GÉRARD GENETTE

# THE ARCHITEXT

## AN INTRODUCTION

TRANSLATED
BY JANE E. LEWIN

WITH A FOREWORD BY ROBERT SCHOLES

A QUANTUM BOOK

# The Architext

ABOUT

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Gérard Genette

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## An Introduction

Translated by Jane E. Lewin

*With a Foreword by Robert Scholes*

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# *Foreword to the English-language Edition*

Poetics is a very old and very young "science": the little it "knows" it would perhaps sometimes be better off forgetting. In a sense, that is all I wanted to say—and that too, of course, is still too much.

(G. Genette)

In the heaven of ideas, the tortoise of form always outruns the hare of content. Here on earth things are more complicated, but here, too, the tortoise regularly outlasts the hare. For over two decades now, Gérard Genette has persisted in formal and rhetorical studies, while ideological storms raged around him and critical fashions arrived with fanfares and departed with whimpers. After poststructuralism, even after deconstructuralism, the formal core of structural studies—which a rash critic once called the "low structuralism" of Genette—remains. If literature is to be studied, discussed, criticized, it will always need poetics—and poetics is what this little book is all about.

As my epigraph indicates, taken, as it is, from near the end of Genette's discussion, this book is "little" in more than one sense. It is brief, of course, consisting of one

major article, followed by some second thoughts and a dialogue in which its methodology is challenged and gently defended. But it is also unpretentious, claiming for poetics neither truth nor intrinsic worth. What Genette does claim for poetics is only that criticism cannot get along without it. What he shows, however, in the course of his discussion, is that the history of poetics is one of astonishing confusions and misprisions, in which every sort of later idea and attitude has been regularly foisted upon the founders of poetic thought, Plato and Aristotle. As one of those whom Genette cites as guilty of such error, I can do no better than plead *nolo contendere*. Since I first read his words, upon this book's publication in France some years ago, I have mended my ways.

Specifically, one of the important things Genette demonstrates here is that many later critics have attributed to Aristotle a poetic doctrine that is mainly Romantic in its origins, thus sowing confusions that still confound us. Not content merely to show the results of this process, Genette sketches the evolution of this misprision with masterful learning and lucidity. From the ancient through the medieval, Renaissance, Enlightenment, and Romantic and on to the modern theories of literary genre, Genette traces the process by which new forms of textuality are regularly justified by being assigned ancient lineages, the thicket of poetics thus continually made denser and more difficult to penetrate. His project is to prune this thicket and blaze trails through it.

He also offers, with proper diffidence and disarming wit, some advice for the continuation of poetic thinking. Challenging himself in a closing dialogue to justify this practice, his interlocutor asks why this should not be left "to literary historians (it's their job, certainly)." Genette's response is to point out that all empirical studies depend upon definition of their objects in order to

function, and such definition requires thought precisely to avoid the pitfalls of traditional terms that conceal and confuse their objects over time. The history of literature is a real history, with certain irreversible elements in it, but it is "guided" to a great extent by poetic possibilities that can be described formally only by poetics. We need poetics because we cannot make sense of any individual text without situating it in terms of other texts and in terms of a repertory of textual possibilities. Even the study of literary transformation, Genette maintains, "implies the examination, and thus the taking into account, of continuities."

As a proposal for continuing poetics, Genette suggests we recognize that what we call "genres" are best described as the intersections of certain modes of enunciation and certain thematic concerns. The modes are basic to the pragmatics of language itself (like narration) and are therefore extremely persistent across time and cultures. Themes, however, though also persistent (love, death), are greatly marked by cultural and historical situations. Persistent or durable links between particular modes and themes give us literary genres or "architexts." The study of these is what, since Aristotle, we have called "poetics"—an old science, as Genette says, and also a young one, because it must always be renewed. What Genette has accomplished, in a text no larger than Aristotle's own, is to disencumber poetics of centuries of accretions. He gives it to us again, clarified and refreshed, in this book. Among other things, he reminds us here of why Aristotle's *Poetics* has itself proved so durable, and in doing so he has given us a book that belongs, in courses and on shelves, right next to its great architextural predecessor.

—Robert Scholes

# *Translator's Note*

In English, the words *epic*, *lyric*, and *narrative* function both as nouns and as adjectives; unless the context provides a decisive "adjectivity" cue, the reader processes each of those words as a noun. In this book, however, it is essential for the reader to recognize when the noun is meant and when the adjective. (French makes the distinction: *l'épopée/épique, le lyrique/lyrique, le récit/narratif.*) Thus, whenever the adjectival form is meant but the context lacks a strong adjectivity cue (a cue that leads the reader to process the word instantaneously as an adjective), I have used *epical* instead of *epic*, have used *lyrical* instead of *lyric*, and have placed "[*narratif*]" immediately after *narrative*. (In a few places, the context makes it appropriate to modify this practice in one direction or the other.)

For the English translation, the author modified the original French text in a handful of places.

# I

We are all familiar with that passage in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* in which Stephen explains to his friend Lynch "his" theory of the three major aesthetic forms: "The lyrical form, the form wherein the artist presents his image in immediate relation to himself; the epical form, the form wherein he presents his image in mediate relation to himself and to others; the dramatic form, the form wherein he presents his image in immediate relation to others."[1] This tripartition in itself is not especially original, as Joyce was well aware, for in the first version of the episode he added ironically that Stephen was expressing himself "with a naïf air of discovering novelties," even though "his Esthetic was in the main 'applied Aquinas.'"[2]

I don't know whether Saint Thomas ever proposed such a tripartition—or even whether Joyce was really suggesting he did—but I have noted here and there that, for some time, the tripartition has been readily attributed to Aristotle, even to Plato. In her study of the history of the division into genres, Irene Behrens cited an example of the attribution from the pen of Ernest Bovet

1. James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916; rpt. New York: Viking, 1966), 214.

2. *Stephen Hero* (New York: New Directions, 1944), 77.

("Aristotle having distinguished among the lyric, epic, and dramatic genres . . . ") and immediately refuted it, while asserting that it was already very widespread.[3] But, as we will see, her clarification did not keep others from repeating the offense—undoubtedly in part because the error (or, rather, the retrospective illusion that is in question here) is deeply rooted in our conscious, or unconscious, literary minds. Besides, her clarification itself was not entirely untainted by the tradition she was denouncing, for she wondered in all seriousness how it came about that the traditional tripartition did not appear in Aristotle, and she found one possible reason in the fact that Greek lyricism was too closely associated with music to be included within poetics. But tragedy was just as closely associated with music; and lyric is absent from Aristotle's *Poetics* for a much more basic reason—a reason that needs only to be perceived for the question itself to lose any kind of relevance.

But not, apparently, any raison d'être; we do not easily forgo projecting onto the founding text of classical poetics a fundamental tenet of "modern" poetics (which actually, as we will often see, really means *romantic* poetics), and perhaps the theoretical consequences of the projection are unfortunate. For by usurping that remote ancestry, the relatively recent theory of the "three major genres" not only lays claim to ancientness, and thus to an appearance or presumption of being eternal and therefore self-evident; it also misappropriates for the

3. Ernest Bovet, *Lyrisme, épopée, drame: une loi de l'évolution littéraire expliquée par l'évolution générale* (Paris: Colin, 1911), 12; Irene Behrens, *Die Lehre von der Einteilung der Dichtkunst, vornehmlich vom 16. bis 19. Jahrhundert: Studien zur Geschichte der poetischen Gattungen*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie, no. 92 (Halle: Niemeyer, 1940).

benefit of its three generic institutions a natural foundation that Aristotle, and Plato before him, had established, perhaps more legitimately, for something very different. This knot of confusions, quid pro quos, and unnoticed substitutions that has lain at the heart of Western poetics for several centuries is what I want to try to untangle a bit.

But first, not for the pedantic pleasure of finding fault with some very bright minds but to illustrate, by their examples, the pervasiveness of this *lectio facilior*, here are a few other, more recent occurrences of it. In Austin Warren:

> Aristotle and Horace are our classical texts for genre theory. From them, we think of tragedy and epic as the characteristic (as well as the two major) kinds. But Aristotle at least is also aware of other and more fundamental distinctions—between drama, epic, and lyric. . . . The three major kinds are already, by Plato and Aristotle, distinguished according to "manner of imitation" (or "representation"): lyric poetry is the poet's own *persona*; in epic poetry (or the novel) the poet partly speaks in his own person, as narrator, and partly makes his characters speak in direct discourse (mixed narrative); in drama, the poet disappears behind his cast of characters. . . . Aristotle's *Poetics* . . . roughly nominates epic, drama, and lyric ("melic") poetry as the basic kinds of poetry.

Northrop Frye, more vague or more prudent: "We have the three generic terms drama, epic, and lyric, derived from *the Greeks*." More circumspect still, or more evasive, Philippe Lejeune assumes that the point of departure for the theory was "the threefold division by *the Ancients* among the epical, the dramatic, and the lyri-

cal." Not so, though, Robert Scholes, who specifies that Frye's system "begins with his acceptance of the basic *Aristotelian* division into lyric, epic, and dramatic forms." And even less so Hélène Cixous, who, commenting on Stephen's speech, pinpoints its source thus: "A classical tripartite division derived from Aristotle's *Poetics*, 1447 a, b, 1456–62 a and b." As for Tzvetan Todorov, he has the triad go back to Plato and to Diomedes' definitive systematization of Plato:

> From Plato to Goethe and Jakobson to Emil Staiger, attempts have been made to divide literature into three categories and to consider these as the fundamental or even the natural forms of literature. . . . Systematizing Plato in the fourth century, Diomedes defined three basic genres: one including the works in which only the author speaks, another including the works in which only the characters speak, and a third including the works in which both author and characters speak.

In 1938 Mikhail Bakhtin, without formulating the attribution in question quite so precisely, asserted that the theory of genres "has not, up to our own time, been able to add anything substantial to what Aristotle had already done. His poetics remains the immutable foundation of the theory of genres, although sometimes this foundation is so deeply buried that we no longer discern it."[4]

4. "Literary Genres," in René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1956), 217, 223; Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (1957; rpt. New York: Atheneum, 1967), 246; Philippe Lejeune, *Le Pacte autobiographique* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), 330; Robert Scholes, *Structuralism in Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 124; Hélène Cixous, *The Exile of James Joyce*, trans.

Evidently Bakhtin is unaware of the massive silence the *Poetics* maintains on the subject of lyric genres, and paradoxically his mistake demonstrates the very ignorance of the foundation of the theory of genres that he thinks he is denouncing. For what is important, as we will see, is the retrospective illusion by which modern (preromantic, romantic, and postromantic) literary theorists blindly project their own contributions onto Aristotle, or Plato, and thus "bury" their own difference—their own modernity.

That attribution, so widespread today, is not entirely an invention of the twentieth century. We find it as early as the eighteenth century, in a chapter that Abbé Batteux added to his essay *Les Beaux-Arts réduits à un même principe* (The Fine Arts Obeying One Law). The title of this chapter is almost more than we could have hoped for: "Que cette doctrine est conforme à celle d'Aristote" (That This Doctrine Is in Keeping with Aristotle's).[5] The doctrine in question is Batteux's general theory on "the imitation of fair nature" as the sole "law" of the fine arts, including poetry; but for the most part the

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Sally A. J. Purcell (New York: David Lewis, 1972), 625; Oswald Ducrot and Tzvetan Todorov, *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Sciences of Language*, trans. Catherine Porter (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 153; Mikhail Bakhtin, *Esthétique et théorie du roman*, trans. Daria Olivier (Paris: Gallimard, 1978), 445. All emphases on attributions are mine.

5. This chapter first appeared in the 1764 reprint of the essay (originally published in 1746) in the first volume of *Les Principes de littérature*. At that time it was only the end of a chapter, "La Poésie des vers," that was added on. In the posthumous edition of 1824, this ending was made into a separate chapter, with a title taken from the text of the material added in 1764.

chapter concentrates on demonstrating that Aristotle divides the art of poetry into three genres or, as Batteux called them, borrowing a term from Horace, three basic *colors*. "These three colors are those of the dithyramb, or lyric poetry; the epic, or narrative poetry; and finally the drama, or tragedy and comedy." The abbé himself quotes the passage in the *Poetics* on which he bases his claim, and the quotation is worth repeating, in his own translation: "Les mots composés de plusieurs mots conviennent plus spécialement aux dithyrambes, les mots inusités aux épopées, et les tropes aux drames" (The words made up of several words are more especially appropriate to dithyrambs, rare words to epics, and tropes to dramas). This comes at the end of chapter 22, which focuses on questions of *lexis* or, as we would say, style. As one can see, at issue here is the appropriate linkage between genres and stylistic methods—although Batteux stretches Aristotle's terms a bit in that direction by translating *ta héroika* (heroic verses, that is, dactylic hexameter) as "epic" and *ta iambeia* (iambic verses, and more particularly, no doubt, the trimeters of tragic or comic dialogue) as "drama."

Let us overlook this slight accentuation: here Aristotle indeed seems to apportion three stylistic features among three genres or forms (dithyramb, epic, dramatic dialogue). What we still need to evaluate is the equivalence Batteux establishes between dithyramb and lyric poetry. Today the dithyramb is not a well-known form, for almost no examples of it remain; but scholars generally describe it as a "choral song in honor of Dionysus" and thus readily classify it among the "lyric forms."[6] They do not, however, go as far as Batteux,

6. Jacqueline de Romilly, *La Tragédie grecque* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1970), 12.

who says that "nothing corresponds better to our lyric poetry," an assertion that gives short shrift to, for example, the odes of Pindar or Sappho. But as it happens, Aristotle does not mention the dithyramb anywhere else in the *Poetics*, except to refer to it as a forerunner of tragedy.[7] In the *Homeric Problems*, he specifies that the form was originally narrative and later became "mimetic"—that is, dramatic.[8] As for Plato, he mentions the dithyramb as the consummate example of poetry that is . . . purely narrative.[9]

Nothing there, then, authorizes us to claim that *in Aristotle (or Plato)* the dithyramb illustrates the lyric "genre"—quite the contrary. The passage Batteux cites is the only one in all the *Poetics* he could have invoked to give Aristotle's sanction to the illustrious triad. The distortion is flagrant, and the point at which it is applied is significant. To appreciate the significance more fully,

7. 1449 a.

8. 19.918 b–919.

9. *Republic* 394 c. "It seems that at the beginning of the fifth century, the lyric song in honor of Dionysus may have dealt with sacred or heroic subjects more or less associated with the god; thus, according to the fragments of Pindar that have been preserved, the dithyramb appears to have been a piece of heroic narration, sung by a choir, without dialogue, and leading into an invocation to Dionysus or sometimes even to other divinities. Plato must be alluding to this type of composition rather than to the dithyramb of the fourth century, which was profoundly modified by the mixing of musical modes and the introduction of lyric solos" (Roselyne Dupont-Roc, "Mimesis et énonciation," in *Ecriture et théorie poétiques: lectures d'Homère, Eschyle, Platon, Aristote* [Paris: Presses de l'Ecole normale supérieure, 1976], 8). Cf. Arthur Wallace Pickard-Cambridge, *Dithyramb, Tragedy, and Comedy* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1927).

we must once again return to the source—that is, to the system of genres that Plato conceived and Aristotle developed. I say "system of genres" as a provisional concession to the vulgate, but we will soon see that the term is incorrect and that something entirely different is involved.

## II

In the third book of the *Republic*, Plato justifies his well-known decision to expel poets from the state with two sets of considerations. The first bears on the content (*logos*) of the poets' works, which basically should be moralizing (though all too often it is not): the poet should not represent shortcomings, especially in gods and heroes, and should certainly not promote shortcomings by representing virtue as miserable or vice as triumphant. The second bears on the "form" (*lexis*), meaning the *mode of representation*.[10] Every poem is a narrative (*diègèsis*) of past, present, or future events; narrative in this broad sense can take three forms: it can be purely narrative (*haplè diègèsis*), it can be mimetic (*dia mimèséôs*—in other words, as in the theater, by way of dialogue between characters), or it can be "mixed" (in

10. Of course the terms *logos* and *lexis* do not a priori have this antithetical value; out of context, the most faithful translations would be "discourse" and "diction." It is Plato himself who constructs the opposition (392 c) and glosses it as *ha lekteon* ("the matter of speech") and *hós lekteon* ("the manner of speech"). Subsequently, as we know, rhetoric limits *lexis* to the meaning "style." [Translator's note: Translations of Plato are from the Loeb edition.]

other words, in reality alternating—sometimes narrative and sometimes dialogue, as in Homer). Here I will not go back over the details of Plato's demonstration[11] or his well-known devaluing of the mimetic and mixed modes, which is one of his main grounds for indicting poets (the other, of course, is the immorality of their subjects). I simply wish to point out the correspondence between the three modes of *lexis* distinguished by Plato and what will later be called the poetic "genres": the pure mimetic corresponds to tragedy and comedy, the mixed to epic, and the pure narrative to—"especially" (*malista pou*)—dithyramb (the only illustration). The whole "system" comes down to that. Clearly, Plato here is considering only the forms of poetry that is "narrative" in the broad sense—poetry that the subsequent tradition, after Aristotle, will more readily call (inverting the terms) "mimetic" or *representational*: poetry that "reports" events, real or fictive. Plato deliberately leaves out all nonrepresentational poetry—and thus, above all, what we call lyric poetry—and a fortiori all other forms of literature (including, of course, any possible "representation" in prose, like our novel or modern theater). An exclusion not only in fact but indeed in principle, for again, the representation of events is here the very definition of poetry: there is no poem except a representational one. Plato obviously was not unaware of lyric poetry, but he excludes it here with a deliberately restrictive definition—a restriction perhaps ad hoc, since it facilitates the banning of poets (except

11. I discuss them in *Figures of Literary Discourse*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 128–33; and *Narrative Discourse*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 162–70.

lyric poets?), but a restriction that, via Aristotle, will become—and for centuries will remain—the basic tenet of classical poetics.

