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# Towards a Sociology of the Novel

*Translated from the French by Alan Sheridan*

## 1 Introduction to the Problems of a Sociology of the Novel

Two years ago, in January 1961, the Institute of Sociology in the Free University of Brussels asked me to lead a research group into the sociology of literature, beginning with the novels of André Malraux. With a good deal of apprehension, I accepted. My work on seventeenth-century philosophy and tragedy in no way prejudiced me against the possibility of a similar study of the novel, even of a body of fiction so nearly contemporary as Malraux's. In fact, we spent the first year on a preliminary study of the problems of the novel as a literary form, taking as our starting-point Georg Lukács's already almost classic work - though still little known in France - *The Theory of the Novel*<sup>1</sup> and René Guénon's recently published *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque*,<sup>2</sup> in which Guénon - unknown to himself, as he later told me - discovered the Lukácsian analyses, while modifying them on several particular points.

Our study of *The Theory of the Novel* and Guénon's book led me to formulate a number of sociological hypotheses that seem to me to be particularly interesting, and on the basis of which my later work on Malraux's novels was developed.

These hypotheses concern, on the one hand, the homology between the structure of the classical novel and the structure of exchange in the liberal economy and, on the other hand, certain parallels in their later evolutions.

Let us begin by tracing the outlines of the structure described by Lukács. This structure may not, as he believed, characterize the novel form in general, but it does characterize at least its most important aspects (and probably, from the genetic point of view, its primordial aspect). The novel form studied by Lukács is that characterized by a hero that he very felicitously calls the *problematic hero*.<sup>3</sup>

The novel is the story of a *degraded* (what Lukács calls 'demoniacal') search, a search for authentic values in a world itself degraded, but at an otherwise advanced level according to a different mode.

By authentic values, I mean, of course, not the values that the critic or the reader regards as authentic, but those which, without being manifestly present in the novel, organize in accordance with an *implicit* mode its world as a whole. It goes without saying that these values are specific to each novel and different from one novel to another.

Since the novel is an epic genre characterized, unlike the folk tale or the epic poem itself, by the insurmountable rupture between the hero and the world, there is in Lukács an analysis of the nature of two degradations (that of the hero and that of the world) that must engender both a *constitutive opposition*, the foundation of this insurmountable rupture, and an *adequate community* to make possible the existence of an epic form.

The radical rupture alone would, in effect, have led to tragedy or to lyric poetry; the absence of rupture or the existence of a merely accidental rupture would have led to the epic poem or the folk tale.

Situated between the two, the novel has a dialectical nature in so far as it derives specifically, on the one hand, from the fundamental community of the hero and of the world presupposed by all epic forms and, on the other hand, from their insurmountable rupture; the community of the hero and of the world resulting from the fact that they

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are both degraded in relation to authentic values, the opposition resulting from the difference of nature between each of these two degradations.

The *demoniacal* hero of the novel is a madman or a criminal, in any case, as I have said, a *problematic* character whose degraded, and therefore inauthentic, search for authentic values in a world of conformity and convention constitute the content of this new literary genre known as the 'novel' that writers created in an individualistic society.

On the basis of this analysis, Lukacs develops a typology of the novel. Setting out from the relation between the hero and the world, he distinguishes three schematic types of the Western novel in the nineteenth century, to which is added a fourth that already constitutes a transformation from the novel form towards new modalities that would require a different type of analysis. In 1920, this fourth possibility seemed to him to be expressed pre-eminently in the novels of Tolstoy, which strive towards the epic. The three types of novel on which his analysis bears are as follows:

- ❖ the novel of 'abstract idealism'; characterized by the activity of the hero and by his over-narrow consciousness in relation to the complexity of the world (*Don Quixote*, *Le Rouge et le Noir*);
- ❖ the psychological novel; concerned above all with the analysis of the inner life, and characterized by the passivity of the hero and a consciousness too broad to be satisfied by what the world of convention can offer him (*Oblomov* and *L'Education sentimentale*);
- ❖ the *Bildungsroman*, which ends with a *self-imposed limitation*; although the hero gives up the problematic search, he does not accept the world of convention or abandon the implicit scale of values - a self-imposed limitation that must be characterized by the term 'virile maturity' (Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* or Gottfried Keller's *Der grüne Heinrich*).

