

MARGINALIA:
Notes Toward a Science of the Literary Text

by

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ABSTRACT

The need for a science of the literary text is created when a startling number of critical theories succeed in mystifying rather than in clarifying the work of literature. The literary text disappears and it is replaced by one of its possible interpretations: certain aspects of the text are selected to serve as explanation for the whole.

Even in more current critical trends the tendency is to subordinate the literary text to the methodology and to view it as one form of expression in an all-embracing typology of texts. In all of these cases the applied methodological canons are all foreign to the literary work in that they were elaborated to explain objects other than literature. When these canons are utilized to explain literature they are bound to give us only a partial and unsatisfactory rendering of its real complexity.

To found a science of the literary text and to depart from the traditional critical approaches it is necessary first of all to define what is a literary text and what is this literariness which distinguishes it from other texts. On these bases a methodology is elaborated which is proper only to the literary text and to no other object.

The manner in which we have attempted to approach the problem can be generally divided into two stages: deconstruction and reconstruction. The first stage indicates a process of demystification of the literary text by means of a critique of the basic methodological assumptions of the more dominant and current critical trends. As a result, the second

stage points to the attempt to determine the laws which govern the production of the literary work: literary laws which underlie any literary work, an understanding of which is necessary to the explication of literature.

This double theoretical undertaking can be more specifically subdivided into four parts: 1) Marginalia: a general critical account of the basic critical fallacies of modern literary criticism; 2) Theory: a definition of the literary text and of the laws which condition literary production; 3) Theoretical Practice: the elaboration of a critical methodology developed in terms of literary laws; 4) Critical Practice: the practical application of this method to a contemporary novel.

In consideration of the complexity and difficulty of the task we are aware of the limitations and of the inadequacies of our own theoretical effort, and we cannot but present our findings as suggestions towards a future and more rigorous scientific elaboration. The paper itself indicates where the major obstacles are to be found and what are the major fallacies to be avoided. The main purpose of this thesis, for writer and reader alike, is then to contribute to a greater degree of critical self-clarification.

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We abandoned the manuscript to the gnawing criticism of the mice all the more willingly as we had achieved our main purpose:- self-clarification.

Marx

The systematic development of
truth in scientific form can
alone be the true shape in
which truth exists.

Hegel, The Phenomenology of Mind

PRE-TEXT I: AN INTRODUCTION

This paper purports to examine major critical trends with the aim of establishing a science of the literary text. It is articulated in terms of a dialectic between the literary text and the critiques which have so far commented upon it to exhibit the relationship between them and the text.

The dialogue between the text and the critic becomes the organizing structural principle of this paper rather than a subdivision which paces the sequence of critical criteria to be analysed. This dialogue is ancient and the forms it has taken have varied as much as the schools of thought that have succeeded each other to this day. To enumerate and assess the contribution of each would be the task of a history of literary criticism which this essay obviously cannot and does not want to be.

We shall try instead to approach the question from the point of view of the relation between the critical act and the literary text attempting to evaluate the former in terms of the demands it makes on the literary work and in terms of its hermeneutical capacity to explain and evaluate the work itself. The reference to other critical texts will be marginal

and always subordinated to the task of establishing a science of the literary text. The space where this task and the conditions of its necessity are to be elaborated constitutes the text of this paper which we refer to as Marginalia.

This investigation is of necessity at its early pre-textual stages of development and can only enumerate a series of critical positions to be adopted. Its aim is not only to determine the conditions of the production of the literary text but also, and primarily, to overcome the obstacles created by previous types of analysis which have mystified not only the nature of the text but have blurred the relation between literature and criticism.

The elaboration of a theory cannot but be concurrent with a critique of the idealistic determinants of current literary criticism. The two are not separate moments of the exposition but clearly one and the same: deconstruction and construction. Idealism in literary criticism privileges one or more aspect of the text, raising it to transcendental status, or conversely it finds the text lacking in essential structures and imports them from outside. In either case the text is a mediating object for a particular critique, insufficient or excessive, as the case may be, saying too much or too little, but never enough not to require interpretation.

Interpretation, a truly imperialistic enterprise of the "critical temper", is the act of covering these lacunas with a language which is the text's own (metalanguage) in order to restore its harmony. The language of criticism supposedly reinstates the text to the status of

literature by determining, where there is only incompleteness and apparent disorder, the impact of its latent signification. The concept of privilege, as applied to the literary text, indicates clearly the private law quality of these critiques: a condition either necessitated by a determinate epistemology or by sporadic onto-theological discourse. A definition of literary text generated on these assumptions becomes evidence for its receptivity. To these private laws one cannot confer the status of theory, let alone of theory of literature.

The theory of an object explains the laws which govern it and differentiate it from others. It entails a definition of the scope and limits of the inquiry, the explication of the object of the investigation and of the relation between the two. To constitute the literary text as the object of a science, it is necessary to determine its specificity: in what does it differ from other texts, i.e. its literariness, and what conditions of production distinguish it from other types of discourse such as the scientific and the philosophical.

These distinctions need to be made. It is not sufficient to approach the literary text as just any text, depriving it thus of its status of fiction which is essential to its explication, and understanding it just as an intertextuality. Reducing the text to anonymity is another way of privileging a methodology or a private law.¹

The objective of a critical commentary is not the rewriting, the rearranging and the rehabilitation of the signifieds in a metalanguage which mimics its text; rather it has the function, through the explication

of the necessary conditions of its production, to explain what the text does not say and cannot say but which determines what is being said.

This absence of signification in the text is not, however, a deficiency or something implied which the critic has then to interpret and bring to light. It is not the result of an estrangement, whereby the narrative proceeds by implication of the meaning it wants to express. For such a procedure is a narrative technique, the writer's conscious effort at artifice which marks the traces of his style. Critiques which privilege this "absence" cover its silences by restating the language of the text claiming as meaning what the writer chose not to say.

The absence of which we spoke above is not the hideout of meaning but the zone of a displacement of meaning which conditions the appearance of the written word: it is that which gives meaning to meaning. It is not in itself a signifier but it does condition the possibility of the interplay of signifieds.² Between the word and its latent meaning, between the implicit and the explicit, the in-visible and the visible, along the axis of this relation is elaborated the production of the word and the meaning of the text.

This absence is the space of a difference, the product of the interplay between what the writer wants to say and what he actually does say: it is the region of a disparity. The "what is not said" retains no meaning to be extrapolated: it is the product of a difference produced in silence. This region of non-signification is what determines the meaning of the literary word and it is the necessary precondition for

the literary text. Without it there would be no literature.

The appearance of a word always presupposes its absence: what is said always lets understand that which is not said. Yet for a critique it is not a matter of choosing between one or the other, or to discard the explicit for the hidden meaning. The nature of the literary text implies both presences: the presence of the word and the presence of its absence. A literary text will be defined by the differential relation between these two terms and criticism consequentially will have to understand and explicate the play of these differences: the production of meaning.

A critique shall have to consider the two levels of signification of the text: what the writer wanted to say and what he actually did say. The meaning produced out of the interaction between these two levels of signification constitutes the trace³ of the text which marks the locus of this difference. The aim of a science, the theory, is to enable us to recognize the presence and the elaboration of this trace; the aim of criticism, theoretical practice,⁴ is to explain and describe this procedure as it is articulated specifically and distinctively in every literary text.

A critical analysis will have to take into consideration these two levels of signification but not as if they were moments of a critique, distinct and separate, synthesis of two types of analyses enclosed in one critical discourse. As determinants of the complex signification of the text they are bound together in a relation of mutual and complex

determination. An analysis, then, even though dealing separately with these two aspects, cannot but in the process of understanding one aspect subtend its correlate.

These two levels of signification can be formulated in the form of two questions which the critic poses to the text in his inquiry: 1. What is the writer attempting to do? And, 2. What has he actually said? An answer to the first question requires an explication of the structural organization of the text which underlies the intentions of the writer. The second answer, which has to account for the shift that has taken place in levels of signification, requires an explanation of a more "historical" nature.

What we are proposing here, however, is not a reflection theory nor a variation of it. The text does not "reflect" an ideology proper, just as it does not portray "reality" or even a "slice" of it. These elements are never found in the text except as literary equivalents: that is to say that they have undergone a transformation within the process of production of the text. What is important to determine is the nature of the transformation which they undergo and which determines the second level of signification. By history or historical explanation is not meant, then, the application to the text of historical or sociological data. The historical element does not condition the text from the outside but it is present in the conditioning and formation of its very language. It is the necessary, and inevitable, conditioning of a dominant ideology together with the shaping influence of other literary

texts which constitutes the historical determinants of the text.

It is by conducting an analysis which will account for these complexities that we can hope to explain the significance of the text. A text never wants to say what it actually says and its meaning is never what is obvious and easily readable. This meaning which emerges out of the complex interaction between the artist's intention and the finished product is not what one could otherwise define as the structure of the text. It is more properly a displacement, a shift in signification, which informs the production of meaning throughout the text and marks the space of a difference.

These are some of the notions which will be further developed in an attempt to establish the bases for a literary science. So far we have intended to provide the reader only with a sense of direction, a conceptual premise around which to organize our task: a kind of preface.

However, to want to restrict this intention within the framework of a "preface" would be misleading. For our aim is to announce not only the preliminaries of a theoretical discourse, but also to initiate a work of deconstruction on which this discourse has to be formulated. To call it a preface would be paradoxical for it would indicate then that our investigation marked the beginning of a new type of discourse and the end of another. In this sense the preface, as it is often used, is the origin of a desire, the illusion of renewal.

The prolegomena to a theoretical investigation does not comprise a set of theoretical notions, a form of commencement ex nihilo progressing forward to its resting place of newly-found evidence. It is rather the doubling on itself of previous forms of writing, of which it is the rupture as well as the continuation. Viewed in these terms there cannot be a preface, for the intentions expounded above claim above all the need, if not the possibility, for a shift within critical discourse. They neither constitute the text nor the theory they anticipate: they are part of the pre-text.

In the spirit of the Hegel of the epigraph, for there to be a "systematic development" of a science of the text it is necessary to sketch first, even if briefly, the potential, and the limits of this potential, of the literary discourse to locate the conditions for this epistemological break and the theoretical implications of this shift: an elaboration which, beginning anywhere, can trace the movement of a critical discourse and discover within it the contradictions and the possible beginnings of a theory. This is the aim of the section which follows.

PRE-TEXT: NOTES

¹ The notion of intertextuality is proposed by Kristeva in many of her writings; see especially Le Texte du Roman, (Mouton: 1970). The methodology privileged in this case is that of transformational grammar which is, however, nonetheless useful as a means towards an increasingly greater understanding of the literary text. Cf. also Chapter II for a more detailed analysis of Kristeva's methodology.

² This concept of absence, on which we will expand later (cf. Chapter II) is theoretically analogous to Derrida's concept of différance, (cf. "La Différance", Marges, éd. de Minuit: 1972).

³ Here we are explicitly referring to Derrida's concept of trace as presence of signification, cf. De La Grammatologie, éd. de Minuit: 1970.

⁴ The terms as well as the concepts implied thereby of "theory" and "theoretical practice" are Althusser's, cf. Pour Marx, Lire Le Capital, Seuil: 1970. See also Chapter III.

Nous insisterons sur ce fait qu'on ne peut se prévaloir d'un esprit scientifique tant qu'on n'est pas assuré, à tous les moments de la vie pensive, de reconstruire tout son savoir.

En revenant sur un passé d'erreurs, on trouve la vérité en un véritable repentir intellectuel. En fait, on connaît contre une connaissance antérieure, en détruisant des connaissances mal faites, en surmontant ce qui, dans l'esprit même, fait obstacle à la spiritualisation.

Bachelard, La Formation de l'Esprit Scientifique.

CHAPTER I

MARGINALIA: THE USES AND ABUSES OF CRITICAL LITERARY DISCOURSE

The subject of this investigation is literary criticism, its object is the literary text. Critical literary discourse is the language which speaks of this relation and covers the space between these two polarities: the inquiry and the object. It is a dynamic process in the sense that the discourse is articulated in terms of a constant and continuous process of investigation to overcome the obstacles of its problematic.

Its aim is to explicate the text rather than render it explainable. When the latter is the case, the process becomes static. The relation between the text and the critique is oversimplified and reduced to a level of common denomination with that of a liberating methodology. The

difference between explaining an object and rendering it explainable is qualitative. In the latter instance the process of understanding implies a reduction and the replacement of the object by a conceptual form more or less compatible with it.

This transfert is what we call a private law, a concept which will be further elaborated later, whereby a methodology arrives at a definition of the text by privileging only certain of its aspects. A private law can be a method, otherwise commonly known as an approach; an aesthetic: the privileging of certain empirical canons; or a poetic which makes no theoretical claim except that of being a partial and particular kind of critique.

The aim of a private law is to make the text readable. It is a process of identification, psychoanalytically defined, which gives the text a status, a place and a function. It reorganizes the text in order to render it receptive to its own particular type of critique. In private law critiques there is almost no distinction made between theory and practice. The two are usually one and the same. And vice versa, when there exists a marked difference between the two, the practical criticism almost always contradicts the theory in its application.

The text, on the contrary, is readable. It needs no interpretation, no complex hermeneutic investigation and no elaborate methodological apparatus: it needs only to be explicated. A critique which establishes a scientific relation with its object, the text, opposes to the concept of private law that of theoretical law: the law of the production of the

literary text.

The concept of theoretical law, and then of theory in general, indicates the presence of a different type of relationship between the critique and the object: the presence of a scientific mode of investigation. What we are suggesting cannot be taken as another type of private law: the application of scientific categories to the literary text, i.e. the natural sciences. On the contrary, it is a type of analysis which is developed on the basis of a constant questioning of the nature of the object under investigation. Theory is the record of the answers provided by the object.

The event of theory in the critical literary discourse does not represent a rupture with previous tendencies nor the beginning of a new type of discourse. This event does not admit either to a type of conceptual control of its discourse by that of another, nor the merging of two different types of discourse. The event of theory is the result of the necessary conditions of existence of the discourse itself. Prepared in advance by it, it is the inevitable outcome of the contradictions and problematics which the discourse has gradually accumulated. The "break" within the discourse marked by the event of a theory is none other than the attempt to renew the discourse itself. The event of a "radical break" is implicit within the nature itself of the discourse.

Within the framework of the critical literary discourse theory represents the transition between private law and theoretical (scientific) law, between criticism as art and criticism as science, between the

literary text as subject and the literary text as object. It is a qualitative directional change: the critical literary discourse asserting itself as discourse.

A scientific elaboration cannot therefore ignore what has preceded it, or better, what has helped to shape it, it being only the expression of the conditions generated from them. A discourse which has scientific pretensions will have to speak first of all of its origins, of the relations it has entertained with its objects, of the obstacles it has encountered, and of the contradictions which need to be resolved and which have made a theory necessary.

It seems, however, that a scientific elaboration of the literary critical discourse is undermined from the start. In fact this is not the first time that such a proposal has been made. Attempts to make of criticism a science, however scientific were the results and the intentions,¹ have always been criticized and dismissed. Science has always been thought of as antithetical to Art and always an intruder in artistic concerns. Art has grown to be synonymous with unscientific, and its development has always been seen in terms of its differential quality from science. The social control exerted on the critical literary discourse has made of science a taboo which is passed over in silence.