Indeed, the first page of the *Poetics* clearly defines poetry as the art of imitation in verse (more exactly, "by rhythm, language, or 'harmony'" [1447 a]), explicitly excluding imitation in prose (the mimes of Sophron, the Socratic dialogues) and nonimitative verse—and making no mention at all of nonimitative prose, such as oratory, on which the *Rhetoric*, for its part, focuses.[12] To illustrate nonimitative verse Aristotle selects the work of Empedocles, and more generally any "treatise on medicine or natural science . . . brought out in verse" (1447 b)—in other words, didactic poetry, which he rejects despite what he calls a widespread opinion ("the name of poet is by custom given to the author"). To Aristotle, as we know, "it would be right to call . . . [Empedocles] physicist rather than poet," even though Empedocles uses the same meter as Homer. As for the poems that we would call lyric (for example, those of Sappho or Pindar), neither here nor elsewhere in the *Poetics* does Aristotle mention them; they are plainly outside his field, as they were outside Plato's. The subsequent subdivisions will thus be brought to bear only within the strictly circumscribed area of representational poetry.

Their basis is an intersecting of categories that are directly connected to the very fact of representation: the

12. [Translator's note.] Throughout, translations of the *Poetics* are S. H. Butcher's (1895; rev. 1911; rpt. in *Criticism: The Major Texts*, ed. Walter Jackson Bate [New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1952]). All references to the *Poetics* are given in the text.

object imitated (the question *what?*) and the manner of imitation (the question *how?*). The object imitated—here we have a new restriction—consists solely of human actions, or more precisely of human beings in action, who can be represented as superior to (*beltionas*), equal to (*kat'hèmas*), or inferior to (*kheironas*) "us" (1448 a)[13]—that is, no doubt, to ordinary people. The middle group will receive very little attention, so the criterion of content (the object imitated) comes down to the contrast between superior and inferior heroes. As for the manner of imitation, it consists either of telling (the Platonic *haplè diègèsis*) or of "present[ing] all [the] characters as living and moving before us" (1448 a)—that is, setting them on stage moving about and speaking (the Platonic *mimèsis*, or dramatic representation). Here again we see that an intermediate class—the Platonic mixed class—has disappeared, at least as a taxonomic principle. Apart from that disappearance, what

13. The translation and therefore the interpretation of these terms obviously involve the entire interpretation of this aspect of the *Poetics*. Their usual meaning is clearly moral, as is the context of their first appearance in this chapter: characters are distinguished by vice (*kakia*) and virtue (*arètè*). The later classical tradition tends rather to interpret them in social terms, with tragedy (and epic) portraying characters of high rank and comedy characters of low rank; and it is certainly true that the Aristotelian theory of the tragic hero, which we will come upon later, is not consistent with a purely moral definition of the hero's excellence. "Superior"/"inferior" is a prudent compromise, perhaps too prudent, but one hesitates to have Aristotle rank an Oedipus or a Medea with heroes who are "better" than the average person. As for Hardy's [French] translation (Paris: Les Belles Lettres), it gets enmeshed in incoherence from the start by trying both renderings within fifteen lines of each other.

Aristotle calls "the manner . . . of imitation" (1447 a) is exactly equivalent to what Plato called *lexis*. This is not yet a system of genres; the most exact term for designating this category is undoubtedly the term—used in the [Butcher] translation—*mode*. Strictly speaking, we are dealing not with "form" in the traditional sense, as in the contrast between verse and prose or between different types of verse, but with *situations of enunciating*. To use Plato's terms, in the narrative mode the poet speaks in his own name, whereas in the dramatic mode the characters themselves speak—or, more precisely, the poet speaks disguised as so many characters.

In the first chapter Aristotle distinguishes in principle three types of differentiation among the arts of imitation: differentiation by the object imitated and by the mode of imitation (the two we are concerned with here), but also differentiation by the "medium" (in [Butcher's] translation [1447 a]; literally, the question "in what?" in the sense of one's expressing oneself "in gestures" or "in words," "in Greek" or "in English," "in prose" or "in verse," "in pentameter" or "in trimeter," etc.). This third type corresponds best to what our tradition calls *form*; but it receives no real attention in the *Poetics*, whose system of genres comprises by and large only objects and modes.

Setting the two "object" categories in cross-relation to the two "mode" categories thus produces a grid with four classes of imitation, corresponding precisely to what the classical tradition will call *genres*. The poet can recount or set on stage the actions of superior characters, recount or set on stage the actions of inferior characters.[14] The superior-dramatic defines tragedy, the

14. With respect to level of dignity (or morality), Aristotle clearly does not differentiate between characters and actions, viewing them no doubt as indissolubly linked—in fact he dis-

superior-narrative defines epic; the inferior-dramatic corresponds to comedy, the inferior-narrative corresponds to a genre that is less clear-cut—one that Aristotle leaves unnamed and illustrates sometimes by the "parodies" (*parôdiai*), no longer extant, of Hegemon and Nicochares (1448 a) and sometimes by a *Margites* attributed to Homer (1448 b), which he expressly declares is to comedies what the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are to tragedies (1449 a). This slot, therefore, is obviously the one for comic narration, which seems to have originally been illustrated—whatever we should take that to mean—basically by parodies of epics (the mock heroic *Batrachomyomachie* could, rightly or wrongly, give us

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cusses characters only as carriers of the action. Corneille seems to have been the first to break that bond, inventing in 1650 the mixed subgenre of "heroic comedy" for *Don Sanche d'Aragon* (a nontragic action in a noble setting). His *Pulchérie*, 1671, and *Tite et Bérénice*, 1672, are other, later examples. In his *Discours du poème dramatique*, 1660, he justifies that dissociation with an explicit criticism of Aristotle: "Dramatic poetry, according to him, is an imitation of actions, and he stops here [at the beginning of the *Poetics*] with the rank of the characters, not saying what those actions should be. In any case, his definition was consistent with the practice then in vogue, when only characters of inferior rank were allowed to speak in comedy. His definition is not entirely appropriate in our time, however, when even kings can figure in comedy as long as their deeds do not raise them above it. When one sets on stage a simple love story among kings and they endanger neither themselves nor their realms, I do not think that even though the characters are illustrious, the action is sufficiently so to rise to the level of tragedy" (*Œuvres de Pierre Corneille*, ed. Charles Marty-Laveaux [Paris: Hachette, 1862–68], 1:23–24). The inverse dissociation (a tragic action in an everyday setting) will, in the next century, produce bourgeois drama.

some idea of these). The Aristotelian genre system, then, can be depicted like this:

| MODE / OBJECT | Dramatic | Narrative [*narratif*] |
|---|---|---|
| Superior | tragedy | epic |
| Inferior | comedy | parody |

As we know only too well, the remainder of the *Poetics* will deploy on this grid a succession of abandonments or deadly depreciations: the inferior-narrative will be mentioned no more, and comedy very little. The two high genres will be left face-to-face in an unequal match because, after setting forth this taxonomic framework, the *Poetics* (at least all but a few pages of what remains of it) turns out to be mainly a theory of tragedy. That outcome in itself does not concern us. Let us at least note that this triumph of tragedy is not solely the effect of incompleteness or mutilation but results from explicit and motivated attributions of higher value. First, of course, the superiority of the dramatic mode over the narrative (the well-known reversal of Plato's prejudice), a superiority proclaimed apropos of Homer, one of whose merits is that as narrator he intervenes as little as possible in his poem and makes himself as much of an "imitator" (that is, a dramatist) as an epic poet can be, letting his characters speak as often as possible (1460 a) (this commendation shows, incidentally, that although Aristotle omitted the category, he was no less aware than Plato of the "mixed" nature of Homeric narration, a fact whose consequences I will return to).[15]

15. In 1448 b, Aristotle goes so far as to call the Homeric epics "dramatic . . . imitation" (*mimèseis dramatikas*), and ap-

Second, the formal superiority of tragedy's variety of meters and its inclusion of "music and scenic effects" (1462 a). Third, the intellectual superiority of tragedy for its "vividness of impression in reading as well as in representation" (1462 a). Fourth and fifth, the aesthetic superiority of tragedy for its concentration and unity (1462 b) and, more surprising, the thematic superiority of the tragic object.

More surprising because theoretically, as we have seen, the opening pages of the *Poetics* attribute to the two genres objects that are not only equal but identical—namely, the representation of superior heroes. This equality is proclaimed again (for the last time) in 1449 b: "Epic poetry *agrees with* [*èkoloutèsen*] Tragedy in so far as it is an imitation in verse of characters of a higher type." Then comes the reminder of the differences in form (epic's uniform meter versus tragedy's varying meter), the difference in mode, and the difference in "length" (tragedy's action enclosed within the famous unity of time—one revolution of the sun). Finally, the officially granted equality of object is surreptitiously denied: "Of their constituent parts some are common to both, some peculiar to Tragedy. Whoever,

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ropos of the *Margites* he uses the expression "dramatising the ludicrous" (*to géloion dramatopoièsas*). However, these very strong terms do not prevent him from keeping those works in the general category of narrative (*mimeisthai apangellonta*, 1448 a). And we should bear in mind that he does not apply these terms to the epic in general, but to Homer only (*monos*, in 1448 b as in 1460 a). For a more detailed analysis of the reasons for this praise of Homer and, more generally, of the difference between the Platonic and Aristotelian definitions of Homeric mimesis, see Jean Lallot, "La *mimèsis* selon Aristote et l'excellence d'Homère," in *Ecriture et théorie poétiques*, 15–23. From our viewpoint these differences pose no problem.

therefore, knows what is good or bad Tragedy, knows also about Epic poetry: for all the elements of an Epic poem are found in Tragedy, but the elements of a Tragedy are not all found in the Epic poem." The placing of higher value, in the proper sense of the phrase, leaps out at the reader, for this passage attributes an automatic superiority if not to the tragic poet then at least to the connoisseur of tragedies, by virtue of the principle "whoever can do more can do less." The reasons for this superiority may still seem obscure or abstruse: tragedy allegedly includes, with no concession of reciprocity, "constituent parts" (*mérè*) that epic does not include. What does all this mean?

Literally, no doubt, that of the six "parts" of tragedy (plot, character, diction, thought, spectacle, and song [1450 a]), the last two are specific to it. But aside from these technical considerations, the comparison intimates even at this point that the initial definition common to the objects of both genres will not completely suffice (to say the least) to define the object of tragedy—an intimation borne out a few lines later by this second definition, which has been authoritative for centuries: "Tragedy then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions" (1449 b).

As everyone knows, the theory of tragic *catharsis* set forth in the final phrase of that definition is not among the clearest, and its obscurity has supported multitudes of perhaps pointless exegeses. For us, in any case, the important thing is not the effect (whether psychological

or moral) of the two emotions of tragedy but the very presence of these emotions in the definition of the genre, as well as the set of specific features Aristotle designates as necessary to their production and therefore to the existence of a tragedy that is in keeping with that definition: an unexpected (*para tèn doxan*) and amazing (*thaumaston*) train of events, as when "coincidences . . . have an air of design" (1452 a); "peripeteia" or "reversal" of the action, as when behavior produces an outcome that is the reverse of what has been anticipated (1452 a); "recognition" of persons whose identities have hitherto been unknown or concealed (1452 a); misfortune suffered by a hero who is neither wholly innocent nor wholly guilty, caused not by a real crime but by a tragic flaw (*hamartia*) (1453 a); violence committed (or, better, on the verge of being committed, but prevented at the last moment by the recognition) between people dear to each other, preferably bound by ties of blood but unaware of the nature of their ties (1453 b); and so on.[16] All these criteria, which mark the actions of *Oedipus Rex* or the *Cresphontes* as the most perfect tragic actions and Euripedes as the author who is most tragic, eminently tragic, or especially tragic (*tragikotatos*) (1453 a), certainly constitute a new definition of tragedy—one we cannot wholly dismiss merely by calling it less extensive and more detailed than the earlier definition, for some of the incompatibilities are a little more difficult to reconcile. One example is the idea of a tragic hero

16. Chapters 9–14; a little further on (1459 b), to be sure, Aristotle restores the balance somewhat by granting to epic the same constituent "parts" that tragedy has, "except song and scenery," including "Reversals of Intention, Recognitions, and Tragic Incidents." But the basic motif of the tragic—fear and pity—remains alien to epic.

who is "neither entirely good, nor entirely evil" (according to Racine's faithful paraphrase in the preface to *Andromaque*) but basically *fallible* ("very far from being perfect, he must always have some defect," as the preface to *Britannicus* extends the idea—correctly, in my view) or not clear-sighted enough or—and this amounts to the same thing—*too clear-sighted* (like Oedipus,[17] who in Hölderlin's famous and inspired verse has "one eye too many") to avoid the traps set by fate.[18] That idea does not square well with the earlier decree of a human nature superior to the average, unless this superiority is to be deprived of any moral or intellectual dimension, which would be rather incompatible with the ordinary meaning of the adjective *beltiôn*, as we have seen. Another example is Aristotle's requirement that the action be capable of arousing fear and pity regardless of whether it is shown on stage or merely narrated (1453 b). Here he certainly seems to admit that the tragic subject can be dissociated from the dramatic mode and entrusted simply to narration, without thereby becoming an epic subject.

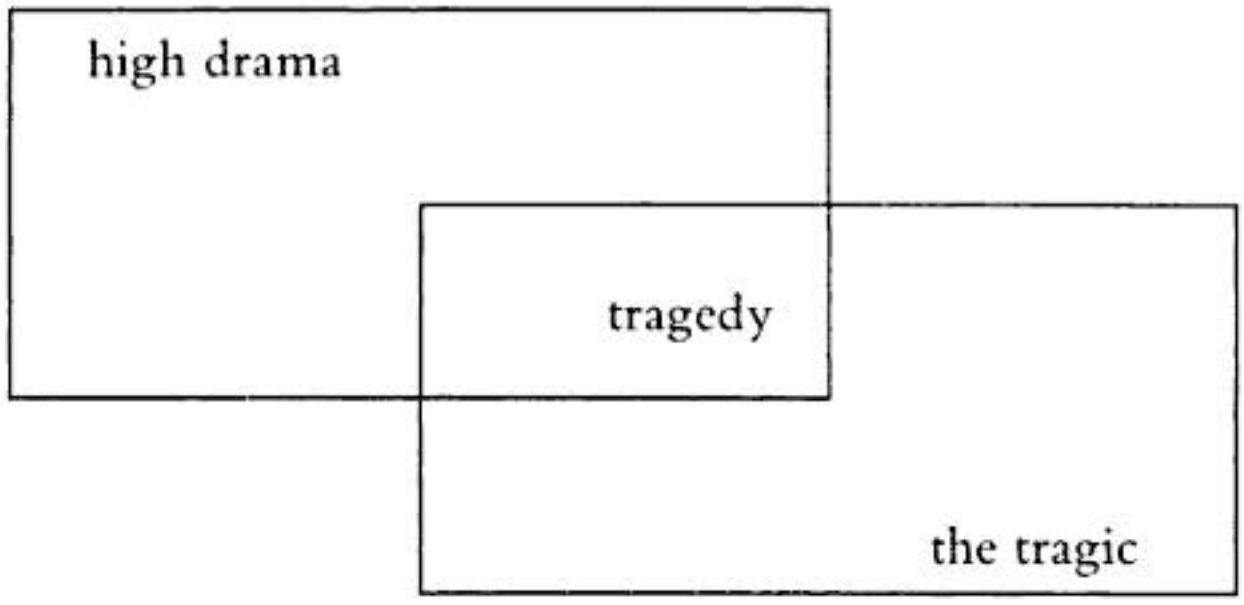
17. *Too clear-sighted* because, like Laius before him, *too well informed* (by the oracle). And so, in any case, *too farsighted* and *too careful*; that is the main theme, tragic here because the issue is death, but comic in other works (*L'Ecole des femmes*, *Le Barbier de Séville*) where the issue is only the mortification of an old fool or the "useless" precaution—useless and even *harmful* or, to put it in terms more appropriate in this context, *disastrous* or *fatal*.

