

# Mediations

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## Form as Formalization In/Against *Theory of the Novel*

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In this essay, I will mobilize a reading of György Lukács's still-crucial *Theory of the Novel* to argue for a new way of thinking literary form.<sup>1</sup> I'll argue for literary form as, first, a process, rather than a thing or set of things; and, second, as a process or set of processes that attends specifically to the *formalization of history*, where the latter is understood as in some fundamental sense already formal, already structured, never quite the "content" to literature's "form." In the third and fourth sections of this essay especially, I will propose an account of the relation between literary form and history that finds in moments of apparent formal withdrawal or stasis moments where literature actively intervenes in history, formalizing the already-formal structures of the latter. Such claims are to be distinguished from the argument influentially advanced by Fredric Jameson, for whom history is to be understood as "the content [literature] has to take up into itself in order to submit it to the transformations of form."<sup>2</sup> The latter formulation paints, I claim, an overly neat picture of what is a messy and inchoate process, one that is nonetheless amenable to analysis when the organicist and textualist errors of prior formalisms are challenged.

I will resist any violent imposition of an a priori theoretical framework onto Lukács's text, a text that is vital in part because of its curious ability to fend off just such appropriative attempts. Or, I will at least signal where my critical project explicitly veers away from Lukács's, frequently at points where my appropriative hold on the text becomes especially tight. Part 1 teases out the status of form in *Theory of the Novel*, while part 2 attends more specifically to Lukács's privileging of narrative. Part 3 contrasts Gustave Flaubert and Charles Baudelaire as case studies, one narrative and the other prosodic, for thinking the literary formalization of history. While my analysis in part 3 will largely, if not entirely, depart from Lukács's priorities, the concluding section will make explicit where my own theories of literary form and formalization touch a subterranean current in *Theory of the Novel*, one that takes history itself to already be formally structured in uncanny and conducive ways.

One should not lose sight, in any case, of the transcendent *weirdness*, the motivating

singularity of this book. I hope that my putting it to use here will be as respectful of that galvanizing eccentricity as it will nonetheless open us onto more general questions that have relevance to recent discussions of urgent interest in the theoretical humanities. Such conversations have especially coalesced, of late, around categories — form, history, worldliness — that haunt us despite, or perhaps because of, their also being so portentously ancient and intractable, so apparently out of time, so seemingly unexorcisable. I don't wish to blast this text out of history, but neither do I think smothering its curious argumentative turns in a normalizing narrative of development does much to reveal its secrets. (Which is just one way to say that, despite its obvious centering on the narrative form, *Theory of the Novel* may well bear within it non- if not anti-narrative theoretical resources, more of which anon). Equally, a minimal commitment to the materialist dialectic must, I think, refuse any ahistorical or philosophical hypostatization of formal categories. Rather, one must insistently inquire after those forms, which is to say those processes, conspicuously left outside of attentive critical-historical analysis, so long as, nonetheless, one also attends to how such forms-in-motion also operate upon, which is to say formalize, the historical conditions within and against which they emerge. Perhaps the most contestable claim I will make, because the most liable to tip into essentialism, is that it is poetry rather than prose that is best able to demonstrate the power of literature to formalize, rather than merely passively present, its historical outsides, and this despite the numerous limit-cases that make any strict or final separation of poetry from narrative impossible.

This is never a conveniently symmetrical process, needless to say; there is never an easy circle here for us merely to trace or square. Rather, history and form are, in their varied attempts at the formalization of each other, rather more elusive of each other's clasp as they may otherwise tend toward any mutual embrace. But it may be this very elusiveness, the stasis produced by apparent moments of literary solipsism or withdrawal, that paradoxically results in any non-mimetic transfer of meaning between the distinctive logics of literature and historical time. What I hope will result is a vision of both form and history that leaves such categories humbly quasi- if not non-transcendental, avoidant of both metaphysical bloat and historicist "contextualization" or what I will come to call narrativization. Such an account of literature in its agonistic interaction with history will be most fully fleshed out in readings of Flaubert and Baudelaire, but Lukács will provide surprising resources both for and against such a theory.

The contemporary debates I mention above have, at least since the turn of the new millennium, often settled under the banner of the "new formalism." If this apparently new "turn" is in fact the latest iteration of an ongoing haunting, the latest uncanny reappearance of age-old conundrums and symptomatic impasses, one would do well to ask what is specific, and what is pointedly excluded, in this latest iteration. I take Caroline Levine's recent book *Forms* to be the most sophisticated intervention yet in

this debate, and so her text may stand in here for what is an increasingly sprawling conversation.<sup>3</sup> A brief discussion of the book will show how different my own take on the form–history debate is. At the very opening, Levine presents what a standard formalist analysis of *Jane Eyre* might look like. Such a reading would, we’re told, attend to “literary techniques both large and small, including the marriage plot, first-person narration, description, free indirect speech, suspense, metaphor, and syntax.”<sup>4</sup> History, then, would be pregnant by its very absence in such an analysis. By contrast, Levine’s new formalism would rather trace the often-agonistic parity between those forms seemingly enclosed within the bounds of the literary text, and the forms and structures into which social life sediments. Levine draws our attention to the following passage in *Jane Eyre*: upon the ringing of a school bell, schoolgirls “all formed in file, two and two, and in that order descended the stairs.” Responding to a verbal command, the children arrange themselves into “four semicircles, before four chairs, placed at the four tables; all held books in their hands.”<sup>5</sup> Critics, Levine writes, are used to “reading Lowood’s disciplinary order as part of the novel’s content and context... But what are Lowood’s shapes and arrangements — its semicircles, timed durations, and ladders of achievement — if not themselves kinds of *form*?”<sup>6</sup>

Levine meets the first obvious objection rather well. “One might object,” she writes, “that it is a category mistake to use the aesthetic term *form* to describe the daily routines of a nineteenth century school.”<sup>7</sup> And yet as she rightly points out, “form” as a term has hardly been restricted to aesthetics. Rather, in its very generality, “form” has traveled through innumerable domains other than aesthetics, and it may nominate a particular object or describe a general property of a class of things. But does this malleable usage justify treating with the same analytical brush Brontë’s use of metaphor, say, and her description of the spatial outlines of a social institution? Levine argues her case forcefully, noting that: “it is the work of form to make order. And this means that forms are the stuff of politics.”<sup>8</sup> Thus, Levine’s new formalism, far from shutting out questions of social and political import, should rather widen their pertinence, to include the rhyming couplet as much as the disciplinary enclosure of space or the distribution of self-regulating bodies. As a consequence

[t]he traditionally troubling gap between the form of the literary text and its content and context dissolves. Formalist analysis turns out to be as valuable to understanding sociopolitical institutions as it is to reading literature. Forms are at work everywhere.<sup>9</sup>

But hasn’t a crucial question been elided here? Even as Levine celebrates the “dissolving” of the barrier between text and context, she presumably wouldn’t wish to claim that there is, as a result, absolutely no distinction to be made between the words that make up Brontë’s narrative and the arrangements of space that are her referent. Presuming this much, we are still to learn how it is that these different

things are to be explained according to the same, now highly capacious definition of “form.” Even more importantly, how do these different forms come to relate to one another at all? Even as it may be tempting to pose this problem as a question of reference, or as, say, a problem of the epistemology of reading, I’d prefer to leave those terms aside and turn instead to Lukács, who may well help us re-thematize the dilemma as that of the historicization of form and the formalization of history, this latter chiasmus an expansive way of describing what I mean by “formalization” per se. If Levine threatens to leave hanging the question of how different forms gain a hold on one another while nonetheless retaining something of their autonomy and distinctiveness, Lukács, I will claim, risks dissolving what is specific about the literature-history relation in the acid bath of narrative recuperation and resolution, and this despite the continued usefulness of his analysis for contemporary debates.