As it has been pointed out,² a type of discourse is never free of social prejudices but can always be considered on one level as the history of those prejudices. Critical literary discourse is no exception. Its development could be traced in terms of the "schools" of thought which

have controlled its "word" from Aristotle onward. A type of discourse characterized not only by the new word which it proposed but by the exclusions and suppressions that such a process entailed.

The consequences of the imperialism of the critical word are not limited to its own discourse. It exerts control over the discourse of the artist and determines the success or the failure of his artistic product.³ Today the control over the literary product has somewhat lessened. The days of "colonialism" have given way to those of "cooperation" and disinterested "aid". Not only is the critic a writer, but the writer is a critic and often a literary work is the product of the cooperation of the two.⁴

The control exerted on the critical literary discourse proper has always been justified in terms of a desire for purity of discourse. Discourse is not exempt from morality. As a social expression it is the expression of a social morality. This is not due merely to a formalist tendency in critical discourse, but mainly to a theological one. Where the writer is the prophet the critic is the high priest and the object is sacralized. Yet purity demands not only differentiation from what is impure and thus canonization, but it also necessitates a doctrine of the impure.

It is in these terms that a liberalization of the discourse was made possible. What was discarded in silence or tabooed was gradually tolerated. This was the case with science, with Marxism and with psychoanalysis. It is a liberal tendency however to rejoice at such additions

and at such tolerance. If the critical literary discourse has in fact become more ecumenical, it has become also more contradictory and more repressive. The social control has in fact doubled.

What has been called a science or scientific is nothing more than a pseudo-theoretical attempt at a certain degree of rigour in critical analysis or at best they are applications of other scientific methodologies badly transfigured and simplified in the process.⁵ Emasculation is also the fate of the other two disciplines mentioned above: Marxism and psychoanalysis. Of the two the former has enjoyed much less good fortune.

The fortune of marxist criticism in the critical literary discourse might prove to be an interesting study. Academics have always resisted it and serious scholars have dismissed it after first having taken it into consideration and found it wanting.⁶ To this day Marxism has found few adherents because its word has always been silenced, its literary theories always carefully put aside, its name put under taboo.⁷

Of note, and in passing, is the case of Lukacs⁸, whose achievements in aesthetics and practical criticism have been overshadowed mainly by a brief and often-quoted essay, "^{Franz}Kafka or Thomas Mann?", and by his studies on modernism. Lukacs' literary pronouncements were biased, however, not from a marxist standpoint, rather from a poetic which needed reworking and elaboration if it had at all to be applied to modernist writings.

Marxism also found a voice in critical literary discourse within the application of a sociological approach to literature, although in a

very diluted and transformed manner.⁹ Putting aside the relevance of these studies and the contributions they have made towards an understanding of certain literary problems, these texts are characterized by an emasculation of the marxist assumptions, Lukács', from which they are derived.

The subject-object relationship is viewed in terms of an isomorphic correspondence, also called homologie, of structures: the literary and the social, the latter being the determining factor in terms of which the text, the modern novel, is organized. However, even the impact of a sociological critique is limited not only geographically but also in terms of a dominant voice which has had no relevant and adequate development.¹⁰

In terms of critical literary discourse, the very same fate was shared, until recently, by psychoanalysis. The text vis à vis these critiques has always functioned as the Book which required the appropriate exegetical interpretation: an abuse resulting in a misunderstanding of both the text and the approach employed. At the most superficial level it takes the form of a translation program on a one-to-one term relationship. The subject-object relationship is direct and the meaning is attributed according to the one selected by the symbology privileged.¹¹

The combinatory relations between subject and object within the critical literary discourse are as many and as varied as the epistemologies and epistémés, in Foucault's sense, that have succeeded each other. The critical discourse is constituted by these attempts at perceiving the

literary text. A history of criticism and a history of the literary text is based on this dialectic between the critical perception and the work of literature.

With the addition of one more mode of perception to the critical discourse the basic relation between subject and object is not necessarily redefined or understood better. A new mode in fact entails a principle of double exclusion: 1) exclusion of other modes of perception; 2) exclusion of itself as tool to understand "totally" the literary text. It is merely one among many: acceptance implies a knowledge of its limitations as a necessary limitation.

This is true regardless of the claim which is usually made: the capacity to cover critically the object of perception - a science of literature. Within the types of private law critiques it is possible to distinguish two general trends: the deductive and the inductive ones. Both exert or have exerted equal control both over the critical literary discourse and the literary text.

The former, the deductive private law, is constituted by a set of critical canons derived through means of an analysis of existent types of literary text. The resulting typology of forms with its established rules of literary production according to the desired ends makes up the body of laws for writers and critics alike. A paradigm case is Aristotle's Poetics, whether the setting down of prescriptive rules was intentional or so rendered by his interpreters and followers.

These rules deduced from examples of classical Greek literature, the result of an interpretative methodology itself borrowed from other domains, Logic and Physics, is what we also know by the name of Theory of Genres. As anything else, it is a system of recognition and of evaluation for the critic: it helps him to identify the text, to classify it through comparison and finally to judge it.

Other attempts at theorizing the subject-object relation have either dismissed it altogether or have reinterpreted it to suit more contemporary forms of writing which could not be accounted for completely in any one category.¹² However, in the latter case there is a marked theoretical shift: rules become categories and the aristotelean system is inverted into a platonic vision of ideal Forms. The literary object is sacralized and takes its place within a formalized hierarchy of archetypal forms.

By inductive private law on the other hand is understood the transfert of canons from one discipline to the study of literature. In modern and contemporary critical discourse it has predominated over the deductive one. Claims for a science of literature are often made on these assumptions: the text is refamiliarized in terms of scientific categories which reorganize the production of its meaning in rendering it available for critical consumption.

In these instances what is really being attempted is an interpretation of the relation which then serves to define both the subject and the object. The utilization of linguistics and derived forms of analysis

provides an obvious example. The principle of scientificity becomes part of the critical discourse thanks to imported forms of scientific methodology.

These types of private law critiques, as the terminology implies, have two common underlying factors: 1) a concern with criticism qua criticism rather than the text, hence the positivist concern to want to systematize and regulate the literary text; 2) the other and equally important factor is the mode of critical perception which, even though varied, is basically the same: the text is an object to be interpreted, i.e. translated, into something other than itself. The text is an object to be replaced and criticism is the agent of that replacement.

Critical perception amounts then to a special way of apprehending the object, a special way of looking at it. It consists in privileging parts and aspects of the literary object as locus of signification to which all other aspects are subsumed. Hence their characteristic as private critiques. This mode of perception is hierarchical and classificatory. It distinguishes in order to evaluate and not to appreciate. In some cases the two are taken to be synonymous.

Parallel to this tendency is the trend which privileges only and just the text, in itself and for itself. It seemingly opposes the methodology of a private law by denying the impossibility of signification outside the range of the literariness of the text. It delimits and determines this range by elaborating new empirical canons and a new kind of typology. It is developed in terms of exclusion of purely extrinsic

shaping factors on the literary text and in opposition to the assumption that the text is only a partial reality, only partially signifying and therefore only part of a reality which, if it is to be interpreted, needs also to account for that reality.

In critical literary discourse a formalism of the text justifiably arises in opposition to extreme extrinsic tendencies. The text is this time sacralized as a closed totality rather than just as a text with emphasis placed on the process, the techniques, of signification.¹³ It is inevitable then that literary history becomes the history of texts and literary discourse the conditioning of various subforms of literature which shape indirectly the process of writing. This, however, would only be a kind of history.

If a history of the critical literary discourse were to be written - this is not one - it would have to take into consideration the dialectic subject-object which underlies all critical apperception: the conscious and/or unconscious posture of critical perception of its object. The questions that the critical spirit asks already contain within themselves their own answer, always being formulated in terms of a certain conception one has about the work. The history of the critical literary discourse is a history of those questions and of the limitations of their formulations.

The formulation of one question does not, however, eliminate the preceding one which it supposes, contains and from which it is derived. Only in appearance is the insurgence of a new poetics the denial of another; often it is the awareness of a limitation and the setting of another. Viewed in these terms, there cannot be a new method, nor a

new private law, that is to say that there cannot be a true way of understanding the text or that there is no new reality to discover.¹⁴ What is possible, however, is to attempt, through a re-examination of existing trends, a reformulation of the question potentially more precise and more rigorous.

However we must distinguish. What we just said would be contradictory if we did not. A reformulation of the question does not mean, as we have stated before, the re-elaboration of another poetics, of another private law; it is rather the elaboration of a theoretical law: a theory of the literary text. This is the condition for all scientific knowledge:

Pour un esprit scientifique, toute connaissance est une réponse à une question. S'il n'y a pas eu de question, il ne peut y avoir connaissance scientifique. Rien ne va de soi. Rien n'est donné. Tout est construit.¹⁵

The qualitative difference which needs to be made between these two types of questioning is that the first presupposes a privileged perspective in terms of which the question is then formulated. The questioning of theoretical law, on the other hand, does not imply a privileged point of view but rather a set of theoretical notions about the work of literature which direct only the elaboration of the critical practice. The questioning is made on those bases, but the answers are provided by the text and not by the theory.

Further implied within this concept of questioning of the text is the idea of a dynamic relationship established between the subject

and the object. That is to say that the questioning is not fixed on certain empirical canons but on aspects of the production of the literary text itself. The question then is no longer a model, a principled intuition which is then applied to a literary text, but it is a question which is formulated in terms of a theory of the text: the production of its literariness.

Before we go further into an elaboration of this question and of the theory in general, it is necessary to clarify our notion of science and scientific elaboration and the place it occupies in critical literary discourse. This notion does not imply in the first place a definition of the literary text as an organism, alive because meaningful, which the critic has to dissect to determine the relations of parts of the system: a new "anatomy" of criticism.

By science we mean a certain type of perception: a critical, objective and dynamic one. We imply that between the object of perception and the act of perception exists a dialectical relationship with the task of providing us with an understanding of that object. Science presupposes a new form of knowledge and has as its prerequisite the foundations of a theory of that object. A scientific elaboration is, then, that mode of perceiving an object which gives us knowledge of that object.

A theory is not founded on empirical canons but on categories established in terms of the essential nature of the literary text, what we shall limit to calling for the moment its literariness: its essential fictive nature. Theoretical law is then understood as comprising the set

of principles which determine the mode of production of the text: the production, and not the process, of fictionalization.

We shall return to these aspects later on but now it is necessary to enlarge upon the wider implication of a science of the literary text, the place it occupies within the wider framework of the critical literary discourse, and the relation of previous methodologies vis à vis a theoretical practice.

To want to establish a science of the text is not to found a new dogma or a system of control of the literary production, or a set of rules for the writer. The relation between the scientific perception and the text is dialectical in that the theoretical assumptions help to formulate the critical question which the inquiry asks the text. The theory does not dictate how to read a literary text but it helps to understand only what the text is and what it is not. The theory clears the conceptual ground for the explication of the text; it has the purpose of demystifying the reading of the text from familiar, accultured forms of critical perception.

A theory, as we stated, is the culmination of a certain stage in critical literary discourse. It is the outcome of previous critical statements which it corrects without at the same time rendering them invalid. For implicit in the elaboration of a form of knowledge is the overcoming of previous diagnoses and critical errors rather than engaging in polemics against them. Scientific knowledge is, in this sense, the product of previous errors in an effort to overcome them. Knowledge, or

scientific truth, in the words of Bachelard, is achieved through "un véritable repentir intellectuel":

En fait on connaît contre une connaissance
antérieure, en détruisant des connaissances
mal faites, en surmontant ce qui, dans l'esprit
même, fait obstacle à la spiritualisation.¹⁶

A theory is developed in terms of both a deconstruction of previous critical assumptions and in terms of a construction of the knowledge acquired.

Otherwise the result is a relativism and pluralism of the critical perception and subjectivism and competent speculation in practical criticism.¹⁷ One cannot agree entirely with Croce's maxim that criticism is good when it is good, whatever it may be, and that, moreover, when criticism is good it is the critique of the whole text.¹⁸ Even though one can agree perhaps in principle with the first half of this statement it still does not follow for us that the end justifies the means especially when the concept of "good" is based on mistaken assumptions. For, as we have stated, one of the characteristics of a private law is the great discrepancy which exists between the method and its application. The theory in such cases is a deterrent for the critic for usually the sharpness of his critical insights is blunted by a desire to justify it in terms of his aesthetics.¹⁹

Science, however, does not mean rigidification, rather it is synonymous with knowledge and understanding. Criticism as the science of the literary text implies a critical questioning of the nature of the

literary text to understand it as the locus of signification, that is to say the production of artistic signification: the Theory. It is also a critical questioning of the individual literary text in order to explicate the necessary conditions of its mode of production: Theoretical Practice.

The advent, however, of a Theory and of a Theoretical Practice within the critical literary discourse is neither the culmination of a desire nor the low ebb of a recurrent pattern which has reached its synaptic stage. Even if the latter were the case, this obsession of the critical mind to raise the level of its perception to scientific status should be, if anything, praised. But the subject in this case has next to no importance, he merely figures as an agent and as a risk for the degree of error he contributes. The advent of a Science of the literary text is itself conditioned by the dialectical motion of the discourse itself. It is the culmination of the questioning of the critical mind spread out in diverse directions seeking clarification and knowledge.

The critical literary discourse is this constant overcoming of errors as well as the fabrication of new ones. Yet to date it is a movement which has gained its momentum from the radical reaction of one critique from another, from the juxtaposition of one critical assumption with another. This antithesis of critical judgement is also one other source of error, the assumption being the reverse of Croce's maxim quoted earlier: that is, that criticism is bad when it is bad, whatever it may be, and that moreover when criticism is bad it is not a critique of the

text at all.

If a critique is deemed insufficient its assumptions are questioned not, however, to redress the error but to dismiss it altogether. The type of knowledge which derives from this type of critical effort is not a better understanding of the text but just one more point of view. A scientific elaboration however does not develop out of certain conceptualized canons it then tries to apply. It is not a point of view. It attempts to understand the object of investigation for what it is, making use of what has already been said and aware of the fallacies it needs to overcome.

For these reasons not only is it necessary to speak of "abuses" but also of "uses" in critical literary discourse. So far we have tried to provide a fairly general notion of the mistaken assumptions of earlier forms of critical perception. These will be made more specific in our elaboration of a Theory just as its "uses" will be evident.

The word "uses", however, requires explanation and definition. On a theoretical level it indicates that continuity, not genetic but dialectic, which exists between previous forms of critical intellection and a scientific theory. It emphasizes the constant and continuous process of understanding which is vital to any discourse. It also implies, far from a pluralism of approaches, that a theory of the literary text emerges out of the corrected perception of previous assumptions: out of the significative commentary undaunted by its theoretical presuppositions.

Uses is neither indicative of a synthesis of various, arbitrarily selected, approaches, but rather a qualitative term denoting the experiential and conceptual impact that these critiques bring to bear upon an understanding of the literary text. This is the mode in which contemporary critical trends are elaborating their theoretical tools. It is seemingly a salutary move away from the fallacy of private laws, and of the omniscient point of view. The diacritical mark in this instance is what is commonly called "structuralism". However, this methodology as it is sometimes applied to literary criticism and the literary text functions as a private law. The model and/or the structure become the empirical canons of this type of criticism. With other poetics, it shares the characteristics of constructing meaning and the privileging of a space of signification to be interpreted: the fallacy of "-isms".

