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Aesthetic Experience

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and

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Literary

Hermeneutics

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Hans Robert Jauss

Translation from the German by Michael Shaw

Introduction by Wlad Godzich

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Theory and History of Literature, Volume 3

University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis

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Publication of this book was assisted by a grant from the publications program of the National Endowment for the Humanities, an independent federal agency.

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Published by the University of Minnesota Press,  
2037 University Avenue Southeast, Minneapolis MN 55414  
Printed in the United States of America

This book was originally published as *Aesthetische Erfahrung und literarische Hermeneutik I* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1977).  
"The Swan" is reprinted from *Charles Baudelaire, The Flowers of Evil*, a selection edited by Marthiel and Jackson Mathews, copyright © 1955 by New Directions, with the permission of the translator, Anthony Hecht.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Jauss, Hans Robert.

Aesthetic experience and literary hermeneutics.  
(Theory and history of literature ; v. 3)  
Translation of: *Ästhetische Erfahrung und literarische Hermeneutik*, Bd. 1: Versuche im Feld der ästhetischen Erfahrung.

Bibliography: p. 343.

Includes index.

Contents: Sketch of a theory and history of aesthetic experience — Interaction patterns of identification with the hero—On why the comic hero amuses—[etc]

1. Literature—Aesthetics. I. Title. II. Series.

PN45.J313 801'.93 82-4786

ISBN 0-8166-1003-7 AACR2

ISBN 0-8166-1006-1 (pbk.)

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## Introduction

*Wlad Godzich*

"Literature, its history and its study, have, in recent times, fallen into greater and greater discredit," wrote Hans Robert Jauss some eleven years ago in the preface to the book in which he set forth his program for the revival of literary studies.<sup>1</sup> It should be noted at the outset that, between literature and its study, Jauss inserts history, a point made not only syntactically but with considerable theoretical vigor and erudition in the key chapter of the book, the justly famous "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," originally delivered as the inaugural lecture of his seminar at the University of Constance in 1967.<sup>2</sup> Yet, during the ten years that elapsed between that day and the original publication of *Ästhetische Erfahrung. Literatur und Hermeneutik I.*, whose translation follows these introductory remarks, history did not stand still but rather, as it is wont to do, problematized even further its relationship to literature and its study. Some may have felt discomfited by such a development, but not Jauss who had just argued for a dynamic view of history which would govern the reception of texts. From the perspective of his own theory, he found himself in the highly enviable position of studying the reception of his own pronouncements and of responding to that reception, thereby giving concrete evidence, in his own procedures and writings, of the very processes that he had theoretically elaborated and then described in the works of others. Although too modest, and too mindful of

scholarly decorum, to admit it, Jauss must have reflected upon this dialectic more than once in the writing of *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*. Since the English-language reader may not be familiar with this history, I shall sketch it out briefly and then speculate on what Jauss's reception is likely to be among us. I shall conclude with some comments on the central claims of this book.

It is not easy to characterize Jauss's place on the German critical scene for, in many ways, it is eccentric to the dominant centers of his day. Although he has worked, for the past fifteen years, within the framework of a group of scholars united by similar methodological concerns, his original thinking developed almost idiosyncratically and did not follow any previously traced paths until it burst upon the national scene with his appointment to the new interdisciplinary university at Constance, whereupon it contributed to a major transformation of the German critical landscape.

Literary criticism in Germany, in the immediate post-World War II period, was dominated by approaches derived from American New Criticism. There was ample justification for the adoption of techniques of close reading against the prevailing tradition of positivism which treated texts as either biographical or historical documents or as the sum total of the influences that had determined them. But there was also the advantage to the *Werk-immanente* approach that it permitted the bracketing of all historical questions and thus obviated the need to address painful questions of recent political allegiance. This became the dominant methodological practice among students of German literature, but Jauss remained largely unaffected by it since he is a scholar of Romance literatures, and, in this discipline, the situation was different. As Harald Weinrich, himself a Romanist of note as well as an early theoretician of reader's response, recently noted in a personal memoir, many young Germans were struck by the publication of Ernst Robert Curtius's *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* in 1948 for it provided them with "the unsuspected chance to be all at once reintegrated, together with [their] nation, into the good old family of civilized and cultivated mankind."<sup>3</sup> Although descriptions of Curtius as a Cold War humanist, and of his version of humanism as "a strategic ideology with the aim of covering the restoration of capitalism in the Western world"<sup>4</sup> may strike the English reader as farfetched and extreme, it is nevertheless true that Curtius's influence upon the Germany of Adenauer —of whose brain-trust he

