

WESTERN SOCIOLOGICAL LITERARY THEORY: A HISTORICAL SURVEY

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The decline of New Critical formalism in the Anglo-Saxon world in the 1950s also witnessed a simultaneous revival of a sociologically-oriented practice and theory of literary criticism derived from a critical, non-dogmatic Marxism associated with Louis Althusser and Antonio Gramsci. Traditional sociological approaches based on the ideas of the founders of modern sociology, Weber and Durkheim, displaced in time by positivism and idealism, have influenced New Criticism to the point that society and literature have been irrevocably separated. Comparatists have tried to remedy this separation but failed. It was left to three influential Marxists — the Frenchman Lucien Goldmann, the British Terry Eagleton, and the American Fredric Jameson — to theorize the complex, dialectical mediations between society and literature in the social practices and institutions of specific formations. A summary of the contributions of these three influential thinkers is presented here, together with a brief account of how the semiotics of the Russian aesthetician Mikhail Bakhtin, now recently re-discovered, can supplement and advance contemporary theorizing on society and culture in general.

With the bankruptcy of new Critical formalism as the reigning orthodoxy in the Western academy from the forties to the sixties, following the worldwide rebellions of youth, women, intellectuals and Third World peoples against late capitalism, a revision of canons and standards has begun in North America as well as in Europe and in parts of the Third World like the Philippines. The renaissance of Western Marxism registered its impact by opening the compartmentalized disciplines to the winds of change. Not only Marx's critiques, but also those of Freud and Nietzsche, infiltrated through European structuralism, have battered the walls of specialization in the Anglo-Saxon world.

In the wake of such developments, the official U.S. Establishment center, the Modern Language Association of America (MLA) has tried to catch up with the times by publishing collections like *Literature and Its Inter-Relations* (1985) dealing with interdisciplinary approaches to teaching literature; and numerous studies involving the perspectives of women, ethnic minorities, and Afro-Americans. By the late seventies and early eighties, the MLA has clearly distanced itself from the erstwhile dogmatic consensus of the "intrinsic approach" sanctified by René Wellek and Austin Warren's *Theory of Literature* (1942). In its annual conventions, the MLA now sponsors competing trends, principally various postructuralisms (inspired by the European triumvirate Derrida, Lacan, Foucault), feminisms, marxisms, and the like.¹

Whereas in the fifties and sixties, one might find panels or workshops on "sociological literary approach," today "the sociological" now informs and conditions practically all cultural studies and research in the humanities. It has disappeared as such in order to metamorphose and reincarnate itself in the trends I've cited. Perhaps only the "sociological method" of Lucien Goldmann and his followers still commands respect as a distinct hermeneutic practice.

Traditional Approaches

The principles of modern sociology, first enunciated by Max Weber and Emile Durkheim chiefly in opposition to Marxism, may indicate the rationale for the specialization and fragmentation of the social sciences and humanities in their beginnings. Both Marx and Weber were engaged in analyzing the predicament of humans in modern capitalist society, the former conceptualizing it as "alienation" and the latter as "rationalization." Judging Marx's view as one-sided "economic interpretation," Weber emphasized value orientation or norms (e.g. the Protestant ethic), the national state, and the role of status groups like the elite in bureaucracy.² One ramification of Weber's theory of "ideal type" may be found in Karl Mannheim's "sociology of knowledge." Western sociology today is chiefly empirical and functionalist in pursuing a Weberian model, positing a conception of

society governed by a homeostatic equilibrium of distinct, unrelated parts.

For this part, Durkheim concerned himself with the division of labor and the problem of conceptualizing the social totality. He singled out for praise the Marxist project of explaining social life "not by the notions of those who participate in it, but by more profound causes not perceived by consciousness."³ Durkheim, however, discounted class struggle and the economic sphere as motivating forces in favor of ascribing primacy to the unregulated division of labor in industrial society. One influential sociologist, Ferdinand Tönnies, in his book *Community and Association* (1887), though acknowledging his debt to Marx, betrays the influence of Weber and Durkheim.

In general, sociology as a discipline arose from the increasing fragmentation and atomization of industrial capitalist society. In trying to solve the problem of working-class unrest, sociologists repudiated Marxism and its totalizing mode in favor of nineteenth-century positivism constituted by an empirical-technological ethos and the social-Darwinist extrapolations from the biological sciences. The Italian thinker Antonio Gramsci's description of sociology's genealogy sums up its limits: "Sociology has been an attempt to create a method for historico-political science, dependent on an already elaborated philosophical system (evolutionary positivism)... an attempt to describe and classify historical and political facts schematically, according to criteria modelled on the natural sciences. Sociology is therefore an attempt to deduce experimentally the laws of evolution of human society," as in Herbert Spencer's practice. Gramsci points out that this sociology "cannot grasp the transition from quantity to quality, a transition which disturbs every evolution and every law of uniformity in the vulgar evolutionist sense."⁴

The paradigms of Weber and Durkheim, constructed as a response to Marxism and the crisis of bourgeois society, may be seen operating in the meticulous survey of the sociological approach in the canonical *Theory of Literature* by Wellek and Warren. While admitting that "literature is a social institution, using as its medium language, a social creation," and that literary questions "are, at least, ultimately by

implication social questions," Wellek and Warren insist that literature "has its own justification and aim" separate from social life. They contend that "the social situation, one should admit, seems to determine the possibility of the realization of certain aesthetic values, but not the values themselves."⁵ Such values, metaphysical in nature and origin, become truly problematic.

