "Is it ever possible to overcome this malaise, to assuage this melancholy?" (*RR* 12). Here queer theory's long-standing concern with shame and stigma spills over into reflections on class. Eribon's account of the close links between gay pride and gay shame is foreshadowed, for example, in Heather Love's embrace of a queer archive of despair, ressentiment, defeatism, and loneliness, her argument for the importance of confronting the affective force and ethical weight of bad feelings.[31]

Meanwhile, the afterlife of *Returning to Reims* is a striking example of how struggles for recognition can backfire; Eribon's attempt to bridge

the class divide only serves to widen the chasm between himself and his family. In a later essay, Eribon describes their distress on the publication of his memoir, which they experienced as a painful intrusion into their lives. His brothers feel that he is scorning and judging them—one of them even threatens a lawsuit. His mother, meanwhile, is heartbroken; what seems to Eribon a clear-eyed reckoning with their circumstances is in her eyes a distortion, and above all, a hurtful devaluation, of her life and her world. "I heard the anger in her voice, I heard the sorrow. 'You broke away from us? You were ashamed of us?'"[32] She feels devastated and humiliated by his words. There is a fine line—all too easily crossed—between railing against social inequality and assuming that the lives of the less-affluent or less-educated are, in some fundamental sense, also less worthy. Even as Eribon strives to acknowledge working-class lives, his doing so is experienced by his next of kin as an injury to their dignity and self-respect. His stress on traumas of exploitation and exclusion clashes with his family's—and especially his brothers'—desire to be seen not as abject victims, but as people who have made a modest success of their lives. Mediated by conflicting values, assumptions, and forms of life, the struggle for recognition includes the ever present risk of its failure.

Do You Think You're Better Than Us?

This question points to the larger conjuncture that frames Eribon's narrative and the relations of politics to moral feeling. "Dignity is a fragile feeling, unsure of itself," he writes, "it requires recognition and reassurances. People first of all have a need not to feel like . . . mute objects about which political decisions are made" (*RR* 126). During Eribon's youth his family and everyone around him automatically voted for the French Communist party. Such a vote had little to do with global political issues or support for the USSR; rather, it served as a symbolic protest against the harshness and the drudgery of their lives. In his family, it was clear the world was divided into two: the bigwigs versus "people like us." The boundary being drawn was not just political but moral: in counterposing freeloaders and fat cats against honest workers, such a political language shored up a sense of dignity, a belief that working people mattered. But nowadays who fulfils the role once played by the Communist party? To whom can working-class people turn in order to feel supported, legitimated, proud of themselves? What forces are there in the world that acknowledge who they are, how they live, what they think about? That takes them into account (*RR* 39–40)?

In the current political landscape, the working-class "we" has shifted its meaning: instead of setting the workers against the bourgeoisie, it now separates the category of the French from foreigners and immigrants. *Returning to Reims* documents, in unforgiving detail, what Eribon calls the "ordinary racism" that has long been a feature of French working-class life (*RR* 140). But it is only in recent years, he remarks, that this racism has been translated into an explicit political program: an idea and an identity around which to rally. Here Eribon puts the blame squarely on leftist parties that backed away from a language of conflict in order to embrace individualism and neoliberal policies, leaving workers without any means of voicing collective feelings of frustration or resentment. This void was soon filled by discourses of national and racial identity that channeled such feelings into the creation of new adversaries. The common sense of the French popular classes underwent a transformation: "the quality of being 'French' became its central element, replacing the quality of being a 'worker,' or a man or woman of the 'left'" (*RR* 140).

Here Eribon's analysis chimes with Chantal Mouffe's view of politics as being defined by a state of antagonism: as relying on an opposition between an "us" and a "them."[33] In his youth, he remarks, this opposition could function in two ways: as a class distinction (the rich versus the poor) and an ethnic-racial division (the French versus foreigners). At differing moments, one or other would carry greater weight; during a strike, for example, a temporary solidarity could be forged between white and immigrant workers. The disappearance of class-based languages of commonality and conflict has led to an intensifying of racial divisions, as an alternate means of forging an identity and voicing grievances. The neighborhood and the nation replace the workplace as a means of defining oneself and one's relationship to others. "When the left . . . ceases to serve as a locus in which people can invest their dreams and their energy, they will be drawn to and welcomed by the right and the extreme right" (*RR* 148).

