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Theory and History of Literature

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Edited by Wlad Godzich and Jochen  
Schulte-Sasse

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Volume 1. Tzvetan Todorov  
*Introduction to Poetics*

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Volume 2. Hans Robert Jauss  
*Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*

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Hans Robert Jauss

Translation from German by Timothy Bahti

Introduction by Paul de Man

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Theory and History of Literature, Volume 2

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University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis

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Publication of this work has been made possible in part  
by a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

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Published by the University of Minnesota Press,  
2037 University Avenue Southeast, Minneapolis, MN 55414  
Printed in the United States of America.  
Second printing, 1983.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Jauss, Hans Robert.

Toward an aesthetic of reception.

(Theory and history of literature; v. 2)

Includes index.

Contents: Literary history as a challenge to literary  
theory—History of art and pragmatic history—Theory  
of genres and medieval literature—[etc.]

1. Reader-response criticism—Addresses, essays,  
lectures. I. Title. II. Series.

PN98.R38J38 801'.95 81-16260

ISBN 0-8166-1034-7 AACR2

ISBN 0-8166-1037-1 (pbk.)

The German texts of "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory" and "History of Art and Pragmatic Theory" are © 1970 by Suhrkamp Verlag. They appear here in English by courtesy of Suhrkamp Verlag. A different English version of certain sections of "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory" appeared in *New Literary History* I (1969). For permission to use the translation that appeared in *New Literary History* the publisher is grateful to that journal and its editor Ralph Cohen. The English translation of "History of Art and Pragmatic History" appears here through the courtesy of Princeton University Press, where it appeared in *New Perspectives in German Literary Criticism*, edited by Richard Amacher and Victor Lange (© 1979 by Princeton University Press). "Theory of Genres and Medieval Literature" originally appeared in German in *Grundriss der Romanischen Literaturen des Mittelalters*, volume six (© 1972 by Carl Winter Universitäts Verlag) and appears here by permission of Carl Winter Universitäts Verlag. "Goethe's and Valéry's Faust: On the Hermeneutics of Question and Answer" originally appeared in German in *Comparative Literature* 28 (1976). The essay appears here through the courtesy of that journal and its editor Thomas Hart as well as through the courtesy of Wilhelm Fink Verlag. "The Poetic Text within the Change of Horizons of Reading: The Example of Baudelaire's 'Spleen II'" originally appeared in German in *Romantische Zeitschrift für Literaturgeschichte*, Heft 2/3 (1980), and appears here in English translation courtesy of the author.

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## Introduction

*Paul de Man*

By his own volition, the work of the German literary historian and theorist Hans Robert Jauss has been associated with a study group for which he is a spokesman and which practices a specific way of investigating and teaching literature. In the field of literary theory, the existence of such groups is not an unusual occurrence. They are, at times, centered on a single, dominating personality and take on all the exalted exclusiveness of a secret society, with its rituals of initiation, exclusion, and hero-worship. Nothing could be more remote from the spirit of the group of which Jauss is a prominent member. The Konstanz school of literary studies, so named because several of its members taught or are teaching at the newly founded University of Konstanz in Southern Germany, is a liberal association of scholars, informally united by methodological concerns that allow for considerable diversity. It has the character of a continuing research seminar that includes some constant members (of which H. R. Jauss is one) next to more casual participants; a somewhat comparable instance of such a group, in structure if not in content, would have been, in this country, the Chicago critics of the Forties and Fifties, who shared an interest in Aristotelian poetics. The concerns of such groups are methodological rather than, as in the case of the New Criticism or the Frankfurt School, cultural and ideological; their influence is didactic and "scientific" rather than critical. One has to bear this aspect of Jauss's work in mind in reading the essays included in this volume: it accounts for their programmatic and relatively impersonal tone. Whereas the "masters" of an earlier generation in Germany and elsewhere, literary scholars such as Vossler, Spitzer, Curtius, Auer-

bach, or even Lukács, wrote as individual talents engaged in speculations of their own, Jauss sees himself as a participant in a team that also is concerned with the professional aspects of literary instruction. The attitude is typical for a generation whose approach to literature has become more systematic; it is by no means incompatible with genuine innovation nor with wider humanistic commitments. In reading Jauss, one is not reading the work of a speculative philosopher, a literary critic, or a pure theoretician of poetics. One is, first of all, reading the work of a specialist of French literature who has made contributions to a remarkably diverse number of topics, from medieval genre theory to Marcel Proust.<sup>1</sup> But, beyond this, one is also reading the work of a theoretically informed, learned, and enlightened expert whose work fully warrants extended theoretical discussion and didactic application.

The methodology of the Konstanz school is mostly referred to as *Rezeptionsästhetik*, a word that does not lend itself easily to translation into English. We speak, in this country, of reader-response criticism or, more imaginatively (though also more controversially) of "affective stylistics."<sup>2</sup> These terms stress reading as a constitutive element of any text but, except for the implicit connotations of "stylistic" or "poetics," they put less emphasis on the far-reaching, traditional word "aesthetics" that remains of central importance to Jauss and his associates. What has to be called, somewhat awkwardly, the "aesthetics of reception" has itself been well received in this country. It has been a two-way process; the University of Konstanz may be as far removed from a large urban center as is possible in today's Germany but there is nothing provincial about the Konstanz school. From the start, in 1963, the colloquia of the group included participants from the United States and a recent anthology of their main position papers includes contributions from Michael Riffaterre and Stanley Fish.<sup>3</sup> Conversely, leading members of the Konstanz group such as Wolfgang Iser, Jurij Striedter, and Hans Robert Jauss himself often teach in this country, some on a permanent basis. Leading American journals publish and review their papers; the books of Wolfgang Iser, whose field is English literature, have been translated and are being extensively used and debated by American specialists of narrative fiction. With the publication of this collection of essays by Hans Robert Jauss the introduction of the Konstanz school to American readers is made complete. It makes available some of the most lucidly argued theoretical documents to have originated in the group. They are indeed so clear and convincing as to require little introduction. Since they are rooted, however, in a meth-

odological and philosophical tradition only remotely comparable to our own, it may be useful to see how Jauss's presuppositions are revealed and put into perspective by approaches that developed in different circumstances.

