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Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory *

Hans Robert Jauss

LITERARY history may be seen as challenging literary theory to take up once again the unresolved dispute between the Marxist and formalist schools. 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 understand the literary fact in terms of the circular aesthetic system of production and of representation. In doing so, they deprive literature of a dimension which unalterably belongs to its aesthetic character as well as to its social function: its reception and impact. Reader, listener and spectator—in short, the audience—play an extremely limited role in both literary theories. Orthodox Marxist aesthetics treats the reader—if at all—the same way as it does the author; it inquires about his social position or describes his place within the structure of the society. The formalist school needs the reader only as a perceiving subject who follows the directions in the text in order to perceive its form or discover its techniques of procedure. It assumes that the reader has the theoretical knowledge of a philologist sufficiently versed in the tools of literature to be able to reflect on them. The Marxist school, on the other hand, actually equates the spontaneous experience of the reader with the scholarly interest of historical materialism, which seeks to discover relationships between the economic basis of production and the literary work as part of the intellectual superstructure. However, as Walther Bulst has stated, "no text was ever written to be read and interpreted philologically by philologists,"[1] nor, may I add, historically by his-

[1] "Bedenken eines Philologen," *Sturdium générale*, VII (1954), 321-23. The new approach to literary tradition which R. Guiette has sought in a series of pioneering essays (partly in *Questions de littérature* [Gent, 1960]), using his own original methods of combining aesthetic criticism with understanding of history, follows his (unpublished) axiom, "The greatest error of philologists is to believe that literature has been written for philologists." See also his "Eloge de la lecture," *Revue générale belge* (January, 1966), pp. 3-14.

torians. Neither approach recognizes the true role of the reader to whom the literary work is primarily addressed, a role as unalterable for aesthetic as for historical appreciation.

For 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 his tradition and explains it historically are also readers before their reflex relationship to literature can become productive again. In the triangle of author, work and reading public the latter is no passive part, no chain of mere reactions, but even history-making energy. The historical life of a literary work is unthinkable without the active participation of its audience. For it is only through the process of its communication that the work reaches the changing horizon of experience in a continuity in which the continual change occurs from simple reception to critical understanding, from passive to active reception, from recognized aesthetic norms to a new production which surpasses them. The historicity of literature as well as its communicative character presupposes a relation of work, audience and new work which takes the form of a dialogue as well as a process, and which can be understood in the relationship of message and receiver as well as in the relationship of question and answer, problem and solution. The circular system of production and of representation within which the methodology of literary criticism has mainly moved in the past must therefore be widened to include an aesthetics of reception and impact if the problem of understanding the historical sequence of literary works as a continuity of literary history is to find a new solution.

The perspective of the aesthetics of reception mediates between passive reception and active understanding, norm-setting experience and new production. If the history of literature is viewed in this way as a dialogue between work and public, the contrast between its aesthetic and its historical aspects is also continually mediated. Thus the thread from the past appearance to the present experience of a work, which historicism had cut, is tied together.

The relationship of literature and reader has aesthetic as well as historical implications. The aesthetic implication is seen in the fact that the first reception of a work by the reader includes a test of its aesthetic value in comparison with works which he has already read.[2] The obvious historical implication of this is that the appreciation of the first reader will be continued and enriched through further "receptions" from generation to generation; in this way the historical significance

2   This thesis is one of the main points of the *Introduction à une esthétique de la littérature* by G. Picon (Paris, 1953), see esp. pp. 90 ff.

of a work will be determined and its aesthetic value revealed. In this process of the history of reception, which the literary historian can only escape at the price of ignoring his own principles of comprehension and judgment, the repossession of past works occurs simultaneously with the continual 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 degree to which it can take an active part in the continual integration of past art by aesthetic experience. This demands on the one hand—in opposition to the objectivism of positivist literary history—a conscious attempt to establish canons, which, on the other hand—in opposition to the classicism of the study of traditions—presupposes a critical review if not destruction of the traditional literary canon. The criterion for establishing 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 us to see and in turn to present the historical sequence of works in the way in which they determine and clarify our present literary experience.[3]

Literary history can be rewritten on this premise, and the following remarks suggest seven theses that provide a systematic approach to such rewriting.

I

If literary history is to be rejuvenated, the prejudices of historical objectivism must be removed and the traditional approach to literature must be replaced by an aesthetics of reception and impact. The historical relevance of literature is not based on an organization of literary works which is established *post factum* but on the reader's past experience of the "literary data." This relationship creates a dialogue that is the first condition for a literary history. For the literary historian must first become a reader again himself before he can understand and classify a work; in other words, before he can justify his own evaluation in light of his present position in the historical progression of readers.

R. G. Collingwood's criticism of the prevailing ideology of objectivity in history—"History is nothing but the re-enactment of past thought in the historian's mind"[4]—is even more valid for literary history. For the

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3   W. Benjamin (1931) formulated a corresponding idea: "For it is not a question of showing the written works in relation to their time but of presenting the time which knows them—that is our time—in the time when they originated. Thus literature becomes an organon of history and the task of literary history is to make it this—and not to make it the material of history" (*Angelus Novus*, Frankfurt, 1966, p. 456).

4   *The Idea of History* (New York and Oxford, 1956), p. 228.

positivistic view of history as the "objective" description of a series of events in an isolated past neglects the artistic quality as well as the specific historical relevance of literature. A literary work is not an object which stands by itself and which offers the same face to each reader in each period.[5] It is not a monument which reveals its timeless essence in a monologue. It is much more like an orchestration which strikes ever new chords among its readers and which frees the text from the substance of the words and makes it meaningful for the time: "words which must, at the same time that they speak to him, create an interlocutor capable of listening."[6] A literary work must be understood as creating a dialogue, and philological scholarship has to be founded on a continuous re-reading of texts, not on mere facts.[7] Philological scholarship is continuously dependent upon interpretation, which must have as its goal, along with learning about the object, the reflection upon and description of the perfection of this knowledge as an impulse to new understanding.

History of literature is a process of aesthetic reception and production which take place in realization of literary texts on the part of the receptive reader, the reflective critic and the author in his continued creativity. The continuously growing "literary data" which appear in the conventional literary histories are merely left over from this process; they are only the collected and classified past and therefore not history at all, but pseudo-history. Anyone who considers such literary data as history confuses the eventful character of a work of art with that of historical matter-of-factness. *Perceval* by Chrétien de Troyes, a literary event, is not historical in the same sense as the Third Crusade,

5   Here I am following A. Nisin in his criticism of the latent Platonism of philological methods, that is of their belief in the timeless nature of a literary work and in a timeless point of view of the reader: "For the work of art, if it cannot incarnate the essence of art, is no longer an object which we can regard according to the Cartesian rule 'without putting anything of ourselves into it but what can apply indiscriminately to all objects.' "; *La Littérature et le lecteur* (Paris, 1959), p. 57 (see also my critique in *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen,* CXCVII [1960], 223-25).

6   Picon, *Introduction,* p. 34. This view of the dialogue-like nature of a literary work of art is found in Malraux (*Les vois du silence*) as well as in Picon, Nisin, and Guiette—a tradition of literary aesthetics which is still alive in France and to which I am especially indebted; it finally goes back to a famous sentence in Valéry's poetics, "C'est l'exécution du poème qui est le poème."

7   P. Szondi, "Uber philologische Erkenntnis," *Hölderlin-Studien* (Frankfurt, 1967), rightly sees in this the decisive difference between literary and historical scholarship, p. 11: "No commentary, no criticism of the style of a poem should aim to give a description of the poem which one could gain by oneself. Even the least critical reader will want to confront it with the poem and will not understand it until he has traced the course of the argument back to the original idea upon which it was based." Guiette says something very similar in "Éloge de la lecture" (see note 1).

which was occurring at the same time.[8] It is not a "fact" which could be explained as caused by a series of situational preconditions and motives, by the intent of an historical action as it can be reconstructed, and by the necessary and secondary results of this deed as an eventful turning point. The historical context in which a literary work appears is not a factual, independent series of events which exists apart from the reader. *Perceval* becomes a literary event only for the reader who reads this last work of Chrétien in light of his earlier works and who recognizes its individuality in comparison with these and other works which he has already read, so that he gains a new criterion for evaluating works. In contrast to a political event, a literary event has no lasting results which succeeding generations cannot avoid. It can continue to have an effect only if future generations still respond to it or rediscover it—if there are readers who take up the work of the past again or authors who want to imitate, outdo, or refute it. The organization of literature according to events is primarily integrated in the artistic standards of contemporary and succeeding readers, critics, and authors. Whether it is possible to comprehend and present the history of literature in its specific historicity depends on whether these standards can be objectified.

II

The analysis of the literary experience of the reader avoids the threatening pitfalls of psychology if it describes the response and the impact of a work within the definable frame of reference of the reader's expectations: this frame of reference for each work develops in the historical moment of its appearance from a previous understanding of the genre, from the form and themes of already familiar works, and from the contrast between poetic and practical language.

