

Georg Lukács: Forms of Longing

For Georg Lukács, Marxism represented not only a politics and an economics, but also a morality, an aesthetics, and even, if the word is used guardedly, an erotics. On the first and most obvious level, Marxism is a form-giving principle—its “scientific” method allowing him to impose order and harmony on a fluid reality and to judge the implications of modern developments through a clear, stable perspective. Underlying the surface form of Marxist thought however, the reader will discern a second stratum—that of longing—which rejects formalism and which undercuts the formalistic certainties with the vaguer yearnings of an unfulfilled, unfulfillable hope. Lukács criticism has long implicitly acknowledged this subterranean strain in the Marxist writer, and the recurrence of specific words, phrases, and metaphors in the writings of admirers and critics alike creates a striking pattern in the exegeses of the great Hungarian critic. Thus, writers as various and as distinct as Fredric Jameson, Michael Holzman, Michael Sprinker, David Forgacs, Andrew Arato and Paul Breines, among others, point to the “nostalgia” inherent in Lukács’ vision, a nostalgia related to his “impulse to be everywhere at home in the world.”¹ The impulse to be everywhere at home is, of course, realized in a sense of being truly at home nowhere; in his works, as in his life, Lukács is frequently uprooted or uproots himself. Haunted by potentialities, at home (however defined), he still *yearns* (another recurrent word in Lukács studies)² for another home elsewhere, in another time. Both desperately dislocated and firmly situated at the same time, Lukács’ passionate adoption of the Marxist stance is not that of the single-minded revolutionary, but that of the thinking man whose desire for order is precisely that: a yearning for that which can never be fully achieved. “Every significant person has only one thought,” wrote Lukács, and the idea of form, which he identifies at *the* thought of Leó Popper³ is central to him as well. Yet following de Man, we might add that each person’s single thought is paired with a typical misconception of that thought which together form a hidden dichotomy that fuels insights and provokes blindness in a writer and his critics. The implicit antinomies of Lukácsian thought are, then, those of form and longing: the longing for a form that will complete itself in a future time, the form of a longing that rejects the very possibility of complete form.

The privileged status of form is particularly evident in the essay. As Lukács notes in his early work, *Soul and Form* (1910), "Form is reality in the writings of the critics,"⁴ thus establishing an implicit equation between the ontological status of the essay form and that of poetic image as parallel projections of meaningful structure onto reality. The essayist, however, in his concentration on form, abandons images as the central structure drawing together being and reality; instead, he addresses the facts of life as he perceives them or as these facts are conveyed in their just representation in another piece of writing. His arrangement of these essential forms of reality in a coherent and meaningful structure is the focus of the essay. Objective reality, Lukács implies, is not at issue. Indeed, in his best writings, considerations of objective reality are apt to be left to one side; that is, validity and coherence of form take precedence over objective truth value. Selection and arrangement rather than mimesis are the crucial issues. Said is correct, therefore, in signalling the problematic of *place* as crucial to the discussion of the *form* of the essay. He observes that place "involves relations the critic fashions with the texts he addresses [approach] and the audience he addresses [intention]; it also involves the dynamic *taking place* of his own text as it produces itself." At question then, in this assumption of a place congruent with his chosen form (Said's, Lukács', or mine) is the problem of whether an essay is best considered a "text, an intervention between texts, an intensification of the notion of textuality, or a dispersion of language away from a contingent page to occasion, tendencies, currents or movements in and for history."⁵

In these words the force and the limit of Lukács' thought are suggested. If form is reality, likewise reality is form. Furthermore, as Tavor notes, "To form is therefore not only to represent life; it is also to judge it."⁶ Lukács' longing to recuperate the ontological status of form involves an ideology and a morality which implicitly negate both that being and that assumption of reality. The essayist may dream of a destiny in the world, but his destiny, his condemnation, is to the aesthetics of the word. Thus, the young Lukács consciously abandons his longing for a life with Irma Seidler out of a "dread of the destructive influence of happiness"⁷ which would distract him from his work and from Life in his chosen area of an intellectually rigorous inquiry into form. As he writes in an early essay: "Certainly most men live without Life and are unaware of it. Their lives are merely social. . . . Indeed, for them the fulfilling of responsibilities is the only possible means of enhancing their lives. . . . These men can

never get beyond themselves for their contact with others is at best a psychological interpretation, while the force of responsibility gives their lives a firm and secure, if shallow, form."⁸ The nostalgia so often noted in Lukács' involves a ruthlessly repressed longing for life as well as a Life; his extremely suggestive unmailed letter to Irma—"Once again the 'ice age' has begun for me, complete loneliness, complete separation from life and every human community"⁹—strongly indicates his desire for wholeness despite a rigid theoretical separation of "life" and "work."¹⁰ As the two longings, for life and for a Life, conflict, so too the sedimentation of these longings in his chosen work results in an ambiguous relationship to form as well. For in Lukács the provisionality of the essay form—by definition an exercise or trying out of ideas—is suppressed in a longing for an ideal form. The issue, already implicit in his early work, is never fully resolved.