was a member —coincided with the avoidance of any sociological reflection and the construct of history as handed down tradition. But again Jauss was eccentric to the movement. Having studied under Hans-Georg Gadamer, who was then reexamining the structure and function of hermeneutics, he saw the inescapability of a problematic relationship between the past and the present, and therefore the necessity of confronting the question of history; further, he understood that confrontation as taking place within a framework of communication, and therefore requiring consideration of both the individual and social dimensions of that encounter. He began to address the first, the historical, in his writings on medieval French literature and in a brilliant book with, so far, a very restricted readership, on the relationship of time and remembrance to the structure of the novel in Proust's *A la Recherche du Temps perdu*.<sup>5</sup> The occasion for the second, the examination of the psychosocial dimensions of communication, was provided by the rapid transformation of German society in the early sixties, and especially the rise of mass media and the ensuing crisis of education. Since this is a hotly debated topic in Germany upon which agreement is not likely to be reached in the near future, no more than a brief sketch of Jauss's stand on this matter can be offered here.

The traditional methods and aims of humanistic education, whether drawn along the lines of Curtius's ideal of Romania or the stylistic formalism of the *Werk-immanente* approach, proved vulnerable and incapable of resistance to the new media. Conceived for the leisurely and considered study and transmission of masterpieces, they offered no guidance for dealing with the sophisticated, and frequently aesthetically subtle, messages of the media, which, by their sheer mass and accelerated reception-time, overwhelmed high literature. Jauss took this as a sign of the failure of literary education to perform a "critical social function." It should be the function, he argued, of a literary education to endow the individual with sufficient discrimination and moral power of judgment to protect himself/herself against the influence of the "hidden persuaders." It is clear that Jauss conceived of the development of such a critical social function within the framework of existing society. He was, and continues to be, prepared to argue that literature, especially past literature, has a formative social function. Politically, his attitude could be characterized as liberal-reformist.

What such a project required was the reformulation of the way in which we conceive of our relationship to literature, past and present. Curtius's model, already disqualified by its failure to resist the

trivialization of culture, is far too reverential and makes no provision for us except as celebrants of a richness past. The formalism of close reading is found wanting on two scores: (1) it aims at an asceticism of the reader who must, in her or his encounter with the text, bracket all personal interests and predilections so that the text may deploy its intentional structure unhindered; (2) by stressing the autonomy of each text, this methodological approach is incapable of reintegrating the text into a history. At this juncture, Jauss did something quite bold for a West German student of literature of his day: he decided to look at the model of history provided by Marxism. While he rejected it because of its dependence upon economic determinism, he opened up a debate among literary scholars on the value of the Marxist view of history, taking at times what were seen as highly ambiguous positions, such as his claim that Marxist literary critics had not replaced the Romantic model of literary history with a conceptualization adequate to Marx's view of history. Similarly, he noted that Lukacs's focus on the way in which literature reflects reality (but is not a constituent factor in the shaping of reality) resulted in studies of literary creation but not in any awareness of the effect of literature upon the reader. Jauss then turned to the newly translated work of the Russian Formalists, and especially the notion of literary evolution advanced by Jakobson and Tynjanov.<sup>6</sup> Although he approved of their description, derived from phenomenology but couched in a more linguistic terminology, of the processes whereby individual works set themselves off from their predecessors, absorbed and automatized some of their features, or sought to react against them by the conscious alteration of some devices, he rejected their overall view for it claimed that works of literature evolve in their own autonomous series without reference to extraliterary history.

Coming back to his point of departure, Jauss reexamined the specific communicational situation that we call reading. If the reader is considered a part of the reading operation, the function of a reading cannot be the establishment of some objective, forever valid, meaning of the text. Rather, any conception of reading must start with the recognition that the reader is already fully awash in the tradition that has given rise to the object of his/her reading, and, indeed, that the text is itself an articulation in its mode of reception. No reader of Keats, e.g., approaches a poem of his without some sense of what it is to read a high Romantic poem. But once we begin to think in this manner, a whole host of questions descends upon us: What happens when we read? Do we bring ourselves to the work or do we get something from it? What sort of prejudgments do we bring to our readings?

