

# The Novel

For Jeffrey and Madeline

Edited By

DOROTHY J. HALE

*An Anthology of Criticism and Theory  
1900–2000*

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# General Introduction

This volume has emerged from a course called “The Novel in Theory” that I have taught at Berkeley over the past ten years. I have devised this seminar to be a genuine introduction, a starting point for undergraduates and graduates who have had no prior instruction in literary theory. My classroom experience has taught me that many students are intimidated by literary theory. They regard it almost as a foreign language, riddled with ugly jargon and originating from esoteric philosophical homelands to which they feel they have been given no intellectual passport. Students sign up for the course almost as an inoculation: I’ll get my theory here, and build up resistance to future infections. But my seminar has also proven to me that students are disarmed when they learn that the study of literary theory need not be a move away from the kind of close reading that inspired them to become literature majors in the first place. Students are excited to learn that they can work through theoretical texts as they would any difficult piece of literature, relying on their training as readers to determine what is significant, what is confusing, what makes sense and what doesn’t. Students will be intimidated and alienated by theory as long as they view it as a meta-discourse, mastered by the high priests of the discipline and disseminated from on high to the uninitiated. But if students can instead be taught to read theoretical texts as they would literary texts – as both paradigmatic and problematic, limpidly clear in some paragraphs and excruciatingly opaque in other passages, redundant about some issues and silent about others – then students are truly beginning to “do” theory: they are becoming imaginative and creative readers of imaginative and creative texts that also happen to be analytic and argumentative texts.

My own immersion in the field of novel theory has also taught me to do theory this way – precisely because the field itself has been made and remade over the course of the twentieth century, emerging as a rich problematic rather than a monolithic idea. Positioning novel theory in relation to larger theoretical movements, studying the novel “in” theory, allows us to understand how the study of the novel develops in answer to philosophical problems at the heart of twentieth-century literary theory more generally. Formalism, structuralism, narratology, deconstruction, psychoanalysis, Marxism, social discourse, gender and sexuality, post-colonialism, reader response – the section headings of this volume might be found in any introduction to literary theory. But when we pose the novel as a question, when we ask why the novel has been so important to the theoretical work of each school, we discover not only a new basis of connection among these schools but also something about the novel’s importance to literary theory that is itself theorizable only through an examination of the field as a whole.

One of the first things a reader of this volume might notice is how few of the anthologized essays in fact use the term “novel theory.” The Hungarian György Lukács, who published *The Theory of the Novel* (*Die Theorie des Romans*) in 1920, might be credited for putting the term into general circulation. But in a powerful example of how the field gets made and remade, Lukács repudiates in his famous 1962 preface the argument advanced by that early work. In particular, he critiques the Hegelian philosophical premises that led him to undertake a theory of the novel. Throwing off the “abstract synthesis” that for him defines theory as theory, Lukács champions instead the “concrete” historical analysis he has subsequently come to value.<sup>1</sup>

What the example of Lukács suggests, and what this volume more generally seeks to show, is that the theory of the novel can be practiced under other names. The theory of the novel develops as a problematic precisely through its vexed relation to theory narrowly understood – whether that understanding comes from Hegel or from other intellectual antecedents. Lukács’ preface to *The Theory of the Novel* makes it seem as if the new work he does, the work of concrete historical analysis, is the opposite of theory, theory free, as it were. But in fact his historiography is underwritten by a different kind of theory: Marxist social theory. And although his later titles subtly mark this shift (*The Historical Novel* [first published in 1937]; *Studies in European Realism* [first published in 1948]; *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* [first published in 1958]), they notably name an object of literary study rather than a theoretical approach. It is by following out the actual arguments that Lukács puts forward in these books that we can discover what counts as Marxist inquiry for him. And as we work to identify the ideas he directly imports from Marxist social theory, we also will appreciate the ways that Lukács advances the field of Marxist literary study through his own conceptual innovations, particularly through his new account of the novel. Such analysis will no doubt return us to the 1962 preface with at least one new insight: the account Lukács gives there of his career, the narrative of personal development achieved through self-critique, and more particularly the narrative of Marxist revelation arrived at through Hegelianism, is itself scripted by Marxist theory. We find that Lukács’ account of his development through and beyond novel theory is as theoretical as it is personal. We could even go so far as to say that what counts as personal experience – just as what counts as the novel – is a product of the interpretative paradigm brought to bear on it.



To understand that the theory of the novel can be conducted under other names, in the service of different types of theories, leads to another, equally important, insight into the field: that even when the term theory is used by different thinkers to mean the same thing, even when it connotes a shared understanding of how theoretical inquiry is distinguished from other types of analytic practices, such shared understanding can nonetheless generate profoundly different types of novel study. For example, due to the climate of scientism that pervades the first half of the twentieth century, we find Percy Lubbock in 1921 using the term “theory” in ways that anticipate Roland Barthes’ usage of the term in 1966.<sup>2</sup> Although Barthes explicitly imports the idea of theory from the American linguists who have inspired him to undertake the structural analysis of narrative,<sup>3</sup> Lubbock and Barthes are both more generally responding to the methodologies popularized by the new human sciences that rose to prominence in the first half of the twentieth century, to the point where we can find Lubbock using a phrase in 1921 that might describe the project that Barthes undertakes at mid-century: the attempt to give a “scientific account of the structure of the simplest book.”<sup>4</sup> Lubbock himself doubts that the novel can in fact be studied scientifically, can in fact be theorized in this sense. But he is compelled by the attempt, enough to embark upon a project that, although not scientific in its methods, shares an endpoint of science: to name the objective properties of a work of fiction. By entitling his study *The Craft of Fiction*, Lubbock emphasizes, on the one hand, the limits of scientific methods and, on the other hand, the power of art: on his view, any objective account of the nature of fiction, of the “arts and devices” a novelist uses to bring his scenes and characters to life, derives from a reader response that is itself creative and imaginative, even artistic (*Craft*, 89). Barthes, on the other hand, turns to scientific methods precisely to challenge this sort of privileging of literary effects. Literature, as a linguistic activity, should not be regarded as qualitatively different from any other language use. Producing a scientific account of the structure of the simplest book is not only a worthy endeavor for Barthes, but also one that begins by simplifying literature itself, identifying its most basic linguistic components.

This brief comparison of Lubbock and Barthes suggests the productive sorts of comparisons that can be made when theory is understood as something to be discovered through the readings in this volume, rather than something we bring to the volume, thinking that we already know all about it. In tracing out the full problematic of Lubbock and Barthes, we would also want to note that Barthes finally ends up, if not (like Lukács) repudiating his early position, then working through and beyond the influence of sociological science to help found a radically new type of theory, deconstruction. Studying the theory of the novel as a problematic puts in significant relation thinkers who might otherwise seem to occupy different critical universes. Any reader will, of course, bring to this anthology a working sense of what theory is and, for that matter, what the novel is. But a full understanding of both the novel and novel theory requires us to pluralize and historicize these notions.

This volume charts the uneven development of the field across the twentieth century by putting into relation the different philosophical projects conducted through the study of the novel – whether these bear the name of novel theory or not. I have attempted to work out some of these larger connections in *Social Formalism: The Novel in Theory from Henry James to the Present* (Stanford University Press, 1998). There I argue that the fate of

novel theory is tied to the rise and fall of literary theory as an academic discipline. Before the twentieth century, the novel was considered a popular entertainment, unworthy of a poetics of its own. But while novelists sought to develop the novel into a high art form (especially through the influential work of Gustave Flaubert, Leo Tolstoy, Henry James, Marcel Proust, Virginia Woolf, Edith Wharton, and James Joyce), academic scholarship was moving away from poetics to something that was increasingly called theory. On the one hand, the challenge to poetics came from formalists, structuralists, and narratologists who all sought (in their different ways) to separate questions of literary value from the scientific examination of the literary object, to analyze how a novel works, rather than arguing for its merit as a work of art. On the other hand, the challenge to poetics came from critical theory. From Lukács and M. M. Bakhtin to Fredric Jameson and Nancy Armstrong, the category of aesthetics has, along with the category of the literary, undergone political critique, been exposed as a covert ideological category. But if it can thus be said that novel theory lost its aesthetic grounding – its grounding as an aesthetic theory – almost before that foundation was fully laid, this is also to begin to explain why current academic interest in the novel has never been stronger. Studies of the novel have never been so prolific or so influential. The last thirty years have shown us that even cultural critics who think they have nothing to do with literary theory (and less to do with novel theory) have more than ever to do with novel studies. Especially in the sections on “Marxist Approaches,” “The Novel as Social Discourse,” “Gender, Sexuality, and the Novel,” and “Post-Colonialism and the Novel,” we can see that the very qualities that had previously disqualified the novel for serious scholarship – its popularity, discursive heterogeneity, commercialism, mimeticism, lack of stylistic density – now make it the genre of choice for cultural critics, within English departments and across disciplines. Especially for scholars who believe that the understanding of a culture lies in an understanding of its choice of popular entertainment, the novel’s “rise” (to use Ian Watt’s famous term) provides a rationale for privileging it as an object of cultural study. For post-Marxist ideological critics in particular, the novel’s status as an early form of mass entertainment makes it a preeminent instrument for the operation of social power. Thus, by the end of the twentieth century the novel has derived its exceptionalism not through arguments defending its aesthetic accomplishments, but from those championing its social power. Political theory has, by understanding the novel as the most social of literary forms, done for the genre what poetic theory never quite succeeded in accomplishing – made it the preeminent literary genre of academic study, within the humanities and beyond.

