CHAPTER TWO
Theories of Literary History

Histories Manqués

What David Perkins decried in 1992 as "encyclopedic history" was decried in 1946 by R. G. Collingwood as "scissors-and-paste history" and in 1967 by R. S. Crane as "atomistic" history. In all three the model for the narrative is the "life and works": there is no history aside from bio-bibliography. A true encyclopedia can generate enough bio-bibliographies to attain the status of a massive book, but whether the work contains one life-and-works or a thousand, a new chapter is begun for each figure. The result can be informative and insightful or banal, depending on the quality of the commentator. With as astute a critic and scholar as Robert Kiely doing an atomistic history of the Gothic novel, the result, The Romantic Novel in England, can be very fine indeed.

A slightly different version of "scissors-and-paste" literary history might be called "thematic" history, in which a single idea or a small set of ideas is called into play to account for the differentiation of a subgenre from other contemporary texts. Devendra Varma's The Gothic Flame, for example, chooses the quality of the "numinous" as the differentia between Gothic and non-Gothic novels of the 1764–1824 period.

One difference between atomistic and thematic histories is that the former variety views writers primarily as individuals, the latter as part of a group that has contributed to a subgenre. The major similarity between them is that neither posits any mechanism for change. Atomistic historians tend to emphasize individual influences; thematic historians tend to minimize even this mechanism, since it is unusual for an entire subgenre to show the same, or even a similar, pattern of individual influence. In both atomistic and thematic history, history has no motor. In thematic history, literature essentially does not change: the causes of variation are accidental and
Theories of Literary History

adventitious, but the genres or kinds are like Platonic essences and continue in their mode indefinitely. These are essentially modes of literary criticism rather than literary history, ways of grouping texts. They avoid as far as possible raising specifically historical questions. This chapter deals instead with three varieties of literary history in which at least some mechanism for historical change is posited, and in which literary change is presumed to follow fixed, or at least regular and thus predictable patterns, rules, laws of development.

At first glance it may be hard to discern the attraction of atomistic or thematic literary history. Why would a literary historian want to evade trying to understand mechanisms for change? One possible reason may be precisely the disbelief in or distaste for the notion that the creation of literature—or any other humanistic activity—can be rule governed. One would rather attribute literary change to chance or contingency, which by definition cannot be understood, than view human behavior as mechanical or law governed. While this view may be a mere prejudice, it may also result from a misunderstanding of the nature of contingency.

Perhaps there has always been a conflict between those (like Aristotle) who find contingency at the basis of history, and those (like Hegel and Marx) who seek for law and regularity in patterns of explanation. The conflict is not resolvable because both are right. They are both right because what we call “contingency” is an artifact of the intersection between two systems of “laws.” A contingency is something that occurs according to a law we aren’t paying attention to. For a biologist studying evolution on a Pacific island after the eruption of a volcano, the adaptive behavior (or the extinction) of organisms follows genetic and ecological laws. The laws are statistical—no one can tell whether an individual organism will survive—and they operate in the aggregate. On the other hand, for the biologist the eruption itself was a purely contingent, random event. But for a geologist, the eruption was not random but rule governed. Geologists wish they knew those rules better than they now do, but they understand at least that a system of probabilities governs which areas of the earth’s surface are likely to be volcanic, and which are unlikely. On the other hand, a fluctuation in the sun’s heat that affected the development of a mountain range would strike the geologist as a contingent event. But for the astronomer, that fluctuation might be a predictable event according to the laws of stellar evolution.

It follows that those who attack the Marxists for their failure to predict history are just as misguided as the Marxists who offered to predict it. The social and economic laws and patterns Marx perceived are indeed useful,
and we ignore them at our peril. Nevertheless the intersection with these laws of other systems of law and probability is likely to interfere with (and is eventually certain to falsify) any long-term set of predictions.

For those who would propose purely formal sets of laws for the development of literary genres, the problem is that historical factors external to literature sometimes set up blank walls into which this development runs. There are obvious cases: English drama hit a blank wall in 1642 with the closing of the theaters, and so did satiric political farce in 1737 with the passage of the Licensing Act. There are also walls that are less blank, as when the arrival of a new technology condemns aesthetic forms to lingering desuetude. For instance, certain kinds of physical film comedy declined after 1927 with the arrival of sound and the possibility of comedy that combined rapid-fire dialogue with visual humor. The Keystone Kops did not cease to exist, and Charlie Chaplin made masterpieces, but both became vestigial.

There are other shifts in form that clearly arrive as a result of splits in the general ideology. This happened in the economically strained 1920s and 1930s within the detective story, when a split emerged between the classic British school (exemplified by Agatha Christie) and the hard-boiled American school (Dashiell Hammett), which developed very different stock characters and plot devices. The ideological split turned on whether one considered a social order based on property protected by police as the foundation of civilization or as a deeply corrupt bargain. Since around 1975, the pure puzzle and the hard-boiled school have merged to a great extent, thanks to a new consensus that both society and the police are at least slightly corrupt. Similarly, feminism has produced not only female detectives like Sue Grafton’s Kinsey Milhone and Sara Paretsky’s V. I. Warshawski but also feminized ones like Robert Parker’s Spenser, while the multicultural movement has produced ethnically differentiated detectives in and outside the police, such as Walter Mosley’s Easy Rawlins and Tony Hillerman’s Joe Leaphorn.

Converging Theories

The three schools that I would like to discuss in this chapter—they surely do not exhaust the field—are formalism (both the Russian variety and the neo-Aristotelian version that continues into our own day), Marxist literary history, and reception theory. Both the Russian formalists and the neo-Aristotelians have traditionally emphasized the internal factors in literary
change, while both Marxists and the reception theorists of the school of Konstanz have emphasized the external factors. But what is interesting is how the three schools have converged. At the outset, all three predicated a relatively "pure" version of history that negated and dismissed the others. But contemporary formalists, Marxists, and reception theorists share a tendency to move toward the central, eclectic position, which would posit that literature changes for both internal and external reasons.

A theory of internal change—such as the one associated with Yuri Tynyanov and the Russian formalists—presumes that texts are written to imitate, copy, and otherwise duplicate other texts, to reply to other texts, to complement other texts, to extend and complete other texts, to negate other texts. After each individual breakthrough, a space is created that gets filled up by other less revolutionary works. After a while the space gets crowded and the time becomes ripe for a new direction to be taken, though no one can necessarily predict which direction.

But there are also external reasons for literary change. One external feature is the audience. Audiences are not static. Partly they change in demographic composition. The group of readers (or theatergoers) changes, and with them, the interests of the group. Or audiences change internally: they come to want something different out of their texts or experiences. (An audience may want to be challenged—or somewhat later, it may want to be soothed and reassured.) Another external factor is the publisher and all the other intermediaries between the author and audience. The conditions of publication may favor literary experiment at one time but not at others. Then there are broader but more distant movements: social and political changes—changes in the very shape of society—that alter the form and content of texts. These operate over the longer term and over broad spectra of texts.

To say that literary-historical theory shows a convergence toward a central, eclectic position is not to say that there is a homogenized consensus on literary history. Several factors prevent this. Of these the most common, though perhaps the most tractable, and even possibly avoidable, is the general tendency to argue with opponents as though opponents were taking more extreme positions than they are. Whether poets follow Harold Bloom's model and engage in misprision of other poets, significant forebears, in order to clear space for themselves to operate, it seems pretty clear that literary critics and historians engage in the sport. This is why Hans Robert Jauss argued with the Marxists as though they were still tied to a "reflection" theory of literature, and continued to do so long after his errors
had been pointed out to him. Similarly, John Frow (a post-Althusserian Marxist) reads the Russian formalists as far more tied to change coming exclusively out of formalistic patterns than they ever were, and certainly more so than they became, and attacks Jauss for not carrying a party card. R. S. Crane accuses the older “vulgar” Marxists of oversimplifications that they avoided, while Ralph Rader accuses Michael McKeon of opinions he never held. In an economic universe, it is understandable that anyone with what he hopes is a new idea is going to emphasize differences from competing products, and consumers of literary theory can grow as cynical about self-advertising in this area as any other, as aware that brand X has something to be said for it.

