

ETHICS AND AESTHETICS: THE PROBLEMS OF
ORTHODOX MARXIST SOCIOLOGY OF LITERATURE

Sandra Joan Kahn

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Arts
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg
for the degree of Master of Arts

Johannesburg 1983

ABSTRACT

The aim of this dissertation is to provide a critical assessment of orthodox Marxist accounts of the ways in which sociological factors influence or determine literary texts, with particular attention to a) the origin of these problems in the work of Marx, Engels, and Lenin; b) the way in which they are manifested in the later works of Georg Lukács, crystallizing in his conception of literary realism; c) Lucien Goldmann's unsuccessful attempt to remedy them through an integration of an adulterated version of Marxism with an unsatisfactory kind of structuralism; and d) the need for some such synthesis of the Marxist and structuralist perspectives in order to supplement Marxism's insufficiently sociological approach to the aesthetic dimension of literature with the sophisticated sociological insights of some of the more recent semio-structuralist theorists.

I want to thank Mr. Mark Orkin for his help and encouragement at every stage.

CONTENTS

	page
<u>INTRODUCTION</u>	1
 <u>PART I</u> <u>SOURCES OF MARXIST LITERARY THEORY:</u> <u>MARX, ENGELS AND LENIN</u>	 9
Ch. 1 ORTHODOX MARXISM	14
1. Specific References to Art and Literature: Marx	17
2. Specific References to Art and Literature: Engels	40
3. Economic and Philosophical Writings of Marx and Engels	46
Ch. 2 DOGMATIC MARXISM	57
1. Alleged Origins in Lenin	60
2. Historical Account of True Dogmatism	67
Ch. 3 ELEMENTS OF A MARXIST THEORY OF LITERATURE	73
1. Problematic Issues	77
2. Relation to the Platonic Model	87
 <u>PART II</u> <u>LUKACS AND ORTHODOX MARXIST AESTHETICS</u>	 94
Ch. 4 AN INTRODUCTION TO GEORG LUKACS	98
Ch. 5 THE PROMISE OF THE EARLY WORKS	111
1. <u>Soul and Form</u> : Key Concepts	112
2. <u>Orthodox Marxism and Structuralism in Soul and Form</u>	130
3. <u>The Theory of the Novel</u> : Key Concepts	150
4. <u>Time in The Theory of the Novel</u>	181
Ch. 6 A LUKACSIAN HISTORY OF BOURGEOIS LITERATURE	194
Ch. 7 THE THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS	223
1. <u>History and Class Consciousness and Lukacs's Theory of Literary Realism</u>	229
2. Lukacs's Aesthetic	243
Ch. 8 LITERARY REALISM	252
1. Critical Summary of Lukacs's Conception of Literary Realism	258
2. An Alternative View of Literary Realism	284

	page
<u>PART III</u> <u>LUCIEN GOLDMANN</u>	306
Ch. 9 GENERAL THEORY	313
1. Marxism	314
2. Structuralism	325
Ch. 10 CULTURAL CREATION	341
Ch. 11 THEORY OF THE NOVEL	369
1. Analysis of Goldmann's Theory of the Novel	371
2. More Advanced Marxist- Structuralist Theories	395
<u>CONCLUSION</u>	401
<u>NOTES</u>	406
<u>BIBLIOGRAPHY</u>	433

INTRODUCTION

The defining characteristic of orthodox Marxist examinations of literary works is the contention that texts are influenced or determined by the social contexts in which they are produced. The central deficiency of most such analyses is generally taken to be the inadequate attention paid to the meaning of the text as a specifically literary construct. This neglect of the aesthetic dimension is significant, I believe, not in itself alone, but because it leads to a sociological inadequacy. Accordingly, my argument here will be that orthodox Marxism's problem is not that it is insufficiently conscious of the aesthetic dimension to literature, but that it is insufficiently conscious of the sociological aspects of that dimension. In other words, I shall charge that it is, ironically, in the very area in which it claims, and seems, to specialise - in the relation between literary text and social context - that orthodox Marxism fails.

It is my contention that this inadequacy in the orthodox Marxist account of the ways in which sociological factors influence or determine texts could be resolved by complementing selected aspects of that account with an appropriate version of structuralism. It is, therefore, the aim of this dissertation to define and analyse orthodox Marxist literary theory with a view to pinpointing both its

essential characteristics and its problems, and to examine the work of Lucien Goldmann in order to assess the viability of his particular synthesis of the Marxist and structuralist modes against the somewhat different synthesis which I shall defend.

Since the sociological deficiency that I refer to manifests itself primarily in the Marxist notion of literary realism - which runs parallel to, and represents a literary extension of, philosophical realism - I shall be concerned throughout with an explication of the true nature of realism in literature. I shall argue that it is a misunderstanding of this literary form that precludes the development of a satisfactory Marxist sociology of literature, orthodox or structuralist, and that only an exploration of the sociological implications of linguistic and literary conventions such as realism can result in a sociologically adequate theory of literature.

As far as the Marxist side of my argument is concerned, my thesis in broad outline will be that orthodox Marxist literary theory displays a central conflict between ethics and aesthetics, between revolutionary social theory and an inherited set of bourgeois literary evaluations, and that this gives rise to its unsatisfactory aspects - the contradictions and inconsistencies which come to a head in Lukács's work but are already present in Marx, Engels, and Lenin.

I shall argue here that these are not - as is generally suggested - a question of a clash between social theory and

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I shall argue here that these are not - as is generally suggested - a question of a clash between social theory and

aesthetic theory, and that this is why the problems of Marxist literary theory are not as apparent on the abstract level - where a coherent aesthetic can be developed quite separate from concrete examples - as they are on the level of practical criticism - where the critic must, within the framework of his beliefs, account for that anomalous phenomenon that appears to contradict his theory, namely, the excellence of certain examples of bourgeois literature.

I shall develop my argument in two stages. In the first stage I shall identify orthodox Marxist literary theory and distinguish it from dogmatic Marxism, and I shall also re-examine and re-interpret the sources of both. This involves indicating more and less prescriptive tendencies within the work of Marx, Engels, and Lenin - who, I shall claim, are the founders of orthodoxy and may not legitimately be cited as authorities for dogmatism, which has entirely different roots. It also involves a reconsideration of the overall perspective of this original group, moving away from the base-superstructure proposition towards a theory of art as a particular - if unspecified - form of practical activity, an approach that further supports my classification of them.

In the second stage I shall analyse the distinctive characteristics of an orthodox literary theory as exemplified in the work of Lukács, showing the unacceptable results of his attempt to reconcile the central Marxist dichotomy described above. I shall be concerned here with literature

as ideology, with the Marxist analysis of this, with the flaws in that analysis, and with the Marxists' theoretical manoeuvres designed to avoid having the label 'ideological' applied to their own literary and critical writings. This will involve an analysis of Lukács's concept of literary realism, in which, as I have said, the defects of orthodox Marxism are most clearly exhibited. It will also necessitate, at a later stage, an analysis of Goldmann's key concept, 'world-view', whose problematic nature - as something tied to social class yet ostensibly non-ideological - is due to the manoeuvring mentioned above.

As far as the Goldmannian side of my argument is concerned, my thesis will be that it is a concern to account, within the parameters of a Marxist approach, for the literary dimension as well as the sociological, that leads Goldmann in his synthesis firstly, to settle for the wrong kind of structuralism, and secondly, to present an adulterated version of Marxism. To elaborate: believing that what is missing from the Marxist orientation is a view of the literary artefact as a coherent structure of meaning requiring textual analysis that will complement the genetic explanation of it as a social phenomenon, Goldmann adopts that variety of structuralism that stresses the existence of the literary work as a synchronic system, and, if it does not actually deny it, ignores the essential diachronic dimension to any given synchronic moment. Moreover, Goldmann's drive towards structural coherence betrays

his Marxist consciousness of such essential theoretical and substantive elements as contradiction and process. I shall argue that later developments in structuralism - as represented by the work of Barthes - where the modification of structuralism by the different emphases of semiology leads to a renewed awareness of the diachronic determination of the synchronic at the level of language and literary convention, remedy the deficiencies in Marxism, and form a more satisfactory synthesis of Marxism and structuralism than that version presented by Goldman.

To summarise, then: this dissertation falls into three main parts. In Part I, I will be concerned with the sources of Marxist literary theory, those writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and others that constitute the background to both orthodox and dogmatic Marxist literary theory and criticism. In Part II, I will deal with Lukács's oeuvre, tracing the historical development of his ideas and analysing the end product as the first attempt to formulate a coherent orthodox Marxist aesthetic. In Part III, I will discuss Goldman's attempt to modernise the orthodox Marxist approach to literature by incorporating another perspective into that of Marxism. Part I indicates the problem, Part II investigates it in detail, and Part III presents a critical account of an unsuccessful attempt to resolve it.

This study does not pretend to offer a definitive answer to the question of Marxist aesthetics: it seeks,

rather, to illuminate the necessity for some sort of synthesis between certain strands in structuralist and Marxist sociological theories of literature, by revealing how the former fill a lack in the latter, while making clear that the reconciliation of these different perspectives on literature as complementary dimensions of a comprehensive approach is not a simple, straightforward matter.

I am aware that the very title of this dissertation raises the problem of usage, since the precise meanings of certain commonly used words that are crucial to my argument may not be clear. It is, therefore, essential at the outset to offer some preliminary indication of the sense in which I use these key terms. However, since I believe that successful definition is the outcome of successful theorizing and not its prerequisite, I offer only a few general guidelines - to do more would be to anticipate my conclusions - and as the argument proceeds the extra conceptual load that these words bear will become evident.

The problematic terms fall into three basic sets: 'ethical-moral-prescriptive', 'aesthetic-artistic-literary quality', and 'determinist-reductionist-utilitarian-normative-positivist-materialist'. To these must be added the most troublesome of all, 'liberal' and 'liberalism'. Unless I specify otherwise I shall initially invoke these words in one or another of their dictionary usages.¹ Thus by 'aesthetic' I mean 'pertaining to the appreciation or criticism of the beautiful', and by 'ethical' I mean

'relating to the distinction between right and wrong human conduct (typical of a particular writer or school of thought)'. My use of these terms - aesthetic and ethical - will be clearer if one bears in mind that within the context of this discussion I see them as characterising contrary attitudes towards literature, the former stressing beauty of form, the latter concerned with truth of content, and that I intend them to evoke the network of ideas typical of these attitudes without going into lengthy exposition every time.

In a similar fashion, I use 'liberalism' and 'determinism' to refer to opposite theoretical poles in literary criticism. By 'liberalism' I understand an open-minded belief that the creative imagination is, or ought to be, free from any external and extra-aesthetic social, historical, or political coercive factors. I derive my usage from several definitions of the word 'liberal', (for example, 'open-minded', 'free from narrow-minded prejudice', 'the opposite of mechanical'), but in the main I call upon an obsolete sense more usually applied to people than relations, that is, 'free from restraint'. While this semantic licence may not be ideal, it seems preferable to the alternative - coining some neologism such as 'autonomism' to mean for the aesthetic realm or act what 'voluntarism' means for the social.

I have taken fewer liberties with the meanings of the words in the 'determinism' set; these all refer to some

aspect of that approach to literature that ignores its literariness, sees it as both determined and potentially determining, and reduces criticism to a demand for conformity to the facts.

One further problem of terminology must be mentioned. Although Marx rejects 'morality' as a separate philosophy and in effect denies the ultimate difference between human moral values and facts about human needs and capabilities, this does not seem to me to invalidate my use of the word 'ethical' in relation to his attitude towards literature. It is a convenient means of distinguishing from 'aesthetic' (a concern with quality of form) Marx's primary concern with literature as a true reflection of reality as he understands it. To have substituted the clumsy phrase 'true to the facts' or 'realistically accurate' would have been more misleading, since it is the very validity of such terms that is in question as regards literary realism, and I can think of no other single word that better suits my purpose here - which is to express an opposition between beauty and truth.

PART I

SOURCES OF MARXIST LITERARY THEORY: MARX, ENGELS, AND LENIN

Despite the fact that it appears over and over again in works on literary theory, the description 'Marxist' is a generalisation that is as difficult to sustain as it is to dispense with. Most writers retain the blanket term but distinguish two broad categories within it. The names change, but the criterion underlying this division into two classes remains essentially the same, namely, some conception as to what constitutes orthodox Marxist literary theory. Let us take two fairly representative examples.

Fokkema and Kunne-Ibsch use the words 'Marxist' and 'neo-Marxist'

to distinguish between those theoreticians who base themselves unconditionally on the writings of Marx, Engels, and Lenin - accepting at the same time the leading role of the Communist Party in matters of culture and science - and those others who, while often relying on Marx and Engels, do not interpret their writings in a dogmatic way, or accept the absolute supremacy of the Communist Party in problems of culture and science.¹

They qualify this by noting that within the second category

it is necessary to make a distinction between those who accept the Marxist canon as definite truth and those who regard it merely as a source of inspiration.²

This account implies that the distinguishing characteristics of orthodox Marxism are obedience to party dictates, and the addition of Lenin's writings to those of Marx and

Engels as the fundamental expression of Marxist dogma. I find Fokkema and Kunne-Ibsch's classification unsatisfactory for two reasons: firstly, because no useful purpose is served by a distinction that ignores as many anomalies as the original more inclusive term 'Marxist'; and secondly, because it rests upon what I consider to be a dubious conception of what constitutes orthodox Marxism.

My second example is Steiner, who adopts Michel Crouzet's term 'para-Marxist' to separate those who choose Engels's aesthetics, with its 'ideal of a literature "in which the opinions of the author remain hidden"', from 'those who adhere to the Leninist formula of militant partiality',³ the orthodox Marxists. This is equally dubious. In the first place, surely those who are true to the writings of Marx and Engels, the founders, have a better right to be known as orthodox Marxists than those who model themselves on Lenin? In the second place, I find it presumptuous to attempt to encapsulate a theory of literature in a single sentence, taken out of context at that. It is not surprising that the two phrases quoted above represent a misleading oversimplification that is far from being an accurate summation of the essence of the respective views of Engels and Lenin.

These two typical examples show that there is a certain confusion as to what constitutes Marxist orthodoxy, and that there appears to be a tendency to associate orthodoxy with Lenin and the Communist Party, rather than with the

eponymous theorist responsible for Marxism in the first place. One accepts that the layman is inclined to regard 'Marxist' - a label as vague and general as 'structuralist' (particularly when applied to literary theory and criticism) - as a highly specific term with certain necessary political implications, but the preceding paragraphs suggest that the experts do much the same.

Now, as Habermas so convincingly demonstrates in Knowledge and Human Interests,⁴ it is impossible to draw a line between epistemology and politics, and the same may be said of aesthetics and politics - if one uses the word 'politics' in its most general sense as referring to the form of social organisation as a whole, rather than at the level of specific party doctrine. Indeed, it is one of the central tasks of a sociology of literature to investigate just such insidious general correlations between society and literature.

This is not to deny the existence of the other more specific type of connection. In fact, I intend to distinguish just such a thread in Marxist literary criticism - distinguish and then disregard it, because, informed opinion to the contrary, this blatant form of political interest does not constitute the characteristic feature of orthodox Marxist literary theory; nor can one legitimately classify literature or literary criticism in terms of the political affiliations of the writer or critic.

In my discussion of Marxist literary theory, I shall follow the general practice only to the extent of distinguishing within it two schools, which I shall call the orthodox and the dogmatic. Given the dictionary definition of 'orthodox' as 'in accordance with what is authoritatively established as the true view'⁵, I shall take it that such a description is most appropriately applied to what Marx and Engels themselves said, or to what has been written subsequently that is true to them. In order to see what constitutes the orthodox Marxist approach to literature, I shall, therefore, analyse certain of the writings of Marx and Engels, indicating more and less dogmatic tendencies within these orthodox originals. However, to avoid confusion with the dogmatic school, wherever possible in my discussion of orthodoxy, I shall substitute the word 'prescriptive' for 'dogmatic'.

'Dogmatism', as I use it, refers to what Fokkema and Kunne-Ibsch and Steiner would call 'orthodoxy' - that is, the Stalinist reinterpretation of Marx and Engels. In analysing this approach and distinguishing it from the other, I shall contest Lenin's inclusion as a dogmatist and defend his right to membership in the orthodox group.

The Marxist literary perspective is not unique, and so, to conclude this section, I shall set it within the history of literary criticism, showing its similarity to a non-Marxist tradition of criticism and suggesting that it is precisely where orthodoxy deviates from this model that

its problems begin. I shall then take up some of these problems, notably, the difference between bourgeois and Marxist realism and between Marxist realism and ideology, and the importance in all this of considering the situation of the critic.