For Lukács the essay becomes a search for and the intermittent visualization of an order and a center of universal convergence. As such, it is an objectifying and stabilizing force converting the flux of becoming into concrete being, ongoing praxis into a single form held firm ("a solid possession"), if only momentarily. The "theoretical overtotalization" (Said's phrase) of these early essayistic efforts follows Lukács into his later life as well. Cornel West, referring to Lukács' lifelong obsession with ontological investigation, asks, "Why then did Lukács—the greatest Marxist thinker of this century—pursue such a futile project?" And he answers his own question: "He remained in search of certainty. . . . He had to find a secure grounding for his belief in the objective possibility of wholeness and life-meaning";¹¹ petty lives and longings become a Life closed and whole, become an ideal Life, rounded with significance.

As a Marxist, Lukács refuses, of course, the Christian notion of a transcendental state of perfect being, but his implicit aim in the terrestrial sphere often seems curiously similar. Demetz finds that "Lukács's concept of type . . . rejoins the theological tradition" through its emphasis on the prophetic nature of the typical character,¹² a statement which is true not only for the concept of type but for his theoretical reflections on the essay form in general. Through his essays, Lukács attempts to fix the incessant flux of history in a discrete present moment or in a vision of earthly transcendence. The fact that existence cannot be congealed into being does not invalidate the effort, but acts as a limiting condition that must be acknowledged and taken into account. It is longing that prevents form from fully achiev-

ing its object. For while "form" reflects its alliance with the concepts of order, harmony, reality, totality, recognition, necessity, and being, "longing" draws to itself an opposing set of significations: chaos, dissonance, appearance, immediacy, disguise, freedom, and becoming. Yet, in a certain sense, "longing" is an illicit term in the discussion of a strictly Marxist critic like the later Lukács. The language of desire and passionate attraction is pointedly absent from the vocabulary of Marx, who wishes to by-pass the concerns of the body in favor of the abstractions of science. Curiously enough, however, this rejection of the body in favor of the mind involves another form of passion which is not dissimilar in essence. The great mystics of the Church deny the body and reach out persistently for the truth behind the image, yet, in their description of ecstasy, the language of erotic love is the only appropriate one to describe their experience. So too in Marx (and in Lukács) longing enters surreptitiously through the implications of the chosen rhetoric. The operations of longing upon form are perfectly realized in Marx's writings when he says, "It is value, rather, that converts every product into a social hieroglyphic."¹³ The mysterious operations of value upon form convert it into an image, an object of longing, a myth. Substantiality is subsumed in subjectivity and a simple object come to partake of (to use another illicit word) the sacred.

The young, pre-Marxist Lukács also recognized the significance of the hieroglyph and paid tribute to its evocative power: "the true poets of myth looked only for the true meaning of their themes; they neither could nor wished to check their pragmatic reality. They saw these myths as sacred, mysterious hieroglyphics which it was their mission to read" (*S&F*, 12). As for Marx, the products of a technological society join the old tales and legends as hieroglyphs, and the undecipherable longings of science unite with those of art. The myths of the past retain their vibrancy and the myths of the present gain their mystery through the subjective action of longing upon substance.

It is contrary to the mode of existence of the hieroglyph that it be deciphered. Desire can never be fulfilled or the image loses its value and degenerates once again into a simple product: "all representation," says David Carroll, "is constituted by both production and loss."¹⁴ It is one of the great dilemmas of Lukács' concept of totality that it be so thoroughly conditioned by this unacknowledged paradox, an unresolved problem inherited, perhaps, from his more idealistic youth. Carroll concurs. "Thus," he writes, "the abstract totality which the novel attempts to impose on concrete life can only result in

the repeated assertion of the distance separating it from life. . . ."¹⁵ Disappearing in the distance, yet all the more present, always gone, always within grasp: that which is desired, which stirs the emotions to their heights, is both necessary as the object of the quest, yet unattainable if not actually illusory. Roland Barthes, whose critical differences from Lukács are far more apparent than his similarities with him, nevertheless sees the scholarly endeavor in terms that are highly pertinent to the discussion of this author. He acutely observes that "the writer or the critic and Orpheus are both under the same prohibition which constitutes their 'song': the prohibition from turning back toward what they love."¹⁶ Alienation from the (utopian) reality of the work is the destiny of the realistic or dialectical writer as well as his romantic counterpart. There is an unremitting paradox in this formulation, of course; only that which arouses desire can be known at all, but in order for desire to be maintained the object cannot be known well.