Reframing the populist xenophobia flaring across Europe, Eribon's remarks pivot on the idea of *articulation* associated with Mouffe and her co-author Ernesto Laclau as well as the writings of Stuart Hall. In this way of thinking, there is no necessary correspondence between someone's social or economic position and their political beliefs. In insisting that classes do not have intrinsic interests, Eribon is in accord with Honneth, who contends that individual experiences of misrecognition can only inspire political resistance if certain discursive and material resources are available.[34] Material conditions, discourses, feelings, and values need to align in certain ways for political identifications to arise. In this light, the shift of much of the European working class to the right, rather than

being a sign of its intrinsic benightedness or reactionary tendencies, is a result of various factors coming together: the loss of secure employment, the dissolution of traditional working-class communities, the economic costs of globalization, and the working class's abandonment by the left.[35]

And here *Returning to Reims* invites parallels between Eribon's biography and a larger history. In the eyes of his parents, he has become one of those Parisian intellectuals who are out of touch with reality and understand nothing of the problems of the working class. Meanwhile, there has been a large-scale retreat from engagement with class inequality by politicians, academics, and media commentators, even as gender, race, and sexuality have—deservedly—come to the fore. In devoting his intellectual career to sexual oppression and ignoring class domination, Eribon writes, he was committing an act of "existential betrayal" (*RR* 32). While his memoir can be seen as an act of atonement or apology for such a betrayal, it also suggests that it may have been unavoidable.

"While reading Marx and Trotsky," remarks Eribon, "I imagined myself at the avant-garde of the people. But really I was finding my way into a world of people of privilege . . . the world of people who had the leisure time available to read Marx and Trotsky" (*RR* 84). Several decades later, Marx and Trotsky have given way to other names, yet the point is, if anything, more germane. Progressive politics often presumes a familiarity with ideas and vocabularies that pit themselves against common sense, such that their claims to interrogate and emancipate are tied to advantages of education and class. Eribon writes movingly about certain works of theory—such as the writings of Foucault—that "help us to overcome the effects of domination within our own selves" (*RR* 214). Books were an indispensable resource in his efforts to remake himself as a gay man and an intellectual, to carve out a space of sexual freedom and self-realization. Yet for this very reason, they also distanced him from his background; with each page, with each book, he inched further away from his parents, his siblings, his neighbors. "In order not to shut myself out of the education system . . . I had to shut out my own family, the universe from which I came. There was really no possibility of holding the two worlds together" (*RR* 160).

In one of his memoir's most revealing episodes, the eleven-year-old Eribon comes home from school one afternoon and recites a simple Christmas rhyme he's been taught in his English class. His mother responds, not with the pride of a middle-class mother glowing at her child's accomplishment, but with an outburst of resentment and rage. "Was it that she thought I was trying to make fun of her? To make her feel small? To show my superiority over her now that I had finished my first few months of secondary education? She began screaming like a

madwoman: 'You know I don't speak any English! Translate what you said to me right now!'" (*RR* 78). Her son's modest display of knowledge is a knife to the heart; it drives home what she's been deprived of, including her own youthful hopes of becoming a teacher; it has the effect, in her eyes, of lessening and diminishing her. "You think you're better than us?" is a recurring refrain while Eribon is growing up; his parents feel affronted by his changing manner, his new uniform of duffle coat and desert boots, his reading of *Le Monde*—a newspaper that is not intended for "people like [us]" (*RR* 79, 84).