The aim of the Konstanz theoreticians can be derived from the general title given to their main publication series: *Poetics and Hermeneutics*.<sup>4</sup> The *and* that appears in this combination is not as obvious as it might seem. Hermeneutics is, by definition, a process directed toward the determination of meaning; it postulates a transcendental function of understanding, no matter how complex, deferred, or tenuous it might be, and will, in however mediated a way, have to raise questions about the extralinguistic truth value of literary texts. Poetics, on the other hand, is a metalinguistic, descriptive or prescriptive discipline that lays claim to scientific consistency. It pertains to the formal analysis of linguistic entities as such, independently of signification; as a branch of linguistics, it deals with theoretical models prior to their historical realization. Hermeneutics belongs traditionally to the sphere of theology and its secular prolongation in the various historical disciplines; unlike poetics, which is concerned with the taxonomy and the interaction of poetic structures, hermeneutics is concerned with the meaning of specific texts. In a hermeneutic enterprise, reading necessarily intervenes but, like computation in an algebraic proof, it is a means toward an end, a means that should finally become transparent and superfluous; the ultimate aim of a hermeneutically successful reading is to do away with reading altogether.<sup>5</sup> It is not so easy to say how reading is involved, if at all, in poetics. If—to abuse once more one of the most outworn examples in literature—on noting that Homer refers to Achilles as a lion, I conclude that Achilles is courageous, this is a hermeneutic decision; if, on the other hand, I examine, with Aristotle, whether Homer is using a simile or a metaphor,<sup>6</sup> this is a consideration in the sphere of poetics. The two procedures have very little in common. It is clear, however, from this loaded example (loaded because, by selecting a figure of speech, one has in fact pre-empted the question) that one has to have "read" the text in terms of poetics to arrive at a hermeneutic conclusion. One has to have become aware that it is a figure, otherwise one would simply take it to mean that Achilles has changed species or that Homer has taken leave of his senses. But one also has to read it hermeneutically to "understand" it as poetics: one has to acknowledge Achilles' courage as well as his humanity to notice that something occurs in the language that does not normally occur in the natural or social world, that a lion can be substituted for

a man. All that this hasty piece of improvised poetics is meant to suggest is that hermeneutics and poetics, different and distinct as they are, have a way of becoming entangled, as indeed they have since Aristotle and before. One can look upon the history of literary theory as the continued attempt to disentangle this knot and to record the reasons for failing to do so.

The boldness of the Konstanz school in calling their approach a poetics as well as a hermeneutics measures the scope and the burden of its contribution. In practice, the distribution of competences as well as the rather complex methodological genealogy of the group has divided the emphasis among its various members. Some go back to the structural analyses of the Prague linguistic circle and find their ancestry among the more technical aspects of phenomenology, including the work of the Polish philosopher Roman Ingarden. In their case, the primary emphasis falls on poetics (*Werkstruktur*) rather than on hermeneutics (*Interpretationssystem*).<sup>7</sup> Others find their antecedents among philosophers of history and interpretation rather than in the structural analysis of language and of consciousness; their primary emphasis is on hermeneutics. The synthesis, the articulation of poetics with hermeneutics remains the common aim of all aestheticians of reception, but the attempted solutions as well as the techniques of reading that lead to these solutions vary, depending on the starting position. If, mostly for the sake of convenience, one chooses to divide the group into poetics and hermeneutics, then Hans Robert Jauss undoubtedly belongs among the latter. This may give him the appearance of being more traditional, or at least more concerned with tradition, than some of his associates, yet it makes his approach particularly instructive for American readers whose legitimate impatience with the technicalities of formal analysis sends them in search of models for historical understanding.<sup>8</sup>

Jauss's relationship to the hermeneutic tradition is itself by no means simple or uncritical. He fully shares in the stance that unites all members of the group in their common rejection of "essentialist" conception of literary art. The suspicion of essentialism arises whenever the study of the production or of the structure of literary texts is pursued at the expense of their reception, at the expense of the individual or collective patterns of understanding that issue from their reading and evolve in time. In "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory (Chapter 1 of this volume), the closest Jauss came to writing an actual manifesto, the polemical thrust of the passages in which he sets his methods apart from those of his predecessors allows one to situate this new pragmatism, or this new materialism, within

the tradition of German scholarship. Jauss differentiates himself sharply from both the formalistic and the Marxist tendencies that were prevalent at the time. The grounds for his critical attitude toward Marxism (or, to be more precise, toward a certain type of social realism) as well as toward form, turn out to be remarkably similar. Georg Lukács, an avowed Marxist, is criticized for reasons that differ little from those invoked with regard to the anything but Marxist Ernst Robert Curtius. For all their ideological differences, both adhere to the classical creed of (the canonical work as the aesthetic incarnation of a universal essence) Curtius's canon, which is that of the masterpieces of the Western neo-Latin tradition, differs entirely from Lukács's, which is that of nineteenth century realism as it culminates in Balzac and dissolves with Flaubert. But the disagreements between various canons are less important to Jauss than the canonical conception itself, in which the work is assumed to transcend history because it encompasses the totality of its tensions within itself. Lukács and Curtius both remain faithful to such a conception. Even Hans-Georg Gadamer, Jauss's teacher at Heidelberg whom he has consistently acknowledged as a determining influence, is being reproached for his commitment to a canonical idea of tradition, which, in Germany, often tends to coincide with the canonization of the Age of Goethe. Jauss's work is part of a reaction against an orthodoxy, an orthodoxy that refuses to admit, as Hegel is supposed to have stated in his *Aesthetics*, that the end of classicism is also the end of art. Hence his continued concern with modernity as the crux of literary history. The question remains to be considered whether Jauss's own historical procedure can indeed claim to free itself from the coercion of a model that is perhaps more powerful, and for less controllable reasons, than its assumed opponents believe.