On another level, the object of longing is not merely that which is exterior to the writer and resists his efforts to penetrate it. On the contrary, the essential motivation of longing is not exterior (i.e., not in the product itself) but interior (e.g., in the values that the individual applies to it which invest it with the hieroglyphic quality). Thus Lukács is correct in his assertion that "true longing is always turned inward, however much its paths may lead across the external world" (*S&F*, 92). The discussion of a scientific development or of a work of art is only ostensibly a discussion of the forms of reality in an exterior, verifiable world. The critic, in evaluating a work, is remaking that work and that world in terms of his own value system; the essential core of "reality" is constituted by this implicit set of values. Thus, the form of the essay also reveals the critic's narcissistic longing to come to terms with the conditions and nature of his own desire and a longing to conceptualize the essential verities of desire for others: what Congdon calls the "gnostic tyranny"¹⁷ of Lukács' ideology. This attitude, as Paul de Man suggests, reflects the Nietzschean side of Lukács, at least in his use of rhetoric,¹⁸ the will to truth or will to power that directly confronts the necessarily open, arbitrary form of the essay genre. The gnostic tyranny is all the more strictly imposed in the face of the philosophical rebellion of the tyrant's materials. If Lukács situates the essential reality within himself, then inevitably an abyss opens between totality (form, the monumental home) and the individual (life force, will to power, nostalgic longing). Thus the form of the essay frustrates the longing that inspires its creation, the long-

ing to be one with the object. Even what Rochlitz calls "l'abandon de l'attitude essayiste"¹⁹ in the laterworks (but did he ever abandon this stance?) expresses no more or less than a visible intensification of this longing for form in the face of his struggle with and fear of the neo-Kantian separation of writing subject and written object.

The later, more programmatically Marxist Lukács relegates these concerns to the background, but they are not entirely lost. In "the Writer and the Critic," he observes that "the normal relationship between writer and critic is to be found in their encounter within this 'intermediate zone': in the cognition and grounding of objectivity in the creative process."²⁰ Despite the emphasis on cognitive processes and objectivity in this passage, it is clear that Lukács has not abandoned the idea of the critic as the mediator between the system and the forms on one hand and a subjectively conceived totality on the other. In confronting the flux of immediacy and making an effort to derive the essential forms, the Marxist critic too is involved in an unintentional distortion of reality through his longing to order it. The critic is a mediator, but the form taken by his engagement with the terms of the dialectic is an ambivalent one; his intentions are masked by a false assumption of critical distance.

Lukács points to "the intensive inexhaustibility of man (the subject) and the objective world encompassing him", but warns that in a technologically-oriented modern society "life moves relentlessly toward reducing the word to the mechanical simplicity of a mere sign" (*W&C*, 11). Emphasis on the evolution of forms in time notwithstanding, Lukács implicitly recognizes that, without the component of longing, the form of the word (the Word?) loses its fecundity and degenerates into a mere infertile commodity. Thus, in an ideal situation, the text (historical or fictional) becomes the representative of Logos incarnate as a positive productive force. In modern society, however, there is the clear danger that technology may subsume the meanings of history into a cybernetic structure incapable of producing new meanings or new texts: the pure alienation of life which, as noted earlier, also has a form, albeit a shallow one. In the exchanges of literary commerce, as Conrad notes in one of his letters, meaning and value are themselves ground into the machine:

There is a—let us say—a machine. It evolved itself (I am severely scientific) out of a chaos of scraps of iron and behold!—it knits. I am horrified at the horrible work and stand appalled. I feel it ought to embroider—but it goes on knit-

ting. . . . And the most withering thought is that the infamous thing as made itself; made itself without thought, without conscience, without foresight, without eyes, without heart. It is a tragic accident—and it happened. You can't interfere with it. The last drop of bitterness is in the suspicion that you can't even smash it. In virtue of that truth one and immortal which lurks in the force that made it spring into existence it is what it is—and it is indestructible!

It knits us in and it knits us out. It has knitted time, space, pain, death, corruption, despair and all the illusions—and nothing matters. I'll admit however that to look at the remorseless process is sometimes amusing.²¹

The impersonal efficiency of the machine achieves its power and its terror because it is a pure form free from the exigencies of longing that are required for progress. Through the nihilistic offices of the machine, reality is reduced to a code. As Lukács observes, with the ascendancy of machine over man, "the fragmentation of the object of production necessarily entails the fragmentation of its subject" with the terrifying result that in advanced industrial countries, "time is everything, man is nothing; he is at most the incarnation of time,"²² of time knitted relentlessly, remorselessly into Conrad's machine.