At a distance of forty years, Rene Girard's analyses are often very close to those of Lukacs. For Girard, too, the novel is the story of a degraded search (which he calls 'idolatrous') for authentic values, by a problematic hero, in a degraded world. The terminology he uses is Heideggerian in origin, but he often gives it a content that is somewhat different from that of Heidegger himself. Without going into detail, we might say that Girard replaces Heidegger's duality of the ontological and the ontic by the obviously related duality of the ontological and the metaphysical, which correspond for him to the authentic and the inauthentic; but whereas, for Heidegger, any idea of progress and retreat is to be eliminated, Girard confers on his terminology of the ontological and the metaphysical a content much closer to the positions of Lukacs than to those of Heidegger, by introducing between the two terms a relation governed by the categories of progress and regression.<sup>4</sup>

Girard's typology of the novel is based on the idea that the degradation of the fictional world is the result of a more or less advanced ontological sickness (this 'more or less' is strictly contrary to Heidegger's thinking) to which corresponds, within the fictional world, an increase of metaphysical desire, that is to say, of degraded desire.

It is based therefore on the idea of degradation, and it is here that Girard introduces into the Lukacsian analysis a precision that seems to me particularly important. For him, indeed, the degradation of the fictional world, the progress of the ontological sickness, and the increase of metaphysical desire are expressed in a greater or lesser *mediatization* that progressively increases the distance between metaphysical desire and authentic search, the search for 'vertical transcendence'.

There are a great many examples of mediation in Girard's work, from the novels of

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chivalry that stand between *Don Quixote* and the search for chivalric values to the lover that stands between the husband and his desire for his wife, in Dostoevsky's *The Eternal Husband*. Incidentally, it does not seem to me that his examples are always as well chosen. Moreover, I am not at all sure that mediatization is as universal a category in the fictional world as Girard thinks. The term 'degradation' seems to me broader and more appropriate, on condition of course that the nature of this degradation is specified in each particular analysis.

Nevertheless, by introducing the category of mediation, and even by exaggerating its importance, Girard has elucidated the analysis of a structure that involved not only the most important form of degradation in the fictional world but also the form that is, from a genetic point of view, probably the first, that which gave birth to the literary genre of the novel, the novel itself having emerged as the result of other derived forms of degradation.

From this point on, Girard's typology is based first of all on the existence of two forms of mediation, external and internal, the first characterized by the fact that the mediating agent is external to the world in which the hero's search takes place (for example, the novels of chivalry in *Don Quixote*), the second by the fact that the mediating agent belongs to this world (the lover in *The Eternal Husband*).

Within these two qualitatively different groups, there is the idea of a progressive degradation that is expressed by the increasing proximity between the fictional character and the mediating agent, and the increasing distance between this character and *vertical transcendence*.

Let us now try to elucidate an essential point on which Lukics and Girard are in fundamental disagreement. As the story of a degraded search for authentic values in an inauthentic world, the novel is necessarily both a biography and a social chronicle. A particularly important fact is that the situation of the writer in relation to the world he has created is, in the novel, different from the situation in relation to the world of any other literary form. This particular situation, Girard calls *humour*; Lukics calls it *irony*. Both agree that the novelist must supersede the consciousness of his heroes and that this supersession (humour or irony) is aesthetically constitutive of fictional creation. But they diverge as to the nature of this supersession and, on this point, it is the position of Lukics that seems to me to be acceptable and not that of Girard.

For Girard, the novelist has left the world of degradation and rediscovered authenticity, vertical transcendence, at the moment he writes his work. This is why he thinks that most great novels end with a conversion of the hero to this vertical transcendence and that the abstract character of certain endings (*Don Quixote*, *Le Rouge et le Noir*, one might also add *La Princesse de Clever*) is either an illusion on the part of the reader, or the result of survivals from the past in the consciousness of the writer.

Such a notion is strictly contrary to Lukacs's aesthetic, for which the literature form (any great artistic form in general) is born out of the need to express an *essential* content. If the fictional degradation were really superseded by the writer, even through the ultimate conversion of a number of heroes, the story of this degradation would be no more than a mere incident and its expression would have at most the character of a more or less entertaining narrative.

And yet the writer's irony, his autonomy in relation to his characters, the ultimate conversion of the fictional heroes are undoubted realities.