The strength of Jauss's method stems from a refinement of the established rules for the historical understanding of literature. His interest is no longer directed toward the definition of an actual canon but toward the dynamic and dialectical process of canon formation—a notion that is familiar, in this country, to readers of T. S. Eliot and, more recently and in a very different mode, of Harold Bloom.<sup>8</sup> Such a critique of historical positivism coupled with a critique of essentialism is not in itself new; few historians still believe that a work of the past can be understood by reconstructing, on the basis of recorded evidence, the set of conventions, expectations, and beliefs that existed at the time of its elaboration. What is different and effective in the approach suggested by Jauss are the reasons (implicitly) given for this impossibility: the historical consciousness of a given period can

never exist as a set of openly stated or recorded propositions. It exists instead, in Jauss's terminology, as a "horizon of expectation." The term, which derives from Husserl's phenomenology of perception in its application to the experience of consciousness, implies that the condition of existence of a consciousness is not available to this consciousness in a conscious mode, just as, in a perception, conscious attention is possible only upon a background, or horizon, of distraction.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, the "horizon of expectation" brought to a work of art is never available in objective or even objectifiable form, neither to its author nor to its contemporaries or later recipients.

This complicates, but also enriches, the process of historical description to a considerable degree. A dialectic of understanding as a complex interplay between knowing and not-knowing, is built within the very process of literary history. The situation is comparable to the dialogical relationship that develops between the analyst and his interlocutor in psychoanalysis. Neither of the two knows the experience being discussed; they may indeed not even know whether such an experience ever existed. The subject is separated from it by mechanisms of repression, defense, displacement and the like, whereas, to the analyst, it is available only as a dubiously evasive symptom. But this difficulty does not prevent a dialogical discourse of at least some interpretative value from taking place. The two "horizons," that of individual experience and that of methodical understanding, can engage each other and they will undergo modifications in the process, though none of the experiences may ever become fully explicit.

The analogy with psychoanalysis (which Jauss does not use) underscores the epistemological complexity of the historian's task. Both analyst and historian point to a cognition that, for reasons variously identified as psychological, epistemological, or, in the case of Heidegger, ontological, is not available as an actual presence and therefore requires a labor of interpretation or of reading prior even to determining whether it can ever be reached. We have come to expect this degree of hermeneutic intricacy from any philosophical or psychological analysis but, surprisingly enough, a similar subtlety is rarely demanded from historians and, among historians, least of all from literary historians—although, according to the logic of the situation with its implied stress on reading rather than knowing, literary history, rather than psychoanalysis or epistemology, should be the privileged example, the model case. This surprise is in fact not surprising at all, since the reluctance is itself the symptom of an anxiety of not-knowing that may reach further than pragmatic historians may wish to know. Be this as it may, in Jauss's defense of a history

and an aesthetics of reception, the model for the historical understanding of literature finally comes of age, as it were, by ways of the negative implications contained in the term "horizon of expectation." His critical descriptions of earlier literary histories draw their energy from this insight and, with few exceptions, these descriptions will be found hard to refute. Jauss's critique of the preconscious or unconscious<sup>10</sup> assumptions that underlie canonical literary history constitutes a major contribution, all the more relevant for us since the same problem exists in this country in a less thematized, more diffused, and therefore all the more coercive way.

The same point of departure, the duplicious epistemology of the historical consciousness, allows Jauss to defend a far-reaching synthesis between the private and the public dimensions of the literary work. This synthesis constitutes the programmatic and forward-looking, as opposed to the critical, aspects of his work. Thus the passage from the individual to the collective or the social aspects of the work is implicit in the model of the "horizon": just as the anonymous background of a perception is general and nondifferentiated with regard to the individual perception that stands foregrounded and silhouetted<sup>11</sup> against it, the particular work, at the moment of its production, stands out in its singularity from the collective grayness of received ideas and ideologies. Preconscious or subconscious expectations are always collective and therefore, to a degree, "received." They are the outcome of a reception by means of which the individual work becomes part of a landscape against which new works will, in turn, be silhouetted. Translated from spatial metaphors into epistemological categories, the process can be stated in terms of question and answer: the question occurs as an individual disruption of an answer that has become common knowledge but which, under the effect of this new question, can now be seen to have itself been an individual response to an earlier, collective question. As the answer metamorphoses into a question, it becomes like an individual, tree, or portrait set within a stylized landscape and it reveals, by the same token, a live background behind its background, in the form of a question from which it now can itself *stand out*. The question-and-answer structure, like the foreground-background or the conscious-preconscious structures, are abyssal frames that engender each other without end or *telos*. In the process, however, they create a sequence of apparent syntheses that convey an impression of methodological mastery. Jauss can legitimately claim that the "horizon of expectation" mediates between the private inception and the public reception of the work. And he can also claim that it mediates between the

self-enclosed structure and its outside effect or *Wirkung*. To the extent that the background is collective or "common," it is, at first, nondifferentiated and unstructured; under the impact of the individually structured questions, as understood and identified by the historian-interpreter, it becomes aware of itself as background and acquires, in its turn, the coherence necessary for its organization and potential transformation. A clear example of this process occurs on page 27: Emma Bovary, a character in a fictional construct, whose mind is like an amorphous bundle of aberrations against which the beauty of her shape stands silhouetted, engenders, in the mind of her readers, a critical awareness of social conventions strong enough to put these conventions in question. (The historical reading as reception mediates between the formal structure and social change.)

In the final analysis, the procedure provides a model for the articulation between structure and interpretation. At the moment of its inception, the individual work of art stands out as unintelligible with regard to the prevailing conventions. The only relation it has to them is that of contemporaneity or of synchrony, an entirely contingent and syntagmatic relationship between two elements that happen to coincide in time but are otherwise entirely alien to each other. The differentiation that separates the work from its setting is then inscribed in the historical, diachronic motion of its understanding (*Horizontswandel*), which ends in the discovery of properties held in common between the work and its projected history. Unlike the relationship between the work and its historical present, the relationship between the work and its future is not purely arbitrary. It contains elements of genuine paradigmatic similarity that can circulate freely between the formal singularity of the work and the history of its reception. (Put in somewhat more technical terms, one would say that, in Jauss's historical model, a syntagmatic displacement within a synchronic structure becomes, in its reception, a paradigmatic condensation within a diachrony.) Attributes of difference and of similarity can be exchanged thanks to the intervention of temporal categories: by allowing the work to exist in time without complete loss of identity, the alienation of its formal structure is suspended by the history of its understanding. Chiasmic patterns of this type never fail to carry the promise of totalization.