To this repression of the subject the human being responds by an eruption of subjectivity. Turning to modernist writers, Lukács notes that the subjectivization of time is reflected in the uncritical stance of major writers to their culture: "the modernist writer identifies what is necessarily a subjective experience with reality as such, thus giving a distorted picture of reality as a whole. . . ." ²³ Writing from within the machine, the amusement of a Conrad, for example, becomes an exercise in solipsistic self-indulgence presupposing (and disguising) an underlying scarcely-recognized ethics and politics. The ethics of a conception of time founded in the present moment is hedonistic in the extreme in that it affirms the pleasures of the body or, what is the other side of the same coin, withdraws exclusively to the pleasures of the mind. As a politics, the rejection of the future in favor of a succession of present instants implies the rejection of progress and teleology. There is also a moral issue involved: the conversion of the body into a mere instrument of labor results in (to recall our illicit terminology) a desacralization of that body, a mutilation of man's possibilities.

In a certain sense, the consequences (and the conscience) of the radical formalism of industrial society, on the one hand, and the at-

tenuated longings of a subjectivized vision, on the other, are reflected in the pre-eminence of the ironic form in our literature. "It is a subtle and poignant irony," says Lukács in *Soul and Form*, "when the great critic dreams our longing into early Florentine paintings . . . and speaks of the latest achievements of scientific research, of new methods and new facts" (S&F 12-13). Art becomes a kind of negative theology in the reverence that is shown it, a reverence that is at every point both acknowledged and undermined by the action of the critic. Nevertheless, the irony of irony is not in its distanciation from the object under contemplation, but the submerged longing with which that object is endowed, a longing which is exemplified in the passion for piercing through surfaces to the "essences" supposedly contained in its depths. Malraux captures the crux of this painful situation when he observes in reference to contemporary art that "our modern masters paint their pictures as the artists of ancient civilization carved or painted gods;"²⁴ that is, the denial of spiritual transcendence is, in its negation of faith, itself an expression of faith in the supreme values of art.

Clearly, however, the ironic form typical of the modern essay is subject to perversion in a bourgeois society. "This bourgeois way of life is only a *mask*," says Lukács, "and like all masks it is negative: it is only the opposite of something, it acquires meaning solely through the energy with which it says 'No' to something" (S&F, 56). The negativity of an ironic stance towards reality is perverted into a negation of that reality which mystifies rather than problematizes it. Still, Lukács himself at times wears a version of one of his own masks. In the essay, "Longing and Form," he states that "great longing is always taciturn and it always disguises itself behind many different masks. . . . But the mask also represents the great, two-fold struggle of life: the struggle to be recognized and the struggle to remain disguised" (S&F, 92). As a critic, Lukács impersonalizes and imprisons his longings behind the rhetoric of indirection and the "scientific" modes of analysis appropriate to a Marxist philosophy. There is a secret desire, only intermittently revealed, that his works be appreciated in terms other than truth value. This shedding of the mask is particularly evident in his careful prefaces to the re-issues of his earlier works. Lukács writes in the preface to the 1968 edition of *History and Class Consciousness*: "I must begin by confessing that having once discarded any of my works I remain indifferent to them for the whole of my life" (xxxviii). Similar statements made explicitly in reference to *The Theory of the Novel* and *Soul and Form*, are impossible to take at

face value. In each case, the autobiographical "I" can be revealed as a mask. While each of these works represents a complex of philosophical attitudes which Lukács found deficient, yet his own disguised longing returns in his inability to renounce or wholly abandon them. He must repress his deep urge to find in the delimitation of his complete works a single unified corpus. In this demonstration of the contrary pull of his desire, irony shows both its faces: that of distanciation from the form perceived, and that of longing for a total form to bridge the gap.

In his revisionary prefaces, Lukács must repress pure longing in his longing for form, for totality. On the one hand, each form is prevented from achieving stability (the end of history, irony, longing) by a perpetual postponement inherent in the concept of longing—the beloved can never be possessed by the lover. On the other hand, there are in Lukács indications that the mechanism of longing at times denies or ignores this deferral in an effort to grasp the whole in the present moment. When Lukács discusses the category of totality, he is, then, not so much delimiting a form as describing his own longing for a complete meaning in the instant. Lukács mediates for us the "totality" of his work, that is, he gives it form.

At these points in his arguments, Lukács' ironic consciousness is dispersed as his thought verges on a secularized mysticism that creates the forms of the world out of a longing for system. Geoffrey Hartman has also recognized that the essay form is ideally "a counterpart, perhaps counterpoint,, to mysticism's desire for ultimate issues,"²⁵ and the comparison with the mystics is not an idle one; Lukács himself states that "longing soars higher than itself; great love always has something ascetic about it" (S&F, 94). The image of the ascetic attempting inconceivable heights in search of a union with the Ineffable is essentially a mystic one. That the Ineffable is also the Unapproachable (and unrepresentable) is temporarily forgotten, and from his blindness of longing evolves Lukács' repressed and irrepressible utopianism. Like the mystics who are allowed a glimpse of the face of God, the essayist is vouchsafed a momentary vision of truth: "He is delivered from the relative, the inessential, by the force of judgement of ideas he has glimpsed . . ." (S&F, 16).