18. *The Complete Plays of Jean Racine*, trans. Samuel Solomon (New York: Random House, 1967), 1:141 (*Andromaque*), 1:289 (*Britannicus*). Friedrich Hölderlin, "In lieblicher Bläue," lines 75–76.

So the tragic can exist apart from tragedy, just as there are doubtless tragedies that lack the tragic or that in any case are less tragic than others. Robortello, in his Commentary of 1548, is of the opinion that the conditions laid down in the *Poetics* are realized only in *Oedipus Rex*, and he resolves this doctrinal difficulty by maintaining that some of those conditions are necessary not to the nature of a tragedy but only to its perfection.[19] This jesuitical distinction would perhaps have satisfied Aristotle, for it maintains the apparent unity of the concept of tragedy across the variable geometry of its definitions. Actually, of course, there are two distinct realities here. One, laid down in the opening pages of the *Poetics*, is simultaneously modal and thematic: it is the high or serious drama, in contrast to the high narrative

19. Reported by Corneille in his *Discours de la tragédie* (1660, in *Œuvres*, 1:59). Seven pages later, he applies that distinction to two of the Aristotelian requirements: the semi-innocence of the hero and the existence of close ties between the antagonists. "When I say," he adds, "that these two conditions are only for perfect tragedies, I do not mean that tragedies in which they do not obtain are imperfect; that would amount to making these two conditions an absolute requirement, and I would be contradicting myself. But by 'perfect tragedies' I mean those of the most sublime and affecting kind, so that tragedies lacking in one or the other, or both, of these two conditions, even if they are regular in all other respects, do not fall short of perfection for their kind, although they remain at a less elevated rank and do not approach the beauty and brilliance of the others." Here we have a fine example of those quibbles by which, for a short period, one compromised with [*s'accommodait*]—the phrase is Corneille's own (60)—an orthodoxy one was already daring to disrupt in fact, although not yet in words.

(the epic) and to the low, or mirthful, drama (comedy). This generic reality, which embraces the *Persians* as well as *Oedipus Rex*, is traditionally designated *tragedy*, and Aristotle obviously does not consider questioning that designation. The other reality is purely thematic and of an anthropological, rather than poetic, nature: it is the *tragic*—that is, the sense of the irony of fate or the cruelty of the gods; this is what chapters 6–19, for the most part, have in view. These two realities intersect, and the area where they overlap is that of tragedy in the strict (Aristotelian) sense, or tragedy par excellence, fulfilling all the conditions (coincidence, reversal, recognition, etc.) for producing fear and pity, or rather that specific blend of fear and pity that in the theater is aroused by the cruel manifestation of fate.




In terms of a system of genres, tragedy is therefore a thematically defined category within high drama, just as for us vaudeville is a thematically defined category within comedy, or the detective novel a thematically defined category within the novel. This distinction has been obvious to everyone since Diderot, Lessing, or Schlegel, but for centuries it was concealed by the am-

biguity of the word *tragedy*, with its two senses, broad and narrow. Certainly Aristotle espoused both senses in succession without paying much attention to the difference between them—and without suspecting, I hope, the theoretical imbroglio into which, many centuries later, his casualness would throw some literary theorists, entrapped by the confusion and naively bent on applying and having others apply to the whole of a genre the norms he had elucidated for one of its species.

## III

But let us go back to the initial system, which that memorable digression on the tragic transcends but apparently does not repudiate. As we have seen, the system did not and by definition could not assign any place to lyric poetry; but we have also seen that the system overlooked, or seemed in passing to overlook, the Platonic distinction between the pure narrative mode, illustrated by dithyramb, and the mixed mode, illustrated by epic. Or rather, I repeat, Aristotle recognized the mixed nature of the epic mode perfectly well—and *put a higher value on it*. What disappears in his system is the status of the dithyramb and, at the same time, the need to distinguish between pure narrative and impure narrative. From that point on, however weak the justification, epic will be ranked among the narrative genres: after all, a single word of introduction by the poet is ultimately enough to make it narrative, even if everything that follows is dialogue (just as, some twenty-five centuries later, the absence of such an introduction will be enough to establish the "interior monologue"—a proceeding almost as old as narrative—as a full-fledged novelistic "form"). In short, if for Plato epic belonged

to the mixed mode, for Aristotle it belongs to the narrative mode *even though it is basically mixed or impure*, which obviously means that the criterion of purity is no longer relevant.

Something happens there—between Plato and Aristotle—that we have trouble appreciating fully because, for one thing, the dithyrambic corpus is, sadly, missing. But the devastation wrought by time undoubtedly does not bear sole responsibility: Aristotle speaks of that genre as if it is already a thing of the past, and he surely has reasons for overlooking it *although it is narrative*, and not only, from pro-mimetic prejudice, *because it is purely narrative.* And we know well from experience that pure narrative (*telling* without *showing*, in the language of American criticism) is pure possibility, with almost no attempt made to actualize it at the level of a whole work and, a fortiori, at the level of a genre; we would be hard put to name a novella without dialogue, and for the epic or the novel, pure narrative is out of the question.[20] If the dithyramb is a phantom genre, pure narrative is a fictitious mode, or at least a purely "theoretical" one, and Aristotle's abandoning it is *also* a characteristic expression of empiricism.

20. [Translator's note.] In *Nouveau discours du récit* (published four years after *Introduction à l'architexte*), Genette wrote: "[I take this] opportunity to correct a blunder I made in the *Architexte*, where I completely excluded the possibility of a long narrative (epic or novel) without dialogue. The possibility is, however, obvious; and Buffon's principle ('everything that may be, is') should encourage one to be prudent; and (barring a new error) there is not a single line of dialogue in *Mémoires d'Hadrien*" (*Nouveau discours du récit* [Paris: Seuil, 1983], 28; tr. *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, trans. Jane E. Lewin [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988], 42).

What remains, however, if we compare Plato's system of modes with Aristotle's, is the fact that one slot on the chart has been vacated (and promptly lost) along the way. The Platonic triad

| narrative [*narratif*] | mixed | dramatic |
|---|---|---|

has been replaced by the Aristotelian pair

| | narrative [*narratif*] | dramatic |
|---|---|---|

but not by ouster of the mixed; rather, the pure narrative disappears because it is nonexistent, and the mixed—the only narrative left—establishes itself in the place reserved for narrative.

So, the perspicacious reader will say, there is a slot to be filled, and it's easy to guess what happens next, especially when we already know the outcome. But let's not skip too many steps.

## IV

For several centuries, the Platonic-Aristotelian restriction of poetics to the representative will weigh heavily on the theory of genres and keep the theory's adherents in a state of malaise or confusion.[21] The idea of lyric po-

21. For the most part, the historical information that follows is taken from Edmond Faral, *Les Arts poétiques du XIIe et du XIIIe siècle: recherches et documents sur la technique littéraire du*

etry is obviously not unknown to the Alexandrian critics, but it is not made part of the paradigm alongside the ideas of epic and dramatic poetry, and its definition is still purely technical (poems with lyre accompaniment) and restrictive. Aristarchus, in the third to second century B.C., draws up a list of nine lyric poets (including Alcaeus, Sappho, Anacreon, and Pindar), which will long remain canonical and excludes, for example, the iambic and the elegiac distich. Horace, although himself a lyricist and satirist, limits the *Art of Poetry*, in terms of genre, to praising Homer and setting forth the rules of dramatic poetry. In the list of readings in Greek and Latin that Quintilian recommends to the future orator, he mentions, besides history, philosophy, and of course rhetoric, seven poetic genres: epic (which here comprises all kinds of narrative, descriptive, or didactic poems, including those of Hesiod, Theocritus, and Lucretius), tragedy, comedy, elegy (Callimachus, the Latin

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*moyen âge* (Paris: Champion, 1924); Behrens, *Lehre von der Einteilung*; Wellek and Warren, *Theory of Literature*; M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953); Mario Fubini, "Genesi e storia dei generi litterari" (1951), in *Critica e poesia: saggi e discorsi di teoria letteraria* (Bari: Laterza, 1966); René Wellek, "Genre Theory, the Lyric, and *Erlebnis*" (1967), in *Discriminations: Further Concepts of Criticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970); Peter Szondi, "La Théorie des genres poétiques chez F. Schlegel" (1968), in *Poésie et poétique de l'idéalisme allemand*, trans. Jean Bollack, Barbara Cassin, et al. (Paris: Minuit, 1975); Wolfgang V. Ruttkowski, *Die literarischen Gattungen: Reflexionen über eine modifizierte Fundamentalpoetik* (Bern: Francke, 1968); Claudio Guillén, "Literature as System" (1970), in *Literature as System: Essays toward the Theory of Literary History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971).

elegists), iambic (Archilochus, Horace), satire ("tota nostra": Lucilius and Horace), and lyric poetry—this last illustrated by, among others, Pindar, Alcaeus, and Horace. In other words, here the lyric is simply one of several nonnarrative and nondramatic genres and comes down in fact to one form, which is the ode.

But Quintilian's list is obviously not an *art of poetry*, since it includes works in prose. The later attempts at systematization, at the end of antiquity and in the Middle Ages, make great efforts to integrate lyric poetry into the systems of Plato or Aristotle without modifying their categories. Thus Diomedes (late fourth century) rechristens the three Platonic modes "genres" (*genera*) and, after a fashion, apportions among them the "species" (*species*) that we would call genres: the *genus imitativum* (dramatic), in which only the characters speak, comprises the tragic, comic, and satiric species (the last-named is the satiric drama of the early Greek tetralogies, not mentioned by Plato or Aristotle); the *genus ennarativum* (narrative), in which only the poet speaks, comprises the properly narrative, the sententious (gnomic?), and the didactic species; the *genus commune* (mixed), in which poet and characters speak in turn, comprises the species that are heroic (the epic) and . . . lyric (Archilochus and Horace). Proclus (fifth century) omits the mixed category, as Aristotle did, and in the narrative genre he puts—alongside epic—iambic, elegy, and *mélos* (lyricism). John of Garland (thirteenth century) goes back to Diomedes' system.

The sixteenth-century authors of arts of poetry generally forgo constructing systems and are content instead simply to juxtapose species. Thus Peletier du Mans (1555): epigram, sonnet, ode, epistle, elegy, satire, comedy, tragedy, "heroic work"; or Vauquelin de La Fresnaye (1605): epic, elegy, sonnet, iambic, song,

ode, comedy, tragedy, satire, idyll, pastoral; or Sir Philip Sidney (*An Apologie for Poetrie*, about 1580): heroic, lyric, tragic, comic, satiric, iambic, elegiac, pastoral, etc. The main arts of poetry of the classical tradition, from Vida to Rapin, are basically, as we know, commentaries on Aristotle, in which the inexhaustible debate about the comparative merits of tragedy and epic goes on and on, while the emergence in the sixteenth century of new genres (like the heroical-romantic poem, the pastoral novel, the dramatic pastoral, or the tragicomedy, each too easily reducible to the narrative or the dramatic mode) never really alters the picture. In the classical vulgate, the de facto recognition of the various nonrepresentational forms is reconciled, after a fashion, with the maintenance of Aristotelian orthodoxy by means of a convenient distinction between "the major genres" and . . . the others—a distinction to which the arrangement of Boileau's *Art poétique* (1674) perfectly (albeit implicitly) attests: canto 3 deals with tragedy, epic, and comedy, while canto 2, like its sixteenth-century predecessors, strings together idyll, elegy, ode, sonnet, epigram, rondeau, madrigal, ballad, satire, vaudeville, and song, without any comprehensive classification.[22] In the same year, Rapin speaks openly of the distinction and pushes it further:

22. We should remember that cantos 1 and 4 are devoted to transgeneric considerations. And, in passing, that certain misunderstandings, not to say misinterpretations, of "classical doctrine" are due to an improper generalization of specific "precepts" that have become proverbs without context and thus without relevance. For example, everyone knows that "un beau désordre est un effet de l'art" (a fine disorder is an effect of art), but this is a five-foot alexandrine that people readily complete with a "Souvent" (ofttimes) as apocryphal as

> Poetics as a whole can be divided into three different species of perfect Poem—Epic, Tragedy, and Comedy—and these three species can be reduced to only two, one of which consists of action and the other of narration. All the other species that Aristotle mentions [?] can be reduced to those two: Comedy to dramatic Poetry, Satire to Comedy, Ode and Eclogue to heroic Poetry. The Sonnet, the Madrigal, the Epigram, the Rondeau, and the Ballad are but species of imperfect Poetry.[23]

In short, the nonrepresentational genres may choose only between an annexation that enhances their value (satire annexed to comedy and thus to dramatic poetry, ode and eclogue to epic) or a dismissal to outer darkness or, if one prefers, to the limbo of "imperfection." There is undoubtedly no better comment on this segregative assessment than the discouraged avowal René Bray makes when, having studied the classical theories of the "major genres" and then tried to bring together some information on bucolic poetry, elegy, ode, epigram, and satire, he abruptly breaks off: "But let us stop sifting through so barren a doctrine. The theorists were too contemptuous of everything outside the major genres. Tragedy and the heroic poem were all they paid attention to."[24]

Beside—or rather, therefore, beneath—the major narrative and dramatic genres is a cloud of small forms,

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it is evasive. The real beginning of the line is "Chez elle" (with her). With whom? The answer is in canto 2, lines 58–72.

23. *Réflexions sur la poétique* (Paris, 1674); part 2, chapter 1.

24. *La Formation de la doctrine classique en France* (1927; rpt. Paris: Nizet, 1966), 354.

whose inferiority or lack of poetic status is due somewhat to their littleness (real in the case of their dimensions, alleged in the case of their subjects) and much more to the centuries-old exclusion applied to everything that is not "an imitation of men in action." Odes, elegies, sonnets, etc., "imitate" no action, because theoretically all they do, like a speech or a prayer, is express their authors' ideas or feelings, real or fictitious. Consequently, there are only two conceivable ways of promoting them to poetic dignity. The first way is to uphold, while somewhat expanding, the classical dogma of *mimèsis* and strive to show that that type of statement is still, in its own fashion, an "imitation." The second and more radical way is to break with the dogma and proclaim the equal poetic dignity of a nonrepresentational utterance. Today those two movements seem antithetical and logically incompatible. But in fact one will succeed the other and link up with it almost unnoticeably, the former paving the way for the latter while cloaking it, as reforms sometimes break the ground for revolutions.

## V

The idea of federating all the kinds of nonmimetic poetry to establish them as a third party under the common name of lyric poetry is not wholly unknown to the classical period: it is merely marginal and, so to speak, heterodox. The first occurrence of it that Irene Behrens noted is in the work of the Italian Minturno, for whom "poetry is divided into three parts, one of which is called theatrical, the second lyrical, the third epical." Cervantes, in chapter 47 of *Don Quixote*, has his Canon

speak of a fourfold division, with dramatic poetry split into two parts: "The unrestricted range [of books of chivalry] enables the author to show his powers, epic, lyric, tragic, or comic." Milton claims to find in Aristotle, Horace, "and the Italian commentaries of Castelvetro, Tasso, Mazzoni, and others . . . the laws . . . of a true epic . . . , dramatic . . . , [or] lyric" poem—the earliest example, to my knowledge, of our improper attribution. Dryden distinguishes three "ways": dramatic, epic, lyric. Gravina devotes one chapter of his *Ragion poetica* (1708) to epic and dramatic poetry and the next chapter to lyric poetry. Houdar de la Motte, a "modern" in the context of the Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns, compares the three categories and describes himself as "at once an epic, dramatic, and lyric poet." Finally, Baumgarten, in a 1735 text that outlines or prefigures his *Aesthetica*, evokes "the lyrical, the epical, the dramatic and their generic subdivisions."[25] And my enumeration lays no claim to exhaustiveness.

But none of those propositions is truly well grounded and well explained. The earliest effort in that

25. Minturno, *De Poeta* (Venice, 1559); his *Arte poetica* of 1563, in Italian, has the same division. Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, trans. John Ormsby (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., Norton Critical Editions, 1981), 375. John Milton, *Of Education* (1644), in *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., Odyssey Press, 1957), 637. John Dryden, *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1668), in *Selected Works of John Dryden*, ed. William Frost (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1953), 326. Houdar de la Motte, *Réflexions sur la critique*, 2d ed. (Paris: Du Puis, 1716), 166. Baumgarten, *Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus* (1735), section 106.

direction seems to have been made by the Spaniard Francisco Cascales, in his *Tablas poeticas* (1617) and *Cartas philologicas* (1634): lyric poetry, says Cascales apropos of the sonnet, has for its "plot" not an action, as epic and dramatic poetry do, but a thought (*concepto*). This distortion of orthodoxy is significant: the term *plot* (*fábula*) is Aristotelian, and the term *thought* could correspond to the equally Aristotelian term *dianoia*. But the idea that a thought can serve as the plot of anything whatsoever is totally alien to the spirit of the *Poetics*, which explicitly defines plot (*muthos*) as "the arrangement of the incidents" (1450 a)[26] and in which *dianoia* ("the faculty of saying what is possible and pertinent in given circumstances," 1450 b) covers scarcely more than the characters' techniques of argumentation; very logically, therefore, Aristotle dismisses the topic, referring to his study of it in "the Rhetoric, to which inquiry the subject more strictly belongs" (1456 a). Even though some critics, like Northrop Frye,[27] extend the definition to include the thought of the poet himself, obviously all of that cannot constitute a plot in the Aristotelian sense. Cascales is using a vocabulary that is still orthodox to cover an idea that is already as far from orthodox as possible, namely, the idea that a poem, like a discourse or a letter, may have as its subject a thought or feeling that it simply exposes or expresses. Utterly banal today, for centuries this idea remained not unthought of, surely (no literary theorist could be unaware of the immense corpus it covers), but almost systematically repressed because it could not be

26. Cf. 1451 b: "The poet or 'maker' should be the maker of plots rather than of verses; since he is a poet because he imitates, and what he imitates are actions."