### **Form’s Fate in *Theory of the Novel***

On Fredric Jameson’s estimation, and fairly uncontroversially, *Theory of the Novel’s* dialectical axis pivots around two key terms, that of (formal) essence and that of life, or, as Jameson summarizes, “of meaningfulness on the one hand, and the events and raw materials of daily existence on the other.”<sup>10</sup> The binary gives out onto the broad sweep of Lukács’s argument, one that is familiar enough: while, in Ancient Greece, formal essence was immanent to life, such that literature, and most pertinently epic, neatly encompassed the meaning already abundant in the lifeworld, by the ascension of Platonic philosophy to prominence, life and meaning had become irreconcilable. The novel, of course, is only the most recent form to try, and productively to fail, to suture this tragic faultline that makes of modernity its own, immanent negation, its own repudiation of the dreams of progress that stick resolutely to its ideological self-image. As Jameson rightly emphasizes, it is narrative more than anything else that for Lukács most successfully mediates between the now opposed claims of distinct formal-literary imperatives and the deadened, alienated spaces of the socius, even as “success” must, by the time of the novel’s arrival, very much be taken in a relative sense.

This, at any rate, is one version of Lukács, and it stands as a perfectly reasonable summation of the broad thrust of *Theory of the Novel*. But I’d like to argue, at least in part, for a different Lukács, one that is less attached to the now surely anachronistic terms of phenomenology, Hegelian or otherwise. My aim is not to produce a Lukács of the negative dialectic, but rather to try and imagine a new dialectic of formalization that is inassimilable either to the standard story told of *Theory of the Novel*, as above, or to that teeming and easily translatable agon of literary and social forms that one may associate with the “new formalism.” We get a first clue as to what that alternative may look like with the following, taken from the chapter “The Epic and the Novel” in *Theory of the Novel*:

All the fissures and rents which are inherent in the historical situation must be drawn into the form-giving process and cannot nor should be disguised by compositional means... The epic world is either a purely childlike one in which the transgression of stable, traditional norms has to entail vengeance which again must be avenged *ad infinitum*, or else it is the perfect theodicy in which crime and punishment lie in the scales of world justice as equal, mutually homogenous weights.<sup>11</sup>

There are, for Lukács, few such “fissures and rents” in the “historical situation” proper to ancient epic, whereas the historical situation of the novel is, in a sense, made up of nothing but such fractures. History, on this account, is not to be covered over, made artificially smooth, by the ruses of the “compositional means” or style at hand. But it remains unclear, presuming that one takes the power of form-giving to be not entirely nominalistic, which is to say not entirely defined by each historical period within which it arises, why form should be fissure-free in one historical moment, smooth and non-antagonistically contoured in another. Or to put it another way, might Lukács risk collapsing his very foundational distinction between formal essence and life, or in our terms form and history, by assuming a comprehensive transitivity between the already-formal qualities of the historical lifeworld — expansively meaningful in the ancient context, barren in the modern — and the distinct formal imperatives or processes of the literary?

Even as it is apparently in the very dissonance of the relation between the two that the novel derives its power, there nonetheless seems to be an easy transfer of qualities at play here, such that “fissures and rents” in the historical lifeworld are rather seamlessly reproduced within the apparently nonetheless distinguishable bounds of literary form. To collapse the distance between literary form and the particular lifeworld, as such a theoretical maneuver seems to do, no matter how implicitly or unintentionally, is to negate the very explanatory power of Lukács’s analyses, given that it is in the growing incommensurability between the two poles that the historical narrative central to *Theory of the Novel* takes hold; we move seamlessly, or so we’re told, between the tight fit of ancient commensurability to the agitated fracturings of modernity. If, on the contrary, we were to assume that form, or form-giving, in Lukács names nothing but the particular, relative ways in which literature appears at a given moment, then, again, form disappears into history, or at best becomes passive putty upon which history may leave its mark. But this was surely not the broader ambition of the book, the residual Kantianism of which, at a minimum, would suggest that a rather less nominalist vision of form was intended.

In a strange twist, it could well be that, in an earlier and very different theoretical-critical moment, Lukács stumbled in a fashion similar to the new formalists, who also risk, as I have already suggested above with reference to Levine, suggesting that form and history are amenable partners, even ultimately indistinguishable from one

another. This is an all too understandable caesura, given the laudable desire to avoid, on one hand, the exultation of form into an airlessly metaphysical space outside its historical “content,” or the form-denying boosting of history on the other, this latter the ultimate consequence of much that came under the banner of the new historicism and much that now congregates under the carapace of the digital humanities.<sup>12</sup> In the second half of the quote above, one finds something like a symptomal expression of this anxiety expressed at the level of Lukács’s discussion of the narrative content of epic, as when the critic ironically attributes to epic form, otherwise construed as the most developed and capacious of forms, a childlike indecision, hurtling between a neurotic picturing of punishment — the staging of a formal retribution for the betrayal of the lifeworld’s norms — and an utter placidity, a perfect balance between the law and its transgression. I take this to be an especially telling sign of the theoretical crisis identified above, not least because what I take to be the constructive incommensurability of formalization, the constitutive character of the lack of fit between literature and its histories, would by definition avoid the shutting down of possibilities implicit in Lukács’s hystericization of epic content, its reduction to an impotent vacillation between equally unlikely opposites. To put this otherwise, and to repeat a claim already made by many of Lukács’s admirers and critics, both history and form alike seem thinned out here, made awkwardly to conform to ultimately ahistorical and atextual metaphysical priorities only implicitly announced in the body of the book.

Before reorienting Lukács’s emphasis on “fissures and rents” to my own purposes, I’d do well to pursue this seeming aporia a little further; it may well be definitional of much of the confusion around form and history noticeable in much modern and recent literary criticism. For, at other key moments in the book, a rather more active role is given to literary form, the latter becoming something like a salve to history, a cold cloth upon its fevered brow. At times, Lukács tasks the novel, not just with the unflinching reproduction of modernity’s antagonisms, but rather with the formal amelioration of just those fractures, or so it initially seems:

The irony of the novel is the self-correction of the world’s fragility: inadequate relations can transform themselves into a fanciful yet well-ordered round of misunderstandings and cross-purposes, within which everything is seen as many-sided, within which things appear as isolated and yet connected, as full of value and yet totally devoid of it.<sup>13</sup>

Such is the compromise-formation proper to the novel, whose impotence, at least when held up against its predecessor form of the epic, is nonetheless raised to a higher power as it persists as simultaneously alive to and inadequate to the meaning of its age. Just as the novel-form apparently “self-corrects” the incoherence of its times, so it also smuggles in the isolation and anomie truly proper to its age. As

well-ordered as novelistic structures may seem, they remain fanciful; as capacious as their viewpoints may appear, as malleable as free indirect style, say, may seem, what results is ultimately only apparently full of value. Or, rather, it is both full of value *and* entirely lacking in it, the two vacillating imperatives rather canceling each other out in a whiplash movement ironically not unlike that imputed to the epic above. It is worth underlining the repetition of the deceptive symmetry that, again, also characterized Lukács's diagnosis of epic. (And the latter meant to register as a favorable feature of the ancient form!) What seems an either/or — value or valuelessness, form or formlessness — degrades into a flaccid simultaneity, into the frictionless reproduction of a choice that is ultimately no choice at all. Form only *appears* to in-form its content when it comes to the novel, but in truth it serves only to limply mimic the suspicious *laissez-faire* of modernity's own slack self-presentation, its ideological shell-game, its lashing out at, and its falling wide of the mark of, the nourishment of meaning or spiritual assurance.

And so again, Lukács seems to have de-formed form, and this at the very moment at which his gaze seems most trained on form's fertility, its power. Just as in the discussion of the "fissures and rents" of modernity, and just as in his hystericization of epic, the attempt to particularize formal procedures — there the ancient epic, here the novel — results only in a troubling evacuation of form's constructive power. To be clear, form's formativeness is not reliant in my account on the exultation of the latter to the status of a metaphysical intransitive outside or against history, as I hope will become clear in what follows. And neither is my ambition merely to "prove Lukács wrong," as vain and irrelevant as such an ambition would be in 2016. Rather, in Parts 3 and especially 4, I will positively appropriate resources from *Theory of the Novel*, if only to turn the book against itself. Before I do so, a brief reflection on some tensions in the theory of narrative and time offered in the book should be apposite.