Do we expect, e.g., certain things in certain genres? Are we intimidated by certain works, certain authors, certain reputations? What is the nature of such intimidations? What is the image of the author that we bring to a reading? Do we, as the reading audience, exercise some influence upon the author as s/he writes for us? Do we have immediate access to literature or not, and if not what mediations can we repertory? To what extent can we be manipulated so that we respond in an expected manner? How can it be determined that we will respond aesthetically to something that may not have been intended that way? All these questions, and more, especially those having to do with value, emerge in the forefront of attention as soon as a reader- or a recipient-centered approach to literature is attempted.

Jauss drew upon the teachings of Gadamer in order to establish the foundational categories of his *Rezeptionsästhetik*.<sup>1</sup> Gadamer is concerned with the nature of understanding, ostensibly philosophical, although he begins by conflating the distinction between philosophical and everyday understanding. For him, understanding is an event in which we are implicated but which we do not dominate; it is something that happens to us. We never come to cognitive situations empty but carry with us a whole world of familiar beliefs and expectations. The hermeneutic phenomenon encompasses both the alien world we suddenly encounter and the familiar one we carry. Whereas most philosophical conceptions of the hermeneutic phenomenon require that we overcome our own boundedness (historical, psychological, social, etc.), Gadamer argues that this is impossible and that what matters is to use the hermeneutic phenomenon to recognize what we brought into it, so that we gain knowledge of ourselves by discovering our own unsuspected preformed judgments (*Vorverständnis*), as well as gain knowledge of the alien by extending our horizons until they meet with its own so that a fusion of horizons takes place.

Gadamer's best known model for this encounter is that of question and answer. The relationship of interpreter to text must be conceived as a dialogue in which both participate on an equal footing. Such a dialogue presupposes that its participants share a common concern and are not merely intent upon each other. As a result, the interpreter must not concentrate on the text but rather must adopt an orientation toward the problem that concerns the text, and address the problem along *with* the text. In this way, the interpreter does not identify with the author—a delusion in any case—but explores the text's concern and finds himself/herself interrogated further in the direction that the text's initial question traces. A horizon of interrogation emerges but not in the guise of a new objectivity; rather it is a way of

rendering the text actual to me existentially for I am now concerned with its questions and have brought my concerns to bear upon it

Jauss takes over the notion of horizon which he names "horizon of expectation" and means by it the sum total of reactions, prejudgments verbal and other behavior that greet a work upon its appearance. A work may fulfill such a horizon by confirming the expectations vested in it or it may disappoint the expectations by creating a distance between itself and them. This Jauss labels "aesthetic distance." Aesthetic distance becomes an important factor in the constitution of literary history for it may result in one of two major processes: either the public alters its horizon so that the work is now accepted — and a stage in the aesthetics of reception is set — or it rejects a work which may then lie dormant until it is accepted, i.e., until a horizon for it is forged (such was the case of medieval literature which had to await Romanticism to find a horizon in which it could be received again). In some instances, particularly in Modernism, the public splits into groups of willing recipients and adamant refuseniks. From the perspective of a social critical function for literature, Jauss sees in this ability of literary texts to alter horizons of expectation a strong liberating force which works both upon the recipient for it frees him/her of the views s/he held without necessarily being aware of them, and upon literature, and especially classical literature, for it permits us to recover its initial impact which had been eroded by centuries of veneration and monumentalization.

Such a conception of the interaction of reader and text restores the historical dimension, claims Jauss, for the public of recipients, past and present, is fully involved as the mediator of the texts. The pitfall that the Russian Formalists could not avoid, namely the separation of literature and life, is thus overcome, for it is in their daily lives that readers build up their horizons of expectations and it is in the same lives that any work-induced changes will have to take place. The public also serves as the mediator between an older work and a more recent one, and thus provides the basis for understanding the formation of the literary sequences which historiography will record. A history of literature undertaken according to these principles would appear to be eminently empirical and value-free, for it would not obey some foreordained logic but merely record what it notes without succumbing to the totalizing views of positivism because it need recognize its own historical inscription. So that, for all practical purposes, each generation of readers must rewrite history. This is not a defect of the theory but its most liberating feature, for it ensures that no fixed view ever prevails and that each generation must read the

texts anew and interrogate them from its own perspective and find itself concerned, in its own fashion, by the work's questions.

