



LITERARY THEORY

AN ANTHOLOGY

THIRD EDITION

Edited By

Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan

WILEY Blackwell

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Preface

This book began, as one might guess, in the classroom. We have been teaching courses in contemporary literary theory for the past two decades, and we have each had the familiar experience of not being able to match the design of our courses to any anthology currently available. The move from awkwardly assembled xerox packets to an actual anthology has been both a natural outgrowth of our teaching and an astonishingly complex process of research, selection, and projection. For although the germ of the book was our own classroom(s), its destination has always been many classrooms, courses no doubt much different than any we ourselves might teach, and yet ones that our selections would ideally work both to accommodate and to enrich.

The scale of the volume is one expression of its projected flexibility; we felt that an anthology of literary theory needed not only to cover the range of theoretical perspectives or approaches that characterize the era “after the New Criticism,” the era that we take to be that of contemporary literary theory, but also to represent those perspectives with reasonable depth and range. The effect of such a decision, we hope, is that many kinds of courses will find a home in these selections, that a course that takes as its focus Structuralism, Post-Structuralism, Post-Colonialism, or Psychoanalysis and Gender Studies will find this anthology as useful as one that makes a more extensive survey of theoretical perspectives.

The anthology opens with formalisms – both Russian and American – in a gesture that marks its organization as partly chronological and partly heuristic. That is, we take formalism – at least in its American avatar of New Criticism – to mark the condition of students’ theoretical awareness before beginning the journey into “theory.” To the degree that they have been taught a form of “close reading” as the basic task of literary analysis, they are practicing formalists, though the practice may be, like that of the prose-speaking M. Jourdain in Molière’s *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, an unself-conscious one. Exploring the theoretical premises of a New Critical practice, placing those in conjunction with a historically unrelated yet theoretically cognate predecessor, Russian Formalism, seems like an appropriate way to initiate an exposure to “theory” in its less familiar guises.

The parts themselves have undergone many evolutions; the issue of where to draw the lines, what denomination to use, and where to locate certain selections has been as theoretically complex as it has been practically consequential. While “Deconstruction,” for example, enjoyed a separate life in literary critical history in the US in the 1970s and 1980s, we felt it more appropriate to place it within its historical and intellectual French context, and so you will find Derrida amongst Deleuze and Guattari, and Baudrillard under “Post-Structuralism.” The question of how to categorize some kinds of theory,

regarding gender, for example, was also difficult, and we opted for a big tent: A separate section could easily have been devoted to any number of theoretical projects, each of which has already produced its own “classic” texts, and while attending to these developments has been one goal of the anthology, we wished as well to embrace both the heterodox and the newly canonical. Some of the names in our table of contents may not be readily recognizable for this reason, and our inclusion of these texts is less a sign of presumption regarding future canonicity than it is an indicator of our desire to locate the anthology as much in the contemporary realm as possible. That has meant guessing, and we based our guesses on what we felt would be exciting or helpful in the classroom.

In a desire both to be as inclusive as possible and to represent works not commonly anthologized, we have done a certain amount of excerpting. Our principle has been to represent the core of a given work, and if, to that end, we have sacrificed portions of texts that readers will deem necessary, we can only suggest that our selections constitute a useful beginning to a more extensive acquaintance. We apologize in advance for any such textual editing deemed brutal.

A final word about our cover illustration. The words “No Radio” refer to a sign people put in their cars in New York City. It means “don’t bother breaking into the body of this car; the radio has already been either stolen or else removed by the owner.” We asked Wiley-Blackwell to use this image because it speaks to the reservations many still feel about “theory” and about its association with the ideology of mastery through critical analysis that murders to dissect. It also speaks, of course, to our hesitations as editors engaged in the compilation and dissemination of such theories. We would not summon the image (and we would not engage in the work) if we did not feel that “theory” is itself filled with doubt regarding the objectivist ideal the image so carefully mocks. Some theories do indeed fulfill the aspirations of the man with the heart in his hand, but we hope you will feel that there are many others in this book that adopt the perspective of the woman on the table.

A Short History of Theory

The first recorded human story, something that might be called “The Hunt,” appears on the walls of the caves at Lascaux, France. It was made either by children or for children, judging from the hand and feet impressions on the floor of the cave, and it represents not just a hunt but also a remarkable shift in human cognition that occurred, according to archeologist Richard Klein, around 42 ka. From this point forward, humans become more “human” in our modern sense. They invent new tools, everything from plows to currency, that expand the reach of human culture. They evidence an ability to picture abstract mental concepts and to imagine a spirit world. They slowly switch from a hunting existence to an agricultural existence. They stop living in small kin-based bands and organize large settled communities. The early human tendency to commit rampant genocide against his cousins slowly diminishes, and humans live together in relative peace. The emergence of this new way of life can be accounted for by the change in human cognition that is expressed in “The Hunt.” The mimetic ability one sees in the paintings for the first time was essential to emergent sociality. A capacity for mental representations is linked to control over rapid-fire, automatic negative emotions such as prejudice and fight-or-flight that aided survival on the savannah but were inimical to a settled social existence. That new mimetic cognitive ability was also crucial to imagining others’ lives empathetically so that communities of kin and non-kin could be built. The capacity for story-telling is thus connected in an essential way to the cognitive abilities that aided the emergence of modern human life. We did not so much begin to tell each other stories because we started living together in large communities; rather, we were able to build such communities because we were able to tell each other stories.

