THEORY AND INTERPRETATION OF NARRATIVE
James Phelan, Peter J. Rabinowitz, and Robyn Warhol, Series Editors
FACT, Fiction, and FORM

Selected Essays

Ralph W. Rader

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For June Warring Rader
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Ralph Wilson Rader (1930–2007) was born in Muskegon, Michigan and grew up in rural Indiana. He earned his B.A. at Purdue University in 1952 and his Ph.D. at Indiana University in 1958. In 1956 he began teaching as an Instructor in the English Department at the University of California, Berkeley, the institution at which he spent the rest of his career. Rader advanced rapidly through the ranks, becoming assistant professor in 1958, associate professor in 1963, and professor in 1967, and serving as department chair from 1976–80. In 1992, he was given the title Professor in the Graduate School. He retired in 1993, but he was prevailed upon by his colleagues in 1994 to come out of retirement in order to serve once again as chair. He completed that term in 1996, and in 1997 he officially became professor emeritus. An energetic and influential advisor, Rader received UC Berkeley’s Distinguished Teaching Award in 1976, and, upon his retirement, its most prestigious honor, the Berkeley Citation. Although Rader published only one scholarly monograph during his career (Tennyson’s Maud: The Biographical Genesis, 1963), between 1973 and 1999, he wrote a remarkable series of essays that established him as one of literary theory’s most distinctive and powerful thinkers about the nature and value of literary form. Fact, Fiction, and Form collects those essays.

Although Rader’s work has influenced many who followed its unfolding from essay to essay, it has not yet had the wide influence it deserves, and we hope that Fact, Fiction, and Form will change that situation. Indeed, we believe that these essays are especially relevant to current conversations among critics and theorists seeking to reestablish the importance of questions of form and aesthetics alongside questions of politics and ideology.
Rader’s influence has not yet been as large as it deserves to be, because, like Kenneth Burke, he worked outside the dominant paradigms of literary theory and interpretation, and because his book on Tennyson precedes his extended engagement with fundamental questions of form, literary explanation, and literary history. This engagement was spurred by Rader’s encounter with neo-Aristotelian theory and criticism, primarily through Sheldon Sacks, who was his colleague at Berkeley from 1958 to 1966, and who, like Rader, had done his dissertation on Henry Fielding. Rader shared an office with Sacks for one year (1961–62), collaborated with him on a college textbook (Essays: An Analytic Reader, Little, Brown 1964), and, according to a contemporary, spent many late afternoons arguing literature over drinks at Sacks’s house on Buena Vista Way.

As we explain in our Introduction, Rader was never a wholly orthodox neo-Aristotelian or even a strict formalist who excludes authorial agency and readerly activity from what happens in literature. His fundamental problem, as he himself defined it in 1972, in a successful application for a Guggenheim Fellowship, was the relationship between “the artificial world of literature and the world of real experience” and “the validity of the felt values of literature in relation to the cold work of fact,” including at times the cold facts of an author’s life. He strove to understand how the mind of the reader builds and grasps “the different worlds of the literary imagination on the basis of its commerce with the real world.” Rader drew upon—and modified—neo-Aristotelian principles as he conducted his own rigorous inquiries into these fundamental questions.

The result of those inquiries is Rader’s coherent and powerful explanation of literary form and its value rooted in three related principles: (1) literary works comprise that subclass of texts whose chief end is pleasure; (2) literary form is the means by which human beings come to artistic terms with the nature of the world and their place in it; and (3) form is sufficiently powerful to work its effects on readers even if readers are not always able to translate their experience into conventional literary critical explanations. In our Introduction, we explicate these principles and examine their consequences for Rader’s ideas about the different forms of the novel and the lyric, the history of the novel, the nature and appropriate methods of interpretation, and responses to his work.

As Rader applies his key principles to a broad sweep of literary texts—from Paradise Lost to In Cold Blood, from “Elegy in a Country Churchyard” to “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”—he offers contributions to three significant areas of contemporary literary studies, and we have grouped his essays accordingly. Part I, “Principles,” contains essays that articulate and argue for the fundamental elements of Rader’s critical vision. Part II, “Fact, Fiction, and Form,” is devoted to essays that build on Rader’s second principle (form as an artistic response to human experience) and that show how Rader’s approach to form leads him to
think in fresh ways about the interactions among the three entities of the section’s title. Part III, “The History of the Novel,” consists of essays that outline his general account of the rise of the novel in England and its formal development from the mid-eighteenth century to the modernist period, a development influenced both by individual novelists’ formal innovations and by shifting notions about the appropriate functions of the novel. These essays include impressive readings of a wide range of prose fictions from *Moll Flanders* through *Ulysses* and demonstrate Rader’s ability to integrate his concerns with form, history, and interpretation into his larger vision of the novel as an evolving genre.

Working on this volume has been a rewarding experience for many reasons, but especially because we had encouragement and support from so many people. Arend Flick and June Warring Rader deserve credit for proposing the volume, and Arend and Nancy Rader provided us with hard-to-locate manuscripts. Peter J. Rabinowitz and Sandy Crooms were enthusiastic about the project from its inception, and we were gratified to see their enthusiasm reflected in multiple anonymous reports on the prospectus and in the extensive commentary on the whole manuscript by the anonymous reviewer. Dorothy Hale and Harry Shaw offered important encouragement and advice along the way. Sam Otter and George Starr tracked down information about the collaborations of Rader and Sheldon Sacks at Berkeley. Jim Phelan’s graduate assistants Paul McCormick, Lindsay Martin, and Brian McAllister did heroic work in preparing the manuscript for publication. Lindsay also compiled the Works Cited and Brian reviewed the proofs and made valuable contributions to the index.

Finally, we dedicate this book to June Rader because we know that Ralph would have done the same.

With the exception of “Big with Jest—the Bastardy of Tristram Shandy” (written ca. 1970) and “Barchester Towers: A Fourth Baggy Monster” (written ca. 1980), the essays in this book have appeared previously in journals or edited collections. We are grateful to the publishers for permission to reprint them. Here are the full bibliographic details of their first appearances (listed in the order of their arrangement in this volume).


“Notes on Some Structural Varieties and Variations in Dramatic ‘I’ Poems and Their Theoretical Implications.” *Victorian Poetry* (special dramatic monologue issue) 22.2 (Summer 1984): 103–120.


The Literary Theoretical Contribution of Ralph W. Rader

James Phelan and David H. Richter

Ralph W. Rader consistently located his work within the tradition of Chicago School criticism, and he just as consistently characterized that tradition as a minor movement in the history of twentieth-century criticism and theory. But from our perspective at the beginning of the second decade of the twenty-first century, Rader’s commendable modesty does not do justice either to the Chicago School or to his own work. First, the persistence of Chicago School principles and ideas over four generations of critics and theorists, and especially the presence of those ideas in developments and debates within the still expanding field of narrative theory, suggest that “enduring and influential” would be more apt adjectives than “minor.” The persistence of the Chicago School is especially salient in comparison to the fate of its chief initial rival, the New Criticism, a school that has a recognizable legacy but no contemporary heirs. Second, the Chicago School’s interest in form and genre, and more generally in the affective, ethical, and aesthetic dimensions of literature, has a new appeal in our present moment, when so many critics and theorists, seeking to go beyond the orthodoxies of poststructuralism and New Historicism, are turning (or returning) their attention to these components of literary experience.

In this context Rader’s work is particularly valuable because it develops a coherent and compelling vision of the nature and significance of literature and an impressive way of translating that vision into interpretive practice. That vision, as we will discuss below, is based not on a theory of language, power, history, or culture but rather on an understanding of literary forms as human creations designed to address aspects of our existence in the world. In other
words, for Rader literary forms are not preexisting molds into which artists pour their ideas, but rather the consequence of their efforts to respond to fundamental conditions of human life. Unfortunately, as we noted in the Preface, Rader never fully articulated his vision of literature and its multiple consequences in a single book. Instead, he presented substantial pieces of it in a wide-ranging body of essays, each of which carried out its own distinctive critical inquiry. Consequently, in this introduction, we seek to reconstruct Rader’s vision, to explicate the interrelationships among several of its key components, and to reflect on its consequences. More specifically, we address Rader’s definition of literature, his understanding of the tasks of criticism and theory, his concepts of literary form and literary quality, his work on the history of the English novel, and his methods of interpretive reasoning. We conclude with a brief look at responses to Rader’s work. In a sense, we understand our task as doing for Rader’s critical work what he so often set out to do for another writer’s imaginative work: reconstruct—and appreciate—the core principles of its construction.

