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Toward  
an Aesthetic  
of Reception

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# Chapter 1

## Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory

subjectivity  
revolutionary character  
defn of art  
I representation of art. From  
notion of the "Classic"  
The Canon

In our time literary history has increasingly fallen into disrepute, and not at all without reason. The history of this worthy discipline in the last one hundred and fifty years unmistakably describes the path of a steady decline. Its greatest achievements all belong to the nineteenth century. To write the history of a national literature counted, in the times of Gervinus and Scherer, De Sanctis and Lanson, as the crowning life's work of the philologist. The patriarchs of the discipline saw their highest goal therein, to represent in the history of literary works [*Dichtwerke*] the idea of national individuality on its way to itself. This high point is already a distant memory. The received form of literary history scarcely scratches out a living for itself in the intellectual life of our time. It has maintained itself in requirements for examinations by the state system of examinations that are themselves ready for dismantling. As a compulsory subject in the high school curriculum, it has almost disappeared in Germany. Beyond that, literary histories are still to be found only, if at all, on the bookshelves of the educated bourgeoisie who for the most part opens them, lacking a more appropriate literary dictionary, to answer literary quiz questions.<sup>1</sup>

In university course catalogs literary history is clearly disappearing. It has long been no secret that the philologists of my generation even rather pride themselves in having replaced the traditional presentation of their national literature by periods and as a whole with lectures on the history of a problem or with other systematic approaches. Scholarly production offers a corresponding picture:

collective projects in the form of handbooks, encyclopedias, and (as the latest offshoot of the so-called "publisher's synthesis") series of collected interpretations have driven out literary histories as unserious and presumptuous. Significantly, such pseudohistorical collections seldom derive from the initiative of scholars, rather most often from the whim of some restless publisher. Serious scholarship on the other hand precipitates into monographs in scholarly journals and presupposes the stricter standard of the literary critical methods of stylistics, rhetoric, textual philology, semantics, poetics, morphology, historical philology, and the history of motifs and genres. Philological scholarly journals today are admittedly in good part still filled with articles that content themselves with a literary historical approach. But their authors find themselves facing a twofold critique. Their formulations of the question are, from the perspective of neighboring disciplines, qualified publicly or privately as pseudo-problems, and their results put aside as mere antiquarian knowledge. The critique of literary theory scarcely sees the problem any more clearly. It finds fault with classical literary history in that the latter pretends to be only one form of history writing, but in truth operates outside the historical dimension and thereby lacks the foundation of aesthetic judgment demanded by its object—literature as one of the arts.<sup>2</sup>

This critique should first be made clear. Literary history of the most convenient forms tries to escape from the dilemma of a mere annal-like lining-up of the facts by arranging its material according to general tendencies, genres, and what-have-you, in order then to treat within these rubrics the individual works in chronological series. In the form of an excursus, the authors' biography and the evaluation of their oeuvre pop up in some accidental spot here, in the manner of an occasional aside. Or this literary history arranges its material unilinearly, according to the chronology of great authors, and evaluates them in accordance with the schema of "life and works"; the lesser authors are here overlooked (they are settled in the interstices), and the development of genres must thereby also unavoidably be dismembered. The second form is more appropriate to the canon of authors of the classics; the first is found more often in the modern literatures that have to struggle with the difficulty—growing up to and in the present—of making a selection from a scarcely surveyable list of authors and works.

But a description of literature that follows an already sanctioned canon and simply sets the life and work of the writers one after another in a chronological series is, as Gervinus already remarked,

“no history; it is scarcely the skeleton of a history.”<sup>3</sup> By the same token, no historian would consider historical a presentation of literature by genres that, registering changes from work to work, followed the unique laws of the forms of development of the lyric, drama, and novel and merely framed the unclarified character of the literary development with a general observation (for the most part borrowed from historical studies) concerning the *Zeitgeist* and the political tendencies of the age. On the other hand it is not only rare but almost forbidden that a literary historian should hold judgments of quality concerning the works of past ages. Rather, he prefers to appeal to the ideal of objectivity of historiography, which only has to describe “how it really was.” His aesthetic abstinence has good grounds. For the quality and rank of a literary work result neither from the biographical or historical conditions of its origin [*Entstehung*], nor from its place in the sequence of the development of a genre alone, but rather from the criteria of influence, reception, and posthumous fame, criteria that are more difficult to grasp. And if a literary historian, bound by the ideal of objectivity, limits himself to the presentation of a closed past, leaving the judgment of the literature of his own, still-unfinished age to the responsible critics and limiting himself to the secure canon of “masterpieces,” he remains in his historical distance most often one to two generations behind the latest development in literature. At best he partakes of the contemporary engagement with literary phenomena of the present as a passive reader, and thereby becomes in the formation of his judgment a parasite of a criticism that he silently despises as “unscholarly.” What then should a historical study of literature still be today, a study that—taking up a classical definition of the interest in history, that of Friedrich Schiller—can promise so little instruction to the “thoughtful observer,” no imitative model at all to the “active man of the world,” no important information to the “philosopher,” and everything else but a “source of the noblest pleasure” to the reader?<sup>4</sup>

## II

Citations customarily call upon an authority to sanction a step in the process of scholarly reflection. But they can also remind us of a former way of posing a question, to prove that an answer that has become classic is no longer satisfactory, that it has itself become historical again and demands of us a renewal of the process of question and answer. Schiller’s answer to the question of his inaugural lecture at Jena on 26 May 1789, “What Is and Toward What End Does One

Study Universal History," is not only representative of the historical understanding of German idealism; it is also illuminating for a critical survey of the history of our discipline. For it indicates the expectations under which the literary history of the nineteenth century sought to fulfill the legacy of the idealist philosophy of history in competition with general historiography. At the same time it lets one recognize why the epistemological ideal of the historicist school had to lead to a crisis, and also why it had to draw the decline of literary history along with it.

Gervinus can serve as our chief witness. He authored not only the first scholarly presentation of a *History of the Poetic National Literature of the Germans* [*Geschichte der poetischen Nationalliteratur der Deutschen*] (1835-42), but also the first (and only) theory of historiography [*Historik*] written by a philologist.<sup>5</sup> His *Fundamentals of the Theory of Historiography* develop the main thoughts of Wilhelm von Humboldt's text, *On the Task of the Historian* [*Über die Aufgabe des Geschichtsschreibers*] (1821) into a theory with which Gervinus elsewhere also established the great task of a history of "high" literature. The literary historian will only then become a writer of history when, researching his object of study, he has found "the one basic idea that permeates precisely that series of events that he took upon himself as his object, that appears in them, [and] brings them into connection with world events."<sup>6</sup> This guiding idea—for Schiller still the general teleological principal that allows us to conceive of the world-historical progress of humanity—already appears in Humboldt in the separate manifestations of the "idea of national individuality."<sup>7</sup> And when Gervinus then makes this "ideal mode of explanation" of history his own, he implicitly places Humboldt's "historical idea"<sup>8</sup> in the service of nationalist ideology: a history of German national literature ought to show how "the wise direction in which the Greeks had led humanity, and toward which the Germans (in accordance with their particular characteristics) had always been disposed, was taken up again by these [Germans] with free consciousness."<sup>9</sup> The universal idea of enlightened philosophy of history disintegrated into the multiplicity of the history of national individualities and finally narrowed itself to the literary myth that precisely the Germans were called to be the true successors of the Greeks—for the sake of that idea, "that the Germans alone in their purity were created to realize."<sup>10</sup>

The process made evident by the example of Gervinus is not only a procedure typical of the *Geistesgeschichte* of the nineteenth century. It also contained a methodological implication for literary

history as for all historiography when the historicist school brought the teleological model of idealist philosophy of history into dispute. When one rejected the solution of the philosophy of history—to comprehend the course of events from an “end, an ideal high point” of world history—as unhistorical,<sup>11</sup> how then was the coherence of history, never given as a whole, to be understood and represented? The ideal of universal history thereby became, as Hans-Georg Gadamer showed, a dilemma for historical research.<sup>12</sup> In Gervinus’s formulation, the historian “can only wish to represent complete series of events, for he cannot judge where he does not have the final scenes before him.”<sup>13</sup> National histories could serve as closed series so long as one saw them peak politically in the fulfilled moment of national unification, or literarily in the high point of a national classic. Yet their progression toward the “final scene” must inevitably bring back the old dilemma. Thus in the last analysis Gervinus only made a virtue of necessity when—in notable agreement with Hegel’s famous diagnosis of “the end of the artistic period”—he dispensed with the literature of his own post-classical age as merely a symptom of decline, and gave to the “talents that now lack a goal” the advice that they would better occupy themselves with the real world and the state.<sup>14</sup>

But the historicist-historian seemed to be freed from the dilemma of the closure and continuation of history wherever he limited himself to periods that he could place before him up through the “final scene,” and describe in their own completeness without regard for that which followed from them. History as the representation of periods thus also promised to fulfill the methodological ideal of the historicist school to the fullest extent. Thereafter, when the unfolding of national individuality was no longer satisfactory as a guiding thread, literary history chiefly strung closed periods one after another. The “fundamental law of writing history, according to which the historian should disappear before his object, which should itself step forward in full objectivity,”<sup>15</sup> could be observed most immediately with the period, an individual meaningful whole [*Sinnanlagen*] set off by itself. If “full objectivity” demands that the historian ignore the standpoint of his present time, the value and significance of a past age must also be recognizable independent of the later course of history. Ranke’s famous utterance of 1854 gives a theological foundation to this postulate: “But I maintain that each period is immediate vis-à-vis God, and that its value depends not at all on what followed from it, but rather on its own existence, on its own self.”<sup>16</sup> This new answer to the question as to how the concept of “progress”

in history is to be conceived, assigns the task of a new theodicy to the historian: when the historian considers and represents "each period as something valid for itself," he justifies God before the philosophy of history as progress, a philosophy that values periods only as steps for the following generation and thereby presupposes a preference for later periods—in other words, an "injustice of the god-head."<sup>17</sup> Ranke's solution to the problem left behind by the philosophy of history was nonetheless purchased at the expense of cutting the thread between history's past and present—between the period "as it really was" and that "which followed from it." In its turning away from the Enlightenment philosophy of history, historicism sacrificed not only the teleological construction of universal history, but also the methodological principle that, according to Schiller, first and foremost distinguishes the universal historian and his method: namely, "to join the past with the present"<sup>18</sup>—an inalienable understanding, only ostensibly speculative, that the historicist school could not brush aside without paying for it,<sup>19</sup> as the further development in the field of literary history also indicates.