My thesis is opposed to a widespread skepticism that doubts that an analysis of the aesthetic impact can approach the meaning of a work of art or can produce at best more than a plain sociology of artistic taste. René Wellek directs such doubts against the literary theory of I. A. Richards. Wellek argues that neither the individual consciousness, since it is immediate and personal, nor a collective consciousness, as J. Mukarovsky assumes the effect of an art work to be, can be determined by empirical means.[9] Roman Jakobson wanted to replace the "collective consciousness" by a "collective ideology." This he thought of

8   Note also J. Storost, "Das Problem der Literaturgeschichte," *Dante-Jahrbuch*, XXXVIII (1960), 1-17, who simply equates the historical event with the literary event ("A work of art is first of all an artistic achievement and hence historical like the Battle of Isos").

9   R. Wellek, "The Theory of Literary History," *Études dédiées au quatrième Congrès de linguistes*, Travaux du Cercle Linguistique de Prague (Prague, 1936), p. 179.

as a system of values which exists for each literary work as *langue* and which becomes *parole* for the respondent—although incompletely and never as a whole.[10] This theory, it is true, limits the subjectivity of the impact, but it leaves open the question of which data can be used to interpret the impact of a unique work on a certain public and to incorporate it into a system of values. In the meantime there are empirical means which had never been thought of before—literary data which give for each work a specific attitude of the audience (an attitude that precedes the psychological reaction as well as the subjective understanding of the individual reader). As in the case of every experience, the first literary experience of a previously unknown work demands a "previous knowledge which is an element of experience itself and which makes it possible that anything new we come across may also be read, as it were, in some context of experience."[11]

A literary work, even if it seems new, does not appear as something absolutely new in an informational vacuum, but predisposes its readers to a very definite type of reception by textual strategies, overt and covert signals, familiar characteristics or implicit allusions. It awakens memories of the familiar, stirs particular emotions in the reader and with its "beginning" arouses expectations for the "middle and end," which can then be continued intact, changed, re-oriented or even ironically fulfilled in the course of reading according to certain rules of the genre or type of text. The psychical process in the assimilation of a text on the primary horizon of aesthetic experience is by no means only a random succession of merely subjective impressions, but the carrying out of certain directions in a process of directed perception which can be comprehended from the motivations which constitute it and the signals which set it off and which can be described linguistically. If, along with W. D. Stempel, one considers the previous horizon of expectations of a text as paradigmatic isotopy, which is transferred to an immanent syntactical horizon of expectations to the degree to which the message grows, the process of reception becomes describable in the expansion of a semiological procedure which arises between the development and the correction of the system.[12] A corresponding

10   In *Slovo a slovenost,* I, 192, cited by Wellek, "The Theory of Literary History," pp. 179 ff.

11   G. Buck, *Lernen und Erfahrung* (Stuttgart, 1967), p. 56, who refers here to Husserl (*Erfahrung und Urteil,* esp. § 8) but goes farther than Husserl in a lucid description of negativity in the process of experience, which is of importance for the horizon structure of aesthetic experience (cf. note 74 below).

12   W. D. Stempel, *Pour une description des genres littéraires,* in: *Actes du XIIe congrès internat. de linguistique Romane* (Bucharest, 1968), also in *Beiträge zur Textlinguistik,* ed. by W. D. Stempel (Munich, 1970).

process of continuous horizon setting and horizon changing also deter-
mines the relation of the individual text to the succession of texts which
form 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, changed or just reproduced. Variation and
correction determine the scope, alteration and reproduction of the bor-
ders and structure of the genre. [13] The interpretative reception of a text
always presupposes the context of experience of aesthetic perception.
The question of the subjectivity of the interpretation and the taste of
different readers or levels of readers can be asked significantly only
after it has been decided which transsubjective horizon of understanding
determines the impact of the text.

The ideal cases of the objective capability of such literary frames of
reference are works which, using the artistic standards of the reader,
have been formed by conventions of genre, style, or form. These pur-
posely evoke responses so that they can frustrate them. This can serve
not only a critical purpose but can even have a poetic effect. Thus
Cervantes in *Don Quixote* fosters the expectations of the old tales of
knighthood, which the adventures of his last knight then parody
seriously. [14] Thus Diderot in the beginning of *Jacques le Fataliste*
evokes the expectations of the popular journey novel along with the
(Aristotelian) convention of the romanesque fable and the providence
peculiar to it, so that he can then confront the promised journey and
love novel with a completely unromanesque "verité de l'histoire": the
bizarre reality and moral casuistry of the inserted stories in which the
truth of life continually denies the lies of poetic fiction. [15] Thus Nerval
in *Chimères* cites, combines, and mixes a quintessence of well-known
romantic and occult motives to produce the expectation of a mythical
metamorphosis of the world only in order to show his renunciation of
romantic poetry. The mythical identification and relationships which
are familiar to the reader dissolve in the unknown to the same degree as
the attempted private myth of the lyrical "I" fails; the law of sufficient

13   See also my treatment of this in *"Littérature médiévale et théorie des genres,"*
in *Poétique,* I (1970), 79-101, which will also shortly appear in expanded form in
volume I of *Grundriss der romanischen Literaturen des Mittelalters,* (Heidelberg,
1970).

14   According to the interpretation of H. J. Neuschäfer, *Der Sinn der Parodie
im Don Quijote,* Studia *Romanica,* V (Heidelberg, 1963).

15   According to the interpretation of R. Warning, *Allusion und Wirklichkeit in
Tristram Shandy und Jacques le Fataliste,* Theorie und Geschichte der Literatur und
der schönen Kunste, IV (Munich, 1965), esp. pp. 80 ff.

information is broken and the darkness which has become expressive gains a poetic function.[16]

There is also the possibility of objectifying the expectations in works which are historically less sharply delineated. For the specific reception which the author anticipates from the reader for a particular work can be achieved, even if the explicit signals are missing, by three generally acceptable means: first, by the familiar standards or the inherent poetry of the genre; second, by the implicit relationships to familiar works of the literary-historical context; and third, by the contrast between fiction and reality, between the poetic and the practical function of language, which the reflective reader can always realize while he is reading. The third factor includes the possibility that the reader of a new work has to perceive it not only within the narrow horizon of his literary expectations but also within the wider horizon of his experience of life. I shall return to this horizon structure and its ability to be objectivized by means of the hermeneutics of question and answer in the discussion of the relationship between literature and practical life (see VII).

III

If the horizon of expectations of a work is reconstructed in this way, it is possible to determine its artistic nature by the nature and degree of its effect on a given audience. If the "aesthetic distance" is considered as the distance between the given horizon of expectations and the appearance of a new work, whose reception results in a "horizon change" because it negates familiar experience or articulates an experience for the first time, this aesthetic distance can be measured historically in the spectrum of the reaction of the audience and the judgment of criticism (spontaneous success, rejection or shock, scattered approval, gradual or later understanding).

The way in which a literary work satisfies, surpasses, disappoints, or disproves the expectations of its first readers in the historical moment of its appearance obviously gives 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 experiences and the "horizon change"[17] demanded by the response to new works, determines the artistic nature of a literary work along the lines of the aesthetics of reception: the smaller this distance, which means that no

16 According to the interpretation of K. H. Stierle, *Dunkelheit und Form in Gérard de Nervals "Chimères,"* Theorie und Geschichte der Literatur und der schönen Künste, V (Munich, 1967), esp. pp. 55 and 91.

17 See Buck, pp. 64 ff., about this idea of Husserl in *Lernen und Erfahrung*.

demands are made upon the receiving consciousness to make a change on the horizon of unknown experience, the closer the work comes to the realm of "culinary" or light reading. This last phrase can be characterized from the point of view of the aesthetics of reception in this way: it demands no horizon change but actually fulfills expectations, which are prescribed by a predominant taste, by satisfying the demand for the reproduction of familiar beauty, confirming familiar sentiments, encouraging dreams, making unusual experiences palatable as "sensations" or even raising moral problems, but only to be able to "solve" them in an edifying manner when the solution is already obvious.[18] On the other hand, if the artistic character of a work is to be measured by the aesthetic distance with which it confronts the expectations of its first readers, it follows that this distance, which at first is experienced as a happy or distasteful new perspective, can disappear for later readers to the same degree to which the original negativity of the work has become self-evident and, as henceforth familiar expectation, has even become part of the horizon of future aesthetic experience. Especially the classic nature of so-called masterworks belongs to this second horizon change; their self-evident beauty and their seemingly unquestionable "eternal significance" bring them, from the point of view of the aesthetics of reception, into dangerous proximity with the irresistable convincing and enjoyable "culinary" art, and special effort is needed to read them "against the grain" of accustomed experience so that their artistic nature becomes evident again (compare with IV).[19]

The relationship between literature and the public encompasses more than the fact that every work has its specific, historically and sociologically determined audience, that every writer is dependent upon the milieu, views and ideology of his readers and that literary success re-

18 Here I am incorporating the results of the discussion of "Kitsch," as a fringe manifestation of aesthetics, which took place during the third colloquium of the "Forschungsgruppe Poetik und Hermeneutik" in the volume, *Die nicht mehr schönen Künste—Grenzphänomene des Asthetischen,* ed. H. R. Jauss (Munich, 1968). For the "culinary" approach, which presupposes mere light reading, the same thing holds true as for "Kitsch,"namely, that the "demands of the consumers are *a priori* satisfied" (P. Beylin), that "the fulfilled expectation becomes the standard for the product" (W. Iser), or that "a work appears to be solving a problem when in reality it neither has nor solves a problem" (M. Imdahl), pp. 651-67.