My sense of the large-scale development of novel studies across the century has directed the sequence of this anthology. The first three sections of the volume – “Form and Function,” “The Chicago School,” and “Structuralism, Narratology, Deconstruction” – show how the progress from formalism to deconstruction is imagined primarily as an act of supersession: there is a shared sense among thinkers writing before 1980 that the project of advancing knowledge about the novel requires the invention of a whole new theoretical approach. Wayne Booth, for example, works out his theory of “the rhetoric of fiction” by tinkering with the premises of the Chicago School (of which he counts himself a member) – but more radically, he rounds up the contemporary truisms about fiction (including those derived from the work of James and Lubbock) in order to question their authority. He seeks more particularly to replace

dicta about good and bad novel writing with reasoned argument – what counts for him as theory. Whereas dicta lend themselves to epigraphic quotation, theory, it turns out, is a lengthy pursuit. Booth's new way of thinking about the novel runs to more than 400 pages (with the second edition adding another 100 pages). A less grand but no less dramatic example of theoretical innovation can be found in the work of Tzvetan Todorov, a Bulgarian living in France at mid-century. Todorov cites the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky and the Anglo-American formalist, Henry James, as twin inspirations for a new theoretical approach that he will name "narratology." And in Barthes' work we can see the move from structuralism to deconstruction enacted over the course of a single career.

The supersessivist logic of Parts I through III moves novel theory into the social approaches to the novel that are collected in Parts IV through VIII. Part IV presents the turn to psychoanalysis as an early and influential attempt to apply the methods of deconstruction to social disciplines outside of literature and linguistics. Part V establishes the long-standing Marxist counter-tradition to formalism, structuralism, and deconstruction. Parts VI, VII, and VIII highlight the major post-Marxist approaches to the novel that arose in the 1980s as an answer to deconstruction. I devote more than half the volume to such relatively recent theories because these schools have not just dominated the last two decades of the twentieth century, but have carried over into the next. They provide the contemporary critic with the immediate context for novel studies today. The relationship of Parts VI through VIII is more synchronic than diachronic: one school of social theory did not oust the other, nor, for the most part, did they/do they spend much time engaging in acts of repudiation or critique. In my introductions to these three sections I suggest why these social theories are more interested in finding grounds of compatibility than defining themselves through contestation. In part the answer lies in the overwhelming unanimity of their shared political commitments. But the intellectual tradition that they have inherited has made argumentation itself, as an appeal to reason, something difficult to defend. These thinkers turn to social theory as a way beyond deconstruction, in other words, but at the heart of their enterprise is an engagement with the epistemological problems with which deconstruction has left them.

The large-scale developmental logic of the anthology's design will, I hope, allow readers who have time to spend with the volume as a whole to notice on a smaller scale how the field advances through its return to foundational texts, texts whose influence is felt across the century and within different schools. For example, we might fully expect that Jameson would locate his own Marxist theory of the novel in relation to founding fathers of Marxist literary studies such as Lukács and Walter Benjamin; but we might not have anticipated that he would credit two different kinds of formalists, Vladimír Propp and Northrop Frye, as enabling him to develop a better theory of how "ideological consciousness" gets represented in novels.<sup>5</sup> In the unit "Gender, Sexuality, and the Novel," Eve Sedgwick in one essay develops her theory of queer identity by returning us to James, and, in a different essay, works out her own theoretical position as a post-Marxist feminist through the insights of a novel theorist who is neither: René Girard.

Following out these inter-references, the expected and the unexpected, helps us constellate novel theory as a braid of traditions. But even as we strive to comprehend

novel theory through narratives of development (explicit or implicit), even as we chart the progress of the field across the century, we also want to keep in play other types of connections – the diachronic development within each Part, for example. The century seems astonishingly short when we consider that some of the scholars included in this volume have been contributing to the field of novel theory for three or four decades. Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction* was first published in 1961. The second edition appeared in 1983. In between, his theory is refined in works such as *A Rhetoric of Irony* (1974) and *Critical Understanding: The Powers and Limits of Pluralism* (1979). His thinking continues to develop in *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (1988) – and, in one of those exciting and unexpected moments of inter-reference, Booth writes an important introduction to a new English translation of M. M. Bakhtin's *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1984). Bakhtin himself ends up having what we might call the career of the century. A vital figure in Russian culture in the 1920s, Bakhtin faced political opposition that delayed the publication of his major work. Studies that he authored in the twenties and thirties were reissued (sometimes in revised editions) in Russia in the 1960s. Bakhtin's work enjoyed yet another afterlife when it was translated into English in the 1980s, exploding onto the Anglo-American scene and taking novel studies in what was regarded as a significantly new direction. In his introduction to *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Booth credits Bakhtin for providing a "clear and deep" challenge to his own views about the novel, a challenge that prompts him to engage in a wholesale reconsideration of the philosophical premises that inform the work of the Chicago School.<sup>6</sup> Henry Louis Gates, embarking in 1988 on a project related to the new theoretical field of identity politics that could not be more different from Booth's in method and spirit, likewise finds Bakhtin's work to be formative to his thinking, so much so that he cites a passage from Bakhtin's "Discourse in the Novel" as an epigraph to the first chapter of *The Signifying Monkey* (1988). Although Bakhtin is a rough chronological contemporary of his fellow countryman Shklovsky, the complexity of Bakhtin's publication and reception history situate him within the development of novel theory as *both* an early- and a late-century novel theorist.

A survey works by being representative, which means that the dynamism and complexity of these careers can be suggested only through the supplementary biographical notes included in each section. For readers of this volume, the anthologized essays will come to stand for a certain "ism": formalism, Marxism, post-colonialism, etc. While the making of intellectual historical categories should never be too tidy, my selection of essays has been guided by the influence each has had in helping to bring these rubrics into being. Because it is one of the explicit goals of this anthology to clarify the tenets of these major schools of literary theory, I have deliberately selected essays that fulfill that representative function. I have gathered together what is generally regarded to be the most famous or influential work produced by a particular thinker, whatever direction his or her own career may have taken before or after writing that work. And in order to try to detail the complexity of a particular approach, I try in my introductions to each Part to stay as focused as possible on the works included in the volume – to refer to D.A. Miller, for example, only as the Foucauldian author of *The Novel and the Police* (1988) and not mention his earlier contribution to narrative studies (*Narrative and Its Discontents: Problems of Closure in the Traditional Novel*, 1981); his later book on Roland Barthes, the novel, and gay sexuality (*Bringing Out Roland Barthes*, 1992); or his recently published

study of Jane Austen's style (*Jane Austen: or The Secret of Style*, [2003]). Catherine Gallagher is presented as a feminist cultural historian, but in essays such as "Formalism and Time" (2000) she makes an important contribution to literary history. Peter Brooks, represented in this volume as a deconstructive psychoanalytic theorist, has, in works such as *Troubling Confessions: Speaking Guilt in Law and Literature* (2000), moved into the field of legal studies. Franco Moretti's presence is regrettably limited to a small selection from his recent *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800–1900* (1998); but one wants also to recognize not just early, groundbreaking studies such as *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (1987) and *Modern Epic* (1994), but, more recently, his role as general editor of the five-volume *Il romanzo* (2001), whose encyclopedic reach remaps the novel as a world phenomenon.