Story-telling likely also played a more direct role in the emergence of modern human life. Stories allowed early humans to store and to transmit information that was crucial to the social learning upon which humans’ new culturally mediated civil existence depended. Stories are memory banks that record lessons from the past and are easily transmissible. Some ethnologists believe a greater capacity for short-term memory was a key change in the human cognitive revolution around 42 ka. Early human stories were probably initially accounts of remembered events, simple documentaries. Those documentary accounts with time became fictional narratives as real characters were replaced by imaginary ones (some of whom would be taken from the surrounding nature, such as Crow or Turtle). Memory stories were also narratives that projected a future, the unknown part of the story yet to be told but anticipated in the mind. Such narrative graphing of life’s actions in terms of past, present, and future meant humans could also plan ahead and foresee events more so than before. Their lives were no longer limited to

the satisfying of physical needs in an immediate and short-term manner. “The Hunt” gave way to “The Trip to Whole Foods.”

Story-telling would have aided the building of more complex social networks, the integration of diverse people into a uniform culture, the training of minds in a communally beneficial empathy, and the evolution of common norms. Early human stories often possessed a normative dimension. One purpose of telling them was to instruct the young in the life-sustaining norms and practices of the community. Our earliest recorded verbal stories – Homer’s epics – teach norms of appropriate behavior towards others in one’s community such as hospitality and respect. And the tragedies of the fifth-century Greek enlightenment caution against norm-breaking behavior.

Literary theory came into being at a time when the normative function of story-telling was felt quite strongly. One of the first theorists, Plato, argued that literature should educate the young in good behavior. He lived and taught in Athens 2600 years ago, and he founded the first institution of higher learning in the West, the Academy. That is important because one consequence of the evolution of human cognition is the creation of a need for nurturing environments or niches to sustain the new cognitive abilities. Those nurturing environments were possible in cities and took the form of institutions such as schools and practices such as writing. Psychologists now know that the mind’s advanced cognitive abilities as well as the mind’s ability to live in a civil, sociable way with others depend on training and modeling. External prompting is required to allow full cognitive powers to emerge and full emotional abilities to grow. That humans’ ability to think in certain ways happened at the same time that nurturing institutions such as schools came into being should therefore be no surprise. The advance in human cognitive powers allowed humans to use external instruments such as writing and book-making to preserve past human cognitive achievements (as an external hard drive does today for a computer). Other tools and techniques could now also be used to train minds to replicate the achievements of the past so they would not be lost. Humans became capable of using what today we call cultural and social construction to maintain human civilization.

The new cognitive power of abstraction that began to emerge around 42ka divided knowledge between sense impressions and the abstract ideas the new cognition made possible. Plato built his philosophy around this distinction. He felt the abstract ideas the mind could now imagine were more true than sense impressions. The world around one did not offer many examples of perfectly formed beautiful things, but in one’s mind one could imagine an ideal beauty. Plato mistakenly thought these abstract concepts – Beauty, Truth, Justice – were actual things in the world, a kind of spirit realm of pure forms or ideas. We now know that he was simply describing the new cognitive ability of the human brain, its new capacity to picture non-sensory objects in the mind’s eye. All around Plato in his world, that new cognitive ability was helping his human companions to build a new civilization using new cultural tools such as currency, laws, and rhetoric. He felt, correctly, that the new cultural forms such as the enactment of fictional human events would serve an important function in the building of that new civilization. Empathy, an ability to live together in peace by imagining others’ lives and feeling them as similar to one’s own, was crucial to the new human capacity for sociality and civility, and literature and theater fostered it by obliging audiences to imagine others’ lives as if they were their own. Only a few hundred thousand years earlier, members of the *Homo* line had been hunting each other for food. Athens was clearly an improvement, but getting there required a new way of thinking whose normative function Plato correctly saw.

Plato: If the prospective guardians of our community are to loathe casual quarrels with one another, we must take good care that battles between gods and giants and all the other various tales of gods and heroes coming to blows with their relatives and friends don't occur in the stories they hear and the pictures they see. No, if we're somehow to convince them that fellow citizens never fall out with one another, that this is wrong, then that is the kind of story they must hear, from childhood onwards, from the community's elders of both sexes; and the poets they'll hear when they're older must be forced to tell equivalent stories in their poetry.... All things considered then, that is why a very great deal of importance should be placed upon ensuring that the first stories they hear are best adapted for their moral improvement.

