New Literary History, A Journal of Theory and Interpretation, welcomes three types of contributions: articles on theory of literature that deal with such subjects as the reasons for literary change, the definitions of periods and their uses in interpretation, the evolution of styles, conventions, genres and their relationship to each other and to the periods in which they flourish, the interconnection between national literary histories, the place of evaluation in literary history, etc.; articles from other disciplines that help interpret or define the problems of literary history; and articles on the rationale and function of literary history in the college and university. We solicit contributions from all scholars interested in such studies, and although our focus is upon English and American literature, contributions need not be in English.

Manuscripts should be addressed to the Editor and should be accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes.

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A Note on *New Literary History*

This first number of *New Literary History* can serve as a guide to our direction and our aims; the essays speak for themselves, but it may be helpful to speak for the journal.

The genesis of *New Literary History* is to be found in the research and in the theoretical concerns of each of us on the editorial board. As our own investigations forced historical inquiries upon us and led us to a reconsideration of historical questions from quite different perspectives, we found that the idea of history formed a point of intersection.

We neither intended nor desired to add to the existing journals; *New Literary History* did not even figure in our aims until we discovered the prevalence of historical problems and the lack of a forum for exchange. No journal exists that is devoted to theoretical and interpretative problems of literary history. *New Literary History* is addressed to all engaged or interested in the reconsideration of literary history.

The plan and organization of this number reflect the methods by which we propose to achieve our aims. The organizing center of the issue is a single subject — the problems of literary history — treated from diverse areas, perspectives and disciplines. The articles are meant to stress the various strategies by which practical investigations are related to theoretical implications, by which personal inquiries can be connected with public values. Thus Jerome Buckley reflects on how he recaptured the past in *The Victorian Temper* and how he would now proceed, and Hallett Smith explains the limited theoretical and historical assumptions he made in writing *Elizabethan Poetry*. These personal statements reveal that scholarly descriptions of high calibre can be written without a great burden of theoretical concern, though theoretical implications are surely present.

As editors, we recognize the variety of possibilities available to historical inquiry, not excluding the validity of historical inquiry itself. But in order better to define the kinds of history that scholars pursue, we have invited commentators to analyze some of the attitudes and arguments found in our contributions. Thus Sears Jayne, for example, writing on Hallett Smith's *Elizabethan Poetry*, finds that the author's...
not wanting to write a literary history can be an historical assumption. And J. M. Cameron raises some questions about the theoretical assumptions of D. W. Robertson. Comments such as these place contributions within a particular temporal moment and a particular interpretation of literary history. They provide a basis for formulating differences governing interpretations. They make possible a comparative analysis by which the statements of contemporary problems are conditioned by earlier formulations.

This procedure represents our effort to invoke a self-consciousness of what it means to be a part of a community of scholars, carefully attending to the views of one another, avoiding unreliable attributions of ideas, assumptions or systems of thought. In seeking to have our contributors address each other as well as their readers we can discover, as in this issue, that critics like Robert Weimann and Sears Jayne who explain the New Criticism in quite different ways, nevertheless share the view that in our time it is desirable to consider literary history in terms of the persistence of the past.

The relation between the theoretical and the practical, past interpretations and present needs, will, we hope, become a characteristic of our contributions. Such relation reflects the critical and historical awareness of men alerted to the transitoriness of experience. It reflects our need to connect the values of this journal to the lives we lead. Matters such as the nature of reading or the "truth" of literature need to be reconsidered. Georges Poulet develops a theory about the appropriate literary transaction between reader and book, and applies it to the criticism written by his contemporaries. And J. M. Cameron defends the validity of an inquiry into truth in fiction by redefining "mimesis." He proposes "to reexamine the mimesis of fictions by noting where the mimesis falls short of the author's mimetic intentions."

These essays call attention to an important interpretation of literary history. Without seeking to define literary history in this number, indeed, without seeking to advance any special view of literary history, we find that our contributors do not accept the dichotomy of literary historian and literary critic. When J. M. Cameron enumerates the most eminent literary historians of our time, he names T. S. Eliot, Dr. Leavis, Edmund Wilson and Lionel Trilling, and when Robert Weimann discusses the New Critics, he analyzes their conceptions of history by attending to their criticism. Leo Marx, while concerned with the cultural implications of literature, notes that the argument for the usefulness of Moby-Dick as a historical document "is identical with the argument for the intrinsic merit of Moby-Dick as a work of literature." For these contributors there cannot be literary historians as such, only literary historians who make sociological, economic, stylistic, phenomenological, mimetic, or other assumptions and, in so
A NOTE ON New Literary History

doing, function as critics. And critics, of course, inevitably make his-
torical assumptions. To distinguish literary historians from literary
critics may prove of value in order to call attention to a wrong regard
for cultural detail or to a deliberate neglect of the historical existence
of a literary work, but the distinction rests on a fiction.

The essays by J. M. Cameron and Sears Jayne belong to our con-
ception of the journal as a vehicle for the exchange of ideas on a single
subject. Daedalus regularly publishes papers and exchanges held at
conferences, and occasionally other publications offer the results of
meetings. New Literary History shall make possible exchanges among
contributors before publication and shall provide the reader with
commentaries upon literary history as well as insights into the nature
disagreements about it. We hold no special brief for controversy,
and we are prepared to accept the possibility that disagreements may
more often be announced than enacted. Such exchanges as we propose
will, we hope, encourage a self-consciousness and self-examination that
will reduce contentiousness among contributors and provide the reader
with discussions of how thinking proceeds as well as with products of
thought.

The range of areas in this number mirrors the diverse interests of
the editors and their belief that within these are to be found common
problems and inquiries. But more than merely inquiries. D. W.
Robertson draws attention to the fact that interpretations of literary
history condition the manner of teaching literature and, referring to
his recommendations, he writes, “There are a number of ways in
which literary studies might well be improved in the light of the above
considerations.” We take for granted the relation between scholarship
and teaching, and we do not believe that at this time scholarly in-
quiries can be divorced from the feeling of uneasiness prevalent in
our profession. There is a feeling of inadequacy involved in the teach-
ing of English studies, and, although this feeling is apparent in other
disciplines as well, it ought not to be ignored just because it is wide-
spread. Such uneasiness is inextricably bound to the values we teach
and the kind of community they encourage. If there are students and
teachers who no longer feel at home in the community, it behooves
us to inquire into their estrangement. New Literary History does not
accept the assumption that educational problems, especially those that
pertain to literary studies, are best confined to educational or other
professional journals. If scholarship belongs in the classroom then a
scholarly journal ought to deal with its effectiveness there. We shall
inquire into such questions as, “What are we trying to teach?” and
“How can we best achieve these teaching aims?” Beginning with our
second number we shall initiate a continuing symposium on literary
history as it is taught in different colleges and universities. We hope
in this way to assist the literary community in reassessing its tasks and reconsidering its obligations.

I have said that *New Literary History* was born out of the personal research in which each of the editors was involved. Its initiation is not, and could not be, impersonal. For us, personal belief and involvement is consistent with, even essential to, effective and reliable scholarship. On this matter we agree; on almost all others each of us follows his own direction. We are not a "movement," not a "school," and, although members of the same department, we are surely not a "clique." We hold different views of literary history and these find their way into our teaching. We do, however, agree on the need to reexamine the nature, interpretation and teaching of literary history, especially in the face of the current rejection of history either as guide to or knowledge of the present.

*New Literary History* will reflect our view that the values of a scholarly community can best be defined by the broadest possible range of knowledge, understanding and awareness. These values have resulted in the founding of this journal; and although we dislike the scholarly world of overpublication, we look to these values as our justification and to the articles as our defense. We invite, we urge, all who oppose or share our ends to let themselves be heard.

*Ralph Cohen*
Problems of Literary History

J. M. Cameron

Of the many different things one might do by way of introduction to the idea of literary history or by way of introduction to the able discussions that follow I choose two. First, I shall discuss some of the philosophical issues raised by Robertson and Weimann. Then I shall discuss the elusive question how far — in what sense — we can raise problems about truth and value in connection with those verbal fictions that are the chief and central preoccupations of literary historians.

I

In most situations and in relation to many intellectual enterprises whether or not we go in for philosophical reflection is a matter of taste and inclination. We may employ such concepts as those of, say, "choice" or "language" (as in: He chose foolishly, or The Russian language is difficult) without asking such questions as: What is "choice"? Do men really choose? Do the cries of the brutes count as language? And so on. Plainly, much can be said about the historical treatment of literature — much is indeed said, and said well, by Hallett Smith and Buckley — without raising any questions of philosophical analysis. But what M. Poulet has to say is expressed in a certain philosophical idiom and from within a certain philosophical tradition; and the essays by Robertson and Weimann quite explicitly put certain philosophical positions. Whether or not they need to do so in order to encompass the problems that interest them is, I think, very doubtful. For example, there is the question how we are to understand "earlier cultural structures." Certainly this is a question for the literary historian who wishes to say something about some monument of the past, the Iliad or Pope's On the Countess of Burlington Cutting Paper. It seems to me most implausible to maintain that "the key to any [my italics] helpful understanding of earlier
cultural structures is the realization that human formulations and institutions, including our own, are contingent phenomena without any independent reality of their own." I cannot see that to give an account of the artistic products of the past it is necessary to hold any philosophical views or that if one did hold this or that philosophical view it would make much difference to what one had to say. To take a parallel example, but one that is a good deal more obvious, it has been clear ever since Berkeley's *De Motu* (at least) that total divergence between men over the role of causality in nature and over the correct analysis of statements about material objects, statements, that is, in the vernacular, does not in the least entail any difference over what is said to go on in the world. What is true of the natural sciences is likely to be true of the historical investigation of society and literature. It is a misunderstanding of philosophy to suppose that Humeans and Kantians have different expectations when they put a pot of water on the fire. Why, then, should they as investigators differ over considerations of method or over the right descriptions to offer if it is a case of establishing the connections, if any, between the stylistic traits of Chaucer's verse, the expectations of courtiers and changes in the technique of archery? *A fortiori* it strikes me as a bit excessive to suggest that it is a necessary key to the understanding of "earlier cultural structures" that one should hold such a philosophical thesis as that propounded by Robertson, and one so obscure. That a philosophical thesis is intended seems certain from the use of such logico-philosophical words as "contingent" and "phenomena" and by the use of a characteristically philosophical locution such as "independent reality." By our ordinary standards of what counts as independently real it seems quite certain that the geometry of Euclid ("human formulations") or the constitution of the Ku Klux Klan is what it is quite independently of what particular human beings suppose to be the case; that is, true and false statements can be made about them. Again, the use of "phenomena" (quite apart from "contingent," whatever this may mean in this context), especially linked with talk about what is independently real, implies the distinction between things as they appear to be and things as they are in themselves. Some philosophers, F. H. Bradley, for example, have held that nothing is independently real except the Absolute, and that everything that appears to be so is phenomenal. But such philosophers have not wished to deny the ordinary senses of independence and reality we have when we stress that certain things are so no matter what the thoughts or perceptions or wishes of some human beings may be. As G. E. Moore once put it, philosophers who have denied the existence of matter have not wished to deny that under my trousers I wear pants.
A concern with philosophical issues, and attempts to transform questions about what to do as a historian into philosophical questions about historical method, these are signs of deep dissatisfaction with the existing practice of literary historians and with the place of the discipline in the world of scholarship. Some of these dissatisfactions are well voiced by the contributors to this symposium and practitioners of the art will no doubt be able to add others. Here, at such a moment, it is easy to suppose that what has gone wrong is something very deep, a neglect, perhaps, of the essential limitations of the historical method — what, after all, can we really know about the past? — or an easy reliance upon some belief that ought long ago to have been discarded; perhaps the belief that there is a single human nature, whereas it has been shown that there are many human natures more or less opaque to each other. Both these points are in fact stressed by Robertson and Weimann, especially by the former.

Robertson, after making many historical generalizations and showing that he thinks we know enough about particular periods to say what is not true of them, writes as follows:

In the course of the above discussion I have used "the past" simply as a convenient expression. Actually, we know very little about the past beyond the dubious evidence of our memories, which are always colored by the present. What we have before us as students instead of the past itself is a series of monuments, artifacts, and documents existing in the present, which are just as much a part of the present as are automobiles, neutrons or cola beverages. The historian or the student of literature concerns himself with the order and significance of the detritus of the past in the present, not with the past itself, which is unapproachable.

Such sentiments seem immensely sceptical. They have been preceded by a number of less comprehensive statements a few examples of which I should like to instance. I have already noted the view that formulations and institutions are "contingent phenomena." Robertson also holds that "the nature of language in one society may be quite different from its nature in another society." Again, "in our studies of Chaucer, Shakespeare, or Pope (each of whom used a language appropriate to his time and place)," he argues that "we should constantly keep before us the fact that the language employed by any one of them is not 'the same thing' as the language we employ today." In connection with the writings of Hume and Kant he claims that "a statement may be valid at one time and meaningless at another." Finally, after saying that that the "truths" of Freudian psychology "have a date and locale attached to them," he infers from this that "Freudian 'complexes' have about as much place in discussions of Shakespeare as have carburetors or semiconductors."
Weimann is not disposed to attach himself in quite the same way to what appear to be bold theses of an epistemological or metaphysical character. When he speaks of the historical and argues, very acutely, that the New Criticism was both an attempt to treat literary works as objects lying before the investigator and having, like any physical object, a determinate structure to be traced by him, and in another sense an enormously historical approach, with each work treated as the historian treats a monastic charter or an old letter, he has in mind not so much a philosophical point as a point about the attitudes of individuals and classes to their historical existence, something that comes by various routes from the work of Marx. Marx noted that the governing classes of particular societies are inclined to treat particular institutions and devices as though they were "natural." This is plainly true of private ownership and of the device of the free market in bourgeois society; and the transition from a society based upon status to one based upon contract generates a pathos which comes from the idea that a natural order is fractured. Weimann sees, correctly, that the rise of historical criticism was accompanied by the abandonment of old presuppositions and the acquiring of new ones and, again correctly, he brings the philosophical writers, Vico, Herder, Hegel, into the story. Perhaps he doesn't give enough notice to some of the decisive advances in the replacement of chronicle by scientific history brought about simply by closer attention to evidential material. For example, the fundamental change in the attitude to texts occurs before the Enlightenment, in the work of Richard Simon on the Bible and of the Maurists and Bollandists on the legends of the saints. No doubt there are immense and subtle changes here, in how men take the course of the world to be, in notions of what is a priori possible, in emphases within theology. But such changes do not spring out of speculation, as with Vico, upon whole genres, epic, creation myths and what have you, but out of the encounters of historians with what lies before them on the desk. Weimann, too, brings out the massive achievements of historical scholarship, picking out, for example, historical philology as "the intellectually most coherent movement in nineteenth century scholarship"; and he robustly defends the contribution historical scholarship can make to the work of criticism. Of course, criticism has to do not only with establishing how things are but also with questions of aesthetic judgment; and here the influence of history can go two ways: as tending towards a silly relativism that won't make a final distinction between The Brothers Karamazov and Gone with the Wind; but also as nourishing our capacity to grasp imaginatively what is socially and temporally far away from us.

The many other things Weimann has to say seem to me sound.
In calling his approach "dialectical" he is using a prestige word; but it does quite accurately express his approach to, for example, the problem of how to make a genetic approach to a literary work contribute also to the task of evaluating it. The application of the general considerations to the particular case of the theatrical interpretation of Shakespearean drama is admirably done.

I should now like to take up some of what I think to be the conceptual confusions of Robertson's essay. I should like to make it plain that I think the proposals he makes towards the end of his essay — what is said about "diachronic studies," about the ways in which "survey" courses could be improved, and so on — are quite excellent. If I take up in a slightly polemical way his philosophical dicta, or some of the misconceptions that in my view lie behind them, it is because they are very plausible, express views and attitudes that are common today — perhaps as a consequence of the ubiquity of low-grade sociological theories — and are present as not very influential ghosts even in the careful formulations of Weimann.

I propose to take up one central issue, an important one in its own right: what can reasonably be meant by talk about human nature; that is, whether or not very sceptical positions in relation to the possibility of our talking meaningfully about, say, Socrates' love for Alcibiades or the attitude of the Azande to witchcraft or the intentions of the men who painted pictures of beasts on the walls of the cave at Lascaux, can be defended.

It would be easy, but on the whole unprofitable and unedifying, to take up one by one Robertson's philosophical remarks. For example, we might ask what could be meant by saying that "a statement [by Hume or by Kant] may be valid at one time and meaningless [my italics] at another." Since it would not make sense to say of any statement that it was meaningless before it was uttered, the claim made must be that the statements Robertson has in mind are meaningless at some point of time between the writing of Hume's Treatise or the writing of the Critique of Pure Reason and the present day; and one must presume, I think, that such statements are now meaningless since it would be strange to say — and incompatible with Robertson's general scepticism as to the possibility of our having secure knowledge of the past — that a statement was meaningless in, say, 1851 and has got its meaning (or a meaning) back since then. Now, if a statement is without meaning today, it seems impossible that we could have any view as to its validity when it was uttered; indeed, if it is without meaning today we should scarcely know enough to be able to characterize it as a statement. I suppose Robertson may have in mind some rather weak sense of meaningless. Perhaps it is a pity that no examples are given of these statements by Hume and Kant.
We might want to say that some statements of a poetic kind have a kind of para-sense — "the Snark was a Boojum" or Wallace Stevens's fine "an old sailor,/Drunk and asleep in his boots,/Catches tigers/In red weather" — and are by certain standards, but only by these, meaningless. Perhaps some philosophical statements are of this kind, though I can think of none in any of Hume's works. Of course, some of the things written by Hume must have a strange quality if we suppose them to have been written in our own day. But we don't suppose this, and we know enough about the intellectual and social situation within which they were written to find them quite comprehensible. We can go back much farther and find an immense amount of sense in the work of Plato. Think of the *Theaetetus* which is obviously concerned with some of the problems that puzzled Russell and Wittgenstein; or examine Plato's portrait of the tyrant in Books VIII and IX of *The Republic* and then think of Stalin and Hitler. I won't go on with this for I think the point has been made.

When people are scolded for having an unhistorical conception of human nature or for denying the possibility that human nature should change or for affirming that there is a common human nature that links the men of the Lascaux caves with the men of classical antiquity or the men of classical antiquity with the men of our own day, it is extraordinarily difficult to know what is being affirmed and what denied. Plainly there are considerable differences between men who are contemporaries and members of the same society. There are great differences of taste and thought, of moral beliefs and emotional constitution, between Governor Wallace and Senator Edward Kennedy or between Mr. Norman Mailer and Miss Kathleen Winsor. But it would seem silly to think of them as generically different. Differences of taste, emotional constitution, moral beliefs, and so on, cannot then be what are meant by those who profess the thesis that there are changes in human nature. We can try another possibility. We know of many societies, not necessarily past societies, that embody in their speech and their general ways of life judgments about the world and about what is valuable to human beings that are very strange to us and may at first seem incomprehensible. To take a small example, one that is relevant to literary history, the notion that consecrated virginity has a supreme value is strange and, without some degree of reflection and effort of the imagination, perhaps incomprehensible. This is why *Measure for Measure* can seem a very odd play to the reader or the audience today. Of course, the play doesn't stay incomprehensible if the teacher knows his job. But could the transition from a society that placed a high value upon consecrated virginity (along with a lot of other values not now cherished) to the society existing in Europe and North America today be what is meant by a change in
human nature? This seems implausible. For let us suppose that we come across a small community in the Pyrenees that has a way of life and a set of values much more like those of the English in the sixteenth century than they are like our own. Should we then be inclined to say they had a different nature? If the answer were to be yes, then the controversy becomes trivial, for those who defend and those who attack the existence of a single human nature cannot be understood simply to be affirming or denying that men differ in how they live, economically, socially, politically, and can differ over what things are to be counted good and bad, right and wrong.

We can invent certain cases that might make us wonder a bit. Science fiction provides us with many splendid examples. We might be at a loss if we discovered that what we had, on account of language and behavior, taken to be a human being turned out to have a plastic skin stretched over a mass of wires and transistors. This brings out the obvious but sometimes neglected consideration that when we talk about human nature one of the things we have in mind is something physical, perceptible, having a certain kind of history (pro-created, nourished, and so on); what we see in the street and portrayed by Rembrandt or on the walls of Egyptian tombs. Again, although we know that men have differed a good deal over questions of evaluation, this does not mean that men could put a value upon absolutely anything. Nobody could put an absolute or even a high value upon lying in general, this for purely logical reasons I needn't go into. It isn't arbitrary, that is, that veracity is counted as a virtue. This belongs to the essence of a linguistic community; and I take it that everyone would want to make it a necessary condition of a community's being called human that its members should have language in common. If, then, we were to find an apparently human community that attached values to certain things in such a way that we were absolutely puzzled, we might begin to question their having the same nature as ourselves. Again, examples have to be invented. Philosophers have speculated about people who attach value to not stepping on the cracks in the pavement. If they say that those who step on the cracks in the pavement are likely to be eaten by bears we understand them, just as we understand totemistic societies, though we may think their attitude ill-founded. If they maintain that stepping on the cracks is just a bad thing to do, and refuse to tell an illuminating story in connection with the practice of not stepping on the cracks, then surely we find them irremediably other than ourselves. If we found a great many other features of their life totally baffling in this way, then we should perhaps begin to wonder if they were the members of our own family that from their appearance they seemed to be; though I am quite sure that so long as they looked like human beings and used a
language we should prefer any hypothesis, even the wildest, to the belief that here were "men" who differed fundamentally in nature from ourselves. Indeed, it is surely evident from the examples we are driven to invent in order to give a sense to the notion of a deep change, and consequent difference, in human nature that the notion is not one that can be supported by historical evidence. It is worth noticing that even so "historicist" a writer as Marx has as firm a notion of a common human nature as Aristotle; without this notion the concept of alienation would be without sense and/or the state of being alienated without pain. Again, Vico shows us how language and ancient literatures provide us with evidence of a not very straightforward kind for how men once lived. But the presupposition of this method of investigation is that we are able to grasp the intentional life of men in other ages and other societies because this life is memorialized in buildings, works of engineering, paintings and statues, and above all in language, that necessary sign of our common nature. We can thus establish with men of the past that intimate relation so elegantly described in M. Poulet's charming account of the phenomenology of reading.

It is important in writing or talking about the literature of the past (or indeed the present) that we should keep close to the entirely reasonable belief that even the strangest products of the human family are not in the end strange if we give them enough love, passion and intelligence. It is the very a priori of literary history that we should have the historical sense which, in Eliot's words, "involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence"; that is, we can make our own the intentional life of others — here what Poulet writes is again to the point — so that we recognize as our fellows men who lived under skies quite differently conceived and who wrote in the many blanks in their maps of the earth: Here be dragons.

II

Not all verbal works of art are fictions, though most of them are. In any case verbal fictions raise just the question I wish to discuss. Now, it seems clear that fictions are neither true nor false (where, that is, as with descriptions, questions of truth or falsity might be thought to arise). Just as to dream that I do something is not to do anything, for I do not do anything in a dream, I only dream that I do it, so to give a fictitious description is not to give a description, though a fictitious description has the form of a description just as the murder I dream that I commit has the form of a murder. There seems nothing prior to a fictitious description that we could call upon to make the descrip-
tion true or false. If I tell you that your cat is on the mat, wanting you to look, then what I say is true if the cat is there, false if it isn’t. But if I tell you a story about the dragon who lives on the mountain I should not ordinarily be thought to be lying. Of course, there may be intermediate cases over which we are not sure. This seems all right so far and indeed provides us with a theoretical justification of one of the cardinal principles of the New Criticism, that a verbal work of art is just these words in this order. Narratives and descriptions may be framed in different ways without this affecting their truth, for they are true or false in virtue of there being states of affairs in the world to which they do or do not correspond. But there are no such prior states of affairs against which fictitious descriptions or narratives may be measured.

Against this there is the persistent view that in some sense verbal works of art are mimetic and are successful or unsuccessful as such. “Poetry is the image of man and nature” is not a neo-classical truism but a critical dictum in the “Preface to Lyrical Ballads.” How is this to be explained?

I propose to examine the problem as it arises in connection with the novel. The novel is especially suitable in that it is undoubtedly a work of fiction; and yet the mode of this fiction may plausibly be thought to be in some sense mimetic. The truth of Madame Bovary cannot lie in its correspondence, if there is any, with something that happened in provincial France; yet it doesn’t seem altogether absurd to ask about its truth.

In the case of some novels we may read off the general intention of the writer from the opening sentences and they indicate something about the logical character of such fictions.

In these times of ours, though concerning the exact year there is no need to be precise, a boat of dirty and disreputable appearance, with two figures in it, floated on the Thames between Southwark Bridge which is of iron, and London Bridge which is of stone, as an autumn evening was closing in.

Charles Dickens: Our Mutual Friend

I was born in the year 1632, in the City of York, of a good Family, though not of that Country, my Father being a Foreigner of Bremen, who settled first at Hull . . .

Daniel Defoe: The Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe

The family of Dashwood had long been settled in Sussex. Their estate was large, and their residence was at Norland Park, in the centre of their property, where, for many generations, they had lived in so respectable a manner, as to engage the general good opinion of their surrounding acquaintance.

Jane Austen: Sense and Sensibility
All these opening sentences strike the note of actuality. Here they differ from fairy stories that begin with "Once upon a time, in a country a great way off . . .", though even in such cases there is a muted reference to time and place. *Our Mutual Friend* offers the most difficult of our examples. In Defoe we find that pedantry of detail which is one of his most effective technical devices. We are not surprised simple people should have thought his novels autobiographical or historical narratives. Jane Austen is concerned to give us a firm indication of place and social scene. It is in such solid and tranquil circumstances that the confrontation of Sense with Sensibility is to gather strength.