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CHAPTER 1
ORTHODOX MARXISM

The idea structuring this section is that Marxist literary critics tend to fall into two main groups: those who base their theories on a liberal interpretation of the few scattered but explicit references to art and literature that are to be found in Marx and Engels, and those who derive their theories from a literal reading of the equally sparse passages in Marx's and Engels's economic writings that appear to be relevant - in particular, their account of the relationship between the economic base and the cultural superstructure, and their insistence on the priority of social being over consciousness.¹ The former arrive at a not wholly warranted liberalism (that is, an openminded belief in the autonomy of art); the latter - on the basis of a narrow reading of a few metaphoric lines - adopt an equally unwarranted mechanistic, materialist determinism (that is, a dogmatic view of art as totally conditioned by extra-aesthetic factors). As for those who try to synthesize the views expressed in the references to literature with the general economic theory, they either concede defeat and point to the essential contradictions between the two, or they distort the one to accommodate the other.²

I shall suggest here that a Marxist literary criticism based upon a balanced reading of the writings of Marx and

Engels differs substantially both from that totally dogmatic attitude to art associated with Marxism by layman and expert alike, and from that openminded acknowledgement of creative freedom attributed to Marx and Engels mainly by those Marxist scholars who would convince the non-Marxist of the validity of their aesthetic views.

I shall also suggest that an accurate version of Marx's and Engels's perspective on literature can only be formulated if the aesthetic theory implied by the specific references to art and literature is taken in conjunction with the general theory, for these are neither contradictory nor incompatible in any way, and such a conclusion depends upon a misinterpretation of both. A rigorous and insightful examination of the specifically literary references will reveal a degree of prescriptiveness perfectly consistent with the conception of the relationship between forms of life and consciousness, unless one takes that relationship to imply that consciousness is directly determined by forms of life, a view Marx never intended and Engels explicitly denies:

According to the materialist conception of history, the determining element in history is ultimately the production and reproduction in real life. More than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. If therefore somebody twists this into the statement that the economic element is the only determining one, he transforms it into a meaningless, abstract, and absurd phrase.³

Furthermore, I shall argue that it is only by taking a broad perspective on the general theory - including

a consideration of the themes of history and totality, the relation between the whole and its parts, subject and object, the concrete and the abstract, appearance and essence, and, most important of all, the idea of man as essentially a productive creature who actively creates both his world and himself - that one can do justice to the complexity of Marx's and Engels's understanding of literature as a productive activity conforming to the general laws governing human praxis, and as a specific form of productive activity conforming also to its own laws. This is precisely what Lukács will do, and it is the inclusiveness of his approach that accounts for his success in developing an orthodox Marxist aesthetic.⁴

Every account of Marxist aesthetics cites the same few specific references to art and literature: this dissertation is no exception. These references, in Marx as in Engels, are, in the main, contained in personal letters and notes of conversations, or take the form of brief passages in works of a general nature. If they present no systematized view of art or literature,⁵ they do raise several fundamental issues. For example, in the three texts with which my discussion begins, Marx confronts three essential and contentious points: Firstly, there is the question of the nature of art and the relation between literature and life; secondly, there is the matter of literature as propaganda, which raises the question of the proper function of art; thirdly, there is the concern

with the mode of existence of a literary work of the past, which involves the problem of absolute aesthetic standards and universal human characteristics.

Accordingly, in my re-examination of these key aesthetic references, and in my reconsideration of them in conjunction with both the base-superstructure metaphor and the theory of productive activity, I shall be concerned not only to reveal a compatability between Marxist aesthetics and Marxist political economy, but to provide support for Lukács's contention that the essential elements for the development of a systematic aesthetic are implicit in the work of Marx and Engels. I propose to deal with each man's contribution individually to avoid the inaccurate generalisations and distinctions that can arise from a failure to give equal weight to both writers as well as careful analytic consideration to the extracts.

1. Specific References to Art and Literature: Marx

Karl Marx may have been a revolutionary, but he was also a perfect example of a well-educated German intellectual of the mid-nineteenth century. The son of a middle-class Jewish civil servant, Marx was always intensely interested in all forms of art and literature, and he studied these as well as law and philosophy during his years at the universities of Bonn and Berlin,⁶ so that by 1841 he was well-versed in both the classics and traditional German aesthetics. His taste conformed largely to

the literary canon of his day, and apart from a brief, early liking for romanticism, his preference was for Shakespeare, Goethe, realism, and satire.

Marx looks back to the eighteenth century when culture and education were the property of a gentleman, to whom such abstract notions as 'the beautiful' were of supreme concern; but he also represents a present in which men's interests had begun to turn from the poetry of literature and art to the prose of sociology and political economy.

The growing dominance of the bourgeoisie, with their practical attitude towards art as yet another commodity, led to a situation where aesthetic problems either became the concern of a small intellectual élite, or lost all separate significance, becoming inextricably entangled with questions of power and money. While Marx's humanism dictated that his energies should be primarily directed towards the practical criticism of social ills, rather than dissipated in idle theorising about aesthetic ideas, scattered references to literature in the course of arguments about political economy⁷ indicate that he never lost interest in such matters, nor in their relationship to the larger issues.

In the light of this background, it is not surprising to find an integral relationship between Marx's attitude towards certain aesthetic questions and his general political views; nor is it surprising to find occasional contradictions and clumsy accommodations where received

aesthetic opinions clash with a new political outlook and revolutionary purposes. These are not, however, the contradictions that Marx is usually accused of - they do not represent a basic internal incoherence between relatively deterministic politics and liberal aesthetics. They are instead an example on the individual level of a phenomenon that Marx's theory of social change would lead one to expect in society: they are the unconscious remnants in a new age of the unselfconscious consciousness that belonged to a past era, superstructural survivals.

Although they are by no means the only pronouncements on literary questions to be found in Marx's writings, there are three well-known texts that are invariably referred to by those who base their conception of Marxist aesthetics on his explicit references to literature. Two of these are what might be called exercises in practical criticism, the third is an attempt to confront a theoretical problem. The former are Marx's analysis of Eugène Sue's novel Les Mystères de Paris⁸ in the critical pamphlet The Holy Family (1845) and his criticism of Lassalle's verse drama Franz von Sickingen, contained in a letter to the dramatist written in 1859; the latter is a discussion of Greek art that appears in the Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy (1857). The importance of these references is that each reveals Marx's attempts to come to grips with one or more of those fundamental issues that I outlined earlier.

Dealing with these texts in chronological order, I shall begin with The Holy Family,⁹ which contains Marx's only analysis of a novel. Although The Holy Family was intended as an attack on speculative aesthetics in general, a large part is taken up with Marx's criticism of an abstract, idealistic interpretation of Sue's novel that appeared in the Allgemeine Literaturzeitung under the pseudonym 'Szeliga'. Marx also gives his own critical interpretation of Les Mystères de Paris, a scathing analysis that condemns the book for the same sin of abstract idealism and broadens into a denunciation of bourgeois morals and aesthetics. In the course of the argument several of Marx's critical criteria are explicitly stated and others may be confidently deduced despite certain inconsistencies. Equally important is the emergence of a number of significant contradictions.

Let us first consider Marx's rejection of idealism and abstraction, for this reveals his conception of the nature of art and the relation between art and life. It also shows his attitude towards art's propagandistic use, an attitude that is confirmed elsewhere in his work but is often misrepresented on the basis of a misinterpretation of his remarks here.

Marx's practical criticism rests upon the theoretical conviction that art is a concrete, material creation that must be freed from any obvious subordination to ideals. His critical remarks are directed at Sue's characters and operate on two levels, manner and matter. As regards

manner, he complains that Sue 'turn[s] real human beings into abstract standpoints',¹⁰ who, because they are not sufficiently lifelike to exemplify the author's intentions, are forced to articulate them. They

must express, as the result of their thoughts, as the conscious motive of their actions, his own intention as a writer, which causes him to make them behave in a certain way and no other... Since their life has no real content, their words must give vigorous tones to insignificant features.¹¹

What Marx rejects are puppet-like characters manipulated by the author to express his ideas; what Marx requires are living forces whose development is inherent in themselves.

This is basically a formal aesthetic demand reminiscent of that understanding of the need for a sense of inevitability expressed by Aristotle in his Ars Poetica:

The right thing, however, is in the Characters just as in the incidents of the play to endeavour always after the necessary or the probable; so that whenever such-and-such a personage says or does such-and-such a thing, it shall be the probable or necessary outcome of his character; and whenever this incident follows on that, it shall be either the necessary or the probable consequence of it.¹²

But in evoking Marx's teleological idea of history as working out an inherent design, it also points towards realism and reflection as literary criteria. Marx is not suggesting that literature must be divorced from ideas, nor that the writer must be uncommitted: he is simply aware that a novel whose design upon the reader is transparent is not as effective as a novel that appears to be an objective reflection

of reality. His remarks here are not evidence for a total lack of dogmatism: they just show that Marx - unlike the naive literature-as-propaganda protagonists - recognises that there are two dimensions to literary excellence, the aesthetic and the ethical, and understands that literature achieves its effect best when the former is harnessed to serve the latter.

When he moves to the level of matter, Marx offers a plainly prescriptive view of literature that confirms my interpretation of his criticism at the level of manner: Sue's characters are unacceptable because they are not true to the life of the times - they represent an invalid simplification of a complex and contradictory concrete reality in the interests of a schematic ethical plan and an ultimate reconciliation. Moreover, they are the embodiment of a false consciousness that unquestioningly accepts transient and social bourgeois values as permanent and natural. This is well illustrated by Marx's criticism of the way in which Sue handles the working-class Rigolette:

Eugène Sue described in her the lovely human character of the Paris grisette. Only owing to his devotion to the bourgeoisie and his own tendency to high-flown exaggeration, he had to idealise the grisette morally. He had to gloss over the essential point of her situation in life and her character, to be precise, her disregard for the form of marriage, her naive attachment to the Etudiant or the Ouvrier. It is precisely in that attachment that she constitutes a really human contrast to the hypocritical, narrow-hearted, self-seeking wife of the bourgeois, to the

whole circle of the bourgeoisie, that is, to the official circle.¹³

Here we have the seeds of the Marxist doctrine of literary realism: literature must mirror reality,¹⁴ which consists of a complex of antagonistic historical and dialectical social relationships, and is not to be found in the false consciousness of the bourgeoisie.

Is there a contradiction in this two dimensional critical attitude? Not at all: pedagogic theories of literature always imply a healthy respect for it. Plato's fear of poetry was based upon an appreciation of its power. Similarly, the culturally sophisticated Marx realises that 'good' literature is a better ideological weapon than bad, where 'good' refers solely to some inherently literary quality - as yet undefined, except for the characteristic of apparent inevitability.

So much for literature; but what of literary criticism? This is where the real contradictions appear. In the first place, Marx is guilty here of similar practices to those he deplores: he objects to the way speculative aesthetics ignores literary conventions and distorts the text in order to impose upon it a suitable philosophical interpretation, but, in applying the criterion of what might be called 'sociological realism', as described above, he, too, is denying both the conventionality and the fictive nature of the novel.

A further inconsistency arises in the text of The Holy Family when Marx offers an extremely partisan history of

literature that accounts for the presence or absence of literary excellence in terms of the spiritual nature of the society in which it is produced, as if the quality of the raw social material determines the quality of its literary reflection.

He claims that bourgeois society is essentially inimical to aesthetic creation, for the prosaic monotony of its life is not a fit subject for art. Now this view may be wholly consistent with a correspondence or reflectionist theory of literature, which ignores the quality of literariness, but it is not consistent with Marx's insight into the art of writing.

He goes on to say that the proletariat, with its vitality and its strength of character, is a better subject for the writer, and that it will produce a literature infinitely superior to that of the bourgeoisie, a literature consonant with its own spiritual superiority. Here critical insight and aesthetic appreciation have yielded completely to the demands of political theory; but also present in The Holy Family is a hint of the way in which Marx and his followers will modify the latter to accommodate the former, and this brings us to the third inconsistency.

Marx finds in Les Mystères de Paris a discrepancy between the subjective intention of the author and the objective meaning of the book. He claims that a work whose explicit social message conforms to French bourgeois ideology seems occasionally to escape these ideological

restrictions and disclose the underlying reality. The implication is that in Sue's novel this is an unconscious phenomenon, but an extension of this idea leads to a basic tenet of Marxian aesthetics, that the sensitivity of a great artist's perceptions may lead him - as Marx says in Capital of Balzac - to a deep grasp of the real situation that conflicts with his political allegiances.

Steiner calls this 'the concept of dissociation'.¹⁵ It is a belief that the writer may speak the truth despite himself, that, despite his false consciousness and explicit ideology, his work may offer a realistic representation of life. It is not always clear whether the writer has consciously managed to transcend the viewpoint of his class, or whether the work itself somehow subverts that distorted perspective and reflects the real.

The utility of this concept of dissociation is indisputable. It provides a means of reconciling the conflict between inherited literary evaluations and revolutionary ethical judgments, explaining, for instance, how a reactionary Royalist like Balzac was able to produce the realistic masterpieces that he did. It saves the Marxist from discarding the entire literary tradition and legitimates the high esteem in which he holds the work of such political pariahs as Shakespeare, Goethe, and Tolstoy.¹⁶

The expediency of this concept of dissociation is one thing, its validity is another. I shall consider this in more detail when I come to look at the work of Lukács and

Goldmann, because it is a crucial aspect of Lukács's literary criticism and the motivating force behind Goldmann's theory of cultural creation. For now it is sufficient to point out that Marx ignores two related problems: firstly, that one cannot ascertain an author's intentions and beliefs other than as these are realised in his work; and secondly, that the part played by the critic in the detection of the alleged contradiction may be subjectively interpretative rather than objectively revelatory.

The foregoing discussion shows the degree of political prescriptiveness built into Marx's theory of the nature of literature and his criterion of realism, but he does not appear to regard literature as purely utilitarian, that is, as simply serving particular political ends. Also, although he demands both political correctness and aesthetic excellence, he does not here - momentary aberrations aside - simplistically equate the one with the other.

Marx presents an interesting variation on the classical didactic approach to art (best exemplified by the theory of Plato): for a concern with the effects of literature on society, he substitutes a concern with the effects of society on literature. In moving towards a sociological perspective - a conception of literature as a social practice influenced, like any other, by economic, political, and historical factors - Marx has moved away from his early romanticism with its typical belief in the autonomy of art, but he has not escaped the literary evaluations of his

bourgeois education. This leads to a further deviation from the didactic model - a consciousness of literary quality that is at odds with the rest of his theory.

The main point of my argument here is that the inconsistency in Marx's attitude to literature is contained within his aesthetic theory itself, with its tension between the aesthetic appreciation of artistic manner and the ethical demands made upon literary matter. The problem, then, is not a contradiction between economic determinism and aesthetic liberalism, but this unresolved methodological pluralism.

Although it was written fourteen years later, the second piece of practical criticism under discussion, Marx's analysis of Franz von Sickingen,¹⁷ displays the same basic characteristics noted above: in particular, an uneasy mixture of a feeling for literary quality and a predominating concern with the acceptable presentation of historical and political issues; but here, perhaps because of the nature of the work under consideration, the reductive thrust of Marx's argument - by which I mean the tendency to reduce the discussion of a literary work to a mere question of conformity to the 'facts' - is even more evident.

Marx's politico-historical argument against the play stems from his interpretation of the real life events upon which it is based and ignores the fact that even historical drama is essentially fictive. For example, where Lassalle suggests that Sickingen's revolt failed because he hid it behind a knightly feud instead of openly proclaiming war

against imperial power, Marx claims that:

Sickingen ... did not go under because of his cunning. He went under because as a knight and a representative of a moribund class he revolted against that which existed or rather against the new form of what existed ... Sickingen and Hutten had to succumb because they imagined they were revolutionaries ... and, on the one hand, made themselves exponents of modern ideas, while on the other they actually represented the interests of a reactionary class.¹⁸

The letter continues with a passage that quite clearly reveals what Marx requires for a satisfactory drama:

The noble representatives of the revolution - behind whose watchwords of unity and liberty there still lurked the dream of the old empire and of club-law - ought not, in that case, to have absorbed all interest, as they do in your play, but the representatives of the peasants (particularly these) and of the revolutionary elements in the cities should have formed a quite important active background. You could then have had the most modern ideas voiced in their most naive form and to a much greater extent, whereas now, besides religious freedom, civil unity actually remains the main idea. You would then have had to Shakespeareize more of your own accord, while I chalk up against you as your gravest shortcoming your Schillering, your transforming of individuals into mere speaking tubes of the spirit of the time. Did you not yourself to a certain extent fall into the diplomatic error, like your Franz von Sickingen, of placing the Lutheran-knightly opposition above the plebeian Muncerian opposition?¹⁹

In other words, a play must present a comprehensive and representative (that is, typical) reflection of a particular conception of reality expressed through the medium of 'living' characters. These criteria will be fully developed by Lukács into his conception of totality, typicality, realism, and the intellectual physiognomy,

but their origins lie in Marx.

From this extract it appears that Marx's concern with form and content are now inextricably interwoven. Admittedly, there is a certain ambiguity here: it might be held that he is again requiring both realistic characterisation and comprehensive content, as he did in The Holy Family, but I understand him to be suggesting that success at the formal level is dependent upon conformity at the level of historical dogma.