### **Narrative and the Assimilation of Form to History**

Literary critics have tended to stay away of late from broad pronouncements about the differing effects of narrative and poetic forms. The reasons for this are legion, but the admirable concern for significant differences in the cultural reception and transformation of such forms is surely paramount. According to this recent anti-structuralist, nominalist consensus, there is no ideal type of form named "narrative" or "poetry" that one may extract from their actually-occurring, specific instances. Against this consensus, I will risk some general comments both here and in part 3 on the differing effectivities of narrative and verse form, both for and against Lukács's own remarks in *Theory of the Novel*. One would be mistaken, of course, to accuse Lukács of neglecting poetry in his great book, not least because epic verse plays such a signal role, as already noted. The status of the lyric, the form whose final ascendancy in the nineteenth century assured its becoming synonymous with poetry per se, is less clear cut, although it is quite wrong to claim, as Carl Freedman has, that "lyric poetry



barely exists for Lukács.”<sup>14</sup> In what the latter calls the “world of distance,” in which the gap between subject and object earlier closed in the ancient context now widely looms, lyric poetry tends to inflate the subjective domain at the expense of the latter’s union with its putatively objective correlate. As he writes, “only in lyric poetry do... direct, sudden flashes of the substance become like lost original manuscripts suddenly made legible; only in lyric poetry is the subject, the vehicle of such experiences, transformed into the sole carrier of meaning, the only true reality.”<sup>15</sup>

This is hardly a claim original to Lukács, although few other critics of the time would so boldly cling to the notion that lyric poetry is able to make the metaphysical appear, no matter how attenuated that appearance may become by virtue of its baleful encasement within an exaggeratedly subjective form. Theodor Adorno, of course, would later embark from a similar premise — the inherent subjectivism of the lyric — to reach an opposite conclusion, namely that the very distortions of lyrical subjective voice are paradoxically revelatory of what the lyric “I” struggles to exclude: not any “substance” per se, but rather the lyric’s objective conditions of social and historical possibility.<sup>16</sup> Leaving such dialectical subtleties aside for a moment, it has been well established that, for Lukács, prose contains formal possibilities that render it suppler, more elevated, more attuned to its age, than lyric could ever possibly be. As he writes, “Only prose can... encompass the suffering and the laurels, the struggle and the crown, with equal power; only in its unfettered plasticity and its non-rhythmic rigor can... embrace the fetters and the freedom, the given heaviness and the conquered lightness of a world henceforth immanently radiant with found meaning.”<sup>17</sup>

I’m especially interested in the notion of a “non-rhythmic rigor,” a phrase that brings into relief the bold narratological claim that pervades *Theory of the Novel* without ever quite being named, namely that poetry’s seemingly aristocratic exceptionality must be challenged in the name of narrative. Such a challenge coalesces with the curious idea that a lack of formal rigor, a rigor that historically at least has most often been associated with the disciplining of prose by formal poetic limitations, makes of prose, paradoxically, something especially rigorous. If one associates form, in this context, with poetic meter, say, it is difficult indeed to understand how, for Lukács, the alternative slackness of narrative — if, indeed, slackness is quite right — is instead to be accorded the virtue of rigor. In his earlier *Soul and Form* from 1910, Lukács tasks the “art of writing” with “lead[ing] to a great door — through which there is no passage... This is the most profound meaning of form: to lead to a great moment of silence, to mold the directionless, many-colored stream of life as though all its haste were only for the sake of such moments.”<sup>18</sup> “Writing,” we can infer, refers here to narrative more specifically, whose haste will become important to us below. For now, suffice to notice how form is conducive for both the Lukács of 1910 and the Lukács of just a few years later in *Theory of the Novel*; conducive of, conducive of, life itself, a term broadly substitutable for our preferred term, history. If, for Lukács, the rigor of narrative is such that it waves history through its contours with a minimum

of interruption, feedback, or white noise, it is these very latter that will, in a non-mimetic moment proper to the formal meeting of literature and history, be the very condition on our account for literature's formalization of the latter.

Of course, there are numerous formal decisions ingrained into narrative forms, and one risks excessive credulity in accepting at face value such a discredited hierarchy — aristocratic poetic refinement and “rigor” over and against populist narrative bagginess. The more pertinent distinction to be drawn in this context, and one that will reserve a place within it for a rather different theory of formal rigor, is in the relative rate of the absorption of history that either form affords. By “relative rate of absorption,” I simply mean the relative lack of, or presence of, resistance to the assimilation of textual form inherent to each literary structure. To preview, where Lukács would seem to crown narrative “rigorous” by virtue of its ability to rapidly mainline history, its capacity to yield in the face of history's onrush, perhaps tidying the latter's contradictions in the process, I would prefer to find in the arbitrariness of the poetic line break, in the defiantly *artificial* abstractions of poetry, a resistance to history that, paradoxically, incites the formalization of history all the better. My aim is certainly not to denigrate narrative, or to induce some ahistorical literary-critical choice of one form over the other. Rather, I hope a somewhat polemical counter position of poetry to Lukács's literary form of choice may, by some process of back-projection, help better illuminate Lukács's own critical positions, his own investments.

But let's stick with narrative for a little while longer. Why does Lukács so privilege narrative, and what is the specific relationship between narrative form and history in *Theory of the Novel*? As I've already suggested, narrative quickens history, filtering it through its arrhythmic structures so as to amplify the broadly reflective power of fiction. But there is a sense in which narrative also contains, for Lukács, a certain tendency toward stasis too, perhaps even a kind of resistance, albeit one that is directly borrowed from an allied stasis proper to the external world of which narrative aspires to be the mirror. If epic form neatly communicates the organic self-sufficiency of the world of which it is a part, the novel betrays what Lukács calls the “fundamentally conceptual pseudo-organic nature of the material of the novel,” such material organized in such a way that it is “heterogeneously contingent and discrete.”<sup>19</sup> If epic, on such a reading, “is homogeneously organic and stable,” the novel calls attentions to its parts, parts that have a “strict compositional and architectural significance.”<sup>20</sup> One might put this another way by saying that the novel flaunts its forms, makes a scene of its tricks and folds that allow narrative to correct, but also somehow to reveal, the dihesences proper to its external worlds.

Unexpectedly, perhaps, Lukács makes the novel form as such embody what would, by scholarly consensus, be understood to be the main characteristics of the so-called post-modern novel of the 1990s. For what is this formal calling attention to itself if not a version of a kind of self-reflexivity, a heightening of compositional

artificiality and starkness, albeit one conducted in the vain hope of an authentic heightening of meaning in conditions of the perilous lack of the latter? With this introduction of contingency into novelistic form, this is to say, Lukács gives back a certain agency to form. Instead of merely transposing a certain historically-specific disconnectedness from world to text, the novel asserts a certain independence, a certain self-containedness. Lukács gives the example of “hidden motifs” buried in a narrative, the decisiveness of which only becomes apparent by the narrative’s end.<sup>21</sup> Of course, this seeming autonomization of novelistic form, one that arrives in part through the knowingly artificial centering of narrative upon an individual’s trajectory — “[t]he novel overcomes its bad infinity by recourse to the biographical form” — is paradoxically only in the service of a broader deflation of literature’s independence, insofar as it is precisely the disjunction between the aspiration toward integration and totality and the reality of relatively autonomous parts that makes of the novel a mirror of a history itself composed of just such parts and just such thwarted ambitions toward totality.<sup>22</sup>

One may nonetheless identify a tension, or perhaps a series of tensions, between this apparent formal contingency of novelistic form and the broader success that the novel apparently achieves for Lukács — a success, remember, only to be measured by its conveyance of the failures of totalization and integration. What underpins and unites these subtly different claims is a certain novelistic temporality, what I want to call narrative’s quickening, its ability to overcome a certain stasis and resistance that poetry, in certain conditions, may more stubbornly hold on to. We get a sense of this quickening of narrative in the chapter on “The Romanticism of Disillusionment,” where Lukács meditates on the “discrepancy” between idea and reality, this disjunction of course definitional for the critic of modern times. Indeed, it is time itself that is the medium through which this aporia is revealed. As he writes, “[t]he most profound and most humiliating impotence of subjectivity consists not so much in its hopeless struggle against the lack of idea in social forms... as in the fact that it cannot resist the sluggish, yet constant progress of time... That is why only the novel, the literary form of the transcendent homelessness of the idea, includes real time... among its constitutive principles.”<sup>23</sup>