If Plato's belief in rational ideas such as Justice, Beauty, and Truth that existed in a purely ideal or rational realm apart from sensory experience reflects the emergence of a brain capable of abstraction, of separating mental concepts from sensory data, the ability to construct mental representations also made possible more refined observation of sensory objects by separating the adaptively evolved mind from the world around it. Prior to this point, the human brain, in order to help preserve life, needed to be vigilant and keenly focused on sense impressions for signs of danger. Living in the emerging civil communities allowed the brain to evolve further and to adapt to social life by developing new communicative and emotional skills that required less immersion in or fusion with the sensory world around it. With the diminishment of danger and the growth of sociality came a greater separation of mind from world through the development of a capacity for mental representation that allowed the world to be perceived and studied more like an object. Civil existence and science became possible at the same time.

Plato's student Aristotle studied the structure of literature and its effects in this manner, treating literature as an object in the world that is as worthy of study as geology. He therefore described the structure of stories and noticed, for example, that the sequence of events in narrative is organized around moments of reversal and recognition. He differentiated between narrative perspectives and examined the traits that distinguish one genre like comedy from another like tragedy. He also analyzed the way literature provokes reactions in audiences. Tragedy inspires empathetic suffering with the fictional characters. His focus on empathy is especially important given how essential that emotion now was to the sustaining of human civilization. Without an ability to empathize with others grounded in the new power to imagine mental objects, humans would not have been able to form the newly complex societies that had come into being.

Aristotle: Tragedy is a representation of a serious, complete action which has magnitude, in embellished speech, with each of its elements used separately in the various parts of the play; represented by people acting and not by narration, accomplishing by means of pity and terror the catharsis of such emotions....

Clearly, each of the kinds of representation we mentioned will contain these differences and will vary by representing objects which vary in this manner.... Tragedy too is distinguished from comedy by precisely this difference: comedy prefers to represent people who are worse than those who exist, tragedy people who are better. Again, a third difference among these kinds is the manner in which one can represent each of these things. For one can use the same media to represent the very same things, sometimes by narrating (either by becoming another person as Homer does or remaining the same person and not changing or by representing everyone as in action and activity). Representation, then, has these three points of difference, as we said at the beginning, its media, its objects, and its manner.

The Greek example suggests how important the feedback loop from mind to culture to mind had become in human life. The new sociality and the new civility one sees in Greece during its Enlightenment were dependent on a nurturing environment, and schools played a prominent role in Athenian life. The early cognitive abilities of the Athenians were sustained by that cultural niche. It is no wonder, then, that the conquest of Greece by Rome 2100 ka interrupted the progress of human culture and of human cognition at least in the West. With the disappearance of the nurturing niche the Greeks had built, the cognition it sustained also declined. Authoritarianism, brutality, and pillage – versions of the primitive automatic instincts the mind's new capacity for mental representations helps regulate – became the norm in political and social life for six centuries. After the fall of Rome, the cultural ecosystem the Greeks evolved disappeared almost entirely. But the capacity for symbolic thought did not wane entirely. In the West, the Catholic Church preserved some of the cognitive abilities that emerged in Greece, especially the ability to think in abstract mental representations that stood apart from sensory experience or perception. Church thinkers became fascinated with allegory, the idea that religious texts especially contained hidden meanings. A biblical story about a man's treatment of his wife or children would be interpreted to have a second, other meaning having to do with religious doctrine.

Church thinkers also retained the Platonic idea of a culture that instilled norms of good behavior. Even without Aristotle's texts to serve as examples, some Church thinkers such as Augustine continued the analytic tradition and examined how logic and language worked. They developed a theory of language as signs that would prove important for future cultural analysts.

Augustine: There are two reasons why written texts fail to be understood: their meaning may be veiled either by unknown signs or by ambiguous signs. Signs are either literal or metaphorical. They are called literal when used to signify the things for which they were invented: as, for example, when we say *bovem* [ox], meaning the animal which we and all speakers of Latin call by that name. They are metaphorical when the actual things which we signify by the particular words are used to signify something else: when, for example, we say *bovem* and not only interpret the two syllables to mean the animal normally referred to by that name but also understand, by that animal, "worker in the gospel," which is what scripture, as interpreted by the apostle Paul, means when it says, "You shall not muzzle the ox that treads out the grain." ...

As well as this rule, which warns us not to pursue a figurative (that is, metaphorical) expression as if it were literal, we must add a further one: not to accept a literal one as if it were figurative. Generally speaking, it is this: anything in the divine discourse that cannot be related either to good morals or to the true faith should be taken as figurative. Good morals have to do with our love of God and our neighbor, the true faith with our understanding of God and our neighbor. The hope that each person has within his own conscience is directly related to the progress that he feels himself to be making towards the love and understanding of God and his neighbor.