One can sympathize with Lassalle, who interpreted Marx's criticism as evidence of a rigid historical determinism and accused him of threatening the existence of the hero in literature and life by allowing no room for either dramatic or revolutionary action, both of which require the possibility of choice. Lassalle might well have added the dramatist to his list of endangered species, for the act of literary creation is equally dependent upon a freedom of choice that the kind of prescriptive theory described above would deny it. Perhaps Lassalle exaggerates - although Marx does write here as if drama exists to illustrate his political economy - but this letter certainly reveals unequivocally those prescriptive tendencies hinted at in The Holy Family.

The third text under consideration was first published with A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy in 1904, but it actually appears at the end of the first section of the Grundrisse - the notes Marx originally wrote

as the basis for his projected Economics - and constitutes an incomplete digression on 'the unequal relation between the development of material production and art',²⁰ as a problem for historical materialism. The relevant passage expresses the problem as follows:

It is well known that certain periods of the highest development of art stand in no direct connection to the general development of society, or to the material basis and skeleton structure of its organisation. Witness the example of the Greeks as compared with the modern nations, or even Shakespeare.²¹

These lines are often taken to be a perfect example of the contradictions that arise from a conflict between the exigencies of Marx's economic theory - meaning, in this case, the determination of the superstructure by the base - and his aesthetic theory. This version claims that his belief in the enduring greatness of Greek art leads him here to modify the strict determinism of the main text, displaying a liberalism that is later counteracted by a renewed stress on economic causality in the Preface.²² The well-known passage that allegedly summarises this strict determinism states that

in the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely, relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political, and intellectual life. It is not

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the consciousness of man that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness.²³

My argument here has a dual purpose: in the first place, I wish to defend Marx against this view that his economic theory and his aesthetic theory are irreconcilable, conceding for the moment both the centrality and the extreme determinism of the base-superstructure relationship; in the second place, I wish to defend Marx against himself, offering - still within the framework of his theory of determination - a plausible explanation for what he himself calls a contradiction. True, he does say, a few lines further on in this discussion of Greek art, that 'the difficulty lies only in the general formulation of these contradictions: No sooner are they specified than they are explained',²⁴ but his subsequent account of the intrinsic relation between the epic form, the mythological consciousness of its time, and the primitive stage of technological development of Ancient Greece is not an explanation of what is essentially a value judgment.

There are actually two aspects to Marx's discussion of Greek art. Besides being concerned to explain the apparent discrepancy between a highly developed art form like the epic and the undeveloped economy of Ancient Greece in which it arose, Marx also attempts to come to grips with the question of why the art of the distant past still appeals to us in the present. I shall concentrate on the first issue; as regards the second, I shall merely point out that

Marx cannot answer satisfactorily because an adequate answer would require a purely aesthetic theory divorced from all economic, political, or ethical considerations. In evading this, he presents us with a sentimental explanation at the psychological level,²⁵ whose chief interest lies in what it reveals about his own psychology.

In support of Marx's theoretical consistency and my contention that the apparent autonomy of the history of art in no way invalidates the theory of historical materialism, I shall present two different arguments: one will hinge upon a correct understanding of what comprises the essential determinative aspect of the base; the other will hinge upon a correct understanding of what Marx means by 'determination' and 'development'.

In order to indicate the significant element in the determining base, it is necessary to distinguish between forces of production and relations of production, the two essential components of the infrastructure. Forces of production are the way in which production is organised: for example, there is peasant cottage industry as against mass production in factories. It is in this sense, as regards the forces of production, that the base may be said to be undeveloped in Ancient Greece.

Relations of production, on the other hand, are those 'relatively enduring connections between people, and people and things, which result from the functions to be fulfilled in the process of production'.²⁶ Marx himself is quite

clear on this:

In the process of production, human beings do not only enter into a relation with Nature. They produce only by working together in a specific manner and by reciprocally exchanging their activities. In order to produce, they enter into definite connections and relations with one another, and only within these social connections and relations does their connection with Nature, i.e., production take place.²⁷

There are, for example, the relations of serfdom and lordship typical of feudalism, as against the relations of exploited wage-earning producers to surplus-appropriating owners of the means of production characteristic of capitalism. Now these relations of production, although they 'are appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production',²⁸ can be intricate even when the forces of production are rudimentary.

Marx explicitly states that the determining element in the infrastructure is not the forces of production (the degree of technological sophistication), but the nature of the relations of production²⁹ (the relations between men engaged in production). It is then perfectly consistent with a deterministic general model to argue that Greek art could flourish because of the organic nature of the relations of production, never mind the undeveloped state of the forces of production.

Alternatively, since certain lines in Marx imply a necessary relation between forces of production and relations of production, one could attribute the flowering of Greek art to precisely that undeveloped economic stage when a

harmonious and personal relationship existed between man and his world before the fragmentation, the alienation, and the quantity-over-quality type of production characteristic of capitalism created an environment inimical to art.

This is precisely the point Marx makes elsewhere, citing the alienation of the artist from men and from nature, the limitations imposed by a system that offers to very few the opportunity to be creative, and the devaluation of art in a world of exchange values that reduces it to a mere commodity like anything else.

Having offered the preceding argument in defense of the consistency of Marx's theory of determinism, I shall now argue that the perception of an apparent contradiction in the unequal rates at which art and the economy develop rests upon three misconceptions: firstly, there is the erroneous idea that determination necessarily implies that changes in the base mean parallel changes in the superstructure; secondly, there is a misinterpretation of Marx's idea of development, which does not include the notion of progress in a bad-good-better-best sense, nor even in the sense of a steady forward movement; thirdly, there is a possible mis-reading of the relevant passage, so that Marx is taken to be delivering absolute literary judgments when he is simply saying that certain forms of art are intrinsically related to certain forms of society and that these may reach an extremely high level of development within that society, irrespective of the society's level of economic development -

the passage is ambiguous and I shall consider some of the alternative interpretations at a later stage.

Nowhere does Marx say, or even imply, that a necessary consequence of the determination of the superstructure by the base is that the two will develop in parallel fashion, exhibiting at each stage of their history some kind of equality or some resemblance to one another. Nor does the general concept of determination contain within itself any such comparative or evaluative dimension: it is purely an explanation of relationship in terms of cause and effect. It is quite invalid to demand that the effect must be as good as, or as bad as, or as highly developed as the cause. It is equally invalid to claim that if one can find a single instance where a cause and its effect do not rank at the same level on some scale of excellence, then one has effectively refuted the theory of causation. This is not to mention the further, practical difficulty of establishing criteria equally appropriate to two entirely different spheres, so that one may construct the measuring device in the first place.

As regards the idea of development, what is involved in Marx's conception of the historical evolution of society is the notion of necessity: there is an inevitability about the sequential unfolding of a history whose present and penultimate stage is the conflict of the two great classes of capitalism; but it may only be called progressive in the sense that every step is a step in the 'right' direction

(that is, towards the establishment of the ultimate classless society), even though some steps may appear regressive. There is no question of progress in an evaluative sense, but only the teleological implication of the realisation of an inherent design.

Just as it does not necessarily follow that moral improvement accompanies Marx's kind of progress, so, too, with art. Art develops historically in the sense that it changes form. The forms that are possible at any stage are determined by the content, and that content that art informs, or transforms, is the basic social form of organisation. Again, no necessary increase in aesthetic value, measured in accordance with some supra-temporal criterion, accompanies this development. In fact, as I indicated earlier, it is because Marx cannot contemplate the existence of an absolute standard - an idea fundamentally contradictory to his entire philosophy - that he cannot cope with the other aesthetic problem raised in the passage under discussion - why the literature of the past should still be so highly regarded.

If we cannot convict Marx of inconsistency in this particular text, we can accuse him of a lack of clarity. What is not clear here is a) whether Greek literature is good because it is an accurate reflection of the social reality of its time, or b) whether it is good because the social reality it reflects is good, or c) whether it is good because the nature of the society in which it arose made good literature possible.

Possibility a) applies the criterion of realism; possibility b) invokes an external ethical norm and transfers it to literature; and possibility c) gives a genetic explanation with an unexplicated normative understanding of what constitutes good literature.

Strictly speaking, the requirement of realism in a) takes the form of a demand for correspondence to a particular, preconceived view of what constitutes reality. Without this implicit understanding of the original, the notion of judging a work in terms of how good a reflection it is, is meaningless; but this prescriptive realism raises the problem of the transcendent critic.

Although possibilities b) and c) appear similar and are certainly interrelated, each involves different theoretical preconceptions that give rise to quite different evaluations. The Stalinist and Socialist realist pronouncements, that only literature reflecting a communist society can be good, arise from the application of b). Under c) fall those statements claiming that good literature cannot be produced in a bourgeois society because the alienated artist becomes a detached observer rather than a committed participant. In other words, b) expresses a narrow, dogmatic attitude that denies the existence of literariness and equates the quality of literature with the quality of its subject matter; and c) represents an ethical evaluation of society smuggled in under the guise of a theory about the process of literary creation.

My argument above about the consistency of Marx's determinism suggests that what he intends in the particular text under consideration is proposition c), but - and this is a source of inconsistency in his work - each of the other two possibilities are to be found in his other remarks on literature. Armed with this distinction we can now see that a) forms the basis of his criticism of Lassalle's Franz von Sickingen, and b) validates his rejection of bourgeois literature in general and his high hopes for a future proletarian culture as expressed in The Holy Family.

Now what we are concerned with here is not merely the inherent validity of each of these three approaches; it is also a question of the internal consistency of a critical perspective. A literary theory must allow some degree of generalisation. What is required is a certain unity of methodology or an adequate theoretical basis for deviations in methodology. This is not to insist on universal laws, but to suggest that a particular critic must have a frame of reference with identifiable rules within the terms of which he attributes meaning and value. If his analyses and critical judgments adhere to that framework, they cannot be attacked. All that is possible for somebody beginning from a different epistemological or aesthetic position is to criticise the frame itself, but if there is no internal consistency, the protagonist can escape through the loopholes in his own system.

I have shown that there are inconsistencies in Marx, and that these are not due to a contradiction between

determinism in the economic theory and liberalism in the aesthetic theory, but arise out of the lack of a single and consistent critical frame of reference that applies equally to manner and matter, classicists and contemporaries, bourgeoisie and proletariat.

That the ultimate source of the problem is a lack of reconciliation between Marx's economic-aesthetic theory on one hand and his classical education on the other hand is suggested by certain critical anomalies that emerge from an overview of the three texts discussed above. It would appear, for instance, that contemporary literature of the bourgeois period may be criticised in terms of Marx's economic and political beliefs, because no traditional evaluations adhere to them - this applies to both Sue and Lassalle; but classical literature - such as the Greek epic and certain examples of bourgeois realism - whose traditionally accepted excellence must now be accounted for within the framework of those beliefs, presents a problem. This leads to an evasion of the issue. In the case of the literature of Ancient Greece, this evasion takes the form of a sentimental psychological explanation; in the case of such bourgeois classics as Balzac, the evasion takes the form of the concept of dissociation.

It is this dichotomy in Marx's attitude that has misled some interpreters into attributing to him a liberalism that is not there. They take out of context and overemphasize indications of his unwillingness to deny that literature

is an art of its own kind with a purely literary dimension (which may exist alongside the wrong kind of content and does not necessarily adhere to the right kind of content). But this reluctance to reduce literature entirely to history or propaganda does not negate an otherwise largely inflexible attitude.

2. Specific References to Art and Literature: Engels

Of those scholars who distinguish the individual contributions of Marx and Engels in their accounts of 'Marxist' literary theory, many are more apt to cite Engels than Marx as the authority.³⁰ Although the tastes and judgments of the two men are actually so similar that to deal with each one separately will necessarily involve a certain amount of repetition, it is worthwhile doing so, if only to refute the sort of argument that refers to the economic determinism of their early collaborative efforts and then points out how Engels attempted to modify their dogmatism and formulate a more flexible account of the relations between art and economics.³¹

The aesthetic gospel according to Engels is supposedly contained in two letters written to two aspirant female novelists who had submitted their work to him for appraisal: the first letter was addressed to Minna Kautsky in 1885, and the second to Margaret Harkness in 1888. The two important and related issues that are treated in these

letters are tendentiousness in literature and realism. Tendentious literature is that which propagates a particular point of view and whose *raison d'être* is the articulation of a personal opinion held by the writer. I shall argue that it is a mistake to see these letters as documenting a liberal position, and that it is the prescriptiveness implicit in his concept of realism that allows Engels to adopt an ostensibly flexible attitude towards tendentious literature. As with Marx, the basic intention is the same as that of the naive propagandist, but is modified by a subtle appreciation of how best to employ art as a pedagogic instrument.

When Engels writes to Margaret Harkness:

I am far from finding fault with your not having written a point-blank socialist novel, a 'Tendenzroman', as we Germans call it, to glorify the social and political views of the authors. That is not at all what I mean. The more the opinions of the author remain hidden, the better for the work of art,³²

he is not advocating an 'uncommitted integrity',³³ - he is only denying the need for, or the advisability of, overt proselytizing in literature. Like Marx he is aware that an obvious political thesis, in destroying the work's artistic quality, will destroy its peculiar kind of propagandistic effectiveness.

As he tells Minna Kautsky:

I am by no means opposed to tendentious poetry as such ... I think however that the solution of the problem must become manifest from the situation and the action themselves without being expressly

pointed out and that the author is not obliged to serve the reader on a platter the future historical resolution of the social conflicts which he describes ... under our conditions novels are mostly addressed to readers from bourgeois circles, i.e., circles which are not directly ours. Thus the socialist problem novel in my opinion fully carries out its mission if by a faithful portrayal of the real relations it dispels the dominant conventional illusions concerning these relations, shakes the optimism of the bourgeois world, and inevitably instills doubt as to the eternal validity of that which exists, without itself offering a direct solution of the problem involved, even without at times ostensibly taking sides.³⁴

Clearly, it is Engels's demand for realism in literature and his understanding of the nature of the reality that the work must present that allows him to decry blatant propaganda in literature. If the writer is morally committed to the revelation of objective reality as Engels sees it, then his work can only be politically correct, and if he follows Engels's literary advice, it will be convincing into the bargain.

This prescriptive attitude and the ideological nature of realism here is clearly demonstrated when he tells Margaret Harkness:

... the tale is not quite realistic enough ... In City Girl the working class figures as a passive mass, unable to help itself and not even showing any attempt at striving to help itself. All attempts to drag it out of its torpid misery come from without, from above ... The rebellious reaction of the working class against the oppressive medium which surrounds them, their attempts - convulsive, half-conscious or conscious - at recovering their status

as human beings, belong to history and must therefore lay claim to a place in the domain of realism.

Even though, he continues,

I must own, in your defence, that nowhere in the civilised world are the working people less actively resistant, more passively submitting to fate, more h  b  t  s than in the East End of London.³⁶

So, while her book truly reflects her own experience of reality - and even Engels's - it is not sufficiently realistic for him because it does not illustrate his understanding of the typical nature of the working class. This interpretation is confirmed when he says further on that realism, to his mind, 'implies, besides truth of detail, the truth in reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances'.³⁷

Here we have the elaboration of an idea incipient in Marx, that the chief component of literary realism is typicality. Typicality involves the representation of the social and historical forces of the period and includes the notion of totality. It implies the existence of an underlying truth, and rests upon a preconceived idea of what that truth is, yet it lays claim to objectivity through the use of the reflectionist image of literature as a mirroring of life.

It can now be seen how Engels follows Marx in reconciling political commitment and artistic creativity. Like Marx he applies two criteria: first, there is realism (that is, truthfulness and typicality of reflection), which

applies to content, and which involves a politically prescribed perspective and a utilitarian view of the function of art as directed towards particular social ends; then, there are artistic criteria, which apply to style and involve an understanding of literary excellence, and which are not subject to external ethical standards. The relationship between the two lies in the understanding that artistic concealment of purpose and the semblance of Aristotelian necessity will result in literary effectiveness bolstering a sectarian view of reality. Quite obviously there is no question of Engels moderating Marx's rigid attitude towards art.

It is also clear now that if one understands the phrase 'orthodox Marxist criticism' to refer to an approach based upon, and true to, the writings of Marx and Engels, this is more rigid than is usually conceded by its protagonists - in that it insists upon the reflection of a particular view of reality, and more flexible than is allowed by its antagonists - in that it concedes the importance of a quality of literariness that cannot be reduced to anything else.

A consideration of specific references to art and literature in Marx and in Engels suggests that Lukács is indeed correct in maintaining that it is possible to extract a systematic viewpoint from their writings despite the lack of a complete aesthetic theory. As I suggested earlier, they express - explicitly or implicitly - coherent

and decisive ideas on such essential aspects of a literary theory as the nature and function of art, the relation between literature and life, and the mode of existence of works of the past. However, the comprehensiveness and validity of the perspective that can be deduced from their works depends upon regarding in the light of the general theory what we have already gleaned from the specifically aesthetic references.

As a preliminary argument in support of my contention that a proper understanding of Marxist literary criticism must be based upon both the aesthetic references and the economic and philosophical works, I have tried to disprove the commonly held idea that there is a contradiction between the aesthetic and the general theory by indicating a degree of inflexibility and determinism in the former that is perfectly compatible with even the most dogmatic interpretation of the latter. I shall now change tack and approach the question from an entirely different direction. The allegation of economic determinism depends upon a narrow reading of a few lines abstracted from the rest of Marx's work and represented as the necessary foundation for any Marxist theory of culture. I propose to show not only that those few lines are not as deterministic as the extreme dogmatists would have us believe, but that they are in any case not the key to an orthodox Marxist aesthetic.