This trend of "structural" methodology has given rise to a series of critical efforts which aim to refamiliarize the reader with the literary text: a trend which claims as forerunners the Opojaz and Moscow critics and the saussurian orientation in linguistics. On these bases attempts have been made to elaborate a science of the text to account for the production of artistic language in a given text.

The claim to a science of the literary text is made in terms of certain linguistic categories which are applied to the literary text.²⁰ The methodology is scientific because it belongs basically to a science: linguistics. An understanding of how language works becomes the model for how poetic language works, for how it is articulated, and for how it is

transmitted. The text in this case is a closed linguistic system, pluri-referential if it refers to codes outside its linguistic system, or mono-referential if it points to an inner deconstructed structural organization.²¹

Poetic language is understood as a mode of writing which manipulates language by organizing it. The task of the critic becomes that of interpreting, on the bases of his linguistics knowledge, the displacement undergone by language in the process of writing. An awareness in certain critics of a referent which goes beyond the text, the content of the work for instance, is accounted for in terms of the plurivalency of these signified and of the codes it calls into question.²²

An attempt to utilize these same linguistic constructs this time however toward an elaboration of a marxist aesthetics against the dominant critical canons of both "classical" marxist and formalist theories, is found in the works of Galvano Della Volpe. This is a critical position, which within the framework of critical literary discourse represents almost the breaking point between private law and theoretical law.

The transformation from ordinary to poetic language, which characterizes a mode of writing and which is the basic assumption of structuralist literary criticism, is understood by Della Volpe as an ideological and sociological transformation. That is to say that ordinary language which underlies the poetic language is not naive, exempt of cultural conditioning, but already sociologically, or historically, determined. Poetic language

is an enrichment, in terms of semantic valency, of the ordinary language, and aims at the expression of a meaning, an idea, a concept. Art is idea and the expression of that idea. To discover the idea is to locate the sociological meaning of Art.²³

However, every critique claims knowledge and every critical elaboration constructs meaning. Whether theoretical assumptions are provided or are just implicit, whether the notion of text is given or not the critical spirit always justifies its task in terms of a search for meaning. Certain critical tendencies attempt to systematize their findings into a coherent whole; others, through a contempt for theoretical speculation or just out of a belief of the impossibility for such a task, operate on the basis of their own insights and common sense.²⁴

A theory does not purport to reconcile these two trends. There is more to this distinction than a matter of critical interpretation but these reasons do not concern us here. The distinction however which needs to be made between these trends is that the latter can be described as artistic criticism - interpretative criticism - and the former, in opposition, as scientific criticism. For scientific criticism presupposes a set of principles which are those which necessarily condition the production of the literary text.

The elaboration of scientific criticism will be the argument of the next section where we will try to put forward a set of theoretical positions about the literary text. We shall also make explicit some of

the "uses" which other critical tendencies have for a science of the literary text. Yet given the nature of our task we cannot give more than an approximate analysis of these critiques. In the course of the elaboration of our theoretical position, these critiques, when not directly referred to, are presupposed.

These critiques have been given a position of margin for its "uses" are marginal just as our own attempt, within the critical literary discourse, is marginal. The notion of use, in the sense of knowledge, is an occurrence which is produced at the margins of the critical perception which tries to capture it in its entirety: "Ce n'est pas en plein lumière, c'est au bord de l'ombre que le rayon, en se diffractant, nous confie ses secrets."²⁵

This conception is the motive behind our calling this essay Marginalia. For our task does not seek meaning, or even new meaning; it only attempts to tap the text for understanding. It is a question one formulates in order to listen to the answer: this is the process of knowledge.

It is also for this reason that we attribute importance to what we have arbitrarily placed in the footnotes. Writing does not recognize hierarchies of meaning and what is footnoted is not because of that less meaningful, or devoid of importance. The footnote is a formality which assumes that meaning is centered within the text proper. The footnote then has the function of containing that meaning within theoretical

limits and validating it against reproach and interference.

Neither writing nor meaning acknowledge such an arbitrary separating line. Meaning, if there is meaning, is not centered but displaced. Language cannot be organized into meaning; it is significative but its signification is the product of a difference the poles of which cannot be those of text and footnote.

CHAPTER I: NOTES

¹ Claims for criticism as a science of literature have been made ever since Aristotle whose Poetics is one such attempt to categorize diverse literary expressions. Croce thought of his aesthetics as the "science of the expression" (scienza dell'espressione). Various trends in criticism like the formalists and the American New Critics follow this tradition even though no special claim is ever made. In France, in the early sixties, with the advent of structuralism and the importance given to linguistics as a necessary tool for understanding the literary text, there has been a great increase in attempts to elaborate a science of literature: i.e. semeiotics.

² In Foucault, L'Ordre du discours, Gallimard: 1971; the entire range of Foucault's writings, especially his Histoire de la Folie, can be understood as a history of prejudices. In the title mentioned here the focus is on the discourse of the déraison: the absence of the word of the fool.

³ As just one instance one could mention the impact of the "three unities" on literary production ever since Aristotle's Poetics were discovered in 1548. The example of Tasso could be a case in point.

⁴ Cooperation between the writer and the critic is most evident among the writers of "le nouveau roman" and of "le nouveau-nouveau roman" - Ricardou's collaboration with Robbe-Grillet, Butor, and Ollier among many. Ricardou is himself a writer, while novelists like Robbe-Grillet, Butor,

Sarraute and Simon are also critics, especially of their own writings. In the specific case of Sollers the question needs to be put in totally different terms. For Sollers the terms writer and critic have been re-defined. The "division of labour" has, so to speak, been overcome in that the problem is posed in terms of writing (écriture) and the process of writing considered as a revolutionary act: an act of transformation. Cf. Tel Quel, No. 34, Summer 1968, "La grande méthode"; cf. also the Bibliography at the end of this paper.

⁵ We have already enlarged on this point. This is more apparent, however, in modern critical tendencies. A claim for a science of the literary text is based not in terms of a radical shift in understanding the relation between criticism and its object, but on the use which these critiques make of categories imported from other sciences, i.e. linguistics.

⁶ This is the general trend, at least in North America. Only recently has there been a comprehensive discussion of marxist contributions to literary criticism with the book by Fredric Jameson, Marxism and Form, Princeton, 1972. In England, with the exception of Caudwell, Kettle and Raymond Williams, there has been little interest shown. Lichteim's essays on Lukács for the Fontana Masters Series evidently shows the prejudice and the unwillingness to understand of English Criticism. In France, however, first with the work of Goldmann and later with Sartre, Marxism has been the object of some consideration. The Tel Quel group, especially the work of Jean-Joseph Goux, is to date the only serious group which is attempting

to bring an understanding of Marxism within the confines of the critical literary discourse.

⁷ The problem is mainly one of translation, yet there is no translation if there is no demand. The works of Lukács are very little known. His aesthetics have not found an English translator yet. The same is true of Della Volpe, an Italian marxist critic, of whom nothing is available in English except a few articles. Some of the most important essays of Walter Benjamin have been translated in Illuminations with an excellent introduction by Hanna Arendt, yet most of his work is untranslated. The same is true of Theodore Adorno of whom to date only a few essays collected in Prism have appeared.

⁸ When Lukács is discussed his work is usually dismissed in terms of his pronouncements on the modernist writers. The essay we quoted is part of his Studies in Contemporary Realism which however cannot be taken as proof of the shortcomings of a critical method but rather as the evidence of a theoretical model whose assumptions, derived on the basis of the nineteenth-century realistic novel, the bourgeois novel, do not encompass, but limit, the scope of later developments in the novel. In terms of the empirical canons established by such a theoretical model the question "Kafka or Thomas Mann?" is easily answerable. Further, the question and the proposed confrontation is only rhetorical if one understands it in terms of two modes of writing set against the frame of reference: the epic of socialism (socialist realism) to reharmonize a fractured reality.

⁹ We are referring here to the work of Goldmann and particularly to his Pour une sociologie du roman. Here the theoretical components are not only the early Lukács of Theory of the Novel, but also the Girard of Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque. Here, Lukács, just like Girard, appears only as the accredited inspiration, the rest is all Goldmann's elaboration and transformation.

¹⁰ The sociological trend does not end with Goldmann. Robert Escarpit's work and that of his colleagues have made important contributions, especially as regards the sociology of the book and the problem of readership. Cf. Bibliography. We should note also the work of Jacques Leenhardt, Lecture Politique du roman, Minuit: 1973. His analysis of Robbe-Grillet's La Jalousie is an elaboration of the sociological practice of Goldmann.

¹¹ Freud and Jung share the same fate. The relation between the critic and the text is based on the model established between the psychoanalyst and the patient. As in all critiques of this type the text is replaced by what the critique assumes it stands for. The text is seen therefore as a dream, as a language unit loaded with second, unconscious meaning which has to be deciphered. The critique, at its most superficial, is an exegesis where either Freud or Jung provide the symbology. Exception must be made, however, for more recent trends, which, following the Lacanean interpretation of Freud, understand psychoanalysis not as knowledge but as method: as "opératrice des échanges". Cf. "La stratégie du

language" by Catherine Backès-Clément, Littérature, No. 3, October 1971.

¹² We could mention, as examples of these two tendencies, Croce and Frye. The former regards the differentiation of literature as a "superstition" which "survives to contaminate modern literary history", Aesthetic, p. 449; and the latter on the contrary finds it "an undeveloped subject in criticism" and proceeds to elaborate a comprehensive enough theory to describe even a "middle-size poem" ("Theory of Genres", The Anatomy of Criticism, p. 246). In Frye, it should be stated, the reevaluation of literary genres is platonic rather than aristotelean.

¹³ The formalist tendency initiated by the Opojaz circle and later by the Moscow circle, cf. Victor Erlich, Russian Formalism: History and Theory, and Todorov, Théorie de la Littérature. For an account of the relation between Formalism and Structuralism see Fredric Jameson, The Prison-House of Language, Princeton: 1972.

¹⁴ Gianfranco Contini has expressed a similar view as regards the possibilities of developing new critical methods: "Un altro metodo non serve affatto a raddrizzare gli errori compiuti con un metodo precedente; come neanche, direi, a fornire la prova del nove: serve a ritrovare altre cose, altra realtà, altra verità" in conversation with Renzo Federici, "I Ferri Vecchi e Quelli Nuovi", L'Analisi Letteraria in Italia, by D'Arco Silvio Avalle, Ricciardi: 1970.

¹⁵ Gaston Bachelard, La Formation de l'Esprit Scientifique, p. 14.

¹⁶ Bachelard, op. cit. A seemingly opposite concept is that of Contini, quoted above, where the error is to be found not in the critical

tools but in those who have employed them: "Se errori sono stati commessi in passato, la colpa ovviamente non è degli operatori". However, it seems that for Contini the error is ultimately to be traced in the manner in which these tools are used: ". . . anzi un errore tanto meglio si ravvisa quanto più si risale il corso dell'operazione, e si tocca con mano come impropriamente quel certo strumento critico sia stato adoperato" (op. cit., p. 221). This is to say that even for Contini the critical error can be overcome and redressed by questioning the theoretical assumptions of the critic: the empirical canons which determine the function of the critical tools.

¹⁷ As we have stated (see footnote 3), one such example is the theory of genres: a tool of recognition, of evaluation and of control of the literary text. A division into genres does not indicate the existence of a law or of a scientific methodology. They are rather empirical canons which provide the critic with a descriptive and evaluative function. To criticize in terms of genres is to cover the language of the text in a language not its own: it is interpreting rather than understanding it.

¹⁸ "La critica è tutta buona quando è buona, qualunque essa sia. Per di più, quando essa è buona, essa è la critica intera." This is a statement by Croce paraphrased by Contini, see above, p. 221.

¹⁹ This is particularly true of a critic like Croce who is at his best when he has forgotten many of his theoretical assumptions: see for instance any of the essays in Poesia e Non Poesia.

²⁰ For an example of various application and variations on the linguistic model see "L'analyse du récit", Communications, No. 14, especially Barthes' introduction. This theoretical text is also a good example of the joint efforts and collaboration amongst critics which typifies the "structuralist approach" in literary criticism.

²¹ An example of an analysis which accounts for the plurivalency of the artistic sign is Barthes' S/Z, where the text, Balzac's Sarrasine, is explained in terms of the referential codes the text utilizes. The limitations of such a method, in terms of critical practice, are more than evident in Barthes' book. The analysis ends where it ought to begin: the text is exposed in the ambiguity and plurivalency of its meaning and presented to the reader as a buzzing beehive of possibilities which render the text of Balzac receptive to a number of approaches. This particular method betrays a greater preoccupation with the critical position than with the text, which it easily loses sight of. With this analysis Barthes has also tried to define the limitations of the critical perception and the impossibility really to interpret a text: to privilege one meaning. However, the critic is still there, aware of his impotence but still indulging in the few dreams still possible to him. Yet the major point here is that it is not sufficient, as Barthes himself proves to us, just to face the critic with his limitations as an interpreter; one ought to eliminate the interpreter with his wild imaginings altogether. An example of mono-referential criticism is found in the work of Todorov

where the texts are analysed in terms of narrative patterns and of the generating principles of the literary production. Todorov's is an elaboration of the theoretical findings of Vladimir Propp in Morphology of the Folk-Tale; see for instance Grammaire du Decameron and La Poétique de la Prose.

²² An extreme case is Barthes' S/Z for which see previous footnote. In his Sade, Fourier, Loyola where the focus is on the idiosyncratic aspect of each author, his particular type of écriture, the extrinsic elements of the work are subordinated and integrated with the formal aspects of the text: "il ne s'agit pas de transporter dans notre intériorité des contenus, des convictions, une foi, une Cause, ni même des images; il s'agit de recevoir du texte, une sorte d'ordre fantasmatique" (p. 13). This is a far cry from S/Z but the difference is only qualitative. Barthes' adventure in criticism is a search after "le bonheur de l'écriture", a critical reading which regards extrinsic and biographical elements, biographèmes, as conditions of the trace of the écriture which alone is considered and must be described.

²³ See especially La critica del Gusto, Feltrinelli: 1971. This type of marxist analysis which attempts to combine semantics and Marxism is elaborated in polemics with the basically idealistic aesthetics of Croce and the aesthetic writings of Lukàcs.

²⁴ This is the case of American critics who in reaction to dominant academic literary judgement avoid theoretical elaborations and limit their

critical analyses to a number of texts which for them are the expression of a certain literary orientation: cf. Tony Tanner, The City of Words. The desire to categorize even the uncategorizable gives these critics the name post-modernists, in which we should also include one other important critic, Ihab Hassan (The Dismemberment of Orpheus). There is one other dominant, if not fashionable, trend, that of the social critics whose interests in literature are those of a historian of ideas attempting to articulate literature, within the whole assembly-line of the production of the cultural Geist. The most important figure is George Steiner of whom see Bluebeard's Castle and The Language of Silence.

²⁵ Bachelard, Formation, p. 241.