Totality is, therefore, for Lukács both a normative and an ontological category as well as (though Lukács would not admit it) an epistemological one. It provides, as Jameson notes, both a method and a means of critiquing, of demystifying that method.²⁶ The representation of that totality in a concrete historical moment is the (impossible)

goal of every true work of art or criticism. Thus, while Lukács rejects much of his early Marxist work, *History and Class Consciousness*, he points with pride to the fact that it recognizes the importance of totality as a category and describes the ontological implications of this conception in relation to the concrete historical and political situation of man in the modern age (HCC, xx). Likewise, an artistic work must not be satisfied with the self-enclosed totality of artifact, an avatar of Conrad's Industrial Age machine, but must reach out to comprise the social realities of a specific historical and cultural situation. Only the great artist or the great critic is capable of such an effort of abstraction of the typical: "this step-by-step approximation of the hidden reality is accessible only to the greatest and most persevering genius" (W&C, 80).

The artist's ability is also the source of his obligation; "totality" is not only an ontological category to be grasped in true descriptions of the nature of reality, but it also encloses the necessity for critique: a moral and ethical imperative. In Lukács, this (often) normative drive can become overwhelming, a tendency which has resulted in the frequent charges of inflexibility and utopianism. The nostalgic tone in his appreciation of the lost wholeness of the classical age (e.g., *The Theory of the Novel*) is indicative of this normative drive, as in his later, Marxist-inspired attraction to the closed narrative structures of the nineteenth-century novel. Aesthetic totality reaffirms the (imagined) originary totality of existence in a lost Golden Age.

It is in this respect that Lukács' utopianism is most clearly evident, in his longing for another time, another place—in the past (Classical Greece, pre-1848 Europe), in the future (the projected end of history, the end of longing). While he formally rejects all forms of utopian thought as undialectical oversimplifications, the specter of his longing for a New Eden persists in later reflections. Thus, for example, in his 1962 preface to the re-issue of *The Theory of the Novel*, Lukács warns the reader that this book is "based on a highly naive and totally unfounded utopianism. . . ."27 and he condemns *History and Class Consciousness* in a 1967 preface because "the conception of revolutionary praxis in this book takes on extravagant overtones that are more in keeping with the current messianic utopianism of the Communist left than with authentic Marxist doctrine" (TN, xvii). While he deplores the romantic idealism of his youth that led him to conceive of totality and history in such simplistic terms, this idealism returns to subvert his later rejections of such a stance. Despite all his efforts, his utopianism will not remain repressed, and thus, in a 1970 preface to *Writer*

and *Critic* the same idealism resurfaces. At the end of the preface, Lukács expresses once again his longing and his faith: "Yet ultimately, I am confident, the forces for progress will gain the upper hand" (W&C, 22).

In this utopian aspect of his thought the student of Lukács will be confronted once again with the displaced mysticism of this critic. In spite of his deep commitment to the concept of continual progress and change, Lukács seems unable to avoid indulgence in visions of a perfect order. He has dethroned the God towards whom the mystics yearned, but in his place Lukács has erected a new mythology based on what he considers incontrovertible historical principles. Jameson observes in this respect that "narration is valorized in that it presupposes neither the transcendence of the object (as in science) nor that of the subject (as in ethics), but rather a neutralization of the two, their mutual reconciliation, which thus anticipates the life experience of a Utopian world in its very structure."²⁸ The cult of totality in Lukácsian thought seems inevitably involved in the masked longing for Utopia—a longing that is spurned as soon as it is recognized but which returns again and again in a new form in his works.

Lukács' longing takes on the almost metaphysical quality he ascribes to the Germans in an early essay: "German longing is so strong, they say, that it destroys all form, so overpowering that one cannot express it except by stammering" (S&F, 91). In his work, the concept of totality functions as just such an overpowering force; the mere invocation of the word reflecting the internalization of longing to the extent that it becomes a stammer of the pen:

[The work of art] appears as a *totality* of life. This does not mean that every work of art must strive to reflect the objective, extensive *totality* of life. On the contrary, the extensive *totality* of reality necessarily is beyond the possible scope of any artistic creation; the *totality* of reality can only be reproduced intellectually in an ever-increasing approximation through the infinite process of science. The *totality* of the work is rather intensive: the circumscribed and self-contained ordering of those factors which objectively are of decisive significance for the portion of the life depicted, which determine its existence and motion, its specific quality and its place in the *total* life process. In this sense the briefest song is as much an intensive *totality* as the mightiest epic. [My emphases.] (W&C, 38)