3. Economic and Philosophical Writings of Marx and Engels

Any modern approach to a Marxist theory of culture must begin by considering the proposition of a determining base and a determined superstructure. From a strictly theoretical point of view this is not, in fact, where we might choose to begin. It would be in many ways preferable if we could begin from a proposition which originally was equally central, equally authentic: namely, the proposition that social being determines consciousness. It is not that the two propositions necessarily deny each other or are in contradiction. But the proposition of base and superstructure with its figurative element and with its suggestion of a fixed and definite spacial relationship, constitutes, at least in certain hands, a very specialised and at times unacceptable version of the other proposition. Yet in the transition from Marx to Marxism, and in the development of mainstream Marxism itself, the proposition of the determining base and the determined superstructure has been commonly held to be the key to Marxist cultural analysis.³⁸

So writes Raymond Williams in his book, Marxism and Literature, and proceeds to give an extensive elaboration of this proposition. To counter the more usual deterministic reading, his interpretation stresses human agency and constitutive processes. In so doing he hopes to produce a dynamic version of this idea of the determining base and the determined superstructure that will make it more acceptable as a foundation for a Marxist theory of culture.

I shall use his admittedly liberal interpretation as a springboard for my argument that there is in the general theory a proposition that provides a far sounder basis for a literary theory than either of the alternatives he

offers, however enlightened his view of them: the theoretical link between the general and the aesthetic is not the idea that the economic base determines the cultural superstructure (nor that social being determines consciousness), but the conception of man as a creature who satisfies his needs, both material and aesthetic, through practical sensuous activity.

Williams claims that a metaphoric expression has been understood literally as expressing a static, spatial relationship, and analytic categories have been taken for substantive descriptions. This undermines Marx's explicit intention not to separate such areas of life as thought and activity, and - of greater interest to us here, in the light of our discussion of The Holy Family - not to impose abstract categories upon real human behaviour. To rescue this proposition from economic determinism Williams proceeds to redefine each of its constituent terms in turn.

He begins by reminding the reader that the determining base is not a uniform and selfsubsistent object, but an internally contradictory body of productive activities. That he is referring to the deep contradictions in the relations of production emerges from his description of the base as 'the specific activities and modes of activity over a range from association to antagonism of real men and classes of men.'³⁹ No mention is made of that essential contradiction in the base that accounts for the dynamism of history - the contradiction between the forces

of production and the relations of production.

This limiting of the base to relations of production, and reinterpreting of the base-superstructure proposition in terms of human productive relations, only confirms my conviction that a better starting point for a Marxist cultural theory is the idea of man as a producer who constructs socially both his world and himself, both material reality and consciousness.

Having re-stated the meaning of one term of the relationship, Williams now argues, far less convincingly this time, that the other term, 'the superstructure', is used by Marx in three different senses, none of which necessarily includes art. These three senses are, as Williams understands them:

- a) legal and political forms which express existing real relations of production; b) forms of consciousness which express a particular class view of the world; c) a process in which, over a whole range of activities, men become conscious of a fundamental economic conflict and fight it out.⁴⁰

It is true that there is some ambiguity in the actual texts that Williams is drawing upon,⁴¹ but there seems little real doubt - when they are considered together - that Marx is referring not only to legal and political institutions, nor just to those particular ideological forms in which men become conscious of a conflict in the relations of production and fight it out, but to that all-embracing state of consciousness that Goldmann would

call a world vision, that is, 'feelings, illusions, habits of thought and conceptions of life.'⁴² Nor can there be any question of art being excluded from this catalogue, for the last sense includes the first two and art as well.

It is interesting that Williams's semantic quibbling and close textual analysis here focus on the meanings of the terms 'base' and 'superstructure', but do not question the rather dubious notion of determination as the definitive interpretation of the relation between base and superstructure, although the variety of expressions⁴³ used by Marx in the very texts Williams is analysing should give ample scope for a similar sort of operation regarding the validity of the use of the word 'determines'.

Consequently, to refute a possible economic determinist interpretation of the proposition under consideration, Williams is forced to rely upon other texts⁴⁴ which indicate that Marx and Engels were aware of the existence of a complex dialectical relationship between base and superstructure. One of the texts that he cites in evidence is that passage I examined earlier in which Marx discusses the disparity between the high points of art and the low level of development of the societies in which these may occur. But I have already shown that there is no contradiction between Marx's observations here and a theory of material determinism.

To summarise Williams's thesis: If one is to ground a Marxist aesthetic theory in the conception of a deter-

mining base and a determined superstructure, one must avoid two errors - a mechanical materialism and a positivistic reductionism. That is, one must not presume a simple, uni-lateral determination of literature by economic forces, not must one forget that the essential aspect of both base and superstructure is that they are the result of a human process, an on-going social praxis.

Now while it may be necessary to correct that misinterpretation of the base-superstructure metaphor that underpins a theory of literature-as-ideology, it is not by any means sufficient. Apart from underlining the complexity of the relationship between social and historical conditions and literature, it adds little to the construction of an orthodox Marxist aesthetic. In addition, to begin from so problematic a theoretical proposition seems both impractical and unnecessary when there is at hand an alternative that is less contentious and more basic. It is this alternative that I want to consider now.

I suggested earlier that those who find in Marx's scattered references to art a liberal attitude inconsistent with the determinism revealed by his economic theory are as mistaken as those who derive from that economic theory a deterministic aesthetic. The problem, I claimed, is a matter of erroneous selection as well as faulty interpretation. To see the base-superstructure concepts as the decisive explanatory distinction is to misconceive entirely Marx's understanding of art as primarily a mode of reality-

mining base and a determined superstructure, one must avoid two errors - a mechanical materialism and a positivistic reductionism. That is, one must not presume a simple, uni-lateral determination of literature by economic forces, not must one forget that the essential aspect of both base and superstructure is that they are the result of a human process, an on-going social praxis.

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constructing activity. One gains a far deeper insight into Marx's philosophy of art and allows a far more suggestive foundation for a Marxist aesthetic if one begins from that conception of the nature of man upon which Marx's entire work rests.

For Marx man is essentially a universal producer. 'To be sure, animals also produce ... But the animal produces only what is immediately necessary for itself or its young. It produces in a one-sided way, while man produces universally.'⁴⁵ By interacting with nature in a process whereby both are modified, man progressively produces both himself and his world. 'The practical creation of an objective world, the treatment of inorganic nature, is proof that man is a conscious species-being.'⁴⁶

Art is that form of productive activity through which man creates both the art object and his own aesthetic sense. The aesthetic impulse is not biologically inherent, but is an historical and social product. It is part of the self-realisation of man in the course of his confrontation with nature and with himself. 'The object of art,' Marx maintains, 'as well as any other product, creates an artistic and beauty-enjoying public. Production thus produces not only an object for the individual, but also an individual for the object.'⁴⁷

In Marx's conception of it, productive activity, whether practical or aesthetic, is a sensuous material business and not the abstract intellectual activity that

Hegel's theory posits. It is, however, a process of self-development that is never simply equal to economic production. One must distinguish between labour as a manifestation of human life motivated only by an inner necessity to realise one's nature, and alienated labour which is imposed upon man by an external force. The former involves a free, conscious, self-transcendent act of coming-to-be through which man is both creator and product of external and internal nature. Human freedom consists in this manner of being as a self-mediating person whose purpose is social self-fulfillment. Human activity cannot therefore be simply a means to an end, as in alienated labour. If it is, it is dictated by an external necessity and is neither free nor human. 'Man produces free of physical need, and only genuinely so in freedom from such need.'⁴⁸ Art is a truly human activity because it is free: it is an end in itself, and it is motivated solely by the need to fulfill the multiple dimensions of human nature.

What distinguishes man from the animals is that in this process of objectification whereby he externalises himself and humanises the world, he gives material expression to an idea or purpose. 'The animal is immediately one with its life activity, not distinct from it ... [but] Man makes his life activity itself into an object of will and consciousness. He has conscious life activity.'⁴⁹ It is because he is capable of consciousness that the life activity of man differs from that of animals. Man's

creativity is not bound by narrow inner necessities or drives.⁵⁰ He can produce in accordance with conscious purpose and 'the laws of beauty.'⁵¹

The two related characteristics, then, that distinguish human productive activity - which includes art - are freedom from necessity, and consciousness. What characteristics, if any, are specific to aesthetic creation? Marx does not really provide an answer to this question. Improvising freely upon a theme by Marx, Lifshitz suggests that the relationship between the artist, the created art object, and the raw material are different: the artist interacts with, rather than acting upon, his material, revealing its inner truth and establishing an organic unity with his object. His creation involves a strange relation to reality, Lifshitz continues, because the object that constitutes the raw material, that which is reflected, is not changed in the process of creation. Furthermore, in the process of consumption, art is recreated not consumed.

What is important here is the stress on the practical nature of creative activity. For Marx, art is one of the practical means of assimilating the world and quite different from assimilation by means of a thinking mind. It is a part of the larger process of the concrete objectification of man's subjective abilities and the subjective modification of objective reality's crude natural form.

The Marxist rejection of the idealist exaltation of

art over sensuous reality is wholly consistent with Marx's practical criticism of literature that serves merely to illustrate an idea and his insistence on the literary presentation of 'real life.'⁵² As Lifshitz notes: 'The transition from idealism to materialism is inevitably bound up with the emancipation of art, as a sensuous form of consciousness, from slavish subordination to abstract thought.'⁵³

One begins to understand why, in those brief passages that refer to the determination of consciousness by being, Marx only once includes the aesthetic. It would appear that for him literature is not primarily an expression of consciousness,⁵⁴ but a reflective manifestation of the reality-constituting praxis of man. I use the word 'reflective' in two senses here, one methodological and one substantive, for artistic creation⁵⁵ is not only a perfect microcosmic enactment of the essential human activity of free, conscious production that alters both external reality and human consciousness, but it is an aesthetic presentation in material terms of those concrete realities that comprise the current state of that process.

While this conception provides a more fruitful basis for an orthodox theory of art, it does not eliminate the problems we encountered in the specific references. However, by taking these references in conjunction with this particular thread in Marx's general theory, rather than with the base-superstructure proposition, we are in

a better position to assess and trace the contradictions to their source. It is clear that the fundamental problem is not a clash between determinist economics and laissez-faire aesthetics, but the lack of that consistent frame of reference which is so essential to a critical position. Whether or not this disparity between his fragmentary pronouncements and his true central theme of free conscious production may in turn be traced to the absence of a fully worked out aesthetic will emerge from our discussion of the work of Lukács, where there is a systematic theory.

If I am correct in suggesting that the foundation of an orthodox aesthetic theory must be this conception of man's essential nature as typified by free, conscious production, then Lukács is the orthodox aesthetician par excellence. He will build his theory out of the materials already at hand here in the ideas of the originators of Marxism, and I shall show that it is only where he attempts to extend these in directions Marx and Engels never considered (for example, in his attitude towards modernism) that his work is neither orthodox nor acceptable.

If a literal interpretation of a proposition that lends itself to the suggestion of a rigid economic determinism is not an appropriate foundation for an orthodox theory of culture, it certainly is one of the bases of that school of Marxist thought that I have called 'dogmatism'. As the next step in establishing the distinctive features of orthodoxy, I shall now examine the characteristics of dogmatism, so as

to distinguish the two. In other words, having said what orthodoxy is, I shall now say what it is not.

CHAPTER 2

DOGMATIC MARXISM

What I have chosen to call dogmatic Marxist literary criticism (and some would call 'censorship') is two-faced. In its diagnostic aspect, it is applied to the literary products of the bourgeois era and is justified on the basis of a rigidly deterministic interpretation of the Marxian doctrine of the primacy of material conditioning. The key concept here is ideology in its typically pejorative Marxist sense. In its prescriptive aspect, dogmatic Marxist literary criticism is applied to socialist literature, and is justified by its adherents in terms of a paper written by Lenin in 1905 on 'Party Organisation and Party Literature'. This paper is taken to legitimate an overzealous insistence on the pedagogic function of the written word, in a world where all activity is to be revolutionary activity aimed at transforming social conditions. Here the key concept is socialist realism.

Neither of these aspects of dogmatic literary criticism is essentially theoretical in nature: they involve didactic pronouncements 'destined', as Jameson says, 'more for use in the night school than in the graduate seminar.'¹ It is this lack of a coherent and convincing theoretical justification that necessitates the citing of an economic or political text as precedent. I shall argue here that the sort of dogmatic attitude that typified the Stalinist era

cannot justifiably be upheld by referring to Marx, Engels, or Lenin as the validating authority.

I have looked at Marx and Engels and the alleged determinism of the base-superstructure proposition, and so shall concentrate here upon Lenin and political prescription. I shall argue that, over all, Lenin took a far more tolerant view of art than is allowed by the dogmatists, who select and over-emphasize a single text and over-extend its sphere of reference. In his attitude to art, in his literary preferences, in his utilisation of the concept of dissociation, and in his manner of combining a respect for art with a demand for the representation of a particular conception of the real, Lenin is perfectly in accord with the orthodox Marx-Engels brand of cultural ambivalence that I described in my discussion of their specific references to art.

Having looked at Lenin's true approach to art, I shall examine that kind of dogmatism that is commonly, but erroneously, referred to as 'Leninism', giving an historical account of its development in Russia during the twentieth century to show how distinct it is from the orthodoxy of the founders of Marxism and their most distinguished disciple, Georg Lukács.

Several important theoretical questions arise out of this discussion. Firstly, there is the matter of an inconsistency between what I have called the two faces of dogmatism - that is, between determinism (with litera-

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ture seen mechanistically as a passive reflection of material reality in general and bourgeois ideology in particular) and so-called 'Leninism' (with literature indistinguishable from party propaganda and romantically projecting a political ideal rather than reflecting an economic real).

Secondly, and of more general scope, there is the problem of a normative criticism. This encompasses such questions as 1) whether the value of literature depends upon the value of the ideas it expresses, the quality of the society it reflects, or the validity of the goals it achieves; 2) whether literary criticism that prescribes before the act, rather than analyses after the fact, conforms to what we usually understand by the term 'literary criticism'; and, more basically, 3) whether a totally conditioned or regulated literature is not the antithesis of conventional (both bourgeois and orthodox Marxist) conceptions of what constitutes imaginative literature.

What is really at stake here, as regards the nature of art and the role of the artist, is the subordination of the realm of the former, and the restriction of the freedom of the latter, to the extent that the categories of 'art' and 'artist' become meaningless, since they are indistinguishable from - and more usefully subsumed under - the classifications 'ideology' and 'propagandist' respectively.

I shall argue here that the dogmatist has resolved the

dilemma faced by Marx and Engels² in an extreme fashion, eliminating the ambivalence of their attitude to literature through the eradication of the very concept of literature as they understand it. Failing to find a satisfactory way of reconciling the traditional conception of literature, as an activity of its own kind having its own peculiar standards of excellence, with the revolutionary political requirement that all human praxis should aim at transforming society - a belief that in turn depends upon a view of reality that expressly denies the existence of artistic freedom³ - the dogmatist abolishes art as such.

1. Alleged Origins in Lenin

I have said that the dogmatists, in citing Lenin as their authority, refer to a single text, which they abstract from its historical and political conditioning context. It was Zhdanov, Stalin's cultural right-hand man, who officially promulgated the doctrine of socialist realism at the First Soviet Writer's Congress in Russia in 1934 and offered in validation that essay of 1905 in which Lenin calls for a partisan literature that will be an integral part of the socialist political machine.

Socialist realism requires an activist stance: it insists that a writer's duty is to provide a truthful portrayal of reality in its revolutionary development, bearing in mind always the problem of 'the ideological

remolding and education of the working people in the spirit of socialism'.⁴ Literature must be optimistic as well as tendentious, portraying Soviet party heroes and drawing a glowing Socialist future. It is this type of literature that Lukács later dubbed 'revolutionary romanticism'.

In the paper quoted by Zhdanov as authority for his demand for socialist realism, Lenin proclaims:

It [literature] cannot, in fact, be an individual undertaking, independent of the common cause of the proletariat. Down with non-partisan writers! Down with literary supermen! Literature must become part of the common cause of the proletariat, 'a cog and a screw' of one single great Social-Democratic mechanism set in motion by the entire politically conscious vanguard of the entire working class. Literature must become a component of organised, planned, and integrated Social-Democratic Party work.⁵

Various interpretations of this paper have been suggested: I shall mention here only three, each of which is based on a limited view of the whole. Eagleton⁶ claims that Lenin's assertions were intended to apply only to party literature, to theoretical writings and not to novels, and were aimed at such non-conformist intellectuals as Trotsky and Plekhanov. This contention is difficult to sustain, since elsewhere in this selfsame paper Lenin calls for 'a broad, multiform and varied literature inseparably linked with the Social-Democratic working-class movement,'⁷ and makes it quite clear that party literature is to replace bourgeois literature, whose individualism and freedom is a delusion.