A la place du mythe idéologique d'un philosophie de l'origine et de ses concepts organiques, le marxisme établit en principe la reconnaissance du donné de la structure complexe de tout "objet" concret, structure qui commande et le développement de l'objet, et le développement de la pratique théorique qui produit sa connaissance. Nous n'avons plus d'essence originaire, mais un toujours-déjà-donné, aussi loin que la connaissance remonte dans son passé. Nous n'avons plus d'unité simple mais une unité complexe structurée. Nous n'avons donc plus, (sous quelque forme que ce soit) d'unité simple originaire, mais le toujours-déjà-donné d'une unité complexe structurée.

Althusser, Pour Marx

CHAPTER II

THEORY: TOWARD A SCIENCE OF THE LITERARY TEXT

The elaboration of a Theory is not only justified in terms of a "break" within the literary critical discourse, but also, and primarily, in terms of the object of which it wants to understand the laws. The postulation, in fact, of a "break"¹ can be evidenced when, and only when, a theory of the literary text is elaborated by radically breaking away from previous pseudo-scientific and ideological formulations. We have tried to anticipate this notion in the previous chapter to make clear the character of our intentions in the course of this investigation, and to emphasize the consequences that this theoretical shift has within the

critical literary discourse.

One of the consequences of this "break" is the foundation of a science established "en la détachant de l'ideologie de son passé, et en révélant ce passé comme idéologique".² Hence the double significance of our project, of which we wrote in the "pre-text", whereby a theory of the literary text could not be divorced from an analysis of the idealistic assumptions of previous and current literary criticism. We have tried to expound on this aspect, perhaps all too briefly, in the preceding chapter by outlining the assumptions, and the limitations of these assumptions, of certain critiques, or better, of a characteristic mode of criticism. We called this ideological tendency a private law to stress also the arbitrary and unscientific procedure by which means the literary text was understood.³

Another consequence of this "break" is the development of a new pattern of thought which, following Althusser, we called the problematic: "la présupposition organique de ses concepts fondamentaux".⁴ This term refers not only to the new theoretical elaboration, which is the case here, but it can be used also in reference to previous critical systems, methods, and "scientific" attempts to analyse the literary text: the ideological problematic.

Again very sketchily, we have provided in the previous chapter examples of the basic assumptions of a large part of these critiques, without however specifying for each particular case the contradictions and limitations of its related concepts. We have on the contrary preferred to remain on a level of generality by setting the problem in terms

of discourse, the critical literary discourse, and by identifying as the problematic of this discourse the subject-object relation: the critical spirit and his object of knowledge, the literary text.

By discourse we also mean the problematic of the ideological problematics, what Althusser would call the Theory of theoretical practices.⁵ However, because the relation between the two concepts was not initially intentional, but only coincidental and far less rigorous than the concept meant by Althusser, we shall retain this term for the purposes of our analysis. By discourse, then, we indicated "the dialogue", in a metaphorical sense, established by critical systems and methodologies to understand the work of literature. We understood this "dialogue" as mainly an interpretive one based on differences in understanding the subject-object relation.

This is to say that the dialectic of literary history was understood in terms of "the negation of a negation" whereby each succeeding system arose in defiance of the preceding schemes, i.e. in opposition to them. For our immediate purposes this tendency is indicative of two major characteristics of these critical ideological formations: 1) the subject-object relation which, however, at a closer analysis, not rigorously established in the previous section, reveals a dominant preoccupation with the subject, whereby ultimately there is identification between the subject and the object, and a displacement of the latter by the former: the private law; and consequentially that 2) it reveals the ideological, and thus non-scientific, character of this problematic which

is unable to resolve the contradictions which it produces.

We also used the term discourse, in a general sense, to indicate the relation which underlies these ideological problematics and the theoretical problematic of which we want to construct here at least the basic positions. Even though, as we shall see, this relation is one of transformation or radical modification, it seems important to want to establish the theoretical basis of this Theory which does not arise just "out of the blue". And further, because the elaboration of a scientific problematic, a Theory, also represents on a theoretical level the overcoming of previous ideological problematics, i.e. a knowledge of the object in question, the practical application of the Theory, Theoretical Practice, will allow us to analyse, and to understand, the specific problematic of specific critical systems. Again this is the sense of Althusser's Theory of theoretical practices referred to above. The critical literary discourse points to the "continent" of Literature, to use a telling Althusserean image,⁶ but its discovery can only be the result of a scientific methodology. It is however when referred to this scientific problematic that we see the necessity to adopt a new terminology to describe adequately the theoretical shift.

In the previous section we also attempted to determine approximately the location of the "break" between an ideological and a scientific problematic. We stated that the theoretical innovations introduced by Della Volpe as to the sociological character of poetic language marked a decisive turning point within the critical literary discourse. Even though

this assertion still holds true where indeed it does represent an improvement on previous systems of understanding the object which it radically rejects, it would be misleading to attribute to it the qualitative "leap" from a pre-scientific to a scientific problematic.

It would be ignoring those other critical currents like structuralism and semiotics which have made similar claims to a science of the literary text. These trends, of which the criticism of Della Volpe is a sociologically determined variant, are developed on the basis of a science of the sign as developed by Saussurean linguistics: semiology. These studies, which are still in a phase of research, are however suspect as to the scientific legitimacy of their claims. As pointed out by Derrida,⁷ the concepts of sign, communication, and structure on which rests the semiological method, are equivocal in that they partake ultimately of a logocentric and metaphysical tradition which they set out initially to invalidate. The notions of identity and presence are not entirely left behind but simply tacitly inferred in the concepts of communication and of structure which admit, or imply, the presence of a subject:

Pesant sur le modèle du signe, cette équivoque marque donc le projet "sémiologique" lui-même, avec la totalité organique de tous ses concepts, en particulier celui de communication, qui, en effet, implique la transmission chargée de faire passer, d'un sujet à l'autre, l'identité d'un objet signifié, d'un sens ou d'un concept en droit séparables du processus de passage et de l'opération signifiante. . . . Le cas du concept de structure, . . . est certainement plus ambigu. Tout dépend du travail qu'on lui fait faire. Comme le concept de signe - et donc de sémiologie - il peut à la fois confirmer et ébranler les assurances logocentriques et ethnocentriques.⁸

These notions, at least for Derrida, need continuous reworking within the framework of semiology, and semiotics, if not altogether a transformation in "nouvelles configurations". For Derrida, and at least for as far as these concepts are concerned, there cannot be a decisive break, une coupure épistémologique, but only the possibility of "modifier peu à peu le terrain de travail".⁹

These pronouncements made in a conversation with Julia Kristeva clarify many of the problems which a semiological analysis has to deal with as is the case in Kristeva's Le Texte du Roman published four years earlier. However, the methodological problems which we referred to above seem for Kristeva to be resolved by the nature of the poetic language of the novel. After Jakobson, Kristeva distinguishes between ordinary and poetic language where in the latter there is no confusion between the "sign" and the "concept", and there is no reduction of the signifier to a mere second place to the signified (as in ordinary communication). In poetic language rather the reverse is true: the poetic message relies mainly on the activity of the signifier and the sign is not entirely conceptual:

Il s'agit ici du DÉSÉQUILIBRE de la relation signifiant/signifié: les signifiés restant identifiés (le concept demeurant le même), les signifiants se transforment, se generent et forment la spécificité du message romanesque. Autrement dit, le signe romanesque signifie par ces transformations au niveau signifiant sur un fond de constat au niveau signifié.¹⁰ (my emphasis)

For Kristeva this "déséquilibre" necessary to the novel to express a meaning, un sens, upsets the notion of sign postulated by Saussure which

is rather more applicable to a symbolic form: "relation univoque et restrictive des universaux symbolisés avec l'emblème symbolisant".

The dichotomy of signifier and signified is still maintained but the relation is no longer stable. Stated in different terms, Barthes' to be sure, the novel can be characterized as metonymic discourse¹¹ independently of the conceptual level which remains unchanged. Kristeva also draws the hjelmsleean distinction between Forme de l'expression and Forme du contenu to assert the autonomy of the chain of signification of the signifier even though it depends on "quoique contrôlées par", the level of the signified.

This characteristic of the function of the sign in the "transformational" structure of the novel allows not only the application of a transformational method to the literary text, but it also allows the elaboration of semiology as "science des MODÈLES (signifiants) applicables à des signifiés".¹²

The transformational method consists in reading a text "comme le trajet d'une série d'opérations transformationnelles"¹³ which implies a reading beyond the immediate and visible written word (la forme achevée) to the generative level where the text is discovered as "une INFINITÉ de possibilités structurales".¹⁴ Even though this methodology is applicable to "toute sorte de texte" this is more so the case with a novel whose structure itself is transformational:

Autrement dit, le roman représente (met en scène, raconte), dans sa structure même, les particularités

d'une transformation: (a) la présence de la fonction du tout dans les parties; (b) l'infinité discontinue de la structure.¹⁵ (my emphasis)

The important words here are: "les particularités d'une transformation". important because not only do they single out the novel from other texts as being transformationally receptive, but also because they indicate a certain mode of transformation.

Kristeva explains it in terms of a relation between the structure of the novel and the "idéologème" of the sign. What is an "idéologème"? In the section 0.1.1.2. "La notion de texte comme idéologème" (p. 12) Kristeva explains that it is the distinguishing trait of a text which allows the elaboration of a typology of texts, i.e. necessary to situate a particular text within the framework of a General Text: la culture:

L'idéologème est cette fonction intertextuelle que l'on peut lire 'matérialisée' aux différents niveaux de la structure de chaque texte, et qui s'étend tout au long de son trajet en lui donnant ses coordonnées historiques et sociales. . . . L'acceptation d'un texte comme un idéologème détermine la démarche même d'une sémiologie qui, en étudiant le texte comme une intertextualité, le pense ainsi dans (les textes de) la société et l'histoire.¹⁶

The idéologème stands for the inherent and inevitable "ideological" quantum of any discourse be it literary or otherwise. In Kristeva's analysis, however, it does not have any methodological importance except in the recognition of its presence as the underlying social and historical coordinate present in language: l'idéologème du signe. As a distinguishing mark of the novel, Kristeva clarifies the import of the term "ideological". It does not necessarily imply, when referred to the text, an ideological interpretation, "une démarche explicative-interprétative" of a linguistic occurrence, rather it implies on the part of

the analyst the awareness of a socio-historical dimension, Kristeva calls it "le foyer", within which the transformation from énoncé to totality is understood as taking place, and at the same time the awareness of the social space that this text occupies within a typology of texts.

This conception, in a slightly different version from that intended by Medvedev, is the only concession that first a formalist and then a semiological methodology are willing to make for a scientific approach to the literary text.

This long, but still inadequate, rendering of Kristeva's methodological position, and of semiology in general, was necessary in view of the theoretical positions on which we would like to expand. It is from this conception of the literary text, which to us seems inadequate because it is still entrapped within the confines of a private law: i.e. a formalism in spite of the recognized DÉSEQUILIBRE of the sign, and of the importance attributed to the signifier in poetic discourse, that we would like to make our point of departure.

Again as an added note, we would like to stress the similar methodological position of Della Volpe whose semantic-sociological elaboration of the poetic discourse is, in a different key, a reworking of the theoretical assumptions developed by Kristeva, and in certain ways, as we will explain later, also an overcoming. If we can speak of "coupure épistémologique" at all, in our case, it will be to describe the qualitative

"leap" which it is necessary to make from the theoretical positions just described to a scientific theory, a "leap" which indicates not only a corrective on those positions but a radical change in structure and problematic.

I

Il n'y a dans le mouvement des corps qui 'tombent' aucune vocation à supporter la loi de cette chute, et encore moins à lui obéir (la nature n'est pas un royaume avec un roi qui la soumette à ses lois); les corps tombèrent longtemps et tombent toujours sans énoncer la loi. Mais il était de la vocation du savoir de produire cette loi: c'est dire que la loi n'est pas dans les corps qui tombent, mais ailleurs, à côté d'eux, apparue sur un tout autre terrain qui est celui du savoir scientifique. . . .¹⁷

The founding of a scientific theory requires necessarily an object and a method. In traditional criticism, and here we must include also structuralism and semianalysis, no distinction is made between the object and the method. In fact in the case of certain structuralist critics, Barthes for instance, the method is one and the same with its object: the critical reading is a rewriting of the text. In the case of semianalysis, the object is completely displaced by the method and it becomes just one among many linguistic practices:

Pour la sémiotique, la littérature n'existe pas.
Elle n'existe pas. Elle n'existe pas en tant
qu'une parole comme les autres et encore moins comme

objet esthétique. Elle est une pratique sémiotique particulière qui a l'avantage de rendre plus saisissable que d'autres cette problématique de la production de sens qu'une sémiotique nouvelle se pose, et par conséquent n'a d'intérêt que dans la mesure où elle (la "littérature") est envisagée dans son irréductibilité à l'objet de la linguistique normative (de la parole codifiée et dénotative).¹⁸

A distinction between object and method, between the literary text and the critical practice is therefore necessary to make the transition between private law and theoretical law. To establish literary criticism as the science of Literature in order for the science to produce knowledge of its object, it is also necessary to establish what this knowledge consists of, i.e. what kind of knowledge we are after.

The knowledge which a science produces, as we are reminded by the quotation at the beginning of this section, is a knowledge of the laws of the object which are not part of that object, but which necessarily determine it. These laws, existing "à côté d'eux", science constructs.

There is no possibility of doublage between the scientific method and the literary text for the relation between the two is neither one of deduction nor of extraction, i.e. as in the theological and the empirical method respectively. The relation is no longer one between subject and object, as we have tried to characterize the relation entertained by previous critiques. This relation is overcome in a scientific method whereby the subject, if it is to be called as such, is one within the object. But subject is not any longer a useful and proper terminology,

for it indicates an ideological position antithetical to science and which science sets out to eradicate.

As a result a scientific methodology does not set out to interpret its object, nor to discover its meaning, latent or visible, implicit or explicit. There is in fact no such hidden meaning to be extracted, nor un sens of the text to be described. There is no special message that a literary text is trying to communicate which needs the complicity of criticism, or of the critic, to be enunciated. As a matter of fact not only is there no such meaning but the literary text is defined by the absence of such meaning. As Macherey has pointed out, this absence of meaning is not formed voluntarily by the text but is, rather, the result of the text's very inability to mean: "on dira qu'une parole devient oeuvre à partir du moment où elle suscite une telle absence".²⁰

A scientific methodology which sets out to construct the laws of the literary text also sets out to explicate the reasons for this inability which is at the same time one of the necessary conditions for the appearance, for the "production" we should say, of the work of literature:

. . . ce qui est important, c'est ce qu'elle
ne peut pas dire, parce que là se joue
l'élaboration d'une parole, dans une sorte
de marche au silence.²¹

What the text cannot say is one of the first laws of its production which criticism needs to explicate to produce knowledge of that object.

We have used the term explicate rather than explain and in opposition to interpret for good methodological reasons. To establish a science of an object in opposition to previous ideological critiques, it is necessary to avoid falling into critical pitfalls which could lead a possible scientific method into another ideological interpretation.