The opening of *Our Mutual Friend* is in a way more ambitious and harder to characterize; and the subsequent performance, as almost always with Dickens, formally less successful than in the cases of Defoe and Austen. But I shall assume that this opening adumbrates the substance of the novel, presents us with the thematic material that is to be used later; and in so far as the novel is less than successful, this may suit us very well; for we may be able, in noting where Dickens falls short of his opening intentions, to examine the nature of the mimesis of fictions by noting where the mimesis falls short of the author's mimetic intentions.

"In these times of ours": here is an attempt to combine a reference to the time as specific as Defoe's with something faintly like the fairy story's "once upon a time" — "concerning the exact year there is no need to be precise." I read the intention in the following way. Whatever truth about "these times of ours" may be displayed in the course of the novel, it will not be tied to particular moments or events but will exemplify the truth of all such moments and events. It will be a story of our times but will exemplify the point made by Aristotle in his distinction between history and poetry in that it will show the truth of the times in ways not open to the historian who is tied to the truths of particular times and places. We do not know who the two figures are in the dirty and disreputable boat, though we can be sure they have a role in the story. For the moment they are dwarfed by the river and the two bridges "of iron" and "of stone" and can scarcely be distinguished in the fading light. The appearance of the boat is squalid and from its "disreputable" character we are to infer that its business is doubtful and takes those within it beyond the frontiers of decent society. The reverberation of the phrase about the two bridges of iron and of stone moves us deeply. They stand for the city and the great domesticated river, the river which represents (one is almost inclined at this point to write *cf.* Matthew Arnold *passim*) birth and death, movement and change, and the city as hard as the iron and stone of its monuments; iron is what men make out of nature,
stone is what men find in nature and use for their own ends. The feeling, the tone, of the whole passage is set by the final clause. The season is autumn, the season of fruition and decay; the day is over, the evening closing in, the night about to come; soon the river, the bridges, the human traffic will be hidden in darkness, hidden but not silent and not inactive. Taking into account our knowledge of how the novel goes, we can see that the intention of the opening may be summarized thus. It will be a novel of “our times” and this means those things peculiar to our times, at least in the first place. It will have outcasts and victims among its central characters: outcasts (the boat is disreputable); victims (there is a tone of menace represented by iron and stone, substances as hard and unyielding as nature and art can make). It will be concerned with the city and the river, that is, it will have a big sweep, will attempt to survey and anatomize the urban society that gathers on the banks of the great river. It will be a story in which human flesh will be bruised against and broken by the iron and stone, the hard, angular, unyielding stuff into which human relations have been transformed in “these times of ours,” times in which other and more authentically human relations have been replaced by the cash nexus. Finally, the season and the approaching night tell us that all that comes to fruition decays and dies; and this impression is intensified when we come to know the occupation of those in the boat.

There can be no doubt that I have sketched Dickens’s intentions in Our Mutual Friend, though this account could be added to and filled out in detail. It would also be generally agreed that in the novel many of these intentions are brilliantly realized; but it would also be thought that there is something about the way in which the novel is executed, both as to some of its parts and as to the whole, that gets in the way of the full realization of these intentions. It would be tedious, and unnecessary for our purposes, to go over the successes and the failures. One might attempt a frugal list. A certain kind of smugness peculiar to the English bourgeoisie of the fictional date is for ever fixed in the figure of Podsnap; pretentiousness and parasitism in the Veneerings; rapacity in Alfred Lammle; moral inertia in the unreformed Eugene Wrayburn; the figure of a man ground between the bourgeoisie and the people — ground, indeed, until he screams his agony — in Bradley Headstone. The characters who represent the people are successful only if they are grotesques — Silas Wegg, Mr. Venus and, if we may count the petty bourgeoisie with the people, Mrs. Wilfer. The two occupants of the boat, Lizzie Hexam and her father, are tolerably realized, and Lizzie has a certain strong nobility. The heaps of dust inherited by Mr. Boffin have been commented upon enough. The movement of the novel is spasmodic and uncertain, not
simply through the complexity of the plot but rather through its character. The points Dickens makes structurally important, the mystery of identity upon which so much of the plot turns, or the implausible play-acting of Mr. Boffin, do very little for the main theme. And the final resolution, the redemption of Bella Wilfer from selfishness and the redemption of Eugene Wrayburn from moral frivolity through the improbable marriage with Lizzie Hexam, suggests what is surely false, given I have correctly stated the premises of the novel. What the resolution suggests is that the hard and cruel society that devours men and wounds them as the river devours them and bruises them against the iron and stone of its bridges can be outwitted through a bit of luck and the creation of small, impregnable oases of private happiness. The novel is flawed by the note of falseness, sounded in major as in minor episodes, and as a whole it is false. Dickens has stated a tragic theme, has begun to operate with it, and is ambitious to make the tragedy that of an entire society. And indeed there is plenty of moral passion and a rich display of the creative powers of the author, finer achievements, perhaps, than in any other of his novels (one thinks of the glare of passion that comes from the figure of Bradley Headstone and of the wonderfully realized character of Bella Wilfer); but it all dissolves into a pantomime transformation scene, or rather a series of them, in which private happiness overcomes public despair. It is as though Scott Fitzgerald had ended The Great Gatsby with an elopement and Daisy and Gatsby living happily ever after, forgetting that he had already noted that her voice was "full of money." Something has been falsified in a quite radical way. Since it is wholly a fiction we cannot say that the falsification consists in introducing into a faithful account of what happened accounts of what did not happen. In what consists the falseness, the truth, of a fiction, of this fiction?

One of the ways in which one might disentangle the knot, or bits of it, would be to look at what has been said, from Aristotle onwards, about the probable and the necessary. Some of those who have written about Aristotle's discussion, Butcher, for instance, in his edition of the Poetics, have thought that the probable and the necessary are to be understood in terms of the inner logic of the fiction, the internal structure of the poem, and have nothing to do with the course of life outside the fiction. I think this has been definitively criticized by the late Humphrey House in his lectures on the Poetics (Humphrey House, Aristotle's Poetics, revised, with a preface, by Colin Hardie, London, 1956). Roughly, "probability" is derived from something like an induction. Of course, it does sometimes happen that destitute people receive bundles of dollar bills through the post from anonymous well-wishers; it does sometimes happen that inoperable cancers
vanish spontaneously. But these lie outside the general rule and are hard to absorb into a fiction. Not that there can't be from time to time a tour de force; I am inclined to think the spontaneous combustion of Krook in Bleak House a case in point. Again, in the case of the “necessary,” Aristotle rightly connects this with actions springing from a determinate character; and this means that our knowledge that such and such an action is inevitable, and in this sense necessary, comes from our experience of how people, at least in cultures familiar to us, work. It is true, we may often be in some doubt; and it is a feature of the novel that there is in it room for more complexity, more ambiguity, a greater element of the indeterminate, than in simpler fictions. But if we ask, for example, why A Passage to India is so much Mr. Forster's most successful novel, a part of the answer will certainly be that he doesn't give the reader the intellectual and emotional cramps provoked by the accidental death of the baby in Where Angels Fear to Tread or Leonard Bast's wife turning out to be Mr. Wilcox's discarded mistress in Howard's End.

Some of the failures of Our Mutual Friend are failures by such criteria; Boffin's masquerade, for example, or Wrayburn's marriage to Lizzie. But such criteria can have only a negative function in criticism. A novel which never violated the canons of probability and necessity could still be a poor one and a talented writer can get away with a surprising amount of improbability; and of course there may be fictions cast in the form of a novel which establish quite different premises at the beginning. Tolkien's stories provide an obvious example. The flaws in Dickens's novel must be of a deeper kind.

We have already seen that such failures may be characterized as failures of intentions signaled by what is stated, not simply propositionally but also in terms of the tone and texture of the writing, at the outset of the novel. Such intentions, I would argue in the particular case, and the possibility of their being entertained, come from a perception of the moral truth of how it is with men in a particular society. (To that extent my historicism is not less than that of any of the later contributors.) Dickens's failure lies in a turning away from the very perceptions he states and makes centrally important. Of course, the failures are only seen as such if we respond to the implications of the stated themes, and I have argued, and this will not be disputed, that they are tragic. The difference between this kind of failure and the failure of the prefabricated fictions of the commercial mass-circulation novel of our own time is that the latter's failure springs from its being woven out of clichés that can only be entertained if we steadily refuse to look at the natural and social worlds. Its falseness is complete. The falseness of Our Mutual Friend is to be judged in terms of its own stated and partially realized intentions.
The failure of Dickens lies in his refusal of the truth of his own perceptions. The creative writer hungers for the natural and moral truth and for the image, much searched for and craftily constructed, through which the truth will be refracted for his audience. But since the world is not a place of luminous simplicities, the truth presented through the writer's image must combine the known compulsions — appetites, passions, structures of argument — of life with the darkness and uncertainty, the openness to infinite possibilities, which surround what is known and make the tone of irony appropriate to the utterance of even the plainest of truths. Such considerations are what Keats had in mind when he spoke of "Negative Capability" as a necessary quality for one who wishes to achieve something in literature. It was through an inability to bear the harshness of his time, to rest in loneliness, suffering, doubt, that Dickens falsified Our Mutual Friend; equally, it was through the hold he nevertheless kept upon the quality of negative capability that he was able to conceive the haunting picture of the old man and his daughter, outcasts and victims of their society, fishing for the bodies of the dead "between Southwark Bridge which is of iron, and London Bridge which is of stone, as an autumn evening was closing in."

The relevance of all this to the idea of literary history may be stated in the following way. History which consists of accounts of the structure and contents of literary works juxtaposed to sections on the economic, religious, political and what have you "background" are not adequate to the critical task. This is very well put by Weimann, when he writes that "it will not do merely to combine or to link the study of genesis with the critical evaluation of the art-work. One has to be contained in the other, and the historical sense of the critic needs to be quite indistinguishable from the critical sense of the historian." This, as Weimann notes, is to ask a great deal of the literary historian. His task too is mimetic in part and for this, no less than the poet and the novelist, he needs the charisma of "negative capability." The possession of this charisma is quite compatible with passion and caprice. After all, if we ask what figures we would instance as having made a decisive contribution to this difficult combination of the work of the critical historian with that of the historically minded critic, we should in the first place mention the author of the Lives of the Poets; and in our own day the only figures (writing in English) I should dare to place in such company are Eliot and Dr. Leavis, Edmund Wilson and Lionel Trilling.*

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*Some of the ideas contained in the second part of the above were first expressed in a somewhat different form in my Inaugural Lecture at the University of Leeds (Poetry and Dialectic).
Some Observations on Method in Literary Studies

D. W. Robertson, Jr.

A work of literature, or, indeed, a work of architecture, a statue, or a painting is usually approached in either of two ways. It may be presented as a "work of art" embodying elements that appeal more or less spontaneously to the student. Its relevance may be explained on the basis of the insights of the teacher regarding form, structure, and techniques that are thought of as belonging to the province of all art. On the other hand, the student may be led to examine sources, traditions, historical information of relevance to the work in question, and other matters thought to have a subsidiary value in appreciating the work of art. Roughly, those who employ the first approach are called "critics" while those who employ the second are called "scholars." This difference has led to a great deal of debate.¹ To avoid the unpleasantness arising from controversy, and perhaps, with some sense of creating a kind of Hegelian "higher synthesis," many scholars now like to be thought of as "scholar-critics," and critics have in some instances made certain concessions to scholarship. Usually, the "scholar-critic" agrees with the critic that human nature is a constant and that there are qualities of art that may be said to have a universal appeal. The deliberate cultivation of exotic art, either as "primitive art," or as art from geographically remote places, during the early years of this century, together with an increasing interest in humanity for its own sake, regardless of its specific cultural traditions,² has given a tremendous impetus to the study of all forms of human expression. Most recently, it has become fashionable to reduce works of art, literary or visual, to their elemen-

¹ At a recent conference of humanistic scholars held at Princeton in connection with the series Humanistic Scholarship in America: The Princeton Studies the divergence between "critics" and "scholars" or their equivalents in a variety of fields became surprisingly evident. The "critics" seem in general to have fared better than the "scholars" on this occasion.

² For an interesting discussion of this phenomenon, see Luis Díez del Corral, The Rape of Europe (New York, 1959), esp. Ch. vii.
tary structures, regardless of content. These structures are felt to be somehow valuable in themselves, especially as "aesthetic" manifestations of a kind of universal human reality.

There is some evidence of a growing uneasiness with this posture. In the first place, an ingrained historical optimism has led many persons to assume that privileged men of the past "transcend" their time in such a way that they are able to "look forward" to ideas and attitudes we now think of as being more or less self-evident. The scholar has frequently adjusted his "history" in such a way as to make possible accolades of "great artists" in the past as prophets, and the critic has welcomed such interpretations as confirmation of universal human realities. Each new critical school has been quick to adopt all the more admirable artists of the past as worthy predecessors of its own views and attitudes. However, rapid changes in attitude since the early years of this century, in spite of the continuity of a certain substratum of opinion, make it clear that what was "self-evident" in 1920 is no longer "self-evident" today. Are the attitudes "self-evident" to Chaucer, Shakespeare, or Pope the attitudes of 1920 or those of 1968? It is clear that they cannot be both, and it is increasingly obvious that they cannot be either, and that, moreover, Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Pope did not share the same attitudes. Meanwhile, we have learned a great deal since 1920 about history, so that much of the historical reconstruction of the scholar-critics of a generation ago now seems naive and factually unacceptable. Not only that, but "aesthetic" ideas have changed as well, so that what appeared to be "universal art" in 1920 must now be made "universal" on quite other grounds, if, indeed, it is possible to formulate any such grounds at all.

Perhaps the first coherent solution to the problem was that advanced by historians of the visual arts, who have developed, chiefly under the guidance of Heinrich Wölfflin, a concept of "stylistic history." The aims of stylistic history were at first rather modest: to study changing modes of apprehending the visual world. However, it was realized at the outset that these modes of vision imply "the bases of the whole world picture of a people," and it has become apparent that stylistic history does not lose its validity when the visual arts themselves abandon the "visual world" as it is ordinarily understood entirely. It became clear that what is "good" in terms of one artistic style is not necessarily "good" in terms of another, and, further, that each style representing the tastes of a given population at a given time has an appeal peculiar to certain specific attitudes and ideals, which are much more "basic" than the visual styles seem to be when we regard them

3 Wölfflin's seminal study, available in English as Principles of Art History, was first published in 1915.
in isolation from their cultural contexts. In so far as literary studies are concerned, various efforts have been made to demonstrate parallels between styles in the visual arts and styles in literature, but since the whole subject of stylistic history is still new, and since appropriate descriptions of specific stylistic periods are not always available, a great deal of work still needs to be done.  

A new impetus to sharper historical perspectives has arisen in two disciplines unrelated to art history. The fact that these disciplines seem at first unrelated to literary studies should not deter us from paying careful attention to their conclusions, since these conclusions will undoubtedly exert a profound effect on such studies in the future. In the first place, certain psychologists, who belong, roughly, to the "phenomenological school" in Europe, most notably Dr. J. H. van den Berg, have developed a concept of "psychological history." Much of their work has a very sound basis in observation, and it is by no means necessary to be a disciple of Husserl in order to appreciate the value of some their conclusions. Having observed that different social structures in the modern world profoundly affect the psychic constitutions of those who participate in them, these psychiatrists have reached the very plausible conclusion that historical changes in social structure produce marked alterations in "human nature." That is, "human nature" in one kind of social environment is likely to be very different from "human nature" in a second social environment differing significantly in structure from the first. This general conclusion has already influenced a number of historical studies. Techniques for employing it vary among scholars, and the results have not always been convincing. Nevertheless, it is evident that the idea, here stated only in a very simple form, has enormous possibilities for development, and that its disciplined application will profoundly affect our attitudes toward the literature of the past.

Beginning with far different assumptions, largely derived from


5 Dr. van den Berg's most famous work, The Changing Nature of Man, is available in English (New York, 1961). Certain of his other studies, notably Het menselijk lichaam (Nijkerk, 1959), are also relevant.

6 See the review article by R. van Caenegem, "Psychologische Geschiedenis," Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis, LXXVIII (1965), 189-149.
theories of “structural linguistics” first announced in Prague in 1928, anthropologists like Professor Lévi-Strauss and philosophers like Michel Foucault,7 have sought to show that careful “synchronic” studies, or studies in depth of a given culture at a given time reveal adequate and reasonable “universes of discourse” suited to the structures of earlier or more primitive societies that should not be naively criticized from the point of view of our own, and, at the same time, that historical change is something far more complex than we had ordinarily assumed it to be. Again, the results of these studies may be appreciated even by those who do not share all of the assumptions upon which they are constructed. That is, the conclusions are not necessarily offensive to linguists trained in the school of the “Young Grammarians” who have learned to reverence scholars like Streitberg, Meillet, and Kieckers. The new studies have shown that a given idea or institution may play a far different rôle in one society than it does in one immediately preceding it or in one immediately following it in time. This fact becomes more apparent when a society is viewed as a “system,” not, that is, as a rigorous artificial structure, but as an integrated whole in which the various “parts” are sufficiently interdependent so that a change in one implies concomitant changes in all the others. The metaphor “organic structure” has sometimes been used in this connection, but, although it may be revealing and helpful, it should be considered as a tool rather than as a descriptive epithet. Perhaps it is significant that these ideas are contemporary with “systems analysis” as it has been developed in other fields. In any event, the old attitude toward the “history of ideas” frequently oversimplifies or distorts the actual situation before us in the historical evidence, since it tends to neglect the shifting position of the ideas being studied within the social structure as a whole.

Disturbed by the usual naiveté of diachronic studies in this respect, Professor Foucault has developed a concept of historical “archaeology.” That is, he has set out to show, specifically on the basis of attitudes toward language and money, that a substratum of common assumptions underlies apparently divergent opinions set forth contemporaneously in a given society, and that this substratum undergoes radical shifts at certain periods in the course of history. Although

7 For a brief account of the early development of structural linguistics, see Emile Benveniste, Problèmes de linguistique générale (Paris, 1966), Ch. viii. Professor Lévi-Strauss is best known to English readers for The Savage Mind (Chicago, 1966). The book reveals a fondness for outmoded Marxist polarities and is tinged with romantic neo-primitivism. Its author dislikes stylistic history. Nevertheless, some of the results are extremely useful. Foucault's relevant work is Les mots et les choses (Paris, 1966). His earlier work on madness tends to be sensationalistic and the scholarship is unreliable.
the evidence adduced is sometimes rather fragmentary, especially in
the treatment of the Renaissance, and Professor Foucault is not always
aware of the background of some of the ideas he adduces (like that,
for example, of *conveniencia*), the results are extremely impressive
in a general way. He makes it obvious that "truths" concerning lan-
guage and money in the nineteenth century are not the "truths"
concerning these matters in earlier societies, and that we have no
justification for projecting nineteenth-century "truths" about these
matters on the Baroque or Renaissance past. Meanwhile, although he
did not employ the evidence of stylistic history in any systematic way,
the "periods," or chronological divisions of relative stability in the
substratum of thought, that he proposes are roughly the same as those
used by stylistic historians in the study of the visual arts. At the same
time, with minor exceptions, they are generally consonant with con-
cclusions we should expect from studies in "psychological history." 
That is, scholars interested in stylistic changes, alterations in "human
nature," and shifts in the substratum of thought are occupied with
what are essentially similar phenomena. In this connection, it is highly
significant that similar conclusions have been reached on the basis
of very different kinds of premises and working methods. It is obvious
that, leaving aside all quarrels about premises, definitions, and other
features of what might be called the tools of investigation, we shall,
in the future, need to be much more thorough in our synchronic
studies of cultural structures in the past. The integrity of past struc-
tures must be respected, and histories of isolated classes of phenomena
must be written with a careful eye to the shifting position of those
phenomena within the structures that produce them. Above all, it
seems obvious that we shall need to exhibit far greater reluctance than
we have usually shown to impose our own formulations about ideas
and institutions on the structures of the past as though they were uni-
universal truths.8

Perhaps the key to any helpful understanding of earlier cultural
structures is the realization that human formulations and institutions,
including our own, are contingent phenomena without any inde-
pendent reality of their own. For example, language exists only in the

8 In 1950 in "Historical Criticism," *English Institute Essays, 1950* (New York,
1951), I wrote that the historical critic "looks with some apprehension on the
tendency of the literary critic to regard older literature in the light of modern
aesthetic systems, economic philosophies, or psychological theories. He feels that
such systems . . . do not exist until they are formulated." This statement was
inspired by a reaction to some remarks by P. W. Bridgman in *The Nature of
Physical Theory* (Princeton, 1936), and was felt to be harmonious with views
acceptable in the field of "general semantics," a subject that was then popular.
However, the statement has frequently been deplored. I have not abandoned it,
and the present essay may serve to make it more comprehensible.
presence of one human being addressing either another human being, himself as though he were another human being, or an imaginary audience, including any inanimate objects to which he may choose to speak. It has no reality beyond one of these situations, and it has no “nature” independent of the nature imposed on it by the speaker and his audience, real or imaginary. The sounds that are the vehicle for language do not constitute its nature, since they have no significance as language except by virtue of a common understanding between the speaker and his audience, real or imaginary. If, as the psychological historians insist, human nature undergoes changes, it is clear that language must undergo changes also, not only of the kind usually discussed under the heading “linguistic change,” but also more profound changes in its nature. Again, the nature of language in one society may be quite different from its nature in another society. In connection with this last consideration, Foucault seeks to show that Baroque language was essentially “representation,” but that in the nineteenth century language became “expression.” The only sane answer to the question as to whether language is “representation” or is “expression” must be that language was “representation” for speakers during the Baroque period and was “expression” for speakers during the nineteenth century. To say that language is expression and has always been expression, or, as more recent linguists are likely to say, language is “a system that embodies a reproduction of reality” is to posit an independent existence and nature for something merely contingent. It is also true that the assumption of any absolute stand on the nature of language will inevitably prevent us from understanding the language of the past as it survives in literary and other documents. This is not to say that formulations of the kind “Language is a system” are not useful. They may be very useful indeed so long as they are regarded as tools and not as absolutes. But in our studies of Chaucer, Shakespeare, or Pope (each of whom used a language appropriate to his time and place), we should constantly keep before us the fact that the language employed by any one one of them is not “the same thing” as the language we employ today. The tendency to read literary texts from the pre-nineteenth-century past as though the language in which they were written was essentially “expression” has given rise to enormous distortions in our criticism.

This caution concerning language should be extended to other ideas and institutions as well. For example, the Oxford neo-positivists have frequently adduced ideas from Hume, Kant, Hegel or other earlier philosophers as though those philosophers were writing today. This procedure simply fails to recognize the fact that a statement by Hume means quite a different thing taken in isolation today from what it meant in the context of the society to which Hume addressed
himself. What is worse, the same neo-positivists have not infrequently subjected the terms used by earlier philosophers to semantic analysis in an effort to show that they are meaningless. It may be quite true that a term used by Hume or Kant has little meaning in the stylistic environment in which we move, but this does not imply that the term was meaningless at the time it was used. That is, a statement may be valid at one time and meaningless at another. Again, as I have sought to show elsewhere, the system of “principal vices” popular during the late Middle Ages may be largely irrelevant in the society of today, but it played a functional part in medieval society, where it had a genuine operational validity. The same kind of considerations apply to more complex institutions like marriage. It is obvious that the institution of marriage plays an entirely different part in our society with its egalitarian ideals, where the sacramental value of the contract is usually merely formal and its function is largely personal, from that it played in an hierarchical society organized in small groups like that of the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, scholars have not hesitated to attribute “modern” attitudes toward marriage to Chaucer, who lived in a society where such attitudes would have been absurd. The initial assumption that marriage is “the same thing” in the fourteenth century as it is today is, of course, erroneous.

Generally, the categories by means of which we analyze our own society may sometimes appear in earlier societies. When such coincidences occur, as they do in the examples cited above, we should be willing to recognize the fact that their significance in the past may be very different from their significance in the present, and, moreover, that their significance in the present will undoubtedly change in the future with changes in the structure of society and concomitant alterations in “human nature.” That is, unless we take into account changes in the positions of institutions within the social structure in the course of time, our studies of subjects like “the history of marriage” are bound to be misleading. The common assumption that institutions, attitudes, and ideals display a “linear development” in the course of history has no justification in the evidence of history itself. And the further assumption that the present represents a kind of glorious fruition of linear developments amounts to nothing more than what might with some justice be called “historical anthropomorphism” inherited from romantic philosophers like Hegel.

In addition to preserving old categories, but in altered form, new

10 The claim for Chaucer’s “modernity” in this respect is usually made in connection with “The Franklin’s Tale.” But as I shall seek to show in a forthcoming article this interpretation rests on dubious premises.
societies construct new categories of their own. These new formulations are likely to appear in fairly large numbers at about the same time, and their appearance on a large scale is accompanied by "changes in style," or "changes in human nature," or, to put it in another way, "changes in the substratum of thought." Such changes occurred, for example, in the mid-twelfth century, in the fifteenth century, in the early seventeenth century, in the later eighteenth century, and at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It is possible, of course, and sometimes desirable to subdivide the "periods" thus established still further. Sometimes these periods coincide with periods of linguistic change as such change is described by historical linguists, although the significance of this coincidence has never been explored. The new categories developed during these periods of change are concomitant with changes in social structure and have little relevance to social structures preceding them. For example, the later eighteenth century developed a concept of "art" and "the artist" that has been continued and modified since. But neither the eighteenth-century concept nor its subsequent modifications have any relevance to earlier societies where "art" meant something entirely different and where the "artist" in the eighteenth-century sense did not exist. Thus for example, one student of the Gothic cathedral has seen fit to explain at some length that the cathedrals do not constitute what we call "art." The same period witnessed the development of an idea of "personality," which was deepened and strengthened in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but this, too, was an idea suited to life within a new kind of social structure without relevance to life as it was lived in earlier centuries. The usual assumption that "art" as we understand it, or "personality" has "always existed" even though people did not "talk about it" in earlier times makes an unwarranted universalization of purely contingent phenomena.