One sees that the methodological rewards for the willingness to give up the illusion of unmediated understanding are considerable. Nor are they purely theoretical: Jauss is entirely willing to submit his hermeneutical model to the concrete test of practical interpretation and to refine it in the process. The lack of compatibility

between literary theory and practice that plagues the study of literature everywhere, thus also seems to be on the way of being overcome by a judicious aesthetics of reception. The persuasiveness of the argument, the validity of the critique of traditional canonical literary history, the considerable contributions to the interpretation of particular texts combine to bear witness to the merits of a method whose influence on the theory and the pedagogy of literary studies has been entirely beneficial. It is an impressive record. If one wishes, in the true spirit of the method, to question in turn the horizon of expectation of the aesthetics of reception, then one should begin by acknowledging the merits of a theory that enables one to ask such a question within a productive context.

Some writers, not very remote from Jauss in time and place, have denied the efficacy of a theory of interpretation based on the public reception of a work of literature and have discarded it as a mere side-effect devoid of hermeneutic interest. Walter Benjamin's dogmatic pronouncement at the onset of his essay entitled "The Task of the Translator" is a relevant case in point: "Nowhere does a concern for the reception of a work of art or of an artform ever itself fruitful for its understanding. . . . No poem is addressed to a reader, no painting to its beholder, no symphony to its listeners."<sup>12</sup> The passage is quoted by Rainer Warning, together with a passage from Adorno, as a prime example of author or production oriented essentialism.<sup>13</sup> But is this really the case? When Jauss identifies the power of canonical essences in the writings of Curtius, Lukács, and Gadamer, he is on safe ground, but when the same is being said about Benjamin, Adorno, and Heidegger—three names that, for all that separates them, belong together in this context—things are not so simple. Benjamin, for instance, in the very essay from which the just-quoted passage is taken, could not be more explicit in his critique of Platonic essences as a model for history when he rejects the validity of the notion of copy or representation (*Abbild*) as an approach to literary texts. Nor could one be more eloquently explicit than he is, in the same essay, about the historicity of literary understanding—although the notion of history that Benjamin here invokes certainly differs considerably from Jauss's. By invoking the "translation" rather than the reception or even the reading of a work as the proper analogon for its understanding, the negativity inherent in the process is being recognized: we all know that translations can never succeed and that the task (*Aufgabe*) of the translator also means, as in the parlance of competitive sports, his having to give up, his defeat "by default." But



"translation" also directs, by implication, the attention to language, rather than perception, as the possible locus for this negative moment. For translation is, by definition, intralinguistic, not a relationship between a subject and an object, or a foreground and a background, but between one linguistic function and another. Throughout the essay, Benjamin's point is that translation, as well as the insuperable difficulty that inhabits its project, exposes certain tensions that pertain specifically to language: a possible incompatibility between proposition (*Satz*) and denomination (*Wort*) or between the literal and what he calls the symbolic meaning of a text or, within the symbolic dimension itself, between what is being symbolized and the symbolizing function. The conflict is stated, in most general terms, as existing between what language means (*das Gemeinte*) and the manner in which it produces meaning (*die Art des Meinens*). It is certainly true that, in Benjamin's essay and elsewhere in his writings, these tensions are, to some degree, suspended in what he refers to as pure language: *die reine Sprache*. But it is equally clear that this apparent transcendence does not occur in the realm of art but in that of the sacred. Between Benjamin's *reine Sprache* and Valéry's *poésie pure* there is very little in common. Far from being nostalgia or a prophecy of the sacred, poetic language, of which the inherent inadequacy is made explicit in its translation, is what has to be forgotten to find access to the sacred: in the poetic translations that Hölderlin made of Sophocles "meaning collapses from abyss to abyss, until it threatens to lose itself in the bottomless depths of language." In such a sentence, "abyss" should perhaps be read as technically and neutrally as in any trivial "mise en abîme." The existential pathos is counterbalanced by the fact that these "bottomless depths" of language are also its most manifest and ordinary grammatical dimensions, the specific linguistic categories that Benjamin can list with some precision. What this does to Benjamin's subsequent claims of transcendence (or to their perhaps falacious understanding as transcendence) is not our present concern. It establishes however that, as far as poetry and its history are concerned, there can be no question of essences. The rejection of a conception of poetry as message or reception is not the result of an essentialist conception of literature but of the critique of such a conception. With numerous qualifications, something similar could be said of Heidegger's essay "On the Origin of the Work of Art," which Jauss summarizes (and dismisses) as an assertion of a "timeless present" or a "self-sufficient presence" (p. 63) of the work of art, a simplification that does scant justice to Heidegger's dialectical concept of historical preservation (*Bewahrung*) on

which Jauss himself, possibly by way of Gadamer, is dependent.

The point is not to oppose to each other philosophical traditions some of which Jauss could easily enlist on his side of the question. Rather, the reference to Benjamin's essay draws attention to the possibility that a concept such as "horizon of expectation" is not necessarily applicable, without further elaboration, to the arts of language. For all the obstacles to understanding mentioned by Benjamin belong specifically to language rather than to the phenomenal world; consequently, the expectation that they could be mastered by analogy with processes that stem from the psychology of perception is by no means certain. Husserl himself, among others, could be invoked to caution against the possibility of such a mistranslation.<sup>14</sup> The hermeneutics of experience and the hermeneutics of reading are not necessarily compatible. This does not imply that the solutions proposed by Jauss are inadequate or that the recourse to perception can or should be avoided altogether; the opposite is the case. It does mean, however, that the horizon of Jauss's methodology, like all methodologies, has limitations that are not accessible to its own analytical tools. The limitation, in this case, has to do with linguistic factors that threaten to interfere with the synthesizing power of the historical model. And it also means that these same factors will then exercise a more or less occult power over Jauss's own discourse, especially over the details of his textual interpretations.