Rader’s Definition of Literature and His Concept of Form

In “Fact, Theory, and Literary Explanation” (1974), Rader defines literature as that class of verbal compositions designed to be understood by immediate reference only to themselves through the reader’s grasp of the writer’s communicative act as directed toward the evocation of a certain pleasure in their own understanding. In this sense, “literary works are verbal compositions in which the act of understanding is experienced as its own justification” (36). This definition has both a descriptive and an evaluative dimension. In its descriptive sense, the definition distinguishes literary works from nonliterary works, the class of verbal compositions in which the reader’s act of understanding is directed toward her doing something else, often something practical (making a pie, voting for one candidate rather than another, writing a letter of protest, and so on). In its evaluative sense, the definition allows us to distinguish among degrees of literariness once we acknowledge that different members of the literary class offer their readers different degrees of pleasure and concomitantly different degrees of self-justification. For example, we could readily agree that *Paradise Lost* is substantially more literary than, say, Ogden Nash’s “Ode to a Baby”: “A bit of talcum / Is always walcum.”

This painfully simple demonstration of the definition’s evaluative dimension also helps illuminate Rader’s understanding of the task of criticism. Why do we readily accept this judgment of Milton’s epic as a greater literary work
than Nash’s doggerel? At least in part because the reference to Milton’s poem and the quoting of Nash tap into our intuitive understanding of each one’s literary merit. This answer doesn’t deny other influences such as Milton’s long-established place in and Nash’s absence from the standard canon, the cultural status of epics versus light verse and so on, but it keeps open the possibility that these other influences are actually connected to what we intuitively know after the experience of reading each poem.

Furthermore, Rader’s trust in our intuition would extend to our ability to distinguish between the literary quality of two works within the same general class, for example, Nash’s couplet and Alexander Pope’s two lines for a dog collar: “I am his Highness’s dog at Kew / Pray tell me, Sir, whose dog are you?” Both couplets convey their wit by using the first line to set up the punch delivered in the second. But we can readily discern that Pope’s couplet is the superior literary text because it gives more pleasure. In addition, Rader would insist, we can find the source of our comparative judgment in the couplets themselves. Where Nash relies on his weak and strained pun to deliver the wit, Pope relies on the more sophisticated conceit of the dog collar’s erasure of difference between its wearer and its reader, a conceit that in turn opens up the rich double-voicing of the couplet, the way it contains both the (imagined) voice of the wearer and the ironic voice of the poet.

Rader believes so strongly in the connection between our intuitive experience of texts and our implicit understanding of them that, for him, the task of criticism is less to construct new knowledge about literature than “to explain, clarify, and regularize the knowledge that we at some level already possess” (34). Consequently, his efforts to develop satisfactory accounts of form, genre, and quality in general and of the form and quality of individual works are efforts to make visible and comprehensible aspects of our reading experience that would otherwise often remain below the level of conscious awareness.

Here we’ve reached an important crux in Rader’s project of explaining the distinctive quality of literary experience: his faith in the ability of literary form to work its effects on audiences, even if those audiences are not always able to articulate very clearly either the nature of those effects or how they come about. In this respect, Rader wants to do for literary understanding something akin to what Chomsky wanted to do for linguistic understanding. Just as Chomsky sought to explain how competent speakers of English intuitively know such things as that “John is eager to please” is not strictly parallel to “John is easy to please,” Rader wants to explain how readers of literature intuitively know such things as that *Paradise Lost* is a greater work than not just all of Nash’s poems but also any of Milton’s other works. This understanding of Rader’s faith helps explain his concept of form.
At the most general level, as noted above, Rader conceives of literary form as the mode by which we humans come to artistic terms with our experiences of the world. Forms are “extensions of our inborn capacities to imagine ourselves, other men, and the world of which we are part” (152). We develop those inborn capacities through direct experiences of the world, and this development is crucial for our ability to make our way through life. But we can also develop those capacities through our encounters—as writers or readers—with literary form. These encounters in turn allow us to broaden and deepen our understanding of ourselves, the world, and our place within it.

Authors employ, adapt, and invent forms in order to communicate what they imagine to audiences, and audiences intuit those forms as they read. This connection between forms and the human agents who produce and consume them is crucial to Rader’s thought. It is the principle that leads to his locating forms within history—even as he contends that those historically situated authors have considerable flexibility in fashioning forms as they do. One good way to clarify Rader’s concept of form is to compare it to the one developed by the first generation of Chicago school critics, a comparison that prompts a quick review of the Chicagoans’ project.

R. S. Crane, Elder Olson, Norman Maclean, and others at the University of Chicago in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s sought to develop an approach to literature based on Aristotle’s *Poetics* and his *Metaphysics* that would be adequate to literary works written over the more than two millennia since Aristotle lived—works that Aristotle never dreamed of in his philosophy. The Chicagoans were drawn to the *Poetics* in particular because they were interested in the affective experiences offered by reading literature, and they understood Aristotle’s treatise as explaining the principles underlying the audience’s experience of Greek tragedy. This way of conceiving their project made Aristotle’s a posteriori method of reasoning back from the effects constituting that experience to the causes of those effects in the plays of the Greek tragedians more important than his particular conclusions. But this way of conceiving their project also led them to adopt the concept of form underlying Aristotle’s famous definition of tragedy. If tragedy is an imitation of an action using the devices of language, spectacle, and song to arouse and purge the emotions of pity and fear, then form (what Aristotle in the *Metaphysics* called *eidos*) is the organizing principle that synthesizes the various aspects of imitation—the objects (the constituent parts of the action: plot, character, and thought), manner (the dramatic spectacle), and means (the speeches of the characters, the songs)—into a larger purposive whole designed to affect its audience in a particular way.

This reading of Aristotle led Crane and his colleagues to distinguish between two broad categories of works, the mimetic and the didactic. Mimetic works
like tragedies are organized as imitations of actions whose purposes are to affect their audiences’ emotions in certain ways. Didactic works, while still containing representations of characters and events, are organized more as arguments than actions and their purposes are to persuade their audiences about the truth of certain propositions (as in the apologue) or about the ridiculousness of certain objects external to the work (as in satire). The mimetic–didactic distinction was important to the first generation because it helped them underline their differences from their major rivals, the New Critics who, by postulating that literature was a special use of language that put meanings in ironic tension, effectively made all works didactic. The Chicagoans’ larger point is that efforts to explain the structure and form of mimetic works by treating them as didactic works (or didactic works as if they were mimetic) was to commit a category error that would doom one’s interpretation to inadequacy because it would disconnect one from the experiential effects of the works.

Thus, Crane, in his manifesto-like essay, “The Concept of Plot and the Plot of Tom Jones,” specifies that he is focusing on plot in mimetic works and that plot is more than just the sequence of events. Instead it is the key to form because, as Crane puts it, plot is a particular temporal synthesis of character, thought, and action endowed with the capacity to affect the audience’s opinions and emotions in a certain way. The plot of Tom Jones, then, is the dynamic system of actions and the affective responses associated with that system. This system governs Tom’s movement from his initial but unstable union with Allworthy and Sophia to the low point of his being on the verge of fulfilling the prophecy that he was born to be hanged and then, in a marvelously swift transition, to the high point of his final stable happiness in Sophia’s arms and Allworthy’s good graces.

Rader, in “Tom Jones: The Form in History,” an essay written in 1981 but not published until David Richter wrested it out of his hands in 1999, finds much to like both in Crane’s concept of plot and in his analysis of Tom Jones because it explains a great deal of his (Rader’s) experience as a reader, and more generally, a great deal of the novel’s ability to move readers who are historically distant from it. Nevertheless, Rader also finds that Crane’s concepts of plot and of form are flawed because they are ahistorical. Rader puts it this way: “Crane, in his rigorous attempt to conceive Tom Jones as an autonomous artistic construct, caused himself to miss the full dimensions of the [novel’s] effect as intended and felt” (245–46). Rader supports this claim by comparing and contrasting his and Crane’s conclusions about the marvelous series of events that brings about Tom’s escape from the gallows and his happy reunion with Sophia. For Crane, with his ahistorical approach, this series is an example of the vagaries of blind Fortune that adds to the moral seriousness of the novel by showing that
Tom’s fundamentally sound moral character is no guarantor of his eventual happiness. For Rader, with his location of form in history, this series of events shows that something more than mere chance is behind Tom’s sudden reversal of fortune. This reversal is an implicit and powerful demonstration of Fielding’s specific mid-eighteenth-century Latitudinarian belief in the hidden providence governing human life, a demonstration that the audience registers in the way that it registers the superiority of Pope’s couplet to Nash’s. Thus, by attending to Fielding’s historically located beliefs, Rader concludes that the predominantly mimetic comic plot carries along with it a significant didactic component. More generally, then, Rader revises Crane’s proposals by relocating form in history, by connecting it even more closely to the historical author, and by significantly reducing the explanatory power of the mimetic–didactic distinction.