In general, new categories should not be imposed on the past. Freudian psychology, for example, represents a series of generalizations based on the effects of a kind of social structure that developed during the course of the later nineteenth century. The relevant social conditions together with certain concomitant attitudes toward sex did not exist in the eighteenth century, and are now rapidly disappearing. Hence efforts to analyze earlier cultural phenomena in Freudian terms inevitably lead to false conclusions. This is not to say that Freudian psychology is or was "wrong," but simply that its truths have a date and locale attached to them. To put this in another way, Freudian psychology is a part of a "universe of discourse" with a

nexus of relationships to other elements in that "universe." To insert it into an earlier universe of discourse where no such nexus exists is to create absurdities. That is, Freudian "complexes" have about as much place in discussions of Shakespeare as have carburetors or semiconductors. It cannot be emphasized too urgently that any age in the past can be understood only when we analyze it in so far as is possible in its own terms. If we can begin to understand those terms in their own context, we can begin to understand the age, but if we impose our own terms on it, we might as well be studying ourselves rather than the past.

Changes in the structure of society and the nature of language frequently imply changes in very basic attitudes toward reality, toward the location of reality, and toward its relation to space and time. Since the early nineteenth century, for example, there has been a very marked tendency to locate reality within the individual. Croce's "intuition," Ortega y Gasset's position that "Reality is my life," and Bishop Robinson's desire to locate God "in the depths of the personality," to cite only a few random examples, are all manifestations of a common "stylistic" or "archaeologically discernible" mode that is a more or less natural concomitant of a society in which the individual is isolated in a complex of large group structures. This mode, with its emphasis on inner reality, is at the same time conducive to expressionistic attitudes toward thought, language, and art, to subjective evaluations of space, and to a mistrust of the "past" and the "future.

But to impose various facets of this mode or its logically felt consequences on the past, as though it were generally characteristic of all humanity, is to invite serious misapprehensions concerning both ourselves and our ancestors.

In the course of the above discussion I have used "the past" simply as a convenient expression. Actually, we know very little about the past beyond the dubious evidence of our memories, which are always colored by the present. What we as students have before us instead of the past itself is a series of monuments, artifacts, and documents existing in the present, which are just as much a part of the present as are automobiles, neutrons, or cola beverages. The historian or the student of literature concerns himself with the order and significance of the

13 For changing attitudes toward time, see Georges Poulet, Studies in Human Time (New York, 1959). There are useful observations in Foucault, and in some of the writings of stylistic historians. Historians of the visual arts frequently treat changing attitudes toward space.

14 Modern thinkers often seek to objectify what are essentially subjective evaluations of space, as Heidegger does in Being and Time (New York, 1962). On attitudes toward the past and the future, cf. Hofmann, The Earthly Paradise, p. 50, and Chaucer's London, p. 120.
detritus of the past in the present, not with the past itself, which is unapproachable. The works of Chaucer, or Shakespeare, or Milton exist today in libraries, in homes, or in the rooms of students. Why not treat them as though they were written within our own generation? The critic, or even the scholar-critic, often shows a marked inclination to do this, either by stating, in terms of some currently fashionable critical doctrine, that great art is universal, or by seeking to interpret the evidence of the past in such a way as to make it conform to the conventions of the present. If modern audiences cannot appreciate the music of Bach played in a Baroque manner on Baroque instruments, why not present symphonic arrangements of Bach that make Bach sound like Tchaikowsky?

There are a number of valid answers to this question, some of them quite simple. To begin with a simple one, it is fairly obvious that Tchaikowsky wrote much better music in his own style than Bach could, and that the efforts of an arranger of Bach are unlikely to equal the efforts of Tchaikowsky himself. If one wishes to listen to music in the style of Tchaikowsky, he would do much better to listen to Tchaikowsky’s own compositions. The idea that Bach’s music transformed for a modern symphony orchestra has a “cultural value” is, therefore, specious. Moreover, the unpleasant prospect looms that we shall some day hear Bach in the style of Webern, or the later Stravinsky, or even Stockhausen, as Bach keeps up with the times. Much the same criticisms may be made of Chaucer, or Shakespeare, or Milton transformed in the classroom into “modern” authors. They are less good at their newly imposed task than are modern authors themselves, and their “cultural” value becomes negligible. More seriously, the literary critic who customarily employs tools first created during the romantic movement now modified by Crocean aesthetics in its various modern forms, frequently commits historical blunders that are obvious to persons of no very great sophistication.15 Crocean aesthetics is, actually, little more than a rationalization of the expressionistic style which seeks to turn all art into a lyrical expression of intuitively recognized inner truths. Although it is well suited to works produced in this style, it has no relevance to earlier styles consonant with social structures wherein the conditions necessary to produce expressionistic attitudes did not exist. If we are to compose valid criticism of works produced in earlier stylistic periods, we must do so in terms of conventions established at a time contemporary with the works themselves. If we fail to do so, we shall miss the integrity of the works we study,

15 The romantic origin of the fundamental attitudes of modern criticism has been amply demonstrated by M. H. Abrams in The Mirror and the Lamp (New York, 1958).
not to mention their significance, frequently profound, for their original audiences.

What we call the past is, in effect, a series of foreign countries inhabited by strangers whose manners, customs, tastes, and basic attitudes even partially understood widen our horizons and enrich our daily experience. Concealed self-study through the inadequate medium of the past only stultifies us within the narrow confines of our own naïvely envisioned perspectives. The specious and easy “relevance” achieved by positing “universal humanity” and then imposing our own prejudices on the past is not merely detrimental to understanding. It will soon become absurd in the light of a growing awareness of the complexity of historical processes. Finally, it is barely possible that the recognition of valid realities established by earlier generations may lead us at least one small step away from that rancid solipsistic pit into which the major tendencies of post-romantic thought have thrust us.¹⁶

Specifically, there are a number of ways in which literary studies might well be improved in the light of the above considerations. In the first place, the usual “diachronic” courses now offered in colleges and universities — courses in the history of the epic, the drama, the lyric, or other “genre” histories — should be recognized as being extremely artificial and misleading. The “lyric” is one thing in the thirteenth century and quite another in the nineteenth century. To present students with a “definition” of the lyric and then study its “history” from the thirteenth century to the present is to engage in a completely artificial exercise that has almost no educational value except that accidentally achieved by the presentation of occasional works that one student or another may, for a short time, enjoy. Similarly, to concoct a “definition” of tragedy, an exercise for which Aristotle offers an unfortunate precedent, and then to make all “tragedies” — Greek, Elizabethan, romantic, and modern — conform to the definition is not only to limit the understanding of the student but to distort the evidence of the past within a framework that has no intellectual respectability. If we are to make literary courses significant, genuinely stimulating, and indeed comparable in sophistication with courses now being offered by some historians of the visual arts, we shall need to emphasize “period” and “author” courses a great deal.

¹⁶ The fact that empirical attitudes, for all their vaunted objectivity, imply the reality of the nervous system of the observer rather than that of anything observed is more often felt than faced squarely. The emphasis on the inner reality of the artist in modern art needs no special elaboration, since it is fairly obvious. However, for significant observations on the subject, see, for example, Wallace Fowlie, The Age of Surrealism (Bloomington, 1960), pp. 29-30; Marcel Brion, Art abstrait (Paris, 1956), pp. 25, 27, 93-94, 139.
more, and to enrich these courses with more thorough and intellectually respectable considerations of relevant monuments from the visual arts, with descriptions of social institutions, and with efforts to evaluate the works being studied in a way that would have been comprehensible to their authors and their original audiences. The usual "genre" courses do not provide sufficient time for the development of an adequate background in the various styles encountered.

Diachronic studies of relatively brief periods in detail can be extremely helpful, since they reveal the gradual changes in attitude that culminate in more pronounced changes in style. However, such studies should not assume any kind of "progress" except that in time. As social institutions change there are concomitant changes in thought, language, and ideals, as well as changes in style. But these changes are better regarded as adaptations within a system than as illustrations of linear progress. Ideas and forms of expression appropriate to a later generation are not necessarily appropriate to an earlier generation, so that there are little grounds for thinking of them as "improvements." But such studies can show very clearly the interaction of various elements in a society that accompany changes in literary conventions. Studies of more extensive periods broken by major stylistic shifts, like the eighteenth century, for example, can serve to illustrate the kind of dramatic contrasts that may appear in the juxtaposition of two very different styles. Undergraduate "survey" courses afford a striking opportunity to present in a simplified fashion the integrity of various stylistic conventions and at the same time to clarify the essential peculiarities of the stylistic modes to which we are accustomed today. But in order to be effective, such courses need to concentrate on a few selected literary texts and to make far more use of the visual arts, music, and relevant historical sociology. Stylistic features are frequently more apparent in the visual arts than they are in literature, since it is always possible to read a text naively in terms of one's own stylistic attitudes.

All this implies, of course, a new professionalism in graduate training. Too frequently graduate students today are treated as though they were potential poets or novelists whose "sensibilities" need cultivating. There is undoubtedly a place for creative arts courses in a modern university, and certainly no one objects to cultivated sensibilities. However, if graduate schools in English are to be professionally effective, they must provide a more thorough grounding in period studies, with emphasis on primary sources in variety, and the cultivation of the kind of imagination that involves skepticism concerning accepted secondary formulations, the ability to see new relationships among primary materials, and the impulse to formulate relevant relationships between those materials and literary texts. The old system
that required little more than the learning of a long series of secondary conclusions by rote, regardless of their value, is now long out of date, and its futility is obvious, even to the students themselves. It has led to academic conservatism of a most undesirable kind and to the unthinking repetition and transmission of outmoded generalizations on a large scale. Literary scholars must learn to welcome the prospect of new approaches and new ideas. At present no group of university men is more resistant to change or more antagonistic to new developments that do not serve to confirm attitudes previously learned than that made up of teachers of what are called the humanities.

The task of understanding a literary text from an earlier generation as it was initially presented is formidable. We cannot, on the basis of the evidence available reconstruct completely any period in the past, and our understanding will always be impeded to a certain extent by the conventions of our own times, which change continuously, but from which no one can escape entirely. But this fact should act as a stimulus rather than as a deterrent, since it means that there will always be something more to be done. The frontiers before us have no limit. And we may be consoled by the fact that the more accurately we can describe the detritus left to us by the past, the better able we shall be to understand ourselves. And if the "humanities" — a nineteenth-century invention — can help us in this task, they will serve a useful and beneficial function in our society. Meanwhile, the realization that our own attitudes are, like those of the past, largely contingent may help to induce a certain equanimity and detachment. If literary studies are divorced from the larger concerns of cultural history they will eventually wither away.

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
I wrote *Elizabethan Poetry* to provide the kind of book for scholars which I strongly felt the need of when I was trying to understand sixteenth century non-dramatic verse back in the early 1930s. In a sense, then, the book, which appeared in 1952, took twenty years to write. I made many false starts but I felt I must be on the right track when the late George F. Reynolds (who taught me, homely as I can, to make) praised the organization of the material I taught in a graduate course one summer at the University of Colorado.

At first, like many novices, I chose too wide a field. I thought I might start with Wyatt and Surrey and continue on to the death of Spenser. Such a book I imagined with the ungainly title *Later Tudor Poetry* — a kind of supplement to the *Early Tudor Poetry* of John Milton Berdan, under whom I had studied at Yale. Hyder Rollins's fine editions of Tottel's Miscellany and the other Elizabethan anthologies and the Johns Hopkins Variorum Spenser were making available texts and commentary, and it seemed, with such major helps as these, that the task would not be too formidable. Two published essays, one called "English Metrical Psalms of the Sixteenth Century and Their Literary Significance" and the other "The Art of Sir Thomas Wyatt" were originally planned as chapters of the book.

* The editors of NLH have asked me to discuss the historical assumptions implicitly or explicitly present in my book *Elizabethan Poetry*, or, if I wish, to argue against such enquiries. They flatter me by saying that they esteem my book and recognize it as "a study of primary importance in the field." I am not sure that the book is literary history in the usual sense, or that it has historical assumptions or consistent theory behind it, but I can at least, at the cost of over-using the first personal pronoun, give an account of how such a book came to be written, what its author thinks it is useful for, and why it was written that way. For seasoning, some sugar and vinegar from the critics are added, to taste.

1 Cambridge, Mass., 1952.
3 *HLQ*, IX (1945-46), 249-71.
4 *HLQ*, IX (1945-46), 323-55.
A sentence in one of them foreshadows something like what I was later to attempt: "When the history of Elizabethan poetry comes to be written, it will be not so much a series of biographical sketches, with critical remarks thrown in from any random point of view, as a study and interpretation of the great commonplaces, with accurate description of the variety of ways in which the treatment of them became art."

I read extensively in the verse of the fifteen sixties and seventies. I remember one time telling a friend with great pride that I could now distinguish between good and bad fourteeners. But something, I do not now recall what, persuaded me that I shouldn't write a history in the sense of a chronological survey but rather a series of chapters on some of the important genres, confining myself mainly to the "New Poetry" of the period from 1579 to the end of Elizabeth's reign.

Perhaps I should explain my attitude about genres. The book does not use the word much, or emphasize it. Instead it talks about Conventions (the sub-title is A Study in Conventions, Meaning and Expression), commonplaces, ideals, values. Even though my chapters could be called essays on Pastoral, Ovidian, Sonnets, Satire, The Lyric and The Epic, and these could certainly be called literary genres, I was clearly shying away from this classification, as anyone will acknowledge who looks at the somewhat long-tailed and pretentious subtitles I appended to the chapter headings.

I suppose I felt a certain revulsion against Brunetière, who compared genres to species in the animal and vegetable worlds and claimed that the various genres were autonomous. I was by no means as rigid a classifier (some critics have complained that I admit some overlapping between pastoral and Ovidian poetry) and I think I had some of the distrust of Brunetière that is best expressed in the comment of his contemporary, Jules Lemaître: "You will never see M. Brunetière bury himself in a book to study it for itself and define its individual charm. For him a book is only a starting point or an example in support of a theory, — an occasion to write a chapter of literary history or to consider a question of aesthetics."

I kept insisting that what I was trying to do was to provide contexts. The poems I spent much time discussing were all, I thought, valuable poems in their own right, worth reading now (just as I had defended Wyatt's poems against Rollins's claim that they were of only historical importance). But they could not rightly be read now by someone who had no context, or the wrong context, to fit them into.

Let me take an example, Shakespeare's Lucrece. In my book I presented Lucrece as a complaint poem in the tradition deriving from the Mirror for Magistrates. (C. S. Lewis, in one of his provocative asides in his history of Elizabethan non-dramatic literature, says that
nothing good ever came out of the *Mirror for Magistrates.*) I paid my sincerely respectful compliments to Douglas Bush's discussion of the poem in his first book, *Mythology and the Renaissance Tradition in English Poetry,* but I objected that he fails to make due allowance for the purpose and nature of the poem, and because of this — not putting it in its right context — he misinterprets the imagery and distorts the poem. He says it is soulless and wearisome and "thus for a modern reader it remains a museum piece." Now Professor Bush's main purpose was source-study; he was a disciple of Lowes. The theme of his book is the use made by English poets of Greek and Roman myth, legend and history. *Lucrece* is of course a Roman story; it contains material from Livy, Ovid, and in the description of the siege of Troy painting, from Virgil. But the manner owes more to Daniel's *Rosamund* than to the classics. It has some details from Chaucer and is, in effect, says Professor Bush, a medieval poem. He concludes that *Lucrece* must remain, for the modern reader, a museum piece. Now that is just what I was trying to prevent. Apparently I failed for Professor Bush, since in the revised edition of his book in 1963 he alters a few phrases here and there in his account of *Lucrece* but does not alter his conclusions. I take some consolation, however, from the fact that J. C. Maxwell, in the latest edition of Shakespeare's *Poems,* says "Smith's chapter on 'Ovidian Poetry' is the best treatment of the context both of *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece.*"

There were obviously some assumptions underlying what I wrote, and they were different from the assumptions underlying what Professor Bush wrote. He had made it unnecessary for me to deal with a large part of the mythological tradition and left me free to attempt something else.

My emphasis, in the chapter on pastoral, was on the meaning the convention had for the sixteenth century mind. I suppose the assumption is that pastoral would quite naturally have a different meaning for Sidney, for Pope, and for Robert Frost.

To the Elizabethans, I tried to show, the pastoral ideal was "an ideal of the good life, of the state of content and mental self-sufficiency which had been known in classical antiquity as *otium.*" It is the opposite of the aspiring mind; that label was not commonly used in Elizabethan scholarship when I had to explain and illustrate it in my chapter, but lately I see that it has been incorporated into the title of a book. I was saying, in contradiction to Greg, that Elizabethan pastoral is not an escape from life but a criticism of life.

The chapter on the sonnets I called "critical or illustrative," though

5 Minneapolis, 1932.
it tries to give some account of Petrarchism in the last twenty years of the century in England. The focus here is on a literary problem which I did not identify very clearly then and perhaps cannot do so now. The problem is this: in what ways are the English sonneteers alike and in what ways are they different? To answer the first question would be to give a definition of Petrarchism in England, which is a question of literary history; to answer the second would be to make fine discriminations of style, tone, organization and effect which are matters of literary criticism. As I am writing this there comes to my attention an essay by another scholar-critic discussing a book of his own published several years ago. He remarks that he has encountered and admitted the paradox "that in their extreme forms scholarly and literary considerations are diametrically opposed." If so, then I hope I can always avoid the extreme forms because it seems to me that scholarship and criticism should serve each other and are in fact dependent upon each other.

The essay on Sidney in the sonnets chapter has attracted more attention than I would have expected, particularly the theory of the double audience for Astrolphe and Stella. I cannot remember how I came upon this idea, but it is now attributed to me and I am quite sure that I never read it anywhere else and I am willing to take responsibility for it. I suppose it was the juxtaposition of Geoffrey Tillotson's essay on Elizabethan taste, which I had clipped from the *Times Literary Supplement* years before without knowing the authorship, and the re-reading of the passage on love poetry and Energeia in Sidney's Apologie. It is possible that I took the Energeia passage too seriously, for Professor William Ringler thinks that the sonnets are not intended for Stella at all: "The poems then are a series of conversations or monologues which the reader overhears. The reader and not the lady is the audience, while Astrophil and those he addresses are the actors." Nevertheless, I am immensely gratified that Ringler thinks I give "the best over-all interpretation" in competition with J. W. Lever, R. L. Montgomery and R. B. Young.

My discussion of Shakespeare's sonnets is concerned chiefly with the imagery and the themes, though that part of the chapter which has been chosen for reprint in a selection of modern criticism of the


8 "Elizabethan Decoration" in *Essays in Criticism and Research* (Cambridge, 1942), pp. 5-16.

sonnets has to do with structure. I find that what I was trying to do in this chapter was not so much to provide contexts as to make distinctions. The critic and the literary historian must do both of these things, I believe, and I see no way to tell, in the abstract, when it is necessary to do one rather than the other. I felt in dealing with the sonnets I could be most useful by pointing out, for example, the distinctive dramatic quality of Sidney's, the emblematic, musical and personal quality of Spenser's, and the complex metaphorical richness and the unusual themes of Shakespeare's. One who wishes contexts for the sonnets should then turn to the older works by Janet Scott and L. C. John and the more recent ones by J. W. Lever and, for Sidney, by David Kalstone. The broad context for Elizabethan sonnets is obviously the whole Petrarchan tradition, and one must decide just how important that whole tradition is, not only for Elizabethan poets as a whole, but for each poet individually.

The chapter on satire makes its presuppositions so explicit that the pronouncement of them might well be called dogmatic: "The significant sources of satire are not literary or philosophical; they are social and economic." "In some kinds of poetry the form may be the most important creative agent; in satire the form is secondary to the social concern which gives the work its impetus and motive power." Accordingly, a sketch of the social and economic conditions in England in the latter half of the century (a sketch which seems to me now much too thin) provides the context for satire. I put a good deal of emphasis on the Piers Plowman tradition of social criticism as being important in the English development of satire, partly because Helen C. White, the great authority on the literature of social criticism of the period, had denied that Piers Plowman was satire, and partly because the older scholarship on the subject, represented by R. M. Alden's The Rise of Formal Satire in England, focussed its attention too narrowly, I thought, on the classical models and literary tradition and not enough on the native English element.

About the time I was writing, Arnold Davenport was bringing out his important series of editions of the satirists and had made stimulating studies of several of them. My views on the nature of satire were, I am glad to say, similar to those of Davenport, and the contributions I was able to make to the understanding of Marston are indicated in

14 Philadelphia, 1899.
the introduction to Davenport's edition of Marston's poems.\textsuperscript{15}

A difficulty I encountered in writing the satire chapter was how to handle the psychological critics. Lily Bess Campbell, the most influential of these, had in her \textit{Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes, Slaves of Passion},\textsuperscript{16} read all kinds of Elizabethan psychological lore into the interpretation of character. O. J. Campbell, in his studies of Shakespeare's Jaques and "Comical Satyre" in \textit{Troilus and Cressida}\textsuperscript{17} had turned this interest toward satire. Lawrence Babb had illuminated the whole subject of Elizabethan melancholy.\textsuperscript{18} I felt that Hamlet and Jaques, to go no farther, indicated clearly enough that the satirical spirit and the melancholy man are to some degree connected, but to read all satire as projection of contemporary academic psychological theory seemed to me a distortion. Accordingly, I had to face the problem as it is displayed in Jonson's \textit{Every Man Out of His Humour} and I found there that the corrective for the too heavily psychological readings of the Campbell-Campbell school could be found in C. R. Baskervill's early work on \textit{English Elements in Jonson's Early Comedy}.\textsuperscript{19} I could not anticipate such work published later in the decade as John Peter's \textit{Complaint and Satire in Early English Literature}\textsuperscript{20} and Alvin Kernan's \textit{The Canker'd Muse}\textsuperscript{21}.

The chapter called "Poetry for Music" is, I think, the weakest in the book. Part of the reason is that I was attempting too much. I was trying to suggest an explanation for the feeling expressed in Miss Latham's remark that the typical Elizabethan lyric "is baffling and beautiful: baffling because it is beautiful and nothing else." Maybe this quality is ultimately unexplainable. But my method of supplying contexts dictated that in this case the context was music. This is hard to do in print, and one reviewer regretted that I had not printed some musical scores. It would have been even better, I suppose, to provide phonograph records.

Another possible explanation for my failure is that I didn't know enough. Mr. John Stevens has suggested this: "his arguments are very difficult to follow and his musical analyses (e.g. of 'Though Amaryllis') are misconceived."\textsuperscript{22} This would seem to put me in my place, but

\begin{enumerate}
\item Liverpool, 1961. His editions of Hall (1949), Weever (1948), Rankins (1948) and the Whipper Pamphlets (1951) are the others referred to.
\item Cambridge, 1930.
\item \textit{Comical Satyre and Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida} (San Marino, Calif., 1938), and \textit{Shakespeare's Satire} (New York, 1943).
\item \textit{The Elizabethan Malady} (East Lansing, Mich., 1951).
\item Austin, Texas, 1911.
\item Oxford, 1956.
\item New Haven, Conn., 1959.
\end{enumerate}
I find that we disagree fundamentally about the quality of Elizabethan madrigal music. I speak of "music so sensitive, imitative of every suggestion of color or emotion in the words, free and inventive in the manner of rhythm as were the madrigals." Well, says Mr. Stephens, "at the risk of seeming a mere iconoclast I must stress the opposite — the rhythmic insensitiveness; the crude pictorialism; the occasional gross misunderstandings of the madrigal composer." There would seem to be no point in arguing in print about this difference: the two parties are hearing differently. In a field in which I am no more than an amateur, I relied upon Bruce Pattison's *Music and Poetry of the English Renaissance*, and the main purpose of John Stevens's paper was to take issue with some conclusions of that standard work.

The final chapter, on Heroic Poetry, tried to solve the problem of handling a big subject in short space by the method of illustration. I chose the story of Hercules at the Fork in the Road to show how the Elizabethan imagination apprehended the heroic theme. It was intended merely as illustration, as I had used the Judgment of Paris story to illustrate the values inherent in pastoral. But as illustration, the Hercules motif crops up so frequently, and its symbolic value is so important, in Spenser and in Milton, that the reader might not realize that this is only one of many heroic motifs.

A fruitful approach to *The Faerie Queene*, I reasoned, might be one which considered how Spenser's contemporaries regarded the ancient epics of Homer and the modern epic of Ariosto. And, as it happens, the Elizabethan translators of these great heroic poems, Chapman and Harington, were far more than translators — they were extensive commentators and interpreters as well. Accordingly, we can see through them the strong didactic element in epic poetry which is so characteristic of *The Faerie Queene*. If, as Coleridge thought, Chapman's *Odyssey* is as original a poem as *The Faerie Queene*, perhaps it should be considered in juxtaposition with it more often.

Some context, I suppose, was provided for *The Faerie Queene* by my discussions of Hercules, Chapman's Homer and Harington's Ariosto. Not nearly enough. One of the most laudatory of the scholarly reviewers, the late Harold S. Wilson, wrote that the last chapter "does not seem to afford sufficient scope for doing thorough justice to Spenser's achievement."23 I heartily agree.

Some other scholarly critics, however, complained because they found not too little context but too much. "In general the contextual material is overdone in relation to the size of the book." Another called my strategy anachronistic in our day. I suppose he meant that

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23 *University of Toronto Quarterly*, XXIII (1953-54), 96-98.
what was fashionable then was close-reading critical analysis, not the supplying of contexts.