The variant suggested by Steiner⁸ - that this paper

was purely a polemic against aestheticism - is also unsatisfactory. It not only ignores the specific commitment Lenin is insisting upon, but suggests that Lenin was politically naive enough to believe that so-called 'pure art' is indeed socially uncommitted. Steiner uses Lenin in much the same way as Zhdanov does, holding him up as the prototype of an 'orthodox' - what I would call 'dogmatic' - Marxist literary critic on the basis of one atypical and ambiguous text. Steiner qualifies his version of 'Lenin's response to literature' with the proviso 'as set forth in Novaia Jizn', explaining that 'the restriction is necessary for elsewhere ... Lenin took a subtler and more tolerant view of poetic freedom', but nevertheless he proceeds to contrast what he calls 'Leninist principles' and 'Leninist orthodoxy' with Engelian liberalism.

Swingewood's⁹ argument is that Lenin was referring to literature of all kinds written by Bolshevik members, published by the party press, and distributed by the party bookshops and newspapers. According to this view, he was concerned to prevent the use of the name of the party for the dissemination of anti- or non-party ideas. This version denies that Lenin was aiming at the totalitarian control of all imaginative literature and insists that he was merely attempting to impose unity and conformity within the party.

This interpretation is interesting less for its plausibility than for the theoretical question it raises

of the possibility of a dual aesthetic. All forms of literature created by party members must confirm to the dictates of the party, on the other hand, everyone has the right to create freely according to his own ideals - on pain of excommunication! As Lenin expresses it in the same article:

Everyone is free to write and say whatever he likes, without any restrictions. But every voluntary association (including a party) is also free to expel members who use the name of the party to advocate anti-party views.¹⁰

Strictly speaking, this is not a case of a dual aesthetic, but of double standards - censorship for party members and literary criticism for the rest. That is, one may either be a party member or an artist, but not both. If a party member, all must be subordinated to the cause and the only criterion applicable is the furtherance of the aims and policies of the party. If not a member and not bound by the same stern social duty, one has artistic freedom and aesthetic criteria presumably come into consideration. There is an odd mixture here of respect for the power of the written word and dismissal of imaginative literature for its own sake as a trivial activity, yet recognition of its right to exist as a form of free and individual expression.

I move to dismiss all three variants discussed above on the grounds that it is quite unnecessary to labour to save Lenin from himself. My argument is two-fold:

firstly, too much is staked upon this single text when Lenin wrote widely, and in different vein elsewhere, on literary matters; secondly, this particular text can only be understood in context as displaying the same sense of expediency that infects a great deal of Lukács's work.

Lenin returned from exile in 1900 concerned to bring the Social-Democrat party back to strict Marxism and to build up a strong centralised party capable of taking charge. Despairing of this, he organised in London in 1905 a congress of his own Bolsheviks, and it was during this congress that he expressed the attitudes that are now taken as the canon for dogmatism. It is presumably these circumstances that account for the ambiguity and contradictoriness that allow three reputable critics to develop three different interpretations simply by focusing upon certain statements to the exclusion of others.

If, however, one considers Lenin's total oeuvre, it is possible to maintain that despite a personal conservatism of taste - Lenin confessed to a total inability to understand or appreciate the 'isms' in art - and despite a predilection, shared with Marx and Engels, for realism and the works of Dante, Shakespeare, Balzac, and Tolstoy, his attitude to aesthetic questions - as opposed to political issues - was to a considerable extent open-minded.

One may support this view by quoting from his 1920 speech to the Congress of Proletarian Writers, in which he

argues for the preservation of the culture of the past, albeit a bourgeois culture, and deplores both cultural ignorance and proletarian literature's abstract dogmatism. Not in Lenin will one find support for the extremist view that the most mediocre of socialist writings is preferable or superior to a bourgeois classic. One may quote, too, from his On Literature and Art,¹¹ where he opposes conformity and supports the wide-ranging creative freedom of the writer in thought, imagination, form, and content.

That Lenin is far from taking a simplistic view of literature as totally conditioned emerges from his practical criticism of Tolstoy, where he distinguishes between the overt ideological commitment of the writer and the realistic literary creation that his genius produces despite himself.

Between 1908 and 1911 Lenin wrote five articles on Tolstoy. His strategy in these articles is two-pronged: firstly, he falls back upon the concept of dissociation in order to salvage Tolstoy for the Marxist; secondly, he applies a sort of historical relativism that accords with the doctrine of materialism. The possibilities of literature at any time, suggests Lenin, are determined by the material conditions of the time, and so must be evaluated against the background of the era in which it was written. Thus he can reconcile Tolstoy's laudable social criticism and 'sober realism' with his unacceptable 'preaching of one of the most odious things on earth, namely, religion.'¹²

Tolstoy is original, because the sum total of his views, taken as a whole, expresses what is precisely the specific features of our revolution as a peasant bourgeois revolution. From this point of view, the contradictions in Tolstoy's views are indeed a mirror of those contradictory conditions under which the peasantry has to play their historical part in our revolution. On the one hand, centuries of feudal oppression ... piled up mountains of hate, anger and desperate determination On the other hand, the peasantry, while striving towards new forms of social intercourse, had a naive, patriarchal, religious idea of what kind of intercourse this should be, of what struggle they must wage to win freedom for themselves.¹³

If we take an inclusive view of Lenin's apparently contradictory stances, we arrive at that same uneasy mix of politically principled yet aesthetically flexible Marxism that is to be found in Marx and Engels themselves. Common to all three is the problem of how to reconcile the demands of their political beliefs with their conviction that literature somehow constitutes an autonomous realm, and still remain within the parameters of Marxism. It is this that leads to what I have called the ambivalence of Marx and Engels, and an accurate account of Lenin's approach to literature cannot but reveal his direct line of descent from them.

It ought to be clear by now that it is a mistake to use the term 'Leninism' to describe that critical dogmatism that reached its apogee in Russia in the 1930's. Nor does this attitude to literature constitute 'orthodox' Marxism, for what is involved here is a question of conformity to

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the political dictates of a temporary political régime, and not faithfulness to the theoretical principles of Marxism as conceived of by its founders. To illustrate this, there follows a brief historical account of the incredible campaign waged by that régime to harness the powers of the imagination in the service of its own peculiar ends.

2. Historical Account of True Dogmatism

There was little attempt to interfere in cultural matters on the part of the Bolshevik party after the 1917 revolution. The relative liberalism of this era is indicated by the number of independent cultural organisations that existed side-by-side, and also by the motley assortment of artistic movements that proliferated at the time, for example, futurism, constructivism, and symbolism. I have already mentioned the attitude adopted by Lenin at the Congress in 1920; and Trotsky - that other great figure of the revolution - was even more open-minded in his approach to cultural questions and more sophisticated in his literary tastes. Although Lenin died in 1924 (and Trotsky was to be expelled from the party in 1927), the first official party pronouncement on literature - made by Lunacharsky, the Bolshevik Minister of Culture - specifically maintained a neutral attitude towards contending groups, despite Lunacharsky's personal preference for the Proletkult movement.

The Proletkultists rejected all bourgeois culture as the reflection of a class ideology that would infect the reader, and looked upon proletarian art as a means of indoctrination and as a weapon in the revolutionary struggle. Since its function was to organise the consciousness of the working class and direct it towards the revolutionary ideals of the proletariat, the literary work must exhibit social optimism, a positive hero, brave workers, and sincere party members.

Lunacharsky's approach was perfectly compatible with this. For him, too, literature mirrors the class background of the writer. He believed, rather simplistically, that ideology is manifested in the content, and so critical assessment must begin here, by relating the content to a particular social group. What he called 'form for form's sake' - and under this heading would fall all types of modernism - represents a bourgeois tendency to hide from reality. In falling victim to the myth of literary realism he fails to see that what he expects of socialist realism, that it should transcend reality so as to express the 'soul life' of its class, is no different.

Perhaps this hesitance on the part of the Bolsheviks to side openly with the Proletkultists had something to do with the fact that at this stage not a single major writer belonged to, or supported, the movement. Gorky was one such eminent figure who still rejected the possibility of decreeing a literature into existence, still favoured a

continuity that learned from and built upon both bourgeois and feudal cultural artefacts, and still saw art's function as the revelation of truth - even if this meant dealing with the darker side of Soviet life.

By 1928 things had begun to change: the first five-year plan was initiated, and it was officially proclaimed as a part of this plan that literature must serve the interests of the party. Anxious to comply, some writers produced novels in which machinery filled the leading roles, as their conception of what was appropriate to the demands of socialism. By 1930 the situation had worsened, and the dogmatic RAPP (the All Russian Association of Proletarian Writers), formed with the express intention of eliminating aesthetic freedom, had either absorbed or destroyed all other writers' organisations by means of a relentless campaign of criticism, defamation, and intimidation, waged against dissident groups and individuals.

1932 saw the dissolution of the 'proletarian' RAPP and its replacement by the 'national' Soviet Writers' Union, an instrument of Stalin's power. Without membership in this union, publication was simply not possible. At the 1934 Congress Zhdanov expounded the official doctrine of socialist realism as put together by Gorky - who was now collaborating with Stalin - and from then on the cultural freeze set in properly.

The 1940's and 1950's brought a series of devastating decrees that, at the level of individual dissent, led to

suicides and murders, and at the level of collective conformism, produced banal works with uniform plots infused with false optimism. Steiner¹⁴ describes most graphically what an examination of official critical journals and State publications of this era reveals: dull, interminable arguments over some minor point and its putative coherence with dogma, abject self-denunciations for trivial offences against official policy, hysterical witchhunts for imaginative heresy, and puritanical condemnations of literary complexity, ambiguity, or impartiality. True talent went underground, while the hack writer produced sterile works of non-art, socialist soap-opera.¹⁵

The following extract from a report written by Zhdanov in 1947 on the journals Zvezda and Leningrad gives some idea of what passed for literary criticism at the time:

It is, I think hardly necessary for me to instance Zoshchenko's 'work' The Adventures of a Monkey. You have certainly all read it and know it better than I do. The point of this work of Zoshchenko's is that in it he portrays Soviet people as lazy, unattractive, stupid and crude. He is in no way concerned with their labour, their efforts, their heroism, their high social and moral qualities. He never so much as mentions these. He chooses, like the cheap philistine he is, to scratch about in life's basenesses and pettinesses. This is no accident. It is intrinsic in all cheap philistine writers, of whom Zoshchenko is one... Is it possible to fall morally and politically lower than this? How can the people of Leningrad tolerate such rubbish and vulgarity in the pages of their journals? The Leningraders in charge of Zvezda must indeed be lacking in vigilance if a 'work' of this sort is offered to the

journal's Soviet readers, if it is found possible to publish works steeped in the venom of bestial enmity towards the Soviet order. Only the scum of the literary world could write such 'works', and only the blind, the apolitical could allow them to appear.¹⁶

Zhdanov died in 1948 and Stalin in 1953. The 1954 Second Congress of Soviet Writers is commonly described as marking the official onset of the post-Stalinist cultural thaw. At this congress, we are told, Sholokhov re-defined socialist realism as a mark of this new cultural liberalism: what he actually did was merely point out that to prescribe both realism and the educative function of literature is redundant because each term presupposes the other. It is true that the larger critical issues once more came under discussion among literary theorists, but the party line was still to insist upon the pre-eminence of Soviet literature and to condemn those who dealt with the classics as yielding to counter-revolutionary tendencies. This was precisely the basis of Revai's complaint against Lukács in the 1950's, that he stressed 'pure' criteria above party interests. Let us, however, concede to Revai that he did see how incompatible is the doctrine of dissociation with the socialist demand for an overtly committed literature, for he made this the subject of his most concentrated attack.

I have not needed to trace the history of Soviet literary criticism up to the present day in order to have distinguished, in this brief account of what is more

accurately termed 'Stalinism' than 'Leninism', dogmatism proper from the orthodox line which runs from Marx and Engels through Lenin to Lukács.

One of the features that distinguishes the two 'schools' is the nature of the ambivalence that is specific to each: where orthodoxy fails to reconcile inherited aesthetic standards with revolutionary ethical requirements, dogmatism fails to integrate determinism and romanticism within a coherent literary theory. The belief in a mechanical, non-mediated relation between art and society, such that bourgeois literature is ideologically determined by the class consciousness of its writers, is not extended to the proletarian. To him is imputed that freedom from determinism that is a necessary pre-requisite if he is to conform to the party's cultural dictates and produce a literary object that transcends reality, that is, socialist realism - or, more accurately, revolutionary romanticism. Just how the transition is made from a passive reflection of the dead bourgeois world of the present to the active creation of an intimation of the glorious proletarian world of the future is not clear, and this is one of the problems I shall examine in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

ELEMENTS OF A MARXIST THEORY OF LITERATURE

I have traced two distinct varieties of Marxism, that common to Marx, Engels, and Lenin, and that practised by the Stalinists, conferring on the former the title 'orthodoxy', and referring to the latter as 'dogmatism' in view of its tendency towards the imperious laying down of narrow political doctrines unaided by theoretical argument. An important part of the project was to demonstrate - in the face of a large body of critical opinion to the contrary - that Marx, Engels, and Lenin all hold essentially similar beliefs as regards literature, and thus may perfectly legitimately be considered as together constituting the orthodox school of Marxist literary theory.

The issue I have not raised is the validity of subsuming two such different approaches under the single heading 'Marxist'. While this is obviously a very broad classification requiring qualification, I submit that its use is justified in the first place by the theorists' own self-understanding as Marxists, and in the second place by the existence of significant similarities - even when these take the form of distortions.

The implication of applying a common classification to so diverse a bunch of theorists over a period of more than a hundred years is that, as unlike one another as they might be, they have still less in common with

any other category of literary critic. It is this related question that I shall be looking at here; namely, whether Marxist literary criticism is so unique a body of aesthetic theory that it warrants total separation from all other literary theories.

There is a glaring omission in the Marxist theories we have examined thus far, an omission that unites the two main approaches. It is the complete lack of concern with the literary tradition as a dynamic social institution with historically specific conventions, and a total ignorance of the extent to which the individual work is conditioned by, and participates in, this tradition. I shall develop the implications of this deficiency in the first part of what follows. However, to see Marxist literary criticism as a self-subsistent, self-enclosed system would be to fall into the same error. I propose, therefore, in the second part of this chapter, to set Marxist literary criticism within the tradition of literary criticism, showing that far from being uniquely different, it bears a striking resemblance to one of the oldest aesthetic theories in the history of Western literature.

To do this effectively it is first necessary to establish the definitive characteristics of Marxist literary criticism and so I shall begin by examining the fundamental components of a Marxist approach as these have emerged from the discussion thus far: a) the criterion of realism, as fidelity to a preconceived version of social reality,

b) a 'reflection' theory of literature, and c) the transcendent critic. Although I have separated them for analytic purposes, complex interrelationships weave these three elements together, so that the prescriptive norms involved in the criterion of realism imply a transcendent critic whose view of reality is the correct one, and the demand for correspondence (that is, realism) is legitimated in terms of a reflection theory of literature which guarantees the objectivity of both the 'realistic' work and the transcendent critic's world view.

Since each of the three concepts is problematic in itself, and far from consistent when taken in conjunction with the others, I propose to draw out their implications, pointing to both practical inadequacies and theoretical contradictions.

Literary realism, I shall argue in this chapter, is a myth that takes no account of literariness - which includes literary conventions - and is accordingly unable to deal satisfactorily with literature of either the present or the past. Moreover, as regards literature of the present, the untenable theory of literature as reflection that is invoked to support this criterion of realism is used inconsistently, and this leads to serious contradictions: for example, 'reflection' allegedly explains both unrealistic (ideological) and realistic bourgeois literature.

The subject of my investigation will be this and other

problems arising out of the above-mentioned inconsistency, in particular the illogical call for socialist commitment as well as realism and reflection, and the specious distinction between ideological bourgeois literature and socialist realism. As regards the latter issue, I shall point out that if one restricts Marxism's general assumption of the materially conditioned consciousness to the bourgeoisie, that is, adopts an unselfconscious notion of ideology, one is led to accept the putatively transcendent stance of the Marxist critic and theorist, a necessary adjunct to the concepts of realism and reflection. It is this that transmutes socialist ideology into realism when it is actually a form of romanticism, a forward-looking socialist romanticism which I shall compare with a backward-looking bourgeois romanticism, since both are economically and historically specific forms of social criticism.

In conclusion, having analysed the salient features of Marxist literary theory in general, I shall relate dogmatism to a Platonic theory of art, arguing that the central problem in orthodoxy - with which I shall be concerned hereafter - arises not out of an essential disagreement with this model, but out of a desire to add a further dimension to it.

1. Problematic Issues

A normative criticism whose criterion is realism ostensibly faces the problem of establishing what 'is' or 'was'; but literary realism generally means fidelity to a certain preconceived version of reality, which, in turn, generally requires allegiance to a particular political theory. Consequently, this question of literary realism can degenerate into overheated and unproductive arguments over differing interpretations of reality stemming from conflicting value systems. As regards contemporary literature, only insight into realism's conventional nature can resolve this impasse, but, for the unregenerate protagonist of realism, it is with regard to the literature of the past that the problems emerge most clearly. These have two dimensions: one practical, the other theoretical. Firstly, there is the difficulty of deciding against what account of the social reality of the time one is to measure, say, Homer's epics, in order to assess them on the scale of realism. And secondly, given this reductive version of the nature and function of imaginative literature, where realism presupposes certain ethical rather than aesthetic values, there is the question of how one is to differentiate between literature and history.