Because they stress the need to overcome the excessive mediatization of cultural life, it is ironic that Jauss's pronouncements should have emerged against a horizon that ensured their misinterpretation. The very misgivings that had led Jauss to formulate a research program for the renewal of the pedagogy of literary studies had by then become a major and social political force in the unrest of German universities and indeed the society at large. This is a history that remains to be written and its complexities are certainly beyond the scope of a sketch such as this one, but, for our purposes, it suffices to note that, with its emphasis upon a reauthentication of the experience of reception in literature; the legitimation of an active role for the reader, hitherto conceived of as passive recipient; the critique of the media; the call for the reorganization of humanistic studies; and the advocacy of a social-critical role for literary education; Jauss's ideas presented superficial analogies with the calls for educational and social transformation emanating from far more radical quarters. Or rather, Jauss was perceived by conservatives within the university and without, as not only legitimizing the oppositional forces of the S.D.S. and the A.P.O. (Ausserparlamentarische Opposition: extraparliamentary opposition), but as serving as their Trojan horse, for, unlike, the famous Frankfurt Institute for Social Research whose critique of the existing order was well known, Jauss appeared to be in the mold of the traditional German scholar. For the Right, then, this senior professor (an *ordinarius*, a member of the ultimate hierarchy in the German university system) was a traitor in its midst. But the excoriation from the Right differed in no manner of degree from the denunciations of the Left, which recognized readily that Jauss's project was reformist and not revolutionary in orientation and which tended to see in his enterprise an attempt at co-optation by the dominant group. How virulent these passions can become was shown when students occupied Adorno's seminar in Frankfurt and eventually had to be removed by the police.<sup>8</sup> Jauss's position thus became quite difficult. The Right, as is its wont, used its power against him, or more precisely against his junior associates so that on several occasions he had to threaten resignation—a threat made the more credible by his acceptance of visiting professorships in the United States. The attacks from the Left he dealt with in his own writings so that, rather paradoxically and misleadingly, Jauss's publications after 1970 give the impression of one intent upon combating the Left only, and therefore of an ally of the Right, whereas Jauss's response was more nuanced and addressed criticism from both

sides with the weapons each would recognize: ideas against the Left—such power as he had against the Right.

*Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics* is therefore a polemical work, an aspect which is at times quite apparent, at others less so. It polemicalizes most of all against what Jauss perceives as the dominant left view of art: Adorno's aesthetics of negativity and the *Ideologiekritik* movement which accompanied it. Adorno is explicitly mentioned in the text a number of times and a full-fledged critique of his views is presented, but even when there is no direct reference to him, he is very much present. For example, Jauss reserves some of his severest criticism of contemporary writers for Samuel Beckett, who happens to be the author to whom Adorno intended to dedicate his *Asthetische Theorie* had he been able to complete it prior to his death. Similarly, one may well wonder at Jauss's selection of the theme *Douceur du foyer* for his discussion of the lyric in the mid-nineteenth century, for the strongly affirmative value he places on this theme is in direct contradiction to Adorno's construct of the role played by a variant of the same theme, namely that of *interieur* (also expressed in French) in the writings of S. Kierkegaard.<sup>9</sup> Were the purpose of these remarks not introductory but investigatory, it would be tempting to substitute for their *rezeptionsästhetische* orientation one drawn from Harold Bloom's agonistics of influence.

The difference between Jauss's views and Adorno's is substantial, even though both share a concern for the current state of culture. Adorno's thinking, always dialectical in the extreme, is equally concerned with the manipulation of art, but it immediately extends into a critique of the ideological means that are invoked to justify that manipulation. For him, aesthetic theory, as indeed any philosophical activity, must be not only theoretical but critical, for only a critical theory can have an impact in the social sphere. With respect to art, the task—but we shall see that it is a Utopian one—is to restore its rightful existence, which can happen, if at all, in a liberated society. Since Adorno did not address the question of the concrete means of such a liberation, all that is left is the critical moment, which of necessity is impregnated with the pessimism caused by the present.