The term explicate is first of all chosen to distinguish a critical practice set to understand the laws which determine the production of a literary work. It is again not the case of making something obscure intelligible, i.e. to explain, nor the case of understanding the text as a totality and reading it critically for what is is - again, to explain; rather it is to detect in the text the inability to formulate a meaning which, as we said, is not an inability in the sense of a fault, but an inability which gives the text its necessity, without which it would not be a literary work:

Expliquer, ce sera justement, rejetant la mythologie de la compréhension, reconnaître en l'oeuvre le type de nécessité qui la détermine, et qui ne se ramène certainement pas à un sens.²²

To explicate means to understand the literary text for what makes it in a literary text, what gives it this inability to signify and what constitutes it as a literary work which gives it "meaning". To understand this "what", one needs to pose the question of how to define the literary work by trying to avoid the pitfalls of empirical and normative criticism.

The definition of the literary work as a totality, sufficient unto itself and able to reproduce an image of this totality, is to be avoided.

For such a conception, the intrinsic approach, conceives of the work in a vacuum and fixes it within the limits of a reality to be interpreted. Such an approach understands the text as an autonomous entity, a closed text,²³ whose verification and truth is not dependent on elements outside its structure, but received from its inner organicity.

An opposed critical tendency which privileges extrinsic factors such as clarification and verification of the literary meaning bases its assumptions on a definition of the text as an open text dependent on significant structures other than its own. This is not only the case for a sociological or a psychological critique, but also the case for a semiotic and semianalyst critique whereby the open structure of the text is the index of a pluri-valency or signification at the level of the signified and signifier respectively detectable through a set of codes, Barthes', or through the transformational method, Kristeva's.

In these last two paragraphs there are many concepts at stake which need to be reviewed and dealt with. The elaboration of a scientific method can only be constituted at first through a deconstruction of various assumptions about the literary text in order to free it as an object from the mystifications of ideological interpretation.

Consequently it would be misleading to affirm the autonomy and the dependency of the literary work as an either/or proposition. The literary text is both autonomous and dependent. It is autonomous, and therefore a closed entity in itself, because as an object it has a truth of its own,

even if it is a truth which reveals the incoherency and the arbitrariness of its system. Yet this truth is not verifiable in terms of canons of scientific truth which pre-exist the work. We refer here to Della Volpe's classical example of the description of the fog in Dickens which cannot be subjected to scientific verification: it is and it is not the same phenomenon. To subject the work to norms not its own is to deny its artistic necessity as a work of fiction and to replace it with a function which is not his to fulfill. If the work were not autonomous it would be impossible to conceive of a science of the literary text. If it did not have laws of its own which determined it as a specific product with specific necessities all of its own, which we will clarify more extensively later, we could not consider it as an object of scientific knowledge but we would have to revert to the theories of the semioticians who regard the literary work as any text: a particular semiotic practice among many.

To say, however, that the literary work is autonomous is not to say that it is independent. To say that the work suffices unto itself is not to mean that this totality produces itself ex novo. While, on the one hand, the heteronomy of the literary work cannot be interpreted according to canons it appears to allude to (i.e. psychological, sociological, philosophical, linguistic, and so on), it does indicate the work's dependency on them.

Yet it would be illusory and misleading to want to discern in this relation one or more of these aspects as the dominant or central preoccupation

of the work. The work, which is not produced in a vacuum, depends on all of these elements for its literary production, but these aspects, or these tendencies, are not reflected in the work and are not present as they might be in a different context, again, as in the case of a philosophical, sociological work, and so on.

Dependency is one of the specific necessities, together with autonomy, of the literary work. Neither can be emphasised at the expense of the other and neither can constitute alone the basic principle of a literary science. In its autonomy the work constructs its own limits; in its dependency the work produces those limits by transforming those elements, i.e. language, ideology, history, into a literary product.

The term transformation has no affinities with the same term used by Kristeva which expresses multiple possibilities of structural variation at the level of the signifier. It is indicative rather of the necessary condition of the work which is the result of a production where those elements are the "raw materials". Yet in no sense is this relation of production to be understood as a transformation of the chain of signifiers into signifieds. The elements which condition the work are not present in it even if they are not absent either. They are transformed in the work in that they result from the conflict between the means of artistic production and the existing relations. This relation of opposition which conditions the work is the process of production of a difference.

This difference as a relation of opposites informs the text throughout by giving it its heteronomy, and its complexity, its incompleteness and at the same time its infinitude. The object of a critique will be to account for this relation of opposites and to explicate the space created by this difference, the absence which this opposition creates, that which the work cannot say but which is expressed as an absence and constitutes the necessary condition for its existence without which absence there would be no literary work. This absence, as we stated, is what gives the work its "meaning": the condition for its appearance. In other words it is the relation between the oppositions present in the work, their differentiality: the way in which they differ from one another.

Within the framework of the science of writing, grammatology, this absence is given a name by Derrida: la différance:

La différance, c'est le jeu systématique des différences, des traces de différences, de l'espacement par lequel les éléments se rapportent les uns aux autres. Cet espacement est la production, à la fois active et passive (le a de la différance indique cette indécision par rapport à l'activité et à la passivité, ce qui ne se laisse pas encore commander et distribuer par cette opposition), des intervalles sans lesquels les termes "pleins" ne signifieraient pas, ne fonctionneraient pas.²⁴

La différance, as understood by Derrida, is not a concept and therefore a hidden meaning to be interpreted, but rather a "jeu", an interplay proper to any process of signification which regulates its movement without at the same time taking a dominant part in it. It is the process which ensures that there cannot be signification without

differentiation between two opposing elements in the process:

La différence, c'est ce qui fait que le mouvement de la signification n'est possible que si chaque élément dit "présent", apparaissant sur la scène de la présence, se rapporte à autre chose que lui-même.²⁵

This procedure discards the privileging of one or other of the elements of signification, and attempts to decentralize the logocentrism of an ideological and metaphysical methodology. For interpretation it substitutes the more appropriate practice of explication: explication of the interplay of differences.

In the process of the production of differences, la différance is the necessary condition of this process in its double necessity as presence and as absence. As a result the possibility of signification which it ensures is the espacement created by the relations established by these differences. Meaning is no longer the privilege of either a signifier or a signified, of a form or of a content but its possibility precedes either the notion of sign or of a concept. Signification, as a result, is produced at the margins of the écriture.

This conception of signification and the process of its production do not however constitute a structure; on the contrary la différance is incompatible with the structuralist conception of structure: a well regulated and systematic system:

Les différences sont les effets de transformations et de ce point de vue le thème de la différence est incompatible avec le motif statique, synchronique, taxinomique, anhistorique, etc., du concept de structure.²⁶

But the concept of structure is not entirely rejected by Derrida. Even though incompatible in a conceptual sense he sees marked affinities between the two: "la différence, n'est pas astructurale."²⁷ The affinity is seen mainly in terms of the possibility for la différence of creating "une science structurale".

The incompatibility however remains in so far as the term structure is misleading, in that it does not define the play of possibilities which condition signification. And in so far as we understand this production of differences at work in a literary work as a condition for literary signification, it is necessary to do away with the concept of structure.

It would be more appropriate to understand the absence in the work, what it cannot say, the lag between the two oppositional relations, as a deferment, a displacement, or a shifting in signification. And it is this shifting which must be explicated by a scientific methodology:

Bien entendu les sciences positives de la signification ne peuvent décrire que l'oeuvre et le fait de la différence, les différences déterminées et les présences déterminées aux quelles elles donnent lieu.²⁸

If we attempt to formulate the possibility for a science of the literary text in these terms we understand more clearly the critical pitfalls which need to be avoided in order to accomplish our task. Yet the critical orientation provided by Derrida can only be the first step toward this accomplishment. We can understand how on the basis provided by this theoretical schema a semeiotics can be elaborated which considers literary practice only as one of its many practices. If a science

of the literary text has to be elaborated, then the literary text has to be the object of that science with concepts which describe the necessary conditions of the production of its literary signification.

What we have said so far about these concepts should have made clear that we need to abandon the conceptual language which has determined so far the way a literary text was to be understood and interpreted. The concepts of "reality" and of "reflection" are also part of this ideological vocabulary.

For what was said of the autonomous dependency of the literary work consequentially eliminates the concept of reality, and the possibility of realism in literature. It should be understood however that this claim is not the denial of the literary phenomenon called "realism" which is an entirely different matter. What is denied is its utility as a conceptual tool in understanding literature. This denial does not affect those texts which have been produced under a "realistic" concern for this narrative style, but these realistic elements can be considered only as parts of the means of production of the work and not as the dominant signification of the text.

As a canon of critical evaluation it is illusory to speak of "realism" and of a "reality" portrayed in the work of literature. The term itself is contradictory with the specificity of the work which is to fictionalize "reality". Whatever one wants to mean by the term "reality", the latter is never found "as it is" in the text but always transformed in a way which does not bear any resemblance to it.

In fact all acceptations of the term "realism" or "reality" are understood as metaphors to indicate a special relation between "reality" and the work of literature: the definition of "reality" as interpreted by the critic and the reality of the work as interpreted by the same critic, neither of which bear any relation to the possible "reality" which has really conditioned the work. The only "reality" at stake here and the only one common to both terms of the transfert is the "reality" of the critic: his subjective reality. This type of transfert is traditionally called mimetic: a direct representation of reality.

Contemporary critics more interested in determining rules of narrative structures have adopted another Aristotelean definition of poetic imitation, diegesis: the indirect imitation of reality proper to the narrative.²⁹ However both for Genette and Lefebvre the concern is no longer with how, or how well, the work imitates "reality" but with what particular linguistic imitation can one identify, and therefore distinguish, a narrative or a discourse, i.e. Genette.

In the case of Lefebvre the diegetic imitation, understood as constituting the signified, in its relation to the narrative, the signifier, refers to the different possible types of diegetic images which can be had and can be categorized. Here the indirect function of the diegesis really means, once removed: for "reality" he substitutes literary reality which taken as the "norm" allows for an elaboration of a "CODE DIÉGÉTIQUE".

There is another type of "realism" which should be mentioned briefly which adopts a similar mimetic transfert: the dialectical type most notably at work in Lukács' theory of critical and socialist realism. We have termed this type of mimesis dialectical because for Lukács objective reality is characterized by a dialectic of essence and phenomenon brought to consciousness by the intellect. It is this dialectic, found in objective reality, which the mimetic transfert translates into aesthetic reflection:

Proprio nel caso dell' "imitazione" questo appare del tutto ovvio, poiché imitare non può significare altro che tradurre nella propria prassi il rispecchiamento di un fenomeno della realtà.³⁰

The relation between reality and praxis however is mimetic and not dialectic because it is simply a question of a direct relationship between the two. The dialectics is a basic fact of life, fatto elementare della vita, and as such it is inevitable that it be reflected in all aspects of culture, aesthetics included:

Poiché la realtà oggettiva è di carattere dialettico, tutto il comportamento pratico e intellettuale dell' uomo, il suo rispecchiamento della realtà gli si deve adeguare.³¹

What determines the mimetic process for Lukács, that is the possibility of this historical necessity to occur in art as in everyday life, is the degree of consciousness of the subject "che peraltro può essere ampliato e approfondito solo col lavoro e con la scienza, e può diventare consapevole solo con la filosofia".³²

It is not necessary to amplify these views further except to make two points as regards our immediate purpose: (1) that the much earlier critical writings of Lukács on "realism" are all based on this conception of reflection stated theoretically much later. Suffice it to say that the categories of typicality and totality and the canons of narrative and descriptive realism are the elaborations of this fundamental dialectic between essence and phenomena which when applied to the epic, even as remotely as Theory of the Novel, are those of wesen und leben: essence and life.

And finally (2) that the element of consciousness, very debatable in the context of marxist theory, which determines artistic reflection, is the dominant concept which in Lukács' earlier critical writings on realism conditions his aesthetic judgement of individual authors and justifies the typology of realisms: critical, idealist, mechanistic, bourgeois, modernist and socialist.

To formulate a critical question in terms of "reality" and aesthetic reflection is to operate under an idealistic illusion: the question is asked in the abstract and resolved in the abstract and no concrete knowledge of the work or of the "reality" which conditions its production is acquired.

Macherey has well stated the problem and the necessity to recognize it: "Il importe donc de distinguer les trois formes que donnent au langage trois usages différents: illusion, fiction, théorie."³³ What we have outlined here however is more than just three basic language usages.

It indicates the political power of language utilized in three different ways: to create illusion - the power of ideology which decentralizes by creating the illusion of a centre, of a meaning, but which itself occupies none; at the other end of this schema, if we can understand it as such, there is theory or science which in opposition to ideology is utilized to demystify the illusory constructs of ideological language through a reconstruction of basic modes of signification. This process of reconstruction is also exemplified in the attempt to decentralize the false centre proposed by ideology; thirdly, fiction which occupies a central position closer to ideology, but not to be confused with it, and closer to theory but also not to be confused with it. The relation of fiction between the two is, so to speak, central and important for an understanding of the work of fiction as the object of a literary science. An understanding of this relation will also clarify the political power attributed to the language of fiction.

We have chosen to take literally the positions of the forms in the order they were presented by Macherey for they help to explain the various interrelations amongst the three which was also, if I am not mistaken, the theorist's intention. The central position of fiction in the schema serves to illustrate, at least for our purposes, the relation fiction-ideology and then the relation fiction-theory.

The first set of relations indicates, as stated previously, the conflict between the means of artistic production and the existing social relations. This conflict is also the relation of opposites which

determines the process of production of differences in the text, the deferment, which is also the essence of the text. The relation of opposites however which produces the conflict is, in terms of literary production, a conflict between ideology and the aesthetic means employed. The latter is a general term which comprises any artistic technique, any consciously stylistic devices utilized to produce a work of fiction.

"Existing social relations" is meant as a very broad term, for the specifics depend on the actual elements present in a given work, the necessity which motivated the writer to write in the first place, the conscious aims he was trying to achieve, his choice, in other words, determined by a kind of ideology committed to form, fiction.

It is understood however that these oppositional elements are never found in such a clear-cut form in a literary text. It remains the task of an analysis to discern the form of these two languages which are in conflict in the work. But to consider this relation ideology-fiction more specifically we have to determine the impact of this relation on the literary production.

We have spoken of incompleteness of the work and of its inability, as necessary conditions for its existence, to create knowledge. The literary text is in fact characterized by what it cannot say and it is this element which determines it as fiction and not as an ideological discourse.

Here then one first distinction between illusion (a form of ideology) and fiction. A work cannot and does not create an illusion, be it of reality or of a mode of being or whatever. In its incompleteness

the work achieves a totality, a complete form by constructing, as we said, its limits. This constructing and this final "completeness" is not indicative that it has something to say, rather it is an arbitrary closure: it has to end sometime, which is on the contrary indicative of its infinitude as the conflict which conditions its production could go on for ever.

The incompleteness of the work is however indicative also of its relation with ideology, for what it cannot say is conditioned by its ideology which is also, as an illusory form, incomplete, so that even though, as Macherey notes, fiction is not and does not produce knowledge, it is "le substitut, sinon l'équivalent d'une connaissance".³⁴

This type of knowledge, as we could call it, produced by fiction, clarifies the oppositional relation between fiction and ideology also on a theoretical level. For not only do we have, between the two, a relation of identity, the incompleteness of signification, but also a conflict whereby the fiction betrays this manque not only in itself but also in the ideology which it helps to expose. This disclosure is the equivalent of a knowledge which the text itself is not able to provide.