At first sight, this hardly seems to be the case. Jauss is by no means adverse to taking the linguistic aspects of texts into consideration, nor is he in any way on the defensive in dealing with the work of linguists. His preference, however, goes to linguists who attempt to mediate between the communicative and the aesthetic function of language, to what one could call the stylists of communication theory. Jauss has argued from the start that the recognition of the formal and aesthetic aspects of a text are not to be separated from historical investigations having to do with its reception; a good formalist, by the strength of his own performance, has to become a historian. The Czech linguist Felix V. Vodička, whose work is often cited with approval by Jauss and other Konstanz theoreticians, has made this explicit in his conception of reception as the historical "concretization" of a linguistic structure. The element of negativity that, in Jauss's horizon of expectation is located in the nonawareness of the background, resides, in Vodička and in the Prague linguists generally, in the characterization of literary language as a language of signs. Just as an element of not-knowing is built within the model of the horizon, the concept of literary sign implies an element of inde-

terminacy and of arbitrariness. In the words of Jan Mukařovský, a leading figure of the Prague Linguistic Circle, as quoted by Vodička: "Although the work of literature is closely dependent in its effect on communication by signs, it depends on it in such a manner that it is the dialectical negation of an actual communication."<sup>15</sup> The ensuing polysemy is mastered by inscribing it within the historical and social continuum of particular receptions or "concretizations." Structural aesthetics as practiced by the Prague circle are therefore far from being a threat to Jauss. His historical concepts seem to dovetail perfectly with their linguistic terminology. This theoretical alliance achieves a genuine synthesis between hermeneutics and poetics. Is this to say that Benjamin's anxieties about the semantics of poetic language are convincingly laid to rest by the concerted investigations of both linguists and historians?

The answer will depend on a term that until now we were able to keep in abeyance. When Vodička speaks of concretizations, he strongly insists that these are *aesthetic* concretizations, just as Jauss's reception is an *aesthetic* reception, an *aesthetic* process. How "aesthetic" is to be understood here is not self-evident. For Mukařovský, the aesthetic quality of the work of literature, like its historical quality, is a function of its sign-structure. In the analysis of poetic diction "the structure of the linguistic sign holds the center of attention, whereas the (nonpoetic) functions are oriented toward extralinguistic instances and goals exceeding the linguistic sign."<sup>16</sup> The focus, in poetic texts, on the process of signification rather than on significance is what is said to be specifically aesthetic. The arbitrary and conventional aspects of the sign thus acquire value as aesthetic features and it is by this same conventionality that the collective, social, and historical dimensions of the work can be reintegrated. This is the very point at which the procedures of a historian such as Jauss and poeticsians such as Vodička or Mukařovský converge. It is Jauss's considerable merit to have perceived and demonstrated the linkage between reception and semiotics. The condensation of literary history and structural analysis occurs by ways of the category of the aesthetic and depends for its possibility on the stability of this category.)

This stability, however, remains problematic for many philosophers. A concatenation of the aesthetic with the meaning-producing powers of language is a strong temptation to the mind but, precisely for that reason, it also opens up a Pandora's box. The aesthetic is, by definition, a seductive notion that appeals to the pleasure principle, a eudaemonic judgment that can displace and conceal values of truth and falsehood likely to be more resilient to desire than values of

pleasure and pain. Nietzsche, who is acutely aware of aesthetic powers as tools of the will, warns that judgments based on pleasure or on pain "are the silliest expressions of judgments imaginable—by which, of course, I (Nietzsche) do not mean to say that the judgments which become audible in this manner have to be silly."<sup>17</sup> Aesthetic reactions can never be considered as central causes (*Ursachen*) but only as trivial side-effects (*Nebensachen*): "they are value judgments of the second order which are derived from a centrally dominant value; they consider the useful and the harmful in a purely affective mode and are therefore absolutely volatile and dependent."<sup>18</sup> The considerable interest they hold for the historian or for the critical philosopher is symptomatological rather than systematic: they are philosophically significant to the extent that their power to mislead points to other causes. Hegel's massively misunderstood treatment of the aesthetic as a provisional (*vorläufig*, a word that also occurs in Benjamin<sup>19</sup>) form of cognition is entirely in the spirit of his continuators Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. This means, among other things, that whenever the aesthetic is invoked as an appeal to clarity and control, whenever, in other words, a symptom is made into a remedy for the disorder that it signals, a great deal of caution is in order. Jauss's straightforward equation of the aesthetic with the pleasure principle, as in the essay on Valéry and Goethe, or as is implicit in his subsequent book on *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*<sup>20</sup>, is in itself symptomatic. And when this same principle is then made to link up with the more objective properties of language revealed by linguistic analysis, the suspicion arises that aesthetic judgment has trespassed beyond its legitimate epistemological reach. As is to be expected in such a case, the traces of this transgression become noticeable by the omission, rather than by the misrepresentation, of certain features of language.

Characteristic of such omissions is Jauss's lack of interest, bordering on outright dismissal, in any considerations derived from what has, somewhat misleadingly, come to be known as the "play" of the signifier, semantic effects produced on the level of the letter rather than of the word or the sentence and which therefore escape from the network of hermeneutic questions and answers. Such a concern with "the instances of the letter" is particularly in evidence, as is well known, among certain French writers not generally included within Jauss's own critical canon of relevant *Fachliteratur*. He has always treated such Parisian extravagances with a measure of suspicion and even when, under the pressure of their persistence as well as of genuine affinities between their enterprise and his own, he acknowledged

some of their findings, it has always been a guarded and partial recognition. There are good pedagogical and ideological reasons, of local rather than general interest, for this reserve. The tactics of exclusion, on the other hand, are so familiar as to constitute, within the community of literary scholarship, a mass reaction: in a long tradition, more familiar even in the world of *haute couture* than of literary theory, what is made in Paris is often thought of as more fashionable than sound. What is in fashion in Paris is tolerable only as window display, not for everyday wear. Yet, as we know from Baudelaire, fashion, *la mode*, is itself a highly significant and, precisely, aesthetic and historical category that historians should not underestimate. When it becomes fashionable to dismiss fashion, clearly something interesting is going on, and what is being discarded as mere fashion must also be more insistent, and more threatening, than its frivolity and transience would seem to indicate. What is being dismissed, in the context of our question, is the play of the signifier, the very same topic (if it can thus be called) which Friedrich Schlegel singled out when the displeasure of his readers, the accusation of frivolity, forced him, in 1800, to suspend publication of the *Athenäum*.<sup>21</sup>