It is not simply the inability of the modern individual to find a symbolic home that is at stake here, or not only that. Rather, it is the ineluctability of the movement of duration (Lukács makes direct reference to Bergson) that exacerbates the anomie proper to the modern condition and its most quintessential form, the novel. Both the modern subject and its artistic corollary have barely gained a footing, a transcendental point from which to fully measure the proximity or distance between subject and object, between individual and history, before time and the demands of novelistic reinvention sweeps away whatever precarious outpost had been secured. We may need to modify, then, our prevailing claim that, for Lukács, the quickening of narrative is what makes of it a successful conductor of its times. This much is true, but only as long

as one also acknowledges the constitutive failure that must go along with this success, the failure of the center to hold in the face of the formal and temporal onrush of sentence after sentence. Roland Barthes had the measure of this, when he commented on the anxiousness of Flaubert's sentences, each meticulously corrected, but each never quite a success in its own right, the failures of the one inevitably requiring the writing of another, and another... Barthes wrote: "it is... a matter of vertigo: correction is infinite, it has no sure sanction. The corrective protocols are perfectly systematic... but since their points of application are endless, no appeasement is possible: they are groups at once structured and floating."<sup>24</sup> Something about the sentence, its inevitable move toward an end marked by the finality of the period, makes it unperfectable, making of novelistic structure a kind of pure duration. Before detouring Lukács's transcendentalism in order to help construct my own take on literary formalization, I will take a detour through Flaubert's neurotically corrected narrative and Baudelaire's verse in order to make good on my earlier promise to draw out what I take to be some crucial formal differences between verse and prose, differences that are rather covered over in Lukács's generalization of narrative as the *ur*-form of literature's encounters with historical time.

### **Immobility, Mobility and History in Literary Form: Flaubert, Baudelaire (and Lukács)**

In his recent *The Antinomies of Realism*, Fredric Jameson offers a peculiar and intriguing account of the interaction of two definitional modes of nineteenth-century narrative realism. The argument turns on the status of affect, defined against determinate emotion and understood as resistant to capture in language; as I hope will become clear, "affect" on Jameson's understanding has something significantly to do with what I have discussed above as narrative's quickening, and the more general temporal-historical consequences of different literary forms. "The new implication," Jameson writes, "is that affect (or its plural) somehow eludes language and its naming of things (and feelings), whereas emotion is preeminently a phenomenon sorted out into an array of names."<sup>25</sup> If emotion, then, is easily integrated into a typology, affect "seems to have no context," but rather "float[s] above experience without causes and without the structural relationship to its cognate entities which the named emotions have with one another."<sup>26</sup> If Balzac, in his *La Père Goriot* of 1835, uses elaborate description to, as Jameson phrases it, offer a "sign or allegory of the moral or social status of a given character," Flaubert, a few decades later in the century, would turn such descriptions to the service of "non-meaningful non-symbolic objects."<sup>27</sup> Jameson explains this shift according to a change in how bodies and feelings were constructed historically, in the light of newly-bourgeois conceptions of individuality and autonomous self-identity. The details of this causal argument, only indirectly and insufficiently presented in his book, need not concern us here.

What is more important in Jameson's analysis is his characterization of narrative

affect as weightless, free-floating, untethered from the materialities of both language and the world, and thus somehow as outside the quickening effects of narrative that I have described. Even as Flaubert features prominently as an example of this most important feature of affect, Jameson puts Zola much more extensively to use in justifying this characterization. But it is entirely possible to bear out Jameson's argument by reference to any number of passages in Flaubert's novels. Take, for instance, the following from *L'Éducation sentimentale*, a famously cloudy and amorphous novel, already buckling at the limits of the realist form:

The street-lamps shone in two straight lines, stretching away into the distance, and long red flames flickered in the depths of the water. The river was the color of slate, while the sky, which was brighter, seemed to be supported by the huge masses of shadow that rose on each side of the river. Buildings which the eye could not distinguish intensified the darkness. Further away, a luminous haze floated over the roof-tops; all the noises of the night melted into a single murmur; a light breeze was blowing.<sup>28</sup>

Quite clearly, this picturing of a city scene serves no urgent narrative purpose. But more than this, it, and many other such paragraphs dotted throughout the novel, maintains a certain singular texture of its own, not just indifferent to but autonomous from the travails of the characters caught up in the wisp of a plot that is forwarded elsewhere. In the above quotation, the parallel lines of light projected by the street lamps establish visual perspective. The bottom of the frame is drawn by reference to the murky depths of the water as the light reflects within it. And yet this apparently static vision soon melts into a "single murmur," an amorphous jumble rhymed with that "luminous haze" that floats over the roof-tops. It is almost as if Jameson had lifted his account of affect from Flaubert's phraseology; the critic, too, will refer multiple times in *The Antinomies of Realism* to the "amorphous" quality of affect. Incidentally, there is no apparent subject of the narrative of the kind lamented by Lukács above, one who might nonetheless take sustenance from this apparent freeze in forward motion of the plot. Or rather, the only subject in question is that of the omniscient narrator, one who nonetheless seems unable to secure the binding effect one might usually associate with such a device. Rather, as Lukács insightfully notes, this is a novel in which "no attempt is made... to counteract the disintegration of outside reality into heterogeneous, brittle, and fragmentary parts by some process of unification."<sup>29</sup> Time, once again, ensures this brittleness, although it is also celebrated by Lukács with allowing a single "unifying principle of... homogeneity that rubs the sharp edges off each heterogeneous fragment."<sup>30</sup> Is the passage above the example of a "heterogeneous part," one nonetheless unified by the narrative time of which it participates? One need not subscribe to Lukács's idealism here to recognize the

insight: it is the formal time of narrative itself that prevents the above passage and the many others like it in the novel attaining a genuine stasis or a truly weightless affective charge of the kind described by Jameson.

One should not lose sight, nonetheless, of the equally important formal variables that condition the increasingly liquid texture of Flaubert's scene: narrative itself, in its ineluctable temporal movement, seems, at the least, to render these autonomous moments fleeting and ephemeral, easily and quickly drained away by the next paragraph with its reassuring reintroduction of narrative movement. Poetry also moves, of course, but its ability to isolate elements of its structure, the capacity of its constrictive patterns, meters, or suggestive repetitions to particularize even trace elements that stand in contradiction with the seeming thematic consensus of the verse — these latter are enough to open it up to a species of materialism different in kind to that enabled by prose, and thus, perhaps, to a different kind of formal accounting, a different kind of formalization proper to the literature-history relation. More specifically, I would like to claim that while the onrush of narrative time risks assimilating form to history, the particular capacity of poetry to induce a sense of immobility or stasis, linked in some way to Jameson's theorization of affect, protects poetic structure from dissolving into its contexts. But if Jameson's affect seems particular to narrative, and if it is meant after all to represent an interregnum in historical time, the kinds of immobility I will now locate in Baudelaire are eminently historical, albeit at moments in the poetry where poetic form seems most sealed within itself, most unlike narrative.

Before approaching a particular poem by Baudelaire, I should sharpen just what is meant by "history" here, at least as the category relates to the poet's verse. In general terms, and insofar as Baudelaire is so often understood as a figure of transition between French Romanticism and Stéphane Mallarmé's subtractive *symboliste* experiments, history would seem to denote both intra- and extra-poetic concerns. The first, clearly enough, refers to the strikingly *late*, at least when compared to the British context, challenging of prior seventeenth-century, Racinean metrics by post-Romantic poets, Baudelaire very much included. The second would involve the gradual distancing of French poetry from its prior imbrications within the vicissitudes of French Revolutionary politics. Mallarmé will, in 1867, famously call for poetry to renew itself far from the public square, remarking as he did so the historical gulf between his historical standing and that of 1789.<sup>31</sup> Baudelaire, then, would appear stuck productively in-between: he did, of course, participate in the Revolution of 1848 and he wrote for a revolutionary newspaper, but the individualizing imperative of the *flâneur*, of the leisured classes chasing ecstasis apart from, but somehow still within, the city crowd, already seems to ineluctably place him on a trajectory toward Mallarmé's inward-turning poetics, and away from (collective, political, fractious) history proper.