However, Lukics thinks that precisely to the extent that the novel is the imaginary creation of a world governed by *universal* degradation, this supersession cannot itself be other than degraded, *abstract*, conceptual, and not experienced as a concrete reality.

According to Lukacs the novelist's irony is directed not only on to the hero, whose demoniacal character he is well aware of, but also on the abstract, and therefore inadequate

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and degraded, character of his own consciousness. That is why the story of the degraded search, whether demoniacal or idolatrous, always remains the sole way of expressing essential realities.

The ultimate conversion of Don Quixote or Julien Sorel is not, as Girard believes, a discovery of authenticity, vertical transcendence, but simply an awareness of the vanity, the degraded character not only of the earlier search, but also of any hope, of any possible search.

That is why it is an end and not a beginning and it is the existence of this irony (which is always a self-irony, as well) that enables Lukacs to make two related definitions that seem to me particularly appropriate to this form of the novel: *the Way is begun, the journey is ended*, and *the novel is the form of virile maturity*, the second formula defining more specifically, as we have seen, the *Bildungsroman* of the *Wilhelm Meister* type, which ends with a self-imposed limitation (the hero gives up the problematic search, without accepting the world of convention or abandoning the explicit scale of values).

Thus the novel, in the sense given it by Lukacs and Girard, appears as a literary genre in which authentic values, which are always involved, cannot be present in the work in the form of conscious characters or concrete realities. These values exist only in an abstract, conceptual I form in the consciousness of the novelist in which they take on an *ethical* character. But abstract ideas have, no place in a literary work, where they would form a heterogeneous element.

The problem of the novel, therefore, is to make what in the novelist's consciousness is *abstract* and *ethical* the essential element of a work in which reality can exist only in the mode of a non-thematized (Girard would say mediatized) absence or, which is equivalent, a degraded presence. As Lukacs says, the novel is the only literary genre in which *the novelist's ethic becomes an aesthetic problem of the work*

The problem of a sociology of the novel has always preoccupied sociologists of literature, though, as yet, no decisive step towards its elucidation has so far been attempted. Basically, the novel, for the first part of its history, was a biography and a social chronicle and so it has always been possible to show that the social chronicle reflected to a greater or lesser degree the society of the period - and one does not have to be a sociologist to see that.

On the other hand, a connection has also been made between the transformation of the novel since Kafka and the Marxist analyses of reification. Here, too, it has to be said that serious sociologists should have seen this as a problem rather than as an explanation. Although it is obvious that the absurd worlds of Kafka or Camus's *L'Etranger*, or Robbe-Grillet's world composed of relatively autonomous objects, correspond to the analysis of reification as developed by Marx and later Marxists, the problem arises as to why, when this analysis was elaborated in the second half of the nineteenth century and concerned a phenomenon that appeared in a still earlier period, this same phenomenon was expressed in the novel only at the end of World War I.

In short, all these analyses concern the relation between certain elements of the *content* of fictional literature and the existence of a social reality that they reflect almost without transposition or by means of a more or less transparent transposition.

But the first problem that a sociology of the novel should have confronted is that of the relation between the *novel form* itself and the *structure* of the social environment in which it developed, that is to say, between the novel as a literary genre and individualistic modern society.

It seems to me today that a combination of the analyses of Lukacs and Girard, even though they were both developed without specifically sociological preoccupations, makes it possible, if not to elucidate this problem entirely, at least to make a decisive step towards its elucidation.

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I have just said that the novel can be characterized as the story of a search for authentic values in a degraded mode, in a degraded society, and that this degradation, in so far as it concerns the hero, is expressed principally through the mediatization, the reduction of authentic values to the implicit level and their disappearance as manifest realities. This is obviously a particularly complex structure and it would be difficult to imagine that it could one day emerge simply from individual invention without any basis in the social life of the group.

What, however, would be quite inconceivable, is that a literary form of such dialectical complexity should be rediscovered, over a period of centuries, among the most different writers in the most varied countries, that it should have become the form *par excellence* in which was expressed, on the literary plane, the content of a whole period, without there being either a homology or a significant relation between this form and the most important aspects of social life.

This hypothesis seems to me particularly simple and above all productive and credible, though it has taken me years to find it.