As for the second type of relation, fiction-theory, the relation is also one of identity and difference. The identity is the one described above as both being, to different degrees, producers of knowledge in their capacity of unmasking the ideological forms which mystify the process of signification. It is understood however that production and

demystification are moments of the same theoretical practice: deconstruction and reconstruction.

Here however is the difference between these two language forms. Theory is a scientific practice which produces knowledge of the object of which it is the theory. Fiction does not produce a knowledge but only knowledge of itself as lack. This is for reasons not of its own however, for it is only through theoretical practice that this knowledge is produced.

To sum up the argument so far, the complex interrelation ideology-fiction-theory justifies not only the necessity for a science of literature: the necessity to disengage, theoretically, fiction and ideology to determine the relation of identity and difference between the two, i.e. to produce knowledge of the literary work; but it also indicates through an apparent affinity between these three elements the great difference which separates them.

This is probably also the most important aspect, for the necessity to understand these three elements as conceptually different entities by being aware of their identity is the prime condition not only for a scientific theory of the literary text, but also of THEORY in general. As such, this relation of identity and difference has to be understood not as a dual relational possibility, but as one being the pre-condition for the other: the identity of differences where the form of signification is the product of differences.

In the next section we shall try to elaborate further on this relation of production of differences between ideology, fiction and

theory. An understanding of the norms of this relation will be instrumental for an elaboration of a theoretical practice and indicative of a method of critical analysis to be adopted.

CHAPTER II: NOTES

¹ The notion of epistemological break as defined by Althusser varies somewhat from Bachelard's definition. This is the description given by Ben Brewster in the English edition of Pour Marx: "It describes the leap from the pre-scientific world of ideas to the scientific world; this leap involves a radical break with the whole pattern and frame of reference of the prescientific notions, and the construction of a new pattern. Althusser applies it to Marx's rejection of the Hegelian and Feuerbachian ideology of his youth and the construction of the basic concepts of dialectical and historical materialism in his later works." Althusser, For Marx, Vintage Books: 1969, p. 249 (The Glossary). Cf. also Pour Marx, Maspero: 1973, p. 168.

² Althusser, Pour Marx, p. 168.

³ As we stated in the previous chapter our general treatment of these private law critiques did not constitute a critique. This could be the task of a philosophy of criticism like a theory of theoretical practices.

⁴ Althusser, Pour Marx, p. 196; cf. also the glossary in For Marx, pp. 253-254 on the problematic.

⁵ Cf. "Sur la dialectique matérialiste," Pour Marx, pp. 161-224.

⁶ Cf. the image of the "continent" by Althusser, "Marx's relation to Hegel," Politics and History, NLB: 1972.

⁷ Derrida, Positions, pp. 32-35; cf. especially on the drawbacks of the concept of "sign".

⁸ Ibid., pp. 34-35.

⁹ By this remark Derrida is not trying to contest the possibility of an epistemological break; see p. 35: "cela n'efface rien la nécessité et l'importance relative de certaines coupures, de l'apparition ou de la définition de nouvelles structures . . ." as is the case for a marxist science of history.

¹⁰ Kristeva, Le Texte du Roman, Mouton: 1970, p. 192.

¹¹ Barthes' "Introduction", L'Analyse structurale du récit, also Communication, no. 8.

¹² Kristeva, Le Texte du Roman, p. 192.

¹³ Ibid., p. 18.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 12.

¹⁷ Macherey, Pierre, Pour une Théorie de la Production Littéraire, Maspero: 1971.

¹⁸ Kristeva, Sémiotique: Recherches pour une sémanalyse, Seuil: 1969, p. 41.

¹⁹ By theological method we are only referring to the deductive or Aristotelean method.

²⁰ Macherey, Production, p. 105.

21 Ibid., p. 107.

22 Ibid., p. 96.

23 Cf. also Della Volpe's concept of closed text, cf. Critica del Gusto, Feltrinelli: 1971.

24 Derrida, Positions, pp. 38-39.

25 Derrida, "La Différance," Théorie d'Ensemble, p. 51.

26 Derrida, Positions, p. 39.

27 Ibid., p. 39.

28 Derrida, De la Grammatologie, Minuit: 1967.

29 Cf. Genette, "Les Frontières du récit," L'Analyse structurale du récit, p. 271.

30 Lukács, Estetica, Vol. I, p. 311; Italian edition, Einaudi: 1970.

31 Ibid., p. 322.

32 Ibid., p. 321.

33 Macherey, Production, p. 81.

34 Ibid., p. 80.

With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed. In considering such transformations a distinction should always be made between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophic--in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out.

Marx, Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy

CHAPTER III

THEORETICAL PRACTICE: THE PROBLEMS OF A SCIENTIFIC METHODOLOGY

The importance of the relation ideology-fiction-theory, as we noted in the last section, is essential to the formulation of a theory of the literary text. The importance is given to the "central" position which fiction occupies with relation to fiction and theory. We realize the relevance of this centrality when we review previous marxist literary analyses and we find that on the whole ideology and fiction are understood to be one and the same: that is to say that fiction is an ideological practice.¹

From these misconceived assumptions there usually follows a frustrated literary practice and a variety of literary theories, each one echoing doubts and confusion. Leo Marx's commentary on the general

theoretical tone of the essays, just quoted in the footnote, is sufficient clarification even if it comes from someone totally opposed to the question at stake:

Many of the essays are marked by a tone of neutrality, and by a search for what can only be described as a theoretical equivalent of general scientific laws capable of yielding more or less objective knowledge.²

The most negative aspect of such misdirected attempts however is the increased skepticism which they elicit in critics like Leo Marx whose comments then become pure banality:

Why, for that matter, do we want a more reliable theory, as well as a better analytic method, relating ideology and literature? What use would they serve? What would we do with them if we had them?³

The title of the issue could well be changed from "Ideology and Literature" to "Literary Ideology".

In most cases in these essays, for instance Jonathan Culler's, the relation ideology and literature means the study of literature in terms of a certain social structure: i.e. a sociological or marxist approach - a difference between the two is not made. Fiction is understood as being above ideology reflecting back on it. It is understandable therefore the "panic" and concern of Prof. O.K. Werckmeister in his "Marx on Ideology and Art" who sees in the coming of socialism, "bound to shed all ideology", the "end of art" because Marx envisaged it "among the products of ideology":

What may be headed for an end is the abstract idea of art as a vessel of the truth above ideologies, the central issue of aesthetics as

a philosophical discipline. And with this idea gone, aesthetics, Marxist or of any other kind, loses its purpose. The notion of the "end of art" backfires on the science which conceived it: if it has any meaning, it means the end of aesthetics.⁴

The whole collection of essays is an example of the fabrications that a misunderstanding of the relation ideology-fiction can give rise to.

The central position we attributed to fiction does not mean, as we explained, its ideological immunity but on the contrary its partaking of ideology within the process of literary production. The task of a theoretical practice is to define the relation between the two and to determine how this relation is constitutive of the process of "signification" of the text. That is what is essential about this relation, or better, what does this relation reveal to us that will enable us to elaborate a science of literature.

We are aware that if we privilege either one or the other of the two we are back at the starting point. To privilege only the fiction would be to subscribe to the "vessel of truth above ideologies" of previous metaphysics; to privilege just the ideology would mean producing another ideological critique which would allow us to understand neither the ideology nor the fiction.

The three elements ideology-fiction-theory must be understood first separately before attempting to understand the complex relation between the three. In marxist-leninist theory the relation ideology-theory underlies the transition from purely ideological theoretical practices to the founding of a science of history, i.e. historical

materialism, by means of an "epistemological break".

This transition however does not mark the disappearance of ideology but it "survives alongside science"⁵ as an essential element of every social formation including a socialist and a communist society. Ideology is thus defined in the Althusserian system as:

the "lived" relation between men and their world, or a reflected form of this unconscious relation, for instance a 'philosophy' etc. It is distinguished from a science not by its falsity, for it can be coherent and logical (for instance, theology), but by the fact that the prático-social predominates in it over the theoretical, over knowledge.⁶

The function of a science (a theory) is also that of providing through an understanding of its object an analysis of the ideological elements present in it.

A science of literature implies the same relation with ideology only that this science is not a science of ideology. Fiction instead as the form of a certain language usage arising out of a determinate social formation does partake of ideology but to a degree which is the task of a critical analysis to determine.

In the relation ideology-fiction-theory the outstanding element is production where taken individually neither ideology nor fiction can produce knowledge. To say that in ideology the "prático-social" predominates is to mean that the illusory effects of ideology are constructs which do not produce a clarification of the prático-social relations but on the contrary they mystify those relations to the advantages of the dominant social class.

Fiction on the other hand does not provide theoretical knowledge but does not mystify the pratico-social either. If this were the case art would be ideology, while on the other hand, if art produced knowledge it would be a theory, but of what?, and no longer fiction.

However, as we have stated the type of "knowledge" produced by fiction is a knowledge of the ideological content which helps to shape it. The process of signification of fiction is a process of this inability to produce knowledge which refers back, by exposing it, to its ideological origins:

L'oeuvre n'est pas ce tissu d'illusion qu'il suffirait de défaire pour en comprendre le pouvoir. L'illusion mise en oeuvre n'est plus tout à fait illusoire, ni simplement trompeuse. Elle est l'illusion interrompue, réalisée, complètement transformée.⁷

It is this transformation which gives the literary text its character of fiction.

It is this characteristic of the work of fiction which makes it into a complex and also an incoherent "whole": a complexity however which is not to be interpreted and rendered intelligible, or an incoherency which is to be ordered and rendered meaningful. These aspects of the text are of the essence of the work of fiction itself and to retransform them into a linear, unequivocal and rational whole, which is essentially the task of criticism which rewrites the text, is to deny its existence in the very act which assumes its presence.

The necessary conditions which determine its complexity and incoherency are to be explicated, for it is through them that the text

reveals and receives its specificity as a literary text: as illusion interrompue. This complexity and incoherency are, moreover, to be understood not as the outcome of a certain style peculiar, in various degrees, to different writers, or the outcome of a certain literary practice, but rather as the product of a transformation proper to any literary text necessarily determined as a form of language use by a given, "le toujours-déjà-donné d'une unité complexe structurée".⁸

The recognition of this given constitutes the essence of a marxist science of history, or of social formations, and also the prerequisite of any science or scientific practice. The starting point resides not in a unity, in an origin or in a zero degree but in the recognition of the structural complexity of any "concrete" object:

. . . structure qui commande et le développement
de l'objet, et le développement de la pratique
théorique qui produit sa connaissance.⁹

The elaboration of a theoretical practice derives from a recognition of the structural complexities of the "object", theoretical laws, developed by the theory: the science of that object. Knowledge of the "object" is only produced through theoretical practice but both this practice and the theory are determined by the "object" in question and not by ideological or metaphysical practices.

The complexity of the literary work is itself then the condition of the existence of the work and is to be explicated rather than interpreted. In fact this complexity is not one synonymous with

difficult or intricate which might describe the organizational structure of a given text or the way in which the sequences of events or imageries overlap or succeed one another, rather it is the given of the object which is the necessary condition for the appearance of the surface complexity in the first place.

To focus only on the latter structure is to mistake the appearance, the product, for the essence. Similarly to focus only on the intentions that preceded the work, or the origins which gave it birth, is to attribute to the work a mysticism which places it in a vacuum, beyond men and society. It is to attribute omniscience and total control to the writer and the text then becomes simply the fulfillment of a desire.

Whereas on the contrary the text is literary just because it demonstrates that these intentions cannot be anything else but a desire, and an unfulfilled desire at that: unfulfilled because of the illusory, ideological, component of the complex structure of the text. And yet there is a trend in literary criticism which on the basis of the "unfulfilled-desire" characteristic of fiction have developed theories of fiction which assume literature as the fulfillment of this desire: desire for origins, for the subject, for the presence of a centre, a desire which because it can only be fulfilled in fiction is betrayed as just such a desire and therefore is manifested as an awareness of the impossibility of its fulfillment:

Le héros incarne la 'chimère' du romancier, son désir. Mais il l'incarne d'abord en tant que

vérité. Dans le chef-d'oeuvre romanesque, il l'incarne en tant que chimère. Le passage de l'illusion reflétée à l'illusion représentée exige l'identification à l'Autre maléfique, c'est-à-dire la mort. Le romancier réussit à vivre cette mort dans l'oeuvre, par l'intermédiaire d'un héros malade, blessé, mutilé, mourant.¹⁰

For Girard, this is the case with great works of literature where the duality Self and Other, Moi et l'Autre, is the main "genetic" principle of literary production. In less important works, "dans l'oeuvre inachevée", the tension between the Self and the Other is almost nonexistent: "seuls les autres désirent".¹¹

In such cases, as in Proust's Jean Santeuil, there is almost total identification between the Self and the Other: that is to say that the hero is the Other and completely invested with the attributes of the Other: "l'originalité dont il croit doter son héros est illusoire."¹² This is more properly the subjective phase of literary creation:

La perfection fade du héros révèle en lui le "double angélique" de la subjectivité créatrice. L'écrivain peut également centrer son oeuvre sur l'Autre. Au héros tout entier positif se substitue alors un héros tout entier négatif, une caricature, le double maléfique. Ces deux types d'oeuvre relèvent d'un même dualisme.¹³

This type of novelistic structure resting on such dualistic oppositional terms is illusory for it gives the work a completeness great works do not possess. This completeness for Girard is due to the fulfillment of a desire: a desire expressed initially either as an angelic or as a malefic double which is not contested but fulfilled

by the conclusion of the novel.

In a great work of art there is no such fulfillment for the initial desire of the subjective intention is contradicted by the resolution which does not fulfill the initial expectations. The duality between the Self and the Other is destroyed and transcended at the same time:

Ayant rejoint ce qu'il croit être le terme de ses efforts, il se retourne enfin sur l'oeuvre qu'il a rêvé parfaite et il en découvre la faiblesse. Au septième jour de la création, le Dieu de la Genèse regarde son oeuvre et il constate qu'elle est bonne. Le romancier regarde la sienne et il constate qu'elle est mauvaise. Il reconnaît, en somme, qu'il n'est pas Dieu.¹⁴

What has happened meanwhile? There exists a process of transformation between intention and retention which has radically changed the projection of a desire to a situation of despair: it is the tragic conclusion of many novels which is essentially what constitutes the novelistic experience. In terms of the duality it is the sudden recognition of the identity of the two terms and the realization that the projection on to the Other which characterizes the novelistic process is none other than a projection on the Self:

Retourner contre soi-même la malédiction d'abord jetée sur l'Autre, découvrir que cet Autre maléfique ne fait qu'un avec le Moi, c'est découvrir le Même dans ce qui passait naguère pour la Différence absolue, c'est unifier le réel. Mais c'est d'abord mourir.¹⁵

It is a process of doublement of the narrative on itself which provides the great works of literature with the complexity and the incompleteness of their achieved form. The writer as the first reader

of his novel is the first to acquire the "experience romanesque".