The achievement of nineteenth-century literary history stood and fell with the conviction that the idea of national individuality was the "invisible part of every fact,"<sup>20</sup> and that this idea made the "form of history"<sup>21</sup> representable even in a series of literary works. To the extent that this conviction disappeared, the thread connecting events had to disappear as well, past and present literature fall apart into separate spheres of judgment,<sup>22</sup> and the selection, determination, and evaluation of literary facts become problematic. The turn toward positivism is primarily conditioned by this crisis. Positivist literary history believed it could make a virtue of its necessity if it borrowed the methods of the exact natural sciences. The result is only too well known: the application of the principle of pure causal explanation to the history of literature brought only externally determining factors to light, allowed source study to grow to a hypertrophied degree, and dissolved the specific character of the literary work into a collection of "influences" that could be increased at will. The protest was not long in coming. *Geistesgeschichte* armed itself with literature, set an aesthetics of irrational creation in opposition to the causal explanation of history, and sought the coherence of literature [*Dichtung*] in the recurrence of atemporal ideas and motifs.<sup>23</sup> In Germany *Geistesgeschichte* allowed itself to be drawn into the preparation and foundation of the "people's" [*völkischen*] literary studies of National Socialism. After the war, new methods relieved it and completed the process of de-ideologization,

but did not thereby take upon themselves the classical task of literary history. The representation of literature in its immanent history and in its relation to pragmatic history lay outside the interests of the history of ideas and concepts, as well as outside the interests of research into tradition that flourished in the wake of the Warburg School. The history of ideas strove secretly for a renewal of the history of philosophy in the mirror of literature;<sup>24</sup> the research into tradition neutralized the lived praxis of history when it sought the focal point of knowledge in the origin or in the atemporal continuity of tradition, and not in the presence and uniqueness of a literary phenomenon.<sup>25</sup> The recognition of the enduring within perpetual change released one from the labor of historical understanding. The continuity of the classical heritage, raised to the highest idea, appeared in Ernst Robert Curtius's monumental work (which set a legion of epigonal *topoi*-researchers to work) in the tension between creation and imitation, between "great literature" [Dichtung] and "mere literature" that is immanent in the literary tradition and not historically mediated: a timeless classicism of masterpieces raised itself above that which Curtius called the "unbreakable chain, the tradition of mediocrity,"<sup>26</sup> and left history behind as a *terra incognita*.

The gap between the historical and the aesthetic consideration of literature is no more spanned here than it already was in Benedetto Croce's literary theory, with its division of poetry and nonpoetry held *ad absurdum*. The antagonism between pure literature [Dichtung] and time-bound literature was only to be overcome when its founding aesthetics was put into question and it was recognized that the opposition between creation and imitation characterizes only the literature of the humanist period of art, but can no longer grasp modern literature or even, already, medieval literature. Literary sociology and the work-immanent method<sup>27</sup> disassociated themselves from the approaches of the positivist and idealist schools. They widened even further the gap between history and literature [Dichtung]. This is most clearly seen in the opposed literary theories of the Marxist and Formalist schools that must stand at the center of this critical survey of the prehistory of contemporary literary studies.

### III

Both schools have in common the turning away from positivism's blind empiricism as well as from the aesthetic metaphysics of *Geistesgeschichte*. They sought, in opposite ways, to solve the problem of

how the isolated literary fact or the seemingly autonomous literary work could be brought back into the historical coherence of literature and once again be productively conceived as evidence of the social process, or as a moment of literary evolution. But there is as yet still no great literary history that could be identified as a product of these two attempts, that would have retold the old histories of national literatures from the new Marxist or Formalist premises, reformed their sanctioned canon, and represented world literature as a process, with a view toward its emancipatory social or perceptually formative [*wahrnehmungsbildende*] function. Through their one-sidedness, the Marxist and the Formalist literary theories finally arrived at an aporia, the solution to which demanded that historical and aesthetic considerations be brought into a new relationship.

\* The original provocation of Marxist literary theory that is also always renewed is that it denies their own histories to art and to the corresponding forms of consciousness of ethics, religion, or metaphysics. The history of literature, like that of art, can no longer maintain the "appearance of its independence" when one has realized that its production presupposes the material production and social praxis of human beings, that even artistic production is a part of the "real life-process" of the appropriation of nature that determines the history of human labor or development. Only when this "active life-process" is represented "does history stop being a collection of dead facts."<sup>28</sup> Thus literature and art can be viewed as a process "only in relation to the praxis of historical human beings," in their "social function" (Werner Krauss),<sup>29</sup> conceived as one of the coeval "kinds of human appropriation of the world" and represented as part of the general process of history in which man overcomes the natural condition in order to work his way up to being human (Karl Kosík).<sup>30</sup>

\* This program, recognizable in *The German Ideology* (1845/46) and other early writings of Karl Marx only in its initial tendencies, still awaits its realization, at least for the history of art and literature. Already shortly after its birth, with the *Sickingen* debate of 1859,<sup>31</sup> Marxist aesthetics was drawn under the spell of an approach conditioned by the concepts of periods and genres, an approach that still dominates the arguments between Lukács, Brecht, and others in the Expressionism debate of 1934-38.<sup>32</sup> literary realism's problem of imitation or reflection [*Wiederspiegelung*]. Nineteenth-century realist art theory—provocatively directed against the romantics who kept their distance from reality, by literary figures forgotten today (Champfleury, Duranty); ascribed *post festum* by literary history to

the great novelists Stendhal, Balzac, and Flaubert; and raised to the dogma of socialist realism in the twentieth century during the Stalinist era—arose and remained in a noteworthy dependence on the classical aesthetics of *imitatio naturae*. At the same time as the modern concept of art as the “signature of creative man,” as the realization of the unrealized, as a potential constructive or formative of reality was being advanced against the “metaphysical tradition of the identity of being and nature, and the determination of the work of man as the ‘imitation of nature,’ ”<sup>33</sup> Marxist aesthetics still, or again, believed it must legitimate itself with a theory of copying. To be sure, in its concept of art it puts “reality” in the place of “nature,” but it then once again endows the reality placed before art with characteristic features of that nature that was apparently overcome, with exemplary obligation and essential completeness.<sup>34</sup> Measured against the original antinaturalist position of Marxist theory,<sup>35</sup> its contraction upon the mimetic ideal of bourgeois realism can only be adjudged as a throwback to a substantialist materialism. For beginning with Marx’s concept of labor, and with a history of art understood within the dialectic of nature and labor, the material horizon of conditions and objective praxis, Marxist aesthetics did not have to shut itself off from the modern development of art and literature, which its doctrinaire criticism has up to the most recent past put down as decadent because “true reality” is missing. The argument of the last years, in which this verdict has been canceled step by step, is to be interpreted at once as a process in which Marxist aesthetics sets to work with secular tardiness against the reduction of the work of art to a merely *copying* function, in order finally to do justice to the long-suppressed insight into art’s character as *formative* of reality.

The orthodox theory of reflection stands in the way of this genuine task of a dialectical-materialist literary history and in the way of the solution of the correlative problem of how one is to determine the achievement and influence of literary forms as an independent kind of objective human praxis. The problem of the historical and processlike connection of literature and society was put aside in an often reproving manner by the games of Plechanov’s<sup>36</sup> method: the reduction of cultural phenomena to economic, social, or class equivalents that, as the given reality, are to determine the origin of art and literature, and explain them as a merely reproduced reality. “Whoever begins with the economy as something given and not further deducible, as the deepest fundamental cause of all and the unique reality that suffers no further inquiry—he transforms the economy

into its result, into a thing, an autonomous factor of history, and thereby promotes a fetishization of economy."<sup>37</sup> The "ideology of the economic factor" that Karl Kosík thus takes to court forced the history of literature into a parallelism that the historical phenomenon of literary production, in its diachrony as well as its synchrony, continually refutes.

Literature, in the fullness of its forms, allows itself to be referred back only in part and not in any exact manner to concrete conditions of the economic process. Changes in the economic structure and rearrangements in the social hierarchy happened before the present age mostly in long, drawn-out processes, with scarcely visible caesurae and few spectacular revolutions. Since the number of ascertainable determinants in the "infrastructure" remained incomparably smaller than the more rapidly changing literary production of the "superstructure," the concrete multiplicity of works and genres had to be traced back to always the same factors or conceptual hypostases, such as feudalism, the rise of the bourgeois society, the cutting-back of the nobility's function, and early, high, or late capitalist modes of production. Also, literary works are variously permeable of events in historical reality, according to their genre or to the form pertaining to their period, which led to the conspicuous neglecting of nonmimetic genres, as opposed to the epic. In searching for social equivalents, sociologism not accidentally held to the traditional series of masterpieces and great authors, since their originality seemed to be interpretable as immediate insight into the social process or—in the case of insufficient insight—as involuntary expression of changes occurring in the "basis."<sup>38</sup> The dimensions specific to the historicity of literature are thereby obviously diminished. For an important work, one that indicates a new direction in the literary process, is surrounded by an unsurveyable production of works that correspond to the traditional expectations or images concerning reality, and that thus in their social index are to be no less valued than the solitary novelty of the great work that is often comprehended only later. This dialectical relationship between the production of the new and the reproduction of the old can be grasped by the theory of reflection only when it no longer insists on the homogeneity of the contemporary in the temporal misrepresentation of a harmonizing arrangement of social conditions and the literary phenomena reflecting them, side by side. With this step, however, Marxist aesthetics arrives at a difficulty that Marx already foresaw: "the unequal relationship of the development of the material production . . . to the artistic."<sup>39</sup> This difficulty, behind which the specific historicity of

literature hides itself, can be solved by the theory of reflection only at the cost of its self-cancellation [*Selbstaufhebung*].

