

Genre without genre

Romanticism, the novel and the new

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Form, as it is mastered, becomes attenuated; it becomes dissociated from any liturgy, rule, yardstick; the epic is discarded in favour of the novel, verse in favour of prose; there is no longer any orthodoxy, and form is as free as the will of its creator.

Gustave Flaubert¹

'Just as *our* literature began with the novel,' writes Friedrich Schlegel in his 'Letter about the Novel', 'so the Greek began with the epic and dissolved in it.'² Written as part of his *Dialogue on Poetry (Gespräch über die Poesie)* published in 1800, as an account of the actual novels of the late eighteenth century, Schlegel's 'Letter' is notoriously problematic. Yet, if nothing else, the importance of the 'Letter about the Novel' is that it establishes a philosophical frame for what will, for much theory and criticism in its wake, be thought to most crucially define and delimit the novel as an art: that it is the distinctively *modern* literary form, the 'beginning', as Schlegel puts it, of *our* literature.³

In what follows I approach this conception of the novel in relation to this dossier's concern with the transdisciplinary legacies of early German Romanticism, with particular reference to the construction of the concepts of 'art' and 'the new'. My basic claim will be that it is precisely as a model of both such concepts – of 'art', on the one hand, and of the 'new' as a condition of art's modernity, on the other – that the significance of the early German Romantic philosophy of the novel exceeds its specific containment within the disciplinary structure of literary studies. At the same time, however, this transdisciplinary significance bequeaths certain difficulties – difficulties that arise, most directly, because of a problem concerning how we are to think the relationship between what are four different conceptual forms of generality (or four different 'ideas') at work in the writings of the Jena Romantics themselves, which are,

nonetheless, often presented as interchangeable: Art, Literature, Poetry and the Novel.

From this perspective, while it has not been entirely unusual in recent philosophical approaches to speak of the early romantic philosophy of 'art'⁴ as in some way anticipating, or precipitating, if not the modern(ist) idea of art in general (as Jay Bernstein suggests),⁵ then at least its current so-called 'post-medium' or 'post-conceptual' condition,⁶ one should also note that a theory of *art*, strictly speaking, is rarely broached in such terms within the writings of the Jena Romantics themselves. Instead, to the degree that such a theory appears, it does so most often in the guise of a philosophy of literature, poetry or the novel.⁷ Indeed, it is this that defines the opening problem of Benjamin's 1919 dissertation 'The Concept of Art Criticism [*Kunstkritik*] in German Romanticism', in which he notes the fundamental 'equivocation' in Schlegel 'when he speaks of art', in so far as it was the 'basic laws' of 'poetry or literature' that 'counted for him, in all probability, as the basic laws of *all* art'. As a result, 'both concepts' – that is, 'art', on the one hand, and 'literature' (*Poesie*) or 'poetry', on the other – Benjamin concludes, 'are only unclearly distinguished from each other'.⁸ What Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy observe of August Schlegel's *Lectures on Art and Literature*, written in 1801–02 – that they could be understood as both 'Lectures on literature considered as ... a specific art' and, at the same time, as 'Lectures on art considered as literature, [or as] Lectures on literature considered as the essence of art' – thus takes on a rather wider significance.⁹

In part, this can be seen to reflect the legacy of a far broader privileging of poetry that, while casting a glance back to the philosophy of Plato or Aristotle, was specific to the eighteenth-century formation of the modern system of the arts. Such is exemplified in Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopaedia* where the

five fine arts of 'imagination' are ultimately reunified as forms of poetry (*Poesie*).¹⁰ Equally, it can be related to the Romantics' overall tendency metaphysically to generalize an idea of *Poesie* as extending beyond either literature or art altogether, in order to name what Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy call the ontological 'truth of production in itself', part of what they term the Romantics' 'hyperbolization' of poetry per se in the wake of Kant's third critique.¹¹ However, I want to focus less on this hyperbolization – though its transdisciplinary implications will not be unrelated to at least one aspect of my discussion – and more on the specific role played by the (theory of the) novel within this reinscription of a privileging of the poetic in early Romanticism, so as to consider what starting from this particular vantage point might tell us about its various legacies. To the extent that the novel played for the Jena Romantics 'the role of the canonical paradigm of Poetry par excellence', it did so, as Rakefet Sheffy notes, precisely 'not as a specific literary model but rather as a general idea, an *organizing principle*'.¹² What, then, does it mean to consider the novel not only as the quintessentially modern literary genre – 'the sole genre that continues to develop', as Bakhtin will later put it, 'that is as yet uncompleted'¹³ – but as constituting the basis for the modern 'idea' of literature or poetry, and, through this, finally, of the 'general idea' of modern art *tout court*?

Such a postulation is not without its dilemmas. As Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy observe, in one sense the 'Letter about the Novel' can be read merely as 'content[ing] itself with transposing to the novel what *Athenaeum* fragment 116 [already] says of poetry' – that is, an idea of romantic poetry as 'a progressive, universal poetry', which would 'mix and fuse poetry and prose, inspiration and criticism, the poetry of art and the poetry of nature', and, in so doing, should – as opposed to all '[o]ther kinds of poetry [which] are finished and now capable of being fully analyzed' – 'forever be becoming and never be perfected'. Indeed, from this perspective, Schlegel's famous definition of the novel as 'a romantic book' clearly 'advances us no farther than fragment 116's "all poetry is romantic"'.¹⁴ Yet, like all translations, this is not without remainder; nor is the shift from fragment 116 to Schlegel's 'Letter' a simple repetition without difference in this respect. Most specifically, it raises the question: what does it mean for an account of 'our literature' – and, by extension, 'our art' – not only that it should find its idea or model *in the novel*, but that the novel itself should be regarded, when all is said and done, as a form of, or even another name for, *poetry*?

A romantic book

At least one reason for the relative indifference of 'Letter about the Novel' to the actual corpus of the eighteenth-century European novel is obvious enough: the text begins with the condemnation of its addressee Amalia's taste for what it calls 'those dirty volumes' full of 'confused and crude phrases', which 'serve no purpose but to kill time and to spoil your imagination': 'stacks of books from the loan library', written by 'people with whom, face to face, you would be ashamed to exchange even a few words'.¹⁵ Placed alongside, for example, *Athenaeum* fragment 421, with its contempt for the 'educated businessman' who, while reading, 'sheds quantities of noble tears', it would certainly not be hard to locate in this an early and entirely typical anxiety about the emergence of mass culture, as well as – à la Auerbach or Rancière – of its consequent, 'democratic' disordering of given class and gender roles.¹⁶ Indeed, there can be little doubt that it is precisely *against* a (so to speak) 'prosaic' reality of the novel's emergence that Schlegel's famous definition of the novel as a 'romantic book' is constructed, while tacitly acknowledging its technological conditions in that which is meant 'for reading'.¹⁷ Most importantly, it is Schlegel's distancing of the novel as a romantic book from such 'dirty volumes' – which are, long before Benjamin's age of technological reproducibility, 'modern-style, mass-produced industrial commodities in a rather special sense'¹⁸ – that is certainly a crucial condition of the novel's ultimate subsumption by an absolute idea of 'poetry' in the Romantics' writings; an idea in the face of which the actual novels produced by the likes of Fielding or Richardson, Jean Paul or Diderot, cannot but be found wanting.

There is, of course, a familiar story to be told at this point concerning the modern 'autonomization' of art or literature, as well as of the role played by Schlegel, Novalis and others within this 'highly contradictory process'.¹⁹ Yet, at the same time, if Schlegel's conception of the novel is, in some sense