Distortions aside, much of the disagreement among these groups of individuals is genuine, in fact genuinely intractable, and is not going to respond to any amount of rhetorical therapy. For instance: Given the structure of their assumptions, Chicago formalists will always tend to emphasize the role of individual contributions within genres, while Marxists will always tend to suppress this and treat the individual as only a member of a class or, more subtly, as the sum of his or her various “insertions into ideology”—a series of class characteristics that, sufficiently refined, will almost uniquely place the individual as different from other writers of the time, while nevertheless not allowing him or her any purely individual characteristics at all. Reception theorists, who like the Marxists view the work of literature as part of a socioeconomic system, will tend to stress the role of consumption over that of production, though both are obviously equally necessary. The point is that each system posits a somewhat different role to the various vectors that mediate and cause literary change. This gives rise to differences in emphasis, and also to alternative explanations of phenomena. In the rest of this chapter I discuss the three versions of literary history and the way in which they have converged toward overlapping versions of historical causality.

**Russian Formalism and Literary Evolution**

The formalist group (OPAYAZ) began with the task of what we would today call literary analysis, and it came to literary history relatively late in its brief vogue as a critical movement. At first, the primary issue was what literature was, and how it worked, rather than how it was created and came to be what it was. The basic literary principle enunciated by Viktor Shklovsky, is that of defamiliarization (ostranenie): the function of literature is to estrange
Theories of Literary History

If the idea of the literary was the important feature of formalism, nevertheless literary history, or as it is called here literary evolution, rapidly becomes one of the main concerns of the school. There is no attempt to account for the coming-into-existence of a particular work—its origins or genesis, especially its origins as something caused by a particular individual. It is rather the collective fate of genres that concerns the formalists. As Yuri Tynyanov put it, "The problem of the evolution and the shift of literary phenomena is being replaced by the problem of the psychological genesis of each phenomenon and instead of literature we are urged to study the personality of the artist. Yet clearly the genesis of each phenomenon is one problem and its evolutionary significance, its place in the evolutionary series, is another" (Tynyanov, "The Literary Fact" 12-13). For the formalists, the older modes of literary history were essentially unexplanatory because they had never established any strong sense of what made a particular text into literature in a given age: without any systematic notion of the literary, the only causal mechanisms available were what Boris Eikhenbaum in "Literature and Literary Life" called "the naive theory of 'inheritance' and 'influence' and hence naive biographism based on individual psychology" (52).

The formalists considered that at any given moment a national literature was not a collection of individual works but rather a system of genres. As Tynyanov puts it, "It is clear that in literature there is no such thing as a separate work, but that the separate work belongs to the system of literature, correlates with it in genre and style . . . that a work has a function in the literary system of a given period" ("Ode" 48-49, quoted in Shukman 41). Any synchronous study would reveal that the system was hierarchical—one genre was supreme over all the others—and that the others tended to exist in dialectical relations with one another.

In mid-eighteenth-century England, for example, the highest honors were given to poetry in general and to philosophical poetry ("Essay on Man," "The Vanity of Human Wishes") over satirical poetry (Dunciad, "London"), and satirical over pastoral and elegiac. Such a preference is not constant over time. (The pastoral mode had been in vogue at the beginning of the eighteenth century, and it would return to vogue at the turn of the nineteenth as well.) This constant conflict over hierarchy, according to Tynyanov, is a natural feature of literary systems: "A literary period, literary contemporaneity, is by no means a static system in contrast with the
dynamic evolving historical series. In contemporaneity, the same historical conflict between different levels and formations is going on as in the multiperiod historical series" ("The Literary Fact" 11).

Literary genres can come into existence for a variety of reasons. Either a form that had existed but was not considered "literary" is placed into the system of what the age denominates as literature, or a form diverges from another form. Once genres are established they can never actually go out of existence—they always remain as a possible model for new work—but they can fall into desuetude. Yuri Striedter has summarized some of the formalists' studies of this: "For the Formalists the epoch . . . is a system with a characteristic intention (ustanovka) and corresponding dominants. Genres particularly suited to expressing this intention advance to the head of the hierarchy of genres and become the dominant ones of the epoch. . . . In the 1820s, for example, the old genre of the heroic poem becomes, in the version of the Byronic poem, the dominant genre of Russian Romanticism" (Literary Structure 64).

In discussing the movement of systems, the dethroning of one dominant genre by another, the formalists were quite clear that difference was more important than similarity. The succession of genres was not a clear line of influence, with one dominant passing on the position to another within its range of filiation, but rather of divergence. Shklovsky uses the following metaphor: "When literary schools change, the succession passes not from father to son, but from uncle to nephew" (28). Exactly how far one can take this metaphor may not be clear (other formalists use the similar metaphor "grandfather to grandson"). But Shklovsky seems to be suggesting that the dominant of one era is not an obviously predictable development of the dominant school of the former era. In the period to which this study relates, it might be the principle behind the fact that the historical novel of Scott was the heir of the historical romance we call the Gothic. They share a family resemblance—the avoidance of contemporary realism, the chronotope (in Bakhtin's terminology) of an exotic time/place—but have a significant difference: realism vs. fantasy.

Shklovsky goes on to claim that

every new literary school is a revolution, something like the emergence of a new class. But of course this is only an analogy. The defeated line is not wiped out; it does not cease to exist. It is merely dislodged from the peak and goes down to the fallow and can be resurrected once more: it remains a permanent pretender to the throne. In reality, of course, things are complicated by the fact that the new leader
Theories of Literary History

is not usually simply the restorer of an earlier form, but is enriched by features from other younger schools and, for that matter, by features inherited from its predecessor on the throne, though these now play a subservient role. (227–28)

One can see the application of this sort of analysis to the relation between the historical novel of Scott and the Gothic, particularly the fact that intruded stories and legends within the Waverley novels were in the mode of the Gothic tale. And the resurgence of the Gothic mode within the sensation novel in the 1860s, and its recrudescence in the last decade of the nineteenth century, show it really was a “permanent pretender to the throne.” We shall be outlining some of the “avuncular”—or as I prefer to term them, “modal”—literary-historical relations of the Gothic in chapter 6.

One example of the formalist approach to the succession of genres is in Yuri Tynyanov’s essay on the ode as an oral form. The causal mechanism for literary evolution, in the earlier stages of formalism, was purely internal. Here is Tynyanov’s telescoped version of it:

In analysing literary evolution we come up against the following stages: 1) the principle of automatization is dialectically opposed by the constructional principle; 2) then comes the application of it—the constructional principle seeks the easiest mode of application; 3) it spreads over the largest possible range of phenomena; 4) it becomes automatized and brings into action opposite constructional principles. (“The Literary Fact” 17)

Tynyanov’s sense of the motor behind formal succession is that as a genre becomes dominant within an era it develops a system of conventions—plot devices, character types, tropes of language—that can be thought of as characteristic of the genre. The genre, as a dominant, then attracts more and more writers to it, and the writers attracted become less and less creative and more and more imitative. Seeking originality within the traditional range of the genre, the genre expands to fill as much territory as it can, as any successful organism expands to fill as many niches as possible in its potential habitat. Furthermore, the genre becomes coarsened: the effects that worked before have become familiar, and it is necessary to deliver stronger sensations to provide the same literary impact. As the genre expands, then, it is held together essentially by its conventions; it thus becomes automatized, and the automatic—as Shklovsky had said—is the mark of the nonliterary. A genre that has reached this point thus becomes ripe for being toppled from the dominant position: a new genre becomes dominant, and the process contin-
ues all over again within the new dominant. (As we shall see in chapter 4, each step of this process is quite visible in the vogue of the Gothic novel.)