The claim to formulate dialectically the theory of reflection thus entangled its leading representative Georg Lukács in striking contradictions.<sup>40</sup> They come into view with his explanation of the normative value of classical art as well as with his canonization of Balzac for modern literature, but also with his concept of totality and its correlate, the "immediacy of reception." When Lukács relies on Marx's famous fragment on classical art, and claims that even Homer's influence today is "inseparably bound to the age and the means of production in which or, respectively, under which Homer's work arose,"<sup>41</sup> he once again implicitly presupposes as answered that which, according to Marx, was still to be explained: why a work "can still provide [us] aesthetic pleasure"<sup>42</sup> when as the mere reflex of a long-overcome form of social development it would still be serving only the historian's interest. How can the art of a distant past survive the annihilation of its socioeconomic basis, if one denies with Lukács any independence to the artistic form and thus also cannot explain the ongoing influence of the work of art as a process formative of history? Lukács helps himself along in this dilemma with the time-honored concept of the "classical" that is nonetheless transcendent of history, that can bridge the gap between past art and present influence, even in the case of its content, only with determinations of a timeless ideality<sup>43</sup>—and thus precisely not in a dialectical-materialist mediation. For modern literature, as is well known, Lukács raised Balzac and Tolstoy to the classical norm of realism. From this viewpoint, the history of modern literature takes on the form of an already honorable humanist schema of the writing of art history: given its classical high point in the nineteenth-century bourgeois novel, the view describes the trajectory of a decline, loses itself in the artistic modes of decadence that are alien to reality, and is to regain its ideality to the extent that it reproduces the modern social reality in forms such as typification, individualization, or "organic narration"—forms that have already become historical, and been canonized by Lukács.<sup>44</sup>

The historicity of literature that is concealed by the classicism of orthodox Marxist aesthetics is also missed by Lukács where he seemingly gives a dialectical interpretation to the concept of reflection, as, for example, in his commentary on Stalin's theses "On Marxism in Linguistics"<sup>45</sup>: "Each superstructure not only reflects reality, but actively takes a position for or against the old or the new basis."<sup>46</sup> How are literature and art, as superstructure, supposed to be able

“actively” to take a position vis-à-vis their social basis when on the other hand, according to Engels, in this “reciprocal influence” economic necessity will “in the last instance” nonetheless prevail and determine the “kind of change and further development” of social reality,<sup>47</sup> and when therefore the step toward the new is always one-sidedly preordained for literary and artistic production by an inevitably altered economic basis? This undialectical one-sidedness is also not eliminated when, with Lucien Goldmann, one reforms the connection between literature and social reality along the “homology” of structures instead of contents.

Goldmann’s attempts toward a literary history of French classicism and a sociology of the novel postulate a series of “world views” that are class-specific, then degraded by late capitalism since the nineteenth century, and finally reified; these must—here the not-yet-overcome classicism betrays itself—satisfy the ideal of “coherent expression” that he allows only for great writers.<sup>48</sup> So here too, as already with Lukács, literary production remains confined to a secondary function, always only reproducing in harmonious parallel with the economic process. This harmonization of “objective signification” and “coherent expression,” of given social structure and imitative artistic phenomenon, implicitly presupposes the classic-idealist unity of content and form, essence and appearance<sup>49</sup>—only now, in place of the idea, the material side, that is, the economic factor, is explained as substance. This has as its consequence that the social dimension of literature and art with respect to their reception is likewise limited to the secondary function of only allowing an already previously known (or ostensibly known) reality to be *once again recognized*.<sup>50</sup> Whoever confines art to reflection also restricts its influence—here the disowned heritage of Platonic mimesis takes its revenge—to the recognition of the already known. But it is precisely at this point that the possibility of grasping the revolutionary character of art is foreclosed to Marxist aesthetics: the characteristic that it can lead men beyond the stabilized images and prejudices of their historical situation toward a new perception of the world or an anticipated reality.

\* Marxist aesthetics can only escape from the aporias of the theory of reflection, and once again become aware of the specific historicity of literature, when it acknowledges with Karl Kosik that: “Each work of art has a doubled character within an indivisible unity: it is the expression of reality, but it also forms the reality that exists not next to the work, nor before the work, but precisely only in the work.”<sup>51</sup> First attempts to win back the dialectical character of

historical praxis for art and literature stand out in the literary theories of Werner Krauss, Roger Garaudy, and Karl Kosík (Krauss), who in his studies of Enlightenment literary history rehabilitated the consideration of literary forms since, in them, "a great measure of social influence [has] stored itself," defines the socially *formative* function of literature as follows: "Literature [Dichtung] moves in the direction of an awareness [Vernehmen]. Therefore the society that is addressed produces itself within the literature: style is its law—through the cognizance of the style the literature's address can also be deciphered."<sup>52</sup> Garaudy turns against that "realism closed within itself" to redefine the character of the work of art, as "realism without bounds," from the perspective of the human present open toward the future as work and myth: "For reality, when it includes human beings, is no longer just that which it is, but also everything that is missing in it, everything that it must still become."<sup>53</sup> Kosík solves the dilemma of Marx's fragment on classical art—how and why a work of art can survive the conditions under which it originated—with a definition of the character of art that historically mediates the essence and influence of a work of art and brings them into a dialectical unity: "The work lives to the extent that it has influence. Included within the influence of a work is that which is accomplished in the consumption of the work as well as in the work itself. That which happens with the work is an expression of what the work is. . . . The work is a work and lives as a work for the reason that it demands an interpretation and 'works' [influences, wirkt] in many meanings."<sup>54</sup>

The insight that the historical essence of the work of art lies not only in its representational or expressive function but also in its influence must have two consequences for a new founding of literary history. If the life of the work results "not from its autonomous existence but rather from the reciprocal interaction of work and mankind,"<sup>55</sup> this perpetual labor of understanding and of the active reproduction of the past cannot remain limited to the single work. On the contrary, the relationship of work to work must now be brought into this interaction between work and mankind, and the historical coherence of works among themselves must be seen in the interrelations of production and reception. Put another way: literature and art only obtain a history that has the character of a process when the succession of works is mediated—not only through the producing subject but also through the consuming subject—through the interaction of author and public. And if on the other hand "human reality is not only a production of the new, but also a

(critical and dialectical) reproduction of the past,"<sup>56</sup> the function of art in the process of this perpetual totalizing can only come into view in its independence when the specific achievement of artistic form as well is no longer just mimetically defined, but rather is viewed dialectically as a medium capable of forming and altering perception, in which the "formation of the senses" chiefly takes place.<sup>57</sup>

Thus formulated, the problem of the historicity of artistic forms is a belated discovery of Marxist literary studies. For it had already posed itself forty [fifty] years ago to the Formalist school that they were fighting, at that moment when it was condemned to silence by the prevailing holders of power, and driven into the diaspora.

#### IV

The beginnings of the Formalists, who as members of the "Society for the Study of Poetic Language" (*Opoyaz*) came forth with programmatic publications from 1916 on, stood under the aegis of a rigorous foregrounding of the artistic character of literature. The theory of the formal method<sup>58</sup> raised literature once again to an independent object of study when it detached the literary work from all historical conditions and like the new structural linguistics defined its specific result purely functionally, as "the sum-total of all the stylistic devices employed in it."<sup>59</sup> The traditional distinction between "poetry" [Dichtung] and literature thus becomes dispensable. The artistic character of literature is to be ascertained solely from the opposition between poetic and practical language. Language in its practical function now represents as "a nonliterary series" all remaining historical and social conditioning of the literary work; this work is described and defined as a work of art precisely in its specific differentiation (*écart poétique*), and thus not in its functional relationship to the nonliterary series. The distinction between poetic and practical language led to the concept of "artistic perception," which completely severed the link between literature and lived praxis. Art now becomes the means of disrupting the automatization of everyday perception through "estrangement" or "defamiliarization" (*ostraneniye*). It follows that the reception of art also can no longer exist in the naive enjoyment of the beautiful, but rather demands the differentiation of form, and the recognition of the operation. Thus the process of perception in art appears as an end in itself, the "tangibility of form" as its specific characteristic and the "discovery of the operation" as the principle of a theory. This theory made art criticism into a rational method in conscious renunciation

of historical knowledge, and thereby brought forth critical achievements of lasting value.

Another achievement of the Formalist school meanwhile cannot be overlooked. The historicity of literature that was at first negated returned with the extension of the Formalist method, and placed it before a problem that forced it to rethink the principles of diachrony. The literariness of literature is conditioned not only synchronically by the opposition between poetic and practical language, but also diachronically by the opposition to the givens of the genre and the preceding form of the literary series. When the work of art is "perceived against the background of other works of art and in association with them," as Viktor Shklovsky formulates it,<sup>60</sup> the interpretation of the work of art must also take into consideration its relation to other forms that existed before it did. With this the Formalist school began to seek its own way back into history. Its new project distinguished itself from the old literary history in that it gave up the former's fundamental image of a gradual and continuous process and opposed a dynamic principle of *literary evolution* to the classical concept of *tradition*. The notion of an organic continuity lost its former precedence in art history and the history of style. The analysis of literary evolution discovers in the history of literature the "dialectical self-production of new forms,"<sup>61</sup> describing the supposedly peaceful and gradual course of tradition [Überlieferung] as a procession with fracturing changes, the revolts of new schools, and the conflicts of competing genres. The "objective spirit" of unified periods was thrown out as metaphysical speculation. According to Viktor Shklovsky and Jurij Tynjanov, there exists in each period a number of literary schools at the same time, "wherein one of them represents the canonized height of literature"; the canonization of a literary form leads to its automatization, and demands the formation of new forms in the lower stratum that "conquer the place of the older ones," grow to be a mass phenomenon, and finally are themselves in turn pushed to the periphery.<sup>62</sup>

With this project, that paradoxically turned the principle of literary *evolution* against the organic-teleological sense of the classical concept of evolution, the Formalist school already came very close to a new historical understanding of literature in the realm of the origin, canonization, and decay of genres. It taught one to see the work of art in its history in a new way, that is, in the changes of the systems of literary genres and forms. It thus cut a path toward an understanding that linguistics had also appropriated for itself: the understanding that pure synchrony is illusory, since, in the

formulation of Roman Jakobson and Jurij Tynjanov, "each system necessarily comes forth as evolution and on the other hand evolution inevitably carries with it the character of a system."<sup>63</sup> To see the work in *its* history, that is, comprehended within literary history defined as "the succession of systems,"<sup>64</sup> is however not yet the same as to see the work of art in *history*, that is, in the historical horizon of its origination, social function, and historical influence. The historicity of literature does not end with the succession of aesthetic-formal systems; the evolution of literature, like that of language, is to be determined not only immanently through its own unique relationship of diachrony and synchrony, but also through its relationship to the general process of history.<sup>65</sup>

From this perspective on the reciprocal dilemma of Formalist and Marxist literary theory, a consequence can be seen that was not drawn by either of them. If on the one hand literary evolution can be comprehended within the historical change of systems, and on the other hand pragmatic history can be comprehended within the processlike linkage of social conditions, must it not then also be possible to place the "literary series" and the "nonliterary series" into a relation that comprehends the relationship between literature and history without forcing literature, at the expense of its character as art, into a function of mere copying or commentary?

