

TEACHING THE CONFLICTS

*Gerald Graff, Curricular
Reform, and the Culture
Wars*

Edited by
William E. Cain

GARLAND PUBLISHING, INC.
New York & London / 1994

Establishing A Way in a World of Conflicts

Harold Fromm

Over the past fifteen years or so, Gerald Graff has served as a sober conscience for literary theory, a discipline often inclined to postmodern tricksiness and meretricious displays of sophistry masquerading as ethical highmindedness. Graff's austere integrity has functioned as a badly needed corrective to the commodification of culture against which "oppositional" theorists rail even as they themselves exemplify this self-same vice in their "race for theory" (to use Barbara Christian's expression). As the Spartan Ralph Nader of literary theory, Graff has embodied many of the virtues he esteems, so that if one were inclined to be a follower of gurus at all in this age of unbelief (an age nonetheless fatuously credulous of mountebank metaphysics), Graff would seem to be one of the few to be taken seriously.

Although Graff began to make his reputation in the seventies as a rebellious young, albeit somewhat liberal-conservative, Turk—a period culminating in his influential book *Literature against Itself* (whose oppositional mentality he now seems to be repudiating or historicizing)—his success in the academy has gradually subsumed him into the prevailing world of literary theory as one of its most serious, intellectually committed spokespersons. To sum up in as few words as possible, he has moved from an earlier "oppositional liberalism" into a sort of "domesticated radicalism" that in reality is the New Conservatism of today's academic literary Establishment. Thus,