Rader’s engagement with Crane both reinforces his commitment to the concept of form as crucial to explaining literary experience and gives him a greater openness to the variety of forms in literary history than any other member of the first two generations of Chicago critics. Rader then uses that openness in combination with his own rich responsiveness as a reader of literature across the span of literary history to develop two important lines of thought, one about form in the novel and the other about form in the lyric. The key principle underlying Rader’s work in both lines of thought is that the purposes of different forms can be analyzed by attending to different configurations of the relationships among (1) the author (and his or her capacity to imagine); (2) the objects represented (self, others, and the world in some combination); and (3) the audience’s positioning toward both author and objects.

Form in the Lyric and Form in the Novel

In approaching the lyric, Rader’s first move is to reject the a priori critical doctrine popularized by Cleanth Brooks and given support by W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley’s essay on “The Intentional Fallacy” that the speaker of a lyric is always distinct from the poet. This rejection allows us to distinguish between lyrics in which the speaker and the poet are identical and those in which they are not. These distinctions in turn also enable us to recognize the difference between lyrics that are essentially nonfictional and those that are essentially fictional and to think about the variety of forms along a spectrum from wholly nonfictional to wholly fictional. Thus, at one end of the spectrum, we have the expressive lyric such as Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey” in which poet and speaker are one and in which the poet works out in the present-tense of the poem his thoughts about some real issue or his responses to some real experience:
Once again
Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs
That on a wild secluded scene impress
Thoughts of more deep seclusion. . . .

(4–7)

In the expressive lyric, the audience understands the poet to be presenting rather than representing his thoughts and feelings, and the audience enters into the poet’s effort to work through those materials.

The next point along the spectrum is the dramatic lyric such as Hopkins’s “The Windhover” or Frost’s “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening.” The dramatic lyric is based on the poet’s memory of a real experience, and, thus, in contrast to the expressive lyric, is a re-presentation of an experience even if told in the present tense. Thus, though the poet and the speaker have the same identity, the audience registers a difference between the “I” who is the lyric actor and the “I” who is the poet fashioning the actor’s experience into this artistic construct. The audience in the dramatic lyric has a primary awareness of—and participates in—the lyric actor’s experience and a secondary awareness of the poet’s constructive activity in re-presenting that experience.

Next along the spectrum is the mask lyric, such as Tennyson’s “Ulysses” and Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” in which the poet and the speaker are no longer the same person, but in which the poet uses the speaker as a surrogate to express his genuine thoughts and feelings. The audience once again has a dual awareness, but one that, like the mask lyric itself, straddles the line between fiction and nonfiction: the audience simultaneously takes on the vision of the fictive surrogate but attaches the surrogate’s thoughts and emotions to the poet. The mask lyric also allows (but of course does not require) a poet to explore, under the guise of the mask, thoughts, attitudes, or experiences that he or she is not wholly comfortable with or would not speak of without the mask. Tennyson’s Ulysses, for example, alludes to suicidal impulses before resolving to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

At the far end of the spectrum, we move wholly into the realm of fiction with the dramatic monologue proper, a form for which Browning’s “My Last Duchess” serves as a paradigm case. Here the poet and the speaker are totally distinct, and the poet uses the speaker’s monologue gradually to reveal the speaker’s inner purpose in uttering this speech to this narratee on this occasion—and then through that disclosure to reveal the speaker’s overall character. In the dramatic monologue, the audience’s dual awareness of the speaker’s purpose contained within the poet’s purpose constitutes a major source of the form’s power.
As we turn to Rader’s ideas about form in the novel, we will begin with a brief sketch and then flesh it out in the next section where we discuss his conception of the formal history of the English novel. Again, Rader’s ideas about form are linked to his focus on the relations among the author, the objects represented, and the audience, and he identifies three main configurations of those relationships. The first configuration is what he calls the pseudo-factual with Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* as the paradigm case. The second configuration is the action/fantasy or the plot/judgment model, with Richardson’s *Pamela* as the exemplar. The third is the simular with Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* as the prototype. More specifically, the action/fantasy pattern of *Pamela* conforms to our ordinary conception of the standard novel of represented action, which Rader describes this way: “a work which offers the reader a focal illusion of characters acting autonomously as if in a world of real experience within a subsidiary awareness of an underlying constructive authorial purpose which gives the story a significance and affective force that real experience does not have” (99). The pseudo-factual form of *Moll Flanders* does not offer its audience this dual awareness. Instead, it takes advantage of its fictiveness to heighten the entertainment pleasures associated with an action-packed true story. The pleasures of *Moll Flanders* reside not in how Defoe shapes Moll’s story into a larger design with greater significance but rather in the very vividness of her experiences. By contrast, the simular form moves away from the “as if” quality of the novel to represent in fictional form real people and events. The young artist in Joyce’s narrative is called Stephen Dedalus, but his experiences are those of Joyce himself. Joyce gives another twist to this simular form in *Ulysses*, where he combines this recreated version of his younger self in Stephen with a recreation of his mature self in the body of another—in, that is, Leopold Bloom.

Form in History: The English Novel

Rader’s ideas about the literary history of the English novel, like his ideas about the form of the novel, both draw on and diverge from R. S. Crane’s work. In “Critical and Historical Principles of Literary History,” Crane argues that form should have a central place in any properly literary history. Not surprisingly, his preferred concept of form is the neo-Aristotelian one defined above: the organizing principle that synthesizes objects (the constituent parts of the action: plot, character, and thought), manner (the dramatic spectacle, or, in the novel, the narrative technique), and means (the speeches of the characters, the songs, the diction and syntax of the narration) of imitation into a larger purposive whole designed to affect its audience in a particular way.
Crane labeled any analysis of this synthesis and of the relations among objects, manner, and means as one focused on the “constructional” aspect of a text. Crane also identified “preconstructional” and “postconstructional” aspects and their relevance to literary history. The preconstructional aspect consists of the text’s origins, sources, analogues, and other raw materials. For a writer working within a given genre and literary scene, the preexisting tradition offers a storehouse of such materials (familiar plot devices, character types, verbal strategies, narrative conventions) to which the author looks in composing his or her original work. The “postconstructional” aspect consists of the work’s actual influences on its readers, the ways it affects their relations to other aspects of culture and, indeed, to “the common causes of all human discourse: language, the mind, society, history, and so on” (“Principles” 48).

While all three aspects of a text can provide evidence for its role in literary history, Crane argues that the constructional aspect has been relatively ignored, especially in comparison to the preconstructional aspect, with the result that most literary histories leave out essential parts of the story. Literary historians found it easier to trace the historical origin, continuity, and variation of the raw materials of a text or set of texts than to understand how authors shaped those materials for specific purposes and how such shaping influenced subsequent authors as they sought to achieve their own purposes. Despite all that preconstructional histories tell us about the conditions under which writers worked, they remain incapable of addressing the distinctive qualities of individual texts that are both primarily responsible for their place in the canon and for their influence on subsequent texts. Engaging in purely preconstructional explanation is like writing a history of the apple pie through chapters on apple growing, pig farming, flour milling, and the development of the oven. Obviously an apple pie needs apples and flour and lard and an oven, but apple pie is also obviously more than the sum of its necessary ingredients and tools.

Crane’s antidote to the “scissors and paste” preconstructional literary histories was to move the constructional aspect of texts to the center of those histories. A novel (or any other literary work) is the way it is less because of its available raw materials than because the artist’s choice of form demands that the artist choose some of those materials rather than others and that she shape those chosen materials in one way rather than another. As Crane puts it, the “first interpretative task of the historian of forms” is “the various reasons of art which presided in their making.” Crane usually wrote about masterpieces like Macbeth and Tom Jones, but for him, even the apparent “defects” of a form can be dictated by formal considerations. For example, the simplistic characterization in the Gothic novel may “have been dictated, in some sense, by the artistic end their authors had in view, namely, a concentration on the mysteriously terrifying
quality of the events portrayed.” One needed “enough character to impel readers to take sides . . . and nothing more” (“Principles” 109–110). But Crane assumes that the sequential analysis of masterpieces like *Tom Jones*, defective canonical works like *The Vicar of Wakefield*, and texts in minor genres like the Gothic will yield “narrative histories of form.” Crane himself did not attempt such a history, and he does not identify a motor for driving historical change, a force or set of forces that would give us a sense of necessary sequence, of history rather than mere chronology supplemented by a formal literary analysis.