While a reductive appreciation of Lukács' thought would interpret

this stammering longing for totality as a longing for stasis, as a suspension within the tension he has described, the Lukácsian concept is not so simply grasped. The longing he reveals is never separated from a pugnacious relationship to the forms of experience, and Lukács' practice of theory and criticism resides in a mediation between the two which consistently stresses the significance of a dialectical mode of thought. In *History and Class Consciousness*, he emphasizes the originality and the importance of the Hegelian construction of the dialectic, a construction to which, despite Marx's revisions, he is compulsively drawn: "Even more original is the fact that the subject is neither the unchanged observer of the objective dialectic of being and concept . . . nor the practical manipulator of its purely mental possibilities . . . the dialectical process, the ending of a rigid confrontation of rigid forms, is enacted essentially *between the subject and the object*" (HCC, 142). Or, in the words of Merleau-Ponty, "the central fact to which the Hegelian dialectic returns in a hundred ways is that we do not have to choose between the *pour soi* and the *pour autrui*, between our version of thought and the version of others, which is alienation itself."²⁹ As the two poles of dialectic do not act upon each other rigidly, so too the essence of artistic expression is motion, but the movement is not realized by a dissonant oscillation between harmony and discord, but rather in a focus on what Yeats would call the interpenetration of the gyres. Lukács says, "Eros is in the middle" (S&F, 92)—a statement which is both true and revealing. The focus of the artistic pressure is located in the driving force of the points of the gyres that force a passage through each other. This mutual penetration is tormented by the impossibility of absorbing the other; it is fulfilling in its partial transformation, and erotic in the force of its longing and in its desire for fructification.

In his "Introduction" to *Georg Lukács*, Parkinson uses a similar image. He notes that "praxis is by its nature a penetration, a transformation of reality; but reality can be grasped and penetrated only as a totality, and only a subject which is itself a totality can do this."³⁰ This penetration represents itself in the classic bourgeois novel by a dialectical mediation; the hero is problematic in his relation to the world in that he is both homogeneous to it in certain essential aspects, yet in others he is clearly no longer part of the totality. By a mutual interpenetration, the values expressed are both authentic and degraded. The critic adds one more level to this dialectic by superimposing a parallel subject (his longing) and object (his ideal form) upon the original one, and this layering produces a tension and a fric-

tion of texts that is more than linguistic. The critic's desires form a secondary gyre that pierces the first at a different angle.

In Lukács, however, there is often a third layer of criticism in which the author reviews and criticizes his own work. Roland Barthes points to "the infinite perversity of the critic and his reader,"³¹ and the chain of criticism begun by Lukács seems to partake of this perversity in a particularly full manner. The inevitable corollary of the constant critical undermining and exposé of theory is the denial of any category of sacred texts. Indeed, not only are his own texts open to correction and revision, but those of his masters as well. Lukács is careful to distinguish between the method and the conclusions of Marx, Engels, and Lenin, and warns that the essence of their theories resides in their methodology. It would be incorrect, as he notes in his preface to *History and Class Consciousness*, to study Marx in terms of the "exegesis of a 'sacred' book" (HCC, xxvi). Given this turn of mind, it would be an act of gross irresponsibility on Lukács' part to allow a work to be re-issued without a discussion of the misconceptions it contains and without a re-evaluation of the key points made.³²

In his preface to *The Theory of the Novel*, Lukács establishes a formal distance between his older self and the reincarnation of his youthful one: "The author of *The Theory of the Novel* did not go so far as that. He was looking for a general dialectic of literary genres . . . [my emphasis]" (16), emphasizing the alienation he feels from this earlier text through the use of the third person and making a fair pretense of unbiased criticism from the point of view of a disinterested writer. His mature attitude towards *History and Class Consciousness* is more problematic, and his continuing affinities with many aspects of the text are clearly in evidence. He admits that the nature of the work makes it "difficult even now to give a coherent critique of the book" (xvi), and even forty-five years after writing the original text, Lukács remains perplexed by some of its central issues. The observation made by Merleau-Ponty on Lukács' dialectical relation to literature applies as well to his criticism: "the whole is always glimpsed in consciousness as an enigma; and thus, being is always exposed to error, consciousness is faced with a permanent self-criticism, and, being always open to truth, it can and must proceed by peremptory condemnation."³³ In spite of the obvious difficulties he had with this preface, it is clear that for Lukács the process of criticism and self-criticism is essential to the thinker who espouses a dialectical theory and practice.