As Marx discovered when he had to account for the pleasure that Greek literature afforded the nineteenth-century reader, his approach, in denying the quality of literariness, cannot handle the question of aesthetic

response, nor can it do justice to texts where different ideologies or literary traditions are involved.

I am not suggesting that Marx (or Engels or Lenin or any other Marxist critic - as opposed to an enforcer of political dogma) denied the existence and importance of the aesthetic dimension. It was, indeed, partly from his perception of the complexity of the mode of existence of the literature of the past, as simultaneously past and present, that Marx's awareness of an irreducible quality of literariness arose, but he was unable to formulate a consistent attitude that would cover all literature and conform to his general thesis. Consequently, he was left with two sets of standards for two sets of literature, a normative approach to contemporary literature and a traditional reverence for the evergreen classics, the former ethical, the latter aesthetic - an unsatisfactory, ambivalent attitude that precludes a coherent and inclusive theory of literature.

If we utilise the structuralist's synchronic - diachronic polarity to summarise the situation, we may say that for the orthodox Marxist contemporary literature exists only synchronically and may be judged normatively in terms of ethical conviction and with certain knowledge and experience of the real. Literature of the past, however, exists both synchronically and diachronically. As regards its diachronic existence, if we are to apply the tenets of historical relativism and judge it in

relation to its original context, we have the problem of establishing the literary, historical, and ethical norms of the period. Moreover, in restricting it to the time of its original creation, we have effectively reduced the literary significance of the work to that of an historical curiosity - which leaves the synchronic existence unexplained and inexplicable. This ignores the effect of the text as it exists here and now for a common reader quite ignorant of its origins. It also suggests a discontinuity of both literary history and ethical values. This may be consistent with Marxism, but the denial of the meaning of the past for the present most certainly is not.

Now despite the Marxist's confidence in his ability to apply his primary criterion - realism - to contemporary literature, the situation vis-à-vis literary realism and the literature of the present is equally problematic. Inseparable from Marxist literary criticism and a major source of its contradictions are several sets of dual standards. We have seen how this applies to the literature of the past versus that of the present. Given the political interests underlying the notion of literary realism, it is not surprising to find that it also applies, within the literature of the present, to the literature of the Marxist as opposed to the non-Marxist.

The Marxist critic dismisses claims to objectivity and fidelity-to-the-truth as formulas used by the

bourgeoisie to ratify the universalisation of individual, subjective, sensory experience. At the same time he must explain why his claim to realism, with its implications of objectivity and fidelity-to-the-truth, should constitute a more acceptable mode of legitimating subjective beliefs - unless, perhaps, collective conformity guarantees correspondence.

This is where the Janus-faced concept of reflection - as both determinism and realism - comes in, for literary realism invokes reflection-by-the-text of what 'is' to confer a warrant of objectivity upon socialist literature and certain maverick bourgeois writers, and, at the same time, uses reflection in the sense of material determinism to condemn bourgeois literature in general as ideology.

In other words, the Marxist condemns as determined by reality literature which does not conform to his world-view, and praises as an accurate reflection of the real that literature which does conform to it. The first response leads to a stress on genetic explanations which in themselves cannot result in satisfactory evaluations without the introduction of extra-literary criteria, the second response involves a total rejection of the part played by literary conventions and traditions; both imply an unacceptable reification of the text.

The problems arising from this inconsistent use of the idea of reflection as both determinism and realism are manifold. To begin with, if one subscribes to the

theory that bourgeois works are mere ideological products of the class situation, then one must believe that the literary work is unconscious in the sense that the writer neither knows what he 'really' writes nor writes what he 'really' intends. This is, presumably, one way of allowing for bourgeois realism, although it by no means constitutes an explanation. However, if artistic freedom is merely an illusion, then surely the Marxist demand for a conscious commitment in literature to a specific point of view is a contradiction. Conscious commitment to socialism may be possible, but it is literarily irrelevant, for one cannot command a literary superstructure to reflect an ideal base.

The concept of dissociation is another unsatisfactory aspect of the use of the notion of reflection to discredit bourgeois literature as ideology while preserving certain of its classics as realism. Implying, as it does, a complex and dialectical relation between literature and society, the concept of dissociation could have opened up a fruitful examination into the question of mediation, but its proponents seem unaware of this possibility, and, in tying it to the concept of reflection-as-realism, only succeed in raising the question of why realism should depend upon an overt commitment to socialism when a brilliant reactionary can achieve greater literary realism unconsciously than can a mediocre progressive with intent.

The theory of dissociation - necessitated by a clash between revolutionary social theory and traditional aesthetic tastes - undermines the whole idea of a committed literature which is supposedly a pre-requisite for realism and a distinguishing feature of Marxist literary theory. We have seen that the only difference between the dogmatic and the orthodox critic in this matter is the difference between overt and covert commitment. We have also seen in the work of Marx, Engels, and Lenin that the so-called impartiality which later Marxists gave the name 'objective partisanship' is not impartial at all. To reveal the real 'objectively', thereby being partisan because of the nature of that real, is a theory which depends upon a subjective, committed view of reality - in other words, upon an ideology.

The contradictions in the Marxist concept of realism, their dual notion of reflection, the inconsistencies in their approach to contemporary literature, all this boils down to an unsatisfactory theory of ideology. It follows logically from the Marxist belief in a materially conditioned and socially constituted consciousness that it should deny the possibility of artistic objectivity; what is not logical is the attempt to confine this attitude to the bourgeoisie - and then to only certain of the bourgeoisie. If social-being determines consciousness, in however indirect or mediated a fashion, then it cannot be held to operate selectively and to apply only to one's

political opponents: it must be extended to cover socialist writers as well. It is impossible to sustain the Marxist distinction between ideological bourgeois literature and realistic socialist literature, particularly if both categories are justified in terms of a reflection theory of literature.

This characteristic Marxist dichotomy between bourgeois ideology and socialist realism not only necessitates a bipartisan interpretation of the concept of reflection, but also implies the existence of a transcendent Marxist theorist or critic who can distinguish the two. A critical examination of this premise would reveal that ideology is in fact realism's alternative persona, that there is a Jekyll and Hyde relationship between the two that is best indicated by saying that one man's realism is another man's ideology, a bit of McLuhanese which translates as 'realism is ego's truth while ideology is alter's delusion.'

It may thus be seen that what is missing from both the orthodox and dogmatic Marxist literary criticism studied thus far is an awareness that the literary theorist or critic, as well as the writer, is socially situated. The outcome is a reification of the text which denies its existence as potentiality and leads the Marxist to ignore the intersubjective construction of meaning that accounts for both 'realism' and 'ideology'. This failure to see that 'realism' is a function of critical interpretation, an unwitting collaboration between reader and

writer, gives rise to that whole series of inconsistencies discussed above.

A self-reflective attitude on the part of the Marxist is a fairly recent development. We have to wait for Adorno to point out that Marxism has gone beyond 'the traditional transcendent critique of ideology',¹ a practice which presupposes the very alienation and reification that it takes as its critical object, and an attitude which totally contradicts the central Marxist idea of a dialectic of history, implying, as it does, an omniscient, eternal, objective viewpoint outside the social and historical process of human self-determination.

We have to wait for Barthes to note that 'every criticism is a criticism of the work and a criticism of itself'.² Barthes's semiostructural analysis of the act of literary criticism as primarily creative and meta-linguistic - and, therefore, as containing the possibility of being valid or invalid, but not true or false - will provide illuminating insights into the nature of the inadequacies of both orthodox and dogmatic Marxism, and his conception of the literary work as a semantic system, together with his understanding of its relation to other socio-historical institutions of meaning, will suggest most convincingly what the Marxists studied thus far cannot - why no great work is dogmatic, yet all great works undermine established ideologies.

But we, in our historical account of Marxist literary theory, are still at the point where 'ideology' refers solely to bourgeois class-related and self-interest prompted delusions, and a lack of critical selfconsciousness allows the theorist or critic to label socialist ideology 'socialist realism' when it might well be described as socialist romanticism, or, to borrow Lukács's more colourful term, as 'revolutionary romanticism'. It is the sociological insights of such later Marxists as Adorno and Barthes that let us historically relativise the difference between the central concepts in these contentions - realism and romanticism - and see that what is involved is not merely a question of a different point of view.

Realism and romanticism have more in common than that they may refer to the same text from the perspective of different ideological convictions or aesthetic standards: they are also both critical responses to a certain phase in the sequence of social formations. While the realist criticises explicitly, the romanticist criticises implicitly. Romanticism is a rejection of what is, a turning-of-the back upon the here-and-now in favour of yesterday or tomorrow, ever there or never-never land; and what is this if not criticism?

The difference between revolutionary romanticism and nineteenth-century romanticism is that instead of escaping into fantasy, history, the past, or the wilderness,

these latter-day romantics set their Utopia within an attainable social and historical dimension, a future that will come. We have gone from 'long ago and far away' to 'and they all lived happily ever after', from despair to optimism, from taking refuge in the self to finding salvation in the group; but what remains constant is that these are literary responses to periods of great social upheaval and to significant shifts in the balance of social power.

Bourgeois romanticism appears to be the individualistic response of the writer as a member of a being-supplanted class during the phase of the disintegration of the old order. Socialist romanticism appears to be the collective response of a writer as a member of a rising class that hopes to replace the old disintegrating order with its own nascent culture. It is not surprising, therefore, that the former looks backwards while the latter looks forwards.

If twentieth-century socialist realism is actually an unselfconscious romanticism, and nineteenth-century critical realism is - as I shall argue in Part II - a romantically illusory self-consciousness, is there no realism? Since the bourgeoisie's realism is the Marxist's ideology and dogmatism's realism is orthodoxy's romanticism, perhaps literary realism is not only a Barthesian myth³ (in the sense of the social and the temporal posing as the natural and the universal), but a total myth (in the sense that this is not, as Barthes at his most polemical would have us believe, confined to the bourgeoisie).⁴ It is my

contention that realism is the label that a dominant or emergent class gives to its own worldview, but this is a subject that will be taken up in greater detail when we have looked at Lukács's idea of realism.

2. Relation to the Platonic Model

In the same way as a proper understanding of the literary categories, realism and romanticism, depends upon seeing these terms as historically relative and not as absolutes, so a proper understanding of both dogmatic and orthodox Marxist literary criticism - their distinctive features, their similarities to, and differences from, one another - depends upon seeing them not as an unique approach, but as very like one amongst others in the history of literary theories.

I propose to set the Marxist perspective within the literary tradition, maintaining that dogmatic Marxism conforms in every respect to the prototypical utilitarian view of art, that of Plato, and that orthodoxy's problem is its inability to reconcile a Platonic concern with ideas and an Aristotelian emphasis on form.

The key to a literary theory lies not in its particular pronouncements, but in its general conception of the nature and function of art. The key to dogmatic Marxist literary theory, and socialist realism as its practical product, is the realisation that the function and the nature of art are inseparable: it is impossible to legislate as to the

proper function of art without its nature conforming itself accordingly.

Now reams have been written upon the subject of the function of literature, with no conclusive result beyond an agreement to disagree. From Plato's⁵ condemnation of all literature bar that written by politically reliable people for approved didactic purposes, through Horace's⁶ 'dolce et utile', which coats the practical pill with a little pleasure, to the romantic defense of Coleridge⁷ and Wordsworth,⁸ who claim for imaginative literature the status of an impassioned truth whose only purpose is to be, the views are many and various.

It is not my intention to promote one view above the others, but to reiterate that each one is related to other factors in the theorist's social and historical situation, and to point out that literary history reveals how the nature of imaginative creation alters as the conception of its function alters, so that one has two parallel strands in the history of literature.

The dogmatic Marxist position is essentially Platonic.

It is not only to the poets therefore that we must issue orders requiring them to represent good character in their poems or not to write at all; we must issue similar orders to all artists and prevent them portraying bad character, ill-discipline, meanness, or ugliness in painting, sculpture, architecture, or any works of art, and if they are unable to comply they must be forbidden to practise their art. We shall then prevent our guardians being brought up among representations of what is evil, and so day by day and little by little, by

feeding as it were in an unhealthy pasture, insensibly doing themselves grave psychological damage. Our artists and craftsmen must be capable of perceiving the real nature of what is beautiful, and then our young men, living as it were in a good climate, will benefit because all the works of art they see and hear influence them for good like the breezes from some healthy country, insensibly moulding them into sympathy and conformity with what is rational and right.⁹

This extract is from Plato's Republic. The manner is milder, but the sentiments are those of Zhdanov. It seems that everyone who believes that he has found the truth will adopt Plato's attitude towards art. A totalitarian whose sole concern is to establish the Platonic Republic (or the City of God, or the Soviet State) must either discard art as trivial, condemn it as subversive, or harness it as useful. It is in making a political weapon of art, in consciously controlling its function, that dogmatic Marxism unconsciously transforms its nature.

What I shall refer to as the Platonic theory of literature is inescapably idealistic and Utopian. If art is to be a pedagogic instrument, it must provide examples of what might be. One does not, after all, teach people what they already know, nor how to be what they already are. This implies a rejection of what is in the name of an ideal, an attitude more consistent with romanticism than realism, as we have already noted.

Platonic literature is also necessarily collectivist and conformist. If there is one truth for all and art is to spread the word, there is no room for individualism,

subjectivity, or inspiration. Inevitably, in such a theory, the concept of realism is invoked to validate the totalitarian's ideal. All else is dismissed as mere appearance, whether it be the realm of material objects that is the apparent - as for Plato - or whether it be that realm that constitutes the primary reality - as for the Marxist.

Platonism is also invariably tied to a reflective theory of literature. Literary works that must express a preconceived notion of the real, the true, and the good, cannot be autonomous. They are secondary versions of that reality to which they are always related analogically and which serves as a standard to which they are compared. Conformity to a prior, collective system of meanings will naturally stress likeness to, not difference from, the model, and will demand reflection not significant distortion, correspondence not coherence. Finally, because art is seen as determined (or determinable) and secondary, immanent analyses yield place to causal explanation.

In order to be coherent a Platonic-type theory of literature must necessarily include all these ideas, but there is an equally significant omission - everything is directed towards stipulating what art must do, nowhere is there an attempt to say what art is, what peculiar characteristics distinguish it from all other activities or institutions. There are other ways of reflecting the real or projecting an ideal, so wherein lies the art of

this particular method? What makes art art and not ideology or history or wishful thinking or knowledge? For the Platonist, nothing - the essence of art escapes him. For the dogmatic Marxist, the situation is the same, but the orthodox Marxist finds himself on the horns of a dilemma.

Basically, the view of the orthodox Marxist conforms to the Platonic model; but he has to contend with an additional factor that is extrinsic to, and incompatible with, this type of literary theory; and that is, a respect for literature as a phenomenon of its own kind, and a recognition of an essential aesthetic dimension to literature that is ultimately irreducible to anything else. Consequently, the orthodox Marxist is faced with the problem of establishing a theory of literature that will accommodate both this recognition and his normative demand for realism, with all that that implies. Somehow he must effect a theoretical synthesis of reflection and creativity, correspondence and coherence, content and form, Plato's dogmatic stipulation of static ideals and Aristotle's open-minded investigation of dynamic facts.

It may be useful at this juncture to take stock. I have been concerned to discuss certain problems arising out of the primary concepts of a Marxist theory of literature. I have pointed out that the prescriptive norms underlying the criterion of realism are a) practically inadequate - they cannot, for example, deal with the literature of the past and its present day appeal, and

b) theoretically unsatisfactory - they deny the existence of literary conventions, ignore whatever it is that makes literature literature and not something else, and imply a transcendent critical stance. This in turn involves reification and alienation, which allows the Marxist critic to present his ideology as realism. This strategy is legitimated by a reflection theory of literature which guarantees the objectivity of his version of reality. The notion of reflection here is a) inadequate - because it ignores the writer's skill, insight, and consciousness, and b) unsatisfactory - because it unites, without reconciling, such contradictory ideas as bourgeois literature as a reflection of ideology, socialist literature as a reflection of the real, commitment as a prerequisite for socialist realism, and dissociation as an explanation for bourgeois realism. Finally, I suggested that socialist realism is not realism in two senses: firstly, it is as ideological as bourgeois literature; and, secondly, it conforms to the patterns of romanticism in its substitution of a static ideal for the changing real, in the particular form its critical intention takes, and in several other respects as well.

I finished my discussion with an outline of the essentials of a Platonic theory of literature in order to show that, far from being a perfectly unique phenomenon, Marxist literary criticism actually conforms to this model in every respect in the case of dogmatic Marxism,

and in every respect bar one in the case of orthodox Marxism. It is this highly significant aberrant element in orthodox Marxism, and the need to integrate it into the whole, that is to constitute its central problem, and in my analysis of Lukács and Goldmann, I will assess their success in handling this issue.