## V

In the question thus posed, I see the challenge to literary studies of taking up once again the problem of literary history, which was left unresolved in the dispute between Marxist and Formalist methods. My attempt to bridge the gap between literature and history, between historical and aesthetic approaches, begins at the point at which both schools stop. Their methods conceive the *literary fact* within the closed circle of an aesthetics of production and of representation. In doing so, they deprive literature of a dimension that inalienably belongs to its aesthetic character as well as to its social function: the dimension of its reception and influence. Reader, listener, and spectator—in short, the factor of the audience—play an extremely limited role in both literary theories. Orthodox Marxist aesthetics treats the reader—if at all—no differently from the author: it inquires about his social position or seeks to recognize him in the structure of a represented society. The Formalist school needs the reader only as a perceiving subject who follows the directions in the text in order to distinguish the [literary] form or discover the

[literary] procedure. It assumes that the reader has the theoretical understanding of the philologist who can reflect on the artistic devices, already knowing them; conversely, the Marxist school candidly equates the spontaneous experience of the reader with the scholarly interest of historical materialism, which would discover relationships between superstructure and basis in the literary work. However, as Walther Bulst has stated, "no text was ever written to be read and interpreted philologically by philologists,"<sup>66</sup> nor, may I add, historically by historians. Both methods lack the reader in his genuine role, a role as unalterable for aesthetic as for historical knowledge: as the addressee for whom the literary work is primarily destined.

For even the critic who judges a new work, the writer who conceives of his work in light of positive or negative norms of an earlier work, and the literary historian who classifies a work in its tradition and explains it historically are first simply readers before their reflexive relationship to literature can become productive again. In the triangle of author, work, and public the last is no passive part, no chain of mere reactions, but rather itself an energy formative of history. The historical life of a literary work is unthinkable without the active participation of its addressees. For it is only through the process of its mediation that the work enters into the changing horizon-of-experience of a continuity in which the perpetual inversion occurs from simple reception to critical understanding, from passive to active reception, from recognized aesthetic norms to a new production that surpasses them. The historicity of literature as well as its communicative character presupposes a dialogical and at once processlike relationship between work, audience, and new work that can be conceived in the relations between message and receiver as well as between question and answer, problem and solution. The closed circle of production and of representation within which the methodology of literary studies has mainly moved in the past must therefore be opened to an aesthetics of reception and influence if the problem of comprehending the historical sequence of literary works as the coherence of literary history is to find a new solution.

The perspective of the aesthetics of reception mediates between passive reception and active understanding, experience formative of norms, and new production. If the history of literature is viewed in this way within the horizon of a dialogue between work and audience that forms a continuity, the opposition between its aesthetic and its historical aspects is also continually mediated. Thus the thread from the past appearance to the present experience of literature, which historicism had cut, is tied back together.

The relationship of literature and reader has aesthetic as well as historical implications. The aesthetic implication lies in the fact that the first reception of a work by the reader includes a test of its aesthetic value in comparison with works already read.<sup>67</sup> The obvious historical implication of this is that the understanding of the first reader will be sustained and enriched in a chain of receptions from generation to generation; in this way the historical significance of a work will be decided and its aesthetic value made evident. In this process of the history of reception, which the literary historian can only escape at the price of leaving unquestioned the presuppositions that guide his understanding and judgment, the reappropriation of past works occurs simultaneously with the perpetual mediation of past and present art and of traditional evaluation and current literary attempts. The merit of a literary history based on an aesthetics of reception will depend upon the extent to which it can take an active part in the ongoing totalization of the past through aesthetic experience. This demands on the one hand—in opposition to the objectivism of positivist literary history—a conscious attempt at the formation of a canon, which, on the other hand—in opposition to the classicism of the study of traditions—presupposes a critical revision if not destruction of the received literary canon. The criterion for the formation of such a canon and the ever necessary retelling of literary history is clearly set out by the aesthetics of reception. The step from the history of the reception of the individual work to the history of literature has to lead to seeing and representing the historical sequence of works as they determine and clarify the coherence of literature, to the extent that it is meaningful for us, as the prehistory of its present experience.<sup>68</sup>

From this premise, the question as to how literary history can today be methodologically grounded and written anew will be addressed in the following seven theses.

## VI

Thesis 1. A renewal of literary history demands the removal of the prejudices of historical objectivism and the grounding of the traditional aesthetics of production and representation in an aesthetics of reception and influence. The historicity of literature rests not on an organization of "literary facts" that is established *post festum*, but rather on the preceding experience of the literary work by its readers.

R. G. Collingwood's postulate, posed in his critique of the prevailing ideology of objectivity in history—"History is nothing but the re-enactment of past thought in the historian's mind"<sup>69</sup>—is even more valid for literary history. For the positivistic view of history as the "objective" description of a series of events in an isolated past neglects the artistic character as well as the specific historicity of literature. A literary work is not an object that stands by itself and that offers the same view to each reader in each period.<sup>70</sup> It is not a monument that monologically reveals its timeless essence. It is much more like an orchestration that strikes ever new resonances among its readers and that frees the text from the material of the words and brings it to a contemporary existence: "words that must, at the same time that they speak to him, create an interlocutor capable of understanding them."<sup>71</sup> This dialogical character of the literary work also establishes why philological understanding can exist only in a perpetual confrontation with the text, and cannot be allowed to be reduced to a knowledge of facts.<sup>72</sup> Philological understanding always remains related to interpretation that must set as its goal, along with learning about the object, the reflection on and description of the completion of this knowledge as a moment of new understanding.

History of literature is a process of aesthetic reception and production that takes place in the realization of literary texts on the part of the receptive reader, the reflective critic, and the author in his continuing productivity. The endlessly growing sum of literary "facts" that winds up in the conventional literary histories is merely left over from this process; it is only the collected and classified past and therefore not history at all, but pseudo-history. Anyone who considers a series of such literary facts as a piece of the history of literature confuses the eventful character of a work of art with that of historical matter-of-factness. The *Perceval* of Chrétien de Troyes, as a literary event, is not "historical" in the same sense as, for example, the Third Crusade, which was occurring at about the same time.<sup>73</sup> It is not a "fact" that could be explained as caused by a series of situational preconditions and motives, by the intent of a historical action as it can be reconstructed, and by the necessary and secondary consequences of this deed. The historical context in which a literary work appears is not a factual, independent series of events that exists apart from an observer. *Perceval* becomes a literary event only for its reader, who reads this last work of Chrétien with a memory of his earlier works and who recognizes its individuality in comparison with these and other works that he already knows, so

that he gains a new criterion for evaluating future works. In contrast to a political event, a literary event has no unavoidable consequences subsisting on their own that no succeeding generation can ever escape. A literary event can continue to have an effect only if those who come after it still or once again respond to it—if there are readers who again appropriate the past work or authors who want to imitate, outdo, or refute it. The coherence of literature as an event is primarily mediated in the horizon of expectations of the literary experience of contemporary and later readers, critics, and authors. Whether it is possible to comprehend and represent the history of literature in its unique historicity depends on whether this horizon of expectations can be objectified.

## VII

Thesis 2. The analysis of the literary experience of the reader avoids the threatening pitfalls of psychology if it describes the reception and the influence of a work within the objectifiable system of expectations that arises for each work in the historical moment of its appearance, from a pre-understanding of the genre, from the form and themes of already familiar works, and from the opposition between poetic and practical language.

My thesis opposes a widespread skepticism that doubts whether an analysis of aesthetic influence can approach the meaning of a work of art at all or can produce, at best, more than a simple sociology of taste. René Wellek in particular directs such doubts against the literary theory of I. A. Richards. Wellek argues that neither the individual state of consciousness, since it is momentary and only personal, nor a collective state of consciousness, as Jan Mukařovsky assumes the effect a work of art to be, can be determined by empirical means.<sup>74</sup> Roman Jakobson wanted to replace the "collective state of consciousness" by a "collective ideology" in the form of a system of norms that exists for each literary work as *langue* and that is actualized as *parole* by the receiver—although incompletely and never as a whole.<sup>75</sup> This theory, it is true, limits the subjectivity of the influence, but it still leaves open the question of which data can be used to comprehend the influence of a particular work on a certain public and to incorporate it into a system of norms. In the meantime there are empirical means that had never been thought of before—literary data that allow one to ascertain a specific disposition of the audience for each work (a disposition that precedes the

psychological reaction as well as the subjective understanding of the individual reader). As in the case of every actual experience, the first literary experience of a previously unknown work also demands a "foreknowledge which is an element of the experience itself, and on the basis of which anything new that we come across is available to experience at all, i.e., as it were readable in a context of experience."<sup>76</sup>

A literary work, even when it appears to be new, does not present itself as something absolutely new in an informational vacuum, but predisposes its audience to a very specific kind of reception by announcements, overt and covert signals, familiar characteristics, or implicit allusions. It awakens memories of that which was already read, brings the reader to a specific emotional attitude, and with its beginning arouses expectations for the "middle and end," which can then be maintained intact or altered, reoriented, or even fulfilled ironically in the course of the reading according to specific rules of the genre or type of text. The psychic process in the reception of a text is, in the primary horizon of aesthetic experience, by no means only an arbitrary series of merely subjective impressions, but rather the carrying out of specific instructions in a process of directed perception, which can be comprehended according to its constitutive motivations and triggering signals, and which also can be described by a textual linguistics. If, along with W. D. Stempel, one defines the initial horizon of expectations of a text as paradigmatic isotopy, which is transposed into an immanent syntagmatic horizon of expectations to the extent that the utterance grows, then the process of reception becomes describable in the expansion of a semiotic system that accomplishes itself between the development and the correction of a system.<sup>77</sup> A corresponding process of the continuous establishing and altering of horizons also determines the relationship of the individual text to the succession of texts that forms the genre. The new text evokes for the reader (listener) the horizon of expectations and rules familiar from earlier texts, which are then varied, corrected, altered, or even just reproduced. Variation and correction determine the scope, whereas alteration and reproduction determine the borders of a genre-structure.<sup>78</sup> The interpretative reception of a text always presupposes the context of experience of aesthetic perception: the question of the subjectivity of the interpretation and of the taste of different readers or levels of readers can be asked meaningfully only when one has first clarified which transsubjective horizon of understanding conditions the influence of the text.