In this practice of self-criticism, Lukács demonstrates an implicit agreement with Barthes' statement that "all criticism must include in its discourse (even if it is in the most indirect and modest manner imaginable) an implicit reflection on itself. . . ."³⁴ In his prefaces, however, Lukács makes the indirect direct (implying perhaps another implicit layer of indirection in his self-criticism) by citing himself. In the preface to *The Theory of the Novel*, he says, "let me quote a few examples" (13), and in the preface to *History and Class Consciousness* he quotes passages from the text that follows to clarify and support his present arguments (e.g., *HCC*, xx, xxv). Underlying this passion for self-revelation and self-immolation the reader senses the presence of the critical passion *per se*. It is a criticism that loves the precise mechanisms of what is currently called the "deconstruction" of the critical object, but paradoxically also evidences its love for the object itself. In quoting an earlier self, Lukács is at war with himself, denying and reaffirming his points at the same time. This paradoxical passion and criticism reaches its height in the preface to *History and Class Consciousness* at the point in which Lukács cites the postscript to a re-issue of his Lenin book in the context of a criticism of the text to which this preface is directed (*HCC*, xxxii). These multiple layers of self-reflexivity indicate the degree to which Lukács is seduced by his own rhetoric and they also reveal the "ultimate hopelessness of all longing" (*S&F*, 93). Like his younger self, the aged scholar continues to put work before life. He writes for Life, for immortality, composing continuously in a longing for survival, in an effort to break the gnostic tyranny of the real. The language he so ably manipulates is incapable of capturing the totality of his dialectic and his longing. By starting over again with the self-critical act, Lukács strains toward a version of self-dialecticalization in which the subject and the object completely interpenetrate, closing the ironic gap and fulfilling the longing of his form.

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Notes

1. Andrew Arato and Paul Breines, *The Young Lukács and the Origin of Western Marxism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), p. 7. Other references are to: Michael Sprinker, "The Part and the Whole," *Diacritics*, 12, No. 3 (1982), 60; David Forgacs, "Marxist Literary Theories," in *Modern Literary Theory: A Comparative Introduction*, ed. Ann Jefferson and David Robey (Totowa, N.J.: Barnes and Noble, 1982), p. 141; Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1971), p. 179; and Michael Holzman, "Writing,

Criticism, Lukács, and the One," *Criticism*, 24 (1982), 371. Examples could, of course, be multiplied.

2. See for example Michael Holzman, "Georg Lukács' Myth of the Golden Age," *Clio*, 10 (1981), 270; Luisa Villa, "The Early Lukács: Aspects of *The Theory of the Novel*," *The Italianist*, 2 (1982), 117; György Poszler, "The Epic Genres in the Aesthetics of the young Lukács," *Acta Litteraria Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 25 (1983), 46; and Stephen Eric Bronner, "Expressionism and Marxism: Towards an Aesthetic of Emancipation," in *Passion and Rebellion*, ed. Stephen Eric Bronner and Douglas Kellner (South Hadley, Mass.: J.F. Bergin, 1983), p. 413. In his recent book, *The Philosophy of the Novel* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1984), J. M. Bernstein makes an interesting point in this respect. He notes that while the "tone" of *The Theory of the Novel* is nostalgic (p. 65) and the charge of utopianism a critical commonplace (p. 62), Lukács' own repeated refutations of both attitudes suggest that systematic misreadings of the Marxist critic's concept of totality are at fault.

3. Quoted in Lee Congdon, *The Young Lukács* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1983), p. 41.

4. Georg Lukács, *Soul and Form*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1974), p. 8. Hereafter cited in the text as *S&F*.

5. Edward Said, "The Text, the World, the Critic," in *Textual Strategies*, ed. Josue V. Harari (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1979), pp. 184-85.

6. Eve Tavor, "Art and Alienation: Lukács' Late Aesthetic," *Orbis Litterarum*, 37 (1982), 111.

7. Quoted in Congdon, p. 43.

8. Quoted in Arato and Breines, p. 45.

9. Quoted in Congdon, pp. 44-45.

10. Lukács writes in a suggestive passage of *Soul and Form* that "woman . . . saved man for life, but only in order to drag him down. . . . The real woman, the mother, is the most absolute opposite of any yearning for infinity" (*S&F*, 35). In his discussion of this passage, Congdon remarks that for Lukács, "marriage was not only a surrender to life, it was also symbolic of a reconciliation with his mother, a reconciliation he would not accept" (p. 50). The discomfort Lukács felt with his actual mother and home does not negate the overwhelming nostalgic thrust of Lukács' criticism, which makes everywhere a home, nor does it mitigate his yearning for the infinity and immortality of a metaphorical home constructed of his monumental texts.

I would also like to acknowledge here my indebtedness to György Markus' paper, "The Soul and the Life: The Young Lukács and the Problem of Culture" (*Telos*, 32 [1977], 95-115), in developing my own ruthlessly abbreviated analysis in this section of my paper.

11. Cornel West, "Lukács: A Reassessment," *The Minnesota Review*, 19 (1982), 95.

12. Peter Demetz, *Marx, Engels, and the Poets*, trans. Jeffrey Sammons (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 210.

13. Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol I, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton, 1972), p. 322.