In the practice of his own textual interpretation, Jauss pays little attention to the semantic play of the signifier and when, on rare occasions, he does so, the effect is quickly reaestheticized before anything unpleasant might occur—just as any word-play is so easily disarmed by assimilating it to the harmlessness of a mere pun or *calembour*. Thus, in a recent article that makes use of one of Baudelaire's *Spleen* poems as a textual example,<sup>22</sup> Jauss comments judiciously on the lines in which the name of the eighteenth-century painter Boucher is made to pseudo-rhyme with the word "débouché" (uncorked)

... un vieux boudoir  
Où les pastels plaintifs et les pâles Boucher,  
Seuls, respirent l'odeur d'un flacon débouché.

In a rare Lacanian moment, Jauss suggests that what he calls a "grotesque" effect of verbal play—the rhyme-pair Boucher/débouché—is also something more uncanny: "The still harmonious representation of the last perfume escaping from the uncorked bottle overturns (*kippt um*) into the dissonant connotation of a 'decapitated' rococo painter Boucher" (p. 157). After having gone this far, it becomes very hard to stop. Should one not also notice that this bloody scene is made gorier still by the presence of a proper name (Boucher) which, as a common name, means butcher, thus making the "pâle Boucher" the agent of his own execution? This pale and white text of recollec-

tion (the first line of the poem is "J'ai plus de souvenirs que si j'avais mille ans") turns red with a brutality that takes us out of the inwardness of memory, the ostensible *thème* of the poem, into a very threatening literality to which an innocent art-term such as "dissonance" hardly does justice. Much more apt is Jauss's very concrete and undecorous, almost colloquial, word "umkippen" (to overturn), which "overturns" the beheaded Boucher as if he were himself an uncorked "flacon" spilling his blood. That this would happen to the proper name of a painter, and by means of a merely "grotesque" and frivolous play on words tells us a great deal about the difficult-to-control borderline (or lack of it) between the aesthetics of *homo ludens* and the literal incisiveness of *Wortwitz*. For reasons of decorum, the gap that Jauss has opened, by his own observation, in the aesthetic texture of the language is at once reclosed, as if the commentator felt that he might betray the integrity of the text with which he is dealing.

This hesitation, this restraint before giving in to the coarseness and the potential violence of the signifier is by no means to be condemned as a lack of boldness. After all, Baudelaire himself does not threaten us, or himself, directly, and by keeping the menace wrapped up, as it were, within a play of language, he does not actually draw blood. He seems to stop in time, to fence with a foil<sup>23</sup>—for how could anyone be hurt by a mere rhyme? Yet, the poetic restraint exercised by Baudelaire differs entirely from the aesthetic restraint exercised by Jauss. For the play on words, as we all know from obscene jokes, far from preserving decorum dispenses with it quite easily, as Baudelaire dispensed with it to the point of attracting the attention of the *police des mœurs*. What it does not dispense with, unlike decorum (a classical and aesthetic concept), is the ambiguity of a statement that because it is a verbal thrust and not an actual blow, allows itself to be taken figurally but, in so doing, opens up the way to the performance of what it only seems to feign or prefigure. The false rhyme on Boucher/débouché is a figure, a paranomasis. But only after we have, with the assistance of H. R. Jauss, noticed and recognized it as such does the actual threat inherent in the fiction produced by the actual hands of the painter (who is also a butcher) become manifest. This no longer describes an aesthetic but a poetic structure, a structure that has to do with what Benjamin identified as a nonconvergence of "meaning" with "the devices that produce meaning," or what Nietzsche has in mind when he insists that eudaemonic judgments are inadequate "means of expression" of a cognition. Since this poetic (as distinguished from aesthetic) structure has to do with the necessity of deciding whether a statement in a text is to be taken

as a figure or *à la lettre*, it pertains to rhetoric. In this particular instance, Jauss has come upon the rhetorical dimension of language; it is significant that he has to draw back in the face of his own discovery.

But how can it be said that Jauss swerves from the consideration of rhetoric where he has so many perceptive and relevant things to say about it, and does so without any trace of the restraint for which I am both praising and blaming him in his gloss on Baudelaire's poem? An extended study of his writings, going well beyond the decorous limits of an introduction, would show that something similar to what happens in the essay on Spleen occurs whenever rhetorical categories are at stake. One hint may suffice. In a polemical exchange with Gadamer about the rhetoric of classicism (p. 30), classical art is assimilated to a rhetoric of mimesis (the Aristotelian rhetorical category *par excellence*), and opposed to medieval and modern art, which are said to be nonmimetic and nonrepresentational. A rhetorical trope serves as the ground of a historical system of periodization that allows for the correct understanding of meaning; once again, a poetic and a hermeneutic category have been seamlessly articulated. But if this assertion seems so reasonable, is it not because it corresponds to a received idea of literary history rather than being the result of a rigorous linguistic analysis? The alternative to *mimesis* would be, one assumes, allegory, which all of us associate with medieval and, at least since Benjamin, with modern art. If we then ask whether Jauss's own model for reading, the horizon of expectation, is classical or modern, one would have to say that it is the former. For it is certainly, like all hermeneutic systems, overwhelmingly mimetic: if literary understanding involves a (horizon of expectation) it resembles a sense of perception, and it will be correct to the precise extent that it "imitates" such a perception. The negativity inherent in the Husserlian model is a negativity within the sensory itself and not its negation, let alone its "other." It is impossible to conceive of a phenomenal experience that would not be mimetic, as it is impossible to conceive of an aesthetic judgment that would not be dependent on imitation as a constitutive category, also and especially when the judgment, as is the case in Kant, is interiorized as the consciousness of a subject. The concept of nonrepresentational art stems from painting and from a pictorial aesthetic that is firmly committed to the phenomenalism of art. The allegory, or allegoresis, which Jauss opposes to mimesis, remains firmly rooted in the classical phenomenalism of an aesthetics of representation.