Wellek and Warren organize the study of the relations between society and literature into three areas: first, the sociology of the writer and his profession, "the economic basis of literary production, social provenance and status of the writers"; second, the social content of the work, its implications and purposes; and third, the audience and the social influence of the work on society. Because Wellek and Warren share unwittingly the assumption of a necessary division of labor in the production of knowledge, they refuse to integrate or synthesize all those partial insights and observations yielded by various studies. Consequently, their notion of Marxism is the vulgar one that conceives it as economic determinism, relativistic and reductionist. Nevertheless, they do raise the crucial question of "the social determination of forms," the social origins of form and styles, genre and actual literary norms. But their bias against any synthesizing or historical method, and their search for a "rational foundation for aesthetics," reveal a positivistic program concealed by a pedantic liberal eclecticism.

Theorizing amid the pressures of the ideological Cold War in the late forties, Wellek and Warren expend considerable effort in refuting the alleged errors of Marxism. But what about the achievement of the founder of sociological criticism, Hippolyte Taine, who charted the cultural landscape with plural coordinates?

Preceded by the socio-historical speculations of Montesquieu, Vico, Herder and Madame de Staël, together with the radical changes wrought by the French revolution, Taine was the most resolute exponent of the application of the general principles of natural science to literature. In his *History of English Literature* (1863), he seeks to analyze and classify texts according to three criteria: race (national character), moment (age or period), and milieu (cultural environment). Taine tries to combine systematically the historicist thinking of Renais-

sance humanism, the stress on geography of romantic nationalism, and attention to environment mandated by the scientific positivism of mid-nineteenth century France. But Taine's practice is less methodological than polemical. While race is often reduced to a psychological quality (the English "national" character of spirit crystallized in love of nature, dislike for rules, etc.), and "moment" becomes a matter of physical setting, the category of milieu — for Taine, the link between literary criticism and the social sciences — translates into what past events have established. As historical documents, literature embodies the motives of civilization. In examining the causes, the "moral temperature," of literature, Taine deploys an experimental apparatus suggested by French realists like Balzac, Stendhal and Flaubert. Taine's history confesses a positivistic intent, as evidenced by his assertion: Every kind of human production "has for its direct cause a moral disposition, or a combination of moral dispositions: the cause given, they appear; the cause withdrawn, they vanish... They are bound up with their causes, as a physical phenomenon with its condition, as the dew with the fall of the variable temperature, as dilatation with heat."⁶

Taine's pluralistic schema, vitiated by a reductive procedure tied to Comtean evolutionism, failed to escape its mechanistic and impressionistic logic. Its environmentalist hypothesis begot only "chronological dictionaries of literary biography." Successors of Taine, notably Georg Brandes, V.L. Parrington, and Ferdinand Brunetiere (of interest is his *L'Evolution de genres dans l'histoire de la littérature*, 1890), have not displayed any critical awareness of the naive empiricism and teleology of their paradigm.

In contrast to Wellek and Warren's facile dismissal of Taine, the dean of U.S. comparative literary studies Harry Levin took up the challenge of New Critical formalism by extending Taine's milieu to cover the decisive role of literary convention. In *The Gates of Horn* and other works, Levin proposes an institutional approach that can preserve both the complexity of art in social life and its relative autonomy: literature as an institution "tends to incorporate a self-perpetuating discipline, while responding to the main currents of each succeeding period; it is continually accessible to all the impulses of

life at large, but it must translate them into its own terms and adapt them to its peculiar forms."⁷ Levin seeks to mediate "the apparent polarity of social and formal criticism" which he considers "complementary frames of reference", in the process synchronizing "eternal impulses and internal peculiarities," effects of environment and convention. Conceiving literature as an expression of collective consciousness, refracting rather than simply copying reality, Levin's method hopes to reconcile the opposition between form and substance, truth and beauty, which have so far prevented criticism from being "the science of art."

Levin's heroic endeavor to balance the intrinsic and the extrinsic, to bridge the gap between the sociological and the aesthetic, may be read as a liberal compromise, a counterpoint to East-West *Realpolitik*. Like his contemporaries Edmund Wilson, Lionel Trilling and Kenneth Burke, Levin offers a cosmopolitan latitude that approximates Durkheim's quest for a supra-individual intelligence or moral agency which would circumscribe the anomie of modern life. It also anticipates the phenomenological striving for certainty in the fifties and sixties. Levin's valorizing of convention, however, is flawed by its being premised on unquestioned axioms of bourgeois sociology: namely, society as an abstraction confronting the individual, society as an autonomous entity with norms or institutions independent of the natural world and the like.

In elucidating the foundations of sociological criticism and the complex transactions of literature and society, it has become clear that the key element that differentiates critics is their definition of "society." And what demarcates the Marxist from the sociological strategies of Levin, Wellek, Erich Auerbach and Northrop Frye, to cite Western practitioners, hinges on its historical/dialectical mode of inquiry. What is distinctive in Marx's conception of society is that it posits the indivisibility of the human and the social. It rejects the antithesis of society and the individual linked only by a hypothetical social contract. Nor is society cognized as a supra-individual phenomenon. Marx explains in *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* (1844): "Even when I carry out scientific work ... I perform a social, because human, act. It is not only the material of my activity — like the language

itself which the thinker uses — which is given to me as a social product. My *own* existence is a social activity... The individual is a *social* being."⁸