The ideal cases of the objective capability of such literary-historical

frames of reference are works that evoke the reader's horizon of expectations, formed by a convention of genre, style, or form, only in order to destroy it step by step—which by no means serves a critical purpose only, but can itself once again produce poetic effects. Thus Cervantes allows the horizon of expectations of the favorite old tales of knighthood to arise out of the reading of *Don Quixote*, which the adventure of his last knight then seriously parodies.<sup>79</sup> Thus Diderot, at the beginning of *Jacques le Fataliste*, evokes the horizon of expectations of the popular novelistic schema of the "journey" (with the fictive questions of the reader to the narrator) along with the (Aristotelian) convention of the romanesque fable and the providence unique to it, so that he can then provocatively oppose to the promised journey- and love-novel a completely unromanesque "vérité de l'histoire": the bizarre reality and moral casuistry of the enclosed stories in which the truth of life continually denies the mendacious character of poetic fiction.<sup>80</sup> Thus Nerval in the *Chimères* cites, combines, and mixes a quintessence of well-known romantic and occult motifs to produce the horizon of expectations of a mythical metamorphosis of the world only in order to signify his renunciation of romantic poetry. The identifications and relationships of the mythic state that are familiar or disclosable to the reader dissolve into an unknown to the same degree as the attempted private myth of the lyrical "I" fails, the law of sufficient information is broken, and the obscurity that has become expressive itself gains a poetic function.<sup>81</sup>

\* There is also the possibility of objectifying the horizon of expectations in works that are historically less sharply delineated. For the specific disposition toward a particular work that the author anticipates from the audience can also be arrived at, even if explicit signals are lacking, through three generally presupposed factors: first, through familiar norms or the immanent poetics of the genre; second, through the implicit relationships to familiar works of the literary-historical surroundings; and third, through the opposition between fiction and reality, between the poetic and the practical function, of language, which is always available to the reflective reader during the reading as a possibility of comparison. The third factor includes the possibility that the reader of a new work can perceive it within the narrower horizon of literary expectations, as well as within the wider horizon of experience of life. I shall return to this horizontal structure, and its ability to be objectified by means of the hermeneutics of question and answer, in the discussion of the relationship between literature and lived praxis (see XII).

## VIII

Thesis 3. Reconstructed in this way, the horizon of expectations of a work allows one to determine its artistic character by the kind and the degree of its influence on a presupposed audience. If one characterizes as aesthetic distance the disparity between the given horizon of expectations and the appearance of a new work, whose reception can result in a "change of horizons" through negation of familiar experiences or through raising newly articulated experiences to the level of consciousness, then this aesthetic distance can be objectified historically along the spectrum of the audience's reactions and criticism's judgment (spontaneous success, rejection or shock, scattered approval, gradual or belated understanding).

\* The way in which a literary work, at the historical moment of its appearance, satisfies, surpasses, disappoints, or refutes the expectations of its first audience obviously provides a criterion for the determination of its aesthetic value. The distance between the horizon of expectations and the work, between the familiarity of previous aesthetic experience and the "horizontal change"<sup>82</sup> demanded by the reception of the new work, determines the artistic character of a literary work, according to an aesthetics of reception: to the degree that this distance decreases, and no turn toward the horizon of yet-unknown experience is demanded of the receiving consciousness, the closer the work comes to the sphere of "culinary" or entertainment art [*Unterhaltungskunst*]. This latter work can be characterized by an aesthetics of reception as not demanding any horizontal change, but rather as precisely fulfilling the expectations prescribed by a ruling standard of taste, in that it satisfies the desire for the reproduction of the familiarly beautiful; confirms familiar sentiments; sanctions wishful notions; makes unusual experiences enjoyable as "sensations"; or even raises moral problems, but only to "solve" them in an edifying manner as predecided questions.<sup>83</sup> If, conversely, the artistic character of a work is to be measured by the aesthetic distance with which it opposes the expectations of its first audience, then it follows that this distance, at first experienced as a pleasing or alienating new perspective, can disappear for later readers, to the extent that the original negativity of the work has become self-evident and has itself entered into the horizon of future aesthetic experience, as a henceforth familiar expectation. The classical character of the so-called masterworks especially belongs to this second horizontal change;<sup>84</sup> their beautiful form that has become self-evident, and their seemingly unquestionable "eternal meaning"

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bring them, according to an aesthetics of reception, dangerously close to the irresistibly convincing and enjoyable "culinary" art, so that it requires a special effort to read them "against the grain" of the accustomed experience to catch sight of their artistic character once again (see section X).

The relationship between literature and audience includes more than the facts that every work has its own specific, historically and sociologically determinable audience, that every writer is dependent on the milieu, views, and ideology of his audience, and that literary success presupposes a book "which expresses what the group expects, a book which presents the group with its own image."<sup>85</sup> This objectivist determination of literary success according to the congruence of the work's intention with the expectations of a social group always leads literary sociology into a dilemma whenever later or ongoing influence is to be explained. Thus R. Escarpit wants to presuppose a "collective basis in space or time" for the "illusion of the lasting quality" of a writer, which in the case of Molière leads to an astonishing prognosis: "Molière is still young for the Frenchman of the twentieth century because his world still lives, and a sphere of culture, views, and language still binds us to him. . . . But the sphere becomes ever smaller, and Molière will age and die when the things which our culture still has in common with the France of Molière die" (p. 117). As if Molière had only mirrored the "mores of his time" and had only remained successful through this supposed intention! Where the congruence between work and social group does not exist, or no longer exists, as for example with the reception of a work in a foreign language, Escarpit is able to help himself by inserting a "myth" in between: "myths that are invented by a later world for which the reality that they substitute for has become alien" (p. 111). As if all reception beyond the first, socially determined audience for a work were only a "distorted echo," only a result of "subjective myths," and did not itself have its objective a priori once again in the received work as the limit and possibility of later understanding! The sociology of literature does not view its object dialectically enough when it determines the circle of author, work, and audience so one-sidedly.<sup>86</sup> The determination is reversible: there are works that at the moment of their appearance are not yet directed at any specific audience, but that break through the familiar horizon of literary expectations so completely that an audience can only gradually develop for them.<sup>87</sup> When, then, the new horizon of expectations has achieved more general currency, the power of the altered aesthetic norm can be demonstrated in that the audience

experiences formerly successful works as outmoded, and withdraws its appreciation. Only in view of such horizontal change does the analysis of literary influence achieve the dimension of a literary history of readers,<sup>88</sup> and do the statistical curves of the bestsellers provide historical knowledge.

A literary sensation from the year 1857 may serve as an example. Alongside Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, which has since become world-famous, appeared his friend Feydeau's *Fanny*, today forgotten. Although Flaubert's novel brought with it a trial for offending public morals, *Madame Bovary* was at first overshadowed by Feydeau's novel: *Fanny* went through thirteen editions in one year, achieving a success the likes of which Paris had not experienced since Chateaubriand's *Atala*. Thematically considered, both novels met the expectations of a new audience that—in Baudelaire's analysis—had foresworn all romanticism, and despised great as well as naive passions equally:<sup>89</sup> they treated a trivial subject, infidelity in a bourgeois and provincial milieu. Both authors understood how to give to the conventional, ossified triangular relationship a sensational twist that went beyond the expected details of the erotic scenes. They put the worn-out theme of jealousy in a new light by reversing the expected relationship between the three classic roles: Feydeau has the youthful lover of the *femme de trente ans* become jealous of his lover's husband despite his having already fulfilled his desires, and perishing over this agonizing situation; Flaubert gives the adulteries of the doctor's wife in the provinces—interpreted by Baudelaire as a sublime form of *dandysme*—the surprise ending that precisely the laughable figure of the cuckolded Charles Bovary takes on dignified traits at the end. In the official criticism of the time, one finds voices that reject *Fanny* as well as *Madame Bovary* as a product of the new school of *réalisme*, which they reproach for denying everything ideal and attacking the ideas on which the social order of the Second Empire was founded.<sup>90</sup> The audience's horizon of expectations in 1857, here only vaguely sketched in, which did not expect anything great from the novel after Balzac's death,<sup>91</sup> explains the different success of the two novels only when the question of the effect of their narrative form is posed. Flaubert's formal innovation, his principle of "impersonal narration" (*impassibilité*)—attacked by Barbey d'Aurevilly with the comparison that if a story-telling machine could be cast of English steel it would function no differently than Monsieur Flaubert<sup>92</sup>—must have shocked the same audience that was offered the provocative contents of *Fanny* in the inviting tone of a confessional novel. It could also find incorporated in

Feydeau's descriptions the modish ideals and suppressed desires of a stylish level of society,<sup>93</sup> and could delight without restraint in the lascivious central scene in which Fanny (without suspecting that her lover is watching from the balcony) seduces her husband—for the moral indignation was already diminished for them through the reaction of the unhappy witness. As *Madame Bovary*, however, became a worldwide success, when at first it was understood and appreciated as a turning-point in the history of the novel by only a small circle of connoisseurs, the audience of novel-readers that was formed by it came to sanction the new canon of expectations; this canon made Feydeau's weaknesses—his flowery style, his modish effects, his lyrical-confessional clichés—unbearable, and allowed *Fanny* to fade into yesterday's bestseller.

## IX

Thesis 4. The reconstruction of the horizon of expectations, in the face of which a work was created and received in the past, enables one on the other hand to pose questions that the text gave an answer to, and thereby to discover how the contemporary reader could have viewed and understood the work. This approach corrects the mostly unrecognized norms of a classicist or modernizing understanding of art, and avoids the circular recourse to a general "spirit of the age." It brings to view the hermeneutic difference between the former and the current understanding of a work; it raises to consciousness the history of its reception, which mediates both positions; and it thereby calls into question as a platonizing dogma of philological metaphysics the apparently self-evident claims that in the literary text, literature [Dichtung] is eternally present, and that its objective meaning, determined once and for all, is at all times immediately accessible to the interpreter.