19 As also "Epigonentum" (Decadence), for this see B. Tomasevskij (in: *Théorie de la littérature. Texts des formalistes russes,* ed. by T. Todorov [Paris 1965], p. 306): "L'apparition d'un génie équivaut toujours à une révolution littéraire qui détrône le canon dominant et donne le pouvoir aux procédés jusqu'alors subordonnés. [. . .] Les épigones répètent une combinaison usée des procédés, et d'originale et révolutionnaire qu'elle était, cette combinaison devient stéréotypée et traditionnelle. Ainsi les épigones tuent parfois pour longtemps l'aptitude des contemporains à sentir la force esthétique des exemples qu'ils imitent: ils discréditent leurs maîtres."

quires a book "which expresses what the group expects, a book which presents the group with its own portrait . . . ."[20] The objectivist determination of literary success based on the congruence of the intent of a work and the expectation of a social group always puts literary sociology in an embarrassing position whenever it must explain later or continuing effects. This is why R. Escarpit wants to presuppose a "collective basis in space or time" for the "illusion of continuity" of a writer, which leads to an astonishing prognosis in the case of Molière: he "is still young for the Frenchman of the 20th century because his world is still alive and ties of culture, point of view and language still bind us to him . . . but the ties are becoming ever weaker and Molière will age and die when the things which our culture has in common with the France of Molière die" (p. 117). As if Molière had only reflected the manners of his time and had only remained successful because of this apparent intention! Where the congruence between work and social group does not exist or no longer exists, as for example in the reception of a work by a group which speaks a foreign language, Escarpit is able to help himself by resorting to a "myth": "myths which are invented by a later period which has become estranged from the reality which they represent" (p. 111). As if all reception of a work beyond the first socially determined readers were only "distorted echoes," only a consequence of "subjective myths" (p. 111) and did not have its objective *a priori* in the received work which sets boundaries and opens possibilities for later understanding! The sociology of literature does not view its object dialectically enough when it determines the circle of writers, work and readers so one-sidedly.[21] The determination is reversible: there are works which at the moment of their publication are not directed at any specific audience, but which break through the familiar horizon of literary expectations so completely that an audience can only gradually develop for them.[22] Then when the

20 R. Escarpit, *Das Buch und der Leser: Entwurf einer Literatursoziologie* (Cologne and Opladen, 1961; first German expanded edition of *Sociologie de la littérature* [Paris, 1958], p. 116.

21 K. H. Bender, *König und Vasall: Untersuchungen zur Chanson de Geste des XII. Jahrhunderts*, Studia Romanica, XIII (Heidelberg, 1967), shows which step is necessary in order to escape from this one-sided determination. In this history of the early French epic the apparent congruence of feudal society and epic ideality is represented as a process which is maintained through a continually changing discrepancy between "reality" and "ideology," that is between the historical constellations of feudal conflict and the poetic answers of the epic.

22 The much more sophisticated sociology of literature by Erich Auerbach brought to light this aspect in the variety of epoch-making disruptions of the relationship between author and reader. See also the evaluation of F. Schalk in his edition of E. Auerbach's *Gesämmelte Aufsätze zur romanischen Philologie* (Bern and Munich, 1967), pp. 11 ff.

new horizon of expectations has achieved more general acceptance, the authority of the changed aesthetic norm can become apparent from the fact that readers will consider previously successful works as obsolete and reject them. It is only in view of such a horizon change that the analysis of literary effect achieves the dimension of a literary history of readers[23] and provides the statistical curves of the historical recognition of the bestseller.

A literary sensation from the year 1857 may serve as an example of this. In this year two novels were published: Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, which has since achieved world-wide fame, and *Fanny* by his friend Feydeau, which is forgotten today. Although Flaubert's novel brought with it a trial for obscenity, *Madame Bovary* was at first overshadowed by Feydeau's novel: *Fanny* had thirteen editions in one year and success the likes of which Paris had not seen since Chateaubriand's *Atala*. As far as theme is concerned, both novels fulfilled the expectations of the new audience, which—according to Baudelaire's analysis—had rejected anything romantic and scorned grand as well as naive passion.[24] They treated a trivial subject—adultery—the one in a bourgeois and the other in a provincial milieu. Both authors understood how to give a sensational twist to the conventional, rigid triangle which in the erotic scenes surpassed the customary details. They presented the worn-out theme of jealousy in a new light by reversing the expected relationship of the three classic roles. Feydeau has the youthful lover of the "femme de trente ans" becoming jealous of his lover's husband, although he has already reached the goal of his desires, and perishing over this tormenting situation; Flaubert provides the adulteries of the doctor's wife in the provinces, which Baudelaire presents as a sublime form of "dandysme," with a surprising ending, so that the ridiculous figure of the deceived Charles Bovary takes on noble traits at the end. In official criticism of the time there are voices which reject *Fanny* as well as *Madame Bovary* as a product of the new school of "réalisme," which they accuse of denying all ideals and attacking the ideas on which

23   See H. Weinrich, "Für eine Literaturgeschichte des Lesers," *Merkur*, XXI (November, 1967). Just as the linguistics of the speaker, which was earlier customary, has been replaced by the linguistics of the listener, Weinrich pleads for a methodical consideration for the perspective of the reader in literary history and thereby supports my aims. Weinrich shows especially how the empirical methods of literary sociology can be supplemented by the linguistic and literary interpretation of the role of the reader, which is implicit in the work.

24   In "*Madame Bovary* par Gustave Flaubert," Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes*, Pléiade ed. (Paris, 1951), p. 998: "The last years of Louis-Philippe witnessed the last explosions of a spirit still excitable by the play of the imagination; but the new novelist found himself faced with a completely worn-out society—worse than worn-out—stupified and gluttonous, with a horror only of fiction and love only for possession."

the order of the society in the Second Empire was based.[25] The horizon of expectations of the public of 1857, here only sketched in, which did not expect anything great in the way of novels after the death of Balzac,[26] explains the differing success of the two novels only when the question of the effect of their narrative form is posed. Flaubert's innovation in form, his principle of "impersonal telling" *impassibilité* which Barbey d'Aurevilly attacked with this comparison: if a story-telling machine could be made of English steel, it would function the same as Monsieur Flaubert[27]), must have shocked the same audience which was offered the exciting contents of *Fanny* in the personable tone of a confessional novel. It could also have found in Feydeau's descriptions[28] popular ideals and frustrations of the level of society which sets the style, and it could delight unrestrainedly in the lascivious main scene in which Fanny (without knowing that her lover is watching from the balcony) seduces her husband—for their moral indignation was forestalled by the reaction of the unfortunate witness. However, as *Madame Bovary*, which was understood at first only by a small circle of knowledgeable readers and called a turning point in the history of the novel, became a world-wide success, the group of readers who were formed by this book sanctioned the new canon of expectations, which made the weaknesses of Feydeau—his flowery style, his modish effects, his lyrical confessional clichés—unbearable and relegated *Fanny* to the class of bestsellers of yesterday.

IV

The reconstruction of the horizon of expectations, on the basis of which a work in the past was created and received, enables us to find

25   Cf. *ibid.*, p. 999, as well as the accusation, speech for the defense, and verdict of the *Bovary* trial in Flaubert, *Oeuvres*, Pléiade edition (Paris, 1951), I, 649-717, esp. 717; also about *Fanny*, E. Montegut, "Le roman intime de la littérature réaliste," *Revue des deux mondes*, XVIII (1858), 196-213, esp. 201 and 209 ff.

26   As Baudelaire testifies (*"Madame Bovary* par Gustave Flaubert," p. 996): "for since the disappearance of Balzac . . . all curiosity relative to the novel has been stilled and slumbers."

27   For these and other contemporary verdicts see H. R. Jauss "Die beiden Fassungen von Flauberts 'Education Sentimentale,'" *Heidelberger Jahrbücher*, II (1958), 96-116, esp. 97.