For Marx, human existence is essentially praxis, labor — the dialectical interplay of consciousness and the material surroundings. Society is in nature; humans are part of the natural world, the material/setting for all activities. Since the production and reproduction of life, through work and procreation, is simultaneously a social and natural relationship, the economic processes cannot be divorced from those relations. Karl Korsch thus asserted that Marx's science of society "is not sociology, but political economy." I submit that the fundamental principle of Marx's theory is the historical transformation of societies: the interaction between society and nature develops in time through collective labor. This historical interaction climaxing in class struggles and revolutions engenders and transforms relations among humans. Manifested in various levels of contradictions and conflicts, the historical process which constitutes different stages or types of societies presents two aspects: the development of productive forces and the changing social division of labor within the production relations. What defines the type of social formation depends on the modes of production (level of development of productive forces and the corresponding production relations), and the ideological and the political practices in it. In the 1859 "Preface" to "A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy," Marx states that the relations of production serve as the foundation on which "rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life processes in general."⁹ (The term "conditions" does not mean "rigidly determine" but, following Raymond Williams' interpretation, "sets the parameters for change").¹⁰ What these specific parameters are can only be discovered by investigating "empirically given conditions" of the historic conjuncture and cannot be mathematically calculated like the values of commodities. An economic base may be the same in two or more societies but they, Marx advises, can possess "infinite variations and gradations, owing to the

effect of innumerable external circumstances, climatic and geographical influences, racial peculiarities, historical influences from the outside, etc."

Models of Marxist Critical Practice

It remains now for me to describe briefly three models of a Marxist critical practice that is perhaps less sociological (in the sense discussed earlier) than historical, more totalizing and concrete ("overdetermined," in the Althusserian sense) than any of those noticed by Wellek-Warren and Levin.

Lucien Goldmann

Lucien Goldmann is probably the most influential and sophisticated sociological critic claiming Marxist credentials and an international following. His theory of the social genesis of literature centers on a major premise: the partial identity of subject and object, human agents and objective reality, makes possible the formation of "coherent world views" belonging to a "transindividual subject."¹¹ World view is central, for Goldmann, since it is what artistic works embody. Qualifying a Kantian tradition of formal analysis with Piaget's genetic epistemology, Goldmann defines world views as "ensembles of mental categories which tended towards coherent structures and which were proper to certain privileged social groups whose thought, feeling and behavior were orientated towards an overall organization of interhuman relations and of relations between men and nature."¹² Only a group or class striving toward hegemony (to use Gramsci's term) or a global organization of the social formation is capable of achieving the stage of "maximum possible consciousness," in contrast to the contingent limits of individual consciousness. This group is the "transindividual subject" responsible for a world view and therefore cultural creation. In the collective praxis of a class or group to transform reality, complex structures arise in the consciousness of its members; such structures are constellations of categories that organize the everyday life of the group and the imaginary universe created by the artist. Hence the true creator of art, history and change is the "transindividual subject" which mobilizes those

"significant structures" inscribed in collective praxis, even though the individual artist may be credited with objectifying the "maximum possible consciousness" of a group — but only through the structuring process of a world view.

Positing the structural homology of correspondence between the form (not content) of an art work and the mental structures of a "trans-individual subject" which patterns the everyday consciousness of a group, Goldmann proposes to explain the linkage between individual thought and collective consciousness. In *The Hidden God* (1956), Goldmann shows how the world view of Jansenism in 17th century France, born from the increasing powerlessness of the *noblesse de robe*, finds its concentrated expression in the form of Racine's tragedies. Racine's protagonists typify the contradiction in the Jansenist world view between denying the world and accepting it when it refuses to take action. This tragic vision also informs Pascal's discourse. In Jean Genet's theater, Goldmann discovered homologies between the world view of a "transindividual subject" (identified with militant workers and leftwing intellectuals) and dramatic technique.

In evaluating the greatness of a work, Goldmann focuses on the coherent structuring of the text coinciding with the unified world view of a group. He adopts a pivotal distinction from Georg Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness* (1923): the gap between "actual" and "potential" consciousness of a class, the latter signifying full self-knowledge, a grasp of the class' position in the social totality; and the former denoting empirical, immediate awareness. The representative writer creates works that articulate the maximum possible consciousness of the class, given its objective possibility in a historically determinate period.

But when Goldmann shifts his attention to the novel (in *Towards a Sociology of the Novel*, 1973), he privileges the economic aspect in the absence of a mediating world view. No longer homologous with the maximum possible consciousness of a class, the form of the novel now directly reproduces economic life, "everyday life in the individualistic society created by market production. There is a *rigorous homology* between the literary form of the novel ... and the everyday relation between man and commodi-

ties in general, and by extension between men and other men in a market society." In that society, "the collective consciousness gradually loses all active reality and tends to become a mere reflection of the economic life and ultimately to disappear."¹³ Even actual consciousness, or ideology, also disappears. Goldmann employs here Marx's notion of commodity fetishism and Lukács' concept of reification when he defines the plot of the novel as a "degraded search" by a "problematic hero" for authentic values — values identified with real qualitative use value overshadowed by exchange value. The general discontent with commodity fetishism and disenchantment with market liberalism produce the problematic hero. But it is the form of the genre and the system of exchange (not production) that are homologous. When monopolies replaced market capitalism, the novel witnessed the dissolution of character in Kafka, Joyce and Camus. And when, following Marcuse's diagnosis in *One Dimensional Man* (1964), Goldmann juxtaposes organized, consumer capitalism with an art "centered on absence and the impossibility of communication," he is arguing on the basis of his inference that the dominance of exchange value and reification has made impossible the attainment of maximum possible consciousness by the bourgeoisie, or by artists associated with it. Echoing Lukács, Goldmann reflects that "valid" cultural creation takes place only when

man conceives himself or feels himself as part of a developing whole and situates himself in a historical or transcendent trans-individual dimension. But bourgeois ideology, bound up like bourgeois society itself with the existence of economic activity ... is precisely the first ideology in history that is both radically profane and a historical ... created the first radically nonaesthetic form of consciousness (rationalism).¹⁴

Granted it is nonaesthetic, but still nonetheless a form of consciousness which one may discern in Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Voltaire's satires, and Goethe's *Faust*. Goldmann seems to allow no space for biographical or familial causation, nor for the impact of the formal traditions of a genre.