PART II

LUKÁCS AND ORTHODOX MARXIST AESTHETICS

The overall aim of Part II, the section on Lukács, is to present what might be called the positive and the negative sides of his work, indicating both the extent to which it constitutes an advance on the literary writings of the earlier orthodox Marxists, and the manner in which it fails to resolve the essential contradictions to be found there. The underlying assumptions are firstly, that Lukács may be classified as an orthodox Marxist despite certain contra-indications, and secondly, that - like Marx, Engels, and Lenin - he finds it impossible to avoid unsatisfactory accommodations and comprises arising out of an incompatibility between his Marxist epistemology and ethics and his bourgeois literary appreciation. This leads to a strange discrepancy: in his attempt to construct the first orthodox Marxist aesthetic, Lukács is highly successful as long as he remains at the most abstract level of theoretical speculation, but at the level of concrete criticism his work manifests the same inconsistencies we encountered in the original orthodox group.

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standing of his work. Chapter 5 deals with the early aesthetic works, Soul and Form and The Theory of the Novel. A presentation of the main concepts in each work in turn is followed by a general discussion of the development of Lukács's ideas on two central issues. Although these issues comprise a network of related concepts whose names change as Lukács's philosophical allegiances change, I have chosen to refer to them briefly here as 'form and content' and 'art as reflection and/or creation'. What should emerge from my discussion of Lukács is that, despite a difference in terminology and perspective, the questions involved are basically the same as those indicated by 'realism' and 'ideology' in later chapters.

I shall discuss these early works in some detail, firstly, to show a continuity in Lukács's ideas which is often underestimated by those who think in terms of a 'conversion' to Marxism as the crucial turning point in his intellectual development; secondly, to isolate some of the early aesthetic problems, theories, and inclinations, that point towards Marxism as a possible solution (as well as those whose necessary reconciliation with Marxism resulted in strange anomalies); and thirdly, to indicate several remarkable insights, which, had he only pursued them, might have provided Lukács later with the answers he needed.

It is possible to extract from Lukács's later works a critical history of bourgeois literature that continues

where The Theory of the Novel leaves off historically and philosophically, and as regards methodology, displays a similar conception in terms of broad discrete periods whose dominant forms reflect the ideology of their era. I shall present an outline of this history in Chapter 6 together with a critical analysis of various aspects of Lukács's Marxist theory of literary realism as these emerge from my historical account. This chapter will deal primarily with Lukács's practical criticism and the typical orthodox Marxist contradictions referred to above.

To balance this, I shall provide in Chapter 7 a discussion of the general and theoretical bases of Lukács's conception of literary realism, showing his brilliance in constructing a coherent orthodox aesthetic and in deriving his literary criteria - totality, typicality, and concreteness - from his Marxist worldview. I shall argue that it is only when faced with literature as an existent body of work rather than as an ideal concept that he falters. In this chapter, I shall identify in History and Class Consciousness the theoretical foundations of the literary theory that underlies Lukács's account of bourgeois literature as presented in Chapter 6, and shall then proceed to the aesthetic contained within the works of general theory that he wrote in his last years.

With a better understanding of Lukács's literary theory through that general theory to which it is intrinsically related, I shall return in Chapter 8 to a critical

summary of Lukács's conception of literary realism that will prepare the way for the subsequent exposé of the true nature of this mythical literary form. Since Lukács's problem with realism stems as much from his broad conception of the genre as from his narrow literary tastes and prescriptive doctrinal position, I shall offer my own suggestions as to certain classifications that might be made within realism in order to increase one's understanding of the various types that make up this category, particularly in their different relations to class affiliations, historical periods, and epistemological positions.

Lukács, as Chapter 4 will show, was a prolific writer, and the sheer quantity of the material necessitates certain delimitative criteria. Since his criticism may be rather neatly divided into the literature of the West and the literature of Russia, I have chosen to concentrate on the former for several reasons: first, as the principles of his criticism are the same, I would otherwise be involved in a great deal of repetition; secondly, because examples taken from lesser known Russian works are not as significant for the average English-speaking reader; and thirdly, because it is in his writings on Russian literature that Lukács most often displays his compromise with the demands of Party solidarity.

CHAPTER 4

AN INTRODUCTION TO GEORG LUKÁCS

Of primary importance in determining Lukács's literary theory and criticism was not his political commitment to the interests of the Communist Party, but his intellectual allegiance to the doctrines of Marx and Engels as he understood them. Thus, despite the accommodations that he was at times forced into by political exigencies, he belongs essentially to that category discussed in Chapter 1, orthodox Marxism, rather than to the dogmatic Marxists discussed in Chapter 2.

It is relatively easy to separate his real convictions from the dogmatism Lukács deemed it expedient to profess on occasion. When he claims¹ that despite the impossibility of open polemics throughout the '30's and '40's he managed to maintain an underlying integrity, a general commitment to the views of Marx and Lenin that ran counter to the official Soviet doctrine of the time and constituted an implicit critique of it, this is not mere self-justification. It is this basic consistency of belief that makes it possible to divorce the writings of the 'real' Lukács from those of the purveyor of what Adorno refers to as 'Soviet clap-trap'.²

I am not suggesting that the 'real' Lukács is free of either that certain type of dogmatism typical of orthodox

criticism (which, to avoid confusion, I shall continue to call 'prescriptiveness'), or of inconsistency. I am suggesting that these differ in kind and origin from the sort of dogmatism and inconsistency that typifies what I have labeled dogmatic Marxism. Lukács's prescriptiveness arises directly out of his orthodox Marxist theory of the nature and function of art (as a revelation of the totality of objective reality) and the nature of reality and man (as respectively humanly-constructed and a social being), and it finds its most fervent expression in his narrow conception of modernism. It is not, however, as in the case of the dogmatists, the result of a reductive conception of literature as merely a tactical support for political policies. In order to examine the weaknesses and contradictions that are integral to Lukács's literary criticism, it is necessary to distinguish between his prescriptiveness and the dogmatism that is merely a pragmatic veneer.

Lukács is not only a controversial figure academically, with assessments of his work varying from 'brilliant' to 'unoriginal', but he seems to arouse highly emotional responses - whether of approval or approbation - which cloud his critics' judgment. There is, for example, the unsympathetic distaste and deliberate non-comprehension of Swingewood,³ who forgets that the literary critic is not asked to pronounce upon the moral courage of a writer but only upon his work. More acceptable is the stringent yet

compassionate criticism of Adorno,⁴ who gives credit where it is due, and who, while regretting Lukács's compromise, recognises that this occurred under duress of a kind unimaginable by an outsider. However, even Adorno is so incensed by what he sees as Lukács's Cultural Commissar pronouncements on contemporary literature, that he misses the fact that beneath the particular bureaucratic emphases lie the general Marxist theoretical premises that Lukács has always professed.

To avoid these emotional and intellectual pitfalls, I intend to ignore the obviously 'Stalinist' work and to go beneath the dogmatic overlay in other instances to what Lukács himself saw as a consistent position. In any case, no useful purpose is served by dwelling upon Lukács's failings where these are the result of circumstance and not intellectual conviction. The Lukács we are concerned with here is not the Soviet spokesman, but the critic Steiner⁵ describes as the one major talent to emerge from the grey years of dogmatism, the man Brecht, Benjamin, and Adorno⁶ respected sufficiently to consider it worthwhile arguing with, the theorist upon whose work as reputable a scholar as Lucien Goldmann has based his theory of the novel.

Before proceeding to trace through Lukács's work the development of those ideas that have already emerged as central to orthodox Marxist literary theory and which form the core concepts of Lukács's theory of literature, I

propose to give a brief general account of his life. There are some writers whose biographies seem more than usually relevant to their work. Or perhaps one should say that in some cases the relevance of biographical facts is more immediately obvious. Iichtheim⁷ calls Lukács a 'uniquely determined ... phenomenon', which is one way of saying that it is difficult to follow his apparent intellectual development - a sort of switchback movement filled with recantations of earlier ideas and repudiations of recantations as merely tactical - without such aids to understanding and interpretation as are provided by the biographical facts of the matter. In Lukács's case these biographical details play a crucial part in supporting one's hypotheses as to what are Lukács's unconstrained opinions and what derives from the need to conform to the requirements of the Party.

Parkinson⁸ distinguishes six different periods in Lukács's life: the first three are intellectual phases, while the last three are differentiated in political terms. This has the advantage of suggesting that for the second 43 years of his life Lukács maintained a consistent intellectual position despite apparent changes of mind and heart; but by effecting a rigid separation between practical and theoretical issues in Lukács's life and work, it implicitly denies the interrelationship between ideology and form that was Lukács's prime contribution to literary theory. I have chosen, therefore, to use geographical boundaries as a pedestrian but non-prejudicial

method of distinguishing various periods in Lukács's life, a simple matter in the case of a man who appears to have divided his time between writing and packing. It will be found that these moves coincide fairly well with both political experience and intellectual stages, real and apparent. Thus we have Lukács as a young man in Budapest (1902-1906), as a student in Germany (1906-1918), as an exile in Vienna (1919-1929), as a Marxist literary critic in Moscow (1929-1945), as a public figure in Budapest (1945-1956), and as a venerated writer in Hungary (1957-1971).

Lukács came from a wealthy, middle-class, Jewish-Hungarian family of German extraction. He grew up in a country which was predominantly agrarian at a time when there was a rapid growth of industrialism and an allied increase in the numbers of the working-class. Lukács played an active part in the intellectual life of Budapest as a young man, associating himself in particular with a reformist clique of liberals, socialists, and radicals, who were moving away from the values of the upper and middle classes - especially their intense nationalism. During this early stage Lukács studied law but was also involved in the theatre, writing several plays, which he later destroyed, and founding a theatre group to bring drama to the working-class.

Between 1906 and 1918 Lukács spent most of his time studying in Berlin and Heidelberg, where he came under

the direct influence of the two great German sociologists of the twentieth century, Simmel and Weber. It was, however, his interest in philosophy that took Lukács to Heidelberg, for Heidelberg was the centre of that branch of the neo-Kantian school that devoted itself to the philosophy of history (rather than to the philosophy of natural science as did the Marburg school), and so Lukács also studied under both Windelband and Rickert.

Throughout this thirteen year period Lukács showed a great interest in literature and contributed many articles to two Hungarian periodicals, one, (Nyugat), a literary paper with a radical intellectual slant, and the other, (Huszadik Század), a sociological paper with a radical political stance. In 1907 Lukács finished a history of the development of modern drama within the context of a sociological theory, and three years later he published a collection of essays entitled The Soul and the Forms. From 1911 to 1914 Lukács worked on a philosophy of art which was Kantian in orientation and which he abandoned to write The Theory of the Novel in which he moves away from Kant towards Hegel.

The end of the 1914-1918 war saw the establishment of a republic in Hungary and the inception of the Hungarian communist party under Béla Kun. To the considerable astonishment of those who knew him, Lukács - now back in Hungary - became a member immediately. He gave as the reasons for his 'conversion' a lifelong disdain for

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capitalism and bourgeois life, an admiration for such moral ideals as community and selflessness, and an intellectual conviction resulting from seventeen years of intermittent studies in Marxism. This identification of Marxism with Communism seems incredibly naive, and it is precisely the gap between the two that accounts for the vicissitudes of Lukács's life.

When the Károlyi government resigned in 1919, the Social Democrats formed an alliance with the Communists and the Hungarian Soviet Republic came into being with Lukács holding an official position in the Department of Public Education. The Republic lasted only a few months, and when a right-wing régime followed upon the fall of Budapest to the Roumanians, Lukács had to be smuggled out to Vienna where he remained in exile until 1929.

During this period he was extremely involved with the exiled Hungarian Communist Party, and when internal dissensions split this party in two, Lukács sided with the Landler group (based in Vienna and Berlin) against the Kun group (based in Moscow). Things came to a head when Lukács prepared a set of theses for the 1929 Congress, outlining the convictions of his group as to the best form of government to be aimed at for Hungary - on the basis of existing conditions there, he denied the feasibility of a dictatorship of the proletariat. Lukács was denounced by the Moscow group and to avoid expulsion from the party he publically recanted. He also decided herewith to

leave practical politics to others and to concentrate upon theoretical issues.

As a result of his involvement in politics this was literarily a relatively unproductive period in Lukács's life. Apart from the 'Blum theses' ('Blum' being the pseudonym Lukács used at the time) and a few book reviews and articles, the one significant book to emerge from this phase was History and Class Consciousness, published in 1923. This book reflected what Lukács was later to describe as the messianic utopianism of the exiled Hungarian communists. Although Bloch and Revai supported this book, it was harshly criticised by Lenin and other influential Russian voices as 'infantile' and 'revisionist'. Lukács, nevertheless, stuck to his guns until the furor over the 1929 theses prompted a public repudiation of all his 'non-conformist' views.

Except for a brief period between 1931 and 1933 when Lukács went to Berlin, he spent the years from 1929 to 1945 in Moscow. At the beginning of this period he began to consider the problems of aesthetics from a Marxist angle. The idealism of the earlier work had yielded to a new stress on reality, due in part to his study of the 1844 Manuscripts at the Marx-Engels Institute, and in part to his friendship with Mikhail Lifshitz, a student of Marxist literary theory and criticism. The journal of the League of Proletarian Revolutionary Writers proved a ready made vehicle for Lukács's developing theory and

it carried many important articles in which he elaborated upon his ideas.

In 1933 and 1934 Lukács published an autobiographical work and an article in which he criticises his History and Class Consciousness for the sins of philosophical idealism and subjectivist activism, that is, for being theoretically false to Marxism's materialism and practically dangerous to the best interests of the cause of Socialism as interpreted by Soviet bureaucrats. Later he was to insist that this was necessary for publication and that his subsequent support of Stalinism actually hid beneath the appearance of conformity a number of subversive ideas.

With the advent of the so-called Popular Front that followed upon the 1935 Congress's ratification of co-operation with the Social Democrats and all other non-fascist groups, Lukács's position in Moscow became very strong indeed, but the 1939 Hitler-Stalin pact altered the situation, and in 1941 Lukács was imprisoned as a Trotskyite. He was soon freed, but his position remained tenuous. What with this and Russia's entry into the war in 1941, there was little opportunity for publication between 1941 and the end of the war in 1945 when Lukács returned to Hungary.

During this period of 'conformity' in Moscow, Lukács produced many articles which later formed the basis for the prodigious number of books that he published in the years immediately after the war. Significantly, for these

were written after his repudiation of his own idealism, almost all of these works are concerned with realism. Whether they also - as Lukács claimed - express ideas not at all consistent with Stalinist dogma is something we shall consider later. Apart from these excursions into literary theory and criticism, Lukács was working in the area of philosophy. He completed The Young Hegel in 1939 although he was only able to publish it ten years later when official Soviet policy no longer branded Hegel a feudal reactionary.

On his return to Hungary in 1945 Lukács was made professor of Aesthetics at the University of Budapest. He also became a member of Parliament, but played no active part in the Communist Party. This was an extremely busy period for Lukács both as writer and as public figure. However, control of the secret police and the support of the Soviet occupying forces enabled Rákosi, as leader of the Hungarian Communist Party, to eliminate all other parties and to establish a communist régime by 1949. A period of official terrorism set in and lasted until after Stalin's death in 1953. Lukács became a target for these attacks and was harshly criticised in the press for non-conformity although he was not prevented from publishing. Nevertheless, he retired once again from public life to devote himself to writing and theoretical matters.

The 'thaw' that followed Stalin's death benefited Lukács: he won an award in Hungary in 1955 and received

several German honours during this period. Krushchev's attack on Stalin at the 1956 Congress encouraged the Hungarian opposition to Rákosi's very similar régime, and Lukács became an outspoken critic of both Stalinist and Rákosian dogmatism. Despite Rákosi's subsequent removal from office the liberal opposition were not appeased and the revolution of 1956 broke out. For the thirteen days of its duration Lukács was a key figure both in the party and in the government as Minister of Culture, but the end of the revolution saw the seventy-year-old Lukács arrested and deported to Roumania.

Apart from publishing collections of essays written during his Moscow sojourn, Lukács also published many articles and several books during this phase. His History of Modern German Literature appeared in two parts in 1945. Two years later a work on existentialism appeared and in the following year a book on Thomas Mann. In 1947 he published his work Literature and Democracy, which seems to have aroused the ire of Hungarian and Russian officialdom. 1952 saw the completion of The Destruction of Reason, which was only published two years later. In the following two years Lukács published a number of articles on aesthetics which appeared in Hungary in collected form as On Speciality as a Category of Aesthetics. In the same year he finished a work begun in 1955 that was later published in English as The Meaning of Contemporary Realism.

Lukács was lucky: he was allowed to return to Budapest in 1957, merely forfeiting his chair at the University while others involved in the revolution lost their lives or their freedom. He was not even expelled from the party, but refrained from reapplying for membership. He was, however, the continual butt of Communist press attacks on revisionism until 1965 when he was reinstated as a writer with the official publication of a bibliography of his works. In 1967 he rejoined the party and was decorated two years later. In recognition of his increasing stature in the Western world, he was allowed complete freedom of expression and even gave a series of interviews to Western reporters. He died in 1971, literally pen in hand, after a life marked by such reversals of fortune as would put to shame the most inventive write of picaresque romances.