This providing of contexts is, I suppose, neither straight literary history nor straight literary criticism, so it falls under the laws, if any, of neither of these disciplines. If you are going to provide contexts, what contexts will you provide? A common answer now, and when I wrote my book, is History of Ideas. An excellent description of this kind of context is given in Douglas Bush’s tribute to A.S.P. Woodhouse’s classic paper, “The Argument of Milton’s Comus.” It is, says Bush, “a cardinal example of the necessity and value of historical criticism, of setting forth a poet’s assumptions, his intellectual frame of reference, which in his own time he could take for granted, but which must be rebuilt for modern readers. Here that frame of reference is what Woodhouse had already designated as ‘the dogma of the two orders’ of nature and grace.”

Now, if you are discussing the argument of a poem as deeply philosophical as Comus, the relevant context is of course such important Christian concepts as nature and grace. If you are discussing other aspects of the work, the relevant contexts might be derived from the Odyssey, Shakespeare’s Tempest, Stuart masques and the music of Henry Lawes. Even, perhaps, in a Joycean mood, Ludlow Castle and Environs.

In my preface I explicitly disclaimed writing a literary history of Elizabethan poetry. Eventually a history of Elizabethan poetry, and prose, appeared from the hand of a very famous writer, C. S. Lewis. I will not venture to make any comment on that extraordinary work, but I will quote the one scholar, so far as I know, who reviewed both Lewis’s book and mine. He is Michel Poirier, the distinguished Sidney scholar, who says of Lewis’s English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, “Les problèmes d’érudition, de même que les courants d’idées et d’art, sont presque complètement négligés. Nous sommes aux antipodes de l’attitude adoptée par Hallett Smith qui, dans Elizabethan Poetry (Cambridge, Mass., 1952) s’efforce au contraire de suivre et d’expliquer la croissance et la prospérité des certains genres de poèmes.”

The two most prominent American critics of the book found different values in it. Leicester Bradner found the chapter on the sonnet sequences “the most original and rewarding chapter in the book,” perhaps because it deals not with contexts but directly with the literature itself. The method of supplying contexts, he thought,

26 MLN, LXVIII (1953), 425-29.
was "most successful in the sections on pastoral poetry and on the Ovidian tales, least successful in satire and epic. Herschel Baker,\textsuperscript{27} on the other hand, declared that my treatment of satire was first-rate. These two scholarly critics were in agreement, however, about the literary quality of \textit{Elizabethan Poetry}. "It is regrettable," wrote Professor Baker, "that a book which is concerned with great writing should be so bald and bleak in style. Professor Smith's apparent indifference to grace and readability in his own prose underscores the curious fact that many books about literature are innocent of literary charm." Not only can I not write with charm, it seems, but I cannot even appreciate — most of the time — great writing by others. According to Professor Bradner, "Combined with what I must reluctantly describe as a lack of feeling for the poetry itself (except in the chapter on the sonnet and Marlowe's \textit{Hero and Leander}) this over-weighting of background material makes the book rather dull in many places . . . All Elizabethan scholars will want to read this book, and they will find many parts of it profitable for their thinking. But because of its lack of historical or biographical material and its failure (with the exceptions noted above) to present a really stimulating appreciation of the poetry itself, it will not be a useful book for assignment to students or for recommendation to the general reader."

Despite these grave faults \textit{Elizabethan Poetry} was awarded the Poetry Chapbook Prize of the Poetry Society of America for the best book about poetry published during the year. The prize is an interesting one because it is awarded by poets. And for all its unreadability the hardbound edition of the Harvard University Press continues to sell steadily through three printings and a paperback edition has recently been issued by the University of Michigan Press. \textit{Habent sua fata libelli.}

\textsuperscript{27} \textit{JEGP}, LII (1959), 401-3.
P rofessor Smith's essay is a conscientious effort to carry out what was evidently a distasteful assignment. To talk about his book at all was distasteful to him because he is such a modest person, but to talk about its historical assumptions was even more difficult because he does not believe in assumptions. He is a describer, not a prescriber; a pragmatist, not a Platonist; and he did not consciously derive his book from first principles or theories of any sort, historical or otherwise. He tries to say this in the essay, with his courteous suggestions that he is "not sure" that the book has any "historical assumptions or consistent theory behind it," that he hopes he will always avoid the extremes of "straight literary history" and "straight criticism," and that he sees "no way to tell, in the abstract, when it is necessary to do one rather than the other." This distrust of theory and dogma is also expressed in the book, where he deplores the technique of looking for the doctrinaire key to a work as mere "lock-picking." Having deplored this technique in others, it is no wonder that he feels diffident about using it on his own book. But perhaps he will not mind someone else's burglarizing his book for him, finding in it two consistent attitudes which may qualify as "historical assumptions."

The first assumption, reflected in the remarks which I have already quoted, is that there is a clear distinction between history and criticism, and that his book was intended to be a work of criticism. Since we are concerned here with historical assumptions, we should state this first assumption in its negative form: he did not want his book to be a literary history. Mr. Smith states this assumption explicitly in his essay, saying that he had originally planned to write the book as a chronological history, but that "something" told him, at some point, not to write that kind of book, and that he is "not sure" that the work as it finally turned out is literary history "in the usual sense."
There certainly are traces in the book of its originally historical intention: in the copious dates and in the obvious effort to achieve "coverage" in the first four chapters; but the book as a whole is not only not a literary history, but is vociferously anti-historical. In the essay Mr. Smith is able to be philosophical about the opposition between history and criticism, suggesting that the underlying difference between them is that history is a synthesizing activity, whereas criticism is an analytic activity. In the book itself there is no such philosophical musing. The book was published at the height of the polarization in the American academic profession between historical scholarship and the New Criticism. The "something" which diverted Mr. Smith from his original historical intention, I assume, must have been the rise of the New Criticism. The influence of the New Criticism is clear in the chapter on the sonnets, where the close analysis of individual sonnets of Shakespeare represents an entirely different method from that of the rest of the book. But that chapter is no token gesture in the direction of the New Critics; it shows that Mr. Smith had grappled with the major critical controversy of the day, the split between history and criticism, acknowledged that they involved opposite intentions, and opted for criticism. Though he was obviously unable to throw off all of the habits of his previous training, his book was a blow struck for criticism, not for history.

The traditional literary history which the book repudiates (often with the damning adjective "nineteenth century") was a syndrome of four major disciplines developed in France and Germany in the first flush of the application of the scientific method to literary study, and adopted almost universally as the modus operandi of American graduate schools; the four disciplines were: the study of biography, the study of sources, the study of chronology, and the study of the life-cycle of genres and movements. (In his essay Mr. Smith mentions two more recent kinds of historical study: the history of Renaissance psychology, and the history of ideas, which presumably belong to the same syndrome.)

The distinctive feature of all these disciplines is that their subject is not literature but the past; they are written in the past tense, whereas literary criticism is written in the present tense. Literary history accepts the scientific definition of "understanding," which is, "to know the cause of"; what the historian tries to demonstrate is chains of cause and effect, of evolution or development. As Lemaître complains of Brunètire, in the passage which Mr. Smith quotes, the literary historian mentions literary works only incidentally and in the service of a non-literary purpose. The strength of the grip which this historical conception of literary study had on American universities was shown in the reaction of the American professoriat to C. S. Lewis'
volume in the Oxford History of English Literature: the Tudor literature section of the MLA repudiated Lewis' book because it did not show any development or evolution in Elizabethan literature and was therefore not a proper history; moreover, they voted to write a history of their own to show the "developments" which Lewis had ignored. It was this traditional conception of literary history from which Mr. Smith wanted to disassociate himself in his own book, and he made strenuous efforts to do so.

In almost every chapter he takes pains to repudiate traditional historians in one or the other of the four disciplines I have mentioned. In the chapter on the pastoral he repudiates genre-studies such as Greg's, pointing out that one would never have noticed the theme of otium in the Elizabethan pastoral by continuing to re-examine the previous history of the genre. In the chapter on Ovidian poems Mr. Smith points out that we get nowhere by following Professor Bush in the pursuit of specific sources of The Rape of Lucrece. In the chapter on the sonnet, Mr. Smith heaps scorn on the biographical school of literary study, and delegates to others the study of the history of Petrarchism. In the chapter on satire he rejects genre-studies such as those of Alden in favor of closer attention to subject-matter.

In addition to its many specific statements criticizing traditional literary history, the book speaks to the same point through its organization. The book is organized not chronologically, or by author, but by literary type. Mr. Smith tries to avoid any association with traditional genre-study by using unconventional names for his types and, as he himself points out, appending diversionary sub-titles to the chapter headings. He clearly wanted to avoid involvement in the subject of genre, not because he had any Crocean objections to the legitimacy of the concept of genre, but because he associated genre-study with literary history. The literary types which he uses are simply loose categories designed to give his chapters the appearance of parallelism and so of unity. The chapters are not unified by any historical thesis; they are connected only imaginatively. The book begins and ends with essays on kinds of poems which an imaginary Elizabethan poet might have written at the beginning and end respectively of his career. The other essays could have been arranged in any other order, except that it is artistically appropriate that his efforts at "straight criticism" in the sonnet chapter and "straight history" in the section on Elizabethan economic conditions should have been put side by side in the middle of the book. That the book seems to be unified, in spite of its random chapter-order, is due to another artistic device, the use of a recurrent theme. The theme which recurs throughout the book, unifying individual chapters, and the book as a whole, is the theme of classical mythology. By deliberately substituting fiction for
chronology as a unifying device, Mr. Smith asserts in yet another way his determination to write not history but criticism.

The book nowhere urges the modern reader to cross the abyss to the sixteenth century on the Rix-Rubel bridge and approach Elizabethan poems as their authors did, through the place and figure theory of composition. (Indeed Mr. Smith's use of the term "commonplace" is almost confusingly unhistorical.) Similarly the book nowhere urges the modern reader to recover the Elizabethan view of reality, with all of the "history of ideas" implications of that kind of effort. For example, there are many allusions in the book to individual polarities, such as the active-contemplative polarity; but there is no suggestion of the Paul Meissner vision of the integrated intellectual cosmos into which the habit of thinking in polarities fits. Mr. Smith speaks in his essay of "the sixteenth century mind," but his book is not intended to describe that mind; it is intended to describe poems. Tillyard used pieces of poems to tell us something about the Elizabethan world view, but Mr. Smith uses pieces of the Elizabethan world view to tell us something about poems. Mr. Smith's book is written in the present tense about poems, not in the past tense about time; it is fundamentally an achievement of criticism, not of history.

But if he was trying to avoid the writing of literary history, he was certainly not trying to avoid the past, and his position was not merely negative. There is another and more positive assumption behind his book, an assumption which is primarily critical, but in which a knowledge of the past is involved. Mr. Smith himself identifies this assumption as a wish to "provide contexts," but it also involves some considerations which Mr. Smith does not talk about in his essay, and I should like to rephrase the assumption as follows:

One learns more about a poem by relating it to other works of its own time and place than by relating it either to works of other times and places or to one's own experience of the world.

The historical part of this assumption is buried in the phrase "its own time and place," and we cannot get to it without first peeling away the rest of the sentence.

As the beginning and end of the sentence suggest, Mr. Smith assumes that the critic's function is primarily intellective, or instructive, rather than interpretative or evaluative. The critic's primary aim is to help the reader understand ("learn about") the poem more fully. Mr. Smith himself says that his book was an effort to help people understand sixteenth century poetry. He does not look at a poem in Dewey's way as a sequence of experiences in the reader, or in Valery's way as a non-representational artefact. He looks at a poem in Aristotle's way, as a set of words on a page, with form and content,
with a mimetic relation to life, and with a generic relation to other works of literature. He thinks that the critic should help the reader to understand any of these aspects of the poem which he can. But by *understand* he does not mean merely "know the cause of," but "perceive all the relations of"; thus understanding means not only knowing about cause and effect relations of a poem, but relations of similitude, dissimilitude, and all other relations among parts of a poem and between the poem and the external world.

But the critic should not try to say everything that he sees. He should confine himself to saying those few things which will be genuinely *instructive*, that is, new, interesting, and original, to his particular audience. So, for example, if his audience has heard nothing about Shakespeare's sonnets for years except that they are biographically revelatory, the critic may want to limit his own comments to matters of structure or metaphor in the sonnets. Or, if his audience has heard nothing about Elizabethan satires for years except that they are imitations of classical satires, the critic may want to limit his own observations to pointing out that many of the satires may be related to specific social conditions known to the author. If his audience has heard for years about the sources of *The Faerie Queene* and its epic characteristics, the critic may choose to ignore source and genre altogether and instead point out the pervasive recurrence in Spenser's poem of allusions to the myth of Hercules at the Fork in the Road.

In carrying out his function of being *instructive*, of pointing out only what has not been noticed before, the critic must first notice something himself. The principal techniques of discovery are: close analysis of the work itself, relating the work to previous works, relating the work to other works of its own time and place, and relating the work to one's own experience of life. For Mr. Smith, writing in 1948, the most useful of these techniques was the third. At that time the technique of relating the work to works of earlier times, the cause-seeking technique of history, was being discredited; the technique of relating the work to one's own experience was also being discredited, on the ground that it was unscientifically subjective. Moreover both the technique of history and the technique of interpretation had already been used so much that originality in either was nearly unachievable. The easiest way to learn something original about a poem was to use the technique of close analysis or the technique of relating the poem to other works of its own time and place. Mr. Smith employs both techniques, not because they belong to history or to criticism, but because they are both useful in trying to learn something new about a poem. His fundamental purposes are intellectual and his means are pragmatic.
Of the two techniques which he uses, Mr. Smith obviously prefers the second, the relating of the poem to other works of its own time and place. This is a technique of scholarship, but it is not necessarily a technique of history. History deals with what was past from the poet's point of view. What Mr. Smith does is more lexical than historical. He accepts the idea that literature is mimetic; when he sees the phrase, "aspiring mind," he wants to know to what it referred in the poet's own experience, and he reads other works of the poet's own time until he finds out: he consults Elizabethan literature as a dictionary of meanings of things not understood in a given Elizabethan poem. He does not tell us about the history of the concept of "the aspiring mind"; he simply tells us what it means when we see it in a poem. What is important from a critical point of view about Mr. Smith's method is not that it involves the past but that it involves relating the work to something external to it. If we reserve the term "historicizing" for relating a work to earlier times and places, we might well use "contextualizing," following Mr. Smith's own suggestion, for relating the work to works of its own time and place.

Mr. Smith's term "context" is appropriate to what he is doing for more reasons than he makes clear in his essay. For example, in relating a poem to other works of its own time and place he takes the place limit very seriously. He consciously stresses native English materials, suppressing continental relations as thoroughly as he suppresses classical relations. So he relates The Faerie Queene not to Homer or Ariosto, but to Chapman and Harington; the satire not to Juvenal or Rabelais, but to Piers Plowman; The Rape of Lucrece not to Ovid, but to The Mirror for Magistrates; the sonnet not to Petrarch or Scève, but to Thomas Watson; and the lyric not to the Greek Anthology or Ronsard, but to Campion. Part of the assumption here is doubtless that an English poet was more likely to read continental works such as Cartari's emblems in an English translation (Linche, in this case) than in the original. But the main point is simply that for Mr. Smith, in 1948, the richest mine available for learning new things about Elizabethan poems was not classical or continental works but the works listed in the STC. At that time most Elizabethan scholars had never read such obscure Elizabethan works as Lawrence Humphrey's The Nobles, or Peter Colse's Penelope's Complaint, or Anthony Munday's A View of Sundry Examples, or John Trussel's Raptus I Helenae. What Mr. Smith learned from these works when he read them became a part of that rich amalgam of knowledge which he calls the "context" of Elizabethan poetry.

But in discussing a poem he never tries to set the jewel in the whole "context"; all he does is to relate the poem to a particular idea or habit or attitude selected from the treasure-house for special atten-
tion. In this respect the term “context” gives a somewhat misleading idea of what he is trying to provide. The term “context” implies something much too large, something like the milieu of Taine, or the figure-ground relation of Gestalt psychology, whereas what Mr. Smith has in mind is nothing so grand or so theoretical. The “context” of Elizabethan poetry may in fact be the sum of all the little things he discusses, and a great deal more that he knows but does not tell us, but all he talks about at any one time is a single interesting and novel relation between the poem and other works of its own time and place.

That Mr. Smith found this technique the most useful of those available to him was, as I have suggested, partly a function of the interests and knowledge of the 1948 audience, but it is also a function of his own special expertise: the fact that he had read more widely than most other scholars in the “other works” involved. Few scholars then or now have read as widely as Mr. Smith among the works listed in the Short Title Catalogue. It is this reading which makes him such a good anthologist (as in The Golden Hind and the Norton Anthology), and which makes his judgments so sure, his observations so original whenever he writes about Elizabethan literature. His book is still the most instructive book we have about Elizabethan poetry primarily because he has read more Elizabethan works than the rest of us. Though they are works of the past, he does not use them to write history; he uses them to help us understand poems. What he writes is contextual criticism, as opposed to analytical or evaluative criticism; it is not literary history. He writes about Elizabethan poems on the assumption that there are things about them which we do not understand and which he may be able to explain because he is more at home in the English Renaissance than we are. I do not think that this is really an historical assumption, but it is certainly a sound one. For most of us, Elizabethan England, like the Huntington Library, is an interesting place to visit; but Mr. Smith lives there.

Brown University
At the beginning of Mallarmé's unfinished story, Igitur, there is the description of an empty room, in the middle of which, on a table there is an open book. This seems to me the situation of every book, until someone comes and begins to read it. Books are objects. On a table, on bookshelves, in store windows, they wait for someone to come and deliver them from their materiality, from their immobility. When I see them on display, I look at them as I would at animals for sale, kept in little cages, and so obviously hoping for a buyer. For—there is no doubting it—animals do know that their fate depends on a human intervention, thanks to which they will be delivered from the shame of being treated as objects. Isn't the same true of books? Made of paper and ink, they lie where they are put, until the moment some one shows an interest in them. They wait. Are they aware that an act of man might suddenly transform their existence? They appear to be lit up with that hope. Read me, they seem to say. I find it hard to resist their appeal. No, books are not just objects among others.

This feeling they give me—I sometimes have it with other objects. I have it, for example, with vases and statues. It would never occur to me to walk around a sewing machine or to look at the under side of a plate. I am quite satisfied with the face they present to me. But statues make me want to circle around them, vases make me want to turn them in my hands. I wonder why. Isn't it because they give me the illusion that there is something in them which, from a different angle, I might be able to see? Neither vase nor statue seems fully revealed by the unbroken perimeter of its surfaces. In addition to its surfaces it must have an interior. What this interior might be, that is what intrigues me and makes me circle around them, as though looking for the entrance to a secret chamber. But there is no such entrance (save for the mouth of the vase, which is not a true entrance since it gives only access to a little space to put flowers in). So the vase and the statue are closed. They oblige me to remain outside. We can have no true rapport—whence my sense of uneasiness.
So much for statues and vases. I hope books are not like them. Buy a vase, take it home, put it on your table or your mantel, and, after a while, it will allow itself to be made a part of your household. But it will be no less a vase, for that. On the other hand, take a book, and you will find it offering, opening itself. It is this openness of the book which I find so moving. A book is not shut in by its contours, is not walled-up as in a fortress. It asks nothing better than to exist outside itself, or to let you exist in it. In short, the extraordinary fact in the case of a book is the falling away of the barriers between you and it. You are inside it; it is inside you; there is no longer either outside or inside.

Such is the initial phenomenon produced whenever I take up a book, and begin to read it. At the precise moment that I see, surging out of the object I hold open before me, a quantity of significations which my mind grasps, I realize that what I hold in my hands is no longer just an object, or even simply a living thing. I am aware of a rational being, of a consciousness; the consciousness of another, no different from the one I automatically assume in every human being I encounter, except that in this case the consciousness is open to me, welcomes me, lets me look deep inside itself, and even allows me, with unheard-of licence, to think what it thinks and feel what it feels.

Unheard-of, I say. Unheard-of, first, is the disappearance of the “object.” Where is the book I held in my hands? It is still there, and at the same time it is there no longer, it is nowhere. That object wholly object, that thing made of paper, as there are things made of metal or porcelaine, that object is no more, or at least it is as if it no longer existed, as long as I read the book. For the book is no longer a material reality. It has become a series of words, of images, of ideas which in their turn begin to exist. And where is this new existence? Surely not in the paper object. Nor, surely, in external space. There is only one place left for this new existence: my innermost self.

How has this come about? By what means, through whose intercession? How can I have opened my own mind so completely to what is usually shut out of it? I do not know. I know only that, while reading, I perceive in my mind a number of significations which have made themselves at home there. Doubtless they are still objects: images, ideas, words, objects of my thought. And yet, from this point of view, there is an enormous difference. For the book, like the vase, or like the statue, was an object among others, residing in the external world: the world which objects ordinarily inhabit exclusively in their own society or each on its own, in no need of being thought by my thought; whereas in this interior world where, like fish in an aquarium, words, images and ideas disport themselves, these mental entities, in order
to exist, need the shelter which I provide; they are dependent on my consciousness.

This dependence is at once a disadvantage and an advantage. As I have just observed, it is the privilege of exterior objects to dispense with any interference from the mind. All they ask is to be let alone. They manage by themselves. But the same is surely not true of interior objects. By definition they are condemned to change their very nature, condemned to lose their materiality. They become images, ideas, words, that is to say purely mental entities. In sum, in order to exist as mental objects, they must relinquish their existence as real objects.

On the one hand, this is cause for regret. As soon as I replace my direct perception of reality by the words of a book, I deliver myself, bound hand and foot to the omnipotence of fiction. I say farewell to what is, in order to feign belief in what is not. I surround myself with fictitious beings; I become the prey of language. There is no escaping this take-over. Language surrounds me with its unreality.

On the other hand, the transmutation through language of reality into a fictional equivalent, has undeniable advantages. The universe of fiction is infinitely more elastic than the world of objective reality. It lends itself to any use; it yields with little resistance to the importunities of the mind. Moreover — and of all its benefits I find this the most appealing — this interior universe constituted by language does not seem radically opposed to the me who thinks it. Doubtless what I glimpse through the words are mental forms not divested of an appearance of objectivity. But they do not seem to be of a nature other than my mind which thinks them. They are objects, but subjected objects. In short, since everything has become part of my mind, thanks to the intervention of language, the opposition between the subject and its objects has been considerably attenuated. And thus the greatest advantage of literature is that I am persuaded by it that I am freed from my usual sense of incompatibility between my consciousness and its objects.

This is the remarkable transformation wrought in me through the act of reading. Not only does it cause the physical objects around me to disappear, including the very book I am reading, but it replaces those external objects with a congeries of mental objects in close rapport with my own consciousness. And yet the very intimacy in which I now live with my objects is going to present me with new problems. The most curious of these is the following: I am someone who happens to have as objects of his own thought, thoughts which are part of a book I am reading, and which are therefore the cogitations of another. They are the thoughts of another, and yet it is I who am their subject. The situation is even more astonishing than the one noted above. I am thinking the thoughts of another. Of course,
there would be no cause for astonishment if I were thinking it as the thought of another. But I think it as my very own. Ordinarily there is the I which thinks, which recognizes itself (when it takes its bearings) in thoughts which may have come from elsewhere but which it takes upon itself as its own in the moment it thinks them. This is how we must take Diderot’s declaration “Mes pensées sont mes catins” (“My thoughts are my whores”). That is, they sleep with everybody without ceasing to belong to their author. Now, in the present case things are quite different. Because of the strange invasion of my person by the thoughts of another, I am a self who is granted the experience of thinking thoughts foreign to him. I am the subject of thoughts other than my own. My consciousness behaves as though it were the consciousness of another.

This merits reflection. In a certain sense I must recognize that no idea really belongs to me. Ideas belong to no one. They pass from one mind to another as coins pass from hand to hand. Consequently, nothing could be more misleading than the attempt to define a consciousness by the ideas which it utters or entertains. But whatever these ideas may be, however strong the tie which binds them to their source, however transitory may be their sojourn in my own mind, so long as I entertain them I assert myself as subject of these ideas; I am the subjective principle for whom the ideas serve for the time being as the predications. Furthermore, this subjective principle can in no wise be conceived as a predication, as something which is discussed, referred to. It is I who think, who contemplate, who am engaged in speaking. In short, it is never a HE but an I.

Now what happens when I read a book? Am I then the subject of a series of predications which are not my predications? That is impossible, perhaps even a contradiction in terms. I feel sure that as soon as I think something, that something becomes in some indefinable way my own. Whatever I think is a part of my mental world. And yet here I am thinking a thought which manifestly belongs to another mental world, which is being thought in me just as though I did not exist. Already the notion is inconceivable and seems even more so if I reflect that, since every thought must have a subject to think it, this thought which is alien to me and yet in me, must also have in me a subject which is alien to me. It all happens, then, as though reading were the act by which a thought managed to bestow itself within me with a subject not myself. Whenever I read, I mentally pronounce an I, and yet the I which I pronounce is not myself. This is true even when the hero of a novel is presented in the third person, and even when there is no hero and nothing but reflections or propositions: for as soon as something is presented as thought, there has to be a thinking subject with whom, at least for the time being, I identify, for-
getting myself, alienated from myself. "JE est un autre." said Rimbaud. Another I, who has replaced my own, and who will continue to do so as long as I read. Reading is just that: a way of giving way not only to a host of alien words, images, ideas, but also to the very alien principle which utters them and shelters them.