Goldmann's critics all converge in targeting the mechanistic and dualistic implications of establishing homologies. The chief objection is

that it rules out fantasy, negativity, utopia, transcendence. In defense, Goldmann articulates the rationale of his methodology in defining two levels of criticism. First is comprehension or understanding of a text through a description of its internal relations, its coherence, the semantic polysemy of the text which subsumes the dialectic of desire, difference, death. Second is explanation or interpretation which occurs when a text's function, inserted into the realm of the "transindividual subject," is grasped. When this totalizing act joins the work's imaginary universe with the collective consciousness of the group within the historical totality, the aesthetic meaning and intelligibility of the text is made explicit. The goal then is to explain the social whole, not the individual transposition of a world view. If so, cultural praxis conflated with social praxis loses its concrete specificity — at least, on the level of explanation. Goldmann admits the division of labor in the human sciences, and asserts that "the problematic of literary history ... is to situate human behavior in a framework within which it becomes necessary and comprehensible."

For all its synthesizing power and conceptual reach, Goldmann's "genetic structuralism" valorizes too much the homogeneous and unitary virtue of world views and totalities at the expense of manifold contradictions and ruptures that generate revolutionary changes. In short, the dialectics of the historical process is suppressed, or at least occluded, in favor of functional necessity Piaget's assimilation-accommodation cycle, and a meta-historical instrumentalization of thought. Much more fatal is the corporatist nature of world views quite incompatible with the Marxist axiom of uneven development, non-synchronic conjunction of base-superstructure, and the like which Gramsci has summed up in his theory of hegemony founded on class alliances in the historical bloc.

In *Marxism and Literature* (1977), Raymond Williams reviews the inadequacies of the homologizing strategy. He notes that by giving "social order" a structured form as world view, it treats culture as formal products, not "active practices." By substituting "epochal" for "connected historical analysis," it narrows its procedural selectivity of evidence. Its paramount

defect inheres in its inability to comprehend contemporary artistic expression because it overly depends on "a known history, a known structure, known products."¹⁵

While Lukács, Korsch, and the circle of Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Lowenthal and Marcuse (later known as the Frankfurt school) developed the dialectical application of Marxist principles in the twenties and thirties against the positivism of the Second International, other Marxists like Christopher Caudwell, George Thomson, Max Raphael, Ernst Bloch and Bertolt Brecht explored other areas beyond the scope of a mechanical base-superstructure equation. But it was not until the intervention of the French philosopher Louis Althusser in the early sixties that the renaissance of Western Marxism could properly begin.¹⁶

In *For Marx* (1965) and *Reading 'Capital'* (1970), Althusser questions the prevalent Hegelian version of Marx's *problematique* by positing an epistemological break between the Marx of 1844 *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* and *Capital* (circa 1857). Inventing a method called "symptomatic reading" which probes for an absent field of discourse to disclose the text's condition of possibility, Althusser attacks empiricism and its assumption of a knowing, coherent subject claiming to know an object directly. In Althusser's problematic, knowledge is a theoretical practice, a knowledge-production distinct from the economic, political, and ideological practices.

Althusser's most decisive contribution to aesthetic theory is the idea of overdetermination already assumed in the works of Terry Eagleton and Frederic Jameson, which I'll discuss next. Since the demise of its founders, Marxism has been plagued by both economism (where the superstructure passively reflects the inescapable determinism of the base) and historicism (where all knowledge is relative to a present consciousness). To rectify those mistakes, Althusser argues that a social formation or totality has no essence or center. It is decentered. Society is comprised of complex multiple practices or structures, with their specific effectivities, so that even though the economic determines causation in the last instance, any number of practices (such as religious ideology in the Middle Ages) can play a dominant role in certain circumstances. Reality is hence overde-

terminated. In the structured process of life, subjects are deemed effects of totalities and relations, endowed with no universal essence or nature. Althusser avoids reductionism by insisting on a cardinal rule: society should be grasped in its full concreteness, with each historical conjuncture situated within the "structure in dominance."

Since then, Althusser's intervention has engendered a rich harvest of inquiries into the relations between literature and ideology, such as Pierre Macherey's *A Theory of Literary Production* (1966) and the researches of Michel Pêcheux and Renée Balibar. "Symptomatic reading" has been modified by a new conceptualization of ideology in Althusser's essay "On Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (*Lenin and Philosophy*, 1971). Instead of being "false consciousness," ideology is theorized now as a system of social practices tied to certain apparatuses and institutions that constitute individuals into subjects. Instead of the conditions of production, the work's specific ideological effects — ideological domination and its reproduction through the educational system — now preoccupy the critic. From the perspective of Etienne Balibar and Pierre Macherey, the literary phenomenon exists within the determinate social conditions; the notion of the text as an object-in-itself, with a transcendent and immutable value, makes no sense because the text is defined as the sum of its effects embedded within material social practices. Balibar and Macherey expound a post-Althusserian Marxist theory of literature in their well-known essay, "On Literature as an Ideological Form" (1978).¹⁷

Terry Eagleton

I would like next to describe briefly the British critic Terry Eagleton's formulation of a critical strategy presented in his book *Criticism and Ideology* (1976) which employs Althusser's concept of theoretical practice in an original way. Eagleton assigns himself the task of analyzing the complex articulation of various structures which produce the text as a mode of material practice. To illuminate overdetermination in a precise and rigorous way, Eagleton charts the field of Marxist critical discourse into six spheres: General Mode of Production (GMP), Literary Mode of Production (LMP), General Ideology (GI), Authorial Ideology (Aul), Aesthetic Ideology (AI), and Text.