In *Capital and Ideology*, Thomas Piketty offers a comprehensive analysis of changing patterns and divisions of class. To a far greater extent than in the past, he observes, leftist parties are now supported by the highly educated; meanwhile, those without college degrees are courted by the right. The category of the working class, which does not carry much traction in the US, is also losing force in Europe and elsewhere; instead, forms of identification crystallize along different lines.[36] And here academics are often oblivious to how their manner of communicating—irrespective of its political content—can make others feel small, to echo Eribon's phrase. In the US, for example, a tradition of anti-intellectualism has been vigorously fanned by conservatives who are intent on defunding public universities and weakening higher education. Such attacks on academia shift attention away from accelerating economic inequality and the growth of a billionaire class. In another example of articulation at work, class-based forms of resentment are drawn away from hierarchies of income and capital and redirected at the perceived condescension of intellectual elites. Yet analyzing this shift in purely economic terms—concluding that the working class is misperceiving its real interests—misses the defining force of moral and affective ties. The growing divisions, culturally and politically, between the highly credentialled and everyone else can inspire what Michael Sandel calls a politics of humiliation that can be easily exploited by populist movements.[37]

Eribon's status as a well-known queer theorist affords him a rare ability to mediate between these disparate spheres. The US edition of his book, carrying an introduction by the Yale University historian of gay New York, George Chauncey, was reviewed in publications that might otherwise evince little interest in a working-class memoir. As a form of autoethnography, it can lay claim to authenticity—the author having experienced the life he documents—while also being fluent in the idioms of the highly educated. Yet barriers—both material and cultural—block movement in the other direction. "I'm painfully aware that the way I have arranged the writing of this book assumes—both about me and about my readers—that we are socially distant from the circumstances

and from the people who still live the kinds of lives I am attempting to describe and to reconstruct" (*RR* 92). Even as it documents the details of working-class life, *Returning to Reims* is distanced—both aesthetically and sociologically—from these details. In a recent essay on contemporary forms of cultural capital, Juliane Rebentisch conjures up the new figure of the cultural omnivore and the confidence with which the highly educated are now able to display their eclectic and wide-ranging tastes. Dismissing old distinctions between high and low, she writes, they feel free to appreciate Shakira alongside such highbrow preferences as *The Wire*, Arnold Schoenberg—and Didier Eribon.[38]

Yet the passage of words through the world is not as rigidly prescribed by class divisions as Bourdieu implies: books can escape their containers, find unanticipated audiences, and sometimes move across demographic divides. In his introduction to a new French edition of Eribon's memoir, for example, Édouard Louis recalls his experience of reading it as a queer, working-class youth. The effect was electrifying; he felt he was reading the story of his own life. Looking back, he realizes that this perception was askew, given that he still spoke to his family, did not live in Paris, was not an intellectual, and so on. This misperception, however, was vital and necessary: because he lived for several months as if he were Eribon—changing his name, his way of laughing, his physical appearance, his relationship to his father—he gradually became a different person and started, in turn, to write books.[39] This passage brings to mind Eribon's own account of a youthful crush on one of his classmates; his desire to imitate his friend inspired an interest in Jean-Luc Godard and Samuel Beckett and "convinced me to become a believer in art and in literature—a belief I faked at the beginning, but that became more and more real as the days went by" (*RR* 168). Another turn of the screw; recognition is not just a matter of acknowledging or being acknowledged for who one is. It can also be a matter of who one wants or desires to be, of hope and aspiration: an impetus to refashion the self.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

The language of dignity and respect has little standing in literary studies. If mentioned at all, it is likely to be derided, seen as synonymous with a conservative or craven mentality that jars with the radical aims of literary studies—and especially such politicized fields as queer theory. The reigning ethos of such fields has been what Eribon calls, in a sarcastic aside, a commandment to refuse normativity: "a 'prescribed subversion'" (*RR* 67). Nowadays, however, the relations between class

and morality are articulated quite differently than a hoary opposition of bourgeois versus bohemian would suggest. It is the working class, writes Joan Williams, who identify most strongly with moral traits, whereas elites are far less interested in morality than in merit and achievement. Echoing the findings of Beverley Skeggs, Richard Sennett, and Michèle Lamont, Williams highlights a wide-spread desire among people from working-class backgrounds for respect, recognition, and dignity.[40] It is not surprising, after all, that the highly educated feel free to engage in what Bourdieu would call licensed transgression, while the economically disadvantaged and culturally looked-down-upon seek a basic acknowledgment of their dignity and their worth.