28   See the excellent analysis by the contemporary critic E. Montegut (see note 25), who explains in detail why the dreams and the figures in Feydeau's novel are typical for the readers in the section between the *Bourse* and the boulevard Montmartre (p. 209): they need an "alcool poétique," enjoy seeing "their vulgar adventures of yesterday and their vulgar projects of tomorrow poeticized" (p. 210) and have an "idolatry of the material" by which term Montegut understands the ingredients of the "dream factory" of 1959—"a sort of sanctimonious admiration, almost devout, for furniture, wallpaper, dress, escapes, like a perfume of patchouli, from each of its pages" (p. 201).

the questions to which the text originally answered and thereby to dis-
cover how the reader of that day viewed and understood the work.
This approach corrects the usually unrecognized values of a classical
concept of art or of an interpretation that seeks to modernize, and it
avoids the recourse to a general spirit of the age, which involves circular
reasoning. It brings out the hermeneutic difference between past and
present ways of understanding a work, points up the history of its recep-
tion —providing both approaches—and thereby challenges as platoniz-
ing dogma the apparently self-evident dictum of philological metaphy-
sics that literature is timelessly present and that it has objective meaning,
determined once and for all and directly open to the interpreter at any
time.

The method of the history of reception[29] is essential for the under-
standing of literary works which lie in the distant past. Whenever the
writer of a work is unknown, his intent not recorded, or his relationship
to sources and models only indirectly accessible, the philological question
of how the text is "properly" to be understood, that is according to its
intention and its time, can best be answered if the text is considered in
contrast to the background of the works which the author could expect
his contemporary public to know either explicitly or implicitly. For ex-
ample, the creator of the oldest branches of the *Roman de Renart* as-
sumed—as his prologue testifies—that his listeners knew romances like
the story of Troy, *Tristan,* heroic epics (*chansons de geste*) and verse
fables (*fabliaux*) and that they were, therefore, curious about the "un-
precedented war of the two barons, Renart and Ysengrin," which was
to overshadow everything familiar. The works and genres which are
called to mind are all ironically alluded to in the course of the poem.
The success of this work, which rapidly became famous even outside of
France, and which for the first time took a position opposed to all heroic
and courtly poetry up to that time,[30] can probably be explained by this
change of horizon.

Philological investigation long misunderstood the original satirical

29 Examples of this method, which not only follows the fame, image, and in-
fluence of a writer through history but also examines the historical conditions and
changes in his understanding, are rare. The following should be mentioned: G. F.
Ford, *Dickens and His Readers* (Princeton, 1955); A. Nisin, *Les Oeuvres et les
siècles* (Paris, 1960): discusses Virgil, Dante et nous, Ronsard, Corneille, Racine;
E. Lämmert, "Zur Wirkungsgeschichte Eichendorffs in Deutschland," *Festschrift
für Richard Alewyn,* ed. H. Singer and B. von Wiese, (Cologne and Graz, 1967).
The methodological problem of the step from the impact to the reception of a work
is shown most sharply by F. Vodicka in *Die Problematik der Rezeption von Nerudas
Werk* (1941, now in *Struktur vyvoje* [Prague, 1969]), where he discusses the changes
of the work which are realized in its successive aesthetic perceptions.

30 See H. R. Jauss, *Untersuchungen zur mittelalterlichen Tierdichtung* (Tübingen,
1959), esp. chap. IV A and D.

intention of the medieval *Reineke Fuchs* and along with it the ironic-didactic sense of the analogy between animals and human nature, because ever since Jacob Grimm it had been wedded to the romantic notion of pure nature poetry and naive animal fairy tales. To give a second example for modernizing values, one could reproach French epic research since Bédier for continuing the criteria of Boileau's poetics —without realizing it—and judging literature which is not classical by the standards of simplicity, harmony of the parts and the whole, probability, and others.[31] The philological method of criticism is obviously not protected by its historical objectivity from the interpreter who, though supposedly eliminating his subjective evaluation, unconsciously raises his preconceived aesthetic sense to an unacknowledged standard and unwittingly modernizes the meaning of a text from the past. Whoever believes that the "timeless truth" of a work must reveal itself to the interpreter directly and through simple absorption in the text as if he had a point of view outside of history, disregarding all "errors" of his predecessors and of the historical reception, "conceals the fabric of impact and history in which historical consciousness itself stands;" he disavows the "preconditions, which are neither intentional nor random but all-inclusive, which govern his own understanding," and can only feign objectivity "which actually depends on the legitimacy of the questions."[32]

Hans Georg Gadamer, whose criticism of historical objectivism I am incorporating here, described in *Wahrheit und Methode* the principle of the history of impact, which seeks to show the reality of history in understanding itself,[33] as an application of the logic of question and answer to historical tradition. Continuing Collingwood's thesis that "one can only understand a text when one understands the question which it answers,"[34] Gadamer suggests that the reconstructed question can no longer stand in its original context because this historical context is always surrounded by the context of our present: "Understanding is always the process of fusion of such horizons which seem to exist independently."[35] The historical question cannot exist independently; it has to be fused with another question which will result from our attempt to integrate the past.[36] This logic of question and answer is the solution

31   A. Vinaver, "A la recherche d'une poétique médiévale," *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale,* II (1959), 1-16.

32   H. G. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode* (Tübingen, 1960), pp. 284-85.

33   *Ibid.,* p. 283.

34   *Ibid.,* p. 352.

35   *Ibid.,* p. 289.

36   *Ibid.,* p. 356.

to what René Wellek described as the problem of literary judgment: should the philologist evaluate a literary work according to the perspective of the past, according to the viewpoint of the present or according to the "judgment of the centuries?"[37] The actual criteria of the past could be so narrow that their use would only make a work, whose historical impact had a great potential, poorer. The aesthetic judgment of the present would favor a group of works which appeal to the modern taste and would evaluate all other works unjustly because their function in their own day is no longer evident. And the history of the impact itself, as instructive as it may be, is "as authority open to the same criticism as the authority of the writer's contemporaries."[38] Wellek argues that it is impossible to avoid one's own opinion; one must only make it as objective as possible by doing what ever scholar does—"isolating the subject."[39] This view, however, is not a solution for the dilemma, but a relapse into objectivism. The "judgment of the centuries" of a literary work is more than just "the collected judgments of other readers, critics, audiences and even professors";[40] it is the successive development of the potential meaning which is present in a work and which is gradually realized in its historical reception by knowledgeable criticism. This judgment must, however, take place in contact with tradition and thus cause a controlled fusion of the horizons.

The agreement between my attempts at basing a possible literary history on an aesthetics of reception and H. G. Gadamer's principle of a history of impact ends, however, at the point where Gadamer wants to elevate the concept of the classical to the prototype of all historical contact between past and present. His pronouncement, "whatever is called 'classical' does not first require the surmounting of historical distance—for it continuously accomplishes this surmounting itself,"[41] denies the constitutive relationship of question and answer in historical tradition. If classical is "what is said for the present in such a way as if it were said especially for it,"[42] then it would not be a matter of looking for the question that the classical text answers. Doesn't one find described in the classical, which "means itself and interprets itself,"[43] simply the

37   Wellek, "Theory of Literary History," p. 184; *ibid.*, "Der Begriff der Evolution in der Literaturgeschichte," *Grundbegriffe der Literaturkritik* (Stuttgart, 1965), pp. 20-22.

38   Wellek, "Der Begriff der Evolution," p. 20.

39   *Ibid.*

40   *Ibid.*

41   *Wahrheit und Methode*, p. 274.

42   *Ibid.*

43   *Ibid.*

result of what I called the second horizon change: the unquestioning acceptance as self-evident of a so-called masterwork, which conceals its negativity in the retrospective horizon of an exemplary tradition and necessitates our regaining the "right horizon of questioning" in the face of guaranteed classicism? The classical work, too, call for its conscious reception and thus for a realization of the "tension between text and present."[44] The concept of the classical which interprets itself, taken from Hegel, must lead to a reversal of the historical relationship between question and answer[45] and contradicts the principle of the history of impact that understanding is "not only reproductive but also productive."[46]

This contradiction is evidently determined by Gadamer's holding fast to his concept of classical art, which has not been able to support a general basis of an aesthetics of reception beyond the period of humanism. It is the concept of *mimesis*, understood as "recognition," as Gadamer presents it in his ontological explanation of experience in art: "What one actually experiences in a work of art and what one looks for is, how true it is, that is, how much it makes one know and recognize the world and one's own self."[47] This concept of art may hold true for the humanistic period, but not for the preceding medieval period and definitely not for the succeeding period of modernity, in which the aesthetics of mimesis has lost its authority like the metaphysics of substance (*Erkenntnis des Wesens*) which founded it. But the cognitive function of art does not end with this epochal development,[48] which demonstrates that art was in no way bound to the classical function of recognition. The work of art can also communicate knowledge which does not fit the Platonic scheme since it can anticipate ways to future experience, imagine as yet untested models of perception and conduct, or contain an answer to new questions.[49] In Gadamer's conception of