If an anthology that surveys a field must accept the selectivity that enables representativeness, it can more actively work against a different type of partiality. The interest in organizing a field through narratives of development – across the century, within a school, over a career – can blind us to an important fact of intellectual history: it is one thing for a theorist to be the object of critique and another for him or her to accept that critique. Each school of theory represented in this volume has its twenty-first-century practitioners. How does one persist as a narratologist in the face of deconstructive critique? In the same way, presumably, that one persists as a deconstructionist in the face of social and political critique. Or that one persists as a Marxist in the face of the infinitely postponed day of revolution. The interest of Parts V through IX of this volume thus lies in seeing the way founding approaches to literary theory are refurbished to preserve a school *as* a school, as well as in appreciating how foundational ideas are picked up and put to work on the behalf of emergent social theories. An especially powerful example of the latter case is Homi Bhabha's trumpeted recovery of deconstruction for the sake of post-colonial studies (*The Location of Culture*, 1993). Bhabha's important concept of hybridity arguably develops from a theoretical approach that is itself self-consciously hybrid, grafting an older definition of literature onto new thinking about the nation-state. But one wants to contrast this sort of staged return to and incorporation of past theoretical work to more immanent defenses of a theoretical school, defenses that are offered as a working through rather than a working beyond. Bhabha's embrace of deconstruction might be, for example, fruitfully compared to what we might call the renewal of vows undertaken by Barbara Johnson in *A World of Difference* (1987). Her aim is to show that deconstruction has always at its heart been a political theory, and that it can give us the best account of the politics of social identity, even if its political potential has been missed by interpreters who mistake deconstructive play for aestheticism.

One wants to appreciate, in other words, the persistence of certain schools across the century: the way, for example, Nancy Armstrong's "materialist" feminism sees itself carrying forward the work of Virginia Woolf (*Desire and Domestic Fiction* [1987], 622); or the way Garrett Stewart's theory of the conscripted reader moves reader response theory into the twenty-first century by addressing the major critiques that have been leveled at this school over the past three decades. I regret that limitations of space have prevented me from doing justice to recent developments in narratology, especially narratological projects that reach out in interesting ways to the topics of ideology and history in works such as *Gendered Interventions: Narrative Discourse in the Victorian Novel* (1989) by Robyn

Warhol; *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice* (1992) by Susan Sniader Lanser; *Narrative as Rhetoric: Technique, Audiences, Ethics, Ideology* (1996) by James Phelan; and *The Distinction of Fiction* (1999) by Dorrit Cohn.

I have concluded the volume with a unit on “Novel Readers” to highlight how novel theory moves forward through acts of return. In making this the volume’s concluding section, I do not mean to imply that the novel reader is the culminating chapter in the narrative of how novel theory develops over the twentieth century. I do not mean to suggest, in other words, that novel theory has ended – or should end – here. On the contrary, the book chapters collected in this Part (none published earlier than 1974) are meant to remind us that the reader has never not been a category of investigation for novel theory. The end of the volume is thus an invitation to rethink the volume across schools, to connect this latest wave of work to the theories of the reader (both explicit and implicit) that have gone before.

I hope that the reader of this anthology will more generally come to understand the progress of novel theory by identifying its constants, to develop a sense of what changes in novel theory by appreciating what recurs. In addition to pointing out the acts of tradition-making engaged in by the theorists themselves, my introductions call attention to the persistence of key concepts that have not as yet been generally acknowledged as abiding preoccupations in the twentieth-century study of the novel. Perhaps the most dominant of these is what I call the novel’s referential lure. Throughout the century, theorists who disagree with one another on just about everything else all agree that the novel’s extraordinary mimeticism is at once seductive and unsettling – and that no understanding of the novel can be complete without taking this generic doubleness into account. The referential lure is, I show, at stake in Shklovsky’s theory of defamiliarization; Lubbock’s valorization of “showing”; Todorov’s notion of the grammatical subject; Barthes’ analysis of the sign (and his application of that understanding to realist fiction); Barbara Johnson’s account of narrative as an endless “fishing expedition”; J. Hillis Miller’s understanding of the relation between story and discourse; Shoshana Felman’s description of narrative as grounded in the psychology of “disavowal”; and D. A. Miller’s conceptualization of the liberal subject as politically and psychically constituted by the false belief in self-presence.

Almost as pervasive as the referential lure is the more recognized problem of point of view. For James, the novel’s capacity to present rich characterological consciousnesses is one of its most distinctive generic resources. Later theorists make it their project to work out the ethical consequences of this generic capacity. If one is allowed into the mind of a character, does one have a responsibility to understand that mind in a certain way? Should one sympathize, identify – or do such acts compromise the alterity of the other, overwriting all the qualities that make that consciousness different from one’s self? Bakhtin believes that the novel can promote social understanding precisely by allowing its reader to inhabit points of view different from her own. But for someone like Stewart, the reader’s felt experience of characterological identification produces not an expanded social perspective but self-division and alienation: the fact that points of view can only be inhabited through the act of novel reading means that such understanding is only fictional, produced by the particular practices of novel reading, which are marked by their difference from the social practices that guide our knowledge about people who exist outside of novels. For Marxists, the social effects of characterological point of view

are understood to be of major political importance. Jameson, for example, believes that James's valorization of novelistic point of view is itself a symptom of late capitalist ideology. On Jameson's view, James's infatuation with private consciousness actively fosters a repressive political ideology. Under capitalism, people are encouraged to imagine themselves not as the social and communal beings that they are, but as unique and isolated individuals. Jameson argues that this false ideology effectively masks the social, historical, and material realities that are the true source of social identity and political power, and thus serves as an effective tool for class domination.

In Jameson's case, the theoretical account of novelistic point of view dovetails with his understanding of the novel as a referential lure: the novel gives its reader a picture of the world, organized through individualized points of view that she mistakes for social reality. Shklovsky similarly sees the referential lure and point of view as mutually entailed, but, given the apoliticism of his own theoretical stance, he believes that the professional reader can escape the seduction of both: point of view is correctable and the referential lure is avoidable simply by right reading. Shklovsky advises the reader not to adopt the point of view of one character or another nor the point of view of one narratorial agent or another – but to resist the lure of fictional subjectivity altogether, taking on instead the impersonal point of view of the work itself.

Another issue that is never laid to rest, that intrigues thinkers at the end of the century as much as at the beginning, is the problem of the novel's unity. This problem is posed in different registers, in keeping with the different philosophical concerns of each theoretical school. For some, the novel's unity is a matter of achieved aesthetic power: can the novel be theorized as its own literary genre or is it instead distinguished by a discursive heterogeneity that is antithetical to high art forms? For the theorists who decide in favor of latter, the problem of unity reemerges as another sort of question: if the novel is indeed a discursive heterogeneity, can it perform cultural work that is itself unified in its social effects? The problem of whether unity can and should be imputed to the novel is a question that we find taken up in every unit, and by almost every theorist. Henry James famously tries to tame the Victorian baggy monster through the unifying effects of composition and style. If we fast-forward to the other end of the century, we find post-colonial critics arguing that the novel is distinguished as a literary form – in fact projects itself as form – due to its unique capacity for spatial effects. The novel reader's experience of text as space can unify, so these theorists argue, even the most multi-plotted or digressive of narratives. For members of the Chicago School, a particular novel finds its unity as form through its successful control over readerly emotion and ethical judgment. And we will be interested to note more generally how often in this volume the novel's unity is defined in terms of the philosophical truth it offers its reader, a truth that is defined differently by each school. For Bakhtin, the novel's unity lies in the ethical condition of achieved alterity. Lukács, Jameson, Armstrong, D. A. Miller, and Edward Said all stress the unity of the ideological mystification performed by the novel. Jane Tompkins believes that the novel can provide a unified "blueprint" for social reform. Girard finds in the novel a unified path out of self-blindness and into authentic self-awareness. Johnson, Felman, and J. Hillis Miller imagine this same dynamic as a unified process of oscillation: the novel moves its reader into insight only to return her to blindness – and then back again.

The referential lure, point of view, novelistic unity – when taken together, do these persistent topics of inquiry add up to a meta-issue that might lie at the heart of the theory of the novel? Perhaps so. One of the primary concerns of the theorists in this volume is how the seeming social heterogeneity achieved in the pages of high realist novels (most often cited are works by Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, Honoré de Balzac, George Eliot, and Leo Tolstoy) is covertly mediated by unifying value. Value is, of course, defined variously – semantically, ideologically, ethically, politically, rhetorically, formally, or psychoanalytically. Wolfgang Iser, for example, formulates the split between the novel's visible story world and the invisible operation of value as the tension between the ostensible empirical world represented by the novel and the hidden principles of selectivity that underlie this seemingly mimetic presentation. Iser rightly sees his theory as compatible with James's view of the novel as an indirect expression of authorial identity. For James, novel reading refers us back to the author, whose vision of life is sincerely represented through its successful manifestation as an independent social world. Felman's deconstructive reading of James leads her to argue that the seemingly independent life of fictional characters is an emblem of the blindness upon which any act of knowledge is built. The value that mediates the novelistic world is, for Felman, a philosophical truth about the epistemological inadequacy of reference – and yet also a confession of our psychological dependence upon reference, our inability to pursue truth claims without it.