Returning to Reims circles back repeatedly to this question. "My mother recently reminded me, with more than a touch of irony in her voice, that I was always criticizing them for being too 'bourgeois.' ('You were always saying stupid things like that in those days,' she added. 'I hope at least now you are aware of it')" (*RR* 83). Class misrecognition takes the form of academics reproaching working-class people for not conforming to their expectation of the working class. Meanwhile, in present-day intellectual circles, cultural capital is less a matter of acquiring an aesthetic disposition, as Bourdieu argued, than a "critical disposition": possessing fluency in the various discourses of critique. In this light, a re-evaluation of academic values is overdue, given the high premium awarded to academic gestures of iconoclasm and subversion as ways of displaying one's "critical capital."[41] When it comes to inequities of class, at least, moral feelings of dignity and humiliation turn out to be far more politically salient.

Recognition is tied up, as McQueen writes in an illuminating discussion, with fundamental questions about what it means to have a "liveable life."[42] While drawing heavily on Honneth's thought, McQueen renders recognition more appealing to literary and cultural critics by highlighting ambivalence rather than affirmation and making illuminating links to feminist and transgender debates. "The process of being recognised," he remarks, "can often initiate a whole set of new recognition struggles which have no easy, or indeed possible, resolution."[43] Rather than denoting a deficit to be fixed, the desire for recognition is an ongoing and never finalized negotiation between the ways we perceive ourselves and the often very different ways we are seen and acknowledged by others.

Struggles for recognition, moreover, are not just a matter of institutions or identities; they are powerfully shaped by affective relations, sense perceptions, and aesthetically mediated attachments.[44] Seen in this light, recognition turns out to be a highly salient concept for literary critics; novels and memoirs can have the effect of making desires

for recognition newly legible, hooking up with the moral and political concerns of both authors and readers. Conversely, literature proves to be an essential resource for social and political theorists who want to get a better grasp on how the ambivalent dynamics of struggles for recognition play themselves out. As Eribon's memoir brilliantly shows, literary works do not simply illustrate or confirm existing theories of recognition; they also *reconfigure* them.

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NOTES

1   Didier Eribon, *Returning to Reims,* trans. Michael Lucey (London: Allen Lane, 2018), 9 (hereafter cited as *RR*).
2   As Eribon explains, this distaste is motivated, at least in part, by the class-based associations of German in France, as German is a language that is commonly taught to elite students. And also, perhaps, by a long-standing tradition of antagonism between French and German intellectual traditions.
3   Pierre Bourdieu, *Sketch for a Self-Analysis*, trans. Richard Nice (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2008). In his later work, Bourdieu is much more willing to let ordinary people speak for themselves. See, for example, the individual stories recorded in Bourdieu et al., *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society*, trans. Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson et al. (Cambridge: Polity, 1999).
4   See, for example, Oliver Davis, "Didier Eribon, Restive Rationalist: The Limits of Sociological Self-Understanding in *Retours à Reims*," *French Cultural Studies* 23, no. 2 (2012): 117–26.
5   Walter Erhart, "Kommunikation, Anerkennung, Resonanz: Literaturwissenschaft und Kritische Theorie," in *Literatur und Anerkennung: Wechselwirkungen und Perspektiven*, ed. Andrea Albrecht, Moritz Schramm, and Tilman Venzl (Berlin: LIT, 2017).
6   Amanda Anderson, *The Way We Argue Now: A Study in the Cultures of Theory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2005), 141. Jürgen Habermas's notion of the ideal speech situation is often misunderstood by literary scholars as a real-world description rather than as a counterfactual ideal. For a discussion of the feminist counter-public sphere, see Rita Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1989). The few exceptions to the neglect of Habermas include Nicholas Hengen Fox, "A Habermasian Literary Criticism," *New Literary History* 43, no. 2 (2012): 235–54; Fox, *Reading as Collective Action: Text as Tactics* (Iowa City: Univ. of Iowa Press, 2017); David L. Colclasure, *Habermas and Literary Rationality* (London; Routledge, 2010); and Peter Uwe Hohendahl, *The Institution of Criticism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 2016). Anderson often draws on Habermas: see especially *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces: The Rhetoric of Fallenness in Victorian Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1993) as well as *The Way We Argue Now.*
7   The scant literary-critical engagements with Axel Honneth include Winfried Fluck, "Literature, Recognition, Ethics: Struggles for Recognition and the Search for Ethical Principles," in *Literature, Ethics, Morality: American Studies Perspectives*, ed. Ridvan Askin and

Philip Schweighauser (Tübingen: Narr Francke Attempto Verlag, 2015); Marie-Elisabeth Holm, *Recognition Redefined: Using Literature to Get Social Acknowledgment* (London: Routledge, forthcoming); and Camilla Schwartz and Rita Felski, "Gender, Love and Recognition in *I Love Dick* and *The Other Woman*," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 28, no. 2 (forthcoming). On the stalled conversation between literary studies and present-day German critical theory, see Felski, "Good Vibrations," *American Literary History* 32, no. 2 (2020): 405–15.