As noted above, Rader’s revision of Crane’s formal analysis argues that form needs to be located more squarely in history. As he puts it in his reflections on the work of Sheldon Sacks, we should “think of literary works not as embodiments of a priori principles of form but as constructions in which the author’s attempt to realize his aesthetic and allied aims may produce conflicts which leave on the works the marks of their solutions” (“Contribution” 189). By expanding his view to include those “allied aims,” Rader can explain, first, that partially incoherent mixed forms, flawed comedies such as Fielding’s *Amelia*, Smollett’s *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker*, and Goldsmith’s *The Vicar of Wakefield*, abound in literary history, and are demonstrably more common than masterpieces like *Tom Jones*. Second, Rader can explain that these texts need to be understood through the formal conflicts engendered by these aims, aims that may be personal idiosyncrasies of the author, or that may be cultural, that is, set by rules and principles that are widely shared in a particular age. Thus, some works of art may in fact be less than optimally effective either because of a collision of formal requirements or because of conflicts between formal rules and ethical or political principles. It is not only possible but perhaps inevitable that the ideology of an age can be at odds with its aesthetic principles, in ways that generate problematic texts with different solutions to these conflicts, some more and some less successful, with later novels building upon the aggregate failures of earlier ones.

Like Crane, Rader sensed something intrinsically defective about “preconstructional” literary history, as one can see from “The Emergence of the Novel,” his review-essay on Michael McKeon’s neo-Marxist treatise, *The Origins of the English Novel*. For Rader, McKeon goes wrong from the very first page, where he skips over any constructional view of the novel as a distinct form and claims that “genre theory cannot be divorced from the history of genres, from the understanding of genres in history. Another way of saying this is that the theory of genre must be a dialectical genre theory” (qtd. by Rader 203). As Rader sees the case, any theory of the novel’s origins must be able to distinguish the formal principles of a novel from other fictional narratives in prose. The epistemological and ethical changes that McKeon presents as predisposing causes for
the construction of the novel, ideological components caused by changes in the socioeconomic patterns of English society, are necessary but not sufficient elements of the story of the novel’s emergence. Because McKeon does not capture the novel as a literary form, he does not—indeed, cannot—adequately place it in history. Like Crane’s apple pie, the English novel for Rader is far more than the sum of its elemental materials and techniques, and until we explain its distinctive qualities we cannot do justice to its history.

More particularly, Rader objects to McKeon’s notion that we can adequately understand *Moll Flanders* and *Pamela* as two products of the same ideological processes, without some understanding of the very different formal qualities of the two texts. In “Defoe, Richardson, Joyce, and the Concept of Form in the Novel,” Rader had laid out the main lines of his literary history of the English novel. The central track is the action/fantasy or plot/judgment pattern that we have briefly described above. This pattern begins with Richardson’s *Pamela*, acclaimed in its own day as inaugurating a new kind of writing, and which continues through the late Victorian and early modern novels by Hardy and Conrad—and, indeed, into the present day. *Pamela* is an original form because the events it recounts have to be understood in two different ways at once, on a narrative plane and on an authorial plane. That is, the reader is forced to take the story as autonomously “real,” in the sense that we understand Pamela’s world as operating by the laws that obtain in our own world and that render her fate independent of our desires for her (narrative plane). At the same time, the reader is forced to take the story as “constructed” in the sense that we understand the novel as shaped by Richardson’s creative intention, which in turn guides our developing expectations and desires respecting Pamela and her eventual fate (authorial plane). For Rader the crucial moment in the emergence of the novel is precisely Richardson’s construction of a prose fiction that operates simultaneously as autonomous narrative and as authorial construct. Once Richardson wrote his novel, others could imitate and adapt the achievement, bringing to the form new sorts of meaning and structure.

Before *Pamela*, Rader argues, Daniel Defoe wrote a very different kind of prose fiction. Works such as *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders* are pseudofactual texts, that is, imitations of naïve, incoherent autobiography, or false true stories. These texts, in Rader’s view, have no authorial plane corresponding to the one in *Pamela*, and, thus, create no sense that an authorial designer is weaving Moll’s diverse experiences into any significant larger pattern. What we see—Moll’s collection of tellable adventures—is what we get. *Moll Flanders* does include inadvertent signs, here and there, that someone other than Moll wrote the words that we are reading, but these signs never coalesce into a pattern that signals an encompassing authorial design of the kind we intuit in *Pamela*.
or in *Tom Jones*. Indeed, to the extent that we are distracted by these signs, the intended illusion collapses. (Other fictions written in the period before *Pamela* have the opposite feature: they tell without adequately showing, creating a world in which the presence of the authorial plane is so heavy that the autonomous narrative plane never develops.) After *Pamela*, the genre in which Defoe excelled fell into disuse, as the most talented writers explored the complex possibilities of the action/fantasy or plot/judgment model for most of the next two centuries.

Then around the beginning of the twentieth century, the most important writers of the masterpieces of literary modernism—Proust, Joyce, and Woolf—developed a new form of prose fiction, the “simular” novel. As we noted above, the simular form moves away from the “as if” quality of the novel to represent in fictional form real people and events. The protagonist in Joyce’s *Portrait* is called Stephen Dedalus, but his experiences are those of Joyce himself. In *Ulysses*, Joyce develops another variant of this simular form by combining the recreated version of his young self in Stephen with a recreation of his mature self in the figure of Leopold Bloom.

The simular novel is in one way like the protonovelistic form of Defoe in that “both project images of the actual as opposed to the fictional; the effects . . . depend, in very different ways, upon the reader’s imaginative sense that he is in contact with life as in nature it actually is” (184). Nevertheless, “between Defoe and Joyce there is a very great formal difference that we may begin to specify by saying that Defoe presents false natural facts as truth, whereas Joyce presents something like real natural facts as fiction” (184). Thus in the novel of represented action between Richardson and Conrad, “the world meets the terms of our wishes,” while “in simular novels, as I would call those of Joyce, Woolf, and Proust—novels built as artificial simulations of the actual—our wishes are made to meet the terms of the world” (185).

In an early essay on *Tristram Shandy* (circa 1970), published for the first time here, Rader prepares the ground for a case that he did not develop, namely, that the simular novel descends not only from Defoe but also from Sterne. Rader argues that Sterne is present as Yorick within his novel in a way parallel to Joyce’s presence as Stephen Dedalus: “Even the uninitiated reader surmises that [in the scene of the death of Yorick] he is confronted with a more-than-fictional reality, the presence of which in the book has an extra-fictional justification. The material is given point within the story, but there seems to be a private meaning beyond” (266).

Rader never wrote a protohistory of the novel leading up to Defoe, or a full history of the simular novel of Joyce, Woolf, and Proust, but he did attempt to explain the stages within the history of the novel of represented action over the 160 years between Richardson and Conrad in terms of what we have earlier
called the “collision of formal requirements or . . . conflicts between formal rules and ethical or political principles.” Rader’s first demonstration of the workings of this theory is “From Richardson to Austen,” in which he argues that the morally serious comedy we admire in Fielding’s Tom Jones was distorted in the course of its development by what Rader calls “Johnson’s Rule.” Johnson’s Rule is that feature of eighteenth-century ideology explicitly articulated in Samuel Johnson’s Rambler essay No. 4 (and visible elsewhere) which demanded fictional narratives with heroes and heroines of perfect moral rectitude and entirely unsympathetic villains. From the perspective of Johnson’s Rule, texts with attractive villains, like Clarissa, or with scapegrace heroes, like Tom Jones and Roderick Random, were ethically ambivalent if not defective.

The key point here is that many other works written to situate themselves in conformity to Johnson’s Rule paid an affective and aesthetic price for moral clarity. Sir Charles Grandison, written explicitly in order to demonstrate what male rectitude would look like, is rendered so insipid by its moral paragons that it fell from canonical status soon after the turn of the nineteenth century, while the novels of Burney and even early Austen (Sense and Sensibility and Northanger Abbey) are weakened by the formal compromises required for conformity with the rule. Rader envisions the sequence of the English novel from Pamela through Grandison, Fanny Burney’s Evelina and on to Pride and Prejudice and Emma as a struggle with “Johnson’s Rule,” as the search for a form of morally serious comedy that will be simultaneously acceptable to the ideology of the age and dramatically effective. Austen resolves the conflict by constructing her heroes and heroines with traits that temporarily keep them from happiness with each other, correctable character flaws that nevertheless do not amount to serious moral faults. But this solution is no sooner reached than, with the change of aesthetic ideology at the start of the nineteenth century, it becomes practically irrelevant to the further formal development of the novel, which after Austen takes quite different directions. (A second ideological feature of the period, the requirement of distributive justice, where characters’ fates are apportioned according to their ethical deserts, explains why after Clarissa no successful tragic novel is written in the eighteenth century.)