Thus far, the formalist perspective is simply one of literary evolution within a generic system. In effect it predicts that "nothing fails like success." Regardless of the ideology of the age or the role of the reader, successful genres expand until they become automatized and then cease to be successful. Around 1927, however, in the course of its debate against the Marxist aestheticians, formalism began to include questions about exterior causes of literary evolution. One of the clearest perspectives is provided by the Tynyanov–Roman Jakobson collaboration, "Problems in the Study of Literature and Language":

The history of literature (art) being simultaneous with other historical series, is characterized, as is each of these series, by an involved complex of structural laws. Without an elucidation of these laws, it is impossible to establish in a scientific manner the correlation between the literary series and other historical series. . . . However, these laws do not allow us to explain the tempo of evolution, or the chosen path of evolution, when several, theoretically possible evolutionary paths are given. This is owing to the fact that the immanent laws of literary (linguistic) evolution form an indeterminate equation; although they admit only a limited number of possible solutions, they do not necessarily specify a unique solution. The question of the specific choice of path, or at least of the dominant, can be solved only by means of the correlation between the literary series and the other historical series. . . . This correlation (a system of systems) has its own structural laws, which must be submitted to investigation.

As Roman Jakobson's participation suggests, this essay is protostructuralist: it suggests that human life is a system of systems, each law driven. Nevertheless, unlike the most usual structuralist position, there is no suggestion that each mode of human activity is reducible to the laws of linguistics. Instead, Tynyanov and Jakobson suggest that each system "has its own structural laws" and that so do the correlations between these semi-independent systems.

Furthermore, there is even a suggestion that the influence of these various series has a different weight at different periods of literary history. According to a minor member of the formalists, Lev Ginzburg, "We may speak of 'formal' periods when a thoroughly literarized theme lives and alters according to some kind of immanent laws; and of ideological periods when theme is dictated by an external series and discussed and evaluated according to the laws of these series" (92).
Theories of Literary History

This recomplication of what begins as a simple, dialectical process of literary evolution also brings the Russian formalists closer to the Marxist critics who, in the Soviet Union at least, became their heirs. If historicism replaced formalism in the Soviet Union, the situation in America was the reverse. Formalism (both the New Critical and the Chicago varieties) flourished in the middle third of the century, displacing in interest a theoretically naive historical scholarship. R. S. Crane himself began as a historical scholar before he became the chief theorist of Chicago formalism, and he spent his life trying to reconcile these aspects of his philological career.9

Neo-Aristotelian Literary History: Crane, Rader, and the Theory of Emergent Forms

Ronald Crane had begun as a philological scholar and had developed into something of a historian of ideas long before he instituted his formalist theory of literature, and he was aware that literary history is always more complicated than any description of it can possibly be. Having done such a wide variety of practical work, Crane did not want to leave anything out, to dismiss or bracket important historical factors such as those he had investigated in the most traditional scholarly ways at the beginning of his career. Indeed, writing *Critical and Historical Principles of Literary History* may have been for him a way of putting his working life into some sort of order, of coming to terms with the relationship between his work as philologist, historian of ideas, critic, and theorist.10

Crane assumes that literary works of art are constructions in which a literary form dictates choices of actions, characters, and philosophical thought, along with language and devices of disclosure (narrative or dramatic technique), all engaged so as to effect a formal end. An analysis of these relations is the "constructional" aspect of the text. There is also a "preconstructional" aspect: the work's origins, sources, and analogues. For a writer working within a given genre, the preexisting tradition offers a storehouse of literary conventions (familiar plot devices, character types, verbal strategies, narrative conventions) to which the author looks in composing his or her original work. On the other side, there is a "postconstructional" aspect of a work, the ways that literary works affect their readers in terms of "common causes of all human discourse: language, the mind, society, history, and so on." All three aspects of the text are important, but Crane felt that the constructional aspect had been relatively ignored in literary history. It was simply easier to
treat historically a given material aspect of a set of texts, apart from any considerations of how that material is shaped by the requirements of the text’s form, or else to philosophize about common aspects of texts—their embodiments of a common idea or myth, say—that their authors might never have considered. Crane wants to consider texts as wholes rather than just as parts, at least partly because organized wholes have demanding shapes. A novelist’s choice early in a work can force a certain mode of development, a certain handling of language, later on. And on the other hand, he wants to consider them as literary wholes, as forms rather than mere texts that may embody any sort of discursive content.

Crane’s commitment to the primacy of the constructional aspect of the literary work naturally demands that he emphasize the causes inherent in literary form, both the causes productive of literary success in general and those that are demanded by the specific requirements of particular literary genres. For him the “first interpretative task of the historian of forms” will be uncovering “the various reasons of art which presided in their making.” And for Crane, even the apparent “defects” of a form can be dictated by formal considerations:

A case in point is the tendency exhibited by most of the Gothic novelists of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to endow their principal agents, whether heroes, heroines, or villains, with relatively little character and to represent them acting from simple, uncomplicated motives easily intelligible in the light of the situations they face. This doubtless detracts from the interest such works can have for serious minds, but the historian, before passing judgment, will ask whether the neglect of specificity and roundedness of character in the Gothic stories may not 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. To portray character in more vivid detail would either introduce moral issues conducive to something like tragic pity and fear or divert the reader’s attention from the unusual and sinister happenings to the persons involved in them. What the form demanded, in short, was enough character to impel readers to take sides... and nothing more. (*Principles of Literary History* 63–64)

In effect, Crane suggests that what critics may term the formal defects of a text may be the side effects, or unintended consequences, of choices made to secure some other good.

Crane’s notion of “narrative histories of form,” as he presents it in *Principles of Literary History*, rests on his formal method of analyzing literary texts. In “The Concept of Plot and the Plot of *Tom Jones*” the novel is viewed as a
plot structure that induces, develops, and finally cathartically resolves in the reader an active concern for a protagonist which results from the tension between what the reader is led to believe will happen to the character (his or her fate) and what the reader is led to think ought to happen (his or her desert). This model holds for only a certain set of novels—though they include a great many of the canonical texts. In *Fiction and the Shape of Belief* (1964), Sheldon Sacks extended Crane’s model to two alternative fictional models, the apologue and the satire, two didactic forms that were popular in the eighteenth century and have also become important in our own day.\(^1\) Crane and Sacks were able to use this model to analyze the novels of Richardson, Fielding, and Austen, among others, and a number of their students have used the model effectively with certain fictions from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

To my present way of thinking, there are a number of weaknesses with the Crane-Sacks model. One is that it presumes that novels have a single protagonist and a single plot, and hence the model fails to deal with such important forms as the Victorian multiplot novel. The model also fails to account for a number of fictions that are unequivocally registered as novels, but that also fail to fit into the action model, including among others the novels of Defoe, written before the action model came into existence, and the novels of Joyce and Woolf, in our own century, which do not fit the pattern of “objective fantasy” the action model requires. Most important, especially for the present subject, the Crane-Sacks model implicitly presumes that literary texts are written and interpretable entirely within the confines of a generic model. For Crane, mimetic novels were ipso facto not didactic. Sacks, who was more explicitly aware of the role of messages implicit in novels of action, was nevertheless convinced that a novelist’s beliefs, indeed, explicitly didactic intentions, such as Fielding’s intention “to recommend goodness and innocence” in *Tom Jones*, could be integrated with seamless perfection into objective fantasy. But as Ralph Rader has pointed out, partially incoherent mixed forms, like *Humphry Clinker*, *Amelia*, and *The Vicar of Wakefield*, are more frequent within the literary canon than masterpieces of form like *Tom Jones* and *Emma* (“The Literary-Theoretical Contribution” 189).