27. *Anatomy*, 52–53.

integrated into the system of a poetics founded on the dogma of "imitation."

Batteux's effort—the last effort classical poetics makes to survive by opening itself up to what it has never managed either to ignore or to acknowledge—therefore consists of attempting the impossible: retaining imitation as the sole law of all poetry (as of all the arts) but extending this law to lyric poetry itself. That is his aim in chapter 13, "Sur la poésie lyrique." Batteux begins by admitting that, looked at superficially, lyric poetry "seems to lend itself less than the other species to the general law that reduces everything to imitation." Thus, it is said, the psalms of David, the odes of Pindar and Horace are only "fire, emotion, intoxication . . . a song inspired by joy, admiration, thankfulness . . . a cri de coeur, an outburst in which nature does everything and art nothing." The poet, therefore, is expressing his feelings and imitating nothing. "Which makes two things true: first, that lyric poems are true poems; second, that these poems are not characterized by imitation." But actually, answers Batteux, this pure expression, this true poetry without imitation, is found only in the biblical hymns. God himself dictated them, and God "has no need to imitate; he creates." Poets, on the contrary, who are only human beings,

> have nowhere to turn but to their natural gift, an imagination excited by art, a feigned rapture. That they may have really felt gladness is something to sing about, but for only one or two couplets. If something more extensive is wanted, it is up to art to stitch to that first cloth new feelings resembling the earlier ones. Let nature light the fire; art must at least nourish and sustain it. So the example of

> the prophets, who sang without imitating, proves nothing against poets as imitators.

At least in part, therefore, the feelings expressed by poets are feelings pretended through art, and this part carries the whole, since it shows the *possibility* of expressing fictitious feelings—which, moreover, drama and epic have done right from the start:

> So long as the action [in epic or drama] moves forward, the poetry is epic or dramatic; when the action stops and the poetry portrays nothing except the unique state of the soul, the pure feeling it is experiencing, the poetry in itself is lyric; to be set to song, it need only be given the appropriate form. The monologues of Polyeucte, Camille, and Chimène are lyric fragments; and in that case, why should feeling, which is susceptible of imitation in a drama, not be susceptible of it in an ode? Why can passion be imitated on a stage but not in a song? So there is no exception. All poets have the same object, which is to imitate nature, and all have to proceed in the same manner to imitate it.

Therefore lyric poetry, too, is imitation: it imitates feelings.

> One could consider [it] a species apart, without violating the law that governs the other species. But there is no need to separate them; lyric poetry enters naturally and even necessarily into imitation, with but one difference to characterize and distinguish it: its particular object. The main object of the other species of poetry is actions; lyric poetry focuses completely on feelings: they are its theme, its chief object.

So now lyric poetry is integrated into classical poetics. But, as readers may have observed, that integration entailed two very noticeable distortions in opposite directions. On the one hand, Batteux had to slip silently from a mere *possibility* of fictitious expression to an *essential* fictitiousness of the feelings expressed, had to reduce all lyric poetry to the reassuring model of the tragic monologue, so that he could admit into the heart of all lyric creation that screen of fiction without which the idea of imitation could not be applied to lyric. On the other hand, he had to slip, as Cascales had already done, from the orthodox term *imitation of actions* to a broader term: *imitation*, period. As Batteux himself says, "In epic and dramatic poetry, one imitates actions and customs; in the lyric, one sings of imitated feelings or passions."[28] The asymmetry remains obvious, and with it the surreptitious betrayal of Aristotle. Thus, a supplementary guarantee (or precaution) is indeed necessary in this direction, and that is what lies behind Batteux's addition of the chapter entitled "Que cette doctrine est conforme à celle d'Aristote."

The principle of the operation is simple and already familiar to us: it consists first of deriving from a fairly marginal stylistic comment a tripartition of the poetic genres into dithyramb, epic, and drama, which brings Aristotle to the Platonic point of departure; then of interpreting dithyramb as an example of the lyric genre, which allows one to attribute to the *Poetics* a triad that neither Plato nor Aristotle had ever considered. But we

28. The chapter "Sur la poésie lyrique," at the end. Incidentally, the change from the *concepto* (thought) of Cascales to the *sentiments* (feelings) of Batteux—skipping over the classical silence—is a good measure of the distance between baroque intellectualism and preromantic sentimentalism.

must immediately add that this generic misappropriation has something to be said for it on the level of mode: the initial definition of the pure narrative mode, we should remember, was that the poet constitutes the only enunciating subject, monopolizing speech without ever turning it over to any of his characters. In principle this is what happens in the lyric poem also, except that in lyric, the speech in question is not inherently narrative. If we overlook this proviso and go on to define the three Platonic modes purely in terms of enunciation, we get the following tripartition:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| enunciation reserved for the poet | alternating enunciation | enunciation reserved for the characters |

Defined in this way, the first position can equally well be purely narrative or purely "expressive" or can blend the two functions in any proportion at all. Since, as we noted earlier, no purely narrative genre exists, the first position is just the right place for any kind of genre devoted chiefly to expressing, sincerely or not, ideas or feelings: it is a negative catchall (for everything that is neither narrative nor dramatic),[29] on which the name

29. Mario Fubini, "Genesi e storia," quotes this revealing sentence from an Italian adaptation of Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783; compendiate dal P. Soave, Parma, 1835, 211): "People commonly distinguish three genres of poetry: epic, dramatic, and lyric, with the latter including everything that does not belong to the first two." Unless I am mistaken, that reduction does not appear in the work of Blair himself, who, being closer to classical orthodoxy, distinguished poetry as dramatic, epic, lyric, pastoral, didactic, descriptive, and . . . Hebraic.

*lyric* will bestow its hegemony and its prestige. Hence the expected chart:

| lyrical | epical | dramatic |
|---|---|---|

One will rightly object to such an "accommodation" by pointing out that this modal definition of lyric cannot be applied to the so-called lyric monologues in the theater, in the style of Rodrigue's celebrated "stances,"[30] to which Batteux attributes so much importance for the reason we have seen and in which the enunciating subject is not the poet. But we must remember that this modal definition is not Batteux's doing, for he pays no attention to modes (any more than his romantic successors do). That (trans)historic compromise, continuing to slither along, so to speak, comes out into the open only in the twentieth century, when the enunciating situation again gains prominence for the more general reasons we are all aware of. In the interim, the ticklish matter of the "lyric monologue" receded into the background. It remains intact, of course, and demonstrates, if nothing else, that modal and generic definitions do not always coincide: modally, it is always Rodrigue who speaks, whether to sing of his love or to provoke Don Gormas; generically, the provoking is "dramatic," whereas the love song (with or without the formal markers of meter or strophe) is "lyric," and the distinction, once again, is (partly) thematic in nature: not every

30. [Translator's note.] Corneille, *Le Cid*, 1.6. The *Petit Robert dictionnaire de la langue française* defines *stances* as "the name given since the sixteenth century to lyric poems of serious inspiration (religious, moral, elegiac) composed in a variable number of strophes customarily of the same type."

monologue is perceived as lyric (Auguste's in the fifth act of *Cinna* is not, although it is no more integrated dramatically than Rodrigue's, both of which indeed lead to a decision), and conversely, a dialogue on love ("O miracle of love! / O crowning woe! . . .")[31] can easily be so perceived.

## VI

The new system therefore came to replace the old through a subtle interplay of unconscious or unacknowledged shifts, substitutions, and reinterpretations that allow the new to be presented, not without error but without scandal, as "in keeping" with classical theory—a typical example of a transitional move or, as is said elsewhere, of "revision," or "change within continuity." A sign of the next stage, which will mark the authentic (and apparently definitive) abandonment of classical orthodoxy, comes right on Batteux's heels, in the objections made to his system by his own German translator, Johann Adolf Schlegel, who is also—felicitous conjunction—the father of the two great romantic theorists. The terms in which Batteux himself summarizes and then refutes Schlegel's objections are these: "Mr. Schlegel claims that the law of imitation is not universal in poetry. . . . Here, briefly, is Mr. Schlegel's reasoning. Imitation of nature is not the sole law in matters of poetry, if nature itself, without imitation, can be the object of poetry. . . ." And further on:

31. *Le Cid*, in *Pierre Corneille: The Cid, Cinna, The Theatrical Illusion*, trans. John Cairncross (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), 3.4.985–86.

> Mr. Schlegel cannot understand how the ode or lyric poetry can claim to participate in the universal law of imitation: that is his main objection. He would have it that in a whole host of cases the poet sings of his real feelings rather than of imitated feelings. That may be, and I acknowledge as much even in the chapter he attacks. In that chapter I had to prove only two things: First, that feelings may be pretended, like actions; that, being part of nature, they can be imitated like everything else. I think Mr. Schlegel will agree to the truth of this. Second, that all the feelings expressed in lyric, pretended or real, must be bound by the rules of poetic imitation, that is, they must be probable, appropriate, sustained, as perfect as they can be in their genre, and finally, expressed with all the charms and all the vigor of poetic utterance. This is the meaning of the law of imitation; this is its spirit.[32]

As we see, the basic rupture is expressed here with a tiny shift in balance. Batteux and Schlegel manifestly (and necessarily) agree in recognizing that the "feelings" expressed in a lyric poem can be either pretended or genuine. To Batteux, the fact that these feelings *can be pretended* is enough to subject the entire lyric genre to the law of imitation (for in Batteux's view—and we should remember that this view was shared by the whole classical tradition—imitation is not reproduction but is in reality fiction: to imitate is *to pretend*). To Schlegel, the fact that they *can be genuine* is enough to free the entire lyric genre from that law, which therefore im-

32. Schlegel, *Einschränkung der schönen Künste auf einen einzigen Grundsatz* (1751); Batteux's response is in the 1764 reprint, in notes to the chapter "Sur la poésie lyrique."

mediately loses its role as "sole law." Thus hangs in the balance a whole poetics, and a whole aesthetics.

The illustrious triad will dominate all the literary theory of German romanticism (and therefore well beyond), but not without undergoing, in turn, new reinterpretations and internal mutations. Friedrich Schlegel, who apparently fires the first shot, retains or rediscovers the Platonic division, but he gives it new meaning: in 1797 he claims, roughly speaking (I will return in a moment to the exact content of this note), that the lyric "form" is *subjective*, the dramatic is *objective*, the epic is *subjective-objective*. These are indeed the terms of the Platonic division (enunciation by the poet, by his characters, by both poet and characters), but the choice of adjectives obviously displaces the criterion from the plane of the enunciating situation, which in theory is purely technical, toward a somewhat psychological or existential plane. Furthermore, the ancient division did not involve any diachronic dimension: to both Plato and Aristotle, none of the modes seemed, de facto or de jure, historically earlier than the others; nor did the ancient division intrinsically involve any indication of higher value: in theory none of the modes was superior to the others, and in fact, as we already know, within the same system the biases of Plato and Aristotle were diametrically opposed. On both counts Schlegel departs from the ancients. For him the mixed "form," in any case, is manifestly more recent than the other two: "Natural poetry is either subjective or else objective; the same mixture is not yet possible for man in a state of nature."[33] Therefore, we cannot be dealing with an origi-

33. *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel Ausgabe*, ed. Ernst Behler (Munich: Schöningh, 1958), 16:111 (frag. 322). The dating of the Schlegel notes is René Wellek's.

nal syncretic state from which simpler or purer forms allegedly broke away at a later time.[34] On the contrary, the mixed state is explicitly given high value as such: "There exist an epical, a lyrical, a dramatic *form*, without the flavor of the early poetic genres that bore those names, but separated among themselves by a definite and eternal difference.—As *form*, the epical manifestly has the best of it. It is subjective-objective. The lyrical is *subjective* only; the *dramatic*, *objective* only."[35] Another note, from 1800, confirms this: "Epic = subjective-objective, drama = objective, lyric = subjective."[36] But Schlegel seems to have hesitated somewhat over this division, for a third note, from 1799, attributed the mixed state to drama: "Epic = objective poetry, lyric = subjective poetry, drama = objective-subjective poetry.[37]

34. As Blair, for example, assumed (*Lectures on Rhetoric*, ed. Harold F. Harding [Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965], 2:320–21). For him, "During the infancy of Poetry, all the different kinds of it lay confused, and were mingled in the same composition, according as inclination, enthusiasm, or casual incidents, directed the Poet's strain. In the progress of Society and Arts, they began to assume those different regular forms, and to be distinguished by those different names under which we now know them" (which does not prevent him from immediately proposing that "odes and hymns of every [lyric] sort, would naturally be among the first compositions"). We know that Goethe found ballad to be the *Ur-Ei* of genres, the undifferentiated matrix of all subsequent genres, and according to him, even "in ancient Greek tragedy, we find the three genres combined; only after a certain period of time do they draw apart from each other" (note to *West-östlicher Divan*; see n. 68 below).

35. *Kritische Ausgabe*, ed. Behler, 16:111 (frag. 322).

36. *Literary Notebooks, 1797–1801*, ed. Hans Eichner (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957), no. 2065.

37. Ibid., no. 1750.

According to Peter Szondi, the hesitation arises because at times Schlegel has in mind a limited diachrony—that of the evolution of Greek poetry, which culminates in Attic tragedy; and at times a much broader diachrony—that of the evolution of Western poetry, which culminates in an "epic" understood as the (romantic) novel.[38]

In Schlegel the dominant valuation seems indeed to lie with the latter (the epic), which is not surprising. But Hölderlin, in the fragments he devotes at about the same time[39] to the question of genres, does not share that valuation: "The lyric [poem]," he notes, "in appearance idealistic . . . , is naive in its significance. It is a continuous metaphor of a feeling. The epic [poem], in appearance naive . . . , is heroic in its significance. It is the metaphor of great aspirations. The tragic [poem], in appearance heroic . . . , is idealistic in its significance. It is the metaphor of an intellectual intuition."[40] Here again, the order chosen would seem to indicate a gra-

38. *Poésie et poétique*, 131–33. Yet Schlegel reintroduces the basic tripartite division at least once, within the genre of the novel and in keeping with an endlessly multiplying structure that we will meet in other writers: he distinguishes "in novels a lyric genre, an epic genre, and a dramatic genre" (*Literary Notebooks*, no. 1063, quoted by Szondi, 261). One cannot safely infer from that sequence, however, the presence of a new diachronic schema—one that in this instance (as we will see) would anticipate the schema to be proposed by Schelling and retained by the vulgate.

39. During his stay in Hamburg, between September 1798 and June 1800.

40. *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Friedrich Beissner (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1946) 4:266 (quoted by Szondi, 248, and tr. *Friedrich Hölderlin: Essays and Letters on Theory*, trans. and ed. Thomas Pfau [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988], 83).

dation, in this case favorable to the dramatic ("the tragic [poem]"), but of course the Hölderlinian context suggests rather the higher value of the lyric, which, in the form of the Pindaric ode, Hölderlin explicitly designates as early as 1790 as the link between epic *exposition* and tragic *passion*[41]—and another fragment from the Hamburg period rejects all hierarchy and even all sequence, establishing among the three genres an endless chain, in a ring or a spiral, with each genre alternately leading and following: "The tragic poet gains by studying the lyric poet, the lyric poet the epic poet, the epic poet the tragic poet. For in the tragic lies the completion of the epic, in the lyric the completion of the tragic, in the epic the completion of the lyric."[42]

Actually, all of Schlegel's and Hölderlin's successors agree that drama is the form that is mixed or, rather (the word is becoming a must), *synthetic*, and thus unavoidably superior. This starts with August Wilhelm Schlegel, who writes in a note from about 1801: "The Platonic division of genres is invalid. No true poetic principle in that division. Epical, lyrical, dramatic: thesis, antithesis, synthesis. Light density, energetic singularity, harmonic totality. . . . The epical, pure objectivity in the human spirit. The lyrical, pure subjectivity. The dramatic, the interpenetration of the two."[43] The

41. Ibid., 4:202 (Szondi, 269).

42. Ibid., 4:273 (Szondi, 266).

43. *Kritische Schriften und Briefe*, ed. Edgar Lohner (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1963), 2:305–6 (one would obviously like to know more about the reproach leveled at the "Platonic division"). This arrangement is also the one Novalis most often adopted, with a clearly synthesizing interpretation of the term *dramatic*: in frag. 196, epical, lyrical, dramatic = sculpture, music, poetry (this is already Hegel's *Aesthetics in nuce*); in frag. 219,

"dialectical" pattern is now in place, and it works to the advantage of drama—which, incidentally, revives (and by an unexpected route) the Aristotelian attribution of value. The sequence, which Friedrich Schlegel left partly in doubt, is now clear: epic–lyric–dramatic. But Schelling reverses the order of the first two terms: art begins with lyric subjectivity, then rises to epic objectivity, and finally attains dramatic synthesis, or "identification."[44] Hegel returns to August Wilhelm's pattern: at the beginning, epic poetry, the first expression of the "childlike consciousness of a people"; then "the converse," "when the individual's spirit becomes disentangled from the nation's concrete whole"—lyric poetry; and finally dramatic poetry, which "conjoins the two previous [modes of presentation] into a new whole in which we see in front of us both an objective development and also its origin in the hearts of individuals."[45]

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= phlegmatic, rousing, a wholesome mixture; in frag. 294, = body, soul, mind; so also in frag. 276. Only frag. 160 gives the order (Schelling's, then Hugo's, then canonical) lyrical-epical-dramatic (Novalis, *Schriften*, vol. 2, ed. Richard Samuel et al., 3d ed. [Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1981], 564, 573, 592, 589, 560).