44 *Ibid.*, p. 290.
45 This reversal becomes obvious in the chapter "Die Logik von Frage und Antwort (*ibid.*, pp. 351-360), where Gadamer at first demands of the traditional text (also the unclassical text or the simply historical text!) *per se* "that it ask a question of the interpreter. Thus exposition always includes reference to this question which has been asked. Understanding a text means understanding this question." The further argument shows, however, that a past text cannot ask a question of *us* but that it must be revealed first by the answer, which the text contains.
46 *Ibid.*, p. 280.
47 *Ibid.*, p. 109.
48 See *ibid.*, p. 110.
49 That also follows from formalistic aesthetics and especially from V. Sklovskij's theory of *"Entautomatisierung"*; see also V. Erlich's reply, *Russischer Formalismus* (Munich, 1964), p. 84: "Since the 'tortuous, consciously restrained form' places artificial barriers between the perceiving subject and the perceived object, the chain of familiar connections and automatic reactions is broken; in this manner we become able to really see the things instead of merely recognizing them."

the "classical," the history of the impact of literature lacks just this virtual meaning and productive function in the process of experience. For to think of the "classical" as overcoming by itself the historical distance between the past and the present is to hypostatize tradition. Gadamer does not take into account the fact that classical art at the time of its creation did not yet appear classical, but may rather have once opened new ways of seeing things and may have formed new experiences, which only in historical perspective—in recognition of what is now familiar—give the appearance that the work contains a timeless truth.

The impact of even the greatest literary work of the past cannot be compared either with an event which communicates itself automatically or with an emanation: the tradition of art presupposes a dialogue between the present and the past, according to which a past work cannot answer and speak to us until a present observer has posed the question which retrieves it from its retirement. In *Wahrheit und Methode*, when understanding—analogous to Heidegger's *Seinsgeschehen*—is thought of as "becoming part of a self-sufficient tradition in which the past and the present are continuously in mutual mediation,"[50] the "productive moment which lies in understanding"[51] must be short-changed. This productive function of progressive understanding, which necessarily also includes the criticizing and even forgetting of tradition, forms the basis of the aesthetics of reception of literary history outlined in the following chapter. This outline must consider the historical relevance of literature in three ways: diachronically in the relationship of literary works based upon reception (see V), synchronically within the frame of reference of literature of the same period as well as in the sequence of such frames of reference (see VI) and finally in the relationship of the immanent literary development to the general process of history (see VII).

<div align="center">V</div>

The theory of the aesthetics of reception not only allows the understanding of the meaning and form of a literary work within the historical development of its reception. It also demands the ordering of the individual work in its "literary series" so that its historical position and significance in the context of literary experience can be recognized. Literary history based on the history of reception and impact will reveal itself as a process in which the passive reception of the reader and critic

50   *Wahrheit und Methode*, p. 275.
51   *Ibid.*, p. 280.

changes into the active reception and new production of the author, or in which—stated differently—a subsequent work solves formal and moral problems that the last work raised and may then itself present new problems.

How can the individual work, which determines chronological order in positivistic literary history and thereby superficially turns it into a "fact," be brought back into its historical order and thus be understood as an "event" again? The theory of the formalist school seeks to solve this problem with its principle of "literary evolution." In this theory the new work appears against a background of previous or competing works, reaches the "high ridge" of a literary epoch as a successful form, is reproduced and thereby continuously automated so that finally, when the next form has won out, it vegetates on as a worn-out genre and thus as a part of commonplace literature. If one analyzed and described a literary period according to this program which so far has hardly been begun[52] one might expect a result far superior to the conventional literary history. It would relate the separate categories, which stand side by side unconnected or at least connected only by a sketchy general history (for example, works of one author, one direction or one style, as well as different genres) to each other and disclose the evolutionary give and take of function and form.[53] Works either striking, related, or interdependent would appear as factors in a process which would no longer have to be aimed at one central point because, as a dialectic producing new forms, the process requires no teleology. Seen in this way, the dynamics of literary evolution would eliminate the dilemma of selective criteria. The unique criterion is the work entering the literary series as a new form, not the reproduction of worn-out forms, styles and genres which now move to the background until a new turn in the evolutionary development makes them perceptible again. Finally, in the formalist plan of literary history, which is understood as "evolution" and, contrary to the normal meaning of this term, rejects every directed course, the historical character of a work would remain the same as its artistic character. The evolutionary meaning and characteristics of a literary work presuppose innovation as the decisive feature just as does

52   In the 1927 article, "Über literarische Evolution," by Jurii Tynjanov (*Die literarischen Kunstmittel und die Evolution in der Literatur* [Frankfort, 1967], pp. 37-60), this program is presented most exactly. It was only partially fulfilled—as J. Striedter informed me—in the treatment of problems of structural change in the history of literary genres, as in the volume *Russkaja proza*, Voprosy poetiki, VIII (Leningrad, 1926). See also J. Tynjanov, "Die Ode als rhetorische Gattung" (1922), *Texte der russischen Formalisten*, II, ed. J. Striedter (Munich, 1970).

53   J. Tynjanov, "Über literarische Evolution," p. 59.

the tenet that the work of art is to be perceived against the background of other artistic works.[54]

The formalist theory of "literary evolution" is certainly one of the most significant beginnings in the renovation of literary history. The recognition that historical changes are also occurring within a system in the field of literature, the attempt to functionalize literary development, and last but not least the theory of automation are achievements which must be retained, even if the one-sided canonization of the changes requires correction. Criticism has sufficiently pointed out the weaknesses of the formalist theory of evolution: mere opposition or aesthetic variation is not enough to explain the growth of literature; the question of the direction of the change of literary forms remains unanswered; innovation alone cannot assure artistic value; and the relationship between literary evolution and social change cannot be dispensed with by simple negation.[55] My thesis VII answers the last question; the other questions demand that the descriptive literary theory of the formalists be opened up to the dimension of historical experience by means of the aethetics of reception. The historical position of the present observer as literary historian would have to be included in this experience.

The description of literary evolution as a never-ending fight of the new with the old or as the alternation of canonizing and automation of forms reduces the historical character of literature to the one-dimensional reality of its changes and limits historical understanding to recognition of these changes. The changes of the literary order do not become a historical process until along with the opposition of old and new forms is recognized its specific mutual mediation. This mutual mediation, including the step from the old to the new form in the interaction of work and recipient (public, critic, new producer), past events and successive receptions, can be conceived of formally and substantially as the problem "which every work of art as a horizon of possible solutions creates and leaves behind."[56] But the mere description of the structural changes and new artistic means of a work does not necessarily lead to this problem, nor back to the work's function within the histori-

54 "A work of art is viewed as a positive value if it changes the structure of the preceding period; it is seen as a negative value if it adopts the structure without changing it." (J. Mukarovsky, cited by R. Wellek, "Der Begriff der Evolution," op. cit. pp. 42 ff.

55 See V. Erlich, *Russischer Formalismus,* pp. 284-287, and R. Wellek, "Der Begriff der Evolution," op cit. pp. 42 ff. See also J. Striedter, *Texte der russischen Formalisten,* I (Munich, 1969), Introduction, Section X.

56 H. Blumenberg in *Poetik und Hermeneutik,* III (see note 18) p. 692.

cal order. In order to determine this function, that is, in order to recognize the remaining problem which the new work answers in the historical succession, the interpreter must call upon his own experience, because the past horizon of old and new forms, problems and solutions, can only be recognized after it has been further mediated by the present horizon of the work. Literary history as "literary evolution" presupposes the historical process of aesthetic reception and production up to the observer's time as a condition for the communicating of all formal contrasts or "qualities of difference."[57]

Founding "literary evolution" on an aesthetics of reception not only restores its lost direction by making the position of the literary historian the temporary term of this process. This procedure also emphasizes the fundamentally historical dimension of literary experience by stressing the variable distance between the immediate and the potential meaning of a literary work. This means that the artistic character of a work, whose potential importance as criterion is reduced to that of innovation by formalism, does not by any means have to be immediately perceivable in the horizon of its first appearance, nor does it have to be exhausted by the opposition between old and new forms. The distance between the immediate first perception of a work and its potential meanings, or, to put it differently, the opposition between the new work and the expectations of its first readers, can be so great that a long process of reception is necessary in order to catch up with what first was unexpected and unusable. It can happen that the potential significance of a work may remain unrecognized until the evolution of a newer form widens the horizon and only then opens up the understanding of the misunderstood earlier form. Thus the dark lyrics of Mallarmé and his school prepared the way for a re-evaluation of baroque poetry, which had long been neglected and forgotten, and especially for the new philosophical interpretation and "rebirth" of Góngora. There are many examples of how a new literary form can open an approach to forgotten literature; they include the so-called "renaissances"—so-called because the term implies the appearance of an automatic rebirth and often obscures the fact that literary tradition does not transmit itself. That is, the literary past can only return when a new reception has brought it into the present again—whether it be that a different aesthetic attitude has in-