Art then, for Adorno, is, at the inscription of social conflicts, un-free and subject to ideological control, so that, for all practical purposes, art takes on the aspect of an element of the superstructure. On the basis of his previous studies of advanced capitalism, Adorno wants to bring out how, in its very form, art is compelled to embody

social conflicts. A denunciation of the present treatment of art must therefore be formulated from a perspective which does not exist, which, as Utopian thought, would lay the ground for a conception of art in a world in which conflicts would be sublated. But the situation of art today is, in Adorno's own term, "aporetic." For if, in the past, art had been in the service of rituals or other religious beliefs and practices, its achievement of autonomy in the age of the Enlightenment was but the prelude to a new enslavement. Our society, which Adorno sees ruled by instrumental reason, whose insitutional hallmark is the bureaucracy, is totally, and structurally, unwilling to let art have its autonomy, or, more precisely, it uses its autonomy to give it the motility of a commodity, which becomes subject to the operations of a market, and thus functions as the vehicle of dominant ideology. The market itself is the object of controls, among which is the scholarly study of art which serves to establish hierarchies of (marketable) values and thus provides the ground for market strategies.

Turning art into a commodity leads to a valorization of concepts that insists on its form as closed, on its aspect as finished or polished product. Such closure is achievable, under present socioeconomic circumstances, only by doing violence to the form of the art object which otherwise necessarily reproduces the conflicts and contradictions of the society. True art resists commodification by refusing this closure. It insists on its unfinished character, and on its overall uselessness, its incapacity to serve any end, for, in the radical affirmation of its uselessness, it calls into question the claims to harmonious totalization that our society advances ideologically. In practice, this signifies that the study of art, and *a fortiori* of literature, should not take the form of a traditional aesthetics but rather that of an analytics which, in the immediate study of individual art objects, would elicit the mode of their apprehension of history, i.e., the way in which they reproduce the social agonistics of their moment. This requires a strong denunciation of all approaches to art that wish to re-establish an ideal and separate position for it. What matters most, in Adorno's view, is that each individual analysis bring out the fundamentally critical moment in the artefact, whereby it stands in opposition to, and negates, the order and ideology of its society. For only in this manner can we recover the truth of art, which is that art is the inscription of history and therefore contains the promise of a future liberation.

What is at play in Adorno's aesthetic theory or indeed in his thought at large is negativity, a concept which he endowed with special richness,

first in the formulation of the cognitive principle of nonidentity which then served as the basis of his philosophy of "negative dialectics" against which Jauss's entire critique is directed. In Hegelian dialectics, negativity is the movement of the concept toward its 'other', and a necessary stage in the passage to *Aufhebung*, the overcoming or sublation of the initial concept. But for Adorno, the Hegelian synthesis was, in its ideality, impossible. Reason is incapable of capturing reality, not so much because of its own finitude but because reality, always social in nature, is, in its very objective conditions, far too contradictory to be encompassed by reason without imparting contradictions to it. Thus, for Adorno, a concept and reality exist differentially with respect to each other. Rather than having the concept mirror the reality, as is the case in all idealistic epistemologies, Adorno has the concept refer to the reality by virtue of its nonidentity to it; the process may be envisaged, with the same results, with reality as the starting point. The cognitive force of art is, then, but an instantiation of the operation of a general principle of nonidentity, that is, negativity.

Jauss's critique of Adorno's views is cogently and forcefully expressed in section A2 of the book, and it needs no anticipatory summation here. Yet it appeals to a notion, which is then elevated to a major analytic concept in the study, whose logical emergence in this context may not be apparent to an English-language reader, namely *identification*. It happens that German disposes of two words to designate what we refer to by the simple term 'experience', and it becomes possible to signal an important conceptual difference by preferring one term over the other. In the context of aesthetics, and specifically within the framework of *Lebensphilosophie*, the term *Erlebnis* has been preferred. Generally translated as 'lived experience', it postulates the primacy of experience over reflection, and figures prominently in existentialism in the foundational axiom of the precedence of existence over essence. Earlier, in Dilthey's hermeneutics, *Erlebnis* was the object of the subject's quest for understanding. Adorno, by contrast, has recourse to the word *Erfahrung* by which he means to signal that reflection itself is lived experience and that it concerns the entire individual, not merely his/her capacity as knowing subject. The distinction here could be most easily apprehended through a reference to Kant. Adorno's rejection of the *Aufhebung* of Hegelian dialectics rested to a great extent on his extreme valorization of the individual whose singularity he wished to protect against Hegel's conflation in the collective subjectivity that is Absolute Spirit. To do this, he returned to Kant's phenomenology and its notion of autonomous subject. But Adorno critiqued Kant's