Around 700 ka humans began to relaunch the Greek project as they rediscovered lost Greek texts. With the return of a secular culture during the Renaissance, thinkers could once again study literature as a form of moral instruction and as a cultural object with many dimensions meriting analysis. Dante Alighieri was both a leading poet of the Renaissance and an astute theorist of literature who described the different kinds of meaning a literary text could possess. This emphasis on interpretation or hermeneutics

derived from the allegorical study of religious texts, but it soon would acquire a secular use in literary analysis.

Dante Alighieri: [W]ritings can be understood and ought to be expounded principally in four senses. The first is called the literal, and this is the sense that does not go beyond the surface of the letter, as in the fables of the poets. The next is called the allegorical, and this is the one that is hidden beneath the cloak of these fables, and is a truth hidden beneath a beautiful fiction. Thus Ovid says that with his lyre Orpheus tamed wild beasts and made trees and rocks move toward him, which is to say that the wise man with the instrument of his voice makes cruel hearts grow tender and humble and moves to his will those who do not devote their lives to knowledge and art; and those who have no rational life whatsoever are almost like stones. Why this kind of concealment was devised by the wise will be shown in the penultimate book. Indeed the theologians take this sense otherwise than do the poets; but since it is my intention here to follow the method of the poets, I shall take the allegorical sense according to the usage of the poets.

The third sense is called moral, and this is the sense that teachers should intently seek to discover throughout the scriptures, for their own profit and that of their pupils; as, for example, in the Gospel we may discover that when Christ ascended the mountain to be transfigured, of the twelve Apostles he took with him but three, the moral meaning of which is that in matters of great secrecy we should have few companions.

The fourth sense is called anagogical, that is to say, beyond the senses; and this occurs, when a scripture is expounded in a spiritual sense which, although it is true also in the literal sense, signifies by means of the things signified a part of the supernal things of eternal glory, as may be seen in the song of the Prophet which says that when the people of Israel went out of Egypt, Judea was made whole and free. For although it is manifestly true according to the letter, that which is spiritually intended is no less true, namely, that when the soul departs from sin it is made whole and free in its power. In this kind of explication, the literal should always come first, as being the sense in whose meaning the others are enclosed, and without which it would be impossible and illogical to attend to the other senses, and especially the allegorical.

With a vibrant secular educational system, Italy in the Renaissance was an ideal niche environment for the development of human cognitive skills and for the reemergence of several branches of speculative thought, from literary theory to political theory. Renaissance discussions of literature down through the eighteenth century were dominated by Greek ideas, however, since the educational system favored those texts in the education of young women and men. Religious authorities did not smile on the Humanist argument that the reading of literature constituted a form of moral instruction. Writers such as Philip Sydney responded by arguing that literature portrays a second more ideal nature to the existing one and therefore suggests how things should be. It teaches by imaginative example.

Another debate regarding aesthetics during this period concerned what was called Classicism – the idea that art should follow the rules set down by Plato and Aristotle. Aristotle's notion of mimesis – that art imitates life – became the injunction that art must imitate life or "Nature." The writer should follow Nature and write as simply as possible, without self-aggrandizing artifice.

One of the most innovative thinkers of the Humanist era was Giambattista Vico. His *New Science* foreshadows twentieth-century linguistic philosophy in its recognition of the essentially metaphoric character of all language.

In the eighteenth century, a new way of thinking emerged, and that often is called rationalism because it emphasized the conceptualizing operations of the mind (or "Reason").

Rational ideas are transcendental (they stand outside the ordinary world of everyday perceptions) and universal (they concern what is general to all tulips rather than just to the specific one before our eyes). Theorists of literature such as Samuel Johnson therefore began to argue that literature is important not for how it portrays individual events or characters but rather for how it “rises to general and transcendent truths, which will always be the same.”

Germany’s educational system became quite sophisticated during this period, and a group of German thinkers were especially important in advancing rationalist literary theory: Gotthold Lessing, Immanuel Kant, and Georg Hegel. Writing at a time when the ideal of the classical examples of Greek and Roman art still was influential, Lessing focused on the essential characteristics of poetry and painting. Many assumed poetry should resemble painting, but Lessing differed. He noticed that poetry is consecutive in execution and emphasizes time, while painting favors simultaneity and is more a work based in space.

Gotthold Lessing: I reason thus: if it is true that in its imitations painting uses completely different means or signs than does poetry, namely figures and colors in space rather than articulated sounds in time, and if these signs must indisputably bear a suitable relation to the thing signified, then signs existing in space can express only objects whose wholes or parts coexist, while signs that follow one another can express only objects whose wholes or parts are consecutive.