But the importance of Baudelaire's verse lies just as much in its resistance to these

kinds of narrative accounts of literary-critical history. The poems, that is, put the non-narrative resources of poetic structure to work against such fluid historical emplotments, against the inevitability of narrative time so keenly traced by Lukács, and in so doing they point toward a different, characteristically poetic envisioning of history even in its most political of forms. Adorno's and Walter Benjamin's allegorical accounts of Baudelaire's historicity are a significant advance on the narrative account just mentioned, especially in their attention to the importance of lyric form in both registering and resisting its historical moment. We, however, would wish to go further in highlighting the internal formal features that are not only ironizing of external historical pressures, but are rather productive of an immanent historical logic of their own; that are productive of the *formalization* of historical elements that are, as they approach literary form and convention, already formal, already structured. It will be no surprise that Baudelaire's famed irony will be an important variable in that process, especially as the latter inflects the poet's crucial ruminations on landscape, and in particular as it foregrounds the survival of pastoral forms within a now-urban poetics.

I'll begin with the liminary poem of the *Tableaux Parisiens*, fortuitously entitled "Paysage."<sup>32</sup> Often noted for being out of step with the poems that Baudelaire composed up to his trial for obscenity, scholars have focused on the "riot" announced, seemingly out of the blue, in the twenty-first line. The riot will prove important to us, too, but we gain no truly poetic — rather than simply historicist, or perhaps historical-narrative — knowledge of its effect without attending to the quasi-pastoral form that it apparently interrupts.<sup>33</sup> The poem, so it conveniently informs us in the first line, is an eclogue, albeit one that self-consciously translates the Virgilian convention into a form appropriate to the "belfreys," the "chimney pipes," the "steeple" of the city. J.A. Hiddleston, synthesizing a brief analysis of the poem itself with an attention to Baudelaire's various *Salons*, argues that the pastoral for the new modern poet substantially risks a "mindless cult of nature at the expense of structure and imagination."<sup>34</sup> At the least, it seems in need of "renovation." One might expect, then, a certain irony to attend the wrenching of this rural form into the starker environs of the city. But there is a productive quality to this ironic transposition which is missed if one takes only at face value Baudelaire's more general and often haughty dismissal of landscape poetry, expressed in those *Salons* and usefully catalogued by Hiddleston and others.

The first, merely satiric mode of irony may be traced from any number of vantages in the poem. One of the most striking of these is the placing of the poetic voice indoors, at the very moment that it hymns the "hymns / Of all the neighbouring belfries, carried on the wind," The lyric "I" wishes to "lay me down, like the astrologers, / Next to the sky," and yet, unlike the astrologers, the poet is "up in my attic room." Far from being immersed in the landscape as, say, William Wordsworth so frequently recalled in the form of childhood memory, urban reverie must be taken indoors here, even as

the objects of that reverie remain encased in something still resembling an affective landscape, albeit a decidedly urban one. The winter, when it comes, is to be negated by a further interiorization: no longer are we simply behind attic windows, but we're faced with the deeper interiority of a "fairy palace for myself at night," one of "bright horizons in the blue / Where fountains weep in pools of alabaster hue, / Of kisses in the glades, where birds sing night and day." If, in the poem's first stanza, the regular end-rhyme eases the reader into the state of alert contemplation proper to the poet's outward gaze, the same now, in the long concluding stanza, intensifies the sense of artifice, of fantasmatic desperation, that this further retreat carries with it. The broadly Adornian conclusion that follows from this first, most explicit mode of irony seems clear: the emergence of a city built up around the demands of capital no longer permits a sincere celebration of its affective properties. Rather, the hyper-mediation of city life (allegorized by the physical mediation of the attic window) renders the sensitivities of the pastoral excessive, even ridiculous and cloying in advance. Not surprisingly, the famed excessiveness of Baudelaire's style is in full evidence here: we read of "conjuring the spring with all the poet's might, / Of hauling forth a sun out of my heart, with care / Transmuting furious thoughts to gently breathing air." (Indeed, we're not so far from the centrality of irony to Lukács's arguments around the discrepancy between the novel's totalizing ambitions and the paucity of its historical materials.)<sup>35</sup>

And yet whereas, say, in the later and lesser of Wordsworth's nature poems, the politicality of history threatens to be fully obscured by the poet's excessively dewy gaze, here there is a striking, ironic in a fuller sense, incursion of a political event that makes of the very end of the poem in particular — the already-quoted "transmuting" of "furious thoughts to gently breathing air" — seem rather less empty than it initially appears.<sup>36</sup> The sudden appearance of the "riot" in the twenty-first line is self-consciously presented as just another city sight, the violence of which is not sufficient to disturb the now-interior fantasia already described: "Riot, that rages vainly at my window glass, / Will never make me raise my forehead from my task." Despite the equanimity with which political history enters the frame (leaving that languid frame very much intact, despite the riot's "rage"), its appearance alerts us retrospectively to another temporal logic than the spatially mediated one already analyzed. If, in the latter, the onrush of historical time seems stilled by spatial mediation, by the city's "misty gloom" as much as by shutters locked "neat and tight," this alternative logic appears to effect a sudden contraction of space and time, a sudden clearing away of those mediating layers. It's there in the instantaneous shift from extreme distance to up-close domestic presence in "A star born in the blue, a lamp lit in a room," a zoom that opens up the potential, realized eleven lines later, for the equally vertiginous appearance of political history.

If Baudelaire's famous "À Une Passante" makes of its most seemingly atemporal frame, that of the freezing fetish of the widow's fashionable figure, its most historical



event, here a seemingly progressive interiorization and distancing from history becomes the ephemeral ground for the very emergence of history proper; and yet this emergence, when considered fully, is much less punctual, event-like, than the incursion of dramatic events would usually warrant.<sup>37</sup> When only the first, generic layer of irony is taken into consideration — the poem's satire of pastoral from the perspective of the urban shutaway in his garret — the final line, "Transmuting furious thoughts to gently breathing air," seems at least partially assimilable to the broader ironic calming of urban chaos in the now-belated, out-of-time affect of the oblivious Romantic aesthete. But when read as an aftershock of the riot of the twenty-first line, one prefigured by the gliding collapse of space and time mentioned above (a collapse that would be quickly covered over by narrative's onward flow), we discover that, for all that the poet has indulged his inner calm, history has made those thoughts "furious," even if that furiousness, a close relative of the riot's "rage," is pointedly not in contradiction with the "gently breathing air" that is its willing conduit. To the contrary, the "gently breathing air" explicitly points us toward the poem's formal equanimity, and more generally to poetry's ability to arrange images and historical events in non-narrative, even non-lyrical montage.

To reiterate, history emerges here not in the form of the rushing urban streets whose kinesis chafes at the limitations of the lyric; and neither is the riot just another point of irony, Baudelaire playfully inflating a late-romantic mode of aesthetic contemplation to the extent that even a riot appears as a mere distraction to the serious business of inward reflection. Instead, the poem would have us locate history in images and logics other than those that appear most readily to us, such as shock, rupture, or interruption to the general run of things. Rather, history demurely takes its place alongside various other kinds of equanimously arranged, montage-like appearances — cosmological ("a star born in the blue"), domestic ("my attic room"), fantasmatic-mythological ("kisses in the glades, where birds sing night and day") — that make of history and its incursion in the figure of the riot dramatic in its very lack of drama, in the noticeable lack of the push of time that Lukács associates with novelistic duration.

One may sharpen one's sense of this new vision of historicity in Baudelaire through a reading of perhaps the greatest contemporary inheritor of allegorical reading, and the Baudelaire poem through which he advances an especially acute reinvention of the Adornian/Benjaminian consensus. Jameson's "Baudelaire as Modernist and Postmodernist" takes as its initial focus the first part of Baudelaire's sonnet "Chant d'automne," and the reading that results also finds in Baudelaire's invention of different means of figuring landscape a key to his imagination of history.<sup>38</sup> Our own reading will take some distance from Jameson's conclusions, in the course of which the non-narrative reading of lyric's historical force that I've only intimated up to now will become clearer. In the course of the reading, my hope is that this non-lyrical reading of lyric historicization will also take a distance from what I've established

to be Lukács's distinct privileging of history as narrativization. Nonetheless, in the concluding and final section of the essay, something of a rapprochement with Lukács will become possible.