In general, Eagleton follows the Marxist theory of uneven and combined development when he defines the GMP as the dominant mode of production in a social formation made up of different, interpenetrating modes of production. The LMP refers to a unity of certain forces and social relations of literary production. At a given time, one LMP may be contradictorily linked to another LMP: for example, the coexistence of the patronage system and capitalist literary production in 18th-century England; or, in the Philippines, the copresence of *balagtasan* and other ritualized performances with commercialized television serials. This complex articulation of different LMPs with the GMPs of a social formation is in turn internalized in the text. While the LMP generally reproduces the GMP which determines it in the last instance, they are not homologous: romantic poets, for example, resisted the commodity fetishism of emergent capitalism.

General Ideology (GI) refers to the "relatively coherent set of 'discourses' of values, representations, beliefs" embodied in various structures and apparatuses. A dominant ideological formation reflects "the experiential relations of individual subjects to their social conditions as to guarantee those misperceptions of the 'real' which contribute to the reproduction of the dominant social relations." All literary production and consumption belongs to the cultural ideological apparatus (communication, education) subsumed in GI. What is required is to describe those modes of insertion of authorial and aesthetic formations into the hegemonic ideology. Eagleton demonstrates how this occurs through language and its political effect: "The genesis of English as a 'national' language is the history of imperialism and its aftermath." Similarly, Milton's decision to write *Paradise Lost* in English illustrates the conjuncture of linguistic and political elements in the interdetermination of GI and LMP. In the academy (whether captured by conservative positivism or liberal humanism), "literature is a vital instrument for the insertion of individuals into the perceptual and symbolic forms of the dominant ideological formation, able to accomplish this function with a 'naturalness,' spontaneity and experiential immediacy possible to no other ideological practice."¹⁸

As for Authorial Ideology (Aul), Eagleton defines this as "the effect of the author's specific

mode of biographical insertion in the GI "over-determined by class, sex, nationality, religion, region, etc. The ideology of the text is shaped not only by Aul but also by Aesthetic Ideology (AI), the area of GI which includes theories of literature, critical practices, traditions, genres, conventions, devices, etc. The ideology of an LMP which mutually reproduces the relations between the GMP and GI is encoded with AI. Eagleton cautions us not to view the relations between the five structures as symmetrical, although when the text's ideology is constituted by the interplay of LMP, GI, and AI, the GMP exerts its determination in the final analysis. One may sum up by conceiving literary practice as the typical result of the complex conjuncture of LMP, GI, and AI, with one or another of these elements asserting dominance. Reading, for Eagleton, is "an ideological decipherment of an ideological product," and criticism an interface of the text's moments of production and consumption (reading).

In the centerpiece of his book, *Towards a Science of the Text*, Eagleton proceeds to concretize his founding thesis that the text is "a certain production of ideology." While granting to text and ideology their status as distinct discourses, Eagleton insists that the ideology of the text is not an "expression" of authorial ideology (Aul). It is "the product of an aesthetic working of 'general' ideology as that ideology is itself worked and 'produced' by an overdetermination of authorial-biographical factors. Aul, then, is always GI as lived, worked and represented for a particular overdetermined standpoint within it." The text may be defined as "a multiple articulated structure that produces ideology" and constitutes it to reveal its relations to history. Contrary to Lukács, Eagleton states that history (society) is not immediately inscribed in the text but registers itself in ideology. Following Althusser, Eagleton treats ideology as an "inherently complex formation which, by inserting individuals into history in a variety of ways, allows of multiple kinds and degrees of access to that history." Now the raw materials on which the text operates its own categories and protocols (genres, symbolic techniques, etc.), the latter being also overdetermined, consist of society's self-representations, assumptions, codes of perceptual habits —

ideological ensembles whose ultimate signified is history. The text does not then directly appropriate history or real-life situations for its immediate object, but rather works on ideologically invested forms and materials to produce a textual or imaginary "real." In producing this "real," the text exhibits a peculiar overdetermination of its own signifying practice, an overdetermination which impels it to negotiate "a particular ideological experience of real history."

Eagleton's approach is genuinely dialectical. While ideologies (in their plurality outlined earlier) generate the text's concreteness (the intense fusion of numerous determinants), the text in turn produces its own textual ideology distinguished by categories that conceal and naturalize its raw materials as well as its own mechanisms. Through various displacements and mutations of form, the text processes the ideological significations mediating the text and history, producing thereby its own ideology. Put another way, the text results from the interplay of two mutually constitutive formations: the ideology of society and the aesthetic mode of constructing meaning; in producing its specific structure, the text establishes distance or relative autonomy form ideology. Eagleton borrows the notion of art's "distantiating effect" from Althusser and Macherey.

In postulating the existence of an ideology of the text, Eagleton opposes Goldmann's theory of the work as a microcosm of a world view or collective mental structures. Such a theory deprives the text of its own relatively independent and creative materiality. Like Raymond Williams and Fredric Jameson, both profiting from Althusser's critique of empiricism and form the revival of Gramsci's praxis-oriented Marxism, Eagleton lays to rest the vulgar, reductive version of "Marxism" which construes ideology and art from the outside.