This last period of Lukács's life was an incredibly productive one, with Lukács realising works he had only conceived of and planned up to now, although at his death these had not all been completed in the final form that he had envisaged. In 1963 he published a two volume work entitled The Specific Nature of the Aesthetic. This was to be part of a complete aesthetics which never materialised because Lukács turned his attention to the writing of a Marxist work on ethics. This, too, was postponed in favour of the two part Ontology of Social Existence, to which Lukács added a further explanatory

volume that he called Prolegomena to an Ontology of Social Existence. It was during this phase that he also wrote several shorter pieces such as articles on Solzhenitsyn and important prefaces to his own reissued works.⁹

It is not my intention here to attempt to summarise the intellectual odyssey that runs parallel to the historical and personal events I have described above, for in dealing with Lukács's works in chronological order, this will emerge from the discussion. Suffice to say here that this is more remarkable for a constancy of thought that may be perceived beneath the tortuous manceuvrings forced on Lukács by political circumstances than for those vast shifts of opinion that some critics claim to find.

CHAPTER 5

THE PROMISE OF THE EARLY WORKS

Lukács's first works of literary criticism are contained within a collection of ten essays published in Hungarian in 1910 and entitled Soul and Form⁺ in the English translation. I believe that the significance of this work for an understanding of Lukács has been underestimated. It is usually cursorily dismissed as 'early' or 'pre-Marxist', the implication being firstly, that this automatically renders it less worthwhile than 'later' or 'Marxist' Lukács, and secondly, that there is a radical discontinuity between the two.

Apart from their intrinsic value, these essays are remarkable as an indication of the continuity of interests that underlies Lukács's total oeuvre. I refer, for example, to such concerns as the relations between art and the real and aesthetics and ethics, the reflectionist example, to such concerns as the reflectionist and the real and aesthetics and ethics, the reflectionist theory of literature, the idea of form as meaning, what

Also of interest is the presence of certain ideas that point beyond Plato, Kant, and Hegel, to Marx. Already Lukács writes:

For the true bourgeois, his bourgeois profession is not an occupation but a life-form, something which - independently from its content, as it were - determines the tempo, the rhythm, the contours, in a word the style of his life. Accordingly, the bourgeois profession is something which, in consequence of the mysterious inter-

action of life-forms and typical lived experience, must penetrate deeply into all creative activity.²

More important still, it is only in the light of this early understanding of form and genre that certain aspects of such later works as The Meaning of Contemporary Realism³ become clear; and it is only by studying Soul and Form that one sees where Goldmann's acknowledged debt to Lukács really lies - in the pre-Marxist work with its ideal forms - and can then better understand the deficiencies in the former's conception of a worldview.

Accordingly, in the first section of this chapter (5.1), I shall present the main substance of this work - together with some intrinsic criticism - in the form of a sequential explanation of several concepts and tendencies which are relevant to, and will crop up in, later Lukács and Goldmann - albeit in terms of a different vocabulary. Then, in the following section (5.2), I shall analyse the central task Lukács was posing himself and the ways in which his ambiguities conceal solutions that structuralism will provide, but that Lukács, later, will be too hidebound a Marxist to discern.

1. Soul and Form: Key Concepts

Soul and Form is usually described as the product of Lukács's youthful neo-Kantian phase. This classification is probably justified by the fact that the book contains one Kantian-type idea⁴ - peculiar to this Lukácsian work

alone - which appears to constitute the underlying conception that unifies the various essays. This idea is that certain aesthetic forms or genres, such as the lyric, the tragedy, and so on, exist a priori as a set of eternal ideas or worldviews in terms of which we constitute reality in art. The phrase Lukács uses is 'the eternal a priori of all content'.⁵

This categorisation, however, can be misleading, for the work seems to owe as much to Plato⁶ as to Kant. Plato is a very real presence in several of the essays, and what there is of orthodox neo-Kantianism is primarily that dualism and idealism that it shares with neo-Platonism, while most of what it owes to the Heidelberg brand of neo-Kantianism is not particularly Kantian nor specific to that school.

Orthodox neo-Kantianism holds the belief that reality is ultimately unknowable, but the conviction underlying Soul and Form is that contact with ultimate reality is possible, admittedly not through reason, but through an act of immediate intuition. This is an attitude that characterised what is known as Lebensphilosophie. Lebensphilosophie refers not to a particular school of philosophy, but to a dominant trend of thought that was common to several different schools, including the Heidelberg-based neo-Kantians mentioned above, of whom it might be said that they were only Kantian in their adherence to the idea of the transcendental subject.

But my main objection to this categorisation of Soul and Form is because it belies the very heterogeneity of ideas which constitutes both its promise and its significance for Lukács's development.

In style Soul and Form is often lyrical, sometimes mystical, and usually obscure - quite different from the incisive expression of Lukács's mature work - but this is not inconsistent with the nature of the truths he is seeking here, nor is it surprising given his early diet of romanticism and fin-de-siècle symbolism. The following extract is typical:

Every written work ... leads us to a great door - through which there is no passage. Every written work leads towards great moments in which we can suddenly glimpse the dark abysses into whose depths we must fall one day; and the desire to fall into them is the hidden content of our lives. Our consciousness allows us to evade them for as long as we can, yet they are always there, gaping at our feet when a view opening unexpectedly before us from a mountain top gives us a touch of vertigo, or when roses whose scent still surrounds us suddenly vanish from our sight in the evening mist ...?

Nevertheless, while Soul and Form is admittedly the work of a young man marked by the currents of thought of his time and by his own specific milieu, it is also a brilliant piece of writing with some remarkable insights. In particular, Lukács's understanding of form (which in his view of it might be said to correspond to the function of art), his conception of the nature of art, and his ideas on the nature and function of criticism as

an art form are worth examining for their intrinsic value as well as for their relation to his later ideas and to the ideas of his arch-disciple, Lucien Goldmann.

A certain degree of confusion arises in Soul and Form, firstly, from Lukács's inconsistent use of his central concept 'form', and secondly, from his failure to explain clearly whether his two basic sets of distinctions (science versus art and abstract concepts versus concrete phenomena) coincide or cut across one another. I shall look at these issues in turn here.

'Form', as Lukács understands it, refers to a Platonic-type idea and to a worldview or structure of meaning; it is also usually, but not always, synonymous with 'genre'. Lukács defines a worldview as 'the immediate form of his life-manifestation, his way of feeling and expressing the world'.⁸ He does not conceive of it as an abstract ideal construct, but in terms of concrete lived experience with both cognitive and emotive dimensions. So although form is primary, it exists as potentiality only, for Lukács expressly says that it is concrete content that brings the possibility of meaning to life.

These forms as worldviews and genres are realised in concrete literary works, but the precise character of the realisation depends to a certain extent on the nature of the raw material that is to be informed: life. For while the forms are basically atemporal significant structures,⁹ they have aspects which can and must be altered to suit

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the particular ends of historical epochs in order to constitute a living art that captures the essence of its era. As Lukács put it:

...existing forms are not the product of our life today ... [and therefore, to express] the innermost essence of our time ... [art must] transform for its own ends whatever aspect of the existing forms could change with time, and must be changed if we are to have a living art.¹⁰

In practical terms, what Lukács presumably means here is that Oedipus, Hamlet, and Murder in the Cathedral all share certain common elements amounting to the broad bases of a conception of the nature of man and his relation to the universe. This allows them to be classed as tragedies because they share a tragic vision of life; but each also exhibits formal characteristics specific to the era in which it was written, variations on that basic viewpoint which are not a question of superficial style, but of essential meaning.

In expanding upon the relationship between form and reality ('form' here referring to an order determined by a worldview and so including the ideas of 'shape' and 'meaning', 'reality' here referring to life and so including the idea of 'content'), Lukács reveals that for him meaning is to be found neither in, nor beyond, but through reality. Reality is chaotic and ambiguous. Form is a means of revealing and communicating the significance underlying that chaos and ambiguity. As Lukács puts it:

all life is merely raw material ...
[and only the artist] can knead the
unambiguous from the chaos of
reality ... give form (i.e. limi-
tation and significance) to the
thousandfold ramifications, the
deliquescent mass of reality.¹¹

In limiting the contingent facts of reality, form expresses
the absolute eternal certainties, it 'defines the limits
of the immaterial'.¹² Moreover, form is ultimately the
promise of salvation because, in expressing a conceptual
re-ordering of the world, it affirms the possibility of
reshaping life, 'of creating it anew'.¹³ Here the ethical
and the aesthetic coincide.

There are two further aspects of these ordering forms
that are significant here, the first because it points
forward to the problem of the transcendent critic, the
second, because it reveals a Marxist-type insight into the
relationship between meaning and human needs.

Just as for Plato there is a pre-eminent form, so for
Lukács there is a pre-eminent genre - criticism. Because
it deals with questions of ultimate reality, 'the critique,
the essay - call it provisionally what you will - [is] a
work of art, a genre',¹⁴ Lukács maintains. Herein lies
the irony of literary criticism, as Lukács explains:

And the irony I mean consists in the
critic always speaking about the
ultimate problems of life, but in a
tone which implies that he is only
discussing pictures and books, only
the inessential and pretty ornaments
of real life - and even then not their
innermost substance but only their
beautiful and useless surface.¹⁵

This is surely the conviction underlying all Lukács's work in aesthetics.

Criticism differs from other forms of art in its relation to those issues of ultimate meaning, for it orders the pre-formed. It may work indirectly in the form of literary criticism, or it may operate directly without the mediation of literature, as in the case of Plato's dialogues. However, Lukács qualifies this by claiming that even Plato's 'direct' approach is actually secondhand because Socrates's life is the equivalent of a work of art. So the role of the artist is to facilitate the critic's search for meaning by providing a preliminary in-form-ation of chaotic reality. This conception of criticism as a transcendent form indicates a tendency that will emerge later as the problem of the situation of the critic.

Lukács maintains that in re-ordering the pre-formed the critic tries to do justice to his object, but there is no 'objective, external criterion of life and truth',¹⁶ for him to go by. There is, in fact, no single truth; truth is merely a perspective on the whole, a form. He qualifies this by saying that he is speaking of cultural not scientific truths, and he likens the former to a mythological rendering of the facts. Facts are facts, but each epoch needs to interpret them so as to satisfy its own needs, and so one age's truths becomes another age's lies. This suggestion that human socio-historical needs determine the nature of structures of significance

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is a move away from Kantian a priori forms in the direction of a Marxist conception of interest-determined ideology, but the associated relativism of truth will be an untenable position for the Marxist Lukács.

In Soul and Form we see Lukács's rejection of a system that denies the possibility of knowing reality in favour of the difficult approach of subjective intuitionism. His attitude towards the 'facts' of man's cultural history already shows the influence of Dilthey's Geisteswissenschaft, a particular brand of subjective intuitionism that is closely related to Lebensphilosophie and which will provide the overall orientation of The Theory of the Novel.¹⁷ From the Lebensphilosophie and Geisteswissenschaft that influenced him Lukács inherits the problem inevitably associated with them, namely, relativism. Whether he limits his perspective to the critic's microcosmic focus upon the individual literary work or broadens it to encompass the philosopher's macrocosmic concern with the totality of human culture, the object - truth - and the stumbling block - relativism - remain the same. In a sense, Lukács's intellectual development may be described as a series of attempts to solve the problem of relativism without discarding his insight into the nature of truth as a socio-historical construct.

If cultural norms affect one's perception of reality, how is one to arrive at metaphysical absolutes? Dilthey's answer was a meta-historical three-fold typology of

philosophies rooted in a Kantian-type conception of permanent, innate psychic structures. In Soul and Form Lukács uses the idea of a priori structures of significance, but he relates these to aesthetic forms and Platonic-type forms rather than to psychological predispositions to conceive of reality in certain ways, and it is only with The Theory of the Novel that he attempts to construct a typology of either literary genres or worldviews. But what is important in both books is the manner in which Lukács deviates from a strict interpretation of his intellectual mentors. Thus in Soul and Form we see evidence that he is already seeking to close the Kantian gap between an ideal realm of timeless absolutes and the concrete historical realisations of them. In The Theory of the Novel we shall see how he effects the accommodation of the eternal to the temporal by moving from his version of Kant to his version of Hegel, from timeless a priori forms to historically specific aesthetic categories determined by intellectual stages of mind but broadly related to types of social organisation.

I mentioned earlier that Lukács's conception of form depends upon two dichotomies whose interrelationship is not clear. In the first place, he distinguishes science and art as two different modes of cognition, each focusing upon a different dimension of reality, each utilising a different manner of communication. 'Science offers us facts and the relationships between facts' and 'affects

us by its contents', while 'art offers us souls and destinies',¹⁸ and affects us by its forms. Lukács then makes a further distinction between two types of reality, each with its own appropriate form of expression:

There are, then, two types of reality of the soul: one is life and the other living ... Elements of both are contained in the lived experience of every human being ... Ever since there has been life and men have sought to understand and order life, there has been this duality in their lived experience. But the struggle for priority and pre-eminence between the two has mostly been fought out in philosophy ... [where] thinkers divided into two camps, the one maintaining that the universalia - concepts, or Plato's Ideas if you will - were the sole true realities, while the others acknowledged them only as words, as names summarizing the sole true and distinct things.¹⁹

The two types of reality comprise the abstract and the concrete, Life and living, ideas and experience of things. Associated with the abstract is the form of expression that Lukács refers to as 'significance-supposing' while 'image-creating' is characteristic of the concrete. Where the former is concerned with such relationships between things as are expressed in concepts and values and which must be intuited by the mind, for the latter only things exist, it is totally sensuous. Criticism is typical of the significance-supposing abstract type and seeks essences, poetry fits into the image-creating concrete bracket and deals with the unique.

Lukács admits that the dichotomy between poetry and criticism, image-creating and significance-supposing, is an artificial one, and that significance is always wrapped in images while images always reflect a truth beyond themselves. What he is really trying to describe here, he explains, are the 'two poles of possible literary expression'.²⁰ What the writer aims for is a balance between transparency and image, significance and sensuousness, and it is form as genre that dictates the nature of the equilibrium (or style) peculiar to it:

It was you who once formulated the great demand which everything that has been given form must satisfy, the only absolutely universal demand, perhaps, but one that is inexorable and allows of no exception: the demand that everything in a work must be fashioned from the same material, that each of its parts must be visibly ordered from one single point. And because all writing aspires to both unity and multiplicity, this is the universal problem of style: to achieve equilibrium in a welter of disparate things ... Something that is viable in one art form is dead in another: here is practical, palpable proof of the inner divorce of forms.²¹

Apart from the homogeneity of style imposed by a genre, the writer also aims for organic unity, and it is form as worldview that achieves this:

We are speaking of the fundamental principles which separate forms from one another - of the material from which the whole is constructed, of the standpoint, the world-view which gives unity to the entire work.²²

Form in this sense is a principle of selection and organisation. It is a viewpoint that in its manner of limiting the concrete raw material of life gives the literary work its abstract significance, its ultimate meaning.

Lukács's suggestion here that an inherent relationship exists between a worldview, the literary genre in which it is expressed, and the literary style intrinsic to that genre, is far more satisfactory than the assertion in The Meaning of Contemporary Realism that there is no intrinsic relation between form and style. The implication here is that philosophical differences do not reveal themselves at the level of content alone (and perhaps not at the level of content at all, for the way is being prepared for a theory of literature as ideology whose true consciousness is revealed by its form), but at the level of form (genre) and style. Similarities, of course, emerge at the same level. Thus, a predominantly non-image-creating writing (style) is common to critics, Platonists, and mystics, whose genre (form) is the essay, because they share a perspective on life (worldview) - they all seek a transcendental reality. They are idealists as opposed to materialists, but Lukács refers to them as realists.

From this discussion, it can be seen that Lukács's theory of the link between philosophical commitment, literary genre, and literary style provides both a

critical criterion, that of homogeneity, and the basis for a system of genre classification. From his idea of a necessary relation between the nature of any particular worldview and the proper proportion of image-creating to significance-supposing elements comprising the genre appropriate to its expression, we draw the conclusion that not only may the writer's cognitive allegiance and philosophical orientation be deduced from his literary style and chosen genre without recourse to explicit content, but, conversely, a literary form (genre) may presumably be classified and evaluated in terms of the proportions it displays (style) and the extent to which these conform to the ideal for that form.

To summarise briefly: What distinguishes one genre from another is the underlying worldview it expresses; what distinguishes one worldview from another is the proportion of materialism to realism;²³ what distinguishes one literary style from another is a certain proportion of imagery to significance, in turn particular to a specific genre, in turn appropriate to a specific worldview, which exists a priori as a potential manner of constituting reality but can be adapted to content (life).

What is confusing is where science fits into all this. In terms of Lukács's original sets of oppositions one would have expected criticism and poetry - both art forms and both, therefore, concerned with ultimate realities - to be classified as significance-supposing, while

Author Kahn S J

Name of thesis Ethics and aesthetics: the problems of Orthodox Marxist Sociology of literature 1983

PUBLISHER:

University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

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