8   Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, trans. Joel Anderson (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 1995), 143. See also Eleonora Piromalli, "Marxism and Cultural Studies in the Development of Axel Honneth's Theory of Recognition," *Culture, Theory, and Critique* 53, no. 3 (2012): 249–63.

9   Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1994), 25–73; Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking Recognition," *New Left Review* 3 (2000); Fraser and Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange*, trans. Joel Golb, James Ingram, and Christiane Wilke (London: Verso, 2003). Fraser's arguments precede—and perhaps helped inspire—subsequent waves of protest against neoliberal policies, such as Occupy Wall Street. For a more recent take, see Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya, and Fraser, *Feminism for the 99%* (London: Verso, 2019).

10   See Honneth's contributions to Honneth and Fraser, *Redistribution or Recognition* and Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives* (London: Virago, 1986).

11   Lisa Henderson, *Love and Money: Queers, Class, and Cultural Production* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 2013), 12

12   I explore these issues in the "Recognition" chapter of *Uses of Literature* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 23–50. Other relevant discussions include the cluster of essays by Nikolas Kompridis, Winfried Fluck, James Simpson, and Aleida Assmann in *New Literary History* 44, no. 1 (2013); Fluck, "Fiction and the Struggle for Recognition," *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 57, no. 4 (2012): 689–709; and *Literatur und Anerkennung*, ed. Albrecht, Schramm, and Venzl. Terence Cave's *Recognitions: A Study in Poetics* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1988) is comprehensive but deals with representations of recognition in literature rather than as a relationship to literature.

13   For helpful clarifications of this question from rather different perspectives, see Majid Yar, "Recognition and the Politics of Human(e) Desire," *Theory, Culture and Society* 18, no. 2–3 (2001): 57–76; and Lois McNay, *Against Recognition* (Oxford: Wiley, 2008). For a critical take on recognition from within political theory that, in my view, exaggerates its reliance on mutual transparency and essentialist notions of identity, see Patchen Markell, *Bound By Recognition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2009).

14   On this point, see Felski, "My Sociology Envy," *Theory, Culture, and Society*, July 25, 2019, *https://www.theoryculturesociety.org/rita-felski-my-sociology-envy/*.

15   Honneth, *Struggle for Recognition*, 132.

16   Jean-Philippe Deranty and Emmanuel Renault, "Politicizing Honneth's Ethics of Recognition," *Thesis Eleven* 88, no. 1 (2007): 93.

17   Paddy McQueen, *Subjectivity, Gender and the Struggle for Recognition* (London: Palgrave, 2015), 19.

18   Honneth, *Reification: A New Look at an Old Idea*, ed. Martin Jay (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2012), 42.

19   See Cillian McBride, *Recognition* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), 151.

20   McQueen, *Subjectivity, Gender and the Struggle for Recognition*.

21   To be sure, Honneth distinguishes his approach from that of other critical theorists in terms of its hermeneutic dimension. To scholars in the humanities, however, this dimension will seem very thin.

22 See, for example, Honneth, *Freedom's Right: The Social Foundations of Democratic Life* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2015). A recent issue of *WestEnd*, however, is devoted to John Williams's *Stoner*, with an introduction and essay by Honneth: "Stichwort: Stoner— Ambivalenzen einer literarischen Sozialfigur" and "Abgründe der Selbstlosigkeit: Größe und Untiefen einer literarischen Figur," *WestEnd—Neue Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 2 (2015): 79-81 and 97-102. US based political theorists have sometimes connected theories of recognition to discussions of tragedy that pay more attention to its literary dimensions. See, for example, Markell, *Bound by Recognition*; and Bonnie Honig, *Antigone, Interrupted* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

23 Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics*.