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conception of the relation of subject to object, for it seemed to him to lead to the kind of postulate of identity that his own principle of non-identity was meant to displace. In effect, he argued, Kant's notion of the individual was too formal and abstract, and therefore easily subsumable in reified thought, which is apparent in the master category of the transcendental subject, from the perspective of which every individual subject is, like a commodity, exchangeable for another, and thus not an individual, in the sense of specific, at all. If reflection is conceived of as *Erfahrung*, it will not stand in an abstract relation to lived experience and not become the locus of reification. At the same time, this implies that cognition is not merely an intellectual matter but one that involves the entire person, including the body. So that, in conclusion, it is the whole human person, as an empirically existing individual, that is engaged in *Erfahrung*, whereas *Erlebnis* is but the fodder of reflection. Jauss retains the term *Erfahrung* to designate aesthetic experience and thus gains for his discussion the reference to the somatic aspects of *aesthesis*, which permits the masterful discussion of pleasure. But, against Adorno, Jauss returns to another aspect of Kant's conception of the individual and his/her cognitive powers. For Kant, the fact that the individual could not experience the object as it was in itself required the postulation of another dimension among individuals: intersubjectivity. This was retained by both Hegel and Marx in their respective concepts of the master-slave dialectic and the class struggle. But Adorno's insistence on the radical and never subsumable individuality of each subject prevented any solution to what appears to be a monadic existence for the individual. Against this notion, Jauss restores the intersubjective dimension of Kant's concept of the subject and grounds it in a communicational framework within which it becomes possible for individuals to share experience. The effect is that of recapturing the hermeneutic dimension of Dilthey's *Erlebnis* without surrendering, at least ostensibly, the coprimacy of reflection implied by *Erfahrung*. The intersubjective dimension of *Erlebnis* is to be found in mechanisms of *identification* which thus come to replace Dilthey's *Einführung*, or empathy. In sum, Jauss replaces the Negation/Affirmation polarity of Adorno by stressing that the negativity of the work of art is mediated by identification, which thus emerges as the key counterconcept of the aesthetics of reception.

Some of the controversies that I have attempted to summarize here by somewhat forcedly, yet nonetheless exemplarily, pitting Jauss

against Adorno may strike us as lacking counterparts on our critical scene. It would appear at first sight that Jauss's reception among us, already mediated by the publication of some of his essays in translation by Ralph Cohen in *New Literary History* and Michael Riffaterre in *Romantic Review*, will take place in the general space that we have recently taken to call "theory," and, within it, the subdivision known as "reader's response theory" presently cultivated in varying degree and orientation by the likes of Norman Holland, Stanley Fish, and David Bleich, and already prepared for Jauss's arrival by the earlier welcome accorded to his Constance colleague and fellow *Rezeptionsästhetiker* Wolfgang Iser. There is little doubt that students of this area will constitute a sizable portion of Jauss's readership, and, given the nature of his contribution and the importance of their concerns, the publication of the present translation would be amply justified. But it would be a pity, in my view, if Jauss were to be read only by such groups, for he is a thinker whose scope of vision extends beyond the boundaries of a specific research question. Rather, he is good for those treks which step off the trodden paths and set out into the wilderness, the present roaming ground of criticism as Geoffrey Hartman reminds us.<sup>10</sup> Since reader's response theoreticians and practitioners will approach Jauss from their special vantage point and with their interests, they need no guidance, whereas Jauss's qualifications for a walk through the desert require a few comments.

Jauss's critical endeavors arose, I suggested, out of the sense of crisis that had befallen German higher education in the sixties, and especially the humanities and social sciences. That we are presently in a state of crisis ourselves in the same areas is too much of a commonplace to bear reiterating, although it is far from clear that we have a sense of the transformation that we are undergoing. In many ways our crisis is unlike the German one: theirs was one of growth, ours one of retrenchment; theirs had to do with the rapid development of the mass media, ours does not; theirs took place in a heavily politicized milieu, whereas our campuses are perceived as more apolitical than ever. Such comparisons are not particularly enlightening. What is perhaps more important is to trace the shifts that are occurring in the organization of knowledge. If we take the discipline English as an example, the dimensions of the crisis become clearer and Jauss's concerns more pertinent.

We have been told, within the universities and without, that there is a "literacy" crisis abroad in the land, that students can neither read nor write, that they no longer comprehend what they read, and that employers view our graduates with distaste, or at least, apprehension.