44. *Philosophie der Kunst* (1802–1805, published posthumously in 1859). Thus: "Lyricism = molding of the infinite into the finite = the particular" (French translation in Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *L'Absolu littéraire, théorie de la littéraire du romantisme allemand* [Paris: Seuil, 1978], 45). [Translator's note: Although *L'Absolu littéraire* has been translated into English, the translators did not include—as the French authors did—translations of the main German texts discussed in the book.]

45. *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 2:1045, 1037, 1046, 1038; cf. 1053 and, even earlier, 627, 634. The romantic triad governs all the visible architecture of Hegel's "Poetics"—but not its

It is, however, Schelling's sequence that holds the lead in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For instance, to Hugo, who deliberately establishes a broad diachrony that is more anthropological than poetic, lyricism is the utterance of primeval times, when "man awakens into a world that has just sprung up"; the epical (which, it must be added, embraces Greek tragedy) is the utterance of ancient times, when "everything comes to a complete standstill"; and drama is the utterance of modern times, marked by Christianity and the sundering of body and soul.[46] To Joyce, whom we have already encountered,

> The lyrical form is in fact the simplest verbal vesture of an instant of emotion, a rhythmical cry such as ages ago cheered on the man who pulled at the oar or dragged stones up a slope. . . . The simplest epical form is seen emerging out of lyrical literature when the artist prolongs and broods upon himself as the centre of an epical event. . . . The dramatic form is reached when the vitality which has flowed and eddied round each person fills every person with such vital force that he or she assumes a proper and intangible esthetic life. The personality of the artist, at first a cry or a cadence or a mood and then a fluid and lambent narrative, finally refines itself out of existence, impersonalises itself, so to speak. . . . The artist, like the God

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real content, which crystallizes into the phenomenology of some specific genres (Homeric epic, novel, ode, song, Greek tragedy, ancient comedy, modern tragedy), themselves extrapolated from some paradigmatic works or authors (the *Iliad*, *Wilhelm Meister*, Pindar, Goethe, *Antigone*, Aristophanes, Shakespeare).

46. Preface to *Cromwell* (1827).

> of the creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails.[47]

Let us note, incidentally, that here the evolutionary pattern has entirely lost its "dialectical" aspect: from the lyric cry to the godlike impersonality of drama there is now only a linear and unequivocal advancement toward objectivity, with no trace of an "overthrowing of the pro by the con." The same in Staiger, for whom the transition from lyric "inspiration" (*Ergriffenheit*) to epic "panorama" (*Überschau*) and then to dramatic "tension" (*Spannung*) marks a sustained process of objectivization, or of progressive dissociation between "subject" and "object."[48]

It would be easy, and rather pointless, to wax ironic about this taxonomic kaleidoscope in which the too-seductive pattern of the triad[49]—a form receptive to any meaning at all—passes through endless metamorphoses, surviving on the crest of dubious reckonings (no one can be certain which genre historically preceded the others, supposing that such a question can be asked) and interchangeable attributions. Given the hardly surprising observation that the most "subjective" mode is lyric, then "objectivity" must perforce be assigned to

47. *A Portrait of the Artist*, 214–15.

48. *Grundbegriffe der Poetik* (Zurich: Atlantis, 1946); tr. *Basic Concepts of Poetics*, trans. Janette C. Hudson and Luanne T. Frank (University Park: Penn State Press, 1991).

49. On this seductiveness, cf. Guillén, "Literature as System."

one of the other two, with the middle term necessarily going to the one that is left; but because here no evidence can support any claim, the choice remains basically determined by implicit—or explicit—respect for the value inhering in "progress," linear or dialectical. The whole history of the theory of genres is imprinted with these fascinating patterns that inform and deform the often irregular reality of the literary field—patterns whose designers claim to have discovered a natural "system" precisely where they are constructing a factitious symmetry with the help of a copious supply of false windows.

These strained configurations are not always useless—quite the contrary. Like all provisional classifications, provided they are taken as such, they often serve an unquestionable heuristic function. In any given case, the false window may open onto a true light and reveal the importance of an unappreciated term; the slot left empty or laboriously filled may, much later, find a legitimate occupant. When Aristotle, noting the existence of a high narrative, a high drama, and a low drama, deduces, through abhorrence of a vacuum and a taste for balance, the existence of a low narrative that he provisionally identifies with the parodic epic, little does he know he is saving a place for the realistic novel. When Frye, another great craftsman of fearful symmetries, notes the existence of three kinds of "fiction"—introverted-personal (the romance), extroverted-personal (the realistic novel), and introverted-intellectual (the confession)—and deduces the existence of a genre of extroverted-intellectual fiction that he christens *anatomy* and that draws together and promotes some misfits of allegorical-fantastic narration, such as Lucian, Varro, Petronius, Apuleius, Rabelais, Burton, Swift, and

Sterne, the procedure can no doubt be challenged, but not the benefit that accrues.[50] When Robert Scholes, adapting Frye's theory of the five "modes" (myth, romance, the high mimetic, the low mimetic, irony) to give it a somewhat more orderly arrangement, offers us his breathtaking chart of the subgenres of fiction and their necessary evolution,[51] we no doubt have a hard time taking it completely literally, but we have an even harder time drawing no inspiration from it. The same is true of the cumbersome but enduring triad, only some of whose many performances I have evoked here.

One of the triad's most curious performances, perhaps, consists of the various attempts made to pair it with another venerable trio, that of the three aspects of time: past, present, and future. There have been many such attempts, but here it will suffice to compare nine examples mentioned by Austin Warren and René Wellek.[52] As an overview, I offer this comparison in the form of two double-entry charts. The first shows which tense each author attributed to each "genre":

50. *Anatomy*, 303–14.

51. *Structuralism in Literature*, 129–38.

52. Warren, "Literary Genres"; Wellek, "Genre Theory." The texts referred to are the following: Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Über Goethes Hermann und Dorothea* (1799); Schelling, *Philosophie der Kunst* (1802–1805); Jean Paul, *Vorschule der Ästhetik* (1813); Hegel, *Vorlesungen über Ästhetik* (*Aesthetics*, 2:1136—about 1820); E. S. Dallas, *Poetics* (1852); Friedrich Theodor Vischer, *Ästhetik* (vol. 5—1857); John Erskine, *The Kinds of Poetry* (1920); Roman Jakobson, "Randbemerkungen zur Prosa des Dichters Pasternak" ("Marginal Notes on the Prose of the Poet Pasternak," in *Language in Literature*—1935); Staiger, *Grundbegriffe der Poetik* (1946).

| GENRES / AUTHORS | Lyrical | Epical | Dramatic |
|---|---|---|---|
| Humboldt | | past | present |
| Schelling | present | past | |
| Jean Paul | present | past | future |
| Hegel | present | past | |
| Dallas | future | past | present |
| Vischer | present | past | future |
| Erskine | present | future | past |
| Jakobson | present | past | |
| Staiger | past | present | future |

The second (clearly just a different presentation of the first) gives the names and thus the number of authors illustrating each of these attributions (see next page).

As with the famous "color of the vowels," it would be of limited relevance to note simply that every tense was attributed successively to each of the three genres.[53] In fact, two chief characteristics are clear: the affinity sensed between epic and the past and between lyric and the present. Drama, obviously "present" in form (representation) and traditionally "past" in subject,

53. We note that some of the lists are defective, which, given the temptation to systematize, is on the whole rather commendable. In particular, Humboldt contrasts the epical (past) with the tragic (present) within a broader category that he designates *plastic* and contrasts in its entirety with the lyrical. It would be a bit cavalier for us to deduce in his name the equivalence lyrical = future and to complete in a similar way the divisions made by Hegel, Jakobson, and Schelling.

| TENSES / GENRES | Past | Present | Future |
|---|---|---|---|
| Lyrical | Staiger | Schelling<br>Jean Paul<br>Hegel<br>Vischer<br>Erskine<br>Jakobson | Dallas |
| Epical | Humboldt<br>Schelling<br>Jean Paul<br>Hegel<br>Dallas<br>Vischer<br>Jakobson | Staiger | Erskine |
| Dramatic | Erskine | Humboldt<br>Dallas | Jean Paul<br>Vischer<br>Staiger |

remained harder to match up. The wisest course would perhaps have been to label it "mixed" or "synthetic" and stop there. Unfortunately, a third tense existed, creating the irresistible temptation to attribute it to a genre—whence the somewhat sophistic equivalence between drama and the future, as well as two or three other strained fancies. One can't win every time,[54] and

54. Another equivalence, this one between genres and grammatical persons, has been proposed, at least by Dallas and Jakobson, who (although diverging on tenses) agree in attributing the first-person singular to the lyrical and the third-person singular to the epical. Dallas adds, quite logically, that the dramatic equates with the second-person singular. This division is fairly intriguing; but what do we do with the plural?

if an excuse for these dubious undertakings is needed, I will find it, perversely, in the frustration we feel with an ingenuous enumeration like Jolles's nine *simple forms*—an enumeration that is certainly neither his only shortcoming nor his only merit. Nine simple forms? No kidding![55] Like the nine muses? Because of three times three? Because he forgot one? And so on. How hard it is for us to admit that Jolles simply found nine, neither more nor fewer, and scorned the facile—by which I mean the cheap—pleasure of justifying that number! True empiricism always shocks us as being unseemly.

## VII

All the theories evoked so far, from Batteux's to Staiger's, constituted so many all-embracing, hierarchical systems, like Aristotle's in that the various poetic genres without exception were distributed among the three basic categories like so many subclasses. Under the epical went epic, novel, novella, etc.; under the dramatic went tragedy, comedy, bourgeois drama, etc.; under the lyrical went ode, hymn, epigram, etc. But such a classification remains very elementary because, within each of the terms of the well-grounded tripartition, the particular genres still come together in a confused way or at least (again as in Aristotle) are organized by a principle

55. For the correctional exercises imposed on Jolles's list (André Jolles, *Einfache Formen* [Tubingen: Max Niemeyer, 1930]), see the "Note de l'éditeur" in the French translation, *Formes simples*, trans. Antoine Marie Buguet (Paris: Seuil, 1972), 8–9; and Todorov, *Dictionary*, 155.

of differentiation wholly unlike the one on which the tripartition itself is based: heroic epic versus sentimental or "prosaic" novel, long novel versus short novella, high tragedy versus domestic comedy, and so forth. Thus, one sometimes feels the need for a more rigorous taxonomy that extends the same principle of arrangement to the distribution of all the species.

The most common way of doing this consists very simply of reintroducing the triad within each of its terms. Thus Hartmann proposes distinguishing pure lyrical, epical-lyrical, dramatic-lyrical; pure dramatic, lyrical-dramatic, epical-dramatic; pure epical, lyrical-epical, dramatic-epical[56]—with each of the nine resulting classes obviously defined by one dominant and one secondary feature, for otherwise the inverted mixed terms (like lyrical-epical and epical-lyrical) would be equivalents and the system would boil down to six terms, three pure and three mixed. Albert Guérard applies this principle, illustrating each term with one or several examples: for pure lyrical, the *Wanderers Nachtlieder* of Goethe; for dramatic-lyrical, Robert Browning; for epical-lyrical, the ballad (in the Germanic sense); for pure epical, Homer; for lyrical-epical, *The Faerie Queene*; for dramatic-epical, the *Inferno* or *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*; for pure dramatic, Molière; for lyrical-dramatic, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; for epical-dramatic, Aeschylus or *Tête d'or*.[57]

56. *Philosophie des Schönen*, 2d ed. (Berlin, 1924), 697–738; *Grundriss der Ästhetik*, vol. 8 of *System der Philosophie im Grundriss* (Bad Sachsa im Harz, 1909); cf. Ruttkowski, *Die literarischen Gattungen*, 37–38.

57. Albert Léon Guérard, *Preface to World Literature* (New York: H. Holt and Co., 1940), chapter 11, "The Theory of Genres"; cf. Ruttkowski, *Die literarischen Gattungen*, 38. We

But this embedding of triads not only endlessly multiplies the basic division, it also unintentionally demonstrates the existence of *intermediary* states between the pure types, with the whole looping back on itself in a triangle or circle. This idea of a sort of unbroken and cyclical spectrum of the genres had been proposed by Goethe:

> One can combine these three elements [lyrical, epical, dramatic] and get infinite variations on the poetic genres; that is why it is so hard to find an order by which to classify them side by side or in succession. One can, however, extricate oneself from the difficulty by setting the three main elements on a circle, equidistant from one another, and seeking exemplary works in which each element predominates separately. Then one can assemble examples that tend in one direction or the other, until finally the three come together and the circle is completely closed.[58]

The idea was taken up in the twentieth century by the German aesthetician Julius Petersen, whose system of genres is based on an apparently very homogeneous

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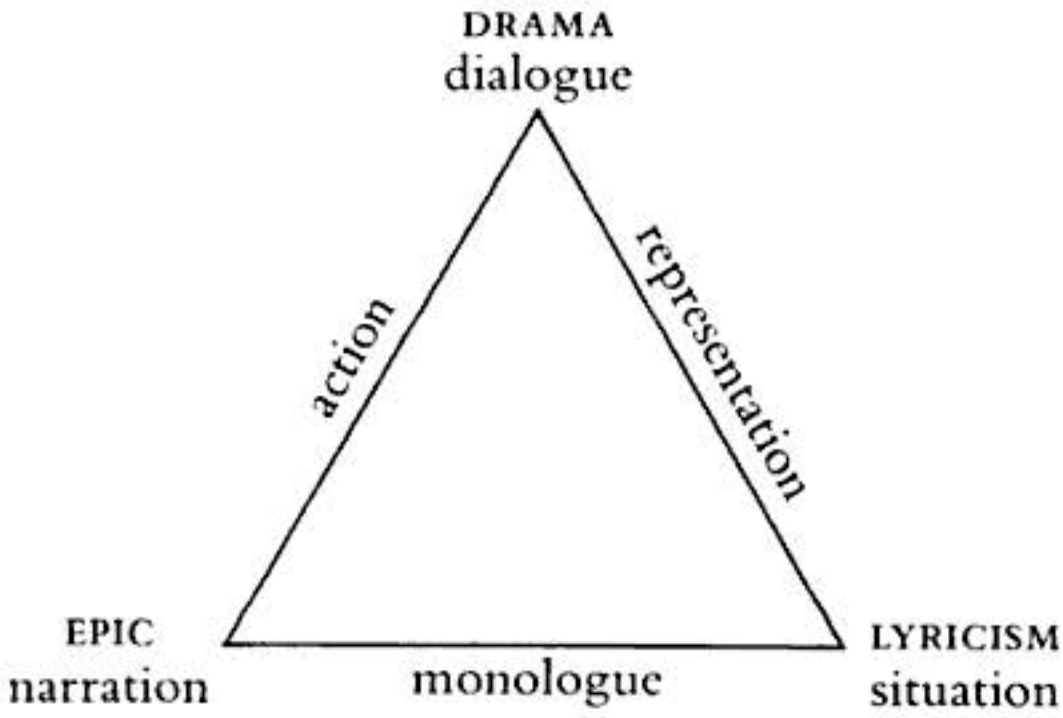
find a less systematic use of this principle in Wolfgang Kayser's handbook, *Das sprachliche Kunstwerk: eine Einführung in die Literaturwissenschaft* (Bern: Francke, 1948). There the three "basic attitudes" (*Grundhaltungen*) can in turn be subdivided into pure lyrical, epical-lyrical, etc., according to either (for the lyrical) the form of enunciation or "presentation" (*äussere Darbietungsform*) or (for the epical and the dramatic) the anthropological content. Here we find both the triad within the triad and the ambiguity of its principle (modal and/or thematic).