Rader’s second sequence deals with action/fantasy novels published in the middle of the nineteenth century, from the late 1830s to the early 1870s, where in place of “Johnson’s Rule” novelists face what he calls the “Victorian Rule” requiring the subordination of the individual to the social. In terms of the value systems of the novels Rader considers (including Vanity Fair, Bleak House, Barchester Towers, and Middlemarch), this rule defines the highest good as the sacrifice of one’s self for the common good, as we see characters like William Dobbin and Esther Summerson and Dorothea Brooke doing. In terms of
their novelistic structures, the Victorian Rule leads to a “transindividual focus in conflict with the intrinsic demands of the action form”: a multiplication of characters and plot lines needed to provide a sense that the fiction is representing society as a whole, with a formal result that the reader registers the work as what Henry James called a “large, loose, baggy monster.” Rader also shows how, in each of the baggy monsters, a different formal structure is used to unify the social vision. In Vanity Fair, for example, Thackeray uses the two intertwined plot lines conveying “a fate felt to be universal,” while in Bleak House a single complex and concatenated plot line is artificially split by the dual narratives to convey multiplicity and universality, with the dual system of the interconnected plot collapsing at the end into a single denouement.

Rader’s theoretical analyses of Victorian fiction also make room, in places, for the biographical issues that had interested him from his early work on Fielding and Tennyson, the way authors make room for representations of themselves and their own personal conflicts within otherwise fictional literary creations. Rader’s analysis of Barchester Towers, for example, attempts to understand Trollope’s way into the clerical community whose internecine conflicts he chronicles. Rader posits that Trollope was closest to this sort of community when he was a student at the Winchester School, opposite the cathedral, and that Obadiah Slope, the ugly and clumsy bishop’s chaplain, darkly figures Trollope’s own adolescent sense of himself as an ungainly hulking pariah.

At the end of the Victorian period, around the turn of the twentieth century, new literary forms are created that Rader envisions as transitions between the novels of social collectivity and the simular forms of the high modernists. Hardy’s Tess of the D’Urbervilles and Conrad’s Lord Jim are the masterpieces of this transition, in which “both actions are focused on an inherently universal conflict between the natural and the social, which is the ground of the protagonist’s tragic suffering” (305–6). For Hardy the conflict centers on sexual love; for Conrad it centers on courage and personal honor. In both the narrator’s voice reflects on the destiny of the protagonist from a “cosmological perspective” which displays fate as malignant and nature as devoid of transcendent norms that would allow us to validate and judge human destinies.

The endpoint of Rader’s work on the history of the English novel is Ulysses, an advance over the earlier Portrait in Joyce’s experiment with turning the actual material of real life into fictional experience. Fiction generally has autobiographical elements, but we can adequately comprehend Jane Eyre and David Copperfield without any awareness that the fictional worlds project portions of the life of Charlotte Brontë and Charles Dickens. Rader argues that the opposite is true of Portrait and Ulysses, which we experience precisely as fictionalized versions of the life of James Joyce, where the awkward underdevelopment of minor
characters testifies not to defective artistry in the portrayal but rather to the fact that they derive from an independent reality that Joyce did not invent. Nevertheless, *Portrait* and *Ulysses* are to each other as lyric is to drama. Whereas in *Portrait* we imagine the world from a point inside Stephen Dedalus’s body (the author’s body, that is), in *Ulysses* “we have the uncanny sense that we are looking with the author at himself as if he were outside himself” (“Defoe, Richardson,” 193)—with respect to both Bloom (a dislocated version of the middle-aged man that Joyce had become) and Stephen (the young man whose anxious arrogance he had left behind). What makes *Ulysses* fascinating to Rader—and to the many Joyceomanes among us—is that the novel’s perverse egocentric fascination with versions of the author is precisely what is most universal about it. As Rader puts it in “The Logic of *Ulysses*,” in a statement that recalls his case for the value of literary form, “only by insisting on the importance of his own personal predicament . . . was Joyce able to write a book that could be true to the predicament we all share, of being locked in a body and a world which will inevitably destroy us but which, meanwhile, we can both imaginatively rise above and spiritually assent to. . . . This world is the only world we have or will have, and our own particular bodies in this time and this place the pre-given and only opportunity we have of seizing it” (341).

We find Rader’s principles of literary history highly explanatory, and we recognize a kind of beauty in the symmetric relationship between the pseudo-factual narratives of the novel before Richardson and the simular novel of high modernism. But it is hard not to wish that Rader had been able to extend his history further in several directions. First, even the most fully developed part of that history, the account of the novel of represented action, is longer on constructional aspects of different subtypes than it is on explaining the historical links among the subtypes. Rader is clear that the historical development of the novel depends on the intersection of individual agency, the aesthetic and ideological demands of a given age, and a tradition of formal achievement, but he does not offer a comprehensive account of the causes and accidents in the evolution of those intersections over time. Thus, for example, using Rader’s model, we could hypothesize that the novelists working under the Victorian Rule did learn from Austen’s use of Charlotte Lucas in *Pride and Prejudice* as a negative but sympathetic analogue to Elizabeth Bennet how to make an even more fully elaborated story of a minor character relevant to a larger, transindividual focus, but we cannot explain the intermediate steps by which the novel developed from Austen to Dickens. Second, we wish there were more than the slight hints about how Rader would have written about Woolf’s experiments with the simular novel, her own versions of the self known from the inside out, like Clarissa Dalloway and Lily Briscoe, and the selves known from the outside
in, like Septimus Smith and Mr. Ramsay. Third, we regret that Rader’s history ends with the masterpieces of high modernism. It would have been fascinating to see him extend his study of the development of the novel to the fiction of the last seventy years.

A different question arises from Rader’s history being what Viktor Shklovsky called a “history of kings.” Rader does not restrict himself to masterpieces, but he writes almost exclusively about canonical works, particularly the canon in place during his graduate training and early career, a canon that culminated in those masterpieces of high modernism. Those of us who have worked on texts on the fringes of the canon—like the Gothic novel—are not so sure that literary history has always been moved by its most canonical texts, particularly by our canonical texts. Nevertheless, we are convinced that Rader’s ideas about emergent form can be extended through the analysis of other sequences that demonstrate the same kind of wrestling with the problematics of form that Rader explicated in “From Richardson to Austen.”

Form and Quality

Just as Rader’s definition of literature has both a descriptive and an evaluative dimension, so too does his concept of form. “In the dramatic lyric,” he writes, “the experience is not created but re-created; more accurately, its significance is recreated. In the greatest such poems the experience recreated will be one which is itself so exceptional—so rare a moment of insight or revelation such as sensitive spirits have in their encounters with the world—that it cannot be conceived as invented by the poet but only given to him” (145–46). In other words, the quality of the poem exists not as something added to the form but as something integral to it. As we register the self-justifying cognitive act of the poet in composing the poem we also register its quality. To put the point in more concrete terms, because we feel that both the experience recreated in Hopkins’s “The Windhover” and the manner of recreation are so extraordinary, we know we’re dealing with nonfiction and with a high degree of literariness.

Coming at the question of quality from the other direction, that is, from the direction of authorial craft, we can say that for Rader formal coherence is typically a necessary but not sufficient condition of literary value. To switch from the dramatic lyric to the novel written on the action/fantasy pattern, the “significance and affective force” of the whole depends on more than just the author’s skillful handling of the action structure. It depends as well on the choice of material—how significant are the situations that the author has chosen to work with—the ability to make the different parts of the structure affecting and plea-
surable in themselves, and on the larger vision of human possibility and experience that governs the shaping of the coherent structure. To the extent that the larger vision both shapes the coherence of the work and touches on something that transcends the work’s particular representations, it offers a highly powerful literary experience. At this juncture, we can see the potential for developing a Raderian ethics of reading, one that would be closely tied to aesthetics.