57 According to V. Erlich. *Russischer Formalismus,* p. 281, this concept means three things to the formalists: "on the level of the representation of reality 'quality of difference' stands for the 'avoidance' of the real, thus for creative deformation. On the level of language the expression means the avoidance of usual speech usage. On the level of literary dynamics finally . . . a change in the prevailing artistic standard."

tentionally taken up the past, or that a new phase of literary evaluation has expectedly illuminated past works.[58]

The new is not only an *aesthetic* category. It cannot be explained completely by the factors of innovation, surprise, surpassing, rearrangement and alienation, to which the formalist theory assigned utmost importance. The new becomes an historical category when the diachronic analysis of literature is forced to face the questions of which historical forces really make the literary work new, to what degree this newness is recognizable in the historical moment of its appearance, what distance, route, or circumlocution of understanding were required for its full realization, and whether the moment of this realization was so effective that it could change the perspective of the old and thereby the canonization of the literary past.[59] How the relationship of poetic theory and aesthetically productive practice appears in this light has already been discussed in another context.[60] Certainly the possibilities of the interaction between production and reception in the historical change of aesthetic attitude are not exhausted by these remarks. I only want to indicate the dimension into which a diachronic study of literature would move, since it can no longer remain satisfied with considering a chronological series of literary "facts" as the historical appearance of literature.

VI

The results which the separation and methodological complementariness of diachronic and synchronic analysis have achieved in the study of language provide grounds for improving upon the diachronic observation which until now has been the customary method in the study of literary history. Since it reveals changes in aesthetic attitudes the perspective of the history of reception always discovers functional connections between the understanding of new works and the meaning of old works. This perspective can also make it possible to take a synchronic cross-section of a moment in the process, to arrange heterogeneous, contemporaneous works into equivalent, opposing, and hierarchical groups, and thereby to discover a general system of relationships in the litera-

58 For the first possibility the (anti-romantic) re-evaluation of Boileau and the classic *contrainte* poetics through Gide and Valéry can be introduced; for the second the tardy discovery of Hölderlin's Hymns or Novalis's concept of future poetry (for the last see H. R. Jauss in *Romanische Forschungen*, LXXVII [1965], 174-83).

59 Thus, since the reception of the "minor romantic" Nerval, whose *Chimères* only attracted attention under the influence of Mallarmé, the canonized "major romantics," Lamartine, Vigny, Musset and a large part of the "rhetorical" lyrics of Victor Hugo have been forced more and more into the background.

60 *Poetik und Hermeneutik*, II (*Immanente Aesthetik—Aesthetische Reflexion*), ed. W. Iser (Munich, 1966), esp. pp. 395-418.

ture of one historical moment. A new literary history could be developed from this if other cross-sections were made earlier and later to illustrate the literary changes of structure in epoch-making moments.

Siegfried Kracauer has questioned most decisively the primacy of diachronic observation in history. His study on "Time and History" [61] challenges the claim of general history that, within the homogeneous medium of chronological time, it can make events of all areas of life comprehensible as a unified process consistent in every historical moment. This understanding of history, still under the influence of Hegel's idea of the "objective spirit" (objektiver Geist), presupposes that everything which happens at one time is determined to the same degree by the meaning of this moment and thus conceals the fact that things which occur at the same time are not really simultaneous. [62] For the variety of events of one historical moment, which the universal historian, as an exponent of a unified system, believes that he grasps, are de facto moments of completely different time curves, determined by the laws of their special history, [63] as becomes obvious in the discrepancies of the different "histories"—of art, of law, of economics, political history, etc.: "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." [64]

It is not the question here whether this assertion presupposes a primary inconsistency in history—which would mean that the consistency of general history only appears retrospectively from the viewpoint and presentation of the historian who imparts unity to it—or whether the radical skepticism of "historical reason" which leads Kracauer from the pluralism of a chronological and morphological passage of time to the basic antinomy of the general and the special in history, really proves

61   In Zeugnisse—Theodor W. Adorno zum 60. Geburtstag (Frankfort, 1963), pp. 50-64, and also in "General History and the Aesthetic Approach," Poetik und Hermeneutik, III. See also History: The Last Things Before the Last (New York, 1969), esp. Chap. VI: "Ahasverus, or The Riddle of Time," pp. 139-63.

62   "First, in identifying history as a process in chronological time, we tacitly assume that our knowledge of the moment at which an event emerges from the flow of time will help us to account for its appearance. The date of the event is a value-laden fact. Accordingly, all events in the history of a people, a nation, or a civilization which take place at a given moment are supposed to occur then and there for reasons bound up, somehow, with that moment." (Kracauer, History, p. 141.)

63   This concept is discussed by H. Foccillon, The Life of Forms in Art (New York, 1948), and G. Kubler, The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things (New Haven and London, 1962).

64   S. Kracauer, History, p. 53.

that universal history is philosophically untenable today. However, it can be said for the field of literature that Kracauer's insights into the "co-existence of the simultaneous and the unsimultaneous," [65] far from leading historical knowledge into a dilemma, emphasize the possibility and necessity of uncovering the historical dimension of literary appearances in synchronic cross-sections. For it follows from these insights that the chronological fiction of the moment which determines all simultaneous occurrences corresponds as little to the concept of the historicity of literature as does the morphological fiction of a homogeneous literary order in which all occurrences follow immanent laws one after the other. Purely diachronic observation, no matter how carefully it can explain changes in the history of a genre according to the immanent logic of innovation and automation, problem and solution, only reaches a truly historical dimension when it transcends the morphological canon, confronts the work important in the history of reception with the forgotten conventional works of the genre yet does not ignore its relationship to the literary surroundings in which it had to assert itself among works in other genres.

The historical character of literature appears exactly at the intersection of the diachronic and synchronic approaches. It must be possible to analyze the literary horizon of a certain historical moment as that synchronic system in which simultaneously appearing works can be received diachronically in relation, and in which the work can appear as of current interest or not, as fashionable, out-dated or of lasting value, or before its time or after it. [66] If simultaneously appearing literature— seen from the point of view of the aesthetics of production—breaks down into a heterogeneous variety of the unsimultaneous, that is, of works formed by the different moments of the "shaped time" of their genre (as the apparently present starry sky moves apart astronomically at very different rates), then this variety of literary works moves together

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65 *Poetik und Hermeneutik,* III (see note 18), p. 569. The term "simultaneity of different things," with which F. Sengle, "Aufgaben der heutigen Literaturgeschtsschreibung," *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen,* CC (1964), pp. 247 ff., refers to the same phenomenon, fails to consider one dimension of the problem which becomes evident from his belief that this difficulty of literary history can be solved by simply combining comparative methods and modern interpretation ("that is, carrying out comparative interpretations on a wider base," p. 249).

66 In 1960 R. Jakobson developed similar assertions in a lecture which is now Chap. XI, "Linguistique et poétique," of his book, *Essais de linguistique générale* (Paris, 1963). See especially p. 212: "La description synchronique envisage non seulement la production littéraire d'une époque donnée, mais aussi cette partie de la tradition littéraire qui est restée vivante ou a été ressuscitée à l'époque en question. . . . La poétique historique, tout comme l'histoire du language, si elle se veut vraiment compréhensive, doit être conçue comme une superstructure, bâtie sur une série de descriptions synchroniques successives."

again for readers who perceive them as works of *their* present and relate
them to each other in a meaningful unity of a common horizon of liter-
ary expectations, memories, and anticipations.

Since every synchronic system must keep its past and its future as
indivisible structural elements,[67] the synchronic cross-section analysis
of the literary production at one historical point implies further
cross-sections earlier and later. Analogous to the history of the language,
constant and variable factors can then be localized as functions of the
system. For literature is also a sort of grammar or syntax with relatively
firm relationships of its own: the structure of the traditional and un-
canonized genres, styles of expression, and rhetorical figures. Opposed to
this is the more variable field of semantics: the literary themes, arche-
types, symbols, and metaphors. This is why one can attempt to draw an
analogy for literary history to what Hans Blumenberg has postulated,
explained through examples of the changes in epochs and especially
the resulting relations of Christian theology and philosophy, and estab-
lished with his historical logic of question and answer for the history
of philosophy: a "formal system of the interpretation of reality . . .
within the structure of which the changes can be localized which con-
stitute the process of history up to the radicalness of the change of
epochs."[68] Once the substantial conception of a self-continuing literary
tradition has been replaced by a functional explanation of the process
relationship of production and reception, it must be possible to see be-
hind the transformation of literary forms and content that change of
positions in a literary system of the interpretation of reality which makes
the change of horizons in the process of aesthetic experience intelligible.