14. David Carroll, *The Subject in Question* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 116.

15. Carroll, p. 94.

16. Roland Barthes, *Critical Essays*, trans. Richard Howard (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1972), p. xviii.
17. Congdon, p. 181.
18. Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971), p. 52.
19. Rainer Rochlitz, "De la Philosophie comme critique littéraire," *Revue d'esthétique*, 1 (1981), 54.
20. Georg Lukács, *Writer and Critic and Other Essays*, trans. and ed. Arthur Kahn (London: Merlin Press, 1970), p. 222. Hereafter cited in the text as W&C.
21. Joseph Conrad, *Letters to R. B. Cunningham Graham*, ed. C. T. Watts (London: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1969), pp. 56-57.
22. Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971), p. 89. Hereafter cited in the text as HCC.
23. Georg Lukács, *Realism in Our Time* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 51.
24. André Malraux, *The Voices of Silence*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1978), p. 616.
25. Geoffrey H. Hartman, *Criticism in the Wilderness* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1980), p. 193.
26. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1981), p. 52.
27. Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971), p. 20. Hereafter cited within the text as TN.
28. Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, p. 190.
29. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose of the World*, trans. John O'Neill, ed. Claude Lefort (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1973), p. 85.
30. G. H. R. Parkinson, ed., *Georg Lukács* (New York: Random House, 1970), p. 12.
31. Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), p. 17.
32. István Eörsi's otherwise interesting discussion of the permutations of Lukács' relationships with the Party and the effects of affiliation on his work ("*Georg Lukács and the Gelebtes Denken: The Right to the Last Word*," *New German Critique*, 23 [1981]) takes a somewhat simplistic stance in this respect. Eörsi writes, referring to a passage of the *Gelebtes Denken*, "The child-guerilla, as well as the mature partisan, wielded self-criticism only when each judged the situation to be such that the rescuing papa would not arrive in time. After 1956, when he could not be thrown out of the Party (because he had not been admitted) and was not in danger of being arrested, he weaned himself completely from self-criticism" (p. 122). Eörsi's analogy is attractive but unconvincing. Without denying the various compromises Lukács made throughout his long career, it is important to note that in major critical work like the late *Aesthetics* as well as in his prefaces, the revisionary and self-critical thrust is a continuing integral trait.
33. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Adventures of the Dialectic*, trans. Joseph Bien (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1973), p. 68.
34. Barthes, *Essays*, p. 257.

Book Reviews

The Political Vision of the "Divine Comedy" by Joan M. Ferrante. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984. Pp. 392. \$35.00.

Of Dante's two great passions, Beatrice may be the more memorable, but politics is the more interesting. Anyone who has read the *Divine Comedy* knows that Dante was not only a political refugee, having been exiled from his native Florence, but a political theorist as well. Dante in fact is very likely the most politically minded of all medieval writers. Personal hardship made politics an inescapable brute fact of life for him and contributed to the formation of his political ideas, but it was not the prime motive for his becoming a theorist. Even had his lot been more fortunate, he would still have come to espouse his theory of government defining the ideal relationship between the two formidable political powers of his day, church and empire. He was simply too involved with the fate of the real world, writing the *Comedy* more out of a desire to cure corruption in government than to avenge himself on his enemies. Dante may be most remembered as having envisioned the shape of things in the afterlife, but his mind was primarily fixed, as Ferrante argues, on the affairs of man in this world.

Given the centrality of the theme of politics to the *Divine Comedy*, it is surprising that this should be the first book to treat the subject in so comprehensive a manner in quite some time. Charles Till Davis's *The Idea of Rome*, published almost thirty years ago, has up till now served as the fundamental study of the origins of Dante's political conceptions out of which was born his vision of Rome as a secular and Christian center. Ferrante retraces some of this ground, as well as a good deal of territory covered by numerous other historians and critics, much of it familiar territory. But she lays to rest any thought that all may have been said on the subject. In fact, this remarkable book fills a lacuna in Dante studies that has not really been considered to exist, and it fills it admirably. It is the work of a seasoned scholar that is destined to become mandatory reading for every serious student of the *Divine Comedy*.

Dante criticism of late has been dominated by allegorical readings of the typological variety. That approach, promoted over the years by Singleton, Freccero, and their disciples, has stressed the importance of allusions to and refashionings of Biblical figures and events in the *Comedy*. Ferrante's tack, by placing emphasis on the historical dimension, is therefore especially refreshing. This is not to suggest that she either rejects allegorical significances or pits history against allegory. Rather she shows how the one complements the other, something that is apparent in her handling of the poem's largest images. Hell stands for Florence, the corrupt, self-centered, and narrow-minded city-state. Its opposite, Paradise, represents Dante's image of the Roman empire, the ideal, regenerate society. In between lies Purgatory, a transitional domain that traces out the road from the small and greedy city-state to the utopian empire that some future though enigmatically identified messiah will one day found. These analogies have been made by other critics, as Ferrante herself is quick to note, but she refines them and creates an extremely useful