Eagleton conceives both text and ideology as modes of production. Their relations are internal to each other, each one reciprocally operating on the other in historically determinate ways. In *Criticism and Ideology*, Eagleton describes in detail how the text "destructures ideology in order to reconstitute it on its own relatively autonomous terms, in order to process and recast it in aesthetic production, at the same time as it is itself destructured to variable

degrees by the effect of ideology upon it."¹⁹ Like Jameson, Eagleton would also stress the "inner logic" of content, content referring here to the real given, lived history, significations which are already articulated in ideological forms, together with specific modes of the aesthetic production of ideology. In part the text already foregrounds the "ideologically determined conventionality of its modes of constructing sense," but it also conceals and naturalizes its modes of production into the semblance or simulacrum of "concrete life." This prototypical effect of literature as an empirical or natural object which sociologists study hides those determinants of the production process that Marxist criticism addresses. Consequently Eagleton submits to us that "The function of criticism is to refuse the spontaneous presence of the work — to deny that 'naturalness' in order to make its real determinants appear."²⁰

In the thirties, Bertolt Brecht and Walter Benjamin carried out that critical mission. Brecht invented epic theater to disclose the determinants of illusion through *Verfremdungseffekt* and other defamiliarizing ruses, while Benjamin (in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*) theorized on the role of the means of intellectual production in constituting the function and value of the art-work. Their findings will be reconceptualized in Bakhtin's "intertextuality" and "heteroglossia" in today's Marxist-poststructuralist dialogue (of which more later).

Frederick Jameson

The single Western Marxist who has tried to restore the dialectic to its central locus in the human sciences is the American critic Fredric Jameson. His fundamental insight is that the categories of our understanding always reflect, albeit in oblique or sublimated fashion, "a particular and determinate moment of history."²¹ A category like the plot of the realistic novel, for Jameson, may be cognized as possible only when society is grasped as a coherent totality; when the intuition of such a totality disappears, the rhetoric of the realistic plot either evaporates or modulates in late Victorian society to melodrama where the unity of personality, the identity of point of view, replaces unity of action. When collective life fused with a sense of

collective destiny fades with the increasing atomization of life in capitalist society, the trajectory of novelistic action yields to psychological montage and eventually postmodernist pastiche. Jameson describes how, in the twentieth century, the primacy of the linguistic model in semiotics and various post-structuralisms (deconstruction, Foucault, Lacan) is rooted in categories of exchange and reification in consumer capitalism. Without this historical contextualization, form is meaningless.

A dialectical mode of interpretation then becomes imperative. When the critic exposes the culture- or time-bound character of all categories of thought — their ideological function vis-à-vis classes, gender, etc. — she is performing an act of demystification. This is the moment of negative hermeneutics. But the task of the critic goes beyond this since the lived experience (the raw material) of the work unfolds a latent content which supports at the same time undermines the repression of its possibilities with a utopian force. Jameson points out that "all stylization, all abstraction in the form, ultimately expresses some profound inner logic in its content, and is ultimately dependent for its existence on the structures of the raw materials themselves."²² This inner logic can only be unfolded by a method Jameson calls "metacommentary," a procedure which combines the negative with a positive hermeneutic whose aim is to restore some original forgotten meaning — the dream of a more humane community — antithetical to the boredom and alienation in capitalism. Metacommentary thus seeks to account for the mechanism that censors the dream (the fantasy about emancipated work) and releases also the impulses which motivate the fantasy. What metacommentary aims to produce in effect is a symptomatic reading of texts (Jameson adapting Althusser's hermeneutics) in order to realize the two-sided project (for Goldmann) of understanding and explanation.

In its application, metacommentary exhibits the relational dialectics mobilized in Marx's *Grundrisse* and *Capital*. Given the inclusion of thought in the unfolding contradictions of a stratified reality, the way the writer thinks reality — the manner in which form, or the possibilities of Experience itself, can be conceived — depends on this intrinsic logic of content,

ously Utopian power as the symbolic affirmation of a specific historical and class form of collective unity."²⁴

In sum, Jameson's historical or dialectical poetics endeavors to resolve the problem of metaphysical dualism (form/content, consciousness/institution, art/society) by a self-critical mode of totalization whereby a text becomes intelligible or meaningful when its manifold inscriptions into history are mapped without annulling the relative autonomy or specificity of the text in the process. This critical performance answers Lukács' "riddle of elevating individuality to the typical without destroying the individual relief."²⁵

Bakhtin's Semiotics

No survey of socially-oriented literary theories today can be complete without mentioning Mikhail Bakhtin. His works, particularly *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1912) and his innovative studies on *Dostoevsky* (1929) and *Rabelais* (1940), as well as numerous essays on discourse, have introduced heuristic and synoptic concepts such as "intertextuality," "heteroglossia," "chronotope," etc., which have proved useful in mediating the complex transactions between art and society. A burgeoning Bakhtin "industry" has enlivened the happenings in the Modern Language Association of America in the last five years.