58. Note to *West-östlicher Divan*, 1819, trans. Henri Lichtenberger (Paris: Aubier, 1940), 378. See below, n. 68.

group of definitions: epic is the narration (*Bericht*) in a monologue of an action (*Handlung*); drama, the representation (*Darstellung*) in dialogue of an action; lyricism, the representation in a monologue of a situation (*Zustand*).[59] These relationships can be depicted initially by a triangle, each angle bearing a basic genre labeled with its specific feature and each side indicating the feature common to the two types it links. Linking lyricism and drama is representation—that is, the direct expression, either by the poet or by the characters, of thoughts or feelings. Linking lyricism and epic is monologue. Linking epic and drama is action.

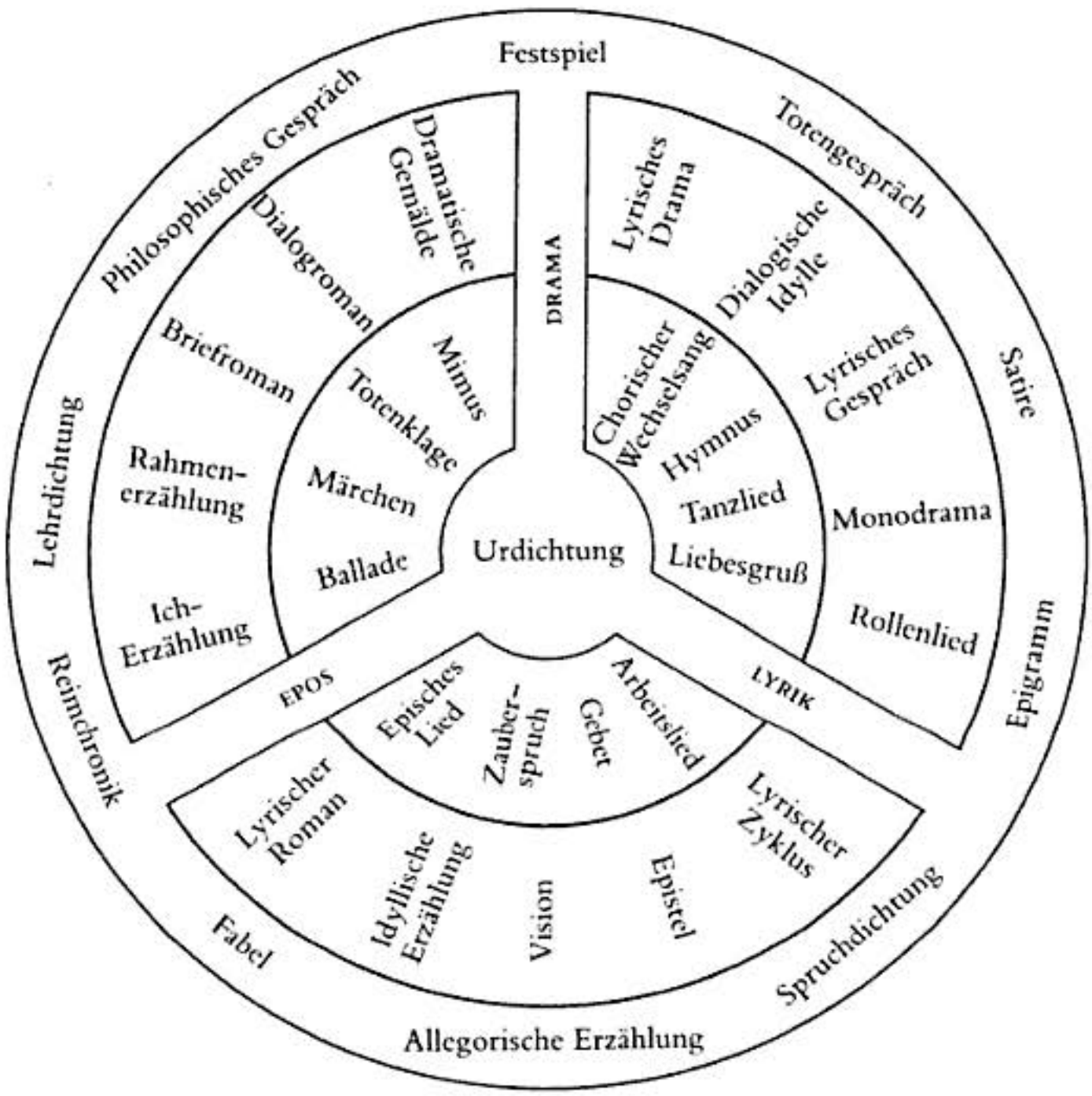



This model reveals a dissymmetry that is troubling and perhaps inevitable (it was already present in Goethe,

59. "Zur Lehre von der Dichtungsgattungen," in *Festschrift August Sauer* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1925), 72–116; Petersen refines the system and model in *Die Wissenschaft von der Dichtung: System und Methodenlehre der Literaturwissenschaft* (Berlin: Junker und Dunnhaupt, 1939), 1:119–26; cf. Fubini, *Critica e poesia*, 261–69.

as we will see). Whereas for epic and drama the specific feature is formal (narration, dialogue), lyricism is defined here by a thematic feature: only lyricism treats not an action but a situation. Consequently the feature common to drama and epic is thematic (action), whereas both of the features lyricism shares with its neighbors are formal (monologue and representation). But this unsteady triangle is only the starting point for a more complex system whose purpose is, on the one hand, to indicate the proper location on each side for some mixed or intermediate genres (such as lyric drama, the idyll, or the novel in dialogue) and, on the other hand, to account for the evolution of literary forms from an original *Ur-Dichtung* (also inherited from Goethe) to the most highly developed "elaborated forms." Thereupon the triangle becomes, in keeping with Goethe's suggestion, a wheel at whose hub lies the *Ur-Dichtung* and whose three spokes are the three basic genres, while the three sections that remain, filled in by the intermediary forms, are themselves sectioned into concentric rings showing the evolution of forms, moving outward in layers from the center toward the periphery (see next page).

On this diagram I leave the German generic terms used by Petersen, often without examples; their referents and French [or English] equivalents are not always obvious. It would be a mistake to try to translate *Ur-Dichtung*. For the others, moving clockwise from epic, let us venture, on the first ring, ballad, tale, dirge, mime, antiphonal choral chant, hymn, dance song, madrigal, work song, prayer, magic incantation, epic song. On the second ring, first-person narrative, embedded narrative, epistolary novel, novel in dialogue, dramatic tableau, lyric drama, idyll in dialogue,




lyric dialogue, monodrama (e.g., Rousseau's *Pygmalion*); *Rollenlied* is a lyric poem attributed to a historical or a mythological character (Béranger's *Les Adieux de Marie Stuart* or Goethe's *Prometheus*); lyric cycle (Goethe's *Roman Elegies*), epistle, vision (the *Divine Comedy*), narrative idyll, lyric novel (the first part of *Werther*; the second part, according to Petersen, belongs under the *Ich-Erzählung*). On the last ring, verse chronicle, didactic poem, philosophical dialogue, festive play, dialogue among the dead, satire, epigram, gnomic poem, allegorical narrative, and fable.

As we see, the innermost circle is filled with genres

that in theory are more spontaneous and popular, approaching Jolles's "simple forms," which, moreover, Petersen explicitly mentions; the next circle is that of the canonical forms; the last one is tantamount to "applied" forms, forms in which the poetic discourse is put at the service of a message, whether moral, philosophical, or other. In each circle, the genres are obviously arranged according to their degree of affinity with or relationship to the three basic types. Manifestly satisfied with his diagram, Petersen affirms that it can serve "as a compass for finding one's bearings among the various paths that traverse the system of genres." The more-cautious Fubini prefers to compare this structure to "those sailboats made of cork inside a bottle, which adorn certain houses in Liguria": one admires their ingeniousness without discerning their function. True compass or false vessel, Petersen's rose window of genres is perhaps neither so valuable as the former nor so useless as the latter. Moreover, and despite the claims he makes for it, it by no means covers the whole range of existing genres: its system of representation provides no clear-cut place for the most canonical "pure" genres, like the ode, the epic, or tragedy. And because its defining criteria are mainly formal, it cannot make thematic distinctions, such as those contrasting tragedy with comedy, or romance (heroic or sentimental novel) with the novel (realistic novel of manners). For that, perhaps another compass would be needed, or even a third dimension, and undoubtedly relating the two to each other would be as difficult as fitting together the several concurrent—and not always compatible—grids composing Northrop Frye's "system." Here, too, suggestive power far transcends explanatory—or even simply descriptive—capacity. We can (only) ponder such things . . . That is no

doubt what ships in bottles are good for—and sometimes antique compasses as well.

But before leaving the curios department, we will glance at one final system, this one purely "historical," based on the romantic tripartition: the system of Ernest Bovet, a man who is quite forgotten today but who, as we have already seen, did not escape Irene Behrens's attention. The title of his work, published in 1911, is, precisely, *Lyrisme, épopée, drame: Une loi de l'évolution littéraire expliquée par l'évolution générale* (Lyricism, Epic, Drama: A Law of Literary Evolution Explained by General Evolution). His starting point is Hugo's Preface to *Cromwell*, in which Hugo himself suggests that the lyrical–epical–dramatic law of succession can be applied—here, as before, in endless reduplication—to each phase in the evolution of each national literature: thus, for the Bible, Genesis–Kings–Job; for Greek poetry, Orpheus–Homer–Aeschylus; for the birth of French classicism, Malherbe–Chapelain–Corneille. To Bovet, as to Hugo and the German romantics, the three "chief genres" are not merely forms (the most formalist of these theorists is Petersen) but rather "three basic ways of imagining life and the universe," which correspond to three stages of evolution, as much ontogenetic as phylogenetic, and which therefore function at any level of unit. The example Bovet chooses is French literature,[60] which he carves into three major eras, subdividing each into three periods (the obsession with trinities reaches new heights). But Bovet skews his system from

60. The evolution of Italian literature, blocked by the lack of national unity, serves as a counterexample. No mention is made of other national literatures.

the start by projecting the evolutionary principle only onto periods, not onto eras. The first era, from the beginnings until about 1520, is feudal and Catholic. Its first period, which lasts until early in the twelfth century, is mainly lyric (obviously this was an oral, popular lyricism, almost all trace of which is now lost); its second period, from 1100 to about 1328, is mainly epic (chansons de geste, tales of chivalry; lyricism is in decline, drama still embryonic); in its third period (1328–1520) drama flourishes with the mystery plays and *Pathelin*, while the epic degenerates into prose, and lyricism (Villon the exception that proves the rule) into Grande Rhétorique. The second era, from 1520 to the Revolution, is that of the absolute monarchy. Its lyric period (1520–1610) is exemplified by Rabelais, the Pléiade, and the essentially lyric tragedies of Jodelle and Montchrestian (the epics of Ronsard and Du Bartas are aborted or unsuccessful, while Aubigné's is lyric). Its epic period (1610–1715) is exemplified not by its official epic (Chapelain), which is worthless, but by the *novel*, which dominates this entire epoch and is illustrated by . . . Corneille (Racine, whose genius is not novelistic, is another exception, and furthermore, at that time his work was not well received); Molière presages the flourishing of drama in the third period (1715–1789), the period of *Turcaret*, *Figaro*, *Le Neveu de Rameau*. Rousseau presages the next period, the lyric period of the third era—an era extending from 1789 to the present day and dominated until 1840 by romantic lyricism. Stendhal inaugurates the epic period (1840–1885), dominated by the realistic and naturalistic novel at a time when (Parnassian) poetry has lost its lyric vein. Dumas fils and Henry Becque initiate the splendid flowering of drama in the third period, which starts in 1885—a period marked forever-

more by the theater of Daudet and, of course, Lavedan, Bernstein, and other giants of the stage. Lyric poetry, however, declines into symbolist decadence—witness Mallarmé.[61]

## VIII

The romantic reinterpretation of the system of modes as a system of genres is neither de facto nor de jure the epilogue of this long story. Thus Käte Hamburger, taking note, as it were, of the fact that it is impossible to divide the two opposing terms *subjectivity* and *objectivity* among the three genres, decided some years ago to reduce the triad to two terms: *lyric* (the old "lyric genre," supplemented by other forms of personal expression like autobiography and even the "first-person novel"), distinguished by the *Ich-Origo* of its enunciation; and *fiction* (which combines the old epic and dramatic genres and adds certain forms of narrative poetry, like the ballad), defined by an enunciation that reveals no trace of its source.[62] As we see, the major out-

61. Ernest Bovet taught at the University of Zurich. His book is dedicated to his teachers Henri Morf and Joseph Bédier. He declares himself to be in full intellectual communion with the antipositivism of Bergson, Vossler, and (despite the controversy over the relevance of the idea of genre) Croce. He claims not to have read a single line of Hegel and a fortiori, we may assume, of Schelling; thus can a caricature be ignorant of its model.

62. *Die Logik der Dichtung* (Stuttgart, 1957); tr. *The Logic of Literature*, trans. Marilynn J. Rose, 2d rev. ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973). Henri Bonnet proposed a comparable two-part division: "There are two genres. And

cast of the *Poetics*—a sweet revenge—now occupies half the field. True, the field itself is no longer the same, because it now encompasses all literature, including prose.

But in reality, what do we mean today—we postromantics—by poetry? Most often, I think, we mean what the preromantics meant by lyricism. Wordsworth's formulation,[63] which defines all poetry more or less as Batteux's translator defined only lyric poetry, somewhat compromises itself by putting so much faith in emotion and spontaneity, unlike John Stuart Mill's definition. For Mill, lyric poetry is "more eminently and peculiarly poetry than any other"; he considers any narration, description, or didactic statement to be antipoetic and, in passing, asserts that every epic poem "in so far as it is epic . . . is not poetry at all."[64] Via Poe and Baudelaire, this idea passed into our symbolist and "modern" vulgate under the catchword (today a little tarnished but still effective) of "pure poetry": to Poe,

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there are only two, for everything that is real can be envisaged from either a subjective or an objective point of view. . . . Those two genres are grounded in the nature of things. We call them poetry and novel" (*Roman et poésie: Essai sur l'esthétique des genres* [Paris: Nizet, 1951], 139–40). And for Gilbert Durand, the two basic genres (grounded in the two "regimes"—diurnal and nocturnal—of the imaginary) are the epical and the lyrical, or mystical; the novelistic is but a "moment" that marks the transition from the first to the second (*Le Décor mythique de la Chartreuse de Parme: Contribution à l'esthétique du romanesque* [Paris: Corti, 1961]).

63. "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" (Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* [1800]).

64. John Stuart Mill, "The Two Kinds of Poetry" and "What Is Poetry?" (1833), in *Mill's Essays on Literature and Society*, ed. J. B. Schneewind (New York: Collier Books, 1965), 123, 113.

who took up or shared Mill's view, "a long poem does not exist," and Baudelaire's "Further Notes on Edgar Poe" explicitly and absolutely condemned epic and didactic poetry.[65] Insofar as all distinction among genres, even between poetry and prose, has not yet been obliterated from the vulgate, our implicit concept of poetry does indeed merge with the old concept of lyric poetry. The outdated or inconvenient connotations of the term *poetry* will no doubt cause this point to be challenged or given only a cool reception, but in my opinion the more one writes and, especially, reads contemporary poetry, the more obvious my point becomes. In other words: for more than a century, we have considered as "more eminently and peculiarly poetry" . . . exactly the type of poetry that Aristotle excluded from his *Poetics*.[66]

A reversal so absolute is perhaps not the sign of a true emancipation.

## IX

I have tried to show how and why theorists reached the point of devising, and then (as a supplementary consideration) of attributing to Plato and Aristotle, a division of the "literary genres" that the whole "unconscious poetics" of both philosophers rejects. To get a firmer grip

65. Edgar Allan Poe, "The Poetic Principle" (posthumous edition, 1850); Baudelaire, "Further Notes on Edgar Poe" (1857), in *Charles Baudelaire: The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. and ed. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon Press, 1964; rpt. New York: Da Capo Press, n.d.), 93–110.

66. See also Jean Cohen, *Le Haut Langage: théorie de la poéticité* (Paris: Flammarion, 1979).

on the historical reality, we should no doubt make clear that the attribution passed through two periods and stemmed from two very distinct motives. At the end of classicism, it stemmed from a still deepseated respect for orthodoxy and a need to treat it with care. In the twentieth century, a better reason for the attribution is retrospective illusion (the vulgate is so well established that imagining a time when it did not exist is very difficult) and also (as is evident in Frye, for example) the legitimate renewal of interest in a modal interpretation of the phenomena of genre—that is, an interpretation based on the enunciating situation. Between the two periods, the romantics and postromantics were not overly concerned about dragging Plato and Aristotle into all these matters. But the present telescoping of these various positions—the fact, for example, that authority is claimed to derive at one and the same time from Aristotle, Batteux, Schlegel (or, as we will see, Goethe), Jakobson, Benveniste, and Anglo-American analytical philosophy—aggravates the theoretical drawbacks of this erroneous attribution, or (to define the error itself in theoretical terms) this confusion between modes and genres.