Rader has suggested that the Crane-Sacks model might be made more useful if we “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.” Rader demonstrates this theory in “From
Richardson to Austen," in which he argues that the morally serious comedy eventually perfected in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma* was distorted in the course of its development by what he calls "Johnson's Rule," that feature of eighteenth-century aesthetic ideology typified in Samuel Johnson's *Rambler* essay no. 4 (but visible elsewhere) demanding that narratives not based on historical subjects have heroes and heroines of perfect moral rectitude (461-83).

The requirements of Johnson's Rule caused works like *Tom Jones* and *Roderick Random* to seem ethically ambivalent or deficient but caused many other works written in conformity to the rule to be slackened affectively. *Sir Charles Grandison*, written explicitly in order to demonstrate what male rectitude would look like, is so etiolated by its three 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 *Pamela* through *Grandison*, *Evelina*, and *Sense and Sensibility* to *Pride and Prejudice* as the search for a form that will be simultaneously acceptable to the ideology of the age and dramatically effective. Jane Austen's solution is to present the hero and heroine as possessing traits that temporarily keep them from happiness with each other, character flaws that nevertheless do not amount to moral faults. But the 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 takes up other courses. This feature of Rader is not really a divergence from Crane, who insists in *Principles of Literary History* that we may use the external causes of literary history primarily to explain the formal inadequacies of literary texts. But the notion of evolutionary sequences, literary-historical "plots" with a beginning, middle, and end, is a very attractive one, and one that makes what Crane was trying to explain easier to comprehend.

Another feature of Rader that differs at least in emphasis from Crane and Sacks, is Rader's insistence on the significance of interpretive history. While Rader thinks that, at bottom, our experience of literary texts is much more similar than our varying descriptions of them would lead one to believe, the way we talk about texts—and in particular the way we disagree about them—tends to point not only to defects in our critical vocabularies but to unique features of the texts themselves. For instance, Rader's account of Defoe's *Moll Flanders* rests heavily on his explanation of the controversy over whether *Moll* is or is not ironic; his account of Joyce's *Portrait of the
Artist explicates the quarrel over the degree of irony in Joyce's attitude to Stephen in that work. In both cases, though in different ways, Rader shows how the controversy results from applying a common narrative model to a text that belongs to a different genre. Agreement, when it is universal enough, is also a sign of a literary-historical fact. For example, the fact that no literary critic has questioned whether Pamela is an English novel, while doubts have been expressed down the years whether various other earlier narratives (like Pilgrim's Progress, Robinson Crusoe, or Gulliver's Travels) should be called novels, demonstrates for Rader that Pamela was indeed the first novel (the first, that is, in what Rader calls the "action-plot-judgment" mode, the central genre in the history of narrative, in which we are meant to register the controlling intention of an author tacitly operating behind the intentions of the various characters and narrators).

Like Crane, Rader has attacked Marxist versions of literary history. But unlike Crane, who targeted the relatively simple-minded "vulgar" Marxism of Hicks and Caudwell, which was always searching literature for evidence of attention to class struggle and the proletariat, Rader has attacked the enormously more sophisticated Marxism of Michael McKeon's Origins of the English Novel. For Rader, McKeon goes wrong on the very first page, where he 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" (Rader, "Emergence of the Novel" 1).

As Rader sees the case, McKeon does not have a concept of the English novel adequate to inform any literary history. The elements that went into the English novel are related to the economic and cultural stream, but the novel is never understood as a literary form and therefore never placed adequately in history. It is as though someone were to advertise a history of the English apple pie but were to produce a series of chapters on apple growing in England, on pig farming, on milling, and on the development of the oven. Obviously an apple pie needs apples and flour and lard and an oven, but equally obviously an apple pie is more than apples and flour and lard and an oven. Like a pie but far more complicated, the English novel for Rader is more than the sum of its elemental materials and techniques, and even if McKeon had succeeded in a right understanding of the historical development of the elements necessary for the novel, the existence of those elements would not be sufficient to explain their combination in a particular sort of literary form.12

The feature of Rader's version of literary history I feel rests on the shakiest
ground is one that at the moment is only implicit in the several essays and studies that have appeared to date. But the corpus of his work ineluctably conveys the notion that the major canonical texts of English narrative (such as Pamela, Tom Jones, Pride and Prejudice, Wuthering Heights, Jane Eyre, Vanity Fair, Bleak House, Middlemarch, Tess of the D'Urbervilles, Lord Jim, Portrait of the Artist, and Ulysses) are also the world-historical texts, the ones that have begun or ended the major evolutionary sequences. This is hard to prove or disprove—doing so would necessitate discovering which literary sequences were the most important. But to me it seems a recrudescence of the tendency of the Chicago school, back to Crane, to valorize the historical implications of masterpieces.

Rader has not yet explicitly defended this view, so it would be out of place for me to attack it here. But my studies in the Gothic novel and other less canonical forms throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have suggested that it is not always the most artistic versions of a genre that appear first. Rader's own study of the morally serious comedy suggests that Grandison, which starts the main sequence that leads to Austen, is a novel whose canonicity evaporated after about 1820. Similarly, the English historical novel is usually thought to begin with Waverley, which is artistically weaker than later works by Scott (such as The Bride of Lammermoor, Ivanhoe, and Redgauntlet). Much later, the second return of the Gothic novel—the era of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, The Turn of the Screw, Dracula, and The Picture of Dorian Gray—began with an obscure sensation novel, Called Back by F. J. Fargus, in which the sensation plot is given what it had not had before: a supernatural twist. I am equally sure that turning points in the drama can be found that involve equally uncanonical texts, failed or at least not entirely successful experiments that later writers were able to bring to perfection.

Marxist Literary History

While "vulgar Marxists" like Christopher Caudwell and Granville Hicks often seemed to eliminate challenging historical questions from literary history, that cannot be said of Raymond Williams, who in The Country and the City (1973) produced what many would agree is the first major triumph of Marxist literary historiography. It is interesting that Williams—of Welsh rural proletarian background—was not at the time an avowed Marxist and took pains to avoid the jargon (base and superstructure, ideology and false consciousness) of Marxist social and literary theory. He talks instead about
The political, social, and economic development of England and about the "forms of feeling" generated by social change that are "precipitated out" in literary form. Here is Williams on "the morality of improvement" in Richardson and Fielding:

[In the eighteenth century] an estate passed from being regarded as an inheritance, carrying such and such income, to being calculated as an opportunity for investment, carrying greatly increased returns. In this development, an ideology of improvement—of a transformed and regulated land—became significant and directive. Social relations which stood in the way of this kind of modernisation were then steadily and at times ruthlessly broken down. (60–61)

Marriage, in feudal days arranged for family alliance, now is a way of concentrating and improving an estate. Richardson’s Clarissa is a pawn in the Harlowe family’s plan to rise in rank by uniting James’s lands with those of the odious Solmes; similarly, Fielding’s Sophia Western is to be forced to marry Blifil in order to join her father’s estates with Allworthy’s. The eighteenth-century novel chronicled “the long process of choice between economic advantage and other ideas of value.” Fielding raises the dilemma but finally, with “a deliberate—one might say a calculating—geniality,” dismisses it: by sleight of hand, Tom Jones becomes Allworthy’s heir, so that both Sophia’s desires and her father’s are simultaneously achieved. In Clarissa, Richardson dramatizes

the reverse of consolidation, of the necessary settlement, the striking of a bargain between advantage and value. The integrity of the human person is fanatically preserved, by its refusal to compromise and then its accepted destruction. . . . Clarissa is an important sign of that separation of virtue from any practically available world which is a feature of the later phases of Puritanism and still later of Romanticism. . . . It is in the end not a criticism of a period or structure of society but of what can be abstracted as "the world." . . . It is in its own way an answer to the problems being raised by an increasingly confident capitalist society. (Williams 65)

Instead of accusing Richardson of “false consciousness,” Williams notes his tendency to view the dramatic tensions of his work as problems of character and morality rather than of the social organization of society. In its grasp of both social process and how that process finds its way into literature, this is a far cry from Hicks’s canned sauerkraut. Nevertheless, the way Williams draws up his questions, there are problems he cannot help to solve. Literature is still seen as the epiphenomenon of economics and sociology.
Richardson and Fielding are understood in terms of their complementary responses to the social changes produced by agricultural concentration and improvement, but not in terms of their hostile/emulative responses to each other, the generation of *Joseph Andrews* by *Pamela*, or of *Sir Charles Grandison* by *Tom Jones*.