Beginning with the premise that the act of communication (production-reception of meaning) through language is constitutive of human existence, Bakhtin formulates a theory or utterance grounded on intersubjectivity. Underlying this is his view that "human personality becomes historically real and culturally productive only insofar as it is part of a social whole, in its class and through its class... Only such a social and historical localization makes man real, and determines the content of his personal and cultural creation."²⁶ Because the speaking subject is "wholly the product of social interrelations," linking internal and external, the act of knowing a text or grasping meaning is, for Bakhtin, essentially dialogical. Somebody else's speech makes it possible to generate my own. Likewise the word in literature exists as part of a dialogue and therefore

necessarily polemical and charged with values. "All understanding is dialogical" because all utterances occur in unique social spaces and historical times. Bakhtin insists that because the structure of the utterance is a social structure, "every literary work is sociological and that it is so internally, immanently."²⁷ Bakhtin uses the term "enunciation" to designate the coalescence of the voice of the sender and the horizon of the receiver. Contexts of orientation, the common horizon of two interlocutors, function as constitutive elements of utterance. All discourses are oriented to the Other. Thus categories of alterity and exotopy — the realization of meaning through difference, through other's positions — are needed to map and assay the "irreducible heterogeneity of human existence."

Like deconstruction and other poststructuralist criticism, the concept of intertextuality rejects the liberal-humanist privileging of a single, dominant consciousness that decrees value and meaning. The intertextuality of dialogic form decenters the Cartesian "I" which has no identity except only in relation to an other. Since meaning and value inhere in the reciprocity of speaker-listener (whose speech evokes the response, the answerability of all), Bakhtin argues that the genre of the novel — particularly Dostoevsky's polyphonic structure and Rabelais' carnivalesque and heteroglotic style — captures the intertextual constitution of subjects in history. Bakhtin chronicles in scholarly detail how the novelistic genre emerged precisely when the authoritarian, dogmatic discourse of the Roman empire disintegrated and was replaced by "the Galilean language conscience" characterized by the multiplicity of voices and styles. Monologue yields to dialogue when "a verbal-semantic decentralization of the ideological universe" occurs.

For Bakhtin, genre is the key concept of literary history that synthesizes the sociohistorical and formal: "The utterance and its types, that is, the discursive genres, are the transmission belts between social history and linguistic history."²⁸ What notions such as "production of ideology" does for Eagleton and "inner logic of content" for Jameson, genre does for Bakhtin — genre conceived as modelling system, fabricator of simulacra of reality. The novelistic genre, from the Menippean satire to Dostoevsky, incarnates the fullest intertextual play and

content as the lived experience of groups in specific times-places articulated in concrete forms. This content-form linkage may be seen as Jameson's translation of Althusser's concept of ideology as the imaginary relation of the subject to the real conditions of existence. What metacommentary strives to discover is why the limiting effect of form — repression, its symptoms and dynamics — obtains. Metacommentary proposes to analyze the dream-work in all writing or signifying practices to reveal the form-content dialectic: for example, science fiction with its glorification of the powerful scientist and the nightmare of uncontrolled technology can be read as a contemporary expression of both the deepest anxieties of the individual psyche as well as the collective folk-dream of self-fulfilling work, a vision of human redemption.

In his *The Political Unconscious* (1981), Jameson sharpens and elaborates his thesis that the Marxist master-narrative of the collective struggle of humankind to wrest a realm of freedom from the realm of Necessity is the "ultimate semantic precondition for the intelligibility of literary and cultural texts." The critic's quest for intelligibility, for a knowledge of the social grounding of a text, culminates with the apprehension of the "ideology of form." Jameson reminds us that aside from the truth of experience, we are also concerned with the "truth of thought," the ideological nexus, how knowledge is constructed or textualized. In other words, texts are rendered intelligible by their systematic insertion into a narrative of history distinguished by complex overlays of overlapping modes of production, by overdetermined contradictions.

In this paradigm of history, metacommentary now assumes the pattern of a methodological process of insertion comprising three stages triangulating distinct semantic horizons: First, the text is apprehended as a political act — for example, Rizal's novels are read as articulations of the grievances and protests of the *ilustrado/principalia* sector of Filipino society in nineteenth-century colonial milieu. Second, the text is grasped as a manifestation of a general ideogeme of the social formation in which it arose, the ideogeme being "the smallest intelligible unit of the essentially collective discourses of social classes." We examine at this

level the ideogeme of education or rational enlightenment as pre-requisite for liberation versus the ideogeme of apocalyptic faith which paradoxically unites Simoun and Padre Florentino. Third, sublating the first two stages, the text is now inscribed in the network of coexisting sign-systems (traces or anticipations of different modes of production) in a social formation with sequenced, layered codes. On this anagogic level, the narrativizing capacity of the imagination is measured by its power to translate Necessity into a temporal process, the touchstone of the "ideology of form" being the adequacy of such forms to carry out the task of representing history. Here we need to scrutinize how Rizal's novels stage the breakdown of the *ilustrado* belief in rationality symptomatically evinced in the collapse of linear plot and the disclosure of its conditions of production in the fissures and gaps of the discourse itself. These three horizons are then theoretically correlated to map "the traces of that uninterrupted narrative," to restore "to the surface of the text the repressed and buried reality of this fundamental plot" of humankind's struggle to liberate itself from "alienating necessities," from the fate of being a victim of History.