The novel form seems to me, in effect, to be *the transposition on the literary plane of everyday life in the individualistic society created by market production*. There is a *rigorous homology* between the literary form of the novel, as I have defined it with the help of Lukacs and Girard, and the everyday relation between man and commodities in general, and by extension between men and other men, in a market society.

The natural, healthy relation between men and commodities is that in which production is consciously governed by future consumption, by the concrete qualities of objects, by their *use value*.

Now what characterizes market production is, on the contrary, the elimination of this relation with men's consciousness, its reduction to the implicit through the mediation of the new economic reality created by this form of production: *exchange value*.

In other forms of society, when a man needed an article of clothing or a house, he had to produce them himself or obtain them from someone capable of producing them and who was under an obligation to provide him with them, either in accordance with certain traditional rules, or for reasons of authority, friendship, etc., or as part of some reciprocal arrangement<sup>s</sup>

If one wishes to obtain an article of clothing or a house today has to find the money needed to buy them. The producer of clothes or houses is indifferent to the use values of the objects he produces. For him, these objects are no more than a necessary evil to obtain what alone interests him, an exchange value sufficient to ensure the viability of his enterprise. In the economic life, which constitutes the most important part of modern social life, every authentic relation with the qualitative aspect of objects and persons tends to disappear - interhuman relations as well as those between men and things - and be replaced by a mediatized and degraded, relation: the relation with purely quantitative exchange values.

Of course, use values continue to exist and even to govern, in the last resort, the whole of the economic life; but their action assumes an *implicit character, exactly like that of authentic values in the fictional world*.

On the conscious, manifest plane, *the economic life* is composed of people orientated exclusively towards exchange values, degraded values, to which are added in production a number of individuals - the creators in every sphere - who remain essentially orientated towards use values and who by virtue of that fact are situated on the fringes of society and become *problematic individuals*; and, of course, even these individuals unless they accept the romantic illusion (Girard would say T' lie) of the *total* rupture between essence and appearance, between the inner life and the social life, cannot be deluded as to the

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degradations that their creative activity undergoes in a market society, when this activity is manifested externally, when it becomes a book, a painting, teaching, a musical composition, etc., enjoying a certain prestige, and having therefore a certain price. It should be added that as the ultimate consumer, opposed in the very act of exchange to the producers, any individual in a market society finds himself at certain moments of the day aiming at qualitative use values that he can obtain only through the mediation of exchange values.

In view of this, there is nothing surprising about the creation of the novel as a literary genre. Its apparently extremely complex form is the one in which men live every day, when they are obliged to seek all quality, all use value in a mode degraded by the mediation of quantity, of exchange value - and this in a society in which any effort to orientate oneself directly towards use value can only produce individuals who are themselves degraded, but in a different mode, that of *the problematic individual*.

Thus the two structures, that of an important fictional genre and that of exchange proved to be strictly homologous, to the point at which one might speak of one and the same structure manifesting itself on two different planes. Furthermore, as we shall see later, the *evolution* of the fictional form that corresponds to the world of reification can be understood only in so far as it is related to a *homologous history* of the structure of reification.

However, before making a few remarks about this homology between the two evolutions we must examine the problem, particularly important for the sociologist, of the process by which the literary form was able to emerge out of the economic reality, and of the modifications that the study of this process forces us to introduce into the traditional representation of the sociological conditioning of literary creation.

One fact is striking at the outset; the traditional scheme of literary sociology, whether Marxist or not, cannot be applied in the case of the structural homology just referred to. Most work in the sociology of literature established a relation between the most important literary works and the collective *consciousness* of the particular social group from which they emerged. On this point, the traditional Marxist position does not differ essentially from non-Marxist sociological work as a whole, in relation to which it introduces only four new ideas, namely:

- a) The literary work is not the mere reflection of a real, given collective consciousness, but the culmination at a very advanced level of coherence of tendencies peculiar to the consciousness of a particular group, a consciousness that must be conceived as a dynamic reality, orientated towards a certain state of equilibrium. What really separates, in this as in all other spheres, Marxist sociology from positivistic, relativist, or eclectic sociological tendencies is the fact that it sees the key concept not in the *real* collective consciousness, but in the constructed concept (*zugerechnet*) of *possible consciousness* which, alone, makes an understanding of the first possible.
- b) The relation between collective ideology and great individual literary, philosophical, theological etc. creations resides not in an identity of content, but in a more advanced coherence and in a homology of structures, which can be expressed in imaginary contents very different from the real content of the collective consciousness.
- c) The work corresponding to the mental structure of the particular social group may be elaborated in certain exceptional cases by an individual with very few relations with this group. The *social* character of the work resides above all in the fact that an individual can never establish by himself a coherent mental structure corresponding to what is called a 'world view'. Such a structure can be elaborated only by a group, the individual being capable only of carrying it to a very high degree of coherence and transposing it on the