I have already indicated how this meta-issue plays out in the Marxist tradition. The understanding of the novel world as a referential lure, covertly mediated by point of view, working in the service of a unified political effect, is characterized by Jameson as one of capitalism's most effective tools of ideological indoctrination. But as we bring this problematic forward for closer study, we will need to shade our sense of how it functions within Marxism more generally. By Lukács' lights, the mimetic world of the novel can be imagined as working on behalf of social reform. Lukács argues that a gifted realist like Balzac can expose the hegemonic operation of social power, its mediation of a life that is experienced as free or empirical, without being guilty of carrying forward this cultural indoctrination through the novelistic act of mediation. Balzac's depiction of a heterogeneous social world lends itself to a Marxist counter-vision of human identity; and his portrayal of characters as social types manifests this alternative scale of values within the world of the novel.

Other social approaches in this volume follow the Marxist tradition in theorizing the split between the story world the novel makes visible and the mediating value that it hides as a representational disjunction that has powerful political effects. Post-colonialists, for example, come down hard on a writer like Jane Austen. Her critique of pride and prejudice on the home front distracts attention from other social sins practiced abroad. The somewhere brought into being by her novel worlds, in other words, authorizes the English imperialism conducted elsewhere. But from the feminist perspective of Virginia Woolf, the story worlds of Jane Austen's novels are triumphs of female self-empowerment. Rather than succumbing to the ideology of her age, Austen, according to Woolf, possessed a mind that "consumed all impediments."<sup>7</sup> Austen's ability to create a story world that seems wholly autonomous, that provides no trace of the biographical author who conceived that world, is for Woolf a political act of revolution. Austen's mimetic achievement represents for Woolf nothing less than the liberation of the female



author from patriarchal mediation. While the political stakes of these Marxist and post-Marxist social theories (hegemonic or subversive, repressive or liberating) may be all too familiar to anyone practicing literary criticism today, I show in my introductions how the particular – and unexpected – arguments made about the way value is manifested in and through novelistic form open a fresh area of inquiry for the theory of the novel.

Of course, in working out the larger significance of this or another potential meta-issue within the field, we need to keep in mind that, while all the essays in this anthology take novels as their primary literary examples, not all have equal stakes in theorizing the novel *as* a genre. We especially want to notice the different types of conceptual work performed by the terms novel, fiction, story, literature, narrative, story/discourse, text, writing, and social discourse. I hope my introductions make clear the different provenances of these terms – the deconstructive and then Foucauldian context for writing, for example, or the structural linguistic and then deconstructive context for narrative. Of course many of these terms have more than one provenance. Storytelling, for example, is the term used by the Marxist Walter Benjamin to denote a supremely human act of communication. But for the narratologist, story is wholly nonevaluative: it is simply the word used to designate a basic component of narrative structure. The term fiction similarly has a descriptive and prescriptive role to play in novel theory. On the one hand, it is the term of choice for formalist studies that present themselves as classificatory, as devoted to labeling the elements or techniques basic to any prose fiction, from a Hemingway vignette to *War and Peace*. On the other hand, fiction is the preferred term for political thinkers such as Armstrong, who believe that novels perform the cultural work of creating false ideology, specifically the grand illusion that human desire is “independent of political history” (*Desire*, 626). Peter Brooks uses fiction to express a more universal distrust of any knowledge claim: in his post-structuralist version of psychoanalysis, he finds any assertion of interpretative authority to be an act of fiction – the fiction that meaning is knowable.

Brooks’s theory of knowledge leads him to rely on another key term, one that is of overwhelming importance not just to his project but the field as a whole: narrative. Narrative is the name he gives (along with Felman, Johnson, and Hillis Miller) to knowledge reconceived experientially, as a dynamic and temporal process. Structured by the desire to obtain meaning, what Brooks calls the desire for the end, narrative provides only temporary satisfactions. Meaning culminates – but never holds. With each collapse, the search for meaning is renewed. Brooks’s psychoanalytic account of narrative derives as much from formalist and narratological studies of narrative as from Freudian and deconstructive accounts of desire. But in appropriating the term narrative from these formalist and narratological studies, Brooks takes a concept that had been derived as a neutral category of semiotic classification (to enable the cross-disciplinary study of narrative in fiction, poetry, nonfictional narrative, film, dance, comic strips, or any other media) and finds it to hold nothing less than the foundational structure of the human mind. We can see this logic replayed in Jameson’s ambitious attempt to refurbish psychoanalytic concepts (such as the unconscious) for Marxist theory. He believes that narrative is not just one semiotic mode but the “the central function or *instance* of the human mind.”<sup>8</sup> On his view, form equates with content: structural centrality is understood as human essence. In a move that brings us back to Benjamin, Jameson declares that “storytelling is the supreme function of the human mind.” For Jameson, the human

essence that is storytelling provides a justification for studying the novel as a socio-political form. In modernity, the central instance of the human mind manifests itself through the culturally significant invention and development of the novel as a genre.

The theorists in this volume who have the most to say about the novel as a genre are those who, like Jameson, define genre as essentially a sociohistorical phenomenon. Some of the formalists (such as Frye and some members of the Chicago School) are arguably exceptions to this trend, since their explicit inquiries into genre are conducted with minimal historicization. Yet we want to note that even their analytic approach to genre is less prescriptive (what a good novel should be) and more descriptive (how the novel as a genre has evolved as a form or evolved in relation to other literary forms), which is why some of these formalist theories of genre have been successfully incorporated into historical approaches (such as Jameson's). Especially from Part VI on, however, theorists tend to follow the Marxist example explicitly: to avoid theories of genre that smack of abstract synthesis and instead to pursue concrete historicization. The historical studies in Parts VI through VIII thus tend to focus on a particular cultural moment of novelistic production: the eighteenth-century English novel; the antebellum American novel; the twentieth-century African American novel; the advent of the female novelist in England.

With this move to historical specificity, there is in Parts VI through VIII a move away from the comparative study of national literatures. In the first half of the century, theorists routinely draw from the canon of European and Russian novels. Shklovsky and Bakhtin conduct readings of Lawrence Sterne and Charles Dickens (respectively) as well as Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. The English Lubbock is as interested in Tolstoy, Flaubert, and Balzac as he is in Samuel Richardson, William Thackeray, and Henry James. But although later sociohistorical approaches to the novel generally refrain from crossing national and period boundaries, there is one important exception to this trend. Interestingly, Lukács and Jameson, the Marxists who played such an influential role in encouraging literary studies to, in Jameson's words, "Always historicize," are themselves able to meet this goal while maintaining a comparativist perspective.<sup>9</sup> The practice of concrete historicization is not, for these thinkers, at all compromised by the opening of the historical field through national border-crossing. For both of these Marxists, the ideological homogenization that takes place under late capitalism unifies modernity and allows modernism to be studied as a unified field. The specific national responses to global change thus become the focus for comparative analysis: Lukács undertakes a study of European realism that includes novels from France and Russia; and Jameson's work brings together Emily Brontë, Balzac, Joseph Conrad, as well as writers in between.

Other non-Marxist thinkers in the volume share the view that modernity is defined by an epistemic shift. The difference between the modern and the nonmodern is thus unbreachable in a way that the differences among modern cultural productions are not. Girard notably holds this view of modernity; but he attributes the cause of this historical shift not to the rise of a particular mode of production, but, more generally, to the decline of monarchy and the advent of individualism. He thus treats as a unified field the novels of Miguel de Cervantes, Stendhal, Flaubert, Proust, and Dostoevsky in his study of the modern condition of triangular desire. For a thinker such as Bhabha, however, the same historical shift (the decline of monarchy and the rise of nationalism) produces a universal modern condition that, on his view, only has meaning through its specific historical manifestations, what he calls the locality of culture. The kind of reading that

Girard undertakes, one that treats novels as autonomous works of art, is thus an impossibility for Bhabha.

Bhabha's belief in the value of thick descriptions of cultural practices is shared by other thinkers in this volume, leading some to pursue what might be called the comparative study of social discourses. Tompkins, studying antebellum American fiction, and Armstrong, studying eighteenth-century British fiction, both believe that the cultural work performed by the novel is best understood when compared to that performed by conduct books and homemaker manuals. Gates conducts his study of the twentieth-century African American novel by turning, on the one hand, to African mythology and, on the other, to African American folklore. Gayatri Spivak exhorts us to investigate government files in order to understand the novel's relation to English imperialism. Gallagher believes that the emergence and development of the English novel can best be understood in relation to legal and economic changes that created new discourses about fiction, female identity, and the market.