Since we live in a society that demands rapid solutions to newly discovered problems, we have invested a tremendous amount of resources, financial and human, over the past ten years, in writing programs, whether they be called that or rhetoric, composition, or communication. This is not the place to undertake an evaluation or a critique of such efforts, nor even to wonder at the wisdom, let alone the efficacy, of implementing on a massive scale the results of one of the least researched areas in our field. Suffice it to consider the effect upon departments of English: in nearly all instances, faculty have been reassigned to the teaching of writing; more important, the bulk if not the totality of new appointments is made in this area at the expense of more established parts of the curriculum. Since the teaching of writing has traditionally been held in low esteem and generally been delegated to junior faculty and teaching assistants, the present shift in resource allocation has begun to produce resentment among senior faculty who see their traditional departmental strengths and disciplinary profile erode. As a result, at a large number of universities an adversary relationship has begun to develop between the central administrators who, feeling that they are responding to societal pressure, want more writing programs, and senior faculty in English who fear that whenever one of their ranks retires or leaves for another position, a traditional appointment in, let us say the eighteenth-century novel, will give way to an assistant professorship in composition. The senior faculty becomes more possessive of those positions which it values and is generally prepared to argue for them on the basis of their importance as specialty fields. Slowly English departments take on a rather new configuration: a service component teaching writing and employing large numbers of graduate assistants, and a specialist component offering pregraduate and graduate training for those who intend to enter the profession, however bleak the prospects of employment might appear. In this respect, English departments are rapidly becoming like foreign language departments which have traditionally kept their language-teaching function quite separate from their graduate training and research. But English as a discipline was never meant to be like French or German in English-speaking universities: whereas those departments rely upon exotica or special interests for their appeal, English has been the department of choice for all those who have wanted to study, and reflect upon, their own culture. The aspiring writer, the future critic, the student generally desirous of acquiring a well-rounded education which would prepare him or her for a broad array of professional endeavors, all came to English, for if it were not quite F. R. Leavis's "discipline of thought"<sup>11</sup> it came closer to that

ideal than any other segment of the curriculum. But today, the student is faced instead with an English department that is in the business of basic or remedial literacy at one end and intent upon reproducing itself-training future practitioners of its specialty-at the other. To literate students, the choice appears to be purely professional and not surprisingly, they opt for those preprofessional programs which hold a greater promise of gainful employment. Should the current realignment of English departments along the structural model of foreign language departments continue, the broad sphere of cultural concerns will progressively diminish and disappear, first from the university and then from public life as well. This is at once the real nature of our crisis and the dimension of our wilderness. The risk is that we will be left with the increasingly strident cries of traditionalists nostalgic for a unity that never was and confident of the universality of their own pursuits, and an array of fragmentary discourses locked away in their specialized concerns and technical terminologies.

The work of Jausss may help us to recover this lost space of cultural criticism, but it is not an enterprise free of dangers. Since my exposition has proceeded through exemplary *figurae* (Jausss, Adorno, English), let me invoke a last one: Lionel Trilling. It is at once obvious that Trilling occupied eminently the space whose parceling we are presently observing. It would indeed be tempting to date the beginning of this process from his death, but I fear that would make better narrative than judgment, for some of the roots of our predicament are already in Trilling.

It is striking to note that Jausss's masterful discussion of aesthetic pleasure contained in this book has no recent antecedent in English unless we return to a text Trilling published in 1963 in *Partisan Review*, "The Fate of Pleasure."<sup>12</sup> This essay, whose translation into European languages would dispel the widely held view on the Continent that there is no aesthetic thought in English, examines a paradigmatic shift in the nature of pleasure and its consequences for our conception of art that occurred between the Enlightenment and Romanticism. Trilling begins with the puzzling statement in Wordsworth's Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* that "the grand elementary principle of pleasure" constitutes "the naked and native dignity of man." From its inception, then, Trilling's reflection upon pleasure is framed by the question of human nature: the dignity of man and the role played by pleasure in its achievement. Wordsworth's notion of pleasure is austere to be sure, but it is not unrelated to certain historical considerations, especially the eudaemonic thrust of Enlightenment political theory, best exemplified in the French Revolution's promise of universal happiness.