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level of imaginary creation, conceptual thought, etc.

d) The collective consciousness is neither a primary reality, nor an autonomous reality; it is elaborated implicitly in the over-all behaviour of individuals participating in the economic, social, political life, etc.

These are evidently extremely important theses, sufficient to establish a very great difference between Marxist thinking and other conceptions of the sociology of literature. Nevertheless, despite these differences, Marxist theoreticians, like positivistic or relativistic sociologists of literature, have always thought that the social life can be expressed on the intermediary link of the collective consciousness.

In the case we have just studied, however, what strikes one first is the fact that although we find a strict homology between the structures of economic life and a certain particularly important manifestation, one can detect no analogous structure at the level of the *collective consciousness* that seemed hitherto to be the indispensable intermediary link to realize either the homology or an intelligible, significant relation between the different aspects of social existence.

The novel analysed by Lukacs and Girard no longer seems to be the imaginary transposition of the *conscious structures* of a particular group, but seems to express on the contrary (and this may be the case of a very large part of modern art in general) a search for values that no social group defends effectively and that the economic life tends to make implicit in all members of the society.

The old Marxist thesis whereby the proletariat was seen as the only social group capable of constituting the basis of a new culture, by virtue of the fact that it was not integrated into the reified society, set out from the traditional sociological representation that presupposed that all authentic, important cultural creation could emerge only from a fundamental harmony between the mental structure of the creator and that of a partial group of relative size, but universal ambition. In reality, for Western society at least, the Marxist analysis has proved inadequate; the Western proletariat, far from remaining alien to the reified society and opposing it as a revolutionary force, has on the contrary become integrated into it to a large degree, and its trade union and political action, far from overthrowing this society and replacing it by a socialist world, has enabled it to gain a relatively better place in it than Marx's analysis foresaw.

Furthermore, cultural creation, although increasingly threatened by the reified society, has continued to flourish. Fictional literature, as perhaps modern poetic creation and contemporary painting, are authentic forms of cultural creation even though they cannot be attached to the consciousness - even a potential one - of a particular social group.

Before embarking on a study of the processes that made possible and produced this *direct* transposition of the economic life into the literary life, we should perhaps remark that although such a process seems contrary to the whole tradition of Marxist studies of cultural creation, it confirms nevertheless, in a quite unexpected way, one of the most important Marxist analyses of bourgeois thought, namely the theory of the fetishization of merchandise and reification. This analysis, which Marx regarded as one of his most important discoveries, affirms in effect that in market societies (that is to say, in types of society in which economic activity predominates), the collective consciousness gradually loses all active reality and tends to become a mere reflection<sup>6</sup> of the economic life and, ultimately, to disappear.

There was obviously, therefore, between this *particular* analysis of Marx and the general theory of literary and philosophical creation of later Marxists, who presupposed an active role of the collective consciousness, not a contradiction but an incoherence. The latter theory never envisaged the consequences for the sociology of literature of Marx's belief that there survives in market societies a radical modification of the status of the individual and collective

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consciousness" and, implicitly, relations between the infrastructure and the superstructure. The analysis of reification elaborated first by Marx on the level of everyday life, then developed by Lukacs in the field of philosophical, scientific, and political thought, finally taken up by a number of theoreticians in various specific domains, and about which I have myself published a study, would appear therefore, for the moment at least, to be confirmed by the facts in the sociological analysis of a certain fictional form.

Having said this, the question arises as to how the link between the economic structures and literary manifestations is made in a society in which this link occurs *outside the collective consciousness*.