The method of historical reception<sup>94</sup> is indispensable for the understanding of literature from the distant past. When the author of a work is unknown, his intent undeclared, and his relationship to sources and models only indirectly accessible, the philological question of how the text is "properly"—that is, "from its intention and time"—to be understood can best be answered if one foregrounds it against those works that the author explicitly or implicitly presupposed his contemporary audience to know. The creator of the oldest branches of the *Roman de Renart*, for example, assumes—as his prologue testifies—that his listeners know romances like the story of

Troy and *Tristan*, heroic epics (*chansons de geste*), and verse fables (*fabliaux*), and that they are therefore curious about the “unprecedented war between the two barons, Renart and Ysengrin,” which is to overshadow everything already known. The works and genres that are evoked are then all ironically touched on in the course of the narrative. From this horizontal change one can probably also explain the public success, reaching far beyond France, of this rapidly famous work that for the first time took a position opposed to all the long-reigning heroic and courtly poetry.<sup>95</sup>

Philological research long misunderstood the originally satiric intention of the medieval *Reineke Fuchs* and, along with it, the ironic-didactic meaning of the analogy between animal and human natures, because ever since Jacob Grimm it had remained trapped within the romantic notion of pure nature poetry and naive animal tales. Thus, to give yet a second example of modernizing norms, one could also rightly reproach French research into the epic since Bédier for living—unconsciously—by the criteria of Boileau’s poetics, and judging a nonclassical literature by the norms of simplicity, harmony of part and whole, probability, and still others.<sup>96</sup> The philological-critical method is obviously not protected by its historical objectivism from the interpreter who, supposedly bracketing himself, nonetheless raises his own aesthetic preconceptions to an unacknowledged norm and unreflectively modernizes the meaning of the past text. Whoever believes that the “timelessly true” meaning of a literary work must immediately, and simply through one’s mere absorption in the text, disclose itself to the interpreter as if he had a standpoint outside of history and beyond all “errors” of his predecessors and of the historical reception—whoever believes this “conceals the involvement of the historical consciousness itself in the history of influence.” He denies “those presuppositions—certainly not arbitrary but rather fundamental—that govern his own understanding,” and can only feign an objectivity “that in truth depends upon the legitimacy of the questions asked.”<sup>97</sup>

In *Truth and Method* Hans-Georg Gadamer, whose critique of historical objectivism I am assuming here, described the principle of the history of influence, which seeks to present the reality of history in understanding itself,<sup>98</sup> as an application of the logic of question and answer to the historical tradition. In a continuation of Collingwood’s thesis that “one can understand a text only when one has understood the question to which it is an answer,”<sup>99</sup> Gadamer demonstrates that the reconstructed question can no longer stand within its original horizon because this historical horizon is always

already enveloped within the horizon of the present: "Understanding is always the process of the fusion of these horizons that we suppose to exist by themselves."<sup>100</sup> The historical question cannot exist for itself; it must merge with the question "that the tradition is for us."<sup>101</sup> One thereby solves the question with which René Wellek described the aporia of literary judgment: should the philologist evaluate a literary work according to the perspective of the past, the standpoint of the present, or the "verdict of the ages"?<sup>102</sup> The actual standards of a past could be so narrow that their use would only make poorer a work that in the history of its influence had unfolded a rich semantic potential. The aesthetic judgment of the present would favor a canon of works that correspond to modern taste, but would unjustly evaluate all other works only because their function in their time is no longer evident. And the history of influence itself, as instructive as it might be, is as "authority open to the same objections as the authority of the author's contemporaries."<sup>103</sup> Wellek's conclusion—that there is no possibility of avoiding our own judgment; one must only make this judgment as objective as possible in that one does what every scholar does, namely, "isolate the object"<sup>104</sup>—is no solution to the aporia, but rather a relapse into objectivism. The "verdict of the ages" on a literary work is more than merely "the accumulated judgment of other readers, critics, viewers, and even professors";<sup>105</sup> it is the successive unfolding of the potential for meaning that is embedded in a work and actualized in the stages of its historical reception as it discloses itself to understanding judgment, so long as this faculty achieves in a controlled fashion the "fusion of horizons" in the encounter with the tradition.

The agreement between my attempt to establish a possible literary history on the basis of an (aesthetics of reception) and H.-G. Gadamer's principle of the history of influence nonetheless reaches its limit where Gadamer would like to elevate the concept of the classical to the status of prototype for all historical mediation of past with present. His definition, that "what we call 'classical' does not first require the overcoming of historical distance—for in its own constant mediation it achieves this overcoming,"<sup>106</sup> falls out of the relationship of question and answer that is constitutive of all historical tradition. If classical is "what says something to the present as if it were actually said to it,"<sup>107</sup> then for the classical text one would not first seek the question to which it gives an answer. Doesn't the classical, which "signifies itself and interprets itself,"<sup>108</sup> merely describe the result of what I called the "second horizontal change": the unquestioned, self-evident character of the so-called "masterwork," which

conceals its original negativity within the retrospective horizon of an exemplary tradition, and which necessitates our regaining the "right horizon of questioning" once again in the face of the confirmed classicism? Even with the classical work, the receiving consciousness is not relieved of the task of recognizing the "tensional relationship between the text and the present."<sup>109</sup> The concept of the classical that interprets itself, taken over from Hegel, must lead to a reversal of the historical relationship of question and answer,<sup>110</sup> and contradicts the principle of the history of influence that understanding is "not merely a reproductive, but always a productive attitude as well."<sup>111</sup>

This contradiction is evidently conditioned by Gadamer's holding fast to a concept of classical art that is not capable of serving as a general foundation for an aesthetics of reception beyond the period of its origination, namely, that of humanism. It is the concept of *mimesis*, understood as "recognition," as Gadamer demonstrates in his ontological explanation of the experience of art: "What one actually experiences in a work of art and what one is directed toward is rather how true it is, that is, to what extent one knows and recognizes something and oneself."<sup>112</sup> This concept of art can be validated for the humanist period of art, but not for its preceding medieval period and not at all for its succeeding period of our modernity, in which the aesthetics of *mimesis* has lost its obligatory character, along with the substantialist metaphysics ("knowledge of essence") that founded it. The epistemological significance of art does not, however, come to an end with this period-change, whence it becomes evident that art was in no way bound to the classical function of recognition.<sup>113</sup> The work of art can also mediate knowledge that does not fit into the Platonic schema if it anticipates paths of future experience, imagines as-yet-untested models of perception and behavior, or contains an answer to newly posed questions.<sup>114</sup> It is precisely concerning this virtual significance and productive function in the process of experience that the history of the influence of literature is abbreviated when one gathers the mediation of past art and the present under the concept of the *classical*. If, according to Gadamer, the classical *itself* is supposed to achieve the overcoming of historical distance through its constant mediation, it must, as a perspective of the hypostatized tradition, displace the insight that classical art at the time of its production did not yet appear "classical": rather, it could open up new ways of seeing things and preform new experiences that only in historical distance—in the recognition of what is now familiar—give rise to the appearance that a timeless truth expresses itself in the work of art.

The influence of even the great literary works of the past can be compared neither with a self-mediating event nor with an emanation: the tradition of art also presupposes a dialogical relationship of the present to the past, according to which the past work can answer and “say something” to us only when the present observer has posed the question that draws it back out of its seclusion. When, in *Truth and Method*, understanding is conceived—analogue to Heidegger’s “event of being” [*Seinsgeschehen*]—as “the placing of oneself within a process of tradition in which past and present are constantly mediated,”<sup>115</sup> the “productive moment which lies in understanding”<sup>116</sup> must be shortchanged. This productive function of progressive understanding, which necessarily also includes criticizing the tradition and forgetting it, shall in the following sections establish the basis for the project of a literary history according to an aesthetics of reception. This project must consider the historicity of literature in a threefold manner: diachronically in the interrelationships of the reception of literary works (see X), synchronically in the frame of reference of literature of the same moment, as well as in the sequence of such frames (see XI), and finally in the relationship of the immanent literary development to the general process of history (see XII).

## X

Thesis 5. The theory of the aesthetics of reception not only allows one to conceive the meaning and form of a literary work in the historical unfolding of its understanding. It also demands that one insert the individual work into its “literary series” to recognize its historical position and significance in the context of the experience of literature. In the step from a history of the reception of works to an eventful history of literature, the latter manifests itself as a process in which the passive reception is on the part of authors. Put another way, the next work can solve formal and moral problems left behind by the last work, and present new problems in turn.

How can the individual work, which positivistic literary history determined in a chronological series and thereby reduced to the status of a “fact,” be brought back into its historical-sequential relationship and thereby once again be understood as an “event”? The theory of the Formalist school, as already mentioned, would solve this problem with its principle of “literary evolution,” according to which the new work arises against the background of preceding or competing works,

reaches the "high point" of a literary period as a successful form, is quickly reproduced and thereby increasingly automatized, until finally, when the next form has broken through, the former vegetates on as a used-up genre in the quotidian sphere of literature. If one were to analyze and describe a literary period according to this program—which to date has hardly been put into use<sup>117</sup>—one could expect a representation that would in various respects be superior to that of the conventional literary history. Instead of the works standing in closed series, themselves standing one after another and unconnected, at best framed by a sketch of general history—for example, the series of the works of an author, a particular school, or one kind of style, as well as the series of various genres—the Formalist method would relate the series to one another and *discover the evolutionary alternating relationship of functions and forms*.<sup>118</sup> The works that thereby stand out from, correspond to, or replace one another would appear as moments of a process that no longer needs to be construed as tending toward some end point, since as the *dialectical self-production of new forms* it requires no teleology. Seen in this way, the autonomous dynamics of literary evolution would furthermore eliminate the dilemma of the criteria of selection: the criterion here is the work as a new form in the literary series, and not the self-reproduction of worn-out forms, artistic devices, and genres, which pass into the background until at a new moment in the evolution they are made "perceptible" once again. Finally, in the Formalist project of a literary history that understands itself as "evolution" and—contrary to the usual sense of this term—excludes any directional course, the historical character of a work becomes synonymous with literature's historical character: the "evolutionary" significance and characteristics of a literary phenomenon presuppose innovation as the decisive feature, just as a work of art is perceived against the background of other works of art.<sup>119</sup>

The Formalist theory of "literary evolution" is certainly one of the most significant attempts at a renovation of literary history. The recognition that historical changes also occur within a system in the field of literature, the attempted functionalization of literary development, and, not least of all, the theory of automatization—these are achievements that are to be held onto, even if the one-sided canonization of change requires a correction. Criticism has already displayed the weaknesses of the Formalist theory of evolution: mere opposition or aesthetic variation does not suffice to explain the growth of literature; the question of the direction of change of literary forms remains unanswerable; innovation for itself does not alone

make up artistic character; and the connection between literary evolution and social change does not vanish from the face of the earth through its mere negation.<sup>120</sup> My thesis XII responds to the last question; the problematic of the remaining questions demands that the descriptive literary theory of the Formalists be opened up, through an aesthetics of reception, to the dimension of historical experience that must also include the historical standpoint of the present observer, that is, the literary historian.