It would have been possible to represent the shift to cultural history that begins in the 1980s by organizing the second half of this volume under the rubrics of different national traditions: Chinese, British, Russian, European, American, Anglophone, etc. While such a study of the novel would be interesting in its own way, I have instead chosen rubrics that allow for the investigation of important philosophical differences among sociohistorical approaches that in spirit seem so compatible, especially in their political views. The essays gathered together in "Post-Colonialism and the Novel," for example, deal exclusively with English cultural production – and it is precisely this common focus that enables subtle theoretical differences to come into focus. Spivak, Said, and Moretti all understand themselves as refining one another's insights; but when we examine closely, for example, Said's analysis of Austen and Spivak's reading of Charlotte Brontë, we find that there are huge differences in the conceptualization of ideology. These conceptual differences have significant ramifications for understanding the novel as an ideological agent not just within these three essays, and not just for our understanding of English imperialism, but for the field of post-colonial theory more generally.

In the anthology as a whole, the discussion of British fiction far outweighs that of any other national tradition. This directly reflects the profound engagement that theorists of all schools have had with the British novel. Said offers an historical explanation for the dominance of British fiction. He argues that the "steady rise and gradually undisputed dominance of the British novel" gave it global hegemony. As other nations developed their own novel tradition, they looked to the English novel as a model. On Said's view, the "eminence" of the British novel cannot be understood apart from English world power: the rise and fall of the hegemony of the English novel is directly related, he argues, to the rise and fall of English imperialism (*Culture*, 693). While other theorists may not agree with Said's political argument, an extraordinary number agree that the novel did in fact rise first in England – and that this historical fact in and of itself makes the British novel of central concern to novel studies more generally. Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel* (1957) helped popularize this view of the English novel. His title has been the basis of citation and/or revision ever since. Nina Baym echoes it in her chapter title "The Triumph of the Novel." Armstrong explicitly takes Watt to task in her *Desire and Domestic Fiction*. And Gallagher encourages us to better understand the rise of the novel by asking a related question: when did fiction arise as a popular cultural form?

The enduring theoretical interest in the rise of the British novel will, I hope, work heuristically for the reader of this anthology. The repeated citation of particular novels across the volume will allow those works to serve as tutor texts for many of the theories in this book. When we are looking to make comparisons across theoretical schools, it is useful to be able to put into relation, say, Spivak's post-colonial interpretation of *Frankenstein* and Stewart's reader-response analysis of the same novel. If one has read *Frankenstein* for oneself, these literary repetitions might carry additional power: one knows intimately which features of the novel are emphasized or omitted – and further knows how one's preestablished interpretation of the novel is overthrown or confirmed by these different approaches to the same novel. But at the risk of sounding perverse, I would also make a case for the heuristic value of reading theoretical accounts that focus on novels that one has never read for oneself. Theoretical claims can sometimes come more clearly into view when one has no particular stake in the novels under discussion. This is not, of course, to say that one should read theory instead of novels or to say that knowing the novels spoils theory. It is only to point out that both types of relation (knowing and not knowing a particular novel under discussion) have their value. It is also to encourage readers of the volume to accept the fact that doing theory is always a process of finding one's moorings: there will be ideas in each essay that inevitably elude one's understanding, especially on a first reading, and the reader of literary theory needs to find a way of charting these waters. This applies equally to readers who are new to the field and readers who make the field their research specialty. For those who become interested in novel theory, this volume is an invitation to read more. Some readers may, for example, want to investigate the philosophical texts that provide the background for much literary theory: Aristotle, Marx, Freud, Saussure, Lacan, Derrida, and Foucault – to mention the names cited most frequently in this volume. Other readers may want to deepen their knowledge of a particular school by reading more deeply within that school. And all of us, one hopes, will be left wanting to read more novels, perhaps in new ways.

I have been talking thus far as if the novel and theory inhabit separate realms, the literary and the logical, perhaps, or the artistic and the argumentative. But I want to make a case for the literary pleasure that many of the essays in this volume provide through their own acts of style. Such literary pleasure does not have one critical modality. It may be found, for example, in the dazzling originality of the close readings performed by Eve Sedgwick. Or it can lie in the high lucidity that Barbara Johnson and D. A. Miller bring to the most abstruse concepts. Roland Barthes might be counted a theorist of the literary pleasures of criticism – and his own narrative and stylistic experiments with the genre culminate in *S/Z* (1970), his masterwork of narrative theory which, precisely because of its literariness is, alas, unexcerptable. If Barthes gives literary criticism a new literary form, Franco Moretti, by contrast, cultivates a conversational style, the projection of an individualized voice whose charm lies in its wit and seeming informality. Or some readers may be moved by the highly wrought sentences of Felman, whose key terms accrue meaning through repetition, making theory inseparable from narrative. Felman's technique actually performs the conceptual relation between her two masters, wedding the theory of Lacan to the style of James. James, himself, of course, culminated his own novel career with the turn to theory. Although after writing the Prefaces for the New York edition of his work (the body of work that is credited with

inaugurating Anglo-American novel theory), he did return to fiction-writing, the Prefaces stand as the epitome of his late style (to some a crowning sublimity, to others, the apex of over-refinement and super-subtlety).

In my introductions I suggest that such acts of literary critical style have their own theoretical importance: they are conducted, in many cases, in accordance with a particular thinker's sense of the function of literary criticism – as description, persuasion, or signification; philosophy, history, aesthetics, or politics. But there is also a more immediate and direct point to be made about the power of literary critical style. The writers in this volume have earned their status as foundational figures in the field of novel theory not just because of their innovative and influential arguments but also because of their own abilities as writers. The rereading that is required to understand the full complexity of any of these thinkers is made attractive in part by the pleasure of reengaging with the style. This literariness allows me to press a point I have already made: that such theory is most fully understood through close reading.

To display theoretical argument in all of its complexity, I have made every attempt to include in this volume book chapters or free-standing essays that are either unedited or very lightly edited. In this regard, the selections in this volume contrast with the soundbite approach to literary theory, the belief that schools of thought can be understood through a brief excerpt, chosen to highlight a major concept. In my own experience with theory, I could no more understand, say, James's notion of the house of fiction by reading only the passage from the Prefaces in which he defines that idea than I could understand *The Portrait of a Lady* by reading only chapter 42. A theory comes philosophically alive when we see a thinker working it out, when we can see an argument develop narratively, across a chapter and through a book as a whole. Is a key idea formulated and then dropped? Does it accrue new meaning as it is applied? Do other ideas seem to mitigate its truth value or even to contradict its claims?

I have attempted to pose such questions consistently and fairly across the volume. In my discussion of each essay, I try to draw out the major thesis claims and to identify what is particularly innovative, controversial, and influential about the argument as a whole. By working out the developmental logic of each argument, I show how these essays actively *generate* the rubrics by which they came to be known. For the thinkers gathered here, the affiliation with a certain approach to the novel is a starting point rather than an end point for theoretical inquiry. Belonging to a theoretical school doesn't provide them with prefabricated answers, with a conceptual grid through which any particular novel can be processed. On the contrary, affiliation with a certain theoretical tradition is a means of generating important new questions about the novel, as well as a way of looking for new answers.

Part of what it means to keep open the dynamism of novel theory is to appreciate the ideas that have been taken from the field. Terms such as defamiliarization, triangular desire, and double voice have become clichés of academic parlance. Indeed, they have appealed to the popular imagination to the point where they enjoy an intellectual life outside the academy. We can find them routinely deployed in journalism and other popular discourses. I call these ideas the portable concepts of novel theory. They may have begun as applied concepts within literary study, but now, even in academic settings, the use of portable concepts may or may not be guided by the original meaning given to the term (in these examples the meaning given by, respectively, Shklovsky, Girard, and

Bakhtin). To study the origin of these concepts, to recapture them as conceptual problematics, does not mean that all later usages should be dismissed as misappropriations. On the contrary, knowing what, say, Shklovsky did and did not mean by defamiliarization puts us in a better position to understand how the act of application can result in theoretical permutation.