The phenomenon is indeed hard to explain, even to conceive, and yet, once admitted, it explains to me what might otherwise seem even more inexplicable. For how could I explain, without such take-over of my innermost subjective being, the astonishing facility with which I not only understand but even feel what I read. When I read as I ought, i.e. without mental reservation, without any desire to preserve my independence of judgment, and with the total commitment required of any reader, my comprehension becomes intuitive and any feeling proposed to me is immediately assumed by me. In other words, the kind of comprehension in question here is not a movement from the unknown to the known, from the strange to the familiar, from outside to inside. It might rather be called a phenomenon by which mental objects rise up from the depths of consciousness into the light of recognition. On the other hand — and without contradiction — reading implies something resembling the apperception I have of myself, the action by which I grasp straightway what I think as being thought by a subject (who, in this case, is not, I). Whatever sort of alienation I may endure, reading does not interpret my activity as subject.

Reading, then, is the act in which the subjective principle which I call I, is modified in such a way that I no longer have the right, strictly speaking, to consider it as my I. I am on loan to another, and this other thinks, feels, suffers, and acts within me. The phenomenon appears in its most obvious and even naivest form in the sort of spell brought about by certain cheap kinds of reading, such as thrillers, of which I say "It gripped me." Now it is important to note that this possession of myself by another takes place not only on the level of objective thought, that is with regard to images, sensations, ideas which reading affords me, but also on the level of my very subjectivity. When I am absorbed in reading, a second self takes over, a self which thinks and feels for me. Withdrawn in some recess of myself, do I then silently witness this dispossession? Do I derive from it some comfort or, on the contrary, a kind of anguish? However that may be, someone else holds the center of the stage, and the question which imposes itself, which I am absolutely obliged to ask myself, is this: "Who is the usurper who occupies the forefront? What is this mind who all alone by himself fills my consciousness and who, when I say I, is indeed that I?"

There is an immediate answer to this question, perhaps too easy an
answer. This I who thinks in me when I read a book, is the I of the one who writes the book. When I read Baudelaire or Racine, it is really Baudelaire or Racine who thinks, feels, allows himself to be read within me. Thus a book is not only a book, it is the means by which an author actually preserves his ideas, his feelings, his modes of dreaming and living. It is his means of saving his identity from death. Such an interpretation of reading is not false. It seems to justify what is commonly called the biographical explication of literary texts. Indeed every word of literature is impregnated with the mind of the one who wrote it. As he makes us read it, he awakens in us the analogue of what he thought or felt. To understand a literary work, then, is to let the individual who wrote it reveal himself to us in us. It is not the biography which explicates the work, but rather the work which sometimes enables us to understand the biography.

But biographical interpretation is in part false and misleading. It is true that there is an analogy between the works of an author and the experiences of his life. The works may be seen as an incomplete translation of the life. And further, there is an even more significant analogy among all the works of a single author. Each of the works, however, while I am reading it, lives in me its own life. The subject who is revealed to me through my reading of it is not the author, either in the disordered totality of his outer experiences, or in the aggregate, better organized and concentrated totality, which is the one of his writings. Yet the subject which presides over the work can exist only in the work. To be sure, nothing is unimportant for understanding the work, and a mass of biographical, bibliographical, textual, and general critical information is indispensable to me. And yet this knowledge does not coincide with the internal knowledge of the work. Whatever may be the sum of the information I acquire on Baudelaire or Racine, in whatever degree of intimacy I may live with their genius, I am aware that this contribution (apport) does not suffice to illuminate for me in its own inner meaning, in its formal perfection, and in the subjective principle which animates it, the particular work of Baudelaire or Racine the reading of which now absorbs me. At this moment what matters to me is to live, from the inside, in a certain identity with the work and the work alone. It could hardly be otherwise. Nothing external to the work could possibly share the extraordinary claim which the work now exerts on me. It is there within me, not to send me back, outside itself, to its author, nor to his other writings, but on the contrary to keep my attention rivetted on itself. It is the work which traces in me the very boundaries within which this consciousness will define itself. It is the work which forces on me a series of mental objects and creates in me a network of words, beyond which, for the time being, there will be no room for other mental
objects or for other words. And it is the work, finally, which, not satisfied thus with defining the content of my consciousness, takes hold of it, appropriates it, and makes of it that I which, from one end of my reading to the other, presides over the unfolding of the work, of the single work which I am reading.

And so the work forms the temporary mental substance which fills my consciousness; and it is moreover that consciousness, the I-subject, the continued consciousness of what is, revealing itself within the interior of the work. Such is the characteristic condition of every work which I summon back into existence by placing my consciousness at its disposal. I give it not only existence, but awareness of existence. And so I ought not to hesitate to recognize that so long as it is animated by this vital inbreathing inspired by the act of reading, a work of literature becomes (at the expense of the reader whose own life it suspends) a sort of human being, that it is a mind conscious of itself and constituting itself in me as the subject of its own objects.

II

The work lives its own life within me; in a certain sense, it thinks itself, and it even gives itself a meaning within me.

This strange displacement of myself by the work deserves to be examined even more closely.

If the work thinks itself in me, does this mean that, during a complete loss of consciousness on my part, another thinking entity invades me, taking advantage of my unconsciousness in order to think itself without my being able to think it? Obviously not. The annexation of my consciousness by another (the other which is the work) in no way implies that I am the victim of any deprivation of consciousness. Everything happens, on the contrary, as though, from the moment I become a prey to what I read, I begin to share the use of my consciousness with this being whom I have tried to define and who is the conscious subject ensconced at the heart of the work. He and I, we start having a common consciousness. Doubtless, within this community of feeling, the parts played by each of us are not of equal importance. The consciousness inherent in the work is active and potent; it occupies the foreground; it is clearly related to its own world, to objects which are its objects. In opposition, I myself, although conscious of whatever it may be conscious of, I play a much more humble role, content to record passively all that is going in me. A lag takes place, a sort of schizoid distinction between what I feel and what the other feels; a confused awareness of delay, so that the work seems first to think by itself, and then to inform me what it has
thought. Thus I often have the impression, while reading, of simply
witnessing an action which at the same time concerns and yet does
not concern me. This provokes a certain feeling of surprise within me.
I am a consciousness astonished by an existence which is not mine,
but which I experience as though it were mine.

This astonished consciousness is in fact the consciousness of the
critic: the consciousness of a being who is allowed to apprehend as
its own what is happening in the consciousness of another being.
Aware of a certain gap, disclosing a feeling of identity, but of identity
within difference, critical consciousness does not necessarily imply the
total disappearance of the critic's mind in the mind to be criticized.
From the partial and hesitant approximation of Jacques Rivière to
the exalted, digressive and triumphant approximation of Charles Du
Bos, criticism can pass through a whole series of nuances which we
would be well advised to study. That is what I now propose to do.
By discovering the various forms of identification and non-identifica-
tion to be found in recent critical writing in French literature, I shall
be able perhaps to give a better account of the variations of which
this relationship — between criticizing subject and criticized object —
is capable.

Let me take a first example. In the case of the first critic I shall
speak of, this fusion of two consciousnesses is barely suggested. It is an
uncertain movement of the mind toward an object which remains
hidden. Whereas in the perfect identification of two consciousnesses,
each sees itself reflected in the other, in this instance the critical con-
sciousness can, at best, attempt but to draw closer to a reality which
must remain forever veiled. In this attempt it uses the only mediators
available to it in this quest, that is the senses. And since sight, the
most intellectual of the five senses, seems in this particular case to
come up against a basic opacity, the critical mind must approach its
goal blindly, through the tactile exploration of surfaces, through a
groping exploration of the material world which separates the critical
mind from its object. Thus, despite the immense effort on the part of
the sympathetic intelligence to lower itself to a level where it can,
however lamely, make some progress in its quest toward the conscious-
ness of the other, this enterprise is destined to failure. One senses that
the unfortunate critic is condemned never to fulfill adequately his role
as reader. He stumbles, he puzzles, he questions awkwardly a language
which he is condemned never to read with ease; or rather, in trying to
read the language, he uses a key which enables him to translate but a
fraction of the text.

This critic is Jacques Rivière.

And yet it is from this failure that a much later critic will derive
a more successful method of approaching a text. With this later critic,
as with Rivière, the whole project begins with an attempt at identification on the most basic level. But this most primitive level is the one in which there flows, from mind to mind, a current which has only to be followed. To identify with the work means here, for the critic, to undergo the same experiences, beginning with the most elementary. On the level of indistinct thought, of sensations, emotions, images, and obsessions of preconscious life, it is possible for the critic to repeat, within himself, that life of which the work affords a first version, inexhaustibly revealing and suggestive. And yet such an imitation could not take place, in a domain so hard to define, without the aid of a powerful auxiliary. This auxiliary is language. There is no critical identification which is not prepared, realized, and incarnated through the agency of language. The deepest sentient life, hidden in the recesses of another’s thoughts, could never be truly transposed, save for the mediation of words which allow a whole series of equivalences to arise. To describe this phenomenon as it takes place in the criticism I am speaking of now, I can no longer be content with the usual distinctions between the signifier (signifiant) and the signified (signifié) for what would it mean here to say that the language of the critic signifies the language of the literary work? There is not just equation, similitude. Words have attained a veritable power of recreation; they are a sort of material entity, solid and three-dimensional, thanks to which a certain life of the senses is reborn, finding in a network of verbal connotations the very conditions necessary for its replication. In other words, the language of criticism here dedicates itself to the business of mimicking physically the apperceptual world of the author. Strangely enough, the language of this sort of mimetic criticism becomes even more tangible, more tactile than the author’s own; the poetry of the critic becomes more “poetic” than the poet’s. This verbal mimesis, consciously exaggerated, is in no way servile, nor does it tend at all toward the pastiche. And yet it can reach its object only insofar as that object is deeply enmeshed in, almost confounded with, physical matter. This form of criticism is thus able to provide an admirable equivalent of the vital substratum which underlies all thought, and yet it seems incapable of attaining and expressing thought itself. This criticism is both helped and hindered by the language which it employs; helped, insofar as this language allows it to express the sensuous life in its original state, where it is still almost impossible to distinguish between subject and object; and yet hindered, too, because this language, too congealed and opaque, does not lend itself to analysis, and because the subjectivity which it evokes and describes is as though forever mired in its objects. And so the activity of criticism in this case is somehow incomplete, in spite of its remarkable successes. Identification relative to
objects is accomplished almost too well; relative to subjectivity it is barely sketched.

This, then, is the criticism of Jean-Pierre Richard.

In its extreme form, in the abolition of any subject whatsoever, this criticism seems to extract from a literary work a certain condensed matter, a material essence.

But what, then, would be a criticism which would be the reverse, which would abolish the object and extract from the texts their most subjective elements?

To conceive such a criticism, I must leap to the opposite extreme. I imagine a critical language which would attempt deliberately to strip the literary language of anything concrete. In such a criticism it would be the artful aim of every line, of every sentence, of every metaphor, of every word, to reduce to the near nothingness of abstraction the images of the real world reflected by literature. If literature, by definition, is already a transportation of the real into the unreality of verbal conception, then the critical act in this case will constitute a transposition of this transposition, thus raising to the second power the “de-realization” of being through language. In this way, the mind puts the maximum distance between its thought and what is. Thanks to this withdrawal, and to the consequent dematerialization of every object thus pushed to the vanishing point, the universe represented in this criticism seems not so much the equivalent of the perceivable world, or of its literary representation, as rather its image crystallized through a process of rigorous intellectualization. Here criticism is no longer mimesis; it is the reduction of all literary forms to the same level of insignificance. In short, what survives this attempted annihilation of literature by the critical act? Nothing perhaps save a consciousness ceaselessly confronting the hollowness of mental objects, which yield without resistance, and an absolutely transparent language, which, by coating all objects with the same clear glaze, makes them (“like leaves seen far beneath the ice”) appear to be infinitely far away. Thus, the language of this criticism plays a role exactly opposite to the function it has in Jean-Pierre Richard’s criticism. It does indeed bring about the unification of critical thought with the mental world revealed by the literary work; but it brings it about at the expense of the work. Everything is finally annexed by the dominion of a consciousness detached from any object, a hyper-critical consciousness, functioning all alone, somewhere in the void.

Is there any need to say that this hyper-criticism is the critical thought of Maurice Blanchot?

I have found it useful to compare the criticism of Richard to the criticism of Blanchot. I learn from this confrontation that the critic’s linguistic apparatus can, just as he chooses, bring him closer to the
work under consideration, or can remove him from it indefinitely. If he so wishes, he can approximate very closely the work in question, thanks to a verbal mimesis which transposes into the critic's language the sensuous themes of the work. Or else he can make language a pure crystallizing agent, an absolute translucence, which, suffering no opacity to exist between subject and object, promotes the exercise of the cognitive power on the part of the subject, while at the same time accentuating in the object those characteristics which emphasize its infinite distance from the subject. In the first of the two cases, criticism achieves a remarkable *complicity*, but at the risk of losing its minimum lucidity; in the second case, it results in the most complete dissociation; the maximum lucidity thereby achieved only confirms a separation instead of a union.

Thus criticism seems to oscillate between two possibilities: a union without comprehension, and a comprehension without union. I may identify so completely with what I am reading that I lose consciousness not only of myself, but also of that other consciousness which lives within the work. Its proximity blinds me by blocking my prospect. But I may, on the other hand, separate myself so completely from what I am contemplating that the thought thus removed to a distance assumes the aspect of a being with whom I may never establish any relationship whatsoever. In either case, the act of reading has delivered me from egocentricity: another's thought inhabits me or haunts me, but in the first case I lose myself in that alien world, and in the other we keep our distance and refuse to identify. Extreme closeness and extreme detachment have then the same regrettable effect of making me fall short of the total critical act: that is to say, the exploration of that mysterious interrelationship which, through the mediation of reading and of language, is established to our mutual satisfaction between the work read and myself.

Thus extreme proximity and extreme separation each have grave disadvantages. And yet they have their privileges as well. Sensuous thought is privileged to move at once to the heart of the work and to share its own life; clear thought is privileged to confer on its objects the highest degree of intelligibility. Two sorts of insight are here distinguishable and mutually exclusive: there is penetration by the senses and penetration by the reflective consciousness. Now rather than contrasting these two forms of critical activity, would there not be some way, I wonder, not of practicing them simultaneously, which would be impossible, but at least of combining them through a kind of reciprocation and alternation?

Is not this perhaps the method used today by Jean Starobinski? For instance, it would not be difficult to find in his work a number of texts which relate him to Maurice Blanchot. Like Blanchot he dis-
plays exceptional lucidity and an acute awareness of distance. And yet he does not quite abandon himself to Blanchot's habitual pessimism. On the contrary, he seems inclined to optimism, even at times to a pleasant utopianism. Starobinski's intellect in this respect is analogous to that of Rousseau, yearning for an immediate transparency of all beings to each other which would enable them to understand each other in an ecstatic happiness. From this point of view, is not the ideal of criticism precisely represented by the fête citadine (street celebration) or fête champêtre (rustic feast)? There is a milieu or a moment in the feast in which everyone communicates with everyone else, in which hearts are open like books. On a more modest scale, doesn't the same phenomenon occur in reading? Does not one being open its innermost self? Is not the other being enchanted by this opening? In the criticism of Starobinski we often find that crystalline tempo of music, that pure delight in understanding, that perfect sympathy between an intelligence which enters and that intelligence which welcomes it.

In such moments of harmony, there is no longer any exclusion, no inside or outside. Contrary to Blanchot's belief, perfect translucence does not result in separation. On the contrary, with Starobinski, all is perfect agreement, joy shared, the pleasure of understanding and of being understood. Moreover, such pleasure, however intellectual it may be, is not here exclusively a pleasure of the mind. For the relationship established on this level between author and critic is not a relationship between pure minds. It is rather between incarnate beings, and the particularities of their physical existence constitute not obstacles to understanding, but rather a complex of supplementary signs, a veritable language which must be deciphered and which enhances mutual comprehension. Thus for Starobinski, as much physician as critic, there is a reading of bodies which is likened to the reading of minds. It is not of the same nature, nor does it bring the intelligence to bear on the same area of human knowledge. But for the critic who practices it, this criticism provides the opportunity for a reciprocating exchange between different types of learning which have, perhaps, different degrees of transparency.

Starobinski's criticism, then, displays great flexibility. Rising at times to the heights of metaphysics, it does not disdain the farthest reaches of the subconscious. It is sometimes intimate, sometimes detached; it assumes all the degrees of identification and non-identification. But its final movement seems to consist in a sort of withdrawal, contradistinction with its earlier accord. After an initial intimacy with the object under study, this criticism has finally to detach itself, to move on, but this time in solitude. Let us not see this withdrawal as a failure of sympathy but rather as a way of avoiding
the encumbrances of too prolonged a life in common. Above all we discern an acute need to establish bearings, to adopt the judicious perspective, to assess the fruits of proximity by examining them at a distance. Thus, Starobinski's criticism always ends with a view from afar, or rather from above, for while moving away it has also moved imperceptibly toward a dominating (surplombante) position. Does this mean that Starobinski's criticism like Blanchot's is doomed to end in a philosophy of separation? This, in a way, must be conceded, and it is no coincidence that Starobinski treats with special care the themes of melancholy and nostalgia. His criticism always concludes with a double farewell. But this farewell is exchanged by two beings who have begun by living together; and the one left behind continues to be illuminated by that critical intellect which moves on.

The sole fault with which I might reproach such criticism is the excessive ease with which it penetrates what it illuminates.

By dint of seeing in literary works only the thoughts which inhabit them, Starobinski's criticism somehow passes through their forms, not neglecting them, it is true, but without pausing on the way. Under its action literary works lose their opacity, their solidity, their objective dimension; like those palace walls which become transparent in certain fairy tales. And if it is true that the ideal act of criticism must seize (and reproduce) that certain relationship between an object and a mind which is the work itself, how could the act of criticism succeed when it suppresses one of the (polar) terms of this relationship?

My search must continue, then, for a criticism in which this relationship subsists. Could it perhaps be the criticism of Marcel Raymond and Jean Rousset? Raymond's criticism always recognizes the presence of a double reality, both mental and formal. It strives to comprehend almost simultaneously an inner experience and a perfected form. On the one hand, no one allows himself to be absorbed with such complete self-forgetfulness into the thought of another. But the other's thought is grasped not at its highest, but at its most obscure, at its cloudiest point, at the point at which it is reduced to being a mere self-awareness scarcely perceived by the being which entertains it, and which yet to the eyes of the critic seems the sole means of access by which he can penetrate within the precincts of the alien mind.

But Raymond's criticism presents another aspect which is precisely the reverse of this confused identification of the critic's thought with the thought criticized. It is then the reflective contemplation of a formal reality which is the work itself. The work stands before the critical intelligence as a perfected object, which is in fact an enigma, an external thing existing in itself and with which there is no possibility of identification nor of inner knowledge.

Thus Raymond perceives sometimes a subject, sometimes an object.
The subject is pure mind; it is a sheer indefinable presence, an almost inchoate entity, into which, by very virtue of its absence of form, it becomes possible for the critic's mind to penetrate. The work, on the contrary, exists only within a definite form, but this definition limits it, encloses it within its own contours, at the same time constraining the mind which studies it to remain on the outside. So that, if on the one hand the critical thought of Raymond tends to lose itself within an undefined subjectivity, on the other it tends to come to a stop before an impenetrable objectivity.

Admirably gifted to submit his own subjectivity to that of another, and thus to immerse itself in the obscurerst depths of every mental entity, the mind of Raymond is less well equipped to penetrate the obstacle presented by the objective surface of the works. He then finds himself marking time, or moving in circles around the work, as around the vase or the statue mentioned before. Does Raymond then establish an insurmountable partition between the two realities - subjective, objective - unified though they may be in the work? No, indeed, at least not in his best essays, since in them, by careful intuitive apprehension of the text and participation by the critic in the powers active in the poet's use of language, there appears some kind of link between the objective aspects of the work and the undefined subjectivity which sustains it. A link not to be confused with a pure relation of identity. The perception of the formal aspects of the work becomes somehow an analogical language by means of which it becomes possible for the critic to go, within the work, beyond the formal aspects it presents. Nevertheless this association is never presented by Raymond as a dialectical process. The usual state described by his method of criticism is one of plenitude, and even of a double plenitude. A certain fulness of experience detected in the poet and re-lived in the mind of the critic, is connected by the latter with a certain perfection of form; but why this is so, and how it does become so, is never clearly explained.

Now is it then possible to go one step further? This is what is attempted by Jean Rousset, a former student of Raymond and perhaps his closest friend. He also dedicates himself to the task of discerning the structure of a work as well as the depth of an experience. Only what essentially matters to him is to establish a connection between the objective reality of the work and the organizing power which gives it shape. A work is not explained for him, as for the structuralists, by the exclusive interdependence of the objective elements which compose it. He does not see in it a fortuitous combination, interpreted *a posteriori* as if it were an *a priori* organization. There is not in his eyes any system of the work without a principle of systematization which operates in correlation with that work and which is even
included in it. In short, there is no spider-web without a center which is the spider. On the other hand, it is not a question of going from the work to the psychology of the author, but of going back, within the sphere of the work, from the objective elements systematically arranged, to a certain power of organization, inherent in the work itself, as if the latter showed itself to be an intentional consciousness determining its arrangements and solving its problems. So that it would scarcely be an abuse of terms to say that it speaks, by means of its structural elements, an authentic language, thanks to which it discloses itself and means nothing but itself. Such then is the critical enterprise of Jean Rousset. It sets itself to use the objective elements of the work in order to attain, beyond them, a reality not formal, nor objective, written down however in forms and expressing itself by means of them. Thus the understanding of forms must not limit itself merely to the recording of their objective aspects. As Focillon demonstrated from the point of view of art history, there is a "life of forms" perceptible not only in the historic development which they display from epoch to epoch, but within each single work, in the movement by which forms tend therein sometimes to stabilize and become static, and sometimes to change into one another. Thus the two contradictory forces which are always at work in any literary writing, the will to stability and the protean impulse, help us to perceive by their interplay how much forms are dependent on what Coleridge called a shaping power which determines them, replaces them and transcends them. The teaching of Raymond finds then its most satisfying success in the critical method of Jean Rousset, a method which leads the seeker from the continuously changing frontiers of form to what is beyond form.

It is fitting then to conclude this inquiry here, since it has achieved its goal, namely to describe, relying on a series of more or less adequate examples, a critical method having as guiding principle the relation between subject and object. Yet there remains one last difficulty. In order to establish the interrelationship between subject and object, which is the principle of all creative work and of the understanding of it, two ways, at least theoretically, are opened, one leading from the objects to the subject, the other from the subject to the objects. Thus we have seen Raymond and Rousset, through perception of the objective structures of a literary work, strive to attain the subjective principle which upholds it. But, in so doing, they seem to recognize the precedence of the subject over its objects. What Raymond and Rousset are searching for in the objective and formal aspects of the work, is something which is previous to the work and on which the work depends for its very existence. So that the method which leads from the object to the subject does not differ radically at bottom from the one which leads from subject to object, since it does
really consist in going from subject to subject through the object. Yet there is the risk of overlooking an important point. The aim of criticism is not achieved merely by the understanding of the part played by the subject in its interrelation with objects. When reading a literary work, there is a moment when it seems to me that the subject present in this work disengages itself from all that surrounds it, and stands alone. Had I not once the intuition of this, when visiting the Scuola de San Rocco in Venice, one of the highest summits of art, where there are assembled so many paintings of the same painter, Tintoretto? When looking at all these masterpieces brought there together and revealing so manifestly their unity of inspiration, I had suddenly the impression of having reached the common essence present in all the works of a great master, an essence which I was not able to perceive, except when emptying my mind of all the particular images created by the artist. I became aware of a subjective power at work in all these pictures, and yet never so clearly understood by my mind as when I had forgotten all their particular figurations.

One may ask oneself: What is this subject left standing in isolation after all examination of a literary work? Is it the individual genius of the artist, visibly present in his work, yet having an invisible life independent of the work? Or is it, as Valéry thinks, an anonymous and abstract consciousness presiding, in its aloofness, over the operations of all more concrete consciousness? Whatever it may be, I am constrained to acknowledge that all subjective activity present in a literary work is not entirely explained by its relationship with forms and objects within the work. There is in the work a mental activity profoundly engaged in objective forms; and there is, at another level, forsaking all forms, a subject which reveals itself to itself (and to me) in its transcendence over all which is reflected in it. At this point, no object can any longer express it, no structure can any longer define it; it is exposed in its ineffability and in its fundamental indeterminacy. Such is perhaps the reason why the critic, in his elucidation of works, is haunted by this transcendence of mind. It seems then that criticism, in order to accompany the mind in this effort of detachment from itself, needs to annihilate, or at least momentarily to forget, the objective elements of the work, and to elevate itself to the apprehension of a subjectivity without objectivity.
When we recall that the infant Victoria was christened Alexandrina — and then almost as an afterthought Alexandrina Victoria, — we may wonder whether we might have had another image of the Victorian era, had the first name rather than the second prevailed. There were assuredly “Alexandrian” (not to say “Alexandrinian”) elements in Victorian life and letters, if that label connotes either the sort of remote pedantic erudition practiced by George Eliot’s Mr. Casaubon or the indolent sensuous decadence that permeates Oscar Wilde’s “Sphinx.” But “Alexandrian,” in whatever sense we take it, is in nowise as vague or inclusive as the epithet “Victorian,” which has long obscured many appraisals of nineteenth-century culture.