Objects or part of objects which exist in space are called bodies. Accordingly, bodies with their visible properties are the true subjects of painting.

Objects or parts of objects which follow one another are called actions. Accordingly, actions are the true subjects of poetry....

But the objection will be raised that the symbols of poetry are not only successive but are also arbitrary; and, as arbitrary symbols, they are of course able to represent bodies as they exist in space. Examples of this might be taken from Homer himself. We need only to recall his shield of Achilles to have the most decisive instance of how discursively and yet at the same time poetically a single object may be described by presenting its coexistent parts....

[But] Homer does not paint the shield as finished and complete, but as a shield that is being made. Thus, here too he has made use of that admirable artistic device: transforming what is coexistent in his subject into what is consecutive, and thereby making the living picture of an action out of the tedious painting of an object. We do not see the shield, but the divine master as he is making it. He steps up to the anvil with hammer and tongs, and after he has forged the plates out of the rough, the pictures which he destines for the shield’s ornamentation rise before our eyes out of the bronze, one after the other beneath the finer blows of his hammer.

Kant distinguished between higher and lower mental faculties. The higher are capable of abstraction, of thinking in pure ideas. The lower were more practical and sensory, tied to specific judgments or perceptions. The best human behavior accorded with a universal idea of higher reason. The concepts of reason must, for Kant, be disinterested and law-like. To regulate human affairs impartially, they must serve no particular end or interest, such as the enrichment of an individual or the pursuit of sensory pleasure alone. Art, because it works on the senses rather than pure reason, is not capable of attaining such a high standard of disinterestedness. The most it can offer is “purposiveness without purpose,” a semblance of universality. Kant also noticed something one might have expected to be the case, given how the human brain evolved, and that is an overlap of

faculties, especially of the faculty for appreciating beauty and the moral faculty for knowing what is good. To judge something beautiful is to claim it resembles a moral that should be valid for all.

Immanuel Kant: Now I say that the beautiful is the symbol of the morally good, and also only in this respect (that of a relation that is natural to everyone, and that is also expected of everyone else as a duty) does it please with a claim to the assent of everyone else, in which the mind is at the time aware of a certain ennoblement and elevation above the mere receptivity for a pleasure from sensible impressions, and also esteems the value of others in accordance with a similar maxim of their power of judgment.... 1) The beautiful pleases immediately (but only in reflecting intuition, not, like morality, in the concept). 2) It pleases without any interest ... 3) The freedom of the imagination (thus of the sensibility of our faculty) is represented in the judging of the beautiful as in accord with the lawfulness of the understanding (in the moral judgment the freedom of the will is conceived as the agreement of the latter with itself in accordance with universal laws of reason). 4) The subjective principle for judging of the beautiful is represented as universal, i.e. valid for everyone.

Georg Hegel believed the mental and the physical or natural worlds were one. The logical processes of the mind, which he called “dialectic” after the logic of the Greeks, could be found at work in human history and human society as well as in nature. The natural and social world followed the same course of development as the mental world of logic. In a logical dialectical process, one moves from simple concrete observation (“Socrates is a man”) to universal idea (“All men are mortal”) to a conclusion that unifies concrete instance and universal idea in a single synthetic proposition (“Therefore, Socrates is mortal”). In human history, the idea of a just society is at first only partly fulfilled; it takes the form of simple rules without any coherent idea of justice informing them. Justice at this stage of human history resembles a simple concrete proposition in the dialectic. But as history progresses, the universal idea is integrated increasingly into juridical institutions until, after a long process of combined sociohistorical and logical development, the universal idea of justice and the concrete institutions that embody it are merged completely in an ideal government of law that is informed by universal principles that apply equally to all. In such a government or state, the practical concrete institutions are saturated with the ideas of reason or mind.

Something similar happens in art. Early art consists of simple sensory images without universal meaning. They are merely mimetic pictures of actual objects. They have no idea in them. But over time, as art evolves, following a logical process of development, art achieves a complex totality in which universally valid idea and sensory object, mind and concrete worldly form are merged and are one.

G. W. F. Hegel: Because the universal idea is in this way a concrete unity, this unity can enter art-consciousness only through the unfolding and the reunification of the particularizations of the universal idea, and, through this process, artistic beauty acquires a totality of particular stages and forms. Therefore, after studying artistic beauty in itself and as itself, we must see how beauty as a totality decomposes into its specific forms. This is the second part of our study, the doctrine of the forms of art. These forms find their origin in the different ways of grasping the universal idea as content.... Thus the forms of art are nothing more than the different relations of meaning and form, relations that proceed from the universal idea and therefore provide the true basis for the different forms of this sphere.