"Allegory," however, is a loaded term that can have different implications. A reference to Walter Benjamin can again be helpful, all

the more so since Jauss alludes to him in the same essay on Baudelaire from which I have been quoting. In his treatment of allegory Benjamin plays, by anticipation, the part of Hamann in a debate in which Jauss would be playing the part of Herder. For him, allegory is best compared to a commodity; it has, as he puts it in a term taken from Marx, *Warencharakter*, "matter that is death in a double sense and that is anorganic." The "anorganic" quality of allegory is, however, not equivalent, as Jauss's commentary seems to suggest (p. 179), to the negation of the natural world; the opposition between organic and anorganic, in Benjamin, is not like the opposition between *organisch* and *aorganisch*, familiar from the terminology of idealist philosophy in Schelling and also in Hölderlin. The commodity is anorganic because it exists as a mere piece of paper, as an inscription or a notation on a certificate. (The opposition is not between nature and consciousness (or subject) but between what exists as language and what does not.) Allegory is material or materialistic, in Benjamin's sense, because its dependence on the letter, on the literalism of the letter, cuts it off sharply from symbolic and aesthetic syntheses. "The subject of allegory can only be called a grammatical subject"; the quotation is not from Benjamin but from one of the least valued sections of Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics*,<sup>24</sup> the canonical bible, still for Heidegger, of the phenomenalism of art. Allegory names the rhetorical process by which the literary text moves from a phenomenal, world-oriented to a grammatical, language-oriented direction. It thus also names the moment when aesthetic and poetic values part company. Everyone has always known that allegory, like the commodity and unlike aesthetic delight, is, as Hegel puts it, "icy and barren."<sup>25</sup> If this is so, can one then still share Jauss's confidence that "the allegorical intention, pursued to the utmost of *rigor mortis*, can still reverse (*umschlagen*) this extreme alienation into an appearance of the beautiful" (205)?<sup>26</sup> If the return to the aesthetic is a turning away from the language of allegory and of rhetoric, then it is also a turning away from literature, a breaking of the link between poetics and history.

The debate between Jauss and Benjamin on allegory is a debate between the classical position, here represented by Jauss, and a tradition<sup>27</sup> that undoes it, and that includes, in the wake of Kant, among others Hamann, Friedrich Schlegel, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche. The debate occurs in the course of interpreting Baudelaire's poem "Spleen II." The poem deals with history as recollection, *souvenir*, Hegel's *Erinnerung*. Jauss's precise and suggestive reading carefully traces the manner in which an inner state of mind (spleen) is first compared

in an inside object (ll. 2 and 5), then asserted to *be* such an object (l. 6), then becomes the voice of a speaking subject that declares itself to be an object (l. 8), and finally culminates in the dialogical relationship of an apostrophe by this subject to a material object that has itself acquired consciousness:

— Désormais tu n'es plus, ô matière vivante!  
Qu'un granit entouré d'une vague épouvante, . . .  
[ll. 19-20]<sup>28</sup>

At the conclusion of the poem, the enigmatic figure of "Un vieux sphinx" appears and is said, however restrictively and negatively, to be singing:

Un vieux sphinx . . .  
Ne chante qu'aux rayons du soleil qui se couche.  
[ll. 22-24]

Jauss convincingly identifies this sphinx as the figure of the poetic voice and his song as the production of the text of "Spleen II" (pp. 169, 170). We rediscover the not unfamiliar, specular (that is to say solar and phenomenal) conception of a "poetry of poetry,"<sup>29</sup> the self-referential text that thematizes its own invention, prefigures its own reception and achieves, as aesthetic cognition and pleasure, the recovery from the most extreme of alienations, from the terror of encrypted death. "The dissonance of the statement is aesthetically harmonized by the assurance and the balance between the various textual layers" (p. 182). "In a successfully elaborated form, the literary representation of terror and anxiety is always already, thanks to aesthetic sublimation, overcome" (p. 167). The promise of aesthetic sublimation is powerfully argued in a manner that leaves little room for further questioning.

The assurance that further questioning nevertheless should take place has little to do with one's own spleen, with pessimism, nihilism or the historical necessity to overcome alienation. It depends on powers of poetic analysis, which it is in no one's power to evade. One of the thematic textual "layers" of "Spleen II" that remain constant throughout the text is that of the mind as a hollow container, box, or grave and the transformation of this container, or of the corpse contained in it, into a voice:

mon triste cerveau.  
C'est une pyramide, un immense caveau,  
Qui contient plus de morts que la fosse commune.  
— Je suis un cimetière abhorré de la lune,  
. . . . .  
— Désormais tu n'es plus, ô matière vivante!

Qu'un granit entouré d'une vague épouvante,  
Assoupi dans le fond d'un Sahara brumeux;  
Un vieux sphinx ignoré du monde insoucieux,  
Oublié sur la carte, et dont l'humeur farouche  
Ne chante qu'aux rayons du soleil qui se couche.