I am acutely aware that the kind of analysis that I offer in this volume is not itself a neutral endeavor – nor would I want it to be. My introductions are themselves arguments, attempts at persuasion. The stakes are higher at some moments than others. There are some thinkers that I especially admire and therefore want you to admire, too, preferably in the same way. There are others whose lapses in logic frustrate me – and others whose lapses in logic strike me as a theoretical tour de force. These investments will no doubt be clearer to my reader than to myself – and I hope they will be a spur to dialogue, a way of encouraging debate that will further enrich our understanding of the double problematic: novel theory. This anthology is not, despite its headstone dates (1900–2000), a memorial to twentieth-century novel theory. If I have done my job, this anthology will be one of the ways that novel theory gets carried forward into the twenty-first century, introducing readers of a new generation to these foundational texts.

#### NOTES

- 1 György Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock (1920; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971) 14, 17.
- 2 Percy Lubbock, *The Craft of Fiction* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1921) 9.
- 3 Roland Barthes, “Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives” (1966), *Image-Music-Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977) 81.
- 4 Lubbock, *The Craft of Fiction* 11.
- 5 Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981) 47.
- 6 Wayne C. Booth, introduction, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, by Mikhail Bakhtin, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson, *Theory and History of Literature*, vol. 8 (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press 1984) xxiv.
- 7 Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* (1929; New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1957) 73.
- 8 Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* 13, 123.
- 9 *Ibid.* 9.

# PAPER

**Form and Function**

# I

## Introduction

What distinguishes the novel as a literary form? It is not just the asking of this question that makes thinkers like Viktor Shklovsky and Percy Lubbock “formalists”; it is their shared belief that literary form should be studied as an autonomous entity, able to be isolated from social, political, and historical contexts. For Russian and Anglo-American formalists, form is an aesthetic property intrinsic to, and therefore varying among, literary genres. To ask what distinguishes the novel as a literary form thus already implies what was, at the beginning of the twentieth century, a controversial claim about the novel: that the novel should be considered neither a “baggy monster” (to use Henry James’s phrase) nor disposable entertainment for the masses, but an art form with compositional strategies all its own. Accompanying this new confidence in the novel as a serious aesthetic accomplishment are new serious methods of studying the novel. By devoting unprecedented close attention to the narrative technique of individual novels, formalists seek to unearth what had so far been hidden from view: that novels are (or should be) more than exciting stories or even accurate pictures of life; novels are strategically composed works of art whose formal complexity and importance rival the aesthetic achievement of epic, drama, and the lyric as well as that of fine arts such as painting, sculpture, and music.

The belief that the art of the novel can be discussed and evaluated only after its narrative techniques or “devices” have been identified and enumerated launches novel theory into an Adamic ecstasy of naming. The first thing to notice about the essays in



this section is how many terms they coin, how the novel's particular literary form seems to require a new literary-critical vocabulary. The aesthetics of the novel have been missed, it seems, not because the novel isn't an aesthetic form, but because critical language derived from other literary genres can't register the novel's distinguishing formal features. James's Prefaces to the New York edition of his work (1907–9) offer plain-speech terms like "picture," "scene," and "center of consciousness" to describe the compositional effects he most valued. This rough vocabulary only whets the appetite of Percy Lubbock, James's most influential follower, who almost twenty years later is driven to write *The Craft of Fiction* (1921) because of his felt "want of a received nomenclature" (90) in the Anglo-American study of fiction. The Russian tradition derives its classificatory practice from a scientific paradigm that would have been anathema to James and Lubbock; but the catalogues generated by Vladimir Propp and Shklovsky are, like the work of the Anglo-Americans, derived from the text-based, empirical examination of specific novels and actual narrative practices.

The terms and grounds of this compatibility, however, should in no way be taken for granted: one of the interests in studying the formalist roots of novel theory is to gauge the conceptual cross-hatching of aesthetic positions that derives from such different intellectual and historical traditions. Although the cross-fertilization of the Russian and Anglo-American traditions is apparent in the theorists' overlapping sense of a novel canon (James quotes Turgenev, Tolstoy is a major figure for Lubbock, and Shklovsky has chapters on Dickens as well as Sterne), there is no evidence that Shklovsky read James's Prefaces (even though he does refer to William James's theory of the emotions) – and even if Shklovsky had read Henry James, he no doubt would have considered their projects far removed from one another. Shklovsky initiates his work on prose fiction in reaction to the poetic experiments being undertaken in Russia at the time, particularly those conducted by the symbolist and futurist poets. His preface to the *Theory of Prose* (1925) makes a bold and controversial statement, one that he will feel obliged to retract in 1930 under Stalinism: "As a literary critic, I've been engaged in the study of the internal laws that govern literature. If I may bring up the analogy of a factory, then I would say that neither the current state of the world cotton market nor the politics of cotton trusts interests me. One thing alone concerns me: the number of strands that make up the cotton plant and the different ways of weaving them."<sup>1</sup>

Whatever the long-term political ramifications of such inflammatory functionalism, Shklovsky's desire to isolate literature from the social world is in fact problematized more immediately by the internal logic of his own argument. In "Art as Technique," an essay that would become the first chapter of *Theory of Prose*, he implicitly establishes the difference between cotton and poetry by asserting the vital human value of literature. According to Shklovsky, literature restores the primacy and vivacity of human perception – and thus makes life worth living. Arguing against influential Russian scholars of the time who, in their own attempt to define the essence of literary language, declare poetry to be "a special way of thinking...precisely, a way of thinking in images," Shklovsky believes that to think in images is in fact not to think at all: poetic images function as symbols; symbols, he believes, express perception that has been robbed of its primacy by becoming habitual, and thus abstract.<sup>2</sup> Whereas his contemporaries praise poetic expression for its "economy," Shklovsky believes that such condensations of thought and expression in fact attenuate life itself. The "algebraic" substitution of

symbols for things ultimately fosters a pernicious false knowledge: the partial representation of objects by their salient characteristics (rather than in their full complexity). As he dramatically puts it,

Habitualization devours works, clothes, furniture, one's wife, and the fear of war... [A]rt exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stone*. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects "unfamiliar," to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. *Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important.*<sup>3</sup>

This crux passage introduces the theoretical concept that has perhaps been Shklovsky's most portable and enduring legacy: the idea of defamiliarization. But although defamiliarization (meaning simply that the familiar has suddenly been made strange) is now a standard vocabulary word in literary study, scholars have never ceased to be perplexed by the logical tensions expressed in this passage. If art exists to restore perception, to make us perceive the stone's essential "stoniness," then what relation does the object's intrinsic identity have to the "artfulness" bestowed upon it through representation? Is the object unimportant, in other words, because no object is too trivial not to be worth restoring? (On this view, stones, clothes, one's wife, and the fear of war are all equatable because all are elemental to human life.) Or is the object unimportant because artistic representation supersedes the real-world importance (or triviality) of the thing it depicts? (On this view, the practice of art bestows significance, even on so lowly an object as a stone.) One may further feel that Shklovsky is trying to have it both ways when he describes perception as "an aesthetic end in itself" without taking into full account the profound real-life consequences he has in fact attributed to defamiliarized perception.

We can see in Shklovsky's reading of *Tristram Shandy* how literary defamiliarization has certain consequences for our understanding of wives, wars, and the perception of life more generally – and why for Shklovsky the novel is the literary genre best suited to the sustained practice of defamiliarization. Shklovsky argues that, on the one hand, Sterne employs defamiliarization to teach the reader something about the normative social values that produce her vision of the "natural" world: according to Shklovsky, Sterne's verbal practices of euphemism and erotic double entendre, for example, draw attention to the "normal" names for body parts (and the conventional social values those names imply) by denaturalizing these names. On the other hand, Sterne defamiliarizes the novel itself by exposing the "artificiality" and literary conventionality of the plot devices that structure the story world. He thus forces the reader to see how she has naturalized the novel as a genre by attending to its realist content and ignoring its antirealist formal practices. Sterne makes it impossible to read through literary form; and he does this by juxtaposing the "realist" logic that governs the story world with the "literary" logic that governs all novelistic representation. If characters in a novel live in a world where causes precede effects, where space is mapable and time chronological, where people come to know one another through shared social decorum, readers of *Tristram Shandy* find that novelistic plot structures operate by different laws. Sterne's narration puts effect

before cause, willfully expands and contracts time, plays with Euclidian space, and overthrows the social conventions that regulate interpersonal intimacy in “real life.” For Shklovsky, Sterne’s flamboyant disruption of the story world is not a novelistic anomaly; on the contrary, it is a vivid display of the normative operation of all prose fiction: “*Tristram Shandy*,” Shklovsky (with deliberate perversity) declares, “is the most typical novel in world literature” (52).