Even though the implications of this critique are interesting in themselves for the point of view that it takes vis-à-vis literary production, the shortcomings of this method are just as easily recognizable. For what really makes it interesting is not so much the light it sheds on the novel in as much as it points to important aspects of the literary work even though the methodology adopted falsifies the conclusions.

For the duality between Self and Other and the thwarting of the initial subjective desire by a contesting outcome not only simplifies the complexity of the literary process but also attributes to artistic creation, and to the novel, a prime function as the vehicle of a desire: "Désirer c'est croire à la transcendance du monde suggéré par l'Autre",¹⁶ and the creation of illusion.

The terms in which the problem is posed, qualitatively reduce the import of that initial desire which seen in terms of a conflict between Self-and-Other resolves the doubling of the Self in the Other as a desire to be "à la mode".¹⁷ To explain the genetic process of the narrative structures of a novel in psychoanalytical terms means to gloss over the necessary conditions for the desire in the first place. But that is not all, for when the problematic of the novel is placed in these terms greatness in literary achievement seems to come from the awareness of the futility of such a desire.

Further, Girard speaks of literary creation and at the same time assumes as fixed the end points between which the creation takes place.

He writes in terms of a conclusion contesting the beginning of a given work yet that conclusion, as he also seems to imply in his notion of the oracle is present and implicit at the beginning. The conclusion of a novel is arbitrary: the author chooses when to stop otherwise he could go on forever.

This same conflict between Self and Other, the way Girard resolves it as explanation for the minor literary merits of Jean Santeuil, surely does not resolve the issue nor is it sufficient to determine minor and great literature. It seems a common sense to want to say that the early works of great writers are minor because they were subjective and parodistic. Surely Proust, Stendhal, Flaubert and Balzac's later more mature works are just as subjective and parodistic?

What Girard likes to attribute to an evolution in the writer's consciousness of himself vis-à-vis his Other and therefore coinciding literary maturity with psychoanalytical cure, is already inscribed within the language of fiction as a form of expression. In Girard's conception the defeat of the writer at his realization that he is not God seems on the contrary to be a victory, for only this realization will make him really a creator, a god, even if only with a small 'g'. The tragedy of the artist, if we want to maintain that "tragic sense" for a little while longer, is the condition itself of his existence as a writer: a producer of fiction. Even Girard would agree to this for the "tragic sense" which the critic finds essential to the novelist's experience derives from the limited control which the writer has on

the material with which he works. The writer is essentially a parodist. What makes him the writer of minor or great works does not really depend on whether he has resolved the initial conflict between himself and his literary creation but on how he uses the language of fiction.

To understand literature by means of a psychoanalytical interpretation of the relation between the writer and the creative process does not tell us anything about the work. For the way a writer understands himself as a writer has really almost no relation to the work he actually writes. For this reason we are always bound to speak in terms of a tragic sense because between the work that the writer intends to write and what he actually writes there lies an immense gulf. Great writers are usually always aware of this fact, Proust included, but the way they understand this discrepancy is always in very highly subjective terms. The same is true of a critique which attempts to interpret their interpretation.

Again a critique like the one formulated by Girard is one which concentrates on the effects in order to try to familiarize itself with the process of fiction. Yet the discrepancy which was noted between the initial intention and the final product must be understood in different terms.

What we would like to emphasize is the process of production of the text itself, that is to say the transformation which a certain more or less given raw material undergoes to produce a certain product.

So far we have tried to understand the literary work as the "object" of a possible science trying to determine the "laws" which govern it and attempting to liberate it from the idealistic and empiricist assumptions of previous critical theories.

We would like now very briefly to describe the theoretical practice of this science: i.e. how does it work to produce knowledge of its object. According to the canons established by Althusser, in following Marx, scientific or theoretical practice acts on the abstract generality of the object in order to produce concrete-in-thought knowledge of that object.

For our purpose it is necessary to explain first what is meant by the abstract generality of the object and then secondly what we should mean by theoretical practice. It is to be understood that the concrete knowledge that a scientific method will have to produce will be a knowledge of the given complex structure of signification of a given text.

Without going into too many theoretical elaborations the explanation of the abstract generality of the text and the theoretical practice amounts to the determining of those aspects of the literary text which will reveal to the analysis the given, complex structure of signification of the text. For this is what we meant when we stated that theoretical practice abstracts from the general abstractions of the object to produce scientific knowledge.

By abstract generalities we understand then all those elements which make up a literary work and are considered as its visible elements.

By visible it is implied the contention that the text as such is readable: it needs no special interpretative tools to extract a meaning from it. It is readable in its complexity and in its incoherence for this is the way it presents itself to the reader.

These are, then, the visible elements of the text.

In order to facilitate a workable literary analysis we shall distinguish between those elements which are visibly part of the author's intention: his aim or intention in writing the work and consequentially those elements which were consciously utilized to carry out that intention from those elements which visibly constitute the work.

The word visibly might be ambiguous here. As we stated previously there exists a great discrepancy from those intentions which the writer sets to work in the text and the product which he really achieves. It is this condition which really allows us to say that the writer is his first reader: he himself does not know how the novel is going to turn out.

We also stated that this discrepancy was due not to the inability of the writer himself but to the specificity of the work of fiction whose process of signification partakes equally of ideology. It is in fact the ideological component of fiction which defers the signification and creates this discrepancy.

In order to understand the extent of this deferment a critical analysis will have to question the text on what were its objectives

before explaining what has really happened to them. This process of explication should reveal the locus of this deferment and allow us to explicate its complex structure of signification.

The visible aspects of the text vary obviously from text to text and it would be misleading therefore to try to generalize on these elements even though to this point I have provided some indications of what these elements might be. To be more explicit, the visible intentional elements of a text might be a thematic that was being developed, or a certain literary project as in the case of Balzac's La Comédie Humaine.

In the next section we have given an example of this type of analysis and we refer to it here. For our immediate purpose, we shall only elaborate on those aspects of the methodology which are not really specified in the analysis.

In La Jalousie there is a definite literary program at work. This text and the ones which precede and follow it are part of a new literary practice which intentionally wants to provide a radical break not only with previous modes of fiction writing, but also with previous ways of reading literature.

As a result the author, Robbe-Grillet, is also attempting to affect a kind of "political" action, to be sure not of directly serving a political cause, but by attempting to force the reader into questioning his ordinary way of perceiving the world, the "comment" of literary and ordinary perception.

With these intentional objectives in perspective the analysis attempts to understand the text in these terms, trying to discern the locus of deferment in the text. The explication of the text so conducted, if properly conducted, should provide us with a knowledge of the text. It should also be stated at this point that an explication of a single text is in itself a partial explication, for it would be more relevant to take into consideration the whole of the literary production of Robbe-Grillet: something which obviously cannot be attempted here.

Perhaps as concluding remarks to this section it would be useful to keep in mind the distinction which is made by Marx in the epigraph to this section. The distinction between economic conditions and the aesthetic do not however invalidate the possibility for a science of the literary text; on the contrary, the transformations at the level of the superstructure require such a theoretical method in order to determine the nature of the transformations and the ideological forms which condition them.

However, the distinction must be kept in mind if only to be aware of the nature of the task which must be done, and of the ideological forms which must be confronted and avoided.

CHAPTER III: NOTES

- ¹ See for instance the issue of New Literary History on "Ideology and Literature," Volume IV, Spring 1973, no. 3.
- ² Ibid., p. 612 for "Commentary" by Leo Marx.
- ³ Ibid., p. 613.
- ⁴ Ibid., p. 519.
- ⁵ Cf. Althusser, For Marx, the glossary by Ben Brewster, the entry on ideology, p. 252.
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ Macherey, Théorie, p. 78.
- ⁸ Althusser, Pour Marx, p. 204.
- ⁹ Ibid., p. 203.
- ¹⁰ Girard, "De l'expérience romanesque au mythe oedipien," Critique, 21, November 1965.
- ¹¹ Ibid., p. 901.
- ¹² Ibid., p. 900.
- ¹³ Ibid., p. 902.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., p. 909.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., p. 907.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., p. 899.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., p. 900, "Les idées de Jean (Santeuil) sont les idées à la mode."

If this is the case with regard to the relationship of the various art genres within the realm of art itself, it is already less striking that it should be the case with regard to the relationship of the realm of art as a whole to the general development of society. The difficulty consists only in the generalization of these contradictions. As soon as they are specified, they are already explained. . . . the difficulty is not to understand that Greek art and epics are tied to certain stages in the development of society. The difficulty is that they still yield artistic pleasure to us, and in a certain way count for a norm and for unattainable models.

Marx, Critique of Political Economy

CHAPTER IV

CRITICAL PRACTICE:

AN EXAMPLE OF THE APPLICATION OF THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD

Many of the lines which make up the epigraph to this chapter have often been quoted by marxist and non-marxist alike. A history of marxist literary criticism could be developed just on the basis of these lines and on the many types of interpretation which they have given rise to.

This is not the place to add my contribution to the subject, but I would, however, like to make two brief suggestions regarding two of the most relevant lines in it: (1) the difficulty of generalization; (2) the artistic pleasure that Greek art still

provides us with.

The first suggestion regarding generalization is to the effect that the special relation between art and society needs a much more profound study than a lot of the critical theories which subscribe to this theoretical tendency are prepared to make. The difficulty of generalization also means a greater facility to generalize: it is too easy to elaborate constructs which will establish a significative relation between art and society.

What Marx says about ideology perhaps should be considered more carefully: "As soon as they are specified, they are already explained." This line should perhaps serve as the norm for future speculations, for contradictions are there where ideology is dominant and they exist in a displaced form which, to be explicated, only required a specification of their displaced condition. Interpretation should give way to specification or to explication, which is the moment of the same analysis.

The second suggestion regards the pleasure that the art of the Greeks still gives to future generations. I would hazard that perhaps the pleasure which we receive is also the pleasure of the knowledge which they produce, that artistic pleasure, in other words, affords us at the same time an understanding of the social formation whence it was produced, a model which is no longer ours. It would be necessary to determine then in what does this knowledge consist and how to acquire it.

What has preceded has been in some way an answer to these problems, but probably just the beginning of an answer. For the moment, to conclude on this general attempt to formulate an answer to the specific question of a science of the literary text, I shall propose, very briefly, one way to resolve the difficulty of the "generalization of these contradictions" with an analysis of Robbe-Grillet's La Jalousie.¹

The Analysis: La Jalousie is a certain type of novel: it is an experimental novel, "un roman de recherche". It is a literary manifesto and the typical example of what Robbe-Grillet calls Le Nouveau Roman.² It wants to be taken as the literary practice of a new trend in literary theory because within the practice of fiction writing it represents a qualitative shift in the art of literary signification.

Signification however is not any longer a given as in previous classical novels, but it is created by the process of writing itself. The novel is not attempting to communicate anything and there is no meaning to be interpreted.³ At best there is "un sens" that the text may have for a reader, but this "sens", even though derived from a reading of the novel, is not necessarily in the novel. Emphasis is shifted to the "regard" and to the process of transformation undergone by the object, or by "reality" which is made up of objects, when perceived by human subjectivity: "le comment".⁴

However, this is not just the beginning of a new trend in literary genre. The shift is not just literary but also social, in fact it is because man's situation has changed that it becomes impossible to write a novel à la Balzac. "L'Homme Nouveau" requires a "Nouveau Roman". The relation is also reciprocal for the "Nouveau Roman" not only requires a new man, who "accepte de se libérer des idées faites, en littérature comme dans la vie", but the new novel attempts also to create a new man: "[the new novel] au lieu de les tromper [the readers] sur une prétendue signification de leur existence, les aideront à voir plus clair." (p. 151, italics mine). Here we have clarified for us what Robbe-Grillet also means by sens: it is not meant only in a literary sense - possibly this is not important at all - but it is meant also in a social sense, as an experience, different from one reader to another, which will help him to understand himself better in relation to his world.

This is what Robbe-Grillet calls "engagement", the only possible form of social activity for a writer. The task however is not to teach or educate the reader but to free him "des idées faites", of his preconceptions about the world. The novel is an experience: a way of seeing and understanding the world. No more. The text, we could say, is lisible.⁵ This "esprit de recherche" contains a double admonishment: for the reader and for the critic. To the reader the advice is not to be constrained, "obnubilé", by a type of reading determined by previous, now no longer adequate, forms of literary

experience:

Ce qu'il lui demande . . . c'est . . . de participer à une création, d'inventer à son tour l'oeuvre - et le monde - et d'apprendre ainsi à inventer sa propre vie. (p. 169)

To the critic,⁶ especially as it concerns La Jalousie, he warns against all attempts at reconstructing the order of events, and at giving the novel a meaning it has not:

Celui-ci n'était pas une narration emmêlée d'une anecdote simple extérieure à lui, mais ici encore le déroulement même d'une histoire qui n'avait d'autre réalité que celle du récit, déroulement qui ne s'opérait nulle part ailleurs que dans la tête du narrateur invisible, c'est-à-dire de l'écrivain, et du lecteur. (p. 167)

The demands which the writer makes upon the reader and the critic are essentially the same he makes on man in general. This is the radical function of the new novelist which places his art not to serve a political cause but to render the reader more aware of the manner in which the mind understands the world, and how the subject transforms the objects around him.

Reading La Jalousie is tantamount for the reader to undergoing a process of defamiliarization whereby the net result of the reading, le sens, is an increased sharpness of perception: a form of understanding. This is what Robbe-Grillet calls his "projet obscur", or in a different phase of literary production, "le contenu douteux de son livre".

For those who might think that we are not analysing the novel but merely giving an account of what the author has himself stated in Pour un nouveau roman, let me restate that La Jalousie is the literary

practice of Robbe-Grillet's theoretical program as he states it in the essays quoted above. It is the literary manifesto of the nouveau roman. What we have stated of this writer's esprit d'écriture is what partially conditions, even if the novel was written two years before, the production of its écriture.

This program is inscribed in the very title of the novel and describes the angle of vision of both the writer, its first reader, and the reader at large. The shutter, la jalousie, narrows and limits the field of vision not only by obstructing the vision but also by allowing only a marginal and fragmentary portion of the object to be seen. The gaze of the writer, as well as that of the reader, is focused on the scene where the writing is taking place, gradually and partially unfolding its object.

On another level of significance this perceptual limitation is that of the subject whose vision is narrowed by the preconceptions he has about the reality he confronts. His is a language which scans, reviews, and records the objects of his perceptions. It is a language which covers the surfaces of the objects, real or imaginary, and questions them for meaning:

. . .c'est un homme qui voit, qui sent, qui imagine,
un homme situé dans l'espace et le temps, conditionné
par ses passions, un homme comme vous et moi. Et le
livre ne rapporte rien d'autre que son expérience,
limitée, incertaine. (p. 149)

Here we have, then, the merging of the form with the content within the elaboration of a certain type of writing which calls attention to itself and to the limits of its endeavour. It describes as it

sees itself in the act of description: it is a doubling of the writing on itself, questioning and interpreting the perceptions which have conditioned it.

Creation, and interpretation of the creation, are the polarities along which a discourse is elaborated but with no purpose except the doubling and redoubling of a discourse which covers the objects looking for clues. It is the process and the mode of perception which is important for the author and not the objects which go to make up that reality.