For me the most conspicuous flaw of the chapter is Williams’s failure to understand why Defoe (despite consciously knowing more about capitalism than Richardson and Fielding did) restricted himself to writing about economic man as an isolated individual (*Robinson Crusoe, Moll Flanders*) rather than as a being enmeshed in social relations. Lacking a sense that developments in *literary form* (rather than in society) might ever take the reins and drive the cart, Williams has no way of evaluating the possibility that the isolation of Defoe’s heroes derives from the single-voiced form in which he wrote: an imitation of naive incoherent autobiography. Once Richardson had pioneered the action-plot-judgment form that allows dramatic intensity combined with variable focus and multiple voices, the individual no longer needed to be seen as an “isolated history” (Williams 62).

The possibility of transcending what Williams achieved within Marxist literary historiography demanded a reinterpretation of Marx. As long as one took Marx’s claim in *The German Ideology* at face value, literature could have no history. The reinterpretation was done in *Reading Capital* by Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, which reads Marx as a canny critic of his own sources. Instead of the old base/superstructure dichotomy, or the notion of culture as a “totality,” Althusser posited a much more fragmentary system with slippage between the various structural elements. Elements of superstructure (law, theology, philosophy, art) affect the base as well as being affected by it. Although “in the last analysis” economic realities rule, literature is a semiautonomous practice of ideology, and to the extent that it is autonomous, it should have its own history immanent within its praxis, though that history must undoubtedly be affected by (and must itself affect) other levels of production—political, social, economic, and so on.

From this one might expect a rush by neo-Marxists to the reconstruction of literary history. But there was no such rush, and one reason may be that in the same volume in which Althusser suggests (without precisely stating) that literary history may be a sensible project, his collaborator, Etienne Balibar states outright that a structural Marxist history of literature may be impossible, or at least might not resemble anything we would want to call literary history. As Balibar tells us in *Reading Capital*,
We can formulate the indispensability of other histories than those of the modes of production, histories whose objects remain to be constituted. Not all histories are possible; historical research . . . is beginning to sense this . . . The determination of the objects of these histories must await that of the relatively autonomous instances of the social formation, and the production of concepts which will define each of them by the structure of a combination, like the mode of production . . . It might be suggested . . . that the history of ideologies, and notably the history of philosophy, are perhaps not histories of systems, but histories of concepts organized into problematics, whose synchronic combinations it is possible to reconstitute . . . Similarly, the history of literature may not be that of the "works," but that of another object, a specific one, i.e., a certain relation to the ideological (itself already a social relation). (251)

Whether or not this is the reason, it does not seem that literary history is the mode in which the post-Althusserian Marxists have been doing their most serious work. We have many brilliant critical essays by Pierre Macherey, Fredric Jameson, Terry Eagleton, and their followers, but one has everywhere the sense that, despite the extreme shift in philosophical and social premises, there is still a hidden loyalty to the New Critical cult of textual interpretation, to finding the hidden music beneath the surface of the language, the Word behind the word.

The most distinguished attempt by an Althusserian to work toward a literary history is the fourth chapter of Criticism and Ideology, by Terry Eagleton (then in his high-Althusserian phase), and both its successes and failures are instructive. True to the prescription of Etienne Balibar, Eagleton does not structure his essay as a history of texts but as a history of a relationship between literature and ideology, so that the essay turns on the various uses in Victorian and modern fiction and poetry of the Romantic ideology of organismism. Here, for example is how Eagleton envisions the embodiment of the problem in Middlemarch of how to show society as a coherent whole and simultaneously as in inevitable conflict:

Each of the novel's four central characters represents . . . an historically typical totalisation: Casaubon idealism, Lydgate scientific rationalism, Bulstrode Evangelical Christianity, Dorothea Brooke Romantic self-achievement. . . . Each of these totalities crumbles, ensnared in the quotidian . . . , the bleak victory of an entrenched provincial consciousness over rationalist or Romantic drives to transcend it. . . . The web as image of the social formation . . . is a derivative organic image, a midpoint between the animal imagery of Adam Bede and some more developed
theoretical concept of structure. The complexity of the web, its subtle interlacing of relatively autonomous strands, its predatory overtones, the possibilities of local complication it permits, accommodate forms of conflict... But at the same time the web's symmetry, its "spacial" dehistoricising of the social process, its exclusion of levels of contradiction, preserve the essential unity of the organic mode. (119-20)

There are some astonishing individual insights like this one scattered along the route, but one comes away more impressed by Eagleton's structural than by his historical perspective here. James's approach to organicism, for instance, is presented as an extension of Conrad's, which is surely correct in purely analytic terms, though it ignores the chronological fact that James's work was nearly over when Conrad's began, and the principal texts Eagleton cites were written over thirty years earlier. Similarly, Dickens's later novels are presented as a development from George Eliot's, particularly the way Dickens makes structural communities and social institutions (Chancery in Bleak House or the Circumlocution Office in Little Dorrit) into the protagonists of his fiction. We may recall with difficulty—as Eagleton avoids giving dates—that Bleak House was written seven years before Adam Bede and twenty years before Middlemarch. The sequence is interesting but cannot contribute to any explanation of the genesis of these texts.

Part of the reason that Eagleton has difficulty coming to terms with history in any usual sense is his acceptance of the replacement of the individual self by what Althusser calls the "interpellated subject." Althusser's scientific Marxism avoids the need to deal with issues of individual psychology by positing a fragmented but basically collective response. All who live within an age respond to its ideology, but each of us is slightly differently "inserted" into the ideological continuum. The representations I can form of the world around me are different because I am a Jew rather than a Christian or a Muslim, a New Yorker rather than an American of the South or West, the son of a factory worker rather than a professional, and so on. Each of the classes and groups to which I belong reshapes my perspective, and what I (in current false consciousness) want to call my individual identity is actually only the sum of the collective allegiances that make me partly similar, partly different from the people I meet at work or in society.

This theory is what inspires Eagleton to say that "the phrase 'George Eliot' signifies nothing more than the insertion of certain specific ideological determinations—Evangelical Christianity, rural organicism, incipient feminism, petty-bourgeois moralism—into a hegemonic ideological formation
which is partly supported, partly embarrassed by their presence” (113). The way this is put is designed to tease out of thought any of us who have retained the post-Romantic habit of thinking of “George Eliot” as a human being with an individual psychology. And for his purposes, Eagleton needs to challenge us there. But there is a sense in which this affects Eagleton’s ability to provide historical explanations. It is perhaps too difficult for us—not just as post-Romantics but as people, and not just ordinary folks like ourselves but Terry Eagleton too—to imagine concretely a history caused by agencies but without agents. Such has been the dream of idealist historians since Hegel, of course, for it creates a history that operates without contingencies, which is more serious and philosophical than any poetry could be. At which point, of course, it would in effect cease to be history at all.