In Plato, and again in Aristotle, as we have seen, the basic division had a clearly defined status, for it bore explicitly on a text's *mode of enunciation*. To the extent that genres in the proper sense of the term were taken into consideration (very little in Plato, more so in Aristotle), they were allocated among modes inasmuch as they came under one enunciating stance or another: dithyramb under pure narration, epic under mixed narration, tragedy and comedy under dramatic imitation. But this inclusive relationship did not prevent the generic and modal criteria from being absolutely dissimilar, as well as radically different in status: each genre was defined

essentially by a specification of content that was in no way prescribed by the definition of its mode. The romantic and postromantic division, in contrast, views the lyrical, the epical, and the dramatic no longer simply as modes of enunciation but as real genres, whose definitions already inevitably include thematic elements, however vague. We see this in Hegel, among others: for him there exists an epic *world* defined by a specific type of social aggregate and human relationship; a lyric *content* ("the individual subject"); a dramatic *milieu* "made up of conflicts and collisions." We also see it in Hugo, for whom real drama, for example, is inseparable from the Christian message (separation of body and soul). We see it, as well, in Karl Viëtor, for whom the three major genres express three "basic attitudes": the lyrical expresses feeling; the epical, knowledge; the dramatic, will and action.[67] Viëtor thus resurrects the distribution Hölderlin ventured at the end of the eighteenth century, but modifies it by transposing epic and dramatic.

The transition from one status to the other is clearly, if not intentionally, illustrated by a well-known text of Goethe's, which we have mentioned in passing and must now consider on its own account.[68] Here Goethe contrasts the ordinary "poetic species" (*Dichtarten*)—particular genres, such as the novel, the ballad, or satire—with the "three genuine natural forms" (*drei echte*

67. "Die Geschichte literarischer Gattungen" (1931), in vol. 9 of *Deutscher Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* (rpt. in *Geist und Form* [Bern: Francke, 1952], 292–309); French translation in *Poétique* 8, no. 32 (1977): 490–506. We have seen the same term (*Grundhaltung*) in Kayser and the same concept in Bovet, who spoke of "basic ways of viewing life and the universe."

68. I am referring to two notes (*Dichtarten* and *Naturformen der Dichtung*) that were made part of the 1819 *Divan*.

*Naturformen*) of poetry: the epic, defined as pure narration (*klar erzählende*); the lyric, as a burst of rapture (*enthusiastisch aufgeregte*); and the drama, as lifelike representation (*persönlich handelnde*).[69] "These three poetic modes [*Dichtweisen*]," he adds, "can function either jointly or separately." The contrast between *Dichtarten* and *Dichtweisen* clearly encompasses the distinction between genres and modes, and it is reinforced by the purely modal definitions of epic and drama. The definition of lyric, however, is thematic, making the term *Dichtweisen* irrelevant and sending us to the vaguer idea of *Naturform*, which covers all interpretations and is for that reason, no doubt, the term commentators have most frequently used.

But the whole point is, precisely, to know whether the term *natural forms* can still be legitimately applied to the triad *lyrical/epical/dramatic* once that triad has been

69. The list of *Dichtarten*, deliberately put in [German] alphabetical order, is allegory, ballad, cantata, drama, elegy, epigram, epistle, epic, narrative (*Erzählung*) fable, heroic verse, idyll, didactic poem, ode, parody, novel, romance, satire. In Lichtenberger's bilingual edition of the *Divan*, which does not include the German text of the notes, the translations (377–78) of *klar erzählende* and *persönlich handelnde* ("qui raconte clairement" [who recounts clearly] and "qui agit personnellement" [who acts in person]) are more cautious or evasive than my translations ("narration pure" [pure narration] and "représentation vivante" [lifelike representation]). Nevertheless, it seems to me that two other statements in that note confirm the modal interpretation. First, "In French tragedy, the exposition is epical, the middle part dramatic"; and then, with a strictly Aristotelian criterion, "The Homeric epic [*Heldengedicht*] is purely epical: the rhapsodist is always in the foreground to recount the events; no one may utter a word unless the rhapsodist first gives him the floor." In both cases "epical" clearly means *narrative* [*narratif*].

redefined in generic terms. The modes of enunciation can, in a pinch, be termed "natural forms," at least in the sense in which we speak of "natural languages." Except when using language for literary purposes, the language user is constantly required—even (or especially) if unconsciously—to choose between forms of utterance such as discourse and story (in Benveniste's sense), direct quotation and indirect style, etc. Therein lies the essential difference of status between genres and modes: genres are properly literary categories,[70] whereas modes are categories that belong to linguistics, or (more exactly) to what we now call *pragmatics*. They are "natural forms," therefore, in this wholly relative sense and only to the extent that language and its use appear as facts of nature vis-à-vis the conscious and deliberate elaboration of aesthetic forms. But the romantic triad and its subsequent derivatives no longer occupy that terrain: lyrical, epical, and dramatic contrast with *Dichtarten* no longer as modes of verbal enunciation that precede and are external to any literary definition but, rather, as kinds of *archigenres*. *Archi-*, because each of them is supposed to overarch and include, ranked by degree of importance, a certain number of empirical genres that—whatever their amplitude, longevity, or potential for recurrence—are apparently phenomena of culture and history; but still (or already) *-genres*, because (as we have seen) their defining criteria always involve a thematic element that eludes purely formal or linguistic descrip-

70. To be more precise, we should say "properly aesthetic," for, as we know, the fact of genre is common to all the arts. Here, therefore, "properly literary" means proper to the aesthetic level of literature, the level literature shares with the other arts, as opposed to the linguistic level, which literature shares with the other types of discourse.

tion. This dual status is not peculiar to them, for a "genre" like the novel or comedy may also be subdivided into more specific "species"—tale of chivalry, picaresque novel, etc.; comedy of humours, farce, vaudeville, etc.—with no limit set a priori to this series of inclusions. We all know, for example, that the species *detective novel* may in turn be divided into several varieties (police procedural, thriller, "realistic" detective story à la Simenon, etc.), that with a little ingenuity one can always multiply the positions between the species and the individual, and that no one can set a limit on this proliferation of species (the spy story would, I suppose, have been completely unforeseeable to a literary theorist of the eighteenth century, and many species yet to come are still unimaginable to us today). In short, any genre can always contain several genres, and in that respect the archigenres of the romantic triad are distinguished by no natural privilege. At most they can be described as the highest—the most capacious—positions of the classification then in use. But the example of Käte Hamburger shows us that a new reduction is not to be ruled out a priori (and it would not be unreasonable—quite the contrary—to envisage a fusion that would be the reverse of hers, a fusion between the lyrical and the epical that would leave the dramatic as the only form with a rigorously "objective" enunciation). And the example of W. V. Ruttkowski shows that one can always, and just as reasonably, propose another ultimate position, in this case the *didactic*.[71] And so on. In the classification of literary species as in the classification of genres, no position is essentially more "natural" or more "ideal"—unless we abandon the literary criteria themselves, as

71. *Die literarischen Gattungen*, chapter 6, "Schlussforderungen: eine modifizierte Gattungspoetik."

the ancients did implicitly with the modal position. There is no generic level that can be decreed more "theoretical," or that can be attained by a more "deductive" method, than the others: all species and all subgenres, genres, or supergenres are empirical classes, established by observation of the historical facts or, if need be, by extrapolation from those facts—that is, by a deductive activity superimposed on an initial activity that is always inductive and analytical, as we have seen in the charts (whether explicit or implicit) of Aristotle and Frye, where the existence of an empty compartment (comic narrative; extroverted-intellectual) helps one discover a genre ("parody," "anatomy") otherwise condemned to invisibility. The major ideal "types" that, since Goethe, have so often been contrasted with the minor forms and intermediate genres[72] are simply more

72. *Type* is sometimes one term of the opposition (Lämmert, Todorov in the *Dictionary*); other terminological couples that have been used are *kind/genre* (Wellek and Warren), *mode/genre* (Scholes), *theoretical genre/historical genre* (Todorov in *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975]), *basic attitude/genre* (Viëtor), *basic genre* or *basic type/genre* (Petersen), or even, with some slight differences, *simple form/real form* in Jolles. Todorov's current position is closer to the one I am upholding here:

> In the past, attempts have been made to distinguish "natural" forms of poetry (for example, lyric, epic, or dramatic poetry) from its conventional forms (sonnets, ballads, odes), or even to oppose [the "natural" and the conventional]. We need to try to see on what level such an assertion may still have some meaning. One possibility is that lyric poetry, epic poetry, and so on, are uni-

capacious, less precisely defined classes; for that reason they are more likely to have a broader cultural reach, but their principle is neither more ahistorical nor less. The "epic type" is neither more ideal nor more natural than the genres of novel and epic that it supposedly encompasses—unless we define it as the ensemble of basically *narrative* genres, which immediately brings us back to the division by mode. For narrative, like dramatic dialogue, is a basic stance of enunciation—which cannot be said of the epical or the dramatic or, of course, the lyrical, in the romantic sense of these terms.

In recalling these obvious but often disregarded facts, I by no means intend to deny to literary genres any sort of "natural" and transhistorical foundation. On the contrary, to me another obvious (albeit vague) fact is the presence of an existential attitude, of an "anthropological structure" (Durand), of a "mental disposition" (Jolles), of an "imaginative design" (Mauron), or (in everyday language) of a "feeling" that is properly epical, lyrical, dramatic—but also tragic, comic, elegiac, fantastic, romantic, etc.—whose nature, origin, continued existence, and relation to history (among other

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versal categories and *thus belong to discourse*. . . . The other possibility is that such terms are used with regard to historical phenomena: thus the epic is what Homer's *Iliad* embodies. In the second case, we are indeed dealing with genres, but these are not qualitatively different on the discursive level from a genre like the sonnet (which for its part is based on constraints: thematic, verbal, and so on). ("L'origine des genres" [1976], in *Les Genres du discours* [Paris: Seuil, 1978], 50; tr. *Genres in Discourse*, trans. Catherine Porter [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990], 18. Emphasis mine.)

characteristics) are still to be studied.[73] For as generic concepts, the three terms of the traditional triad deserve no special hierarchical place: *epical*, for example, overarches the *epic*, the *novel*, the *novella*, the *tale*, etc., only if it is meant as mode (= narrative [*narratif*]); if it is meant as genre (= the epic) and given a specific thematic content (as with Hegel), it no longer *contains* the novelistic, the fantastic, etc., but is instead at their level. Likewise for the *dramatic* with respect to the tragic, the comic, etc., and for the *lyrical* with respect to the elegiac, the satirical, etc.[74] I deny only that a final generic position, and it alone, can be defined in terms that ex-

73. The problem of the relationship between atemporal archetypes and historical thematics is automatically raised (although not resolved) when one reads works like Gilbert Durand's *Décor mythique*, an anthropological analysis of a novelistic manner that seemingly dates from Ariosto, or Charles Mauron's *Psychocritique du genre comique*, a psychoanalytic reading of a genre that dates from Menander and the New Comedy (Aristophanes and the Old Comedy, for example, do not quite belong to the same "imaginative design").

74. In this case, terminology reflects and aggravates the theoretical confusion. To set beside *drama* [*drame*] and *epic* [*épopée*] (understood as specific genres) we can offer in [English or] French only the limp *lyric poem* [*poème lyrique*]. *Epical* [*épique*] in the modal sense is not really idiomatic, and no one will miss it—it is a Germanism, and we gain nothing by sanctioning it. As for *dramatic* [*dramatique*], it truly, and unfortunately, denotes both concepts, the generic (= characteristic of drama) and the modal (= characteristic of the theater). So at the modal level, [in French] we have nothing to align in paradigm with the adjective *narratif* (the only univocal term) [in English, of course, not even the word *narrative* is univocal]: *dramatique* remains ambiguous, and the third term is totally lacking.

clude all historicity. For at whatever level of generality one places oneself, the phenomenon of genre inextricably merges the phenomena—among others—of nature and of culture. That the proportions and the type of relationship itself can vary is, again, an observable fact, but no position is totally the product of nature or mind—as none is totally determined by history.

Sometimes a more empirical, and wholly relative, definition of ideal "types" is proposed (for example, by Lämmert in his *Bauformen des Erzählens*), but those would be only *the most enduring* generic forms. Such differences of degree—for example, between comedy and vaudeville or between the novel in general and the gothic novel—are undeniable, and it stands to reason that the broadest historical range is bound up with the broadest conceptual range. But the argument of duration must be handled carefully: the longevity of the classical forms (epic, tragedy) is not a sure indication of transhistoricity, given the conservatism of the classical tradition and its ability to sustain mummified forms for several centuries. Compared with forms of such durability, the postclassical (or paraclassical) forms suffer a historical erosion that is less their own doing than that of another historical rhythm. A more significant criterion than longevity would be the capacity for dispersion (among diverse cultures) and for spontaneous recurrence (without the stimulus of a tradition, revival, or "retro" style). One could take as an example the apparently spontaneous return of the epical in the early chansons de geste, in contrast to the labored resurrection of the classical epic in the seventeenth century. But in the presence of such subjects, one quickly sizes up the insufficiency not only of our historical knowledge but also, and more fundamentally, of our theoretical resources. For example: to what extent, in what manner,

and in what sense does the species chanson de geste belong to the epical genre? Another example: how can the epical be defined without any reference to the Homeric model and tradition?[75]

Now we are in a position to spell out the theoretical drawback of a fallacious attribution that could at first seem merely an unimportant (if not insignificant) historical mistake. The fallacious attribution projects the privilege of naturalness that inheres *legitimately* in the three modes *pure narration/mixed narration/dramatic imitation* ("there are and there can be only three ways of representing actions in language," etc.) onto the triad of genres, or archigenres, *lyricism/epic/drama* ("there are and there can be only three basic poetic outlooks," etc.). In surreptitiously (and unconsciously) backing both the modal definition and the generic definition,[76] the attri-

75. Cf. Daniel Poirion, "Chanson de geste ou épopée? Remarques sur la définition d'un genre," *Travaux de linguistique et de littérature* 10 (1972), part 2:7–20.

76. To my knowledge, Northrop Frye is the only—or nearly the only—modern literary theorist who maintains (in his own way) the distinction between modes and genres. Even so, he names *modes* what we ordinarily call genres (myth, romance, mimesis, irony), and *genres* what I would like to call modes (dramatic; narrative [*narratif*]–oral, or *epos*; narrative [*narratif*]–written, or *fiction*; sung to oneself, or *lyric*). In Frye, only the second division is based explicitly on Aristotle and Plato and takes as its criterion the "radical of presentation," that is, of communication with the public (see *Anatomy*, 246–51, especially 247). Claudio Guillén (*Literature as System*, 386–88), for his part, distinguishes three sorts of classes: genres properly so called, metrical forms, and (referring to Frye with a felicitous substitution of terms) "presentational *modes*, like

bution sets up these archigenres as ideal or natural types, which they are not and cannot be: no archigenre could totally escape historicity *while at the same time retaining a generic definition.*[77] There are modes (for example, the narrative); there are genres (for example, the novel); the relationship between genres and modes is complex and doubtless not, as Aristotle suggests, one of simple inclusion. Genres can cut across modes (Oedipus recounted is still tragic), perhaps the way individual works cut across genres—perhaps differently; but we do know that a novel is not solely a narrative and, therefore, that it is not a species of narrative or even a kind of narrative. In this area, indeed, that is all we know, and undoubtedly even that is too much. Poetics is a very old and very young "science": the little it "knows" it would perhaps sometimes be better off forgetting. In a

'*narrative*' and '*dramatic.*'" But he adds, not without reason, that "unlike Frye, I do not think that these modes constitute the central principle of all generic differentiation, and that the specific genres are forms or instances *of* these modes."

77. The italicized phrase is no doubt the only point on which I part company with Philippe Lejeune's criticism of the idea of "type" (*Le Pacte autobiographique*, 326–34). Like Lejeune, I believe that type is "an idealized projection" ("naturalized," I would more readily call it) of genre. Like Todorov, however, I think that there exist a priori forms, let us call them, of literary expression. But in my view these a priori forms are to be found only in modes, which are linguistic and preliterary categories. And then, of course, there is subject matter, which is also largely extraliterary and transhistorical. I say "largely," not "wholly": I unhesitatingly concede to Lejeune that autobiography, like all genres, is a historical fact, but I maintain that its thematic commitments are not entirely so and that "bourgeois consciousness" does not explain everything about them.

sense, that is all I wanted to say—and that too, of course, is still too much.