For according to Robbe-Grillet we cannot speak of "reality", for the objects which are represented appear already transformed by the subject which has perceived them. Perception is all that is the case. The visual angle of the reader is conditioned, then, not only by the positions of the shutters, but also by the position and by the retention of the perceiving subject.

The problem then that we are faced with in dealing with La Jalousie is the awareness of Robbe-Grillet of his limitations as a writer, and of the limitations of his own writing. We mean his understanding that the relation between observer and object is only relative and subjective: that it is mainly a matter of interpretation, or more appropriately, a matter of point of view.

The novel for instance, as roman du regard, can be considered as a typology of possible points of view which transform the objects around. We have mentioned already two of these: the shutter and the mental state

of a suspicious and jealous mind. To these we could add a host of others such as the memory: reconstruction of past events; the night: nocturnal cries which indicate only "l'existence, la position et les déplacements"; the thick glass of the window: the refraction of the painted metal plate whose shape "peut se déplacer à volonté"; unfamiliarity: the singing of a native tune "aux paroles incompréhensibles, ou même sans paroles" which makes it difficult to know whether the tune is terminated or incomplete; the standpoint of the observer: the object is invisible or becomes visible according to its distance from the observer; blind spots: the eraser and the razor blade which remove any sign of the object, such as fragments of a letter, the centipede, or a photograph which reveals only part of a scene.

Objects can be made to disappear as well if brought into proximity with flaws in a glass, as with the large oil spot left by the truck in the yard. Or again we could mention the small package of A. . . "absorbé par un défaut du verre" which disappears from sight. There are of course many more examples of such grilles which stand between the observer and the object, which partially or completely distort the perceived object and make it impossible to determine exactly what is being seen: "Il serait difficile de préciser où, exactement, il néglige quelque règle essentielle, sur quel point particulier il manque de discrétion." (p. 23).

We see here that Robbe-Grillet's projet d'écriture, which attempts to shift emphasis from the object to the perceiving subject, is elaborated

in terms of a series of these regards, presented (to the reader) in their limited and conditioned apprehension of the object.

The novel however makes no distinction between these objects: the oil spill, the centipede, the singing of the natives, the banana trees, the alleged affair between A... and Franck and so on; they are all the "reality", or part of that reality, which is perceived and refracted, and they all exist as possibilities of that reality, all equally valid. If there is partiality in the selection it is not determined by the privileging of a meaning and therefore of a certain sequence of events to describe it. The only partiality is that of the perceiving subject in the sense that it looks for rather than looks at something. The presumed relationship between Franck and A... is not a critical problem, nor is it the centre of the novel.

Robbe-Grillet emphasizes "le comment" of the act of perception: what is it then? The problem, as we have pointed out, is one of écriture: the how of the subjective perception. What really conditions this process is a dialectic of construction and deconstruction of the object perceived. La Jalousie, as a roman de recherche, is written by means of a gradual breaking down of those literary canons utilized by the "classical" writers. By eliminating those canons which determine how a novel is to be read, the reader is baffled at a first reading of La Jalousie. As the mode of writing eliminates these literary "crutches", one may even say, of fiction-writing and fiction-reading, it constructs its own nouveau-roman-discourse.

A critical reading of the novel in fact brings this peculiar aspect of this mode of perception to the fore. The perception of an object not only begins to describe an object, that is really to construct it, but also begins to destroy it. This is the case with every object in the novel whatever means are employed - this is usually the function of the grille - to bring about the questioning of the validity of the perception. Again here the title is significative in that it undermines the validity of the perceiving subject, the unperceived subject of the novel,⁷ whose mind is obsessed and possessed by jealousy. He is no longer the clear-minded, omniscient narrator of Balzac's novels.

One example is the novel within the novel motif which underlies the text throughout. We are told that it is "un récit classique sur la vie coloniale, en Afrique, avec description de tornade, révolte indigène et histoires de club." Yet we are not given an exact account of what takes place in this novel with the exception of the comments of Franck and A... and of the interpretation given by the subject of their reactions. We have different versions of this novel and of its characters:

Le personnage principal du livre est un fonctionnaire des douanes. Le personnage n'est pas un fonctionnaire, mais un employé supérieur d'une vieille compagnie commerciale. Les affaires de cette compagnie sont mauvaises, elles évoluent rapidement vers l'escroquerie. Les affaires de la compagnie sont très bonnes.

This account of the novel, so distinctly and intentionally contradictory, is symptomatic not of a literary technique but of a phenomenology of reading. The motif of the novel within the novel is not utilized in

order to establish a meaningful relation between the novel in process and the novel to be written, as in Gide's Les Faux Monnayeurs, but rather to point to the rewriting which the reader himself makes when he comments on it. The stress is placed on the familiarity which the reader of the "classics" seems to have with the novel and its characters, and the speculations which this empathy gives rise to:

Jamais ils n'ont émis au sujet du roman le moindre jugement de valeur, parlant au contraire des lieux, des événements, des personnages, comme s'il se fût agi de choses réelles. . . . des gens qu'ils y auraient connus, ou dont on leur aurait raconté l'histoire. . . . il leur arrive souvent de rapprocher aux héros eux-mêmes certaines actes, ou certains traits de caractère, comme ils le feraient pour des amis communs. (p. 82)

The motif of the reader is there however not to indicate a possible way of reading the text but to destroy that particular relation between the novel and its reader. At best Franck and A... represent the desire, unfulfilled, of the classical reader vis-à-vis the nouveau roman. La Jalousie does not allow the same kind of familiarity and empathy with the characters; on the contrary, the reader is defamiliarized and forced to accept the apparent incoherence and ambiguity of its presentation.

Ultimately even the novel within the novel motif is there in order to be erased. The apparent similarity in plot outline between the two novels is there to indicate the breaking point between two forms of writing: one eliminating the possibility for the existence of the other in the same act of constructing itself.

Similarly, as the new form destroys the old in the act of its elaboration, the familiar perception of the reader gradually disintegrates and his act becomes participatory rather than interpretative and speculative. Again here the technique is similar to the other examples we noted above. The object en situation, here the novel and the two readers, is shifted to a blind spot of the mirror and seen through its flaws.

This is the dialectic of La Jalousie whose program de recherche is elaborated in terms of a form of writing which simultaneously constructs and deconstructs its own discourse on the basis of a shift in our ordinary way of perceiving reality.

"Ordinary" is perhaps the key word here, and the clue to the problematic of La Jalousie. In the works of classical authors we take for granted the distinction between ordinary perception and literary perception and we understand the latter as a transformation of the former. Consciously or unconsciously we know that when we deal with a novel of Balzac we are dealing with a fictionalized account of a certain "reality": i.e. with Balzac's literary perception of that reality.

Considering Robbe-Grillet's claim, as stated in Pour un nouveau roman, we become aware that the underlying assumption of his claim is that in le roman de recherche we are not dealing any longer with a literary form of perception but with an ordinary one. Or perhaps the two have to be taken as one?

C'est Dieu seul qui peut prétendre être objectif. Tandis que dans nos livres, au contraire, c'est un homme qui voit, qui sent, qui imagine, un homme situé dans l'espace et le temps, conditionné par ses passions, un homme comme vous et moi. Et le livre ne rapporte rien d'autre que son expérience, limitée, incertaine. C'est un homme d'ici, un homme de maintenant, qui est son propre narrateur, enfin. (p. 149)

The basic assumption is that we are dealing no longer with "Dieu" but with the ordinary perception of an ordinary man.

Should we then consider La Jalousie no longer as a novel but as a statement of a man who is "engagé . . . dans une aventure passionnelle des plus obsédantes, au point de déformer souvent sa vision. . . ." (italics mine). This seems to be the answer if we are not aware that Robbe-Grillet in denouncing literary perception has accepted another kind of fictionalization: that of the human mind obsessed by human passions. It is that passion which distorts and transforms reality, and the writer need not add that of the literary imagination. This is the necessary condition which determines the literary production of La Jalousie.

This condition is however not only programmatic but also ideological. The author's position, as we stated previously, is to free the reader from his ordinary mode of conceiving reality and to provide him with the experience of one more point of view. We quoted this passage:

Ce qu'il lui demande, ce n'est plus de recevoir tout fait un monde achevé, plein, clos sur lui-même,

c'est au contraire de participer à une création,
d'inventer à son tour l'oeuvre - et le monde -
et d'apprendre ainsi à inventer sa propre vie.

We see now that this apparent radical break from tradition in order to mould "un homme nouveau" is illusory for the task does not really affect man who does not need to be told to invent his own life. What the author finally accomplishes is forcing on the reader one more point of view, one more type of fiction which does not entail change but just time to readjust the focus to what is essentially a technique.

In La Jalousie it is the technique of the shift in perception: the construction and deconstruction of the object constantly reapplied on disparate objects. The new "grille" which Robbe-Grillet proposes is new in that it does not privilege a fixed point of view, but rather one which is in a constant flux determined only by the obsession of the human mind.

What the author calls the new "situation de l'homme" vis-à-vis his world one finds articulated in the novel in terms of a new literary technique. This shift does not represent a radical break but only an ideological shift which does not create a new man but adds one more fiction to the dossier on la condition humaine.

CHAPTER IV: NOTES

¹ All references to La Jalousie are from the 1957 édition de Minuit.

² All references to the theoretical writings of Robbe-Grillet are from Pour un nouveau roman, Gallimard: 1963.

³ Cf.: "Avant l'oeuvre, il n'y a rien, pas de certitude, pas de thèse, pas de message. Croire que le romancier a 'quelque chose à dire', et qu'il cherche ensuite comment le dire, représente le plus grave des contresens." Ibid., p. 153.

⁴ Cf.: "Car c'est précisément ce comment, cette manière de dire, qui constitue son projet d'écrivain, projet obscur entre tous, et qui sera plus tard le contenu douteux de son livre." Ibid., p. 153.

⁵ See for instance p. 150: "Nos livres sont écrits avec les mots, les phrases de tout le monde, de tous les jours. Ils ne présentent aucune difficulté particulière de lecture pour ceux qui ne cherchent pas à coller dessus une grille d'interprétation périmée, qui n'est plus bonne déjà depuis près de cinquante ans."

⁶ We could perhaps add also the following comment of Robbe-Grillet on the critic: "Le critique est donc placé dans cette situation paradoxale: il est obligé de juger les oeuvres contemporaines en se servant de critères qui, au mieux, ne les concernent pas"; and then later: "La meilleure méthode possible, c'est encore d'extrapoler, et c'est justement ce que la critique vivante s'efforce de faire." (p. 156).

7 With the exception of the reader, there is no-one in the novel who perceives his presence. In this sense he is also a subject and not an object.

Condition: Neocritical But Not Serious

Before you let that patient in, please tell us Doc Lacan,
The latest dope from Lévi-Strauss, Derrida and de Man.
What symptomatic concepts may we now disseminate?
What phallic simulacra may we "cluster" or sublate?
Can dialectic referents be structured after Hegel?
Will nominal concretions truly supersede the bagel?
And does the signifier really mean the signified?
O merde, Lacan, your patient just committed suicide!

Vera Lee, Boston College
(printed in Diacritics, Vol. III, no. 2)

PRE-TEXT II: A CONCLUSION

A reaction like the one expressed in the quotation above seems justified and rightly so. It is an implicit criticism of the trend-isms, of which structuralism is the latest event, which dominate periodically the cultural, and then ultimately the academic, scene. Yet every trend, at any one moment of its "cultural existence" welcomes parody, if not outrightly needing it.

The necessity for parody is a cultural safety valve: the necessary objectivity and distancing which a society needs in order to make sense of its phenomena and also in order to appropriate them to itself. The necessity, we said, is within the phenomenon itself: the product of a cultural phenomenon that needs to be recognized as such in its immediate impact and in its temporary duration.

A cultural phenomenon such as structuralism, and its derivations, while being on the one hand a reaction against previous trends and a

solution to the contradictions of those problematics, is on the other hand a refinement and an extension of those contradictions. There is actually no real solution but only a possibility for parody. The previous contradictions, if we can use this term at all, for we are dealing with basically the same contradiction, are neutralized by displacement, but do not cease to exist.

Structuralism is phenomenally the displacement of those previous contradictions resulting from the ideological elements of the social formation whence they are produced. The effect of this displacement is what Althusser calls after Freud over-determination of the contradiction:

The pattern of dominance and subordination, antagonism and non-antagonism of the contradictions in the structure in dominance at any given historical moment. More precisely, the overdetermination of a contradiction is the reflection in it of its conditions of existence within the complex whole, that is, of the other contradictions in the complex whole, in other words its uneven development.¹

Within the framework of critical literary trends structuralism represents the state of overdetermination of the contradiction which is the necessary condition determining its existence as a practice within a given social formation and which necessarily must reflect in its development those necessary conditions.

Parody, and the necessity for parody, is the element which phenomenally betrays those origins and the temporality of its effects: it announces the necessity for a new displacement and a new over-determination.

In the previous sections we have tried to deal indirectly with this question by trying to determine in terms of critical literary discourse the assumptions on which previous critical trends rested. As a solution we have suggested the elaboration of a scientific methodology which would attempt to understand the literary text as a scientific object deprived of the notions with which trend-ism had interpreted and re-interpreted it.

It required first of all a work of deconstruction of the literary work and consequentially a critique of the main theoretical critical assumptions which had invested the text with properties not its own. And then a work of reconstruction, or better, of transformation of the text, as the object of ideological practice, to a stage where it is understood as the object of scientific practice.

A necessarily all too brief operation which we tried to typify as a transition from private law to theoretical law, from artistic criticism to scientific criticism. The advent of a science does not however imply at the same time the end of previous -isms just as much as the advent of socialism or communism does not imply an end of ideology. Just as ideology is a necessary part of any social formation necessarily coexisting with a marxist political practice, so structuralism and semiology and future trends coexist with a science of literature.

The event of an "epistemological break" is thus only a theoretical event which cannot eliminate the contradictions and the play of contradictions present in the complex whole of the superstructure. In fact the elaboration of a scientific method would not be possible and a theory

could not exist without assuming the necessary existence of the contradiction and the necessary ideological conditioning of every practice.

This is the function of a theoretical practice which, beginning with this assumption, and being aware of this conditioning, can produce knowledge of its object.

This is the direction toward which we have oriented this paper; it was an attempt to indicate the possibility of another critical perception and to lay the basis for this possibility. It was by no means meant to be exhaustive or to reach definitive conclusions. Even though we believe not only in the necessity but also in the validity of this direction, we could not at this moment but suggest it as a theoretical project to which one can give only the status of "Notes" and, in all honesty, refer to these theoretical observations by no other title than "Notes toward a science of the literary text".

For these reasons it follows that there cannot be a veritable conclusion to these Notes. In one sense the possibility of concluding is invalidated from the start. In another sense neither a scientific theory nor its theoretical practice can ever be finally conclusive. Given the necessary conditions which determine them their struggle with ideology remains always an open question.

In terms of such considerations, and looking back to the errors and limits of our statements, we cannot but present the whole and this section,

as another Pre-Text in order to stress the necessity for a more specific and rigorous scientific elaboration, the Text, which these notes announce and whose contour they have attempted to delineate.

PRE-TEXT II: NOTES

¹ See glossary by Ben Brewster in Althusser's English edition of Pour Marx.

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