The transformation occurs as one moves from mind (as recollection) to pyramid and to sphinx. It occurs, in other words, by an itinerary that travels by way of Egypt. Egypt, in Hegel's *Aesthetics*, is the birthplace of truly symbolic art, which is monumental and architectural, not literary. It is the art of memory that remembers death, the art of history as *Erinnerung*. The emblem for interiorized memory, in Hegel, is that of the buried treasure or mine (*Schacht*), or perhaps, a well.<sup>30</sup> Baudelaire, however, fond though he is of well-metaphors, uses "pyramid," which connotes, of course, Egypt, monument and crypt, but which also connotes, to a reader of Hegel, the emblem of the sign as opposed to the symbol.<sup>31</sup> The sign, which pertains specifically to language and to rhetoric, marks, in Hegel, the passage from sheer inward recollection and imagination to thought (*Denken*), which occurs by way of the deliberate forgetting of substantial, aesthetic, and pictorial symbols.<sup>32</sup> Baudelaire, who in all likelihood never heard of Hegel, happens to hit on the same emblematic sequence<sup>33</sup> to say something very similar. The decapitated painter lies, as a corpse, in the crypt of recollection and is replaced by the sphinx who, since he has a head and a face, can be apostrophized in the poetic speech of rhetorical figuration. But the sphinx is not an emblem of recollection but, like Hegel's sign, an emblem of forgetting. In Baudelaire's poem he is not just "oublié" but "oublié sur la carte," inaccessible to memory because he is imprinted on paper, because he is himself the inscription of a sign. Contrary to Jauss's assertion—"for who could say with more right than the sphinx: j'ai plus de souvenirs que si j'avais mille ans"—the sphinx is the one least able to say anything of the sort. He is the grammatical subject cut off from its consciousness, the poetic analysis cut off from its hermeneutic function, the dismantling of the aesthetic and pictorial world of "le soleil qui se couche" by the advent of poetry as allegory. What he "sings" can never be the poem entitled "Spleen"; his song is not the sublimation but the forgetting, by inscription, of terror, the dismemberment of the aesthetic whole into the unpredictable play of the literary letter. We could not have reached this understanding without the assistance of Jauss's reading. His work confronts us with the enigma of the relationship between the aesthetic and the poetic and, by so doing, it demonstrates the rigor of its theoretical questioning.

Paul de Man

## Translator's Preface

*Timothy Bahti*

I recently came across a scholarly article (in German) on contemporary "aesthetics of reception" that was utterly forgettable except that, within the space of eleven pages, it displayed no fewer than 106 footnotes. This is an example, perhaps, not only of a certain tendency toward overkill in German scholarship, but also of the degree of close attention and learned debate being given to that development in literary studies that is also known as the Konstanz School. As Paul de Man notes in his Introduction, Hans Robert Jauss and his colleagues are engaged in rethinking the methods of literary study, and this is more an enterprise of literary scholarship than it is a project in literary theory or a part of today's myriad debates on the philosophical and ideological assumptions of the human sciences. It is in this spirit of literary scholarship—rather than one of partisan affiliation—that I have translated the essays collected here, and would make several prefatory remarks.

Widely discussed in both West and East Germany since its organization as a loosely collective position in the late Sixties, and increasingly well known to the Germanophonic audience in France and America, the Konstanz School is for the most part unknown to English-speaking audiences and has until now been largely limited to two translated books by Wolfgang Iser. As a scholar of English literature and a theorist working in large part within the Anglo-American philosophic tradition, Iser could appeal to this audience on its native ground. Now, with the appearance of this work by Jauss in English, the more *historical* position of the other leading Constance representative can finally be broadly appreciated. I believe that Jauss's posi-

tion obviates, or at least reformulates in more interesting and productive ways, many of the difficulties of the various Anglo-American theories of "reader response" (from I. A. Richards to the present) or the neo-Aristotelian ideas about emotions elicited by literary form, at the same time that it circumvents the objections to considerations of the reader as they are presented in W. K. Wimsatt's argument against the "affective fallacy" or other essays of the New Criticism—and Jauss does both precisely through his engagement of the historical dimension of literary understanding. In this, he belongs to a line of twentieth-century German critics that includes Walter Benjamin, Erich Auerbach, Theodor Adorno, and Peter Szondi, and that constitutes the backbone of Germany's contribution to literary studies in this century, distinguishing it from the more ahistorical contributions of French, English, and American theory and criticism. Given this difference in intellectual contexts, then, Jauss's work deserves not a loose translation that might make it all too easily assimilable into our current critical situation, but rather a precise translation that would allow for a close, rigorous, truly critical reception. It is such a translation that I have tried to provide.

Jauss's German is often not easy, and I have not attempted to simplify it when transposing it into English. His terminologies and conceptual frameworks, on the other hand, can perhaps be made more accessible through several brief references. Jauss was trained within the German tradition of Romance philology, a tradition familiar to American readers in the work of Auerbach, E. R. Curtius, and Leo Spitzer, and one to which Jauss has remained ever faithful. His other major training was under the philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer, who was himself a student of Heidegger. If it took *Being and Time* more than thirty years to find its English translation, Gadamer's *Truth and Method* appeared in English within fifteen years of its German publication, and thus the historical hermeneutics that it represents and that Jauss develops further—both drawing upon the work of the English philosopher R. G. Collingwood—can be supposed to meet with a ready and potentially informed audience. In the essays collected here, Jauss's other main theoretical resources are Kant's critique of aesthetic judgment, Husserl's phenomenology, and Russian Formalism together with Prague Structuralism. Kant has long been adopted by Anglo-American thought—indeed, he remains almost the last German philosopher taken seriously by analytic philosophy. Husserlian phenomenology has been widely disseminated in some American university circles, especially its extension into social phenomenology (Schütz's concept of the *Lebenswelt* or "life-

world") that Jauss finds particularly useful. And Russian Formalism and Prague Structuralism have become parts of mainstream American literary theory and criticism through the efforts of René Wellek, Victor Erlich, and others. Thus Jauss's work ought to find a receptive audience here in America, even if his own combination of various intellectual sources represents a major new position within the competing methodologies that characterize the current pluralism of our discipline. Whenever possible, I have sought to assist this reception through reference in the notes to existing English translations of his sources, although I have in each case translated quoted material from the original versions.

The portions of the first essay, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Studies," that originally appeared in translation in *New Literary History* (1970) have been thoroughly retranslated for the sake of accuracy and completeness. On the other hand, I am grateful for permission to have lightly retouched David Wilson's excellent translation of "History of Art and Pragmatic History" (in *New Perspectives in German Literary Criticism*, ed. Richard E. Amacher and Victor Lange [Princeton, N.J., 1979]) in order to ensure terminological and stylistic consistency within the volume. All the other essays collected here have been translated from the German by myself for the first time. I am grateful for the encouragement of Hans Robert Jauss, Paul de Man, and Wlad Godzich in undertaking this translation, as well as for the patient efforts of the editors at the University of Minnesota Press in seeing this volume into print. The shortcomings of the translation, of course, remain my own.

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Ithaca, New York

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## Toward an Aesthetic of Reception

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## Chapter 1

# Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory

### I

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

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