Another, perhaps less serious problem, in my estimation, lies in Eagleton’s evaluations of the writers he discusses. Eagleton is above the “vulgar Marxist” habit of deriding writers whose work can be defined as regressive at the expense of progressive writers. Instead he has a tendency to claim that when one writer is better than another, it is because of a more “productive” insertion into ideology rather than because of any inherent personal qualities. When Eagleton suggests that “The Waste Land emerges from a potentially more ‘productive’ problematic . . . than, say, Georgian poetry” (86), it is a complicated and awkward way of saying that Eliot was a greater writer than Robert Bridges because Eliot was more “relevant” to his own time than Bridges, which is arguable (though to those of us who survived the 1960s, the honorific of “relevant” maketh the flesh to creep). Where Eagleton contrasts Ben Jonson with Walter Savage Landor as conservative classical humanists, his oblique point is that Jonson wrote in the heyday of humanism—the right moment in history—while Landor was born too late (186–87). I don’t know anyone who prefers Landor to Jonson; I don’t in fact know anyone else who has made that particular comparison. But one is bound to wonder whether the burden should lie so heavily on history, or whether here as with Eliot and Bridges we might want to attribute something to the degree of talent in the individuals concerned. We might even want to ask whether Jonson’s comparative vitality is attributable to the characteristic he shares with Landor, or whether we tolerate Jonson’s conservative classical humanism because it underlies a tart and cruel comedy much to the taste of a society that relishes Joe Orton.

One appreciates that Marxist critics are in a bind. On the one hand, it is vulgar to praise tendentious or proletarian art, but on the other hand it seems almost as pernicious to do what Eagleton does, to justify the current critical
canon right down the line using Marxist terminology. There is much to be said for the proposal of Marxist critic Tony Bennett that Marxists get out of the business of aesthetic judgment altogether. But merely avoiding the dilemma of literary evaluation clearly is not going to make for a major improvement in Marxist literary history so long as there is no real attempt to take advantage of the Althusserian notion—derivable, actually, from Marx himself—that literature has a semiautonomous character, so that the motor of history will come both from extrinsic and from intrinsic sources. The most promising development in Marxist literary historiography, to my mind, is the advent of new theorists willing to build bridges to alternative methodologies. Here I would like to mention John Frow, whose ideas return to some of those of the Russian formalists, already analyzed in this chapter, and Tony Bennett, whose ideas look toward those of the reception theorists we shall discuss later on.

John Frow posits a very complex dialectical relationship that—in my opinion—embodies the very real complexities of literary history:

The process of literary evolution occurs in two contradictory ways: discontinuously, through the production of deviant forms of textuality, and continuously, through the reproduction of the literary norm. . . . Historically, literary development has occurred above all through the evolution of genres and the displacement of established genres by newer genres. . . . In the broadest sense, then, the literary system is a mode of production, a structure of functional relations in which there exists a hierarchy of genres, a constant modification of relations to other modes of artistic production—which in turn modifies the hierarchy—and a specific relationship to an audience. . . . Diachronic development is . . . possible only through an intersection with the synchronic literary field: this is represented by the dominant norm, but necessarily involves the "extraliterary" factors of the discursive field, the relation to an audience, social function, and relations of dominance within the total social structure. (105–11)

To my ear, Frow seems to be reviving, from an explicitly neo-Marxist perspective, the later literary-historical ideas of Tynyanov and Jacobson. In fact, his problem is not that the formalists' ideas were so different from the Marxists' but that they were so similar. Both he and they hold a dialectical idea of history. Instead of believing in a totalizing cultural stream that bears all along with it, the formalists believed that history is made not by imitation of forebears but by reaction against them. (Imitation causes automatization; reaction causes the defamiliarization [ostranenie], the most characteristic aspect of literature.) Movement A produces a countermovement B.
Furthermore, Frow is, like the formalists, working to “establish the unity of the conceptual level at which extraliterary values and functions became structural moments of a text and at which, conversely, the ‘specifically literary’ function acquires an extra-aesthetic dimension,” which is going to involve “being willing to relate literary discourse to other discourse (to the structured order of the semiotic field) rather than to a reality that transcends discourse; to relate literary fictions to the universe of fictions rather than to a non-fictive universe” (99).

Frow may not understand how thoroughly formalist his own project has become—and the differences between his own Marxism and their formalism sometimes evaporate under examination. As Harold Bloom suggested about poets, Frow has to engage in a strong misreading of Russian formalist literary history in order to clear the space for his bridge between Marxism and formalism built from the Marxist side. The distortions of Russian formalism take a number of forms. One is taking Shklovsky and the early Tynyanov as the principal spokesmen for formalist literary history rather than the later Tynyanov, whose position is so close to his own. And while Frow is willing to quote Bakhtin’s more dogmatic follower Medvedev (The Formal Method of Literary Study) against Tynyanov, he ultimately has to decry that book as “dogmatic and dismissive” (98), because Medvedev has a scorched-earth, vulgar-Marxist attack that would destroy the possibility of his own bridge between formalism and Marxism if it were taken seriously.

Frow distorts Hans Robert Jauss as well, but with less respectable motivation, since he has little interest in the consumption side of the productive cycle.

The problem with the concept of a horizon of expectations... is that it appeals to a phenomenology of consciousness rather than a theory of signifying systems and practices, and so remains vague about the structuring of discursive authority. In any case the “horizon” is described as an accumulation of quite heterogeneous values (generic conventions, experiential norms, language types) and Jauss offers no explanations of the mediations between them. (126)

Frow criticizes Jauss for not creating the sort of totalized theory of the relationships between literature and other social phenomena that neo-Marxists such as Jameson and Eagleton have jettisoned.

But Jauss may have his uses for the Marxists. Tony Bennett—who criticizes Eagleton’s historiography as blatant idealism—suggests in Formalism and Marxism a radical cure: “What is needed is not a theory of literature as
such but a historically concrete analysis of the different relationships which may exist between different forms of fictional writing and the ideologies to which they allude.” Bennett goes on to explain what some of those relationships are:

As Marx reminds us often enough, it is only consumption which completes the process of production. Whilst the literary text may, by virtue of its intrinsic properties, determine to a certain extent the way in which it is “consumed” or read, it does not do so entirely. For the process of the consumption of literary texts is necessarily that of their continuous re-production; that is, of their being produced as different objects for consumption. This is not merely to say that the history of criticism is one of “creative treason” whereby the same texts are successively plundered for different meanings. The way in which the literary text is appropriated is determined not only by the operations of criticism on it but also, and more radically, by the whole material, institutional, political and ideological context within which those operations are set. (134–35)

To me Bennett’s critique seems to be presenting a version of reception theory in a post-Althusserian Marxist context. He never names Jauss, but in effect he takes up most of his central concerns. In effect literary sociology and reception theory will come into play in a crucial role: as a way of reintroducing the concrete contingencies by which literature is produced and consumed. And Jauss himself was equally convinced, at one point at least, that he and the Marxists were working hand in hand—convinced enough, as we shall see, to recoil in horror against and away from his own most crucial insights.

Hans Robert Jauss and Konstanz Reception Theory

For the formalists and Chicago structuralists, the reader is essentially determined by the text. For Wayne Booth, novels “create” their inscribed readers like a sculptor molding wax. In most Marxist theory, both reader’s and writer’s activity are the products of ideology. But the principal theorists of the Konstanz school, Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauss, perceive in the text the mutual dependence—the creative collaboration—of the composer and performer of a piece of music, a metaphor that suggests a new kind of connection between author and reader. Although the composer is clearly the primary genius whose intentions must be respected, without the per-
former, the composer would remain mute. Following the terminology of Roman Ingarden, Iser and Jauss speak of the text as being concretized by the reader. The vague and ideal word is made flesh in the reading process. The difference between Iser and Jauss is primarily one of perspective. Iser’s interest is in the act of reading as it happens for each of us, and in the individual interpretations that compose that act. Jauss’s concern has been with the history of reading and the contribution a history of reception can make to the broader concerns of literary history.