In writing *The Victorian Temper* twenty years ago I sought first of all to challenge the connotations, virtually all disparaging, of “Victorianism.” My method was simply to assemble blurred and contradictory uses of the term, — that is, in effect, to align current indictments of the age and its attitudes, to let them by their own overstatement cancel each other out, and then to indicate that, at all events, nearly all of the charges were anticipated by the Victorians themselves, who, despite their Edwardian and Georgian reputation for complacency, had an enviable capacity for self-criticism. My intention was to help clear the way for a more objective and less apologetic view of a literature which, withstanding all virulent attack, seemed to me of peculiar strength, variety and charm. To be detached in one's regard, to insist — like the best social historians of the period — on a strictly denotative use of “Victorian,” was to make room for a more patient understanding and eventually a quickened sympathy. Already I saw among scholars an increasing interest in things Victorian, expressed both in some admirable new editions and in carefully measured revaluations of standard authors; but I had no suspicion at the time that the next two decades would make the period one of the principal areas of literary research and criticism. Nor did I foresee the more popular
revivals that would prompt defences of Victorian Gothic (sometimes in its most extravagant forms), recreate a market for forgotten nineteenth-century genre painters, establish a new vogue for l'art nouveau and late Pre-Raphaelite design, and eventually make fashionable once more dundrearies and heavy tresses and patriarchal beards. "Victorian" still remains a highly connotative term, but now the positive connotations frequently outweigh the negative, and the relevance often spreads over more than one culture. Thus in London a dealer in whiskey could recently advertise his product as the potion which "inspired many Victorians to achieve greatness"; and in New York last year the Metropolitan Museum of Art, with a widened view of Victoria's empery, could prepare a calendar calling to our respectful attention "Four Victorian Photographers," one English and one Scottish, but also one American — and one French!

But though I rejected the epithet, at least in its less precise meanings, I assumed that there was indeed in literary history a Victorian "period" (the dates of Victoria's reign established the period in political history) and that the concept of such a period might enhance rather than impede our understanding of its art. I even assumed that some sound and meaningful generalizations might be made about the quality of the period as a more or less distinct whole. I therefore set out to discover and describe the Victorian temper or, at any rate, the dominant attitudes behind literature and some of the related arts roughly between the years 1830 and 1900. (The time limits of the literary period seemed sufficiently definite: the beginning followed several years of no great moment in either poetry or prose after the death of Byron, which brought to a close the spectacular achievement of the second Romantic generation; and the end was determined less by Victoria's death in 1901 than by the late Victorian's sense that the new century would bring radical change and renewal.) Many of the prejudices and inhibitions usually branded Victorian were, I soon learned, not Victorian in origin at all, but Evangelical and so quite pre-Victorian, and the period itself within the assigned temporal limits often represented, in literature as in life, a resolute and largely successful effort at liberation from narrow conformities. In estimating such trends, I was concerned, to be sure, with intellectual history, but much less with "ideas" as philosophical concepts than with moral opinion and aesthetic orientation, with the way a Victorian writer must have looked upon his function and his public and with the variations from decade to decade in a climate of sensibility.

My approach to the age was no doubt deductive as well as inductive. I sometimes looked for facts to support the generalizations I suspected might be true, but I also formed new conclusions from readings in books and authors previously unfamiliar to me. I played off minor
writers against more important ones and delighted to find what seemed
representative in eccentric or neglected figures, — Laurence Oliphant,
Eneas Sweetland Dallas, the father of W. S. Gilbert, George Gilfillan
and the Spasmodic poets, W. H. Mallock, Stephen Phillips, Hubert
Crackanthorpe, the judges of the Great Exhibition of 1851. For I
assumed that in the diverse culture of Victorian England, however
anarchic at times seemed the thrusts toward individualism, there were
some continuities, recurrent attributes to be identified. G. M. Young
had called his social survey, which I much admired, Portrait of an
Age. I tacitly thought of my project on a similar analogy with the
life of a person. My book was to be a biography of the age in terms of
its literary life, tracing a development from the young exuberance of
the early Victorians, through the equipoise of the middle years (repre-
sented in literature and art by the dominance of the “moral
aesthetic”), to the later disillusion and the final literary Decadence.
So construed, my subject was enormous, and every detail I came upon
seemed in some way relevant and more or less significant. I had only
to determine when I had sufficient evidence to establish and to illus-
trate the book’s emergent pattern. The data must clearly take prece-
dence over preconceived theory, but without continual organization
and interpretation the data would merely confuse; the character of the
age would be lost in the factual chronicle. Every detail included or
rejected made it increasingly clear that any such literary biography of
the period would be to a high degree arbitrary. Without any illusion
that my account was either complete or definitive, I sought simply to
present the “life” as accurately as my reading of it allowed.

Though the large design — after the introduction questioning the
concept of Victorianism — dictated the loosely chronological order of
a life-curve, each section of the manuscript was thematically shaped
and developed. Thus Chapter II, “The Anti-Romantics,” pictured the
eyear Victorians as achieving their independence and individuality in
a partial repudiation of the great Romantics, and it selected Hood
and Carlyle, both of whom belonged in time to the generation of
Keats, as representative of the new orientation of the eighteen thirties
and forties. Chapter III on the Spasmodic School provided a sort of
counterpoint by describing the persistence of Romantic values in a
group of minor poets with major ambitions, men of far more sensi-
bility than sense, whose manner nonetheless left its mark on more
considerable literature. The following chapter, narrowing the focus to
Tennyson from his earliest work till the eighteen fifties, considered
the principal representative of a not uncommon conflict between the
anti-Romantic bias and the Spasmodic impulse of the early Victorians.
“The Pattern of Conversion” then widened the perspective as it traced,
with particular attention to the recurrence of a baptismal imagery,
the "way of the soul" travelled by Carlyle, Tennyson and a good many others, from self-interest and private concern to acceptance of a dedicated role in Victorian society. Carlyle's secular gospel of work and progress, however, could readily be turned to the ends of a gross materialism; and a chapter entitled "God and Mammon" accordingly was intended to reflect the literary awareness of the compromises between the ideal and the practical and especially of the process by which a religious code, or at least vocabulary, was often invoked throughout the early and middle decades of the period to rationalize the unspiritual conduct of an aggressive _laissez-faire_ economy. "Victorian Taste" measured another expression of that economy, the anarchic exuberance of design at the Great Exhibition, the proudest witness to Victorian industry, and strove to correlate the literalism and naturalism of the graphic arts, especially as seen at the Exhibition, with their counterparts in the poetry and fiction of the fifties and sixties. Chapter VIII, "The Moral Aesthetic," with some discussion of E. S. Dallas and central emphasis on Ruskin, discussed the principles animating much of the mid-Victorian achievement in both art and literature, the burden of communication, the responsibility of the artist to his public. Chapter IX, "The Fear of Art," concentrated on four writers, Rossetti, Swinburne, Morris and Pater, each somewhat ambivalent in his response to Ruskin's aesthetic, each attracted to a pure art for art's sake, yet each reluctant to declare a complete autonomy, a full denial of social or moral function. "The Revolt from Reason," Chapter X, centered on the eighteen seventies when the liberal rationalism of the earlier Victorian period was repeatedly repudiated and the artist, generally ignorant of the newer philosophic idealism (which was in any case often abstruse and inaccessible), found himself increasingly deprived of intellectual sanction. Chapter XI presented the Aesthetic Movement of the eighties as a necessary consequence of the break-up of the mid-Victorian synthesis and one of many expressions of a new age of specialization, in which each worker must exploit his craft in lonely isolation. And the conclusion related the literary Decadence of the nineties to the larger decline of Victorian society and tentatively suggested some areas of intellectual and creative resurgence.

Twenty years later I am embarrassed to speak at such length of my intentions and their incomplete fulfillment. If I tried, when writing, to look at the age with some disinterest and dispassion, I cannot now confront my book with any real measure of detachment. I cannot tell whether my emphasis on authors I had always enjoyed, or had newly discovered, distorted the literary biography I hoped I had written, and I should not now defend all my appraisals. But I still must believe a sympathetic bias less harmful to any literary history than a deliberate
reductionism, and I consider the Victorian period sufficiently vital to deserve many of the positive interpretations it has more recently received.

If I were now to revise *The Victorian Temper*, I might make some changes in judgment and in illustrative detail. I should probably draw more evidence from the novelists, though I should still consider poetry and intellectual prose more manageable than fiction and more immediately relevant to my purposes. I should give more attention to poets whom I now think inadequately represented, especially Hopkins and Hardy. I should lay more stress on the importance of autobiography and the subjective impulse, even among those who upheld the ideal of objectivity and shrank from self-revelation. I might well take Swinburne's early rebellions more seriously, though I should probably not much alter my view of his reactionary middle age. I should perhaps be less severe in my side remarks on Victorian Gothic. I could well say more about the significance of the idea of social as well as literary decadence. But I should hope that the larger design of the book and most of its basic motifs would remain more or less unaltered. For I cannot now think of the argument — if it is to be made at all — in very different terms. Whether or not my study was within its limits a clear and convincing portrait of the period, I could not now trust myself to make a bolder sketch of so large and elusive a subject.

HARVARD UNIVERSITY
American Studies—A Defense of an Unscientific Method*

Leo Marx

The letter inviting me to join this symposium is a triumph of tact. It asks me to represent my colleagues, certain literary critics and cultural historians associated with the American Studies movement, and to describe and defend our "methodology." Our courteous host, pretending to be unaware of the widely accepted view that American Studies does not in fact possess a method, implies that we must have been too busy to put it in writing. "Nowhere," he says, "does the historian have an outline of this important approach to the study of images and symbols." The flattering implication is that once our procedure is systematized and made available it will be useful to historians, including those who consider themselves social scientists, and perhaps even the most rigorous empiricists who specialize in the study of public opinion. Such at least is the promise held forth by the present meeting. Let me say at once that I am skeptical but willing to try. My feeling, to borrow some phrases used by Ezra Pound on another subject, is that the schools of scholarship represented here have detested one another long enough. Who knows? We might have something to teach each other: let there be commerce between us.

But in what sense can American Studies be said to have a method? The authoritative answer to that question was given in 1957 by Henry Nash Smith. In his essay "Can 'American Studies' Develop a Method?"

* This paper was presented as part of a symposium, "Public Opinion, Foreign Policy and the Historian," May 6, 7, 1967, at Wayne State University and will appear in the forthcoming Public Opinion and the Historian: Interdisciplinary Perspective, ed., Melvin Small (Detroit, Wayne State University Press).

1 Among those scholars often identified with this phase of the movement are Daniel Aaron, Allen Guttmann, R. W. B. Lewis, Charles Sanford, Henry Nash Smith, Alan Trachtenberg and John William Ward. I should say that I am a wholly unauthorized spokesman for this wholly unorganized group.
Smith not only acknowledged our notorious methodological deficiencies, but he concluded his judicious observations by asserting that nothing like a codifiable, overall method for American Studies was in sight.\(^2\) (Thirteen years have passed, it is true, but there is no reason to think that today Smith would need to change that assertion in any significant way.) At first his seemingly pessimistic conclusion dismayed a number of his colleagues, but eventually many, perhaps most, have come around to his point of view, and now some of us are prepared to carry his argument even further. So far, that is, as the tacit definition of what constitutes an acceptable scholarly method is borrowed, by whatever circuitous route, from the physical sciences, then I for one would argue that it is neither possible nor desirable for American Studies to develop a method.\(^3\)

To say this, however, is not to admit that our work is merely capricious or impressionistic. My purpose in what follows, therefore, is to be as explicit as possible in describing our assumptions and procedures. If they embody the rudiments of a method, it is one that admittedly invites the epithet \textit{unscientific}. A less invidious term, however, would be \textit{humanistic}. To clarify the distinction, which turns upon the vital relation between statements of fact and judgments of value, I shall begin with a contrast between two ways of studying group consciousness: that of the empirical historian (or sociologist) who is a practitioner of content analysis, and that of the humanistic scholar working in American Studies. Each is engaged in an essentially historical enterprise: the effort to describe and understand the state of mind of a group (or groups) of people at some moment in the past. Yet each would consider the work of the other inadequate and probably misleading. The comparison is a nice example of the difference between the social scientific and humanistic disciplines, a difference that is in many ways less obvious, and more difficult to clarify, than that between the physical sciences and the humanities. Let me begin by comparing the aims of the two schools, the criteria according to which they select their materials, and their respective methods of analysis. I shall then try to indicate certain ways in which the methods are in fact complementary. For this purpose I propose to describe, in some detail, an example of the procedures used in American Studies.

1. \textit{The Methods of “Content Analysis” and “American Studies”}


\(^3\) Although Smith does not endorse a scientific definition of method, neither does he distinguish between scientific and humanistic methods.
Compared. What are the aims of each method? In large measure the aims of content analysis are determined and limited by an *a priori* methodological commitment. As Lasswell and his colleagues put it some twenty years ago, content analysis is "a technique which aims at optimum objectivity, precision, and generality in the analysis of symbolic behavior; its value is to be appraised according to the success with which it achieves these aims in specific researches." In practice, and judging by the current work of such content analysts as Richard L. Merritt, this means that the method is limited to problems susceptible to "the systematic tabulation of the frequency with which certain predetermined symbols or other variables appear in a given body of data." For the content analyzer, in short, the goal of any specific inquiry must be compatible with a prior methodological restriction: the insistence upon obtaining quantifiable results.

For the humanist working in American Studies, on the other hand, considerations of method are secondary. He defines his purpose without reference to any methodological restrictions, but rather in relation to a vast, apparently limitless subject matter. According to Smith, the aim of American Studies is "the investigation of American culture, past and present, as a whole." The phrase "as a whole" is the key to many of the distinctive features of this interdisciplinary approach; in practice, Smith explains, it does not signal an attempt to deal indiscriminately with all kinds of behavior, but rather to select topics which involve decisive relationships. Much of the interesting work in American Studies has concentrated upon points of intersection between existential reality, the collective consciousness, and individual products of mind; or to use a simpler language, between historical fact,


6 Kwiat and Turpie, p. 3 n.2.

7 The method of American Studies, in its interdisciplinary character, is comparable to the method ascribed by Lewis Mumford to the scholar who is a "generalist," that is, one whose special office is "that of bringing together widely separated fields, prudently fenced in by specialists, into a larger common area. Only by forfeiting the detail can the over-all pattern be seen, though once that pattern is visible new details... may become visible. The generalist's competence lies not in unearthing new evidence but in putting together authentic fragments that are accidentally, or sometimes arbitrarily, separated, because specialists tend to abide too rigorously by a gentleman's agreement not to invade each other's territory." Although here Mumford is talking about the "generalist" in the field of prehistory, his definition is remarkably applicable to the aims of American Studies. For a fuller discussion, see *The Myth of the Machine* (New York, 1966), pp. 16-22.
culture, and particular works. (They may be works of art, music, engineering, political theory, philosophy, literature—in other words, any creations of man.) Thus the specific problem with which I have been concerned, and which I propose to discuss in some detail, is the interplay, in the period before the Civil War, between industrialization, the prevailing attitudes of the American people, and the work of certain major writers—Henry Thoreau and Herman Melville, for example. My purpose has been to discover the most significant relationships among these phenomena, to learn how they illuminate each other, and to see whether such an interdisciplinary approach to the culture "as a whole" provides insights not otherwise obtainable. The subject clearly does not lend itself to quantification or optimum objectivity. Although the content analyzer and the humanist share a general aim—the interpretation of symbolic behavior—they define their specific objectives in wholly different ways.

A marked difference also is evident in the criteria that each invokes in selecting materials for study. Given his prior commitment to systematic, objective, replicable research, the empirical scholar who selects a problem susceptible to content analysis either must study all the relevant data or make a selection in accordance with the principles of scientific sampling. The significant point, so far as the contrast with the humanistic method is concerned, is that the empiricist may not invoke qualitative standards of selection. This restriction would seem to make it difficult, if not impossible, to give any special attention to major works of art or philosophy or other products of the "high" culture. How, for example, does the content analyst choose works of imaginative literature for the study of American attitudes toward industrialization before the Civil War? Since it hardly is possible for him to read all the writing of the period, and since it would be misleading (even if it were possible) to single out works which are in some immediately manifest sense "about" industrialization (the most complex and perceptive responses often were oblique or covert, hence not readily identifiable), the content analyzer must rely upon an arbitrary or random sampling procedure. It is almost certain, therefore, that his sample will not include either Thoreau's Walden or Melville's Moby-Dick.

The exponent of content analysis, it should be said, might meet this objection in several ways. He might exclude all imaginative literature from his sample on the ground that it seldom exercises a significant influence upon public opinion. Or he might take the best-seller list (or some other measure of contemporary popularity) as the basis for his selection of imaginative literature. To be sure, this criterion also would exclude the two masterpieces mentioned, but then we must acknowledge that even a sample of books influential with the elite
audience of the period would not include them. When first published
they had few readers and virtually no influence. Nevertheless, let us
suppose that the content analyzer wants to include a sample of the
"high" culture in his survey of American responses to industrializa-
tion between 1830 and 1860. One obvious procedure would be for him
to select a body of current opinion — current, that is, in the 1960's —
as the basis for his choice. He might select the works to be analyzed
from the reading lists of college courses in American literature, or
from the most widely used anthologies, or from critical articles in
literary journals. After all, the "high" culture of the past has been
defined retrospectively. And though the resulting sample would of
course be based upon a value judgment, it would be an impersonal,
collective judgment — a consensus of informed opinion rather than an
individual preference. The really difficult problem that the content
analyst faces in dealing with imaginative literature is not the selection
but the interpretation of the material.

Turning now to the criteria the humanist invokes in choosing his
subject matter, it is evident, given his aim — the study of the culture
as a whole — that he must have in view an abstract model, however
crude, from which to derive the categories for classifying his materials.
One obvious shortcoming of the American Studies movement has been
a reluctance to make such models or working assumptions explicit. In
the case at hand, for example, I have taken industrialization as an
historical starting point or primary "event"; it signifies a vital change
in the conditions of life in America at the time, a change that can
be located in the category of knowledge closest to existential reality,
or what Hannah Arendt has called "factual truth": that "brutally
elementary data . . . whose indestructibility has been taken for
granted even by the most extreme and most sophisticated believers in
historicism."8 (In the present example, economic statistics provide a
rough measure of the rate of industrialization, and we have fairly
reliable data on the introduction of various kinds of power machin-
ery, urbanization, etc.) On this model the contents of the culture
belong to a higher level of abstraction. The culture may be defined
as a system, or interrelated group of systems, of values, meanings, and
goals. Regional, class, or ethnic subcultures, as well as the literary
"high" culture, must be included among the systems embraced by the
national culture. The identification of these subcultures also requires
a concept of the social structure — a point we shall return to. In
distinguishing the two methods, however, the significant point is the
indispensability to the humanist, and in spite of its ambiguous soci-
ological status, of the category of "high" culture. Any set of criteria

which did not enable him to select major works of thought and expression would be wholly unacceptable.

The judgment implicit in the concept of "high" culture marks a crucial distinction between the methods of the humanist and the social scientist. To invoke it is admittedly to employ a value judgment in the selection of data; but then, of course, all students of the humanities rely, to a degree seldom acknowledged, upon the judgment of others in selecting their subject matter. Consider the scholar who is regarded as an "expert" in American literature. In fact he is expert about a relatively small fraction of the whole body of American writing. Those works have been sifted out by an endless, collective process of evaluation. To be sure, he may have made his own sample of popular and now largely forgotten works, but he cannot be said to "know" American writing in the sense of having made an independent selection of the most significant works from that immense collection of printed matter. His inquiry necessarily begins, therefore, with the established canon — a selection, we trust, based on the collective wisdom, which presumably includes the most fully realized, complex and powerful (hence enduring) work of American writers. Because this canon supposedly embodies the highest development of literary consciousness, it is a major source for the humanist in his continuing effort to recover the usable past. What requires emphasis here is the inherently, inescapably normative character of the intricate, never-ending, and imperfectly understood process which brings the subject matter of the humanities into existence.

Let me compare, finally, the modes of analysis used by each school. It is evident that two basic assumptions distinguish the procedures of the empirical historian from those of the humanist. The first and more obvious follows directly from the former's insistence upon quantifiable results. Given this requirement, he must begin by formulating his problem in such a way that it can be solved, in the words of one

9 The concept of literary "power" here refers to the inherent capacity of a work to generate the emotional and intellectual response of its readers. In recent years, largely as a result of the accomplishments and prestige of contextual scholars, this criterion has replaced the older academic standard, namely, that the value of a literary work depends upon its usefulness as a historical document. In effect this meant that the work was considered to be important to the degree that it was a source of knowledge about some body of extra-literary experience, such as the history of a language, the social life of a nation, or the "spirit of the age." Although the concept of literary power would seem at first glance to be ahistorical, it provides a more reliable and useful measure of historical significance than the older, relatively superficial test of representational value. In the method being described here, therefore, this key doctrine of the generally anti-historical "new criticism" is being incorporated into the essentially historical enterprise of American Studies.
exponent of content analysis, "by counting the appearance of a limited number of content variables in a given body of data." The second assumption is that the paraphrasable "message," either manifest or latent, is the truly significant feature of every verbal construct. Most of the procedures of content analysis rest upon these assumptions. It is a method, accordingly, that "focuses on the message, or the WHAT . . . It is the systematic, objective, and quantitative characterization of content variables manifest or latent in a message."10

The mode of analysis practiced by the humanistic scholar in American Studies is based upon quite different assumptions. For one thing, he assumes that the significant relationships cannot be reduced to quantifiable terms. The chasm between the two schools on this score is implicit in the quite different objects of their concern, in the difference, that is, between "culture" and "public opinion." But if the humanist cannot quantify his results, how does he meet the charge that they cannot be validated? How does he answer the empirical social scientist who says that what the humanist claims to be knowledge is indistinguishable from subjective opinion? Leaving aside the large and complicated problem of documentation or evidence in the humanities, the fact remains that here again the humanist relies, at bottom, upon the eventual achievement of a reliable scholarly consensus. He places his faith in the impersonal process of critical scholarship, trusting that in the long run it will correct or eliminate invalid observations, and that it will incorporate valid insights into the living body of knowledge.

Nor can the cultural historian go along with the content analyzer's second basic assumption, his almost exclusive emphasis upon the paraphrasable message. In analyzing verbal constructs the humanist may be as concerned with the HOW as the WHAT. At the outset, indeed, he postulates a distinction between the discursive and figural uses of language, and although he cannot wholly separate them, in their purest embodiments he regards them as virtually distinct modes of discourse, one verging toward abstract logic, the other toward lyric poetry. Because the language of imaginative literature tends to be figural, and because the controlling context of the individual work usually is imagistic or metaphoric, the message — the element reducible to a discursive statement — is only a part and not necessarily the most important part of the meaning. A large part of the meaning, in other words, resides in the inherent emotional power of the work. To fully apprehend the "content" of a novel or poem, therefore, it

is necessary to get at those feelings, to sort them out, to name them, and to make their function explicit. For this purpose the student of literature has available the remarkably sensitive techniques of modern textual criticism. They enable him to understand the use of various literary devices to generate emotion. I am thinking of certain narrative methods in the novel and their ironic implications, and of the subtle ways in which the explicit theme or "message" may be undercut, in poetry, by rhythm and tone; I am thinking, also, of the immense efficacy of the tacit, that is, of connotative figurative devices and imagery. But this is not the place to describe contemporary methods of literary analysis. Suffice it to say that they help to illuminate aspects of imaginative writing that are essential to its proper understanding but inaccessible to the reductive methods of the content analyzer.

So much, then, for the contrast between the two methods. It is clear that each is designed to provide different yet to some extent complementary kinds of knowledge. Content analysis enables the social scientist to reconstruct a pattern of group opinion as it existed at a particular time, unmodified by any external or retrospective observer's judgment of value. In order to gain such precise, objective knowledge, the practitioner of content analysis in effect excludes certain kinds of evidence. In theory, to be sure, the technique may be applied to any written work, but in practice it is useful chiefly for the analysis of material whose meaning is readily translated into a discursive statement. This means that content analysis is virtually useless in getting at the significance of imaginative writing. To the scholar working in American Studies, of course, this is a serious defect in the method; for him a description of the national consciousness which does not take literature into account is wholly inadequate. At bottom, no doubt, the difference comes down to opposed conceptions of what matters in the record of the past, indeed, to opposed definitions of historical reality. It is a difference implicit, to repeat, in the concepts "culture" and "public opinion." And yet it would be wrong to conclude that we are dealing with the familiar contrast between the literary and the social scientific mentalities, which is to say, between a concern with art and a concern with society. For if the American Studies movement has a distinctive goal, it is to cross that conventional academic barrier and to establish meaningful connections between the two kinds of knowledge. That is why the two methods may be regarded as complementary. By way of illustration, I shall now describe in some detail a sample inquiry in American Studies.

2. A Sample Problem in American Studies. The subject had caught my attention when I read a distinguished critic's remark to the effect that American writers had begun to manifest an awareness of indus-
trialization between 1880 and 1900. Intellectual and literary historians tended to accept this view, but it seemed to me wrong — or at least in need of serious qualification. I had recently been immersed in the work of writers who came to maturity in the 1830's, and it impressed me as deeply informed by the concerns we associate with industrialization. Writers like Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, and Melville did not, to be sure, use the word itself nor did they often write "about" the subject in the literal sense of describing social and economic change. But, like their European contemporaries, they were preoccupied with the theme of alienation — man's alienation both from nature and himself, and much of their thinking turned upon the contrast between the artificial and the natural, the urban and the rural, and the paradox of simultaneously increasing collective power and individual powerlessness. To identify these themes was simple enough, but to relate them to an awareness of industrialization was not. In theory, then, the problem was to trace the impact upon consciousness of a change in existential reality before that change had been fully conceptualized. In this case the most tangible evidence was the striking prominence given by the writers mentioned to images drawn from the latest industrial technology. This fact in turn gave rise to certain obvious questions. How was this body of imagery related to the themes of the particular works in which it appeared? What were the connections between such relatively sophisticated writing, the dominant culture, and the demonstrable fact of industrialization?