But if the highlighted difference in Sterne’s novel between story world and plot structure exposes the “device,” makes palpable to the reader the alternative logic governing literary form, for Shklovsky it also throws into question the normative categories that govern life in the story world. Sterne’s outlandish narrative practices, his refusal to let his story world be taken as an unmediated referent, defamiliarize the conventional assumption that narrative can be neatly divided into content and form: *Tristram Shandy* allows the reader to reconceptualize the relation between story and narrative technique, representational content and representational form, as a dynamic, complex, and, above all, performative relationship. The reader cannot read the novel without normative expectations about the life it seems to depict – and the function of plot is to disrupt those conventions even as its story world invokes them. The story world is thus not what the novel is “about”; it is one element in a process, the referential lure, the “familiar,” whose defamiliarization through the novel’s literary techniques leads the reader to see how thoroughly his habits of perception have constructed his world – which he then mistakes for natural.

The logical tension that attends Shklovsky’s theorization of the “stoniness of the stone” thus carries over to his conceptualization of the “literariness” of the literary work. On the one hand, defamiliarization is a readerly effect, an overturning of readerly habits of interpretation that yields a new perception of reality. But on the other hand, defamiliarization teaches the reader something new about the novel itself: that as an art form it is governed by laws different from those of the social world. Although a theory that emphasizes the reader’s restored perception of “life” might ultimately have more to say about the political and ethical dimensions of “habitation,” Shklovsky instead emphasizes perception’s function within the art work as “an aesthetic end in itself.” In keeping with his interest in “the number of strands that make up the cotton plant and the different ways of weaving them,” he studies an art work only to see how it works: to understand the interrelation of the literary properties internal to it. To his mind, the analysis of the art work’s internal functioning has nothing to do with “interpretation”; he is not concerned with what the novel might mean or how it might communicate. He does not, in other words, analyze individual novels for either thematic or symbolic meaning. Instead he strives to give a purely descriptive account of the “strands of the plant,” the parts of the literary whole.

Shklovsky thus attenuates his account of readerly perception by focusing on its functional position as a part of the literary whole. And we can see in his opinions about other types of reader response how strictly Shklovsky construes “restored perception” as a response that leads the reader back to the literary text and not off into the social world. Restored perception is qualitatively different, on this view, from any emotional response a reader might have to the events in the story world. Shklovsky notes approvingly, for example, that “For Sterne, the death of Bobby Shandy is chiefly motivation for expansion of the material [i.e. the technique]” (45). If art restores

perception to the reader, then this does not mean for Shklovsky that art produces emotion: in one of his most extreme formulations he declares that “Art... is unsympathetic – or beyond sympathy... In discussing such emotion we have to examine it from the point of view of the composition itself, in exactly the same way that a mechanic must examine a driving belt to understand the details of a machine; he certainly would not study the driving belt as if he were a vegetarian” (43). In this rejection of readerly affective response, we see Shklovsky’s abiding valorization of the intrinsic identity of the object of perception. On this view the readerly emotion inspired by the story world is itself part of the novel’s literary function, a drive belt that helps the novel as an art work to work. To understand this emotion in any other way is, for Shklovsky, to misunderstand it. The right perception of the art work thus is always only immanent and impersonal, “from the point of view of the composition itself.” To see it from a different point of view is to not see it at all – as is implied by the mechanic who adopts the perspective of the machine itself rather than that of a “vegetarian.” This notion of a closed and integrated functionality allows Shklovsky to claim that the artfulness of the art object lies wholly in its composition or form: “awareness of form constitutes the subject matter of the novel” (34), he declares, as well as that “The story is, in fact, only material for plot formation” (52). To be moved by the art object would mean that the reader had mistaken its functional purpose, was in fact distorting this purpose by attending too naively to the action of the story world: an emotional response to the story world would mean that the reader had failed to respond to defamiliarization and therefore wrongly imagined that the literary work required a human response to a story about other human beings.

As the example of the driving belt emphasizes, Shklovsky’s definition of the literariness of prose fiction is one based upon the elemental or basic operations of storytelling. For Shklovsky, Sterne is not revolutionary because he has invented something new; rather he is revolutionary in making visible the literariness of the novel’s covert literariness, a complexity which for Shklovsky works more quietly in the ordinary narrative practices of any novel. Although Shklovsky implies that Sterne’s self-consciousness adds to the power of his achievement, Shklovsky’s notion of the literary is based upon a functionality in which neither artistic genius nor authorial intention plays any part. For these reasons, Shklovsky’s theory of literature inspired other formalists to study narrative texts that traditionally have been considered beneath scholarly notice. Shklovsky’s theory of prose fiction thus helped to elevate the novel to a high art form by enabling readers to see the novel’s literariness, to see that it had a form; but it simultaneously weakened the concept of high art by finding formal complexity in just about any narrative performance. Since the greatness of *Tristram Shandy* lies not in its exceptionalism but in its typicality, then why shouldn’t typicality itself become a positive literary value? Scholars who believed that it should and could turned their attention not only to works of art that had been dismissed precisely on the grounds of their unoriginality but also to extraliterary narrative modes such as journalism, history, and autobiography.

The belief that subliterate genres could have complex narrative forms is one inspiration folklorist Vladímir Propp took from Shklovsky’s work. If Shklovsky could uncover the underlying literary laws that gave order to the surface chaos of Sterne’s novel, and if he could further speculate about the common plot elements that unite all novels, then

Propp believed a similar method could work for the study of folk tales, whose multi-formity seemed overwhelming to the empirical researcher. Propp breaks down the chaotic archive of the Russian fairy tale into a typology that includes seven large spheres of action (performed by the *dramatis personae*) and thirty-one subcategories. He is able to achieve such a streamlined system of classification because, he believes, the wide differences in the story's "content" are simply differences in detail, epiphenomena that prevent the common generic identity of these tales from being readily grasped. Past researchers have been led astray, he maintains, in part because they have paid too much attention to the proliferation and variability of *dramatis personae*; his method looks past this superficial difference (the difference, say, between an old man and a princess as protagonists) to examine the actions these characters perform – and he finds astonishing uniformity in tales that otherwise might seem uncomparable.

Like Shklovsky's theory of plot, Propp's *Morphology* of the fairy-tale form begins with the conviction that form is essentially active. In answer to the question "how many functions are known to the tale?" (55), Propp interestingly defines a specific tale's function as a subset of a larger functional unit. Reading each individual tale in relation to the larger body of folk tales, Propp expresses this dynamic concept of form through the analogy of an extended sentence: the "functions" of any particular tale operate as parts of speech by virtue of the larger grammar of fairy tales that Propp's synthetic study has decoded. Propp's belief that this grammar is "dictated by the tale itself" (58) – that the grammar of the fairy tale is a closed set, isolated from social context and legible through a representational logic intrinsic to this set – thus resonates with Shklovsky's desire to understand art intrinsically, from "the point of view of the composition itself." But for Propp this intrinsic functionality is illegible if one were to try to derive it from a single text. The functions of any particular folk tale are noticeable only when detected as repetitions within an intertextual pattern. The formal similarities among individual folk tales thus reveal to the analyst the grammar of the folk tale, a structure that in turn makes legible the salient formal elements of each tale. But we can quickly see in Propp's need to consider the "double morphological meaning of a single function" (60) how the tale's intrinsic "dictation" of function might contain a certain latitude for interpretation: if the model can be complicated so a single function can serve two morphological meanings, why not three or four or more? The introduction of such complexity also suggests that two different decoders might disagree not only about how many functions are being performed but what exactly these functions might be. And yet such potential for interpretative disagreement does not enter Propp's theory – and so we cannot look to him to find a way of resolving potential debates about morphological meaning.

Whereas for Shklovsky the readerly experience of defamiliarization leads to the study of literature in its own terms, from the point of view of the composition itself, for Propp readerly subjectivity simply plays no part. Functions are unambiguous, interpretation is not required, and readers/anthropologists come to the literary text with a seemingly natural capacity for impersonality. And for Shklovsky as for Propp, within the story world "character" is not a privileged locus of human experience; it is a literary (Shklovsky) or grammatical (Propp) property, the function of which distinguishes one kind of textual practice from another and thus becomes the basis of generic (rather than human) identity. If anything, the apparent individuality of characters is a snare of the story world that each theorist learns to read through. For Shklovsky characters function

as referential lures, familiarisms whose mimeticism is integral to the ultimate disruption of social habit performed by narrative structure. For Propp, the apparent heterogeneity and diversity of folkloric characters is accidental or superficial, but in either case insignificant to the common sets of *actions* they perform, actions that for Propp define their identity as functional elements in the larger grammar of the folk tale. As we will see more fully in Part III of this anthology, the Russian formalists' defamiliarization of character will later in the century be picked up by structuralists and contribute to a sweeping, post-humanist reconceptualization of personhood itself. What are the habits of thought about persons that are broken by the disruption of characterological mimeticism by narrative laws? If literary characters are defined by their position within a linguistic structure, and if that position is more important to identity than a name, gender, or occupation, then might the same be true for real persons?