With regard to this I have formulated the hypothesis of the convergent action of four different factors, namely:

- a) The birth in the thinking of members of bourgeois society, on the basis of economic behaviour and the existence of exchange value, of the *category of mediation* as a fundamental and increasingly developed form of thought, with an implicit tendency to replace this thought by a total false consciousness in which the mediating value becomes an absolute value and in which the mediated value disappears entirely or, to put it more clearly, with the tendency to conceive of the access to all values from the point of view of mediation, together with a propensity, ~ to make of money and social prestige absolute values and not merely mediations that provide access to other values of a qualitative character.
- b) The survival in this society of a number of individuals who are essentially *problematic* in so far as their thinking and behaviour remain dominated by qualitative values, even though they are unable to extract themselves entirely from the existence of the degrading mediation whose action permeates the whole of the social structure. These individuals include, above all, the creators, writers, artists, philosophers, theologians, men of action, etc., whose thought and behaviour are governed above all by the quality of their work even though they cannot escape entirely from the action of the market and from the welcome extended them by the reified society.
- c) Since no important work can be the expression of a purely individual experience, it is likely that the novel genre could emerge and be developed only in so far as a *non-conceptualized*, affective discontent, an affective aspiration towards qualitative values, was developed either in society as a whole, or perhaps solely among the middle strata from which most novelists have come.
- d) Lastly, in the liberal market societies, there was a set of values, which, though not trans-individual, nevertheless, had a universal aim and, within these societies, a general validity. These were the values of liberal individualism that were bound up with the very existence of the competitive market (in France, liberty, equality, and property, in Germany, *Bildungsideal*, with their derivatives, tolerance, the rights of man, development of the personality, etc.). On the basis of these values, there developed the category of *individual* biography that became the constitutive element of the novel. Here, however, it assumed the form of the *problematic* individual, on the basis of the following:

1. the personal experience of the problematic individuals mentioned above under *b*);
2. the internal contradiction between individualism as a universal value produced by bourgeois society and the important and painful limitations that this society itself brought to the possibilities of the development of the individual.

This hypothetical schema seems to me to be confirmed among other things by the fact that, when one of these four elements, individualism, has gradually been eliminated by the transformation of the economic life and the replacement of the economy of free



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competition by an economy of cartels and monopolies (a transformation that began at the end of the nineteenth century, but whose qualitative turning-point most economists would place between 1900 and 1910), we witness a parallel transformation of the novel form that culminates in the gradual dissolution and disappearance of the individual character, of the hero; a Transformation that seems to me to be characterized in an extremely schematic way by the existence of two periods: *a)* The first, transitional period, during which the disappearance of the importance of the individual brings with it attempts to replace biography as the content of the work of fiction with values produced by different ideologies. For although, in Western societies, these values might well give a new lease of life to an already existing form that was losing its former content. First and foremost, on this level, are the ideas of community and collective reality (institutions, family, social group, revolution, etc.) that had been introduced and developed in Western thinking by the socialist ideology.

*b)* The second period, which begins more or less with Kafka and continues to the contemporary *nouveau roman*, and which has not yet come to an end, is characterized by an abandonment of and attempt to replace the problematic hero and individual biography by another reality and by the effort to write the novel of *the* absence of the subject of the non-existence of any ongoing search. 8

It goes without saying that this attempt to safeguard the novel form by giving it a content, related no doubt to the content of the traditional novel (it had always been the literary form of the problematic search and the absence of positive values), but nevertheless essentially different (it now involves the elimination of two essential elements of the specific content of the novel: the psychology of the problematic hero and the story of his demoniacal search), was to produce at the same time parallel orientations towards different forms of expression. There may be here elements for a sociology of the theatre of absence (Beckett, Ionesco, Adamov during a certain period) and also of certain aspects of non-figurative painting.

Lastly, we should mention a problem that might and ought to be the subject of later research. The novel form that we have just studied is essentially critical and oppositional. It is a form of resistance to developing bourgeois society. An individual resistance that can fall back, within a group, only on *affective* and *non-conceptualized* psychical processes precisely because conscious resistances that might have elaborated literary forms implying the possibility of a positive hero (in the first place, a proletarian oppositional consciousness such as Marx had hoped for and predicted) had not become sufficiently developed in Western societies. The novel with a problematic hero thus proves, contrary to traditional opinion, to be a literary form bound up certainly with history and the development of the bourgeoisie, but not the expression of the real or possible consciousness of that class.