Jauss’s ideas on literary history are deeply indebted to his mentor, Hans-Georg Gadamer, especially *Truth and Method* and *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Gadamer was a philosopher writing in reaction to the post-Kantian hermeneutic theories associated with Schleiermacher and Dilthey. Those theorists had suggested that the business of interpreters of texts was to clear their minds of the prejudices and the mental detritus of their own age, so as to be able to enter with a clean mental slate into the world of the author. Gadamer, to the contrary, taking his cues from his teacher Karl Heidegger and from Edmund Husserl, suggests instead that this positivistic, scientific stance is neither possible nor desirable in the humanities. To exist in the world is to perceive that world—and its texts—through the horizon of meaning that the culture of the present moment provides. Gadamer in fact inverts the usual negative attitude toward prejudice and claims that without the fore-understanding that so-called prejudices provide it would be impossible to acquire an effective historical understanding. What this means is that, for Gadamer, reading is a dialectical activity: it involves the interaction, or rather the fusion, of the meaning-horizons of text and reader.

Jauss arrived at his method by means of a pragmatic problem. As a medievalist, he was attempting to puzzle out the medieval beast fable *Reineke Fuchs*, a strange tale because the animals behave like humans rather than as the beasts do in nature or in accord with some ideal allegorical version of their nature. He discovered that the peculiarity of the poem could be understood best by attempting to reconstruct the literary preconceptions, the horizon of expectations, of the intended audience for the poem: “With respect to the . . . expectations [the poet] evokes, he either satisfies them or disappoints them . . . by parodying the *chanson de geste*, or by travestying the casuistry of the courtly love poem. . . . Pleasure in the new genre—the comic tale of the fox—sets in when and to the degree that the reader takes its ‘anthropomorphism’ as an indication that he is expected to see aspects of human nature in the animal figures” (*Question and Answer* 221–23). Jauss sought through Gadamer a way of generalizing the procedure he had
successfully followed: examining the horizon of the medieval past through a contemporary horizon that was quite different. Jauss valorized issues like “the historical and literary genesis of individuation,” which the medieval audience would scarcely have understood; but Jauss felt that, by means of what he calls “the dialogue of question and answer,” he had managed to let the text answer his question without projecting a contemporary concern onto the past, and he decided that this was the key to literary history.

This was beyond doubt the “Eureka!” moment in the development of Jauss’s ideas, when he saw that self-consciousness about our own ignorance could be used creatively to produce new knowledge of the past. And in his 1967 inaugural lecture of his professorship at the University of Konstanz, “Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory” (“Literaturgeschichte als Provokation der Literaturwissenschaft”), Jauss aimed at nothing less than using Gadamer’s hermeneutics, his theory of fusion of horizons, to bring the reader into literary history and thereby to make literary history a respectable activity once again.

Like Mikhail Bakhtin, Jauss thinks about literature in terms of dialogue. But instead of Bakhtin’s polyphonic dialogue of language dialects within the work, Jauss views literary history in terms of the dialogue of the newly published work of literature with the audience. Any audience responds to a work of literature in terms of a “horizon of expectations” built up from its previous experience with classic and contemporary literature, on the one hand, and its experience of the real world outside literature, on the other. The new work may merely fall nicely within the horizon of expectations and be accepted as a simple consumer good, or it may challenge that horizon. Works that challenge the audience’s horizon of expectations may succeed in altering the way the audience responds to literature, or may fail in doing so, and be rejected. Rejected or misunderstood works, however, may succeed in entering the literary canon later when the literary horizon has, in effect, caught up with them.

Similarly, the significance of literary works changes to successive audiences with the change in horizons of expectation. One of Jauss’s most striking examples of this is his contrast of two novels that successfully attempted to titillate the audience of Paris in 1857: Ernest Aimé Feydeau’s *Fanny* and Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*. The novels were similar, according to Jauss, in that both were self-consciously antiromantic and avoided grandly ambitious subject matter—for the jaded public expected little in that way from the novel after the death of Balzac. Both treated provincial adultery, and both gave the trite topic a twist, Feydeau by making his lover jealous of
the husband, Flaubert by restoring the dignity, at the denouement, of the cuckolded Charles Bovary. Both, accordingly, were at least moderately successful upon their appearance—but *Fanny* was by far the more successful of the two novels; yet the flowery rhetoric and cheap irony that sold thirteen editions in 1857 have caused it to be almost entirely forgotten today.

On the other side the impersonality of Flaubert's style, which is what is largely responsible for *Madame Bovary*'s present esteem, made the novel a relatively "difficult" book in 1857 and exposed the author to a trial for obscenity. At that time Flaubert's use of the third person *style indirect libre* suggested to the prosecution that the author was glorifying, rather than merely giving exposition to, Emma's enthusiastic adulteries. Flaubert's counsel succeeded in educating the court in how to read this masterpiece of impassibilité, for whose innovations the public was not yet ready. Both *Fanny* and *Madame Bovary* were in a large sense products of the reading horizon for 1857; but the latter work was revolutionary in the sense that it helped to alter the horizons of expectation with which later audiences greeted new works of art.

A coherent history of literature would be based for Jauss upon the history of this pattern of interaction between artist and work and audience. Jauss is not talking about a "history of taste" of the sort that has been often attempted. Taste is by no means irrelevant to his concerns, but even a full diachronic portrait of the works and forms of art that were valorized at various moments in the past would form only a small part of the information needed to write literary history. What is needed is something far more inclusive: a history of the various preconceptions—about art, about reading, and about the cultural milieu in general—that audiences bring to the reading of literary texts.

Jauss feels that literary history is different in kind from other sorts of history simply because of the necessary existence of an audience for literature. "The *Perceval* of Chrétien de Troyes, as a literary event, is not 'historical' in the same sense as, for example, the Third Crusade, which was occurring at about the same time. . . . The historical context in which a literary work appears is not a factual, independent series of events that exists apart from an observer. *Perceval* becomes a literary event only for its reader. . . . In contrast to a political event, a literary event has no unavoidable consequences subsisting on their own that no succeeding generation can ever escape" ("Literary History" 21).

I am not sure this is right. Most of us would want to differentiate between literature and history as such, but as Hayden White (*Tropics of Discourse*) and
many other philosophers of history have argued, history is just as dependent as literature on the way it is inscribed and understood. For the events of history to be influential, they must be chronicled and perceived. It happens that my great-grandfather was killed in a riot in nineteenth-century Russia—something I know from family legends, not from any public source. An ancestor of one of my colleagues at Queens College was killed in a riot as well, but that riot was the Boston Massacre of 1773, an event of history. Both riots had unavoidable personal consequences for the friends and families of those killed, but only the second riot became an event of history, and it did so primarily because it had something equivalent to an audience: contemporaries who then, and their descendants who later, agreed to understand that violent human action as socially and politically significant. Events without such sponsorship are as orphaned historically as surely as a literary text that never finds an audience.

Another problem I find is with the sort of text that Jauss considers to make history: the revolutionary text. "The ideal cases of the objective capability of such literary-historical frames of reference are works that evoke the reader's horizon of expectations, formed by a convention of a genre, style, or form, only in order to destroy it step by step" (Jauss, "Literary History" 23–24). His examples are Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, whose horizon of expectations includes the old tales of knighthood that Cervantes parodies; Diderot's *Jacques le fataliste*, which parodies the "popular novelistic schema of the 'journey'"; and Nerval's *Chimères*, which "cites, combines and mixes a quintessence of well-known romantic and occult motifs only in order to produce the horizon of expectations of a mythical metamorphosis of the world only in order to signify his renunciation of romantic poetry." It seems a weakness in Jauss's historical view that the crucial texts in literary history are parodies and pastiches. These texts are indeed important, for they signal the establishment within the horizon of expectations of the audience of conventions within a literary scene—for nothing can be parodied that is not already part of the literary background. But surely many if not most of the supreme literary achievements are not parodic in this way. Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* would be one of Jauss's "ideal cases"; but most of us would feel her achievement was crowned with *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma*, or *Persuasion*. Thackeray's "ideal case" would be *Barry Lyndon*, but most of us prefer *Henry Esmond*. George Eliot, nothing of a parodist, provides nothing here. The problem for Jauss is to differentiate between masterworks that bring a particular element of a tradition to its highest point without challenging the artistic premises of that tradition (like Jane Austen's *Emma*, like Hardy's
Theories of Literary History

Theories of Literary History

and the Kulinärliterature, the Unterhaltungskunst Jauss despises, texts that operate comfortably within a tradition without either challenging it or advancing it. While Jauss admits that "there is also the possibility of objectifying the horizon of expectations in works that are historically less sharply delineated," the methods for doing so would not differentiate sharply between the classic and the culinary, for both seem to speak to us directly, unmediated. It is a characteristic defect of Jauss's theory that it was seemingly only art that aspired to change history that addressed directly its moment within history.