The first part of the sonnet reads as follows:

*Bientôt nous plongerons dans les froides ténèbres;  
Adieu, vive clarté de nos étés trop courts!  
J'entends déjà tomber avec des chocs funèbres  
Le bois retentissant sur le pavé des cours.*

*Tout l'hiver va rentrer dans mon être: colère,  
Haine, frissons, horreur, labeur dur et forcé,  
Et, comme le soleil dans son enfer polaire,  
Mon coeur ne sera plus qu'un bloc rouge et glacé.*

*J'écoute en frémissant chaque bûche qui tombe;  
L'échafaud qu'on bâtit n'a pas d'écho plus sourd.  
Mon esprit est pareil à la tour qui succombe  
Sous les coups du bélier infatigable et lourd.*

*Il me semble, bercé par ce choc monotone,  
Qu'on cloue en grande hâte un cercueil quelque part  
Pour qui? — C'était hier l'été; voici l'automne!  
Ce bruit mystérieux sonne comme un départ.*

[Soon cold shadows will close over us  
and summer's transitory gold be gone;  
hear them chopping firewood in the court —  
the dreary thud of logs on cobblestone.

Winter will come to repossess my soul  
with rage and outrage, horror, drudgery,  
and like the sun in its polar holocaust  
my heart will be a block of blood-red ice.

I listen trembling to that grim tattoo —  
build a gallows, it would sound the same.  
My mind becomes a tower giving way  
under the impact of a battering-ram.

Stunned by the strikes, I seem to hear, somewhere,  
 a coffin hurriedly hammered shut — for whom?  
 Summer was yesterday; autumn is here!  
 Strange how that sound rings out like a farewell.]<sup>39</sup>

For Jameson, the poem both exemplifies and extends the critical potential of the allegorical reading of Baudelaire, while also demonstrating how the same poetic materials can be conscripted to significantly different readings. The latter insight is of less moment to us than Jameson's claim that the poem stages the passing of rural into urban, the archaic into the definitively modern:

Nature on the one hand, the city, the urban, on the other, and a moment in the interrelationship of these two great contraries in which the first, the archaic cyclical time of an older agriculture and an older countryside, is still capable of being transmitted through what negates it, namely the social institutions of the city itself, the triumphantly un- or anti-natural.<sup>40</sup>

For all the dialectical finesse of Jameson's essay, amply represented in this single, long sentence, the argument here is not so distant from the familiar allegorical one. Baudelaire is, once again, a figure in and of historical transition, between pre-modern agricultural and properly modern urban economies, between romanticism and modernism. Intriguingly, Jameson makes much of the apparent resonance of the sound evoked in the poem's first stanza, an auditory indeterminacy that the critic eventually concludes is the sound of "logs striking the courtyard paving," an interpretation ironically rendered moot by the very translation that Jameson provides of the French.<sup>41</sup> In that translation, the sound is unambiguously attributed to the "chopping" of "firewood," but Jameson finds something much more mysterious in the phenomenon:

The irreducible, the sonorous vibration, with its peculiar hollowness and muffled impact, is here a pure positivity which must be handled or managed in some fashion. This will first be attempted metonymically, by tracing the association of this positive yet somehow ominous sound with something else, which is defined as absence, loss, death — namely the ending of summer.<sup>42</sup>

Baudelaire's poem may be read as modernist insofar as it permits the semi-autonomy of this sound, lets its resonances play out without any immediate assignation of symbolical content or allegorical purpose. Prior to modernism, Jameson provocatively claims, true sense-perception independent of its rhetorical recuperation simply didn't

exist in literature. But the recuperation nonetheless comes, albeit in a manner quite distinct from the “rhetorical transparency” of pre-modernist forms. A measure of openness will remain with the sound and its sensory effects, even as it becomes a sign — a sign, more precisely, of absence, loss, and death. Insofar as “Chante d’automne” is a historical poem, and Jameson quite clearly thinks it records a shift in history, from early to high modernity, its historicity is registered by the ways in which the poem’s very form struggles to cope with the trickiness of its (historical) content, the poem beset by a lack of adequate rhetorical devices to sufficiently integrate and transmit its message. The latter claim is, of course, close enough to the practice of allegorical reading defended by Adorno and Benjamin: the poem finds itself caught between an earlier Romanticism that would have privileged the pastoral over the urban, and a fully mature Modernism that would have developed a new symbolical language of fragmentation and alienation proper to the poem’s urban setting. For our purposes, and for all the reading’s power, it remains essentially an attempt to narrativize history, to produce the latter as the (narrative) content to poetry’s form.

But what is distinctly effaced in Jameson’s reading is the extraordinary sense of violent materiality that punctuates Baudelaire’s poem. It announces itself, obviously enough, with the strike of axe on wood, but it soon spins out across the poem as a whole, culminating in the bruising image of a mind caved in as if by a battering ram: “My mind becomes a tower giving way / under the impact of a battering ram.” In immediately searching for meaning, if only to then register how the poem (meaningfully!) defers it, Jameson (and, perhaps, narrative-historical reading more generally) must remain deaf to the very physicality of this verse, its imposing material presence above and beyond whatever interpretation we may wish draw from it. In Paul de Man’s useful terms, Jameson is too quick to read the poem lyrically, and insodoing misses what is most poetic about it, those elements least assimilable to the temptations of narrative-historical recuperation. Even before the axe hits the wood, something of the poem’s transformative materiality is apparent: notice how the shadows that “will soon close over us” are cold, as if chimera were to be temporarily granted the power to effect a material shift in temperature. There is a stunning quality to these lines, one that seems to arrest the temporal movement necessary for the positing, elaboration, and conclusion of any more or less traditional lyric recollection or sentiment. We are, it is true, alerted from the very beginning of the gradual slide from summer to autumn, the latter threatening the “polar holocaust” of winter, but the poem’s purview remains at the cusp of this movement; we are not in the midst of winter by the end of the poem’s first part, but are rather still preoccupied with the concussive blows of coffins hammered shut, this latter clearly a metaphoric substitution for the sound that rings out of the very first stanza. We remain, that is, temporally, spatially, and historically held fast by the event of the poem’s beginning even as we reach the fourth stanza. The section ends having hardly begun, with stasis and a kind of stunned inertia having won out over thematic development.

When we read the poem's second section, entirely neglected by Jameson, we find ourselves still at the cusp of change, still on a teetering verge, and yet the tenor of the verse has decisively changed. Gone are the stark physical patternings of the first section, those images of impact underpinned by the quasi-iambic churn of "chopping firewood in the court — / the dreary thud of wood on cobblestone." Instead, we're faced with a fantasmatic tone not unrelated to the dreamily interiorized second half of "Paysage." The first two stanzas of the second section are as follows:

How sweet the greenish light of your long eyes!  
 But even that turns bitter now, and nothing  
 — not love, the boudoir, nor its busy hearth —  
 can match the summer's radiance on the sea.

Love me still, my darling! mother me,  
 ungrateful though I am, your naughty boy.  
 Sister and mistress! be the fleeting warmth  
 of a sumptuous autumn or a setting sun.<sup>43</sup>

A kind of movement has occurred in the break between the first and second parts of the poem, for sure, but it is resolutely not of the changing of seasons, or of the allegorical-historical shift from an agrarian to an urban economy. Rather, we have been transported from impressions registered by an immobilized sensory apparatus oriented outward, picking up the uncanny thwack of axe on wood but unable to allegorically or symbolically move beyond its physical reverberations, to an interiorized sensory apparatus whose perceptions are now entirely self-referring, and thus explicitly cancelling of whatever allegorical-narrativizable implication we might still wish to draw from them. Those characteristic exclamation points are always a sure sign in Baudelaire that whatever domain of materiality that might previously have been the poem's concern has been definitively left behind. In "Chante d'automne," the personification in the second section's first line is equivalent to the inbound reverie of the latter half of "Paysage," where outer landscape is replaced with inner dreamscape. The equivalence holds not simply because, in both poems, what had seemed an outwardly oriented poetic aperture is directed sharply inwards, but because this movement seems, in both cases, to be a defensive reaction to an impasse that refuses to give out onto a narrative account of its historical resolution. But my strong claim is that this impasse is no less historical for all that; at the moment at which the poem seems to withdraw from its own historical implications, from its embeddedness in history, it dramatizes that very embeddedness, makes of its distance a beacon for that from which it has apparently departed.