## X

All that precedes is a slightly refined and expanded version of an article published in *Poétique* in November 1977 under the title "Genres, 'Types,' Modes." As Philippe Lejeune immediately let me know, its conclusion was excessively flippant, or figurative. If, then, it is necessary (but is it?) to be literal, what poetics has to do is not "forget" its past (or present) errors but, naturally, understand them better to avoid falling into them all over again. To the extent that attributing the theory of the "three basic genres" to Plato and Aristotle is a historical error that guarantees and places a premium on theoretical confusion, I obviously believe that this (too) significant mishap should be both shaken off and, as a lesson, borne in mind.

But then again, my evasive conclusion masked, badly and somewhat unwittingly, a theoretical difficulty I will now try to confront by way of this detail: "The relationship between genres and modes," I said, was "doubtless not, as Aristotle suggests, one of simple inclusion." "As Aristotle suggests" is, I realize, equivocal: does Aristotle suggest that it is or that it is not? It seemed to me then that he said it is, but undoubtedly I was none too sure, hence the prudent "suggests" and the ambiguous construction. What is the situation in fact, or how do I now view it?

I would now contend that in Aristotle—and contrary to what we find in most of the later literary theorists, classical or modern—the relationship between the category of genre and the category of what I, in his name, call "mode" (the term "genre," after all, does not ap-

pear in the *Poetics*) is not one of *mere inclusion*, or more precisely is not one of *merely single* inclusion. There is and is not inclusion, or rather there is (at least) *double* inclusion—that is, intersection. As the first chart in this book (page 14), constructed according to the text of the *Poetics*, makes very clear—and this, too, I realize only after the fact—the category of genre (for instance, tragedy) is included in both the category of mode (dramatic) and the category of object (superior), where it belongs for a different reason but to the same degree. The structural difference between Aristotle's system and the systems of the romantic and modern theories is that these latter generally come down to an arrangement of univocal and hierarchical inclusions (individual works under species, species under genres, genres under "types"), whereas the Aristotelian system, however rudimentary in other respects, is implicitly tabular, implicitly presupposes a table that is (at least) double entry, with each genre belonging to both (at least) one modal category and one thematic category. Tragedy, for example, is defined (at this level) as both this-sort-of-work-with-a-noble-subject-that-is-presented-on-the-stage and this-sort-of-work-presented-on-the-stage-whose-subject-is-noble, and epic as both a-heroic-action-recounted and the-narrative-of-a-heroic-action, etc. The modal and thematic categories are not related to each other in terms of subordination (mode neither includes nor implies theme; theme neither includes nor implies mode), and it necessarily follows that the spatial presentation of the table could be inverted, with the objects along the abscissa and the modes along the ordinate. But modes and themes, intersecting, jointly include and determine genres.

It seems to me today that *if a system is necessary* (is it?), then *by and large* Aristotle's system (once again, *torniamo*

*all'antico* . . . ), despite its no longer justifiable exclusion of the nonrepresentational genres, is *in its structure* somewhat superior to (meaning, of course, more effective than) most of those that have come after, fundamentally flawed as they are by their inclusive and hierarchical taxonomy, which each time immediately brings the whole game to a standstill and produces an impasse.

I find a new example of this in the recent work of Klaus Hempfer, *Gattungstheorie*,[78] which claims to be a synthetic clarification of the main existing theories. Under the modest yet ambitious heading of "systematic terminology," Hempfer proposes an implicitly hierarchical system whose inclusive classes, going from the broadest to the narrowest, would be "modes of writing" (*Schreibweisen*), based on the enunciating situation (these are our *modes*—for example, narrative versus dramatic); "types" (*Typen*), which are specifications of the modes—within the narrative mode, for example, "first-person" (homodiegetic) narration versus "authorial" (heterodiegetic) narration; "genres" (*Gattungen*), which are the concrete historical realizations (novel, novella, epic, etc.); and "subgenres" (*Untergattungen*), which are the more limited specifications within genres (like the picaresque novel within the genre of novel).

At first glance this system is attractive (to those who are attracted by that kind of thing), initially because it places at the apex of the pyramid the category of mode, which in my view is the most undeniably universal category inasmuch as it is based on the transhistorical and translinguistic fact of pragmatic situations. Next, because the category of *type* authorizes submodal specifications such as those the study of narrative forms has

78. (Munich: W. Fink, 1973), 26–27.

been highlighting for a century (if the narrative mode is a legitimate transgeneric category, it seems obvious that an overall theory of genres has to incorporate the submodal specifications of narratology, and of course the same holds true for any specifications there may be of the dramatic mode). Similarly, it is indisputable (and this I have already acknowledged) that a generic category like the novel can be subdivided into specifications that are less extensive but more detailed, such as picaresque novel, sentimental novel, detective novel, etc. In other words, the categories of both mode and genre unavoidably call for their own subdivisions, and naturally nothing prevents these latter from being christened "types" and "subgenres," respectively (although one would scarcely recommend the term *type* either for its transparency or for its congruence with the paradigm: *submode* would be both clearer and more "systematic"—that is, in this case, symmetrical).

But, as we see, the shoe pinches when we try to draw together in an inclusive relationship the categories of "genre" and "type." For whereas the narrative mode includes in some way, for example, the genre of novel, the novel cannot possibly be subordinated to a particular specification of the narrative mode: if we subdivide this mode into homodiegetic and heterodiegetic, clearly the genre of novel cannot go wholly under either of these two types, for there are both "first-person" novels and "third-person" novels.[79] In short, whereas type is a sub-

79. Let us note in passing that these "formal"—that is, (sub)modal—specifications do not ordinarily have the status of subgenres, or of species, as do the picaresque, sentimental, and other novels referred to above. The properly (sub)generic categories are apparently always connected to thematic specifications. But that question requires closer examination.

mode, genre is not a subtype, and the chain of inclusions breaks apart right there.

But this *systematische Terminologie* creates difficulties on yet another point, one that until now I have avoided bringing up: the highest category of *Schreibweisen* is not so homogeneous (so purely modal) as I have suggested, for it includes other "ahistorical constants" besides the narrative and dramatic modes. Actually, Hempfer mentions only one other, but its presence is enough to unbalance the whole class: the "satiric" mode, whose determination is obviously thematic in nature—and which is therefore closer to the Aristotelian category of objects than to that of modes.

This criticism, I hasten to specify, is directed only at the taxonomic incoherence of a class that is christened "modes of writing" but into which there seems in fact a tendency to pile indiscriminately all "constants," of whatever kind. As I have said, I do indeed acknowledge the existence (at least the relative existence) of "ahistorical," or rather transhistorical, constants, not only with respect to the modes of enunciation but also with respect to some major thematic categories, such as the heroic, the sentimental, the comic, etc. An ultimate inventory of these categories would perhaps serve only to diversify and qualify (along the lines of Frye's "modes" or otherwise) the elementary antitheses Aristotle posited among superior, equal, and inferior "objects," without necessarily compromising, for the moment, the principle of a chart of the genres based on the intersecting of modal and thematic categories. The categories would simply be more numerous on both sides than Aristotle perceived them to be: the thematic categories would obviously increase (and I recall that the main part of the *Poetics* is devoted to a more elaborate description of the tragic subject, implicitly leaving the less "eminently

déry's *Axiane*. So we would need a figure with three dimensions; the third, we should remember, was implicitly foreseen by Aristotle with the question *in what?* that determines the choice of the formal "medium" of imitation (in what language, in what meter, etc.). I am rather inclined to think that perhaps, through a fortunate infirmity of the human mind, the major imaginable parameters of the generic system come down to those three kinds of "constants" (thematic, modal, and formal) and that a sort of translucent cube, no doubt less manageable (and less pleasing) than Petersen's rose window, would give us, at least for a while, the illusion of coping with and accounting for them. But I am not quite sure, and I have spent too much time handling (albeit gingerly) the various models and projections of my ingenious predecessors to take my turn at playing this dangerous game. So for now, let us simply suppose that a certain number of thematic, modal, and formal determinations that are *relatively constant and transhistorical* (that is, whose rhythm of variation is perceptibly slower than the rhythms that History—both "literary" and "general"—must ordinarily be cognizant of) delineate, as it were, the landscape in which the evolution of the field of literature is set, and to a great extent determine something like the reservoir of generic potentialities from which that evolution makes its selections—not, of course, without occasional surprises, repetitions, capricious decisions, sudden mutations, or unpredictable creations.

I am well aware that such a vision of History may seem a poor caricature of the structuralist bugbear, holding cheap precisely what makes History irreducible to this kind of chart, namely, the cumulative and the irreversible—the sheer fact of *generic memory*, for example (*Jerusalem Delivered* recalls the *Aeneid*, which recalls the

*Odyssey*, which recalls the *Iliad*), which is conducive not only to imitation, and therefore stagnation, but also to differentiation (one cannot, of course, *repeat* what one imitates) and therefore to a minimum of evolution. But I also persist in thinking that absolute relativism is a submarine with sails, that historicism kills History, and that the study of transformations implies the examination, and thus the taking into account, of continuities. The course of history is obviously not determined, but it is to a great extent guided by the navigational lights of the combinatory chart: before the bourgeois era, bourgeois drama was impossible; but as we have seen, bourgeois drama can be satisfactorily defined as the diametric opposite of heroic comedy. And I note, too, that Philippe Lejeune, who views autobiography, no doubt correctly, as a relatively recent genre, defines it ("a retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life, in particular on the development of his personality") in terms free of all historical determination.[81] Undoubtedly, autobiography is possible only in the modern age, but this definition—combining features that are thematic (the growth of a genuine individual), modal (a retrospective autodiegetic narration), and formal (in prose)—is typically Aristotelian, and strictly atemporal.[82]

81. "Le Pacte autobiographique," in *Le Pacte autobiographique* (Paris: Seuil, 1975); tr. "The Autobiographical Contract," in *French Literary Theory Today: A Reader*, trans. R. Carter, ed. Tzvetan Todorov (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 193.

82. Historicity of course enters the picture as soon as one supposes that the ideas of becoming and of personality are inconceivable before the seventeenth century; but this

## XI

"Nonetheless," one will object, "this cavalier linking itself is wholly retrospective, and while Lejeune may recall Aristotle, Aristotle does not foretell Lejeune and never defined autobiography."

"Agreed. But we have already noted that, some centuries before Fielding, unknowingly and except for one detail (prose), he did define the modern novel from Sorel to Joyce: 'low narrative.' Since then, have we come up with anything much better?"

"In short, fairly slow progress in poetics. Maybe we'd be better off abandoning an enterprise that's so marginal (in the economic sense) and letting literary historians (it's their job, certainly) do the empirical studies of genres—or maybe subgenres—as sociohistorical institutions: the Roman elegy, the chanson de geste, the picaresque novel, the sentimental comedy, etc."

"That would be a pretty good way out, and seemingly a good bargain for everyone, although not all the items you've named are exactly of prime importance. But I doubt that one can very easily, or very pertinently, write the history of an institution without first defining it: in *picaresque novel* there is *novel*, and assuming that the *picaro* is a social given of the period for which literature bears no responsibility (a supposition that is a little excessive), we must still define that species in terms of the

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(hypo)thesis remains external to the definition proper. And in fact I am not sure that with autobiography I have chosen the most difficult example; it would no doubt be harder to imagine Aristotle defining the western, the space opera, or even, as Cervantes already noted, the tale of chivalry. Certain thematic specifications inevitably bear the mark of their terminus a quo.

nearest genre, the genre itself in terms of something else, and here we are (again) in the thick of poetics: what is the novel?"

"A useless question. What counts is *this* novel, and don't forget that the demonstrative spares us the need for definition. Let's focus on what exists—that is, single works. Let's do criticism; criticism gets along very nicely without universals."

"It gets along very poorly, since it resorts to them without being aware of it and without recognizing them and at the very moment when it claims to be doing without them: you said 'this *novel*.'"

"Let's say 'this *text*,' and be done with it."

"I'm not sure the change does you much good. At best, you've jumped from poetics to phenomenology: what is *a* text?"

"I don't much care: whatever it is, I can always shut myself up inside it and comment on it in my own way."

"You are, then, shutting yourself up inside a genre."

"What genre?"

"Textual commentary, for heaven's sake, and even, to be exact, textual-commentary-that-doesn't-care-about-genres: that's a subgenre. Frankly, your discourse interests me."

"Yours interests me, too. I'd like to know where you get this rage for *getting out*: of the text by way of genre, of the genre by way of mode, of the mode . . ."

"By way of the text, from time to time and just for a change or, at another level, just to get out of the way out. But it is true that *for the moment* the text interests me (only) in its *textual transcendence*—namely, everything that brings it into relation (manifest or hidden) with other texts. I call that *transtextuality*, and I include under it *intertextuality* in the strict (and, since Julia Kristeva, the "classical") sense—that is, the literal presence

(more or less literal, whether integral or not) of one text within another. Quotation—that is, the explicit summoning up of a text that is both presented and distanced by quotation marks—is the most obvious example of this type of function, which comprises many others as well. Under transtextuality I also include—using the obligatory term *metatextuality*, modeled on *language/metalanguage*—the transtextual relationship that links a commentary to the text it comments on. All literary critics, for centuries, have been producing metatext without knowing it."

"They'll know it as of tomorrow: what a staggering disclosure and invaluable promotion. I thank you on their behalf."

"Nothing to it—it's merely terminological fallout, and you know how I like to be helpful if it doesn't take much. But let me finish: under transtextuality I put still other kinds of relationships—chiefly, I think, relationships of imitation and transformation, which pastiche and parody can give us an idea of, or rather two ideas, for they're very different, although too often confused with each other or incorrectly differentiated. For lack of a better term, I'll christen them *paratextuality* (which to my mind is transtextuality par excellence), and perhaps someday, God willing, I'll look into it. Finally (unless I've left something out), I put under transtextuality that relationship of inclusion that links each text to the various types of discourse it belongs to. Here we have the genres, with their determinations that we've already glimpsed: thematic, modal, formal, and other (?). It stands to reason that we should call this the *architext*, and *architextuality*, or simply *architexture* . . ."

"Your simpleness is a bit cloddish. Jokes on the word *text* form a genre that seems to me indeed overworked."

"I agree. So I would gladly propose to stop with this one."

"I would have preferred . . ."

"So would I, but after all, people can't change their ways and, taking everything into account, I'm making no promises. So let's call *architextuality* the relationship between the text and its architext.[83] That transcendence is omnipresent, whatever Croce and others may have said about the lack of validity of the generic viewpoint in literature and elsewhere. We can dismiss the objection by remembering that ever since the *Iliad*, quite a few works have rallied to the generic viewpoint; that quite a few others, like the *Divine Comedy*, have at first hung back from it; that the contrast between these two groups in itself sketches out a system of genres—one could say, more simply, that the blending or scorning of genres is one genre among others; and that no one can either avoid this very crude schema or be satisfied with it. So one is caught up in the system."

"It's okay with me that you're caught up in it."

"You're wrong: it's *my* system, and *you're* the one who's caught up in it. The architext is, then, everywhere—above, beneath, around the text, which spins its web only by hooking it here and there onto that network of architexture. What we call theory of genres, or *genology* (Van Tieghem); theory of modes (I propose *modistics*; and *narratics*, or *narratology*, the theory of narrative, is part of it); theory of figures—no, not rhetoric,

83. The term *architexture* and the adjective *architextual* have been used by Mary Ann Caws, "Le Passage du poème" (*Cahiers de l'Association internationale des études françaises*, May 1978, no. 30: 225–43), in a wholly different sense, which escapes me.

or theory of discourse, which overarches everything way up high—and *figuratics* I was once stuck with; what would you say to *figurology*?"

". . ."

"I'm not forcing you to say it; theory of styles, or *transcendent stylistics* . . ."

"Why transcendent?"

"To be stylish, and to contrast it with stylistic criticism à la Spitzer, which aims more often than not to be immanent in the text; theory of forms, or *morphology* (a little neglected today, but that could change; it includes, among others, *metrics*, meaning, as Mazaleyrat proposes, the general study of poetic forms); theory of themes, or *thematics* (criticism known by that name would be simply an application of the theory to individual works): all those disciplines . . ."

"I'm not too happy with that idea."

"So there we have something in common! But a 'discipline' (let's use quotation marks of protest) isn't, or at least shouldn't be, an institution, but only an instrument, a transitional means that's abolished at once in achieving its goal—which may very well be only another means (another 'discipline'), which in turn . . . and so on: the whole point is to move ahead. We have already used up some disciplines, whose necrology I will spare you."

"One good turn deserves another: you didn't finish your sentence."

"I'd counted on not having to, but you don't miss a thing. All these 'disciplines,' then, and others still to be discovered and scrapped in their turn—the whole endlessly forming and re-forming poetics, whose object, let us firmly state, *is not the text, but the architext*—can, faute de mieux, help us explore that architextual, or architextural, transcendence. Or, more modestly, navigate in it.

Or, still more modestly, float in it, somewhere out beyond the text."

"Your modesty seems pretty venturesome: floating in a transcendence on board a 'discipline' bound for the scrap heap (or for re-formation) . . . Sir Poetician, I'd say you're starting out badly."

"My dear Frédéric,[84] did I say I was starting out?"

84. [Translator's note.] "Frédéric" is the author's nickname.

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