Rader’s comparison between Boswell’s *Life of Johnson* and Capote’s *In Cold Blood* as literary nonfictions sheds further light on the relation between form and quality. Rader notes that both Boswell and Capote are extremely skilled craftsmen who exhibit great “powers of imaginative reconstruction and synthesis” (131). Yet Boswell’s biography achieves literary value because it “lifts an aspect of human reality—namely, Johnson and the events of his life—from the contingency of history and displays it as a concrete universal—self-validating, self-intelligible, inherently moving, permanently valuable” (128). Capote accomplishes the extraordinary feat of simultaneously allowing us to appreciate the full horror of the murder of the Clutter family and to feel a genuine but limited sympathy for the murderers Dick Hickock and Perry Smith. But this achievement is limited by the fact that the deaths of the Clutters ultimately have “no moral relevance whatever to them. There is no ethical consonance in it, so that we do not feel retrospectively that it was worthwhile for them to have lived or that to have lived and died as they did would be worthwhile to us. . . . The defect is not in Capote’s art but in the subject itself, inherently defective because not sufficiently universal” (131).

Goals, Methods, and Tests of Interpretation

Rader’s contributions to literary criticism and theory extend beyond his conception of form, his perceptive delineations of varieties of the lyric and of the novel, his evolving account of the development of the English novel, and his many powerful readings of individual works. His contributions also include (a) his proposal for a comprehensive theory of literature and his accompanying criteria for testing such a theory; and (b) his similar account of the goals, methods, and tests of interpretation itself. “Fact, Theory, and Literary Explanation” succinctly addresses the first set of contributions, but it is both Rader’s discussion in that essay and his practice across a wide range of interpretive essays that address the second set.

In “Fact, Theory,” Rader explains his attraction to a hypothetico-deductive theory of literature as well as to a hypothetico-deductive account of the “constructional” aspects of a given work. Such an account acquires its power by both
advancing a strong generalization that coherently explains the details of a work’s construction and recognizing that the generalization is not a truth but a hypothesis that needs to be tested—and that is always capable of being disproved by its inability to explain adequately some details, especially when compared with a competing hypothesis. Furthermore, Rader follows Karl Popper in arguing that the easiest part of hypothesis testing is hypothesis confirmation. As Stanley Fish and others who emphasize the socially constructed nature of knowledge argue, the frameworks that we use to interpret the world and its texts are often sufficiently powerful to give plausible accounts of texts. Consequently, asking whether the framework can explain a given object almost always results in an affirmative answer. From Rader’s perspective, however, this finding does not mean what it does for Fish, namely, that frameworks, in effect, produce texts, and that we should recognize the basic equality of different interpretive communities. Instead, for Rader this finding means we should take another page from Popper’s book and test hypotheses not simply by seeking to confirm them but also by seeking to disconfirm them.

Rader’s response to Crane’s analysis of *Tom Jones* provides a nice example of how to test both a general theory and an interpretive hypothesis. Both Crane and Rader develop strong generalizations about the constructional aspect of *Tom Jones* based upon both their general frameworks for understanding form and their engagements with the details of Fielding’s novel. Rader’s generalization, however, is capable of explaining some elements of the novel that fall outside of Crane’s view and of giving a more precise explanation for Fielding’s arrangement of the marvelous reversal of Tom’s fortunes. This arrangement is not meant, as Crane with his ahistorical view would have it, as an illustration of the whims of Fortune, but rather as a demonstration of a contemporary Latitudinarian principle about the hidden power of Providence in human life. In other words, when we seek to disconfirm each critic’s interpretive hypothesis by putting it in competition with an alternative, we find good grounds for preferring one over the other. In addition, when we link that preference to the underlying causes in the general theory of form, we have further grounds of preference.

This example also indicates that Rader’s concept of interpretation as the development of a hypothetico-deductive account of a work’s construction is, despite initial appearances, compatible with the neo-Aristotelian commitment to an a posteriori method. Both Crane and Rader are wary of a priori reasoning that says because some variable of literary production (e.g., language, human psychology, a given set of sociohistorical conditions) is a certain way, the literary text must also be a certain way. Instead, both are interested in the results of an inductive examination of the details of the work that a commitment to the a posteriori principle encourages. But then both seek a generalization that
can do justice to the results of that examination, and while both develop strong
generalizations, Rader’s is ultimately more comprehensive and more precise.
For that reason, we think that even Crane would have to concede that Rader’s
hypothetico-deductive account of *Tom Jones* is the more adequate one.

Rader’s interest in strong generalizations also leads him to an intriguing pro-
posal about what he calls “negative consequences of positive intentions.” Rader’s
point is that sometimes well-motivated and even well-executed formal choices
will not only achieve their ends but also give rise to undesirable side effects.
The focus on a strong generalization about the overall formal power of a work
will allow interpreters to differentiate between such side effects and more seri-
ous artistic flaws or failures. Why does Milton’s God in *Paradise Lost* sometimes
sound less like a Deity than like a school divine? Because Milton’s decision to
represent God as an agent in the narrative is a crucial part of his positive inten-
tion of justifying the ways of God to man, but any effort by a finite human, even
one as gifted as Milton, to represent a Deity who, according to Milton’s theology
possesses infinite wisdom, grace, and power, is bound to disappoint. When we
juxtapose that problem with Milton’s successful representation of Satan, then
it is not surprising that William Blake and others would suggest that Milton is
of the devil’s party without knowing it—even as we can see that the suggestion
magnifies the side effect of Milton’s choice to have God speak in His own voice
and neglects the underlying reasons for that choice.

Influenced both by Popper’s emphasis on the need to test hypotheses by
doing more than seeking to confirm them and by his belief in the power of
form, Rader proposes another test for the adequacy of an interpretive hypothesis:
whether it can explain why critics have disagreed about a work the way they do.
Such disagreements for Rader point not to the insurmountable incompatibility
of different readings (or different interpretive communities) but to the difference
between direct and indirect facts of literary experience—and to the desirability of
a hypothesis being able to explain both kinds. A direct fact of experience is one
that just about all readers register, such as the difference between the author–
speaker relationship in the expressive lyric (the speaker in “Tintern Abbey” is
Wordsworth himself) and in the dramatic monologue (the speaker in “My Last
Duchess” is a character wholly distinct from Browning). An indirect fact is one
implied by critical disagreement. A given interpreter may want to take a clear
position on one side of a critical controversy, but her case for that side will be
stronger if it can also explain either the textual source or the critical assump-
tions that give rise to the disagreement. Thus, for example, critics disagree about
whether Defoe ironizes Moll Flanders’s narration, especially when she reports
her conversion at the end of the novel. Rather than simply weighing in on one
side of the controversy, Rader poses the challenging question: “what peculiar
structural quality of *Moll Flanders* causes it, alone among eighteenth-century novels, to be the object of such a controversy?" (33). By hypothesizing that *Moll* is a pseudofactual prose fiction rather than an action/fantasy novel, Rader not only advances a strong position in the debate—irony is not possible because the pseudofactual form does not have an authorial level—but also explains why the debate should exist: those who see irony are treating Defoe's narrative as if it were an action/fantasy novel, yet the narrative itself resists their efforts to establish consensus about the nature and extent of that irony.

More generally, Rader's theoretical discussions and his interpretive practice make his contributions to hermeneutics cogent and compelling. His approach does not offer a simple, straightforward discovery procedure, and it does not replace the art of interpretation with a science of achieving certitude. Instead, in emphasizing that any interpretation is always a hypothesis and in developing criteria for testing hypotheses, he offers a vision of interpretation that is simultaneously open-minded and rigorous.

**Responses to Rader's Work: A Brief Sketch**

Rader's contributions have generated and influenced research projects in the third generation of the Chicago school and even in critics who would not claim to be part of the tradition. Furthermore, Rader's work has been influential not only among those whom Rader directly taught and mentored, but also among those who read his articles or heard his spotlessly finished lectures at conferences. Books by Rader's own students directly inflected by his theories include Laura Brown's *English Dramatic Form, 1660–1760: An Essay in Generic History* (1981), Harry Shaw's *The Forms of Historical Fiction: Walter Scott and His Successors* (1983) and *Narrating Reality: Austen, Scott, Eliot* (1999), Adena Rosmarin's *The Power of Genre* (1985), George Haggerty's *Gothic Fiction/Gothic Form* (1989), and Dorothy J. Hale's *Social Formalism: The Novel in Theory from Henry James to the Present* (1998). But the list of books by scholar-critics who have been influenced by Rader's theories without his direct mentorship is even longer. A partial list would include Michael Boardman's *Defoe and the Uses of Narrative* (1983), Walter Cohen's *Drama of a Nation: Public Theater in Renaissance England and Spain* (1985), James L. Battersby's *Paradigms Regained: Pluralism and the Practice of Criticism* (1991), David Richter's *The Progress of Romance: Literary Historiography and the Gothic Novel* (1996), Michael S. Kearns's *Rhetorical Narratology* (1999), and all of James Phelan's books in narrative theory: *Worlds from Words: A Theory of Language in Fiction* (1981), *Reading People, Reading Plots: Character, Progression, and the Interpretation of Narrative* (1989), *Narrative...*

Not surprisingly, there are many critics who have taken up Rader’s work in order to disagree with it, and in some cases, we have the advantage of Rader’s replies. In elucidating Rader’s ideas about the history of the English novel, we discussed his dissatisfaction with Michael McKeon’s history because it does not do justice to the generic innovation Richardson produced with *Pamela*. McKeon, for his part, objects that Rader overstates Richardson’s innovation, fails to pay sufficient attention to the prehistory that makes *Pamela* possible, and undervalues the extraformal conditions that make the emergence of the novel possible. Rader replies that his account of *Pamela* is designed to explain what Richardson’s contemporaries themselves identified as a new mode of writing and that the prehistory and the extraformal developments are necessary and influential but neither sufficient nor determinative of Richardson’s achievement.