For Jameson, the sound that defines the beginning of "Chante d'automne" is, in the latter stages of the poem's first part, "driven back inside the body of Baudelaire: a

unique event taking place there and utterly alien to anything whose ‘experience’ we might ourselves remember.”<sup>44</sup> This corporeal indeterminacy is enough, we’re told, to indicate the relative lack of older symbolic resources with which to place the uncanny sound within the narrative-continuum of history. What replaces that objective symbolization is a retreat into the body, into what scholars have in more recent years tagged with the suitably indeterminate category of “affect.” This is not to say that the sound and sensation in question isn’t processed for Jameson, but its processing is to be interpreted allegorically; the direction of travel of what Jameson calls “symbolic reunification” is set by the “collapse of the older system of rhetorical language and traditional literary meaning.”<sup>45</sup> Leaving aside the suspicious generality of “traditional literary meaning” — what could this concretely mean? — the relevant argumentative move is, once again, the allegorical/pro-lyrical/narrative one, one only at a minimal remove from Lukács’s vision of literary history as narrativization, whereby what is taken to be a determined shift at the level of the poetic line is related, albeit after a complex machinery of mediation has done its work, to a similarly determinable, and narrativizable, historical move.

The second part of “Chante d’automne” places some significant pressure on this reading. There, recall, we’re faced with what I’ve characterized as a defensive personification — “How sweet the greenish light of your long eyes!” — which is, nonetheless, intriguingly distinct from the inward bodily turn — itself a metonym for the modern detachment of bodily perception from symbolic content — thematized by Jameson. For what is in question is the turn to an other, a figure distinct from the subjective “I” of the lyric voice or from its imputed body, an other whose symbolic relation to the poem’s first part is, at least initially, hard to parse. One is reminded of the fetishization of the widow’s body in Baudelaire’s “À Une Passante”: there, as here, an initial gaze outward at an urban landscape is intercut with or ultimately replaced by a fixation on the features of a female figure. Unlike in “À Une Passante,” however, there is no immediate historical sign or signs to relate this freezing gaze to what is objectively, historically, transpiring outside it. (This link is very much that of fashion in “À Une Passante,” the poem linking intertextually with Baudelaire’s famous reflections on fashion as sign of historical change in his essay “The Painter of Modern Life.”)

Rather, the lines immediately following the reference to the female figure suggest the failure of this defensive personification, and a reversion to the lament for the passing of summer that defines the first part, albeit now in the language of apparently ahistorical fantasia that we also found in the latter half of “Paysage.” The attempt to hold on to summer through its personification itself “turns bitter,” and is replaced by language of a distinctly ruder hue, at once regressive, motivating a further defensive reversal into the dependent state of childhood, and yet expressive of a distinctly adult sexuality, one that is nonetheless parasitic on childhood for its stock images and for its less than convincing come-hithers: “mother me / ungrateful though I am, your

naughty boy.” The somewhat schlocky intimation of incest consolidates this running together of childhood and adulthood, of the innocence and ingenuousness of the apostrophic form, this challenge to the narrativization of a life — “How sweet,” “Love me still!” and so on — mingled, here, with the darker hues of perversion: “Sister and mistress! be the fleeting warmth / of a sumptuous autumn or a setting sun.” If, as Jonathan Culler has argued, apostrophe is an inherently embarrassing form in its apparent emotional overload, its excessive ingenuousness, it becomes doubly so when paired with these tonally ambivalent sexual signs.<sup>46</sup>

Far from signaling a merely intra-generic irony, the stylistic overload of the second section — its punctuation, the just-mentioned apostrophe — are spanners in the allegorical works, rhetorical devices, in Paul de Man’s sense, that arrest the production of a certain kind of historical sense; especially poetic tics, that is to say, that disrupt any attempt to make of this poem the vehicle for a moving historical *narrative*. But this is not to say that history drops out of the frame altogether. Rather, the overwhelming sense of stasis, of a cancelled and then interiorized historical moment, overlaid with fantasy, with regressive sexual fantasy, testifies to a fear of historical movement that can, even in its negation, only be historical. Nonetheless, this defensiveness and fear in the face of history cannot so easily be transmuted into a sign that change is, nonetheless, on the way, or that a shift that has, in fact, already happened has been only imperfectly repressed. Rather, the effect is total, and it is non-negotiable: at least within the bounds of this poem, nothing of time and history will happen, at least insofar as the latter is figured narratively. Or, perhaps better, a certain nothingness, an uncanny mode of historical stasis, buried within historical scenes and within moments of apparent significance and change, will here find its poetic staging — and nothing else.

### **Conclusion — History as Quasi-Transcendental Form in Theory of the Novel**

It may appear that we’ve traveled quite far from *Theory of the Novel*. By counterposing a moment of apparent narrative ephemerality in Flaubert with the means by which Baudelaire’s poetry formalizes history at the apparent withdrawal of the latter, I hope to have shown a way to think the relation between literary form and historical time that rejects familiar dichotomies between literary-critical formalisms and historicisms. But more importantly, I hope to have begun to show how the easy equation of narrative time with historical eventuality, with the becoming-literary of history, is challenged by the (only apparently) ahistorical moments to be found within the starker environs of verse form. This can only remain something of a promissory note, however; the full details of this story of literary formalization must be worked out elsewhere.<sup>47</sup> It remains for me to briefly return to Lukács, if only to flesh out a claim I have made more than once in this essay, but which I have yet to fully justify, namely that historical time itself is always-already formal. The latter, that is, is never the complementary “content” to literary form, but is rather the form upon which a

distinctively literary formalization works.

This notion is already implicit in my claim, above, that literature comes to formalize history at moments when it is most apparently withdrawn from any mimetic relation to its historical conditions; think, for instance, of the manner in which the second half of “Chante d’automne” undercuts the historical-narrative temptations of the first half. What would count as the historical “content” here? There is none: the apparent naturalization of change through the figures of summer and winter in the first half are, clearly enough, always-already literary-figural; they become historical only at the point at which the second half challenges them, exposes their narrative artificiality, reveals their contingency, and thus opens the poetry up to a different kind of poetical-historical logic.

But my claim is borne out, too, in those narrative-allegorical readings of literary form’s historicity that I have been pushing against. To presume that history is the content to literature’s form is already, implicitly, to locate history as narrative form, to make of history a kind of narrative duration. In Jameson’s reading of “Chante d’automne,” the uncanny sound reverberates and disrupts precisely because it is inassimilable, at least at first blush, to the historical-narrative content of the seasons’ changes that makes up the rest of the poem’s first half. But this inassimilable sound is quickly reappropriated as an itself-narrativizable sign that history has moved on, that older symbolic resources no longer work, and that new materials, new narratives, are required. In Caroline Levine’s suggestive account as discussed at the very opening of this essay, one encounters an agon of forms — literary, social, historical — that nonetheless tessellate with ease; Levine, at least, recognizes the formality of her extra-literary variables, although I think she is too quick to assume that it is in moments of encounter rather than withdrawal or disjunction that the literary makes its historical mark. It may well be, then, that my theory is not especially novel: all theoretical accounts of the literary tarrying with history presume history to be formal, even if these presumptions are not always made explicit. Even as I have seen fit to disagree with his own, distinct narrativization of the form-history relation, Lukács offers us other, more congenial resources to render more concrete this already-formal character of the historical, especially in his suggestive notion of the transcendental governance of historical-literary intelligibility.