The ideas of Kant and Hegel – especially the distinction between the world of sensory experience and the ideal world of Reason – influenced the Romantic movement and writers such as Friedrich Schiller, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Ralph Waldo Emerson. For Schiller, artistic accounts of the rational spirit realm educated the mind and made it more civil. Art had a broad public purpose. While that idea may seem odd to modern secular ears, there is a way of understanding its accuracy, and that is to think of the spirit realm as a projection of the mind's capacity for abstraction. That capacity is connected to the mind's ability to use mental representation to control negative emotions, and reading fiction is now known to increase empathy. Writers like Schiller may have been correct, then, to think a literary education might make humans more civil.

The idea that literature might “elevate” the mind remains popular with literary theorists down through Matthew Arnold in the late nineteenth century. Arnold believed literature served an educational purpose. It elevated the mind to a higher rational realm above and separate from practical consciousness and natural emotional impulses.

Matthew Arnold: At first sight it seems strange that out of the immense stir of the French Revolution and its age should not have come a crop of works of genius equal to that which came out of the stir of the great productive time of Greece, or out of that of the Renaissance, with its powerful episode the Reformation. But the truth is that the stir of the French Revolution took a character which essentially distinguished it from such movements as these. These were, in the main, disinterestedly intellectual and spiritual movements; movement in which the human spirit looked for its satisfaction in itself and in the increased play of its own activity. The French Revolution took a political, practical character. The movement which went on in France under the old regime, from 1700 to 1789, was far more really akin than that of the Revolution itself to the movement of the Renaissance; the France of Voltaire and Rousseau told far more powerfully upon the mind of Europe than the France of the Revolution. Goethe reproached this last expressly with having “thrown quiet culture back.” Nay, and the true key to how much in our Byron, even in our Wordsworth, is this! – that they had their source in a great movement of feeling, not in a great movement of mind. The French Revolution, however, – that object of so much blind hatred, – found undoubtedly its motive-power in the intelligence of men, and not in their practical sense; this is what distinguishes it from the English Revolution of Charles the First's time. This is what makes it a more spiritual event than our Revolution, an event of much more powerful and worldwide interest, though practically less successful; it appeals to an order of ideas which are universal, certain permanent. 1789 asked of a thing, Is it rational? 1642 asked of a thing, Is it legal? ... But what is law in one place is not law in another ... [T]he prescriptions of reason are absolute, unchanging, of universal validity....

It is of the last importance that English criticism should clearly discern what rule for its course, in order to avail itself of the field now opening to it, and to produce fruit for the future, it ought to take. The rule may be summed up in one word – disinterestedness. And how is criticism to show disinterestedness? By keeping aloof from what is called “the practical view of things”; by resolutely following the law of its own nature, which is to be a free play of the mind on all subjects which it touches. By steadily refusing to lend itself to any of those ulterior, political, practical considerations about ideas.... Its business is, as I have said, simply to know the best that is known and thought in the world.

Yet equally influential during this period was an aesthetic philosophy that privileges sensory experiences and the impressions of the mind as it contemplates art. Writers such

as Charles Baudelaire and Walter Pater emphasized the value of the surface of experience, the physical pleasures of the world, and a concept of artistic experience as an end in itself. Art should be enjoyed for art's sake alone; there is no need to refer to a spiritual meaning, an ideal rational realm, or a moral purpose. Baudelaire also rejected the Romantic ideal of Nature and celebrated instead the pleasures of artifice.

Charles Baudelaire: In the window of a coffee-house there sits a convalescent, pleasurably absorbed in gazing at the crowd, and mingling, through the medium of thought, in the turmoil of thought that surrounds him. But lately returned from the valley of the shadow of death, he is rapturously breathing in all the odours and essences of life; as he has been on the brink of total oblivion, he remembers, and fervently desires to remember, everything. Finally, he hurls himself headlong into the midst of the throng, in pursuit of an unknown, half-glimpsed countenance that has, on an instant, bewitched him. Curiosity has become a fatal, irresistible passion!

Imagine an artist who was always, spiritually, in the condition of that convalescent, and you will have the key to the nature of [the ideal artist].

Now, convalescence is like a return towards childhood. The convalescent, like the child, is possessed in the highest degree of the faculty of being keenly interested in all things, be they apparently of the most trivial. Let us go back, if we can, by a retrospective effort of the imagination, towards our most youthful, our earliest, impressions, and we will recognize that they had a strange kinship with those brightly coloured impressions which we were later to receive in the aftermath of a physical illness, always provided that that illness had left our spiritual capacities pure and unharmed. The child sees everything in a state of newness; he is always drunk. Nothing more resembles what we call inspiration than the delight with which a child absorbs from color and form. I am prepared to go even further and assert that sublime thought is accompanied by a more or less violent shock which has its repercussion in the very core of the brain. The man of genius has sound nerves, while those of the child are weak. With the one, Reason has taken up a considerable position; with the other, Sensibility is almost the whole being. But genius is nothing more nor less than childhood recovered at will—a childhood now equipped for self-expression with manhood's capacities and a power of analysis which enables it to order the mass of raw material which it has involuntarily accumulated.