The description of literary evolution as a ceaseless struggle between the new and the old, or as the alternation of the canonization and automatization of forms reduces the historical character of literature to the one-dimensional actuality of its changes and limits historical understanding to their perception. The alterations in the literary series nonetheless only become a historical sequence when the opposition of the old and new form also allows one to recognize their specific mediation. This mediation, which includes the step from the old to the new form in the interaction of work and recipient (audience, critic, new producer) as well as that of past event and successive reception, can be methodologically grasped in the formal and substantial problem "that each work of art, as the horizon of the 'solutions' which are possible after it, poses and leaves behind."<sup>121</sup> The mere description of the altered structure and the new artistic devices of a work does not necessarily lead to this problem, nor, therefore, back to its function in the historical series. To determine this, that is, to recognize the problem left behind to which the new work in the historical series is the answer, the interpreter must bring his own experience into play, since the past horizon of old and new forms, problems and solutions, is only recognizable in its further mediation, within the present horizon of the received work. Literary history as "literary evolution" presupposes the historical process of aesthetic reception and production up to the observer's present as the condition for the mediation of all formal oppositions or "differential qualities" [*"Differenzqualitäten"*].<sup>122</sup>

Founding "literary evolution" on an aesthetics of reception thus not only returns its lost direction insofar as the standpoint of the literary historian becomes the vanishing point—but not the goal!—of the process. It also opens to view the temporal depths of literary experience, in that it allows one to recognize the variable distance between the actual and the virtual significance of a literary work. This means that the artistic character of a work, whose semantic potential Formalism reduces to innovation as the single criterion of value, must in no way always be immediately perceptible within the

horizon of its first appearance, let alone that it could then also already be exhausted in the pure opposition between the old and the new form. The distance between the actual first perception of a work and its virtual significance, or, put another way, the resistance that the new work poses to the expectations of its first audience, can be so great that it requires a long process of reception to gather in that which was unexpected and unusable within the first horizon. It can thereby happen that a virtual significance of the work remains long unrecognized until the "literary evolution," through the actualization of a newer form, reaches the horizon that now for the first time allows one to find access to the understanding of the misunderstood older form. Thus the obscure lyrics of Mallarmé and his school prepared the ground for the return to baroque poetry, long since unappreciated and therefore forgotten, and in particular for the philological reinterpretation and "rebirth" of Góngora. One can line up the examples of how a new literary form can reopen access to forgotten literature. These include the so-called "renaissances"—so-called, because the word's meaning gives rise to the appearance of an automatic return, and often prevents one from recognizing that literary tradition can not transmit itself alone. That is, a literary past can return only when a new reception draws it back into the present, whether an altered aesthetic attitude willfully reaches back to reappropriate the past, or an unexpected light falls back on forgotten literature from the new moment of literary evolution, allowing something to be found that one previously could not have sought in it.<sup>123</sup>

The new is thus not only an *aesthetic* category. It is not absorbed into the factors of innovation, surprise, surpassing, rearrangement, or alienation, to which the Formalist theory assigned exclusive importance. The new also becomes a *historical* category when the diachronic analysis of literature is pushed further to ask which historical moments are really the ones that first make new that which is new in a literary phenomenon; to what degree this new element is already perceptible in the historical instant of its emergence; which distance, path, or detour of understanding were required for its realization in content; and whether the moment of its full actualization was so influential that it could alter the perspective on the old, and thereby the canonization of the literary past.<sup>124</sup> How the relationship of poetic theory to aesthetically productive praxis is represented in this light has already been discussed in another context.<sup>125</sup> The possibilities of the interaction between production and reception in the historical change of aesthetic attitudes are admittedly far from

exhausted by these remarks. Here they should above all illustrate the dimension into which a diachronic view of literature leads when it would no longer be satisfied to consider a chronological series of literary facts as already the historical appearance of literature.

## XI

Thesis 6. The achievements made in linguistics through the distinction and methodological interrelation of diachronic and synchronic analysis are the occasion for overcoming the diachronic perspective—previously the only one practiced—in literary history as well. If the perspective of the history of reception always bumps up against the functional connections between the understanding of new works and the significance of older ones when changes in aesthetic attitudes are considered, it must also be possible to take a synchronic cross-section of a moment in the development, to arrange the heterogeneous multiplicity of contemporaneous works in equivalent, opposing, and hierarchical structures, and thereby to discover an overarching system of relationships in the literature of a historical moment. From this the principle of representation of a new literary history could be developed, if further cross-sections diachronically before and after were so arranged as to articulate historically the change in literary structures in its epoch-making moments.

Siegfried Kracauer has most decisively questioned the primacy of the diachronic perspective in historiography. His study "Time and History"<sup>126</sup> disputes the claim of "General History" to render comprehensible events from all spheres of life within a homogeneous medium of chronological time as a unified process, consistent in each historical moment. This understanding of history, still standing under the influence of Hegel's concept of the "objective spirit," presupposes that everything that happens contemporaneously is equally informed by the significance of this moment, and it thereby conceals the actual noncontemporaneity of the contemporaneous.<sup>127</sup> For the multiplicity of events of one historical moment, which the universal historian believes can be understood as exponents of a unified content, are de facto moments of entirely different time-curves, conditioned by the laws of their "special history,"<sup>128</sup> as becomes immediately evident in the discrepancies of the various "histories" of the arts, law, economics, politics, and so forth: "The shaped times of the diverse areas overshadow the uniform flow of time. Any historical period

must therefore be imagined as a mixture of events which emerge at different moments of their own time."<sup>129</sup>

It is not in question here whether this state of affairs presupposes a primary inconsistency to history, so that the consistency of general history always only arises retrospectively from the unifying viewpoint and representation of the historian; or whether the radical doubt concerning "historical reason," which Kracauer extends from the pluralism of chronological and morphological courses of time to the fundamental antinomy of the general and the particular in history, in fact proves that universal history is philosophically illegitimate today. For the sphere of literature in any case, one can say that Kracauer's insights into the "coexistence of the contemporaneous and non-contemporaneous,"<sup>130</sup> far from leading historical knowledge into an aporia, rather make apparent the necessity and possibility of discovering the historical dimension of literary phenomena in synchronic cross-sections. For it follows from these insights that the chronological fiction of the moment that informs all contemporaneous phenomena corresponds as little to the historicity of literature as does the morphological fiction of a homogeneous literary series, in which all phenomena in their sequential order only follow immanent laws. The purely diachronic perspective, however conclusively it might explain changes in, for example, the histories of genres according to the immanent logic of innovation and automatization, problem and solution, nonetheless only arrives at the properly historical dimension when it breaks through the morphological canon, to confront the work that is important in historical influence with the historically worn-out, conventional works of the genre, and at the same time does not ignore its relationship to the literary milieu in which it had to make its way alongside works of other genres.

The historicity of literature comes to light at the intersections of diachrony and synchrony. Thus it must also be possible to make the literary horizon of a specific historical moment comprehensible as that synchronic system in relation to which literature that appears contemporaneously could be received diachronically in relations of noncontemporaneity, and the work could be received as current or not, as modish, outdated, or perennial, as premature or belated.<sup>131</sup> For if, from the point of view of an aesthetics of production, literature that appears contemporaneously breaks down into a heterogeneous multiplicity of the noncontemporaneous, that is, of works informed by the various moments of the "shaped time" of their genre (as the seemingly present heavenly constellations move apart astro-

nomically into points of the most different temporal distance), this multiplicity of literary phenomena nonetheless, when seen from the point of view of an aesthetics of reception, coalesces again for the audience that perceives them and relates them to one another as works of *its* present, in the unity of a common horizon of literary expectations, memories, and anticipations that establishes their significance.

Since each synchronic system must contain its past and its future as inseparable structural elements,<sup>132</sup> the synchronic cross-section of the literary production of a historical point in time necessarily implies further cross-sections that are diachronically before and after. Analogous to the history of language, constant and variable factors are thereby brought to light that can be localized as functions of a system. For literature as well is a kind of grammar or syntax; with relatively fixed relations of its own: the arrangement of the traditional and the uncanonized genres; modes of expression, kinds of style, and rhetorical figures; contrasted with this arrangement is the much more variable realm of a semantics: the literary subjects, archetypes, symbols, and metaphors. One can therefore seek to erect for literary history an analogy to that which Hans Blumenberg has postulated for the history of philosophy, elucidating it through examples of the change in periods and, in particular, the successional relationship of Christian theology and philosophy, and grounding it in his historical logic of question and answer: a "formal system of the explanation of the world . . . , within which structure the reshufflings can be localized which make up the process-like character of history up to the radicality of period-changes."<sup>133</sup> Once the substantialist notion of a self-reproducing literary tradition has been overcome through a functional explanation of the processlike relationships of production and reception, it must also be possible to recognize behind the *transformation* of literary forms and contents those *reshufflings* in a literary system of world-understanding that make the horizontal change in the process of aesthetic experience comprehensible.

From these premises one could develop the principle of representation of a literary history that would neither have to follow the all too familiar high road of the traditional great books, nor have to lose itself in the lowlands of the sum-total of all texts that can no longer be historically articulated. The problem of selecting that which is important for a new history of literature can be solved with the help of the synchronic perspective in a manner that has not yet been attempted: a horizontal change in the historical process of

“literary evolution” need not be pursued only throughout the web of all the diachronic facts and filiations, but can also be established in the altered remains of the synchronic literary system and read out of further cross-sectional analyses. In principle, a representation of literature in the historical succession of such systems would be possible through a series of arbitrary points of intersection between diachrony and synchrony. The historical dimension of literature, its eventful continuity that is lost in traditionalism as in positivism, can meanwhile be recovered only if the literary historian finds points of intersection and brings works to light that articulate the processlike character of “literary evolution” in its moments formative of history as well as its caesurae between periods. But neither statistics nor the subjective willfulness of the literary historian decides on this historical articulation, but rather the history of influence: that “which results from the event” and which from the perspective of the present constitutes the coherence of literature as the prehistory of its present manifestation.

## XII

Thesis 7. The task of literary history is thus only completed when literary production is not only represented synchronically and diachronically in the succession of its systems, but also seen as “special history” in its own unique relationship to “general history.” This relationship does not end with the fact that a typified, idealized, satiric, or utopian image of social existence can be found in the literature of all times. The social function of literature manifests itself in its genuine possibility only where the literary experience of the reader enters into the horizon of expectations of his lived praxis, preforms his understanding of the world, and thereby also has an effect on his social behavior.