But the problem remains as to whether, parallel with this literary form, there did not develop other forms that might correspond to the conscious values and effective aspirations of the bourgeoisie; and, on this point, I should like to mention, merely as a general and hypothetical suggestion, the possibility that the work of Balzac - whose structure ought, indeed, to be analysed from this point of view - might constitute the only great literary expression of the world as structured by the conscious values of the bourgeoisie: individualism, the thirst for power, money, and eroticism, which triumph over the ancient feudal values of altruism, charity, and love.

Sociologically, this hypothesis, if it proves to be correct, might be related to the fact that the work of Balzac is situated precisely at a period in which individualism, ahistorical in itself, structured the consciousness of a bourgeoisie that was in the process of constructing a new society and found itself at the highest and most intense level of its real historical efficacy.

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We should also ask ourselves why, with the exception of this single case, this form of fictional literature had only a secondary importance in the history of Western culture, why the real consciousness and aspirations of the bourgeoisie never succeeded again, in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in creating a literary form of its own that might be situated on the same level as the other forms that constitute the Western literary tradition.

On this point, I would like to make a few general hypotheses. The analysis that I have just developed extends to one of the most important novel forms a statement that now seems to me to be valid for almost all forms of *authentic cultural creation*. In relation to this statement the only expression that I could see for the moment was constituted precisely by the work of Balzac<sup>9</sup>, who was able to create a great literary universe structured by purely individualistic values, at a historical moment when, concurrently, men animated by ahistorical values were accomplishing a considerable historical upheaval (an upheaval that was not really completed in France until the end of the bourgeois revolution in 1848). With this single exception (but perhaps one should add a few other possible exceptions that may have escaped my attention), it seems to me that there is valid literary and artistic creation only when there is an aspiration to transcendence on the part of the individual and a search for qualitative trans-individual values. 'Man passes beyond man,' I have written, slightly altering Pascal. This means that man can be authentic only in so far as he conceives himself or feels himself as part of a developing whole and situates himself in a historical or transcendent trans-individual dimension. But bourgeois ideology, bound up like bourgeois society itself with the existence of economic activity, is precisely the first ideology in history that is both radically profane and ahistorical; the first ideology whose tendency is to deny anything sacred, whether the otherworldly sacredness of the transcendent religions or the immanent sacredness of the historical future. It is, it seems to me, the fundamental reason why bourgeois society created the first radically nonaesthetic form of consciousness. The essential character of bourgeois ideology, rationalism, ignores in its extreme expressions the very existence of art. There is no Cartesian or Spinozian aesthetics, or even an aesthetics for Baumgarten - art is merely an inferior form of knowledge.

It is no accident therefore if, with the exception of a few particular situations, we do not find any great literary manifestations of the bourgeois consciousness itself. In a society bound up with the market, the artist is, as I have already said, a problematic individual, and this means a critical individual, opposed to society.

Nevertheless reified bourgeois ideology had its thematic values, values that were sometimes authentic, such as those of individualism, sometimes purely conventional, which Lukács called false consciousness and, in their extreme forms, bad faith, and Heidegger's 'chatter'. These stereotypes, whether authentic or conventional, thematized in the collective consciousness, were later able to produce, side by side with the authentic novel form, a parallel literature that also recounted an individual history and, naturally enough, since conceptualized values were involved, could depict a positive hero.

It would be interesting to follow the meanderings of the secondary novel forms that might be based, quite naturally, on the collective consciousness. One would end up perhaps - I have not yet made such a study - with a very varied spectrum, from the lowest forms of the Delly type to the highest forms to be found perhaps in such writers as Alexandre Dumas or Eugene Sue. It is also perhaps on this plane that we should situate, parallel with the *nouveau roman*, certain best-sellers that are bound up with the new forms of collective consciousness.

However, the extremely schematic sketch that I have just traced seems to me to provide a framework for a sociological study of the novel form. Such a study would be all the more important in that, apart from its own object, it would constitute a not inconsiderable contribution to the study of the psychological structures of certain social groups, the middle

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strata in particular.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1 Georg Lukacs, *The Theory of the Novel* (1971) (trans. A. Bostock) London: Merlin Press.

2 Rene Girard, *Mensonge romantique et verite romanesque* (1961) Paris: Grasset.

3 I should say however that, in my opinion, the field of validity of this hypothesis must be contracted, for, although the hypothesis may be applied to *such* important works in the history of literature as Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir*, and Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and *L'Education sentimentale*, it can be applied only very partially to *La Chartreuse de Parme* and not at all to the works of Balzac, which occupy a considerable place in the history of the Western novel. As such, however, Lukics's analyses enable us, it seems to me, to undertake a serious sociological study of the novel form.