The crowd is his element, as the air is that of birds and water of fishes. His passion and his profession are to become one flesh with the crowd. For the perfect *flâneur*, for the passionate spectator, it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite.... Thus the lover of universal life enters into the crowd as though it were an immense reservoir of electrical energy. Or we might liken him to a mirror as vast as the crowd itself; or to a kaleidoscope gifted with consciousness, responding to each one of its movements and reproducing the multiplicity of life and the flickering grace of all the elements of life. He is an "I" with an insatiable appetite for the "non-I", at every instant rendering and explaining it in pictures more living than life itself, which is always unstable and fugitive....

Everything beautiful and good is the result of reason and calculation. Crime, of which the human animal has learned the taste in his mother's womb, is natural by origin. Virtue, on the other hand, is artificial, supernatural, since at all times and in all places gods and prophets have been needed to teach it to animalized humanity, man being powerless to discover it by himself. Evil happens without effort, naturally, fatally; Good is always the product of some art. All that I am saying about Nature as a bad counsellor in moral matters, and about Reason as true redeemer and reformer, can be applied to the realm of Beauty. I am thus led to regard external finery as one of the signs of the primitive nobility of the human soul. Those races which our confused and perverted civilization is pleased to treat

as savage, with an altogether ludicrous pride and complacency, understand, just as the child understands, the lofty price and complacency of make-up. In their naive adoration of what is brilliant – man-colored feathers, iridescent fabrics, the incomparable majesty of artificial forms – the baby and the savage bear witness to their disgust of the real, and thus give proof, without knowing it, of the immateriality of their souls....

Fashion should thus be considered as a symptom of the taste for the ideal which floats on the surface of all the crude, terrestrial and loathsome bric-a-brac that the natural life accumulates in the human brain: as a sublime deformation of Nature, or rather a permanent and repeated attempt at her reformation. And so it has been sensibly pointed out (though the reason has not been discovered) that every fashion is charming, relatively speaking, each one bearing a new and more or less happy effort in the direction of Beauty, some kind of approximation to an ideal for which the restless human mind feels a constant, titillating hunger.

Walter Pater was a professor of aesthetics at Oxford University who influenced a generation of artists and writers through his scholarly publications. The “Conclusion” to his *Studies in the Renaissance* caused a scandal by urging good Victorians to enjoy life and art as ends in themselves. No need for a “higher” spiritual meaning or a moral purpose. The experience of art itself was a sufficient reward.

Walter Pater: The service of philosophy, of speculative culture, towards the human spirit, is to rouse, to startle it to a life of constant and eager observation. Every moment some form grows perfect in hand or face; some tone on the hills or the sea is choicer than the rest; some mood of passion or insight or intellectual excitement is irresistibly real and attractive to us, – for that moment only. Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end. A counted number of pulses only is given to us of a variegated, dramatic life. How may we see in them all that is to be seen in them by the finest senses? How shall we pass most swiftly from point to point, and be present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest energy?

To burn always with this hard, gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life. In a sense it might even be said that our failure is to form habits: for, after all, habit is relative to a stereotyped world, and meantime it is only the roughness of the eye that makes any two persons, things, situations, seem alike. While all melts under our feet, we may well grasp at any exquisite passion, or any contribution to knowledge that seems by a lifted horizon to set the spirit free for a moment, or any stirring of the senses, strange dyes, strange colours, and curious odours, or work of the artist’s hands, or the face of one’s friend. Not to discriminate every moment some passionate attitude in those about us, and in the very brilliancy of their gifts some tragic dividing of forces on their way, is, on this short day of frost and sun, to sleep before evening. With this sense of the splendour of our experience and of its awful brevity, gathering all we are into one desperate effort to see and touch, we shall hardly have time to make theories about the things we see and touch. What we have to do is to be for ever curiously testing new opinions and courting new impressions, never acquiescing in a facile orthodoxy, of Comte, or of Hegel, or of our own....

One of the most beautiful passages of Rousseau is that in the sixth book of the *Confessions*, where he describes the awakening in him of the literary sense. An undefinable taint of death had clung always about him, and now in early manhood he believed himself smitten by mortal disease. He asked himself how he might make as much as possible of the interval that remained; and he was not biased by anything in his previous life when he decided that it must be by intellectual excitement, which he found just then in the clear, fresh writings of Voltaire. Well! we are all *condamnés*, as Victor Hugo says: we are all under sentence of death but with a sort of indefinite reprieve ... ; we have an interval, and then our place knows us

no more. Some spend this interval in listlessness, some in high passions, the wisest, at least among "the children of this world," in art and song. For our one chance lies in expanding that interval, in getting as many pulsations as possible into the given time. Great passions may give us this quickened sense of life, ecstasy and sorrow of love, the various forms of enthusiastic activity, disinterested or otherwise, which come naturally to many of us. Only be sure it is passion – that it does yield you this fruit of a quickened, multiplied consciousness. Of such wisdom, the poetic passion, the desire of beauty, the love of art for its own sake, has most. For art comes to you proposing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake.