Trilling shows very carefully that the notion of dignity derived from a certain level of material well-being, characterized by the possession of luxurious goods. By contrast to Wordsworth, who is made to play, rather aptly, the role of a *moraliste des Lumieres*, Keats is ambivalent about pleasure, or more precisely, discovers the specific dialectic of pleasure. Not content with the confinement of pleasure to the higher intellectual pursuits, though constantly mindful, in Wordsworth's sillon, of its cognitive power, Keats proceeded to affirm the principle of pleasure most boldly, discovering in this manner that it required the greatest scrutiny. As Trilling reminds us, in "the country of La Belle Dame sans Merci, the scene of erotic pleasure . . . leads to devastation" (p. 58). Keats does something that Wordsworth did not consider: he separates the experience of pleasure, which continues to be described in the most approving terms, from its effects, which are incalculable and therefore most unreliable. In "Sleep and Poetry," Keats draws upon this distinction in order to show that poetry, through the pleasure that it procures, can "soothe the cares, and lift the thoughts of man," thereby articulating what Trilling calls the "essence of Philistinism" (p. 60). Trilling takes Keat's distinction and sees it at the root of the dichotomy of politics and art today, where the first seeks to satisfy the principle of pleasure by increasing material influence, whereas the latter looks at such a goal with considerable disdain.

Since it is already apparent in Keats that aesthetic pleasure, just as much as erotic pleasure, may serve illusion as easily as cognition, that, in other words, pleasure is cognitively unreliable, modern art is forced to seek a firmer cognitive ground by abandoning the pleasure principle and cultivating what Trilling calls "the negative transcendence of the human, a condition which is to be achieved by freeing the self from its thralldom to pleasure" (p. 71). Trilling's best examples come from Dostoevski's *Notes from Underground* and its theme of the search for a greater intensity of life, and from Augustine's wonderment in the *Confessions* at his own perversity in stealing pears that he neither needed nor desired. The juxtaposition of the two examples results in a curious conflation of the historical dimension in the essay. Until the invocation of Augustine's sin, the phenomenon described had firm historical boundaries, corresponding to the emergence and hegemony of the bourgeoisie, which is in the business of purveying reified experience, "specious good" (p. 66). But a historical inquiry of this sort leads, in Trilling's mind, to an impasse: if his analysis is correct, the modern tilt toward a negativity of pleasure must be seen in its historical relativity, and modernity abandoned. But for what? Will it have to be "an idiot literature, [with] 'positive heroes' who know

how to get the good out of life and who have "affirmative" emotions about their success in doing so?" (p. 69). Trilling has already precluded social change ("the impulse to destroy specious good would be as readily directed against the most benign socialist society, which, by modern definition, serves the principle of pleasure," (p. 67) and is left therefore with a strategy that will greatly alter the status of history in his inquiry. By showing that the negativity characteristic of modernity already obtains in Augustine, and is therefore prebourgeois, he can argue that it is a permanent feature of the human psyche, a solution already foreseeable in the decision to frame the analysis within the question of human nature. Not unexpectedly, Freud is invoked to give the stamp of scientific approval to the notion that negativity is part and parcel of humanity. The only historical question left is that of the changing equilibria between the pleasure principle and its beyond. This final gesture of Trilling's neatly removes the historical phenomenon of negativity from its contingency and relativizes history itself. Appropriately enough, the essay is collected in a volume entitled *Beyond Culture*, a space which is meant to be that of unchanging human nature and therefore "not within the purview of ordinary democratic progressivism" (p. 74).

Once historical considerations are removed, the realm of cultural criticism is set adrift for it no longer has a function. Either the critic can argue from the perspective of an atemporal human nature and denounce the present or the past dogmatically, that is, uncritically with respect to his/her own position, or s/he can cultivate specialized subfields which, by virtue of their technicity, appear to be beyond the judgment of value. It would be easy to speculate upon the historical coincidence of such a choice with the political upheavals of the sixties and early seventies, but it is more to the point here to observe that for all the similarities of concern, Jauss's problematic is diametrically opposed to Trilling's: it seeks to restore the historical consciousness of criticism after a period of painful repression, and even the presumed universality of aesthetic response is shown to fluctuate historically. The very vigor of Jauss's historical inquiry ought to help us to return from Trilling's 'beyond', to a realm of culture. It is for this long march through the wilderness that Jauss can be our guide.

### III

The reopening of the cultural realm for criticism will not represent an advance, though, as long as the possibility of Trilling's solution remains. We must recognize that his notion of culture rested upon an