Perhaps the most profound distinction between early Russian and early Anglo-American formalism lies in the treatment of subjective agents. The Jamesian formalist tradition places the representation of consciousness – and ultimately the problem of point of view – at the heart of novel studies. For James the novel is first and foremost a representation of the author's sensibility, his "vision of life." And at times it seems that this is the only quality James requires the novel to possess. In an early essay called "The Art of Fiction" (1888), James argues against an English contemporary, Walter Besant, who believes the "laws of fiction may be laid down and taught with as much precision and exactness as the laws of harmony, perspective, and proportion."<sup>4</sup> James insists instead that there are no laws of fiction, other than the grounding imperative that the novel be true to "life": "the only reason for the existence of a novel is that it does attempt to represent life."<sup>5</sup> This represented life is necessarily mediated for James by authorial consciousness: "A novel is in its broadest definition a personal, a direct impression of life."<sup>6</sup>

In an odd way, James and Shklovsky thus both imagine the same origin for prose fiction: human perception. But whereas Shklovsky's notion of human perception is essentially social, grounded in norms established through the shared experience of habituation, James thinks of perception as radically individualistic, based in his belief that each person's "impression of life" is unique. To invoke one of James's most famous figures from the Prefaces, each viewer in the house of fiction looks out onto the same scene, but they enjoy entirely different prospects: "one seeing more where the other sees less, one seeing black where the other sees white" (*Portrait* Preface, 69). For Shklovsky, habituated perception is a universal social condition, one that is worked through and ultimately resisted through the help of literature and its practice of defamiliarization; for James, the individual can resist conformity independently through the practice of authentic self-reference, the attempt to be true to one's own private sensibility, whether one writes a novel or not. And because the novel's only purpose is to express this unique sensibility, then, as James declares in his letter to the students at Deerfield Academy, "Any point of view is interesting that is a direct impression of life."<sup>7</sup> For James it is thus the authentic expression of unique individual experience that becomes not only the defining indication of the author's character – the amount of "felt life" of which he is capable – but also the sole imperative for the writing of fiction. In "The Art of Fiction" James declares, "But the only condition that I can think of attaching to the composition of the novel is... that it be sincere."<sup>8</sup>

“Sincere” perception resembles defamiliarized perception in that both are opposed to a conventionalized way of regarding “life.” But if conventionalized thinking and feeling are anathema to James, the achievement of sincere experience is also a source of artistic difficulty – a happy problem about life that the novel’s form can happily appear to solve. For James, sincere experience entails perceptual abundance: individual “experience is never limited, and it is never complete; it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider-web of the finest silken threads suspended in the chamber of consciousness, and catching every air-borne particle in its tissue.”<sup>9</sup> For James, literary form is the answer to this perceptual plentitude; the artist can compose his sensibility through the practice of art – and one of his most artful practices is to impose a limit upon experience without seeming to do so. As he puts it in his first Preface, the Preface to *Roderick Hudson*, “Really, universally, relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which they shall happily *appear* to do so.”<sup>10</sup> Thus, although James posits a model of the relation between story and structure that is more cooperative than Shklovsky’s (“the story and the novel, the idea and the form, are the needle and the thread”<sup>11</sup>), the novel is in its very essence distinguished from life by having a compositional form – and for James the degree to which a novelist can successfully delimit the life he depicts is the degree to which he turns his vision of life into a work of art: “the painter of life . . . wishes both to treat his chosen subject and to confine his necessary picture. It is only by doing such things that art becomes exquisite, and it is only by positively becoming exquisite that it keeps clear of becoming vulgar.”<sup>12</sup> James repeats this point in his Preface to *The Ambassadors*: “One’s work should have composition, because composition alone is positive beauty” (*Ambassadors* Preface, 82). James’s radical mimeticism, his belief that fiction’s only charge is to represent an individual’s sincere impression of life, is thus tempered by the practical necessity and aesthetic value of achieved literary composition.

When James discusses composition, then, a set of rules for fiction writers is the last thing on his mind. Composition is most frequently described in the Prefaces as the disciplined confinement of unfurling authorial sensibility to the productively “tight place” of fictional form. Fittingly, James’s primary metaphor for the novelist is one that denotes spatial restriction: the portrait- or picture-painter. As a novelist, James thus strives to invent narrative techniques that will seem to spatialize writing, that will promote the illusion of the novel’s plastic or organic integrity. By successfully creating the illusion that individual experience is encompassable, novels can also promote the illusion of their own representational economy, a symbiosis of internal elements in which all parts contribute to the whole. For example, James writes in the Preface to *The Ambassadors* that he is disinclined to use first-person narration purely for reasons of representational economy: it foredooms the novel to a “looseness” of self-revelation and thus “wastes” point of view as a potential element of literary form. James vastly prefers third-person narration because it promotes the illusion of formal integrity and representational economy. Third-person narration avoids the first-person narrator’s unanchored commentary upon the story world by making such descriptions functions of the story world itself: background description or exposition thus unites form and content by carrying the added value of character revelation. The novel thereby accomplishes a representational efficiency that will enable it to seem fully composed, the needle and the thread working as one. James thus approvingly describes Lambert

Strether as “encaged and provided for” by third-person narration (*Ambassadors* Preface, 83). If James can create the illusion that Strether’s consciousness is in fact a point of view, a sensibility delimited by its own immanent identity (the view), then this compositional technique can help the novelist succeed first of all in seeming “to draw the circle” around the “spider-web” of sensibility; and second of all in making consciousness seem solid enough (a point) to enhance the novel’s goal of illusionary spatialization.

As we can see in this example, James’s passion for economy can make him sound if not exactly exploitative then at least utilitarian in regard to the characters that he creates – and this kind of functionalism can seem at odds with the subjective primacy he bestows upon these beings in his actual novels. To the degree that James wants us to be moved by Lambert Strether’s moral choices and complex consciousness, in other words, we may object to James’s dehumanized description of him in the Preface as “encaged and provided for.” Similarly, we might balk at the description of Isabel Archer as a “precious object . . . all curiously at [her author’s] disposal” (*Portrait* Preface, 70) – however breathtaking it might be also to consider her the “corner-stone” of a novel whose structure is so vast and palpable that it compels James to think of it not just as portraiture but as inhabitable architecture. While James thus diminishes the subjectivity of his characters by theorizing them as compositional elements (and the concept of the *ficelle*<sup>13</sup> is precisely invented to describe certain characters as pure formal necessities), this theoretical position is complicated by the real alterity – the subjective autonomy and otherness – he also feels his characters possess. As he says of Christopher Newman, “the interest of everything is all that it is *bis* vision, *bis* conception, *bis* interpretation: at the window of his wide, quite sufficiently wide, consciousness we are seated, from that admirable position we ‘assist.’ He therefore supremely matters; all the rest matters only as he feels it, treats it, meets it.”<sup>14</sup> James’s sense of his characters’ alterity is so strong that he more often than not describes the creative process as hinging on the imaginative appearance of a character whose complexities of sensibility and character “impose” upon the author the rest of the story. The person who can so magnanimously express his own vision of life through the realization of another’s point of view seems at odds with the artist who finds point of view a convenient way of establishing a compositional “center” to unify his work of art.

In writing the Prefaces to the New York edition of his work, James did not sit down with the intention to invent a theory of fiction – and one of the interests of reading a Preface is to understand it as a narrative performance, to see how meditations upon the problems of technique emerge through the genre of authorial autobiography. James’s disciple, Percy Lubbock, is more eager to systematize James’s insights, and he begins by trying to put the problem of literary form on a philosophical footing, a philosophy that is grounded in his own empirical experience as a novel reader. This experience is, according to Lubbock, fundamentally double: novels are “objects, yes, completed and detached, but I recall them also as tracts of time during which Clarissa and Anna moved and lived and endured in my view . . . [A] critic seems to shift from this one to that, from the thing carved in the stuff of thought to the passing movement of life” (*Craft*, 87). The work of *The Craft of Fiction* is to make visible the novel as object, the solid form underlying the genre’s evanescent representation of “life.” And although Lubbock’s notion of novelistic structure is fundamentally different from Shklovsky’s, Lubbock is closer to Shklovsky than to James in positing an adversarial relation between “story” and