Rader’s “Fact, Theory, and Literary Explanation” generated debates about the relationship among general literary theories, particular hypotheses about specific works, and the ways in which facts internal and external to the specific texts might be used to validate or invalidate these hypotheses. Jay Schleusener presents two main objections to Rader’s use of the work of Karl Popper. First, Schleusener argues that Rader fails to distinguish between general theories and hypotheses about particular matters of fact and fails to do justice to the asymmetry between falsifiability, which applies only to general theories, and to verification, which applies to both. Consequently, Schleusener contends, Rader also fails to distinguish among critical misapprehensions (more likely to derive from a general theory), unintended negative consequences, and artistic defects (both more likely to be parts of particular hypotheses). Thus, we cannot know whether a particular problematic textual phenomenon is an unintended negative consequence, an artistic defect, or the product of a critical misapprehension. In addition, Rader mistakenly seeks falsification for interpretations. Second, Schleusener asserts that Popper’s ideas about scientific knowledge and proof were designed to be used about natural facts that are the objects of scientific inquiry rather than about human creations such as histories and works of art. Consequently, Rader’s effort to use Popper’s ideas as a guide to hypothesis construction and hypothesis testing is doomed to inadequacy.

Rader responds to these objections by clarifying his use of Popper and by extending the argument of “Fact, Theory.” Rader deals with the issue of applying Popper’s views to literature and criticism by noting that Popper himself was open to extending his views beyond the realm of science. In addition, Rader contends that he has sought to be responsive to the distinctiveness of literary
experience rather than to assume that literature and nature were wholly equivalent. As for Schleusener’s first objection, Rader agrees with Schleusener’s point about the asymmetry between falsifiability and verification but insists on the crucial role of explaining problematic facts in testing both general theories and particular hypotheses: “the most relevant facts are those problematic ones on which earlier theories can be shown to founder, as these are subsumed in more comprehensive theories which lead to the discovery or appreciation of new facts and new problems” (“Explaining” 903). Then in order to demonstrate that his approach is able to distinguish between critical misapprehensions, artistic defects, and unintended negative consequences, Rader turns to concrete cases. We will summarize his treatment of one case in order to clarify his proposal about the controversial concept of unintended negative consequences.

In “Fact, Theory,” Rader had introduced the concept by means of a simple story, told in an office manager’s account book entries for a single month, of that manager’s hiring, seduction, and sudden firing of a stenographer who starts out as the “new stenographer,” becomes “Mary,” and ends as the “stupid stenographer” for whom the manager pays doctor’s expenses.

The audience’s pleasure in the story depends on making rapid inferences about the developing affair from the brief account book entries, culminating in the conclusions that the doctor’s expenses are for an abortion and that the final entry, “Ad for male stenographer,” indicates that the manager is determined not to make the same mistake twice. But the inference about the abortion overlooks the fact that the stenographer could not know within the limited timeframe of the story that she was pregnant by the manager. In order to preserve the pleasure, we overlook that fact and overlook the way in which it makes the story even less realistic than it purports to be. Thus, that fact is an unintended negative consequence of the positive intention of telling this efficient joke at the manager’s expense.

Rader contrasts this hypothesis with one in which the fact of the physiological impossibility is a positive feature, one that combines with the fact of the stenographer’s being named Mary, to produce an analysis of the story as an inversion of the myth of the Virgin Mary. This Mary is far from the pure and innocent mother of the Christian Savior but instead a calculating woman who outwits the manager and who is unable to give birth.

In his reply to Schleusener, Rader argues that this alternative reading is an example of a critical misapprehension based on an overreading of a single fact, the appearance of the name “Mary” and the neglect of other elements of our experience. This hypothesis fails to explain the common response to the story as a witty joke and fails to account for such facts as the story’s being written as an account book. In addition, the key fact undergirding this hypothesis, that
the stenographer’s name is Mary, can also be explained by Rader’s interpretation as being consistent with the story’s interest in efficiency and generality: it needs common names, and the anonymous author chooses Mary not to allegorize the stenographer but because it is so common as a result of its being the name of the Virgin.

Stanley Fish responded to “Fact, Theory” in part by defending himself against Rader’s attack on Fish’s interpretive paradigm of “affective stylistics,” a paradigm that Fish was soon to subsume under his broader theory of interpretive communities, and in part by objecting that Rader’s reasoning is circular: “Rader presents . . . the ‘independently specifiable facts’ whose existence he is supposedly proving; but in fact he is assuming them.” (Fish’s theory of interpretive communities effectively denies the existence of independently specifiable facts, so he would make a similar argument about any critic who does not agree that interpretive strategies determine textual features.) Rader responds by clarifying that he is not the source of the facts and so cannot be accurately described as assuming them. Instead, the facts are either direct or indirect, either in the texts or objectively part of the history of their interpretation. Rader also notes that, ironically, it was Fish’s own celebrated interpretation of God in *Surprised by Sin* that Rader used to explain how “unintended consequences” arise and how they work.

In *Act and Quality*, Charles Altieri raises a very different objection to “Fact, Theory.” He argues that defining artistic wholes in terms of principles of coherence “creates the danger that [Rader] may purchase coherence at the cost of ignoring the complex situating required to account fully for the multiple levels of meaning and the loose edges of authorial involvement in the mimetic world we find in the richest literary texts” (260). Although Rader does not respond directly to Altieri, we think that he would be sympathetic to Altieri’s concerns. Rader in fact often discovers in the genesis of particular texts some obvious or covert autobiographical impulse engaged within the fiction, and he was always aware of the many jobs (of self-justification, confession, revenge) that authors expect their texts to perform. Rader’s essay on *Barchester Towers*, published here for the first time, for example, explains why the comic form Trollope adopted required the antagonist to Archdeacon Grantly to be a contemptible character whose defeat we expect, but also explains, based on a reading of Trollope’s autobiography, the psychological reasons why in constructing Obadiah Slope the author might have given him the particular traits he did. And Rader’s account of “My Last Duchess,” while making sense of the poem as a discourse by the Duke within a fully coherent imagined world conceived as external to both poet and reader, does not reject the possibility that Browning’s personal motivations might have included a desire to expose the sort of brutal domestic tyranny under which his wife had grown up. Rader could have given a similar
account of the discourse in “The Bishop Orders His Tomb,” whose imagined world within Renaissance Rome intentionally comments, as Browning’s correspondence with his publisher reveals, on the religious scene in England at the time of the Oxford Movement. But in all cases, Rader would extend the analysis to consider whether the complex situating is accommodated within an overall positive constructive intention or leads either to unintended negative consequences or actual artistic defects.

James Kincaid, in “Coherent Readers, Incoherent Texts,” offers a stronger version of Altieri’s objection. “But what if [complex texts] are not [coherent]? What if most texts, at least, are, in fact, demonstrably incoherent, presenting us not only with multiple organizing patterns but with organizing patterns that are competing, logically inconsistent . . . a structure of mutually competing coherences? Instead of a single pattern, we are presented with many incompatible competitors, all of which are supported but none of which is, by itself, adequate” (783).