The choice of literary material for this study presented no particular difficulty. It was based, as I have said, upon an initial familiarity with the major writers of the period. (Their status as "major," which is to say, their place in the "high" culture, had of course been determined for me by the conventional literary wisdom.) The first step, accordingly, was to read their work closely, in its entirety, and with special attention to the links between technological imagery and cardinal themes. The aim at this stage was to locate recurrent patterns of meaning. One observation that later proved to be of value was the simple fact that machine images seemed to take on symbolic power to the degree that they were coupled with images of landscape. What struck the literary imagination, in other words, was the symbolic contrast between the new industrial technology and the natural setting, either wild or rural. The terms image and symbol, as used in American Studies, derive from literary criticism, and while no absolutely precise distinction can be drawn between them, an image refers...
to a verbal recording of a simple sense perception, and it becomes a symbol to the degree that it is made to carry a burden of implication (value, association, feeling, or in a word, meaning) beyond that which is required for a mere reference.

The selection of materials from the general culture to represent what used to be called "the spirit of the age" was based upon more ambiguous principles. Moving out from the work of major writers, I read the work of men with lesser reputations, some of the popular or even subliterature of the period, and I examined magazines, newspapers, speeches, songs, diaries, and the graphic arts. At first the method was to read widely and at random in order to get an impression of the incidence and character of reactions to industrialization. Later I selected a few periodicals for a more extensive and somewhat more systematic study. In choosing them I was guided chiefly by the presence of relevant materials, and by the sociological identity or special bias of certain journals. From the vantage of the empirical social scientist this no doubt will seem one of the weakest features of the procedure, but there does not seem to be any obvious solution to the root problem here. The scholar wants to define certain pervasive attitudes in the culture, yet he knows that most of his sources represent the special interests of an economic class, or of a particular regional, political, religious, ethnic or vocational group. His only recourse, under the circumstances, is to take these biases into account, and to select sources which roughly approximate a cross-section of the national culture. To do this, of course, he must have some sort of sociological model in view, and for that he inevitably relies upon the general historian. The procedure, in short, is to read the current historical literature, form a conception of the social structure, and use it as a frame for the evidence.

In selecting material from the journals singled out for relatively extensive study, the procedure was an informal version of the random sample. Depending upon the apparent density of the evidence, I might decide to read one issue of a monthly magazine for each year — a different month, of course — over a span of thirty years. If that sample did not seem adequate, the process was repeated. The test of an

12 To improve the quality of the sociological model would seem to be the only way of meeting the criticism of the method raised by Alan Trachtenberg. In reviewing The Machine in the Garden, he says that the book "tends to oversimplify what was occurring outside of consciousness, 'out there' in society . . . . [the] treatment of the dialectic within history is not as strong nor as convincing as [the] treatment of the contradictions within consciousness." Although I would substitute the terms "culture" and "social structure" for Trachtenberg's "consciousness" and "history" (or "society"), I agree with him about the inherent weakness of the method in dealing with the unverbalized, collective, institutional aspect of past behavior. For his penetrating argument, see The Nation (July 19, 1965).
adequate sample was the yield of new evidence. When no new kinds of evidence were forthcoming, that is, when it seemed virtually certain that the next technological image would conform to one or another of a limited number of established patterns, the source was considered exhausted. At the more popular level the material fell more neatly into stereotypical categories. In any case, the nearest equivalent to validation here was the more or less predictable recurrence of certain patterns.

In this kind of inquiry the most interesting problems arise in establishing connections between particular works and the general culture. As all students of literature know, the relationship is always indirect, always modified by the interior history of literature itself. Let me illustrate with a specific example. My initial aim had been to discover responses to industrialization, and in the serious writing of the period I had found a recurrent use of the contrast between the machine and the natural landscape. In attempting to understand how this device comported with the larger design of the works in question, however, I came to realize that I was dealing with a modern, post-romantic, and in some respects peculiarly American version of an ancient literary mode — the pastoral. Before proceeding, therefore, it was necessary to shift attention from the interplay between literature and the extra-literary experience of the age to the relation between American writers of the period and their literary forbears. In other words, it was necessary to be clear about the pastoral mode, its origin and development, and the similarities and differences between American and earlier versions of pastoral.

To establish a degree of continuity between Thoreau and Shakespeare and Virgil was to recognize the evolution of literature — the interior development of its forms and conventions — as a semi-autonomous feature of the culture. This is only to say that in addition to his unique experience of his own age, each writer was influenced by writers who preceded him, particularly those whose work he in some sense emulated. When the cultural historian deals with a work of physics, sociology, or music, he confronts a similar point of intersection between the interior development of an intellectual discipline and an individual’s special experience. Obvious though it is, the point often is neglected, and it complicates the procedures of content analysis in ways that are seldom discussed. (How, for example, does the analyst distinguish between the conventional element in a work and a response to the immediate environment?) In the specific inquiry being described, many of the literary works which embodied a significant response to industrialization proved to be pastorals. But although they were similar in many respects to traditional versions of pastoral, they also displayed marked differences which could be attri-
buted, it seemed, to the special conditions of life in America. If there is a generalization about method to be made here, it is this: the conventional features of a work must be acknowledged and understood before the cultural historian can answer such important questions as: what made the convention relevant at the time? what modifications did the age make in the convention? how can the modifications be explained?

As a way of answering these questions, I sought and found a comparable pattern in the general culture. Here too, when technological images acquired a distinct symbolic power they tended to be juxtaposed to images of landscape. Certain traditional features of literary pastoralism also were present. The contrast between the new machine power and the native landscape served to epitomize a contrast between two styles of life, one relatively complex and sophisticated, the other simple, contemplative, and dedicated to the pursuit of happiness. In the American imagination, that is, the conventional retreat of the shepherd — or other pastoral figure — from the corrupt world to the green pasture took on new and more literal significance. It had been reenacted, or rather en-acted collectively for the first time, in the transit of Europeans from the oppressive environment of the Old World to the open, unspoiled terrain of the New. But it often was difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish between elements borrowed from the pastoral (a distinct literary mode), and those which had been more or less spontaneously generated in America — a kind of indigenous pastoralism blended out of evangelical Christianity and the pervasive, if attenuated, myth of America as the land of a new beginning. (The image of America as a “garden,” for example, combines Christian and pastoral elements.)¹³ I will return to the distinction.

But first, a word should be said about the concept of myth as used in American Studies. This is another term that resists precise definition, for it refers to a more complex mental construct that belongs on the continuum, introduced earlier, that leads from image to symbol. If a symbol may be defined as an image invested with significance beyond that required for referential purposes, then a myth is a combination of symbols, held together by a narrative, which embodies the virtually all-encompassing conception of reality — the world-view of a group. The many versions of the “American myth” embody ideas of the genesis and meaning of the new nation, and according

¹³ Charles Sanford has correctly criticized the original account of this pastoral strain in American thought for its inadequate emphasis upon the influence of Protestant evangelicism. See his review of The Machine in the Garden in American Quarterly (Summer, 1965).
to the pastoral version the Republic was formed as a result of the
movement of Europeans across the Atlantic, away from a complex
society dominated by the striving for status, wealth and power, to a
simpler world of rural peace, sufficiency and virtue. Emigration, as
described in the myth, was a voyage of spiritual and political regen-
eration. But there was no need, in this particular study, to document
the hold of the myth upon the American consciousness. On that score
the evidence already was overwhelming. In gauging the response
to industrialization, however, it became necessary to distinguish be-
tween the interpretation of the myth characteristic of the dominant or
general culture, and the interpretation of writers like Thoreau and
Melville. For this purpose the concept of pastoral, a literary mode
with a long and rich history, and the distinction between complex
and sentimental kinds of pastoral, proved to be invaluable.

Pastoral conventions often had lent themselves to both serious and
sentimental uses. Sophisticated writers working in the mode generally
had been careful to surround the arcadian dream with something like
irony; they made it difficult, that is, for perceptive readers to come
away with a simple belief in idyllic possibilities. But the extraordinary
promise of life in America made it relatively easy for indulgent writers
to gratify the popular taste for pleasure fantasies. Thus the distinction
between complex and sentimental pastoralism helped to illuminate
divergent American responses to industrialization in the nineteenth
century. To be sure, the image of the machine was incorporated in a
pastoral design at all levels of the culture, but there were marked
variations in the significance attached to the device at various levels.
In the general culture on the whole, the image of the machine in the
American landscape was treated as a token of hope and progress. It
served, in effect, to endorse the progressive idea of history inherited
from the Enlightenment, and to reconcile industrialization with the
pastoral myth of a new beginning. Here the industrial power was
interpreted, curiously enough, as an instrument for creating the
simple, rural society envisaged in the myth. Writers like Thoreau and
Melville, on the other hand, whose intellectual affinities were with
the romantic counter-Enlightenment, turned the device into a dark
metaphor of contradiction. For them the sudden appearance of the
iron machine in the green landscape evoked a sense of the irreconcila-

14 See for example Richard Hofstadter, The Age of Reform: From Bryan to
F. D. R. (New York, 1960); R. W. B. Lewis, The American Adam: Innocence,
Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century (Chicago, 1955); Marvin Meyers,
The Jacksonian Persuasion: Politics and Belief (New York, 1960); Charles Sanford,
The Quest for Paradise: Europe and the American Moral Imagination (Urbana,
1961); Henry N. Smith, Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth
bility of the nation's actions and ideals. In their work the image of industrial power, set against the professed desire for rural simplicity, becomes a vehicle for ironic and even tragic pastoralism. It discloses the widening gap between reality and myth which was — and still is — consistently obscured in the general culture.

3. Conclusion. With this sample project in view, some of the ways in which the two methods complement each other should be obvious. A striking weakness of the American Studies approach is its imprecise description of the general culture. For this phase of the humanist's work the procedures used by the content analyst in studying public opinion would seem to be appropriate. Certainly it would be useful to find out whether the techniques of systematic sampling and analysis can provide a more detailed and reliable picture. An experiment in collaboration also should be useful to the social scientist, if only because the insights gained from imaginative literature would be a source of provocative questions, and of significant patterns of meaning not likely to be found in the raw data usually examined by students of public opinion. Just as Freud put literary themes to clinical tests, so the content analyst might check the intuitions of the most talented writers against the accessible facts.

In suggesting the possibility of collaborative effort, however, I would not gloss over the profound gulf between the aims of the two schools, as indicated by the concern of one with "public opinion" and of the other with "culture." To the student of public opinion the important aspect of the American response to industrialization before the Civil War is to be found in documents which express widely held attitudes. His purpose is to understand collective behavior at the time. The opinions that matter most, presumably, are those which made themselves felt in action, and particularly in public affairs. Therefore it is reasonable to regard virtually any political speech or editorial comment made on the subject in 1851 as more significant than, say, Moby-Dick. No one will deny that at the time such documents had a greater impact upon the collective consciousness, and are more revealing of popular attitudes, than Melville's novel. Why, then, does the humanist working in American Studies consider the novel relevant? On what ground does he take it seriously as a source of insights into the relation between industrialization and mind in nineteenth century America?

The correct answer to this question too often has been obscured by extravagant claims for the value of imaginative literature as historical data. Not only must the humanist grant that Moby-Dick had no immediate public appeal, but he also should grant that it is no more valuable than many lesser works of fiction as a "reflection" of objective reality. Quite the contrary, so far from crediting the indefensible
claim that the best books somehow provide a more reliable mirror image of actuality, that they are more representative of "the spirit of the age," it seems more reasonable to argue that the books of the 1850's which we now value least — the truly popular novels of the age — are the most useful as historical documents of this kind. The writers whose works endure as art tend on the whole to be the most critical of — the most emancipated from — the prevailing culture. If our purpose is to represent the common life, then we should not turn to the masterpieces we continue to read and enjoy. Probably it would be best, for that purpose, to put literature aside altogether. In any event, and this is the crux of the method being defended here, I would submit that the argument for the usefulness of Moby-Dick in the kind of inquiry I have described is identical with the argument for the intrinsic merit of Moby-Dick as a work of literature. It is useful for its satisfying power, its capacity to provide a coherent organization of thought and feeling, or in a word, for its compelling truth value.

But I realize that no social scientist can accept this answer. What objective validation can there be, he asks, for ascribing cognitive value to a work of literature? The answer, of course, is that for the humanist there are no sanctions which can be called objective, which are unmodified by judgments of value. The high value attached to Melville's novel rests upon its continuing — one might say, growing — capacity, as compared with the editorial of 1851, to provide us with satisfaction, and to shape our experience of past and present. At first this may seem to be a simple distinction between the instrumental (or political) value of the editorial and the intrinsic (or esthetic) value of the novel. But even that distinction loses its force when we shift from the immediate perspective of the 1850's to the long-term perspective of the present. For in the longer perspective Moby-Dick clearly must be credited with having had the greater influence upon American action as well as thought. And yet, to say that the novel had a greater influence upon the culture is a misleading way of putting it, for it obscures the literal sense in which the enduring work of art becomes the culture which produced it. With the passage of time, that is, books of the stature of Moby-Dick comprise a larger and larger portion of the consciousness of nineteenth century America that remains effectively alive in the present. The importance we attach to the novel arises, in the last analysis, from the fact that today it is read, studied, and incorporated in our sense of ourselves and of our world, past and present. So far, then, as the book embodies a response to industrialization, it is a particularly significant response — more significant for us than one which may have had a greater influence upon public opinion at the time. But the measure of that significance cannot be located in any objective realm, uncompromised by human judgment.
It derives from choices made by human beings, hence they are the ultimate basis for the method we would call humanistic.

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Past Significance and Present Meaning in Literary History*

Robert Weimann

Over the last 30 years the critique of the historical method has, in the West, achieved considerable dimensions, but perhaps the time has now come to re-assess the nature and the object of this critique, and from there to proceed to some re-appraisal of the possibilities and limitations of literary history. If, in the United States, the historical study of literature is to achieve a new sense of direction and purpose, it must first be prepared to face (with all that this implies) the full extent of the crisis of its discipline. This crisis is in many ways a symptom of the larger crisis of western society, in which the revolutionary idea of change, organic and dialectical concepts of evolution, and the liberal and humanist traditions of progress are all, in various degrees, affected. In recent years the consciousness of this wider background of crisis seems once more to be gaining ground, and perhaps the conjecture may be hazarded that a new interest in historical method can only benefit from an awareness of its present background. Such awareness may indeed facilitate the first steps towards re-opening, in the realm of literary history, the

* This paper uses and develops further the theoretical assumptions that govern the present writer’s previous work, especially New Criticism und die Entwicklung bürgerlicher Literaturwissenschaft (Halle, 1962), but also Drama und Wirklichkeit in der Shakespearezeit (Halle, 1958) and the more recent Shakespeare und die Tradition des Volkstheaters (Henschelverlag Berlin, 1967). Some of these assumptions have also gone into several articles, of which two are accessible in English: “The Soul of the Age: Towards a Historical Approach to Shakespeare,” Shakespeare in a Changing World, ed. Arnold Kettle (London, 1964), pp. 17-42; “Shakespeare on the Modern Stage: Past Significance and Present Meaning,” Shakespeare Survey 20 (1967), 113-20. There is one rather relevant article in German which the present paper alludes to (but does not actually draw on) when it refers to the recent crisis of American literary history: “Tradition und Krise amerikanischer Literarhistorie, Zu ihrer Methodologie und Geschichte,” Weimarer Beiträge, XI (1965), 394-435.
question of method and purpose from an angle which defines itself, at the outset, beyond the assumptions of formalist criticism.

Among the recent forces of adversity which the historical study of literature saw itself confronted with, the New Criticism was certainly not the least important. But while the anti-historical direction of its influence can scarcely be doubted, this does not mean that its critique of literary history did not raise a number of very important questions. Now that the New Criticism has itself become part of the history of criticism, the neohumanist and formalist revolt against positivism, as well as its consequences, can more nearly be seen in perspective. At this date we certainly cannot go back to the nineteenth century tradition of historical philology. But for all those who have felt that the theory and practice of formalism do not offer any valid alternative, the demise of positivism can never mean the end of literary history. A new method of literary history will reject the uncritical study of sources, influences and biographical data as an end in itself; but it will also refuse to accept the new critical indictment of the "extrinsic" approach, precisely because the much recommended "intrinsic" study of literature has shown itself equally incapable of coping with the challenge of literature as a process in time.

Any serious re-appraisal of the aims and methods of literary history, then, would have to dispense with antiquarian as well as formalist assumptions. It would have to pursue a more dialectical method, for which the work of art, even when it imitates reality, is seen to be more than merely the reflection or expression of a past age or society. There would still be room for an approach to literature as past mimesis, but not at the cost of present morality. Thus, the customary distinction between the "extrinsic" and the "intrinsic" approaches would appear to be almost as irrelevant as the similar one between the pastness of the work and its present "autonomy." From this angle, history would then be seen as a comprehensive process which includes the present as well as the past; a process which is a continuum and as such as indivisible as the aesthetic experience, which appeals to the whole nature of man as a historical being. In this process and in this nature both the extrinsic and the intrinsic interact: change and value constitute a relationship which corresponds to a similar tension, in the work of art, between what is past and what is present. Literary history has to embrace this necessary tension, and conceive of its object in terms of both the unity and the contradiction of mimesis and morality, of past significance and present meaning.
I

As indicated, a new approach to the historical study of literature cannot pass by, and indeed must not underrate, the theoretical positions from which the New Criticism has challenged the methods of traditional literary history. This is not the place for a full survey of new critical opinion on the subject, but perhaps a few illustrations will suffice to bring out its main direction and emphasis. Even when, with some effort, the new critics would retain a grudging modicum of respect for the "intense and precise labors of the Victorian philologists in the service of authenticity and other forms of factuality," their rejection of historical antiquarianism was as consistent as it was complete. If this had entailed a formulated alternative in historical method, there might have been more to be said for their polemics, especially for their attacks on the academic accumulation of unrelated historical facts, and even their scarcely concealed scorn for those mechanistic "exercises relating literature to various kinds of influence — social, political, economic, climatic, national, regional, traditional, psychological, and genealogical." Such polemics, of course, were almost as vigorous in Britain and Europe, as in F. R. Leavis' protests against "the usual compilation . . . — names, titles, dates, 'facts about', irrelevancies, superficial comments, and labour-saving descriptions."

These attacks (which were also aimed at "the verbose inanities of tendencies," historical Zeitgeist, etc., and which were echoed by a good many liberal critics) are too well-known to call for further documentation. They were all more or less explicitly based on certain theoretical assumptions which, reduced to their common denominator, can perhaps best be phrased negatively: They saw "the great mistake of the scientific-historical scholarship" in the fact that it "had allied itself with the physical sciences of the nineteenth century." The most disreputable symptoms of such mésalliance were diagnosed in "the whole underlying assumption that literature should be explained by the methods of the natural sciences, by causality, by such external determining forces as . . . race, milieu, moment." Such "scienticism,"

2 Ibid., p. 543.
it was argued, was behind both the "study of causal antecedents and origins" and the use of "quantitative methods of science: statistics, charts, and graphs."  

Again, this is not the place to open the vast question of the relation of historical scholarship and natural science, and in any case an answer to this question would have to show, as many scholars and critics have done, that literary criticism is not an exact science. But even though the early battle in "the revolt against positivism" was in many ways justified, later new critical polemics tended both to complacency and to ingenuousness. Even while the enemy was routed, the attacks continued to be directed at a straw man who supposedly still believed in the methodological identity of history and mechanical physics. Although positivism was dead, its spectre was not allowed to find rest. These polemics, which served as a comfortable alibi to the anti-historical bias of the newer criticism, were questionable in several respects.

In the first place, the attack against the mechanistic aspects of nineteenth century literary scholarship never paused to consider that the tradition of historical inquiry was much older than, and never solely identical with, the pseudo-scientific pose of some latter-day philologists. The rise of historical criticism can (roughly) be traced in the decline of the social and theoretical presuppositions of natural law, and dates from, say, Vico's *La Scienza Nuova* (1725), the work of Leibniz, Shaftesbury, the French enlightenment and, in its fully developed form, from Herder's *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784/91). It finds its mature expression in Goethe's own "sense of the past and the present as one," for him a "powerful and overwhelming feeling," which could hardly "be expressed wonderfully enough." ("Ein Gefühl aber, das bei mir gewaltig überhand nahm und sich nicht wundersam genug äußern konnte, war die Empfindung der Vergangenheit und Gegenwart in Eins . . .") This is a poet's statement which corresponds to Schiller's attempt, in his theory of *Universalgeschichte*, "to connect the past with the present": "das Vergangene mit dem Gegenwärtigen zu verknüpfen." From here, through Hegel, this tradition of historical thought branched off in two directions. On the one hand there was the *geistwissenschaftliche* idealism of Dilthey and the later historians of *Historismus*, Ernst Troeltsch and Friedrich Meinecke, whose philosophy of history cer-

6 Ibid., p. 257.
tainly contained elements of irrationalism, but not of mechanism. On the other hand it was, in the context of revolutionary materialism, carried on by Engels and especially Marx, who in his well-known comment on classical Greek art argued that certain great works of art can only arise at an early or undeveloped stage of social development, and that "the charm of their art for us" is not opposed to their historical origins; so that the true "difficulty" of the historian's task lies not in the fact that "the Greek epic and Greek art are connected with certain social forms of development," but rather that these works of art "still offer aesthetic pleasure to us and in some respect serve as norm and unattainable standard." ("Aber die Schwierigkeit liegt nicht darin, zu verstehen, daß griechische Kunst und Epos an gewisse gesellschaftliche Entwicklungsformen geknüpft sind. Die Schwierigkeit ist, daß sie für uns noch Kunstgenüß gewähren und in gewisser Beziehung als Norm und unerreichbare Muster gelten."9)

It was an illusion, therefore, to assume that the indictment of philological positivism could refute the tradition of historical inquiry at large. At the time when Hippolyte Taine was developing his determinism in terms of the moment, the race and the milieu (1863), the more dialectical concepts of historical criticism were perhaps overshadowed by what Nietzsche contemptuously called the reign of "that blind force of facts" ("jene blinde Macht der Fakta"10) but they certainly had not ceased to be available. There was, from the point of view of method, a tradition in which "the past and the present" could be considered "as one" and in which the present "charm" (and meaning) of great art, its norm and standard, might well be reconciled with a thorough understanding of its past genesis.

If it was undiscriminating to charge the historical approach with the abuse of "the methods of the natural sciences," then it was no less questionable, in the fourth decade of the twentieth century, to conceive of these methods solely or mainly in terms of nineteenth century ideas of causality and such mechanistic assumptions as "that the world was reflected with perfect literalness in the will-less mind of the observer."11 Again and again the literary historian was warned to keep away from the methods of science — but of a science which was hopelessly out of date. Nor was there, on the side of the critics, any curiosity as to whether the method of historiography itself had not (like that of modern science) developed considerably. By now to

10 Friedrich Nietzsche, Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Histoire für das Leben, Kröners Taschenausgabe, XXXVII (Leipzig, [1933]), p. 70.
11 Cf. Trilling, The Liberal Imagination, p. 182.
condemn the writing of history on the charge that it adopts the methods of the natural sciences (which "natural sciences"?) has become meaningless, if not downright complacent. At any rate (and this is not the place to say more) it ignores a great deal in modern physics; for instance the tendency among physicists in recent years to speak of their science in terms which (as a distinguished historian notes) suggest an "identity of aim between scientists and historians" and even "more striking analogies between the physical universe and the world of the historian." It may be that in the light of such statements and recent insights into the nature of "the two cultures" (and how "dangerous" it is "to have two cultures which can't or don't communicate") the responsible literary critic will have to be more and more wary of stressing the irreconcilability of the two disciplines.

To say this is not to minimize the basic differences in method, and is emphatically no apology for positivism, but it may help us to recover a more sober perspective, from which the nineteenth century's "serene unification of scientific conscience" can be viewed with less ambiguity (than Cleanth Brooks betrays in the context of this phrase). Whatever its shortcomings, historical philology was intellectually the most coherent movement in nineteenth century scholarship, and it is with some feeling of respect that one would wish to see the necessary criticism to be based on more facts and less arrogance. It would take more detailed investigation into the method and practice of nineteenth century literary history to assess the degree to which the attempts at historical syntheses were actually thwarted by the pseudo-scientific pose. Not that the "blind power of facts" (Nietzsche) can ever be admired again, but on the basis of a recent study of traditional literary history in America one is inclined to think that the really important works are less seriously affected by the mechanism of uncritical research than is commonly assumed by the critics of positivism. A sober re-assessment of these works (some of which, by

12 E. H. Carr, *What Is History* (London, 1962), pp. 80, 66. Contrasting modern and nineteenth-century assumptions of method, Carr writes (pp. 77-78): "Nowadays both scientists and historians entertain the more modest hope of advancing progressively from one fragmentary hypothesis to another, isolating their facts through the medium of their interpretations, and testing their interpretations by the facts; and ways in which they go about it do not seem to me essentially different."