In the nineteenth century, revolutions occurred against the reactionary monarchies that ruled much of the Continent. Only some succeeded, but the thinking of those concerned with literature turned to thoughts of the social and political role of literature. The realist and naturalist writers such as Émile Zola felt literature, using the new tools of science, should seek to promote change by questioning existing norms and established patterns. Russian critics such as Vissarion Belinsky felt literature should play a role in making their country more modern.

Karl Marx began as a philosopher, but he was moved to radical politics by the revolutions in Europe in the 1840s. Europe was awash in the ideas of utopian socialism, and those merged with the uprisings against monarchy across Europe and eventually gave rise to the communist and anarchist movements, which sought to create a post-capitalist democratic society in which workers would no longer be the slaves of capitalists and wealth would be shared equally. Forced into exile, Marx ended up in England, where he was able to analyze the emerging social order created by industrialization and capitalist free market economics. He saw literature as immersed in its social, historical, political, and economic context. One could not know the meaning of a work of literature without knowing the world in which it was made and the social forces out of which it emerged. Often literature served a political purpose and gave expression to the "ruling ideas of the ruling class."

Karl Marx: The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life.... In direct contrast to German philosophy which descends from heaven to earth, here we ascend from earth to heaven. That is to say, we do not set out from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at men in the flesh. We set out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process. The phantoms formed in the human brain are also, necessarily, sublimates of their material life-process, which is empirically verifiable and bound to material premises.

Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence. They have no history, no development; but men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking. Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life. In the first method of approach the starting-point is consciousness taken as the living individual; in the second method, which conforms to real life, it is the real living individuals themselves, and consciousness is considered solely as their consciousness.

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time

over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance. The individuals composing the ruling class possess among other things consciousness, and therefore think. Insofar, therefore, as they rule as a class and determine the extent and compass of an epoch, it is self-evident that they do this in its whole range, hence among other things rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age: thus their ideas are the ruling ideas of the epoch. For instance, in an age and in a country where royal power, aristocracy, and bourgeoisie are contending for mastery and where, therefore, mastery is shared, the doctrine of the separation of powers proves to be the dominant idea and is expressed as an "eternal law". . . . [W]e can say, for instance, that during the time that the aristocracy was dominant, the concepts honour, loyalty, etc. were dominant, during the dominance of the bourgeoisie the concepts freedom, equality, etc. The ruling class itself on the whole imagines this to be so.

Taking literary theory in the opposed direction were the French Symbolists led by Stéphane Mallarmé. These writers believed that poetry especially provided access to an ideal spiritual truth. Poetry served no moral purpose and had no social use. It was instead a privileged way of capturing the Ideal. Attention in literature should be on technique, language, and meaning. Instead of real natural flowers, the poet writes of "the flower that is absent from all bouquets."

Friedrich Nietzsche is now better known for his radically perspectival epistemology than for his theory of art, but in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) he advanced a theory of tragedy that foreshadowed in certain ways the emphasis in twentieth-century philosophy on discontinuity and contingency. Most philosophers believe Being is something easily known using the categories of Reason, but Nietzsche saw Being as becoming, as a process more akin to a fiery flow that had no knowable unity. Traditional philosophy suppresses this radical becoming by manufacturing lies to cover up the instability of the world. Nietzsche reached back to an alternative tradition that originated in Greece and that emphasized the ungraspable flow of life and conceived of Being as active becoming that eluded conceptual stabilization.

He makes a theme of that philosophic distinction in *The Birth of Tragedy* where he describes the Apollonian principle in art in terms of the philosophic quest for a knowable Being behind the play of appearances, a ground of unity and coherence. This principle of stability and unity is opposed by the Dionysian principle, which he defines in terms of play, mutability, and becoming.

Friedrich Nietzsche: The Dionysiac, with the primal pleasure it perceives even in pain, is the common womb from which both music and the tragic myth are born.

Could it be that with the assistance of musical dissonance, we have eased significantly the difficult problem of the effect of tragedy? After all, we do now understand the meaning of our desire to look, and yet to long to go beyond looking when we are watching tragedy; when applied to our response to the artistic use of dissonance, this state of mind would have to be described in similar terms: we want to listen, but at the same time we long to go beyond listening. That striving towards infinity, that wing-beat of longing even as we feel supreme delight in a clearly perceived reality, these things indicate that in both these states of mind we are to recognize a Dionysiac phenomenon, one which reveals to us the playful construction and demolition of the world of individuality as an outpouring of