Recall how, in *Theory of the Novel*, differing historical periods offer different levels of cultural, historical, and subjective integration. If the period proper to the epic afforded a “starry sky” acting as the “map of all possible paths,” an age where “everything [was] new and yet familiar, full of adventure and yet their own,” any era where philosophy is required is already one where subject and object are torn asunder, where there is a “rift between ‘inside’ and ‘outside,’ a sign of the essential difference between the self and the world.”<sup>48</sup> This is, clearly, enough an unabashedly idealist thesis, but I’d like to risk the thesis that, when given only a slight twist, this recognition of the transcendental ordering of history is eminently amenable to a



materialist reading. Just as I think the idealist temptation of collapsing history into narrative is only avoidable by conceding the already-formal character of history upon its indirect interaction with literary form, so I think one must recognize the operations of a kind of transcendental in any meeting of distinctly literary and distinctively historical-temporal forms. But when Lukács employs the Kantian machinery of the transcendental, he openly risks collapsing the latter into the transcendent, into a full-blown metaphysical condition. Thus, when he famously describes the modern condition as one of “transcendental homelessness,” he exalts this condition into a position not merely of a priori conditionality, but of transcendence — this is no mere subjective limit upon possible knowledge, but is rather a world-defining frame, one fixed and definitional of any literature that might attempt to grasp its limits.

Is it possible to imagine a quasi-transcendental logic of the literary-historical relation? Such a logic would refuse Lukács’s metaphysical exultation, even while taking sustenance from his recognition of history’s conditionality. But a further turn of the argument is necessary, for what compromises history, makes of it only a *quasi*-transcendental, are those other forms with which it must parry, not the least of these being literature itself. Recall the first part of “Chante d’automne”:

[Soon cold shadows will close over us  
and summer’s transitory gold be gone;  
hear them chopping firewood in the court —  
the dreary thud of logs on cobblestone.

Winter will come to repossess my soul  
with rage and outrage, horror, drudgery,  
and like the sun in its polar holocaust  
my heart will be a block of blood-red ice.

I listen trembling to that grim tattoo —  
build a gallows, it would sound the same.  
My mind becomes a tower giving way  
under the impact of a battering-ram.]<sup>49</sup>

If my argument above about these lines above holds, there are at least two distinct formal logics at work here. One is clearly enough the passing of historical time, figured in the more benign terms of an inevitable change in the seasons. Needless to say, this logic doesn’t reach us unfiltered, but is rather already formalized, already comingled with distinctively literary pressures, namely the seasonal imagery just mentioned. Other formal-literary logics exert themselves, this time with more consequence: the assonance of the second half of the second line of the final quoted stanza above colluding with the violence of the imagery, for instance, crowned by

that final battering-ram. Narrative-historical readings would ultimately resolve this tension — the punctual materiality of the assonance and its associated imagery, the seductive pull of history's ever-changing durations — by placing interpretive weight on the latter. To do so is to implicitly neuter literary form to the benefit of history. History hurts, as we've so often been told, but it does so in literature only when limited to the status of a quasi-, not full, transcendental, a form partly defanged by literature's own quasi-transcendental efforts. Caroline Levine's highly suggestive account of such formal interactions, referenced at the very outset of this essay, properly recognizes their always-already formal character, while nonetheless not quite doing enough to specify how literature, in its specificity, may resist and withdraw as much as it colludes with its own historical narrativization, producing a quite distinct historical logic in turn. The alternative, as I hope to have shown, is not a mere ahistorical textualism or literary solipsism. Rather, there is a historical logic proper to literary form, one best detected in moments of poetic retreat and tension, or when literary form appears placid and unmoved, as outside the pressure of narrative duration. It is, at any rate, the virtue of *Theory of the Novel* to continue to provoke new ways of thinking the form-history relation, usefully apart from tractionless appeals to historical context or anecdote.

## Notes

1. György Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge: MIT P, 1971).
2. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1981) 81.
3. Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2015); I partially draw here on a long review-essay of the book forthcoming in *boundary 2*.
4. Levine, *Forms* 1.
5. Qtd. in *Forms* 1.
6. *Forms* 2.
7. *ibid.*
8. *ibid.*
9. *ibid.*
10. Fredric Jameson, "The Case for George Lukács," *Salmagundi* 13 (Summer 1970) 10. Jameson's views on Lukács have surely evolved since 1970, but his now commonplace reading of the central theoretical thrust of *Theory of the Novel* was rather less common upon its original publication, and it serves our purposes as what has become scholarly commonsense, against which our rather more heterodox reading of the critic will proceed.
11. Lukács, *Theory of the Novel* 61-2.
12. For my thoughts on both recent schools of thought, see my "The Perils of the Digital Humanities: New Positivism and the Fate of Literary Theory," *Postmodern Culture* 23.2 (January 2013).
13. *Theory of the Novel* 75.
14. Carl Freedman, *Critical Theory and Science Fiction* (Middletown: Wesleyan UP, 2000) 26. For some deliberately provocative comments on this recent history of the (ahistorical?) generalization of lyric, see the editors' entries in Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins (eds.), *The Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2014).
15. *Theory of the Novel* 63.
16. Theodor Adorno, "On Lyric Poetry and Society," *Notes to Literature* Volume 1, ed. R. Tiedemann, trans. S.W. Nicholson (New York: Columbia UP, 1991) 37-54.
17. *Theory of the Novel* 58-59.
18. György Lukács, *Soul and Form*, ed. J.T. Sanders and K. Terezakis, trans. A. Bostock (New York: Columbia UP, 2010) 135.
19. *Theory of the Novel* 76.
20. *ibid.*
21. *ibid.*
22. *Theory of the Novel* 81.
23. *Theory of the Novel* 121.
24. Roland Barthes, "Flaubert and the Sentence," *New Critical Essays*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: U of California P, 1990) 75.
25. Fredric Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism* (London: Verso, 2013) 29.
26. Jameson, *Antinomies of Realism* 37.
27. *ibid.*
28. Gustave Flaubert, *A Sentimental Education*, trans. Robert Baldick (London: Penguin, 1964) 60.

29. *Theory of the Novel* 125.
30. *ibid.*
31. Stéphane Mallarmé, *Divagations*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard UP, 2009).
32. Charles Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil*, trans. James McGowan (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998) 167; all further quotations from “Paysage” refer to this page.
33. There is some debate as to exactly which street disturbance is being referred to in the poem. For an enlightening discussion of these debates, one that makes the intriguing claim that the city described may well be Lyon and not Paris, see R.D.E. Burton, “Baudelaire and Lyon: a Reading of ‘Paysage,’” *Nottingham French Studies* 28.1 (March 1989) 26-38.
34. J.A. Hiddleston, *Baudelaire and the Art of Memory* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999) 183.
35. See *Theory of the Novel* 74-5.
36. This argument is made with some force in Jerome J. McGann, *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1985).
37. “Around me roared the nearly deafening street / Tall, slim, in mourning, in majestic grief, / A woman passed me, with a splendid hand / Lifting and swinging her festoon and hem // Nimble and stately, statuesque of leg. / I, shaking like an addict, from her eye, / Black sky, spawner of hurricanes, drank in / Sweetness that fascinates, pleasure that kills.” Charles Baudelaire, “À Une Passante,” *The Flowers of Evil* 189.
38. Fredric Jameson, “Baudelaire as Modernist and Postmodernist,” *The Modernist Papers* (London: Verso 2007) 223-238.
39. I have provided the translation of the poem that Fredric Jameson uses in his discussion. Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du Mal: The Complete Text of the Flowers of Evil in a New Translation*, trans. Richard Howard (Boston: David R. Godine, 1982) 61-2.
40. Jameson, “Baudelaire” 225.
41. “Baudelaire” 227-228.
42. “Baudelaire” 229.
43. *The Flowers of Evil* 117. I here revert to McGowan’s translation, as Jameson does not discuss the second part of the poem.
44. “Baudelaire” 228.
45. “Baudelaire” 229.
46. Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2002) 135-155.
47. I begin such a project in my forthcoming *Speculative Formalism: Literature, Theory, and the Critical Present* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 2016).
48. *Theory of the Novel* 29.
49. See note 38.