The functional connection between literature and society is for the most part demonstrated in traditional literary sociology within the narrow boundaries of a method that has only superficially replaced the classical principle of *imitatio naturae* with the determination that literature is the representation of a pre-given reality, which therefore must elevate a concept of style conditioned by a particular period—the “realism” of the nineteenth century—to the status of the literary category par excellence. But even the literary “structuralism” now fashionable,<sup>134</sup> which appeals, often with dubious justification, to the archetypal criticism of Northrop Frye or to the structural an-

thropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss, still remains quite dependent on this basically classicist aesthetics of representation with its schematizations of "reflection" [Wiederspiegelung] and "typification." By interpreting the findings of linguistic and literary structuralism as archaic anthropological constants disguised in literary myths—which it not infrequently manages only with the help of an obvious allegorization of the text<sup>135</sup>—it reduces on the one hand historical existence to the structures of an original social nature, on the other hand literature to this nature's mythic or symbolic expression. But with this viewpoint, it is precisely the eminently social, i.e., socially *formative* function of literature that is missed. Literary structuralism—as little as the Marxist and Formalist literary studies that came before it—does not inquire as to how literature "itself turns around to help inform . . . the idea of society which it presupposes" and has helped to inform the processlike character of history. With these words, Gerhard Hess formulated in his lecture on "The Image of Society in French Literature" (1954) the unsolved problem of a union of literary history and sociology, and then explained to what extent French literature, in the course of its modern development, could claim for itself to have first discovered certain law-governed characteristics of social existence.<sup>136</sup> To answer the question of the socially formative function of literature according to an aesthetics of reception exceeds the competence of the traditional aesthetics of representation. The attempt to close the gap between literary-historical and sociological research through the methods of an aesthetics of reception is made easier because the concept of the *horizon of expectations* that I introduced into literary-historical interpretation<sup>137</sup> also has played a role in the axiomatics of the social sciences since Karl Mannheim.<sup>138</sup> It likewise stands in the center of a methodological essay on "Natural Laws and Theoretical Systems" by Karl R. Popper, who would anchor the scientific formation of theory in the prescientific experience of lived praxis. Popper here develops the problem of observation from out of the presupposition of a "horizon of expectations," thereby offering a basis of comparison for my attempt to determine the specific achievement of literature in the general process of the formation of experience, and to delimit it vis-à-vis other forms of social behavior.<sup>139</sup>

According to Popper, progress in science has in common with prescientific experience the fact that each hypothesis, like each observation, always presupposes expectations, "namely those that constitute the horizon of expectations which first makes those observations significant and thereby grants them the status of observations."<sup>140</sup> For progress in science as for that in the experience

of life, the most important moment is the "disappointment of expectations": "It resembles the experience of a blind person, who runs into an obstacle and thereby experiences its existence. Through the falsification of our assumptions we actually make contact with 'reality.' The refutation of our errors is the positive experience that we gain from reality."<sup>141</sup> This model certainly does not sufficiently explain the process of the scientific formation of theory,<sup>142</sup> and yet it can well illustrate the "productive meaning of negative experience" in lived praxis,<sup>143</sup> as well as shed a clearer light upon the specific function of literature in social existence. For the reader is privileged above the (hypothetical) nonreader because the reader—to stay with Popper's image—does not first have to bump into a new obstacle to gain a new experience of reality. The experience of reading can liberate one from adaptations, prejudices, and predicaments of a lived praxis in that it compels one to a new perception of things. The horizon of expectations of literature distinguishes itself before the horizon of expectations of historical lived praxis in that it not only preserves actual experiences, but also anticipates unrealized possibility, broadens the limited space of social behavior for new desires, claims, and goals, and thereby opens paths of future experience.

The pre-orientation of our experience through the creative capability of literature rests not only on its artistic character, which by virtue of a new form helps one to break through the automatism of everyday perception. The new form of art is not only "perceived against the background of other art works and through association with them." In this famous sentence, which belongs to the core of the Formalist credo,<sup>144</sup> Viktor Shklovsky remains correct only insofar as he turns against the prejudice of classicist aesthetics that defines the beautiful as *harmony of form and content* and accordingly reduces the new form to the secondary function of giving shape to a pre-given content. The new form, however, does not appear just "in order to relieve the old form that already is no longer artistic." It also can make possible a new perception of things by preforming the content of a new experience first brought to light in the form of literature. The relationship between literature and reader can actualize itself in the sensorial realm as an incitement to aesthetic perception as well as in the ethical realm as a summons to moral reflection.<sup>145</sup> The new literary work is received and judged against the background of other works of art as well as against the background of the everyday experience of life. Its social function in the ethical realm is to be grasped according to an aesthetics of reception in the same modalities of question and answer, problem and solution,

under which it enters into the horizon of its historical influence.

How a new aesthetic form can have moral consequences at the same time, or, put another way, how it can have the greatest conceivable impact on a moral question, is demonstrated in an impressive manner by the case of *Madame Bovary*, as reflected in the trial that was instituted against the author Flaubert after the prepublication of the work in the *Révue de Paris* in 1857. The new literary form that compelled Flaubert's audience to an unfamiliar perception of the "well-thumbed fable" was the principle of impersonal (or uninvolved) narration, in conjunction with the artistic device of the so-called *style indirect libre*, handled by Flaubert like a virtuoso and in a perspectively consequential manner. What is meant by this can be made clear with a quotation from the book, a description that the prosecuting attorney Pinard accused in his indictment as being immoral in the highest degree. In the novel it follows upon Emma's first "false step" and relates how she catches sight of herself in the mirror after her adultery:

Seeing herself in the mirror she wondered at her face. Never had her eyes been so large, so black, or so deep. Something subtle spread about her being transfigured her.

She repeated: "I have a lover! a lover!", delighting at the idea as at that of a second puberty that had come to her. So at last she was going to possess those joys of love, that fever of happiness of which she had despaired. She was entering upon something marvelous where all would be passion, ecstasy, delirium.

The prosecuting attorney took the last sentences for an objective depiction that included the judgment of the narrator and was upset over the "glorification of adultery" which he held to be even much more dangerous and immoral than the false step itself.<sup>146</sup> Yet Flaubert's accuser thereby succumbed to an error, as the defense immediately demonstrated. For the incriminating sentences are not any objective statement of the narrator's to which the reader can attribute belief, but rather a subjective opinion of the character, who is thereby to be characterized in her feelings that are formed according to novels. The artistic device consists in bringing forth a mostly inward discourse of the represented character without the signals of direct discourse ("So I am at last going to possess") or indirect discourse ("She said to herself that she was therefore at last going to possess"), with the effect that the reader himself has to decide whether he should take the sentence for a true declaration or understand it as an opinion characteristic of this character. Indeed, Emma Bovary is "judged, simply through a plain description of her exist-

ence, out of her own feelings."<sup>147</sup> This result of a modern stylistic analysis agrees exactly with the counterargument of the defense attorney Sénard, who emphasized that the disillusion began for Emma already from the second day onward: "The dénouement for morality is found in each line of the book"<sup>148</sup> (only that Sénard himself could not yet name the artistic device that was not yet recorded at this time!). The consternating effect of the formal innovations of Flaubert's narrative style became evident in the trial: the impersonal form of narration not only compelled his readers to perceive things differently—"photographically exact," according to the judgment of the time—but at the same time thrust them into an alienating uncertainty of judgment. Since the new artistic device broke through an old novelistic convention—the moral judgment of the represented characters that is always unequivocal and confirmed in the description—the novel was able to radicalize or to raise new questions of lived praxis, which during the proceedings caused the original occasion for the accusation—alleged lasciviousness—to recede wholly into the background. The question with which the defense went on its counterattack turned the reproach, that the novel provides nothing other than the "story of a provincial woman's adulteries," against the society: whether, then, the subtitle to *Madame Bovary* must not more properly read, "story of the education too often provided in the provinces."<sup>149</sup> But the question with which the prosecuting attorney's *réquisitoire* reaches its peak is nonetheless not yet thereby answered: "Who can condemn that woman in the book? No one. Such is the conclusion. In the book there is not a character who can condemn her. If you find a wise character there, if you find a single principle there by virtue of which the adultery might be stigmatized, I am in error."<sup>150</sup>

If in the novel none of the represented characters could break the staff across Emma Bovary, and if no moral principle can be found valid in whose name she would be condemnable, then is not the ruling "public opinion" and its basis in "religious feeling" at once called into question along with the "principle of marital fidelity"? Before what court could the case of *Madame Bovary* be brought if the formerly valid social norms—public opinion, religious sentiment, public morals, good manners—are no longer sufficient to reach a verdict in this case?<sup>151</sup> These open and implicit questions by no means indicate an aesthetic lack of understanding and moral philistinism on the part of the prosecuting attorney. Rather, it is much more that in them the unsuspected influence of a new art form comes to be expressed, which through a new *manière de voir les*

*choses* was able to jolt the reader of *Madame Bovary* out of the self-evident character of his moral judgment, and turned a predecided question of public morals back into an open problem. In the face of the vexation that Flaubert, thanks to the artistry of his impersonal style, did not offer any handhold with which to ban his novel on grounds of the author's immorality, the court to that extent acted consistently when it acquitted Flaubert as writer, but condemned the literary school that he was supposed to represent, but that in truth was the as yet unrecognized artistic device:

Whereas it is not permitted, under the pretext of portraying character and local color, to reproduce in their errors the facts, utterances and gestures of the characters whom the author's mission it is to portray; that a like system, applied to works of the spirit as well as to productions of the fine arts, leads to a realism which would be the negation of the beautiful and the good, and which, giving birth to works equally offensive to the eye and to the spirit, would commit continual offences against public morals and good manners.<sup>152</sup>

Thus a literary work with an unfamiliar aesthetic form can break through the expectations of its readers and at the same time confront them with a question, the solution to which remains lacking for them in the religiously or officially sanctioned morals. Instead of further examples, let one only recall here that it was not first Bertolt Brecht, but rather already the Enlightenment that proclaimed the competitive relationship between literature and canonized morals, as Friedrich Schiller not least of all bears witness to when he expressly claims for the bourgeois drama: "The laws of the stage begin where the sphere of worldly laws end."<sup>153</sup> But the literary work can also—and in the history of literature this possibility characterizes the latest period of our modernity—reverse the relationship of question and answer and in the medium of art confront the reader with a new, "opaque" reality that no longer allows itself to be understood from a pre-given horizon of expectations. Thus, for example, the latest genre of novels, the much-discussed *nouveau roman*, presents itself as a form of modern art that according to Edgar Wind's formulation, represents the paradoxical case "that the solution is given, but the problem is given up, so that the solution might be understood as a problem."<sup>154</sup> Here the reader is excluded from the situation of the immediate audience and put in the position of an uninitiated third party who in the face of a reality still without significance must himself find the questions that will decode for him the perception of the world and the interpersonal problem toward which the answer of the literature is directed.

It follows from all of this that the specific achievement of literature in social existence is to be sought exactly where literature is not absorbed into the function of a *representational* art. If one looks at the moments in history when literary works toppled the taboos of the ruling morals or offered the reader new solutions for the moral casuistry of his lived praxis, which thereafter could be sanctioned by the consensus of all readers in the society, then a still-little-studied area of research opens itself up to the literary historian. The gap between literature and history, between aesthetic and historical knowledge, can be bridged if literary history does not simply describe the process of general history in the reflection of its works one more time, but rather when it discovers in the course of "literary evolution" that properly *socially formative* function that belongs to literature as it competes with other arts and social forces in the emancipation of mankind from its natural, religious, and social bonds.

If it is worthwhile for the literary scholar to jump over his ahistorical shadow for the sake of this task, then it might well also provide an answer to the question: toward what end and with what right can one today still—or again—study literary history?