On these premises a principle of presentation of a literary history
could be developed which would neither have to follow the all too fami-
liar high route of the traditional classics nor wander in the valleys of
the complete descriptions of all texts which can no longer be historically
articulated. The problem of the selection of the works significant for a
new history of literature can be solved with the help of the synchronic
view in a way which has not yet been tried: a change of horizon in the
historical process of the "literary evolution" need not be seen through-
out the whole complex of diachronic fact and relations, but can also
be determined by the altered make-up of the synchronic literary sys-

67 J. Tynjanov and R. Jacobson, "Probleme der Literatur und Sprachforschung"
(1928), *Kursbuch,* V (Frankfurt, 1966), 75: "The history of the system itself pre-
sents another system. Pure synchrony proves to be illusory: each synchronic system
has its past and its future as an inseparable structural element of this system."

68 First in "Epochenschwelle und Rezeption," *Philosophische Rundschau,* VI
(1958), 101 ff., most recently in *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit* (Frankfort, 1966),
see esp. pp. 41 ff.

tem and by further cross-section analyses. In principle a presentation of literature in the historical succession of such systems, analyzed at arbitrary points of time, would be possible. The historical dimension of literature, its eventful continuity which is lost in traditionalism as in positivism, can only be rediscovered if the literary historian finds cross-sections and points out works which articulate the process character of "literary evolution" in its history-making moments and epochal caesuras. But it is neither statistics nor subjective caprice on the part of the literary historian which decide about this historical articulation but the history of impact, that is, what results from the event and what from the present perspective constitutes the continuity of literature as the historical explanation of its present status.

VII

The task of literary history is not completed until the literary work is not only synchronically and diachronically presented in the sequence of its systems but also seen as *special history* in its own unique relationship to *general history*. The fact that the historian can find in the literature of all times a typified, idealized, satirized, or utopian picture of social existence does not completely explain this relationship. The social function becomes manifest only where the literary experience of the reader enters the horizon of expectations of his life, forms his interpretation of the world, and thereby has an effect on his social actions.

The functional relationship of literature and society is usually demonstrated by traditional literary sociology within the narrow confines of a method that has only outwardly replaced the classical principle of *imitatio naturae* with the definition that literature is the representation of a given reality and that was forced to sanction a period-determined concept of style—"Realism" of the nineteenth century the literary category *par excellence*. Even the presently fashionable literary "structuralism," which is, often with doubtful justification, founded on the archetypal criticism of Northrop Frye or on the structural anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss, retains the basically classical aesthetics of representation and its schematization of "reflection" (*Widerspiegelung*) and "typification." [69] By interpreting the findings of structural linguistics and literary scholarship as archaic, anthropological constants clothed in literary myths (an interpretation often made possible only by the allegorization of the text) it reduces historical existence to structures

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69 C. Lévi-Strauss himself testifies to this involuntarily but extremely impressively in his attempt to "interpret" one of R. Jakobson's linguistic descriptions of Baudelaire's poem *Les chats* with the help of his structural method; see in *L'Homme*, II (1962), 21.

of an age-old social nature and literature to its mythic or symbolic ex-
pression. Thus exactly the predominantly social, or society-*forming*
function of literature is missed. Literary structuralism does not ask—
just as Marxist and formalist literary scholarship before it did not ask—
how literature "itself helps to determine the idea of society which is its
prerequisite" and which it has already helped to determine through
the process of history. With these words Gerhard Hess in his lecture,
"Das Bild der Gesellschaft in der französischen Literatur" (1954), for-
mulated the unsolved problem of the connection between literary
history and sociology and thereby explained to what degree litera-
ture can claim to have first discovered certain laws of social ex-
istence.[70] Answering the question of the society-forming function
of literature from the point of view of the aesthetics of recep-
tion exceeds the competence of the traditional aesthetics of representa-
tion. The attempt to close the gap between literary-historical and so-
ciological research by using the methods of the aesthetics of reception is
simplified by the fact that the concept of the *horizon of expectations*,[71]
has also played a role in the axioms of sociology since Karl Mann-
heim.[72] It is also the main point of a methodological essay, "Natur-
gesetze und theoretische Systeme" by Karl R. Popper, who anchors the
scholarly forming of theories in the pre-scholarly experience of life.
Popper develops the problem of observation from the presupposition of
a "horizon of expectations" and thus provides a basis of comparison
for any attempt to determine the specific achievement of literature with-
in the general process of experience and to define its relationships with
other forms of social behavior.[73]

   According to Popper, the procedure of scholarship shares with pre-
scholarly experience the fact that every hypothesis, like every observa-
tion, always presupposes expectations: "namely those that constitute the
horizon of expectations, a horizon that for the first time makes the ob-
servations significant and consequently gives them their place within
the order of observations."[74] For in the procedure of scholarship as in
the experience of life, the most significant moment is the "disappoint-

70 Now in *Gesellschaft—Literatur—Wissenchaft: Gesammelte Schriften 1938-
1966*, ed. by H. R. Jauss and C. Mueller-Daehn (Munich, 1967), pp. 1-13, esp. pp.
2 and 4.

71 I have introduced this concept first in *Untersuchungen zur mittelalterlichen
Tierdichtung* (Tübingen, 1959), see esp. pp. 153, 180, 225, 271; further *Archiv für
das Studium der neueren Sprachen*, CXCVII (1961), 223-25.

72 K. Mannheim, *Mensch und Gesellschaft in Zeitalter des Umbaus* (Darm-
stadt, 1958), pp. 212 ff.

73 In *Theorie und Realität*, ed. by H. Albert (Tübingen, 1964), pp. 87-102.

74 *Ibid.*, p. 91.

ment of expectations": "it resembles the experience of a blind man run-
ning into an obstacle and thereby learning of its existence. We gain
contact with 'reality' by disproving our assumptions. The refutation
of our errors in the positive experience that we gain from reality." [75]
This model of course does not exhaustively explain the process of the
scholarly formation of theories [76] though it certainly illustrates the "pro-
ductive meaning of negative experience" of life. [77] It can, however, shed
more light on the specific function of literature within social life. For
the reader has one advantage over the (hypothetical) non-reader, that
he—to adhere to Popper's metaphor— does not have to run into a new
obstacle to gain new experience of reality. The experience of reading
can free him from adaptations, prejudice, and predicaments in his life
by forcing him to a new perception of things. The horizon of expecta-
tions of literature is differentiated from the horizon of expectations of
historical life by the fact that it not only preserves real experiences but
also anticipates unrealized possibilities, widens the limited range of social
behavior by new wishes, demands, and goals, and thereby opens avenues
for future experience.

The orientation of our experience by the creative capability of litera-
ture rests not only on its artistic character, which by virtue of a new form
helps us surmount the mechanical process of everyday perception. The
new form of art is not only "perceived against the background of other
works of art and through association with them." Viktor Sklovskij
is right in this famous sentence, the heart of the formalist credo, insofar
as he turns away from the prejudice of classical aesthetics that defines
beauty as harmony of form and content and accordingly reduces the

75 *Ibid.*, p. 102.

76 Popper's example of the blind man does not distinguish between the two possi-
bilities of a simple reaction and experimental action assuming certain hypotheses.
If the second possibility is characteristic of the reflective scholarly attitude in dis-
tinction to the unreflective attitude in life, the scholar would be "creative" on his
part, that is he could be placed higher than the "blind man" and could better be
compared with the poet as a creator of new expectations.

77 Buck, *Lernen und Erfahrung*, pp. 70 ff. "[Negative experience] teaches not
solely by leading us to revise the context of our subsequent experience so that the
new fits into the corrected unity of an objective interpretation . . . . Not only
is the object of the experience represented differently, but the experiencing con-
sciousness changes. The action of a negative experience is one of becoming con-
scious of oneself. Whatever one becomes conscious of are the motifs which have been
guiding experience and which have remained unquestioned in this guiding func-
tion. Negative experience has primarily the character of self-experience, which frees
one for a qualitatively new kind of experience." From these premises G. Buck de-
veloped the concept of hermeneutics, which as a "principle of practical life that is
guided by the highest interest in practical living; the actors' understanding of each
other" legitimizes the specific experience of the so-called humanities in contrast
to the scientific empire. See "Bildung durch Wissenchaft," in *Wissenschaft, Bildung
und pädagogische Wirklichkeit* (Heidenheim, 1969), p. 24.

new form to the secondary function shaping a given content. But the new form appears not only "in order to replace the old form, which is no longer artistic," it can also make possible a new perception of things by forming the content of an experience which first appears in the form of literature. The relationship of literature and reader can be realized in the sensuous realm as stimulus to aesthetic perception as well as in the ethical realm as a stimulation to moral reflection.[78] The new literary work is received and judged against the background of other art forms as well as the background of everyday experience of life. From the point of view of the aesthetics of reception its social function in the ethical realm is equally to be understood in the modality of question and answer, problem and solution, through which it enters the horizon of its historical effect.