4 In Heidegger's thinking, as indeed in that of Lukics, there is a radical break between Being (For Lukics, Totality) and whatever may be spoken of in the indicative (a judgement of fact), or in the imperative (a judgement of value).

It is this difference that Heidegger designates as that of the ontological and the ontic. And, from this point of view, metaphysics, which is one of the highest and most general forms of thought in the indicative, remains in the final resort in the domain of the ontic.

While agreeing on the necessary distinction between the ontological and the ontic, totality and the theoretical, the moral and the metaphysical, the positions of Heidegger and Lukics are essentially different in the way these relations are conceived.

As a philosophy of history, Lukics's thought implies the idea of a coming-into-being (*devenir*) of knowledge, of a hope in progress, and a risk of regression. Now, for him, progress is the bringing together of positive thought and the category of totality; regression, the distancing of these two, ultimately inseparable, elements. The task of philosophy is precisely to introduce the category of totality as the basis of all partial research and of all reflection on positive data.

Heidegger, on the other hand, establishes a radical separation (and, by the very fact, an abstract and conceptual one) between Being and the datum, between the ontological and the ontic, between philosophy and positive science, thus eliminating any idea of progress and regression. He, too, arrives in the end at a philosophy of history, but it is an abstract philosophy with two dimensions, the authentic and the inauthentic, openness to Being and oblivion of Being.

So, although Girard's terminology is Heideggerian in origin, the introduction of the categories of progress and regression brings him closer to Lukics.

5 While ever exchange remains *sporadic* because it bears solely on surpluses or because it has the character of an exchange of use values that individuals or groups cannot produce within an essentially natural economy, the mental structure of mediation does not appear or remains secondary. The fundamental transformation in the development of reification results from the advent of *market production*.

6 I speak of a 'consciousness-reflection' when the content of this consciousness and the set of relations between the different elements of the content (what I call its structure) undergo the action of certain other domains of the social life, without acting in turn on them. In practice, this situation has probably never been reached in capitalist society. This society creates, however, a tendency to the rapid and gradual diminution of the action of consciousness on the economic life and, conversely, to a continual increase of the action of the economic sector of the social life on the content and structure of consciousness.

7 There arises a problem here that is difficult to solve at the moment, but which might one day be solved by concrete sociological research. I mean the problem of the collective, affective, non-conceptualized 'sound-box' that made possible the development of the novel form.

Initially, I thought that reification, while tending to dissolve and to integrate in the over-all society different partial groups, and, therefore, to deprive them to a certain extent of their specificity, had a character so contrary to both the biological and psychological reality of the individual human being that it could not fail to engender in *all* individual human beings, to a greater or lesser degree, reactions of opposition (or, if this reification becomes degraded in a qualitatively more advanced way, to reactions of evasion), thus creating a diffuse resistance to the reified world, a resistance that would constitute the background of fictional creation.

Later, however, it seemed to me that this hypothesis contained an unproved *a priori* supposition: that of the existence of a biological nature whose external manifestations could not be entirely denatured by social reality.

In fact, it is just as likely that resistances, even affective ones, to reification are circumscribed within certain particular social strata, which positive research ought to delimit.

8 Lukacs characterized the time of the traditional novel by the proposition: 'We have started on our way, our journey is over.' One might characterize the new novel by the suppression of the first half of this statement. Its time might be characterized by the statement: 'The aspiration is there, but the journey is over' (Kafka Nathalie Sarraute), or simply by the observation that 'the journey is already over, though we never started on our way' (Robbe Grillet's first three novels).

9 A year ago, when dealing with the same problems and mentioning the existence of the novel with a problematic hero and of a fictional sub-literature with a positive hero, I wrote, 'Lastly, I shall conclude this article with a great question mark, that of the sociological study of the works of Balzac. These works, it seems to me, constitute a novel form of their own, one that integrates important elements belonging to the two types of novels that I have mentioned and probably represents the most important form of fictional expression in history.'

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The remarks formulated in these pages are an attempt to develop in greater detail the hypothesis hinted at in these lines.