24 Honneth, *Disrespect: The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), 88.

25 Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman,* 12.

26 Kim Willsher, "Didier Eribon, Writer: What Was Difficult Was Not Being Gay but Being Working Class," *The Guardian*, May 27, 2018.

27 Willsher, "Didier Eribon."

28 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1993), 350.

29 Along similar lines, Andrew Sayer develops the idea of "lay normativity" and criticizes sociologists for their lack of attention to moral questions. See Sayer, *The Moral Significance of Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005), 2–7.

30 Bourdieu, *Esquisse pour une auto-analyse* (Paris: Éditions Raisons D'Agir, 2004), 127.

31 Eribon, *Returning to Reims*, 216–17; Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2009). See also Eribon, *Insult and the Making of the Gay Self,* trans Michael Lucey (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2004).

32 Eribon, "Qui est 'je'? Genèses, enjeux, et réceptions de l'autonalyse," *Principes d'une pensée critique* (Paris: Pluriel, 2016), 73. An—otherwise admiring—review of *Returning to Reims* on *Goodreads* speaks directly to this issue: "Eribon describes the working class as a place in the social system that you should escape, and he demands respect for fleeing this class. Quick reality check, Didier: Sociology professors like yourself are important, they can help to improve our society by questioning and analyzing it. Without waste collectors, bricklayers, nurses and firefighters though, our society would collapse. They are vital parts of our society that allow all of us to live the way we do. These hard-working people deserve reasonable pay, good working conditions and above all, you owe them respect, you arrogant fool" (Meike, Retour à Reims," *Goodreads*, February 28, 2018, https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/2155612615).

33 See, for example, Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2009).

34 Honneth, *Struggle for Recognition,* 138.

35 Though Eribon, it must be said, focuses exclusively on the last of these causes.

36 Thomas Piketty, *Capital and Ideology*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2020). Piketty offers a detailed analysis of three axes of class—education, income, and capital—showing how the first of these, and to a lesser extent the second and third, is now correlated with leftist voting patterns in the US, England, and France, even as leftist parties have also shifted toward the center. What were "workers' parties in the years after World War II gradually turned into parties of the highly educated in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries" (1008). As a result, he contends, "less educated voters felt that these parties had abandoned them" (1008). On changing forms of class identification with a focus on England, see Mike Savage, *Social Class in the 21st Century* (London: Pelican, 2015).

37 Michael Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020). A once clear-cut distinction between the working class and an educated elite has been altered by the emergence, in recent decades, of an "academic precariat" that possesses cultural capital but suffers from severe economic disadvantage.
38 Juliane Rebentisch, "Distinction and Difference: Revisiting the Question of Taste," *The Nordic Journal of Aesthetics* 26, 54 (2018): 12.
39 "Cinq Questions à Édouard Louis," preface to *Retour à Reims* (Paris: Flammarion, 2018).
40 Joan C. Williams, *White Working Class: Overcoming Class Cluelessness in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2017); Beverley Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable* (London: Sage, 1997); Michèle Lamont, *The Dignity of Working Men: Morality and the Boundaries of Race, Class, and Immigration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2002); and Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb, *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (London: Vintage, 1973). For a memoir that engages this question, see Lynsey Hanley, *Respectable: Crossing the Class Divide* (London: Penguin, 2017).
41 Nicholas Holm, "Critical Capital: Cultural Studies, the Critical Disposition and Critical Reading as Elite Practice," *Cultural Studies* 34, no. 1 (2020): 143–166.
42 McQueen, "Recognition, Queer Politics and a Liveable Life," in *Subjectivity, Gender and the Struggle for Recognition*, 157–87.
43 McQueen, *Subjectivity, Gender, and the Politics of Recognition*, 37.
44 See, on this point, Schramm's attempt to mediate between Honneth and Jacques Rancière in "Die Kunst der Anerkennung: Axel Honneth, Jacques Ranciere und die 'Aufteilung des Sinnlichen,'" in *Literatur und Anerkennung*, 135–58. And also Jason Miller, "The Role of Aesthetics in Hegelian Theories of Recognition," *Constellations* 23, no. 1 (2016): 96–109.