How a new aesthetic form can simultaneously have moral consequences, how it can give a moral question the greatest conceivable social impact, is impressively demonstrated by the trial of Flaubert after the pre-publication of *Madame Bovary* in the *Revue de Paris* in 1857. The new literary form which forced Flaubert's readers to an unfamiliar perception of the "worn-out fable" was the principle of the impersonal (or uninvolved) narration in conjunction with the so-called "erlebte Rede," a stylistic device which Flaubert handled like a virtuoso and with a consistent perspective. What is meant by this can be seen in a description which the prosecuting attorney Pinard claimed in his indictment was immoral in the highest degree. In the novel it follows Emma's first "misstep" and tells how she looked at herself in a mirror:

En s'apercevant dans la glace, elle s'étonna de son visage. Jamais elle n'avait eu les yeux si grands, si noirs, ni d'une telle profondeur. Quelque chose de subtil épandu sur sa personne la transfigurait.

Elle se repétait: J'ai un amant! un amant! se délectant à cette idée comme à celle d'une autre puberté qui lui serait survenue. *Elle allait donc enfin posséder ces plaisirs de l'amour, cette fièvre de bonheur dont elle avait désespéré. Elle entrait dans quelque chose de merveilleux, où tout serait passion, extase, délire ...*

The prosecuting attorney regarded the last sentences as an objective description which included the judgment of the narrator and was upset over this "glorification of adultery" which he considered to be even

78   J. Striedter has pointed out that in the diaries and examples from the prose of Leo Tolstoy, to which Sklovskij referred in his first explanation of the process of "Verfremdung," the purely aesthetic aspect was still connected with a theory of knowledge and an ethical aspect: "however, Sklovskij was interested—in contrast to Tolstoy—primarily in the artistic 'process' and not in the question of its ethical prerequisites and effects." (*Poetik und Hermeneutik*, II [see note 60], pp. 288 ff.)

more dangerous and immoral than the misstep itself.[79] In this Flau-
bert's accuser fell victim to an error as the defense immediately pointed
out. The incriminating sentences are not an objective determination of
the narrator, which the reader can believe, but a subjective opinion
of a person characterized by her feelings that are formed from novels.
The scientific device consists in revealing the inner thoughts of this per-
son without the signals of direct statement (*Je vais donc enfin posséder
. . .*) or indirect statement (*Elle se disait qu'elle allait donc enfin possé-
der . . .*). The effect is that the reader must decide for himself whether
he should accept this sentence as a true statement or as an opinion char-
acteristic of this person. Indeed, Emma Bovary is actually "condemned
merely by the explicit description of her existence and by her own feel-
ings."[80] This modern analysis of style agrees exactly with the refutation
of the defense attorney Senard, who stressed that disillusion begins for
Emma as early as the second day: "The denouement for morality is to
be found in every line of the book."[81] (Senard himself could not, how-
ever, name this artistic device which had not yet been recorded at this
time.) The consternating effect of the formal innovation in Flaubert's
narrative style was obvious in the trial: the impersonal narrative form
forces his readers not only to perceive things differently—"photographi-
cally exact" according to the judgment of the time—but it also forced
them into an alienating insecurity about their judgment. Since the new
stylistic device broke with an old novelistic convention—unequivocal de-
scription and well-founded moral judgment about the characters—
Madame Bovary could radicalize or raise questions of life, which dur-
ing the trial caused the original motive for the accusation, alleged las-
civiousness, to recede into the background. The defense attorney began
his counter-attack by turning the charge that the novel does not present
anything but the *Histoire des adultères d'une femme de province* into
the question of whether the subtitle of *Madame Bovary* should not prop-
erly read *Histoire de l'education trop souvent donnée en province*.[82]
But the question with which the *Réquisitoire* of the prosecuting attorney
reaches its high point has not yet been answered:

Qui peut condamner cette femme dans le livre? Personne. Telle est la
conclusion. Il n'y a pas dans le livre un personnage qui puisse la condam-

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79 Flaubert, *Oeuvres*, I, 657: "thus, as early as this first mistake, as early as this
first fall, she glorified adultery, its poetry, its voluptuousness. Voilà gentlemen,
what for me is much more dangerous, much more immoral than the fall itself!"

80 E. Auerbach, *Mimesis: Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Lit-
eratur* (Bern, 1946), p. 430.

81 Flaubert, *Oeuvres*, I, 673.

82 *Ibid.*, p. 670.

ner. Si vous y trouvez un personnage sage, si vous y trouvez un seul prin-
cipe en vertu duquel l'adultère soit stigmatisé, j'ai tort. [83]

If no character presented in the novel could condemn Emma Bovary
and if no moral principle is asserted in whose name she could be con-
demned, is not general "public opinion" and its basis in "religious feel-
ing" questioned along with the principle of "marital fidelity"? To
what authority should the case of *Madame Bovary* be presented if the
previously valid standards of society, "opinion publique, sentiment
religieux, morale publique, bonnes moeurs," are no longer sufficient
for judging this case? [84] These open and implicit questions do not by
any means indicate an aesthetic lack of understanding or moral philis-
tinism on the part of the prosecuting attorney. Rather, there is ex-
pressed in them the unsuspected influence of a new art form which can
by means of a new *manière de voir les choses* jolt the reader of *Madame
Bovary* out of the belief that his moral judgment is self-evident and re-
open the long-closed question of public morals. Inasmuch as Flaubert,
thanks to his impersonal style, did not provide an opportunity for the
banning of his novel on grounds of immorality, the court acted consis-
tently when it acquitted Flaubert as author but damned the literary
school which they supposed him to represent, but which in reality was
his stylistic device, as yet not recognized:

Attendu qu'il n'est pas permis, sous prétexte de peinture de caractère ou
de couleur locale, de reproduire dans leurs écarts les faits, dits et gestes des
personnages qu'un écrivain s'est donnée mission de peindre; qu'un pareil
système, appliqué aux oeuvres de l'esprit aussi bien qu'aux productions des
beaux-arts, *conduit à un réalisme qui serait la négation du beau et du bon
et qui*, enfantant des oeuvres également offensantes pour les regards et
pour l'esprit, commettrait de continuels outrages à la morale publique et
aux bonnes moeurs. [85]

Thus a literary work with an unusual aesthetic form can shatter the
expectations of its reader and at the same time confront him with a
question which cannot be answered by religiously or publicly sanctioned
morals. Instead of further examples, a word of reminder is in order
here: it was not Bertolt Brecht but the Enlightenment which first pro-
claimed the competitive relationship between literature and canonized
morals. Friedrich Schiller bears witness to this when he makes this ex-
press claim in regard to bourgeois drama: "the rules of the stage begin

83   *Ibid.*, p. 666.
84   Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 666-67.
85   *Ibid.*, p. 717.

where the realm of worldly laws ends."[86] The literary work can also—and in the history of literature this possibility characterizes the most recent period of modernity—reverse the relationship of question and answer and in an artistic medium confront the reader with a new "opaque" reality which can no longer be understood from the previous horizon of expectations. Thus the newest form of the novel, the much discussed *nouveau roman,* is a form of modern art which—according to Edgar Wind's formulation—presents the paradoxical case "that the solution is provided, the problem, however, is given up in order that the solution can be understood as the solution."[87] Here the reader is excluded from the position of the immediate audience and placed in the position of an uninitiated third person, who in the face of a still meaningless reality must himself find the question which will enable him to discover the perception of the world and the interpersonal problem to which the work's answer is directed.

It follows from all of this that the specific achievement of literature in society can be found only when the function of literature is not understood as one of imitation. If one looks at the moments in history when literary works toppled the taboos of the prevailing morality or offered the reader new solutions for the moral casuistry of his life which later would be sanctioned by the consensus of all readers in a society, a little-studied area of research opens for the literary historian. The chasm between literature and history, between aesthetic and historical knowledge, can be bridged if literary history does not simply once again describe literary works as a reflection of the process of general history, but rather discovers in the course of "literary evolution" that truly socially formative function which belongs to literature as it competes with other arts and social forces in the emancipation of man from his natural, religious, and social ties.

If the literary critic is willing to overcome his lack of historical sense for the sake of this task, then it can provide an answer to the questions, why and to what ends one can still—or again—study literary history.

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(Translated by Elizabeth Benzinger)

86 *Die Schaubühne als eine moralische Anstalt betrachtet,* Säkular-Ausgabe, XI, 99. See also R. Koselleck, *Kritik und Krise* (Freiburg and Munich, 1959), pp. 82 ff.

87 "Zur Systematik der künstlerischen Probleme," *Jahrbuch für Asthetik* (1925), 440; for the application of this principle to works of the art of the present see M. Imdahl, *Poetik und Hermeneutik,* III (see note 18), pp. 493-505, 663-64.