We can now conclude that what metacommentary above all intends to accomplish is what Jameson calls the discovery/recovery of "the political unconscious." The "political unconscious" signifies the text's precise ideological function, its value as a social act, at unique moments in history — a function concealed or repressed in all class societies. All critical theories and interpretive strategies will then find their ultimate justification in the pursuit of "the political unconscious," in short, in history as "the ground and untranscendable horizon" of all action and thought. Jameson is convinced that Marxism "provides a way of comprehending how literary texts achieve a kind of *cognitive* authority by virtue of their capacity to 'work up a certain *knowledge* (not merely a certain 'intuition') of the conditions of their own production and render those conditions intelligible thereby."²³ In addition to the axiom that all artistic representation of life is ideological in nature, the Marxist analysis of culture, Jameson argues, "must seek, through and beyond a demonstration of the instrumental function of a given cultural object, to project its simultane-

heterology (diversity of languages and voices) possible. Changes in genre always register social transformations: "The true poetics of genre can only be a sociology of genre." In addition to genre, Bakhtin theorizes the form-content dialectic in the category of the "chronotope," "the set of distinctive features of time and space within each literary genre," which serves as the architectonic principle of the artistic universe.

If only for reminding us that comprehending a literary work requires alterity, the Other without whom we cannot speak, dialogue, and intertextuality, all of which exceed the limits of positivistic or formalist hermeneutics, Bakhtin deserves to be credited for confirming once more the truth of the indivisibility of culture, society and history in all human disciplines.

Notes

¹Any program of the annual MLA Convention for the last ten years will bear this out. See also the survey of trends in the introduction of Josué Harari, *Textual Strategy* (Ithaca, 1979), pp.9-72, and also Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory* (Minneapolis, 1983)

A good indicator of changes in this discipline is Robert Clements, *Comparative Literature As Academic Discipline* (New York, 1978).

²A good collection of Weber's writings are found in *Economy and Society* (New York, 1968), 3 volumes, and also *Max Weber: Selections in Translation*, ed. W. G. Runciman (London, 1978).

Mannheim's classic work is *Ideology and Utopia* (New York, 1936).

³See Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (London, 1955). Cf. Tom Bottomore, *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983), pp. 105-109.

⁴Antonio Gramsci, *The Modern Prince and Other Writings* (New York, 1957), p. 93.

⁵Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (New York, 1956; original edition 1942), pp. 94-109 *passim*. For a review of the field, see also David Daiches, *Critical Approaches to Literature* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1956), pp. 358-375. For a sampling of sociologically-oriented essays, see David Lodge, *20th Century Literary Criticism* (London, 1972).

⁶William K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Cleanth Brooks, *Literary Criticism, A Short History* (London, 1957), pp.531-532. See also Walter Jackson Bate, *Criticism: The Major Texts* (New York 1952), p. 500-501.

⁷Harry Levin, "Literature As An Institution," *Sociology of Literature and Drama*, edited by Elizabeth and Tom Burns (Middlesex, 1973), p. 68.

⁸Bottomore, pp. 448-449.

⁹*The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York, 1978), p.5.

¹⁰Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (New York, 1977), pp.83-89.

¹¹This section summarizes ideas found in the following texts by Goldmann: *Essays on Method in the Sociology of Literature* (St. Louis, 1980); "Genetic Structuralism in the Sociology of Literature" and "The Moral Universe of the Playwright," *Sociology of Literature and Drama*, pp.109-124, 311-318; *The Sociology of Literature: Status and Problems of Method*, "International Social Science Journal, XIX (1967); *Towards a Sociology of the Novel* (1975).

¹²Quoted in William Q. Boelhower, "Introduction," *Essays on Method in the Study of Literature*, p. 24.

¹³Quoted in Jane Routh, "A Reputation Made: Lucien Goldmann," *The Sociology of Literature: Theoretical Approaches*, ed. Jane Routh and Janet Wolff (Keele, 1977), p. 154.

¹⁴David Laing, *The Marxist Theory of Art* (Brighton, 1978), p. 56.

¹⁵Williams, pp. 106-107. Compare William's idea of "structures of feeling" (pp. 128-135) with Goldmann's world-view.

¹⁶For a selection of Writings by Caudwell and other critics cited, see the following anthologies: Maynard Solomon, *Marxism and Art* (New York, 1973); Berel Land and F. Williams, *Marxism and Art* (New York 1972); Ernst Bloch et al., *Aesthetics and Politics* (London, 1977). See also Leo Lowenthal, *Literature, Popular Culture and Society* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1961), esp. Chapter 5. For an exemplary application of Althusser's ideas, see Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (London, 1980).

¹⁷Included in Robert Young, ed. *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader* (Boston, 1981), pp. 79-100.

¹⁸Terry Eagleton, *Criticism in Ideology* (London, 1976), pp. 56.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 98-99.

²⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 101.

²¹This section summarizes the main ideas of Jameson found in: *Marxism and Form* (Princeton, N.J., 1972); *The Prison House of Language* (Princeton, 1972); *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca, 1981); "Metacommentary" in Robert Con Davis, ed. *Contemporary Literary Criticism* (London, 1986), pp. 111-123; "Criticism in History," in Norman Rudich, *Weapons of Criticism* (Palo Alto, 1976), pp. 31-50.

²²Jameson, quoted in Robert Con Davis, p. 120.

²³*Ibid.*, p. 149.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 158.

²⁵Quoted by Harry Slowocher, "Literature and Society," *Marxism and Art*, ed. Maynard Solomon, p. 482.

²⁶Quoted in Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin The Dialogical Principle* (Minneapolis, 1984), p. 31.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 34.

²⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 81-82. See also the enlightening summaries and comments of Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Cambridge, Mass., 1984), Chapters 3, 9, 10, 13, 14.

For an indication of sociological literary trends in England, see the works of Richard Hoggart and Stuart Hall Both of whom were connected with the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham; see, e.g., Richard Hoggart, "Contemporary Cultural Studies: An Approach to the Study of Literature and Society," *Contemporary Criticism* (Stratford-Upon-Avon Studies 12) (London, 1970), pp. 155-170.