This is a genuinely interesting issue that exposes one of the fault lines in late twentieth-century literary theory, as many critics tended to regard coherence as either a necessary condition for literary achievement or an outdated critical ideal blind to the indeterminacy of language, the inevitable psychic conflicts within authors, and the force of competing cultural ideologies on literary production. Rader, however, while valuing coherence, does not assume it a priori. Indeed, as our earlier discussions indicate, Rader is well aware that many texts do have elements that work against their overall coherence, even as he stops far short of making incoherence the defining feature of most texts. Rader argues, for example, that Sheldon Sacks failed to build into his theory an expression of the significance of the fact that, though the action structure requires for its efficacy a transfusion of extraformal values, it can be overloaded and unbalanced by an ethical or conceptual input that is not fully absorbed into the functioning organic action structure of the book. [Sacks’s] formulation is designed not to take careful notice, so to speak, when the affective force of an action work—the tension of the caring—suffers for the sake of some other element. . . . The suggestion I would make is that the action form involves indeed a pure principle of construction but one which is explanatorily more useful if we think of it as an abstract and in practice malleable one which can accommodate (at an affective price) many extraformal intentions which the creative freedom of writers may bring to it. (“Literary Theoretical Contribution” 189)

Rader here is explaining the incoherence of Fielding’s last novel, *Amelia.* *Amelia* is perhaps Fielding’s weakest novel, but it seems clear that some of the greatest novels of the nineteenth century—including *Moby Dick* and *War and Peace*—
have the same sorts of problem with coherence that Rader described in *Amelia*. Rader was careful, in ways that Sacks and other first- and second-generation neo-Aristotelians were not, to register this incoherence, in terms of the ways in which the action form absorbs didactic intent while losing some of its “affective force.” At the same time, he, like Sacks, celebrated unity more enthusiastically than incoherence and chose his texts accordingly. It is not an accident that Rader’s essay on Victorian “baggy monsters” discusses *Bleak House*, whose apparent incoherence is a rhetorical strategy masking a more fundamental unity, rather than, say, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, a text of the same period that never quite achieves a comparable coherence.

If Kincaid argues that formalists invariably find form, that Rader allows too much force to the framing effect of generic forms to resolve the actual incoherence of literary texts, the Marxist critic Michael Sprinker argues, similarly, that Rader’s literary history of the novel accurately describes the changing literary forms but takes too little account of the actual history against whose background the novel developed and flourished. In “Fiction and Ideology” Sprinker admires Rader’s formal analysis of *Lord Jim* as far as it goes. As noted above, Rader views Conrad’s narrative as an exemplar of the novel in the period between the Victorian “baggy monsters” and the “simular novel” of Joyce, Proust, and Woolf, a period, Rader claims, when the conflict of the individual with society “is imaged with reference to the sense of a nature, a cosmic trans-social reality which offers an over-arching perspective to which a sense of individual destiny within society can be referred” (103). Sprinker agrees that Rader has accurately caught Conrad’s formal intention, to create a quasi-tragic action hinging on Jim’s assumption of responsibility for the consequences of his key mistake during his time governing Patusan. But Sprinker then argues that Rader has analyzed only the “manifest content” of *Lord Jim*, its ideology in the sense of “false consciousness,” missing the latent content revealed in Fredric Jameson’s analysis of Conrad’s novel, about the contradictions inherent in European imperialism heading into its final half century.

Although Rader never responded directly to Sprinker, we can extrapolate from his reply to McKeon that he would resist Sprinker’s tendency to explain Conrad’s achievement as the result of forces wholly independent of Conrad’s agency. For Rader, Sprinker—and Jameson—do a good job of explaining the sociohistorical context in which Conrad wrote, but they are not able to explain adequately the specific formal achievement of his novel because they do not give a sufficient role to Conrad’s individual agency in shaping his particular response to that context.

In a recent reflection on Rader’s work on the history of the English novel, Frances Ferguson returns to his debate with McKeon less in the interest of
taking sides and more in the interest of using it to identify what distinguishes Rader’s position from those of most other historians of the novel. Ferguson emphasizes four interrelated points: (1) Where other historians adopt a gradualist approach to describing the novel’s emergence, tracing lines of resemblance among ever-earlier precursors to *Pamela*, Rader views Richardson’s novel as the inauguration of a radically different form, one dependent on the dual operation of the narrative and authorial planes. (2) Where other historians regard the novel’s emergence as “a precipitate of a larger socio-economic transformation” (91), Rader views that emergence as the result of Richardson’s insight into the formal possibilities of epistolary fiction and of his readers implicitly recognizing that he had created something new. In this way, other historians tell a “history from without” whereas Rader tells a “history from within.” (3) Where other historians link the march of history with the development of the novel, Rader offers a view of the novel as moving both forward (as later novelists expand upon possibilities opened up by earlier ones) and backward (as some developments significantly change our view of earlier forms, e.g., in the way that Joyce’s similar novel sheds new light on Defoe’s false true stories). (4) These emphases in turn point toward Rader’s concern with the novel as a written genre. Rader’s emphases on form and literariness that lead to his “history from within” also entail an effort to tell the history of a genre by “isolating and identifying its technological resources.”

Ferguson’s essay highlights in its own way some of what we have been saying here about the distinctive quality of Rader’s history of the novel. From our perspective, she underrepresents his interest in the interactions between the ideological strictures of a given age and literary form, and we find her claims about Rader’s interest in the novel as a written genre to be a suggestive extrapolation rather than a central feature of his critical project. But all in all Ferguson’s essay testifies to the continuing relevance of Rader’s work, even as it demonstrates one strong critic engaging with another.

Another such demonstration can be found in Steven Knapp’s recent assessment of Rader’s concern with the immanent intention underlying any literary form. In a sense, Knapp offers a fresh and more nuanced version of Kincaid’s case about the inevitability of incoherence. Knapp nicely recapitulates Rader’s position that the intuitive act of responding to a work entails the intuitive apprehension of its underlying purpose. But Knapp focuses on Rader’s admission of flaws in various works—the difficulty of perceiving Defoe’s presence in *Moll Flanders*; the mingling of dramatic monologue and mask lyric elements in “Fra Lippo Lippi”; the unintended negative consequence of Pamela’s writing-to-the-moment making her appear to be a hypocrite—and then flips their significance. Where Rader sees these flaws in relation to a larger immanent
intention, Knapp argues that they are “moments in which the formal principle, the ‘immanent’ intention, points beyond itself to that which exceeds or evades its control” (111). Furthermore for Knapp, it is moments such as these that define the literary. “Although they disrupt the formal perfection defined by what Rader regards as the work’s immanent intention, such moments of confusion are themselves still formalizable as objects of literary interest. Indeed, in the tradition of aesthetics associated with the literature of the sublime, exactly these kinds of moments become the objects of literary interest par excellence” (111).

Knapp’s case reveals as much—or more—about his own theoretical commitments as it does about fundamental problems with Rader’s, as the progress of his argument indicates. After carefully reconstructing Rader’s accounts of immanent intention and flaws in the specific works, Knapp jumps from the three cases to the generalization about all literature. This induction will make sense to anyone who already sides with Knapp’s view about the literary being located in the escape from authorial control, but it will be less persuasive to anyone who does not share that view, particularly anyone who also puts into the balance Rader’s insightful accounts of works that do not exhibit such defects (e.g., “My Last Duchess” rather than “Fra Lippo Lippi,” Pride and Prejudice rather than Pamela). Even as we counter Knapp’s argument in this way, we remain aware that he—and others who begin with different first principles from Rader’s—will have their own rejoinders.

The essays of Ralph W. Rader, then, are a rich resource for anyone who wants to engage with any of the following ambitious issues: the concept of form, the genres of the lyric and the novel, the literary dimensions of literary history, the distinction between fiction and nonfiction, the evaluation of literary quality, and the nature and tests of general theories and of interpretations. Even more significant, when we study Rader’s essays in the aggregate, we can discern a very striking figure in the collective carpet. What we find is a rich and coherent theory of literary form, purpose, and value, one that connects Rader’s interest in form not only to a rigorous—and persuasively demonstrated—method of interpretation but also to our collective efforts as finite human beings to come to terms with our life in this world.

Notes

1. Kincaid’s argument begins by contrasting other groups of critics who find order and chaos in literary texts, e.g., Wayne Booth and M. H. Abrams with Roland Barthes and Stanley Fish, and only later settles down to argue with Ralph Rader’s case in that our perceptions of a literary text’s genre tends to limit and control the way possible ambiguities are perceived.

2. In a similar way, David Richter explicated the incoherence of Goldsmith’s The Vicar
of Wakefield as a comedy that, about halfway through, becomes an apologue as the Vicar becomes a Christian version of the biblical Job. See *Fable’s End* (171–77).

3. In *The Political Unconscious*, Jameson sees the novel as demonstrating “the demoralizing effect of Jim’s discovery of Sartrean freedom on the ideological myths that allow a governing class to function and to assert its . . . legitimacy” (qtd. in Sprinker 243).
Editors’ note: In most cases, we have cited the editions of the works that Rader himself used. In a few cases, however, we have, for ease of reference or purposes of clarity, used more recent editions (e.g., Daniel Defoe’s *Moll Flanders*, Jane Austen’s *Emma*).


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