Jauss's vision of literary history was provocative because it not only presented the exterior world as having an impact on the form and content of literature, but presented literature as making a difference, in a way that artists themselves have always hoped, in the way life is lived. Jauss suggests that Flaubert had introduced "a new manière de voir les choses" that "was able to jolt the reader of Madame Bovary out of the self-evident character of his moral judgment, and turned a predecided question of public morals back into an open problem." History would not merely be reflected in literature; rather the historian would chronicle literary evolution as a "socially formative function that belongs to literature as it competes with other arts and social forces in the emancipation of mankind from its natural, religious, and social bonds" (43-45).

What would Jauss's version of literary history look like in practice? In fact the recipe as Jauss spells it out may seem more than a little daunting. To write genuine literary history—as opposed to the reference books created with scissors and paste that now pass for it—one would need, in addition to knowledge of the major authors, their works, and their times, a sense of the "horizon of expectations" with which their audience responded to their works, and the audience's phenomenological modes of experiencing literature and art in general. One would need to be familiar with not only the classic works of the age but with its popular literature as well—for it is not in an age's masterworks but its page-turners that one would find the most explicit evidence of the audience's preconceptions. We may be less daunted if we realize that such a history can be written only in slow stages. One must first take a sort of "snapshot" of the literary world—production, works, reception—in a certain land as of a certain date. Then another, and another, at earlier or later dates. Finally, by comparing these synchronic portraits, by linking these freeze-frame stills, one can build up a sense of how literary change occurred.

Jauss's "Literaturgeschichte als Provokation" was clearly meant as a
provocation: it drew dozens of replies from every possible school of thought. Jauss was reproached for being too sociological and for not being sociological enough. Possibly what stung Jauss the deepest, though, was that his vision of literary history as energized primarily by works that evoke the reader's customary horizon of expectations in order to call it into question was uncomfortably similar to that of T. W. Adorno, whose _Aesthetische Theorie_ was published posthumously in 1970. In Adorno's dialectic of negativity, the art that is worthy of the name, those literary texts that are autonomous, are so because they negate their origins in two senses: they negate the false portraits of the world proffered by ideology, and they negate the literary traditions out of which they spring. Though Jauss himself describes the moment differently, it seems likely to me that he recoiled as he realized that his own version of literary history (where common values were most clearly objectified when they were being ridiculed and parodied, where literature functioned by emancipating one from traditional values) was dangerously close to the Frankfurt school of Marxism. Jauss himself claimed that he recognized his own errors when he saw them through the horizon of Adorno. The objection that we raised earlier—that in "Literary History as Challenge" history is made more clearly by _Northanger Abbey_ (arguably Austen's weakest novel) than by _Emma_, more by _Barry Lyndon_ than by _Middlemarch_—is one that Jauss began to raise for himself. And as he did so, he decided he needed to come to terms with the feet that most literature, for most people at most times, provides comfortable pleasure and not negativity. _Don Quixote, Jacques le fataliste_, and _Chimères_ are in effect special cases of a more general issue: the aesthetic experience of the reader.

So Jauss's next major essay, "Sketch of a History and a Theory of Aesthetic Experience," was both an advance and a retreat. It was an advance in the sense that he succeeded in clarifying and improving the logic of his earlier essay. His essay does full justice to the pleasure of the audience, and it renders a historical account of what Jauss calls "aesthetic experience"—that repertory of ways people respond to art.

Jauss distinguishes between three basic modes of artistic enjoyment, which he calls "poiesis," "aisthesis," and "catharsis." The first, poiesis, is the experience of art as a mode of productive activity. Once the exclusive preserve of the artist, in open works of the twentieth century poiesis is shared by authors with the readers, who must complete their creations. Jauss is talking, I believe, about the sense of accomplishment we experience in helping James create the world of _The Golden Bowl_ or Joyce that of _Ulysses_. The second, aisthesis, involves the contemplative, passively receptive experience of
art. This type of experience can take the "language-critical" form of rapturous aporia—Roland Barthes's *jouissance*—of the sort that might be stimulated, say, by Robbe-Grillet's wasteland of signifiers. Or it may take what Jauss editorializes is the less alienating and healthier "cosmological" form when we observe how the world looks through another's eyes, as in Proust's *The Past Recaptured*. The third, catharsis, is the communicative function of poetry, what brings about in the reader "both a change in belief and the liberation of his mind." This is the familiar "delight and instruct" function of art, which Jauss traces from Aristotle to Brecht. For Jauss, I must stress, these three modalities of aesthetic experience are not static categories but dialectical alternatives each of which has had its own historical development.¹⁹ Jauss's first essay in this mode of historical reception-study was a considerably more synchronic study than his piece on Baudelaire. This was a short piece called "Le douceur du foyer: Lyric Poetry of the Year 1857 as a Model for the Communication of Social Norms." In effect this is an examination of the literary sociology of what Americans would call the "home sweet home" theme, as it appears in lyrics of that year by poets ranging in stature from Baudelaire and Hugo down through minor figures like Damey, Lemoine, and Magnier.

The problem with the newer and more complicated model of literary reception that Jauss has been moving toward since about 1977 is that it seems to be missing a motor. In the inaugural lecture, literary history was driven by the horizontal gaps between author and audience, gaps that demanded an effort of fusion, which in turn could result in either the rejection of the text, temporarily or permanently, from the literary scene, or the transformation (at least in part) of the sensibility of the audience. But in Jauss's more recent work on aesthetic experience, the crucial issue of shifts in the horizon of expectations on the part of the audience tends to drop out of the picture: he presents a pluralistic universe in which audiences are free to make whatever use or take whatever pleasure they choose, and the choices made seem less crucial to determining the direction of literary history. As Robert Holub observed about the direction of Jauss's recent work, it seems that its revolutionary moment has passed, just as the revolutionary moment for the universities in general passed with 1968, and has been replaced with a drier, more academic, and less seemingly urgent agenda. Nevertheless, there is no need for his admirers to follow Jauss all the way into the swamp of pluralistic perspectives in which he is currently mired. With an awareness of its logical flaws and rhetorical gaps, "Literaturgeschichte als Provokation" can go on provoking us for a long time to come.
Conclusion

It thus appears that the three major holoscopic modes of literary historiography of our century—Russian and Chicago formalism, Marxism, and reception theory—have shown a tendency to merge their perspectives and bridge their differences as time has gone on. Despite their practitioners' tendency to perform strong misreadings on critics of alternative persuasions, it is hard to mask the ways in which post-Althusserian Marxists have allowed the "semi-independent" causal principle of aesthetic ideology to moderate the epiphenomenal status of aesthetic forms, or in which formalists, Russian or American, have compromised any notion of pure immanent change. This is not to say that these modes of criticism and literary history have become identical except for their terminology. Chicago critics still think primarily in terms of the development of institutional forms, Marxists in terms of the influence of material conditions upon ideology, reception theorists in terms of the phenomenological act of reading and changes in the horizon of expectations. These differences affect, as we shall see in chapter 7, the distance or "focal length" at which history is viewed, and therefore the sort of history that is written. These three methods fill the gaps in one another's views, cover one another's blind spots, and so fortunately remain complementary, rather than becoming identical. The differences between Marxist, formalist, and reception histories of the Gothic novel will become clearer in practice when the results of these methods are presented in chapters 3–5.