14 See my article "Tradition und Krise amerikanischer Literarhistorie" (cf. above, footnote to title), where the traditions of Moses Coit Tyler and Vernon Louis Parrington are discussed.
the way, are eminently readable) would, among other things, reveal a startling contrast to the much more analytical and experimental prose of the New Criticism.\textsuperscript{15}

If the new critical attitude towards historical scholarship was somewhat ambiguous, it was also, of course, not uniform. The various critics reacted rather differently, and there were quite a number of protests (some of them undoubtedly sincere) "that the literary historian and the critic need to work together" and that both functions should, ideally, be united "in one and the same man."\textsuperscript{16} But, as the main works in the tradition of historical inquiry were generally treated with more condescension than knowledge and as their results were, in the practical business of criticism, usually ignored, such protests often rang hollow. So whereas the critics did not offer any theoretical alternative, there developed and spread a climate of critical opinion in which historical scholarship seemed \textit{per se} hostile to critical evaluation; likewise, the genetic approach seemed \textit{per se} to be an expression of relativism; the study of the writer's background and biography seemed \textit{per se} to be a symptom of the "intentional fallacy"; etc. As in the forties and early fifties the New Criticism reaped its academic triumphs and one scholarly journal after the other thinned the volume of its historical contributions, it must have appeared to many that the study of literary genesis could only detract from and never add to the critical approach to literature as a serious art form. Small wonder, when even the most thoughtful observers approached the relations of "History and Criticism" as "something unavoidably problematic, part of a troublesome opposition which runs through all our experience."\textsuperscript{17} Such an opposition was in many quarters not merely taken for granted; it was justified by, and elaborated into, the theory of "absolute" criteria of evaluation. It was an "absolutism" by which the (undoubted) "relativism" of the traditional literary historian was, unfortunately, not overcome but relegated to a series of opposites, among which change and value, development and order, etc. As in the forties and early fifties the New Criticism reaped its academic triumphs and one scholarly journal after the other thinned the volume of its historical contributions, it must have appeared to many that the study of literary genesis could only detract from and never add to the critical approach to literature as a serious art form. Small wonder, when even the most thoughtful observers approached the relations of "History and Criticism" as "something unavoidably problematic, part of a troublesome opposition which runs through all our experience."\textsuperscript{17} Such an opposition was in many quarters not merely taken for granted; it was justified by, and elaborated into, the theory of "absolute" criteria of evaluation. It was an "absolutism" by which the (undoubted) "relativism" of the traditional literary historian was, unfortunately, not overcome but relegated to a series of opposites, among which change and value, development and order, etc. As in the forties and early fifties the New Criticism reaped its academic triumphs and one scholarly journal after the other thinned the volume of its historical contributions, it must have appeared to many that the study of literary genesis could only detract from and never add to the critical approach to literature as a serious art form. Small wonder, when even the most thoughtful observers approached the relations of "History and Criticism" as "something unavoidably problematic, part of a troublesome opposition which runs through all our experience."\textsuperscript{17} Such an opposition was in many quarters not merely taken for granted; it was justified by, and elaborated into, the theory of "absolute" criteria of evaluation. It was an "absolutism" by which the (undoubted) "relativism" of the traditional literary historian was, unfortunately, not overcome but relegated to a series of opposites, among which change and value, development and order,  

\textsuperscript{15} Ironically it "was precisely this scientific pose, conscious or unconscious, that constituted one of the main strengths of the New Criticism" (J. H. Raleigh, "The New Criticism as an Historical Phenomenon," \textit{Comparative Literature}, XI [1959/60], 23). The irony of it was noticed by at least one critic who — finding in Allen Tate's work "a rage, so deep a hatred of Science and positivism, not to say democracy" — saw "a certain irony in his position, since the very textual analysis he defended was an aping of scientific method and rigor" (Alfred Kazin, \textit{On Native Grounds}, Overseas ed. [New York, 1942], p. 361).

\textsuperscript{16} Cleanth Brooks, "A Note on the Limits of 'History' and the Limits of 'Criticism,'" \textit{The Sewanee Review}, LXI (1953), 132.

history and aesthetics, past significance and present meaning, appeared more irreconcilable than ever before.

II

However, it would be a gross over-simplification to imply that the new-critical critique of traditional literary history was entirely based on a series of formalist fallacies. Nor would one wish to minimize the extent to which the virtue of close textual analysis can survive the decline of the dogma of the autonomy of literature, thereby making a very considerable contribution to the more recent rapprochement of literary criticism and historical scholarship. And in the work of critics such as F. R. Leavis, Yvor Winters and Kenneth Burke, these possibilities reach as far back as the thirties and forties. For whatever the degree of the failure of the New Criticism in the field of literary history, even in its heyday a number of serious issues were raised and several very penetrating questions were asked, which a new approach would not wish easily to dismiss.

Among them, the question of relevance was foremost. Inspiring the attack on historical antiquarianism, it asserted the need for a new consciousness of "the relation between antique fact and poetic value." The simplest and the most straightforward form in which the problem was posed was one in which the purpose of literary history was defined from the angle of the present. A history of English literature, F. R. Leavis wrote, "will be undertaken because the works of certain poets are judged to be of lasting value — of value in the present." From this position, which may be said to stress one aspect of one basic truth, the need for evaluation was articulated with a new sense of urgency: If the criteria for a history of literature somehow correspond to a living system of values, then an awareness of these values would indeed seem to be one prerequisite for historical studies. F. R. Leavis (without bothering much about the emphasis carried by our cautious italics) put this quite bluntly: "Such a history, then, could be accomplished only by a writer interested in, and intelligent about, the present. It would, for one thing, be an attempt to establish a perspective, to determine what of English poetry of the past is, or ought to be, alive for us now."20

The strength of this position consisted in the fact that the literature of the past was related to what was felt to

be "alive" in the present. When the interests of contemporary literature can find an echo in the literature of the past, then there needs must exist some community of poetic values (and, we should add, of historical moments). Even when this community was defined solely in terms of "modern" values, it comprised, and had to be defined in terms of, a sense of tradition. But then, again, "tradition" was taken as a mode of relating (rather than correlating) past poetry to present practice. F. R. Leavis and most of the new critics still behaved as if their literary history virtually had the choice between past significance and present meaning — their choice being, of course, in favour of the latter.

The result, even though it satisfied current aesthetic assumptions, was not very helpful in establishing criteria by which a new approach to literary history might have prospered. F. R. Leavis' The Great Tradition (1948) just as Cleanth Brooks' Modern Poetry and the Tradition (1947) yielded the proof that by and large the historical community of values had been defined solely in terms of "modern" meaning. Here were two accomplished critics, both of them certainly "interested in, and intelligent about, the present," and both venturing into literary history, but with a result that somehow defeated the very aims and functions of this discipline. To be sure, neither critic had intended to write anything like a history of the English novel or a history of English poetry — as they are "or ought to be, alive for us now." But the historical elements of tradition which they recommended, were so much at odds with the history of English literature as an actual process of possibilities (a process, that is, of both developments and values), that not even the rudiments for a future synthesis of history and aesthetics were laid. (In this, Leavis and Brooks followed the critical theory and practice of T. S. Eliot, who however — interestingly enough — had defined the idea of tradition much less exclusively and more "historically," when he said that tradition involves "the historical sense" with its "perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence."21

To take up only one example, the criteria by which Leavis defined the great tradition of the English novel were not merely narrow and exclusive, but also confusing. To dismiss, usually in form of a footnote, Defoe (without mentioning Robinson Crusoe) as well as Thackeray, Scott and Hardy may perhaps be legitimate for one who wishes to bring out the undoubted greatness of George Eliot, Henry James and Joseph Conrad. But in this context to introduce such concepts as "historical importance" or "the important lines of English literary

history" is entirely to beg the question not merely of literary history, but of a workable synthesis of criticism and history. If Leavis states his "reason for not including Dickens in the line of great novelists" and then proceeds to assure us that he is "a great genius and is permanently among the classics"; if he gives a mere "note" to Emily Brontë "because [her] astonishing work seems to me a kind of sport," and then continues to say that "out of her a minor tradition comes . . ."; if Fielding is rejected as "simple" and then is said to have "made Jane Austen possible by opening the central tradition of English fiction"; — then there must be something wrong with a criticism which conceives of "tradition" not historically, not as a process of both developments and values, but in terms of three or four major modern novelists. Again, the complex relationship between past significance and present meaning is overlooked. It is ignored or replaced by a concept of tradition which can conceive of no unity and of no living interplay between the past world of the English novel and its present reception, but which judges everything in terms of "the significant few" major novelists. (Leavis touches on the real problem, which he prefers not to go into, when he says: "To be important historically is not, of course, to be necessarily one of the significant few.").

But to raise these objections is not to dispute the relevance of a concept of value, which (for Leavis) is seen "in terms of that human awareness . . . of the possibilities of life." Nor can such a concept of value be anything but critical. That is to say that it will evaluate the literature of the past not "as a record of past customs, past habits, past manners, past fashions in taste," or anything which is in the nature of a museum. If, as the New Criticism was perfectly justified to insist, literature is properly understood as literature and not as a medium of sociological reference and exemplification, then indeed

23 Ibid., p. 38.
24 Ibid., p. 11.
25 Ibid. There seems to be a similar contradiction, of which Cleanth Brooks is probably unaware, when he says "that we need to revise drastically our conventional estimate of the course of English poetry." ("Criticism, History, and Critical Relativism," The Well Wrought Urn, Harvest edn. [New York, 1947], p. 224; my italics.) At any rate, this is too facile a way of correlating value ("estimate") and development ("course").
26 Leavis, The Great Tradition, p. 10.
the poetic value of a work of literature is not easily to be abstracted from its ideological or biographical significance. To elucidate the latter is not in itself identical with an awareness of the former. And to achieve this awareness, it is certainly not enough to assume "that the specific problem of reading and judging literature is completely met in the process of learning the meaning of words, the political and philosophical allusions, the mental climate in which the poem originated, etc. etc."28

The most valuable contribution of the New Criticism, then, was to raise (if not to answer) the question as to the function and the criteria of literary history. To stress the need for evaluation involved an awareness of both, the necessity of selection and the importance of achieving a point of view from which to select and hence to evaluate. In the words of W. K. Wimsatt: "We are bound to have a point of view in literary criticism, and that point of view, though it may have been shaped by tradition, is bound to be our own. . . . Our judgments of the past cannot be discontinuous with our experience or insulated from it."29 The realization of one's own point of view as both distinct from, and shaped by, the past finally called for a recognition that the object of evaluation was (just as its "subject," its ego) part of a more comprehensive process of tradition and experience. Such an approach could conceive of history not only "in its several antecedent or causal relations to the writing of literature" but it could also raise the question "whether antecedents themselves, if viewed in a certain light, do not become meanings."30

But to answer this question already involved a break with the formalist dogma of the autonomy of the work of art. This paved the way towards the more recent synthesis between literary criticism and historical scholarship which reveals the extent to which the virtues of close textual analysis can survive the decline of formalism. The inevitable compromises so characteristic of the late fifties and the sixties, need not detain us here. Obviously there are plenty of ways and means through which historical concepts such as, say, the author as "The Necessary Stylist" (Mark Spilka) can be re-introduced, and the whole question of rhetoric can be smuggled into the discussion of the purists. Once the "implied author" is conceived as a "core of norms and choices," a "choosing, evaluating person" who attempts "consciously or unconsciously to impose his fictional world upon the reader," the "strategy of point of view" (Percy Lubbock) can no longer be

29 Wimsatt, "History and Criticism," p. 258.
30 Ibid., p. 254.
divorced from the world of history and sociology. This is a far cry from the formalist ghost of "the affective fallacy"; and even though *The Rhetoric of Fiction* still neglects the "social and psychological forces that affect authors and readers," it again points to what is potentially the historical meaning in the narrative structure of point of view. Similar tendencies have for some time been noticed in the interpretation of imagery, another domain of formalist interpretation, where there is a tendency to widen the scope of the term image and to stress its subject-matter or "tenor" as opposed to its "vehicle," the real subject of the discourse as opposed to the adventitious and imported image. It surely is a sign of the times, when a critic of the stature of W. K. Wimsatt produces a historical monograph on the portraits of Alexander Pope, or when Cleanth Brooks, former explicator of "paradox" and "irony," now at great length writes on the geographical theme and background of Yoknapatawpha County. To recognize "that a writer's choice of a subject is an aesthetic decision" prepares the way for a deeper understanding of history as part of the literary theme. The renewed interest in thematics, like that in poetic personality and rhetoric, is an indication of far-reaching transitions and changes in critical doctrine. Themselves part of history, they re-open the neglected dimensions of change and society by which literary history can now be discussed more profitably in terms of what it can and what it cannot accomplish.

### III

A dialectical approach, which is conscious of its own social function, will wish to consider the problem of literary history from an angle where literature is history, and history is an element of literary structure and aesthetic experience. What is needed is not simply an act of combination between the literary historian's approach ("A is derived from X") and that of the critic ("A is better than Y"). It is not good enough to have — in F. W. Bateson's sense — a "more intimate co-operation" of their efforts, or anything less than an integration in


32 See the discussion of theories of metaphor in my *New Criticism und die Entwicklung bürgerlicher Literaturwissenschaft*, pp. 220-277; there is a much shorter French version in *Recherches internationales*, VIII (1964), no. 43 (mai-juin), 201-11.

method and purpose. To say that the historian is concerned with a task like "A is derived from X" is in itself a somewhat superficial formula; but even if this is read as a symbol of the genetic approach, it will not do merely to combine or to link the study of genesis with the critical evaluation of the art-work. One has to be contained in the other, and the historical sense of the critic needs to be quite indistinguishable from the critical sense of the historian.

A postulate like this may sound presumptuous and, perhaps, over-optimistic, but really the object and the function of literary history can demand no less. Let us for a moment ask the question: What is the object of the literary historian as critic? Is it the work of art as it is experienced today? Or is it the work of art in statu nascendi, in the contemporary context of its genesis and original audience? To ask the question is to draw attention to both the unity and the contradiction of the past world of the art-work and the present world of its reception; or, in other words, to suggest that the historian's task (and the pastness of the work) cannot be separated from the critic's task (and the work of art as a present experience). Obviously, we cannot afford to isolate these two necessary aspects: merely to do the former is to fall back into some kind of antiquarianism; merely to do the latter is to run all the risks of misunderstanding and distortion that the New Criticism was guilty of so often. The one alternative will finally reduce literary history to a study of origins and influences, a mere Entstehungsgeschichte; the other reduces the discipline to a series of modern appreciations, a mere Wirkungsgeschichte. Neither is (as an alternative) acceptable: in the last resort, for literary history to study past significance makes no sense without an awareness of present meaning, and an awareness of present meaning is incoherent without the study of past significance.

Thus the object of the literary historian as critic is necessarily complex. It involves both genesis and value, development and order, the work of art as a product of the past and the work of art as an experience in the present. To stress these two dimensions of the art-work in terms of their interrelationships is to argue for more than just expediency (in the sense that an awareness of history might prevent us from making a mistake or overlooking an anachronism in interpretation). The point that has to be made is not that the historian (or the critic) had better do his job thoroughly. The point is that these two dimensions are inherent in the work of art, and that the study of genesis and the pursuit of evaluation find an equivalent in the similar relationship, which is a historical and an aesthetic one, between the mimesis and the morality of the work of art itself. Or, to make this point from a somewhat different angle, one might refer to two basic functions of literature: on the one hand the work of art...
as a product of its time, a mirror of its age, a historical reflection of the society to which both the author and original audience belonged. On the other hand, it is surely no idealism to assume that the work of art is not merely a product, but a “producer” of its age; not merely a mirror of the past, but a lamp to the future. Incidentally, it was Karl Marx who pointed out that art is one of the “besondere Weisen der Produktion”34 — the “special forms of production” — as in the sense that the work of art can produce its audience, and influence their attitudes and values.

In order to distinguish these two basic functions of literature one might call them, although this is to over-simplify, the mimetic and the moral. (The over-simplification does not bring out that actually each is correlated to the other: the moral element is implicit in mimesis as representation, just as the sensuous nature of representation and imitation points to the only process through which morality can be translated into art.) But if we for the present purpose accept this convenient distinction of terms, it may be said that the twofold function of art calls for a corresponding activity of the historian as critic and of the critic as historian. Once the work of art is seen as both imitation and creation, it must be conceived as not merely a product of the past, but also as a “producer” of the future. And while the former function is involved in the genesis (and is rooted in the past world of the artwork), the latter function is realized in both the past world and the present world of its reception: it is rooted in a creative capacity for “production,” which transcends the very time and age that are the object of the mimesis. Thus, the “mimetic” (the historical) and the “moral” (the ever present) functions interact: the literary historian as critic approaches an object in which Zeitlichkeit and Überzeitlichkeit, time and “timelessness,” can be fused into one.

This is the very stuff that literary history is made of. The past significance of the work of art, its background and origins, is in the last resort indivisible from its present meaning and its survival into the future. The literary historian is confronted with more than the coexistence of these aspects: he has to face both their contradiction and unity. But to say this is not to make a new and particularly sophisticated demand on the historian of literature. Eventually, this is the same problem that, some 350 years ago, Ben Jonson faced, when he paid his highly complex tribute to his dead rival’s work as “a Moniment, without a tombe”; Shakespeare’s work, he said, was “for all time,” but at the same time (or even before this) he also remarked that Shakespeare was the “Soule of the Age.”35 Jonson’s epitaph can

34 Marx and Engels, Werke, Ergänzungsband I, 53f.
hardly be said to anticipate the systematic approach of a modern literary history, but the basic problem, which is a dialectical one, is there quite clearly. It is the problem of origin and survival or, in a different light, of a great work as the product of its age and the "producer" of its future. For the modern literary historian to grasp the dialectics of Zeitlichkeit und Überzeitlichkeit calls for an awareness of the art-work as having both a past and a present dimension (as well as a present and a future existence). And it calls for a perception from this awareness, that these dimensions are, as an object of literary history, simultaneous in their interaction and tension.

The task of the literary historian, consequently, cannot be abstracted from either the genetic or the functional aspects of literature. For the historical study of origins helps to assess the continuity of, or the degree of change in, its social functions; while the study of its present functions can, in its turn, help us to appreciate the potential richness of the original constellation of its origin. In this sense, history can be studied as meaning: the structure of the work of art is potentially inherent in its genesis, but in society it becomes functional only through its affect in terms of a human and social experience. Structure is intimately linked up with, though not determined by either its genesis or its affective relations. It is correlated to both its past genesis and its present functioning; for the critic to understand the full measure of this correlation is to become conscious of the necessary complexity of structure as history.

IV

But to discuss this correlation in terms of history and aesthetics yields only very general results which do not by themselves suggest a more practical application of theory. In order to illustrate some of the issues involved, we propose to raise the problem in the more practical context of the historical, critical and theatrical interpretation of Shakespearean drama. Although here the gulf that separates the critical and the historical approaches has in recent years been considerably narrowed, there still exists an astonishing number of conflicting assumptions as to what are the aims and methods of literary inquiry into a great work of the past. Among these, the unresolved tension between past genesis and present function looms large, although as a problem of method it has hardly been perceived or discussed.

At the risk of repetition, the basic problem may perhaps again be phrased in terms of the question which we have asked above: What is the object of a historical and critical approach to Shakespeare? What does the literary historian as critic mean when he refers to Hamlet?
Presumably the answer would still be quite different according to whether the person in question would wish to stress the importance of historical research or the priority of critical judgment. On the one hand (in terms of historical research) the answer would preferably be: the Renaissance play. Hamlet, according to this approach, will be a historical figure, the play's message an Elizabethan one in the sense that its past significance is to be explored without (explicit) reference to its modern meaning. On the other hand (and this would be the more critical approach) the answer would involve a different object which is primarily related not to the Elizabethan theatre or even the Elizabethan text, but to the modern sensibility that it is meant to evoke. From this angle, an interpretation (or a theatrical production) would be authentic as long as it achieves the tone and tenor of our own age: Hamlet will be a modern symbol and the play's message a contemporary one in the sense that in the last resort its present meaning has priority over its past significance.

Actually, the two points of reference may not be so diametrically opposed, but the contradiction involved is an objective one. No matter what the approach is, there remains a historical text for modern readers (or actors); on the one hand there is the Elizabethan context and meaning, on the other, the modern understanding and interpretation. There is no getting away from this inevitable tension between the historical and the modern points of view, and no one-sided solution is feasible. The most learned and historically-minded scholar cannot physically become an Elizabethan; he cannot recreate the Globe or visualize the original production. Even if he conceived of Shakespeare's drama as being enacted in the theatre, he would still be influenced by his own experience of the modern stage, its twentieth-century audience and actors and their social relationships that are quite different from those which, in Shakespeare's Globe, then constituted part of the play's meaning.

The underlying contradiction is not an academic one, and the more we think of it in terms of practical interpretation (including the theatrical interpretation of Shakespeare on the modern stage) the clearer the theoretical implications will emerge. Since today it is just as impossible to understand Shakespeare without a modern interpretation as it is to have an interpretation without Shakespeare, we cannot proceed from either a genuine Elizabethan production (and this already contained an interpretation of the text) or from one which makes us believe that Hamlet is a modern play. Today any Shakespeare interpretation has to come to terms with the tension between historical values and modern evaluations. But this contradiction is not necessarily frustrating, and the way it is solved constitutes the most essential decision of both historical criticism and serious theatri-
past significance and present meaning

cal interpretation. Viewed from the angle of the drama as a work of
the theatre, this contradiction involves an inevitable tension between
the mimetic (or expressive) and the affective aspects, between the
significance of what Shakespeare’s work reflected (or expressed) in
plot and character, and the changing impact of this on the contempo-
rary spectator. Now to re-create the mimetic and the expressive dimen-
sions is impossible without reference to Shakespeare’s world and his
intentions; to re-assess their affective and moral effects is impossible
without reference to our audience and our world.

For the literary historian and critic the question, then, is not
whether or not to accept both worlds as points of reference, but rather
how to relate them so as to obtain their maximum dimensions. To put
it like this may appear provocatively superficial, but to resolve the
contradiction one cannot minimize the conflicting elements when each
is — in its different world — so inevitable and necessary. The “maxi-
mum dimensions” then, can mean no more and no less than this: to
have as much of the historical significance and as much of the contem-
porary meaning merged into a new unity. Of course there is no easy
formula as to how this synthesis of historical values and modern
evaluations can be achieved. But in order to grasp its dialectic, it is
well to remember that it is not entirely a case of opposites. On the
contrary, it would be a grave mistake to overlook those many points
of contact and identity, where, say, Shakespeare’s Renaissance values
can today be considered valid. This area of identity or interaction,
however, is not simply given; it will be enlarged from a contemporary
point of view which can conceive its own social direction as historical
in the sense that it affirms both the revulsions and the links of contact
between the past and the future. In the last resort this relationship
involves a social and a methodological position from which both the
change and the continuity can be accepted as part of a meaningful
movement in history. In the present reception of Renaissance drama,
therefore, the area of identity will radically differ between, say, a
Marxist interpretation and one based on the premises of Jacques
Maritain’s neoscholasticism. Where the Renaissance heritage is not
repudiated, there is bound to be a wide range of living contact, in
which the “historical” element can be viewed as part of a wider
configuration in which the present reproduction of past art is one way
of bringing about a meaningful future.

Nor is this area of identity, which of course is also one of humanity
and derives from man’s anthropological status, confined to the Renais-
sance tradition. We are all, the great dramatists of the past, their con-
temporary producers and critics, characters in history; our own points
of reference are, like our predecessors’, products of history. In this, our
present values emerge from the same historical process which is both
reflected in, and accelerated by, Shakespeare's contribution. This is quite obvious in the history of literature which can only be written in reference to a scheme of values that (among other things) has to be abstracted from its great objects, including Shakespeare's dramas. Their greatness has been confirmed by the very contribution they have made for furnishing us with criteria by which to judge, and to judge not only modern plays but also the history of the drama as a whole.

Since such area of identity may be accepted as given, the relationship between Shakespeare's vision and its modern perspectives cannot simply be described as one of conflict or opposition. The difference between his world and ours is obvious enough, but it does not exclude some kind of concurrence. As Arnold Kettle has remarked, "the best way to emphasize the value of Shakespeare in our changing world is to see him in his, recognizing that the two worlds, though very different, are at the same time a unity." This unity is at the basis of all our veneration for Shakespeare; without it, the impact of his work would not be possible. At the same, this unity does not preclude a contradiction which is at the basis of all our conflicting interpretations. In very much oversimplified terms: the unity creates the need of our interpretations of Shakespeare; the contradiction accounts for the need of our interpretations of Shakespeare. But actually each is contained in the other, and the interpretation as a whole can only succeed when these two aspects are inextricably welded into one. (By himself the modern historian can, as we have seen, either enhance or reduce the sphere of unity or the area of contradiction, but he can never entirely annihilate either.)

Once this relationship (although here still oversimplified) is understood more deeply, the historical study of literature has gained at least two negative standards of evaluation, but they may have some practical use for judging not only the literary but also the theatrical interpretation of the great drama of the past. For in the theatre as elsewhere, the modernized classic is no more acceptable than the museum version. This may not be saying anything new, but perhaps it helps to recover certain assumptions which might prove practicable to both the theatre director and the historical scholar. If the rift between them could thus be narrowed, the present theatrical reception of Shakespeare need be neither academic nor irresponsible. In modern Shakespearean productions, then, Hamlet need not become a hippy in order to convince, nor would it be necessary, as Martin Walser thinks it is, to produce "the old play" in order "to show us what things were like formerly" ("um uns zu sagen, wie es früher war"). If the past can be conceived, neither in its identity with, nor

in its isolation from the present, a historical perspective could evolve which might be both theatrically effective and convincing to the scholar. No topical effects are wanted, but a sense of history which can discover permanence in change but also change in seeming permanence; the past in the present but also the present in the past. Hence the "timeless" would result through a sense of time and history. It is in this sense that Shakespeare is "for all time" precisely because he was the "Soule of the Age." In this view, a historical vision can be made to yield a contemporary meaning. Its past significance was achieved because, at the time, it was contemporary and then incorporated the experience of the present. The meaning of literary history today can best be discovered through this past present, or that part of it which — although past — is still present and meaningful in a contemporary frame of reference. Thus, past significance and present meaning engage in a relationship which, in its interdependence, may illuminate either — the past work as against its present reception, and the contemporary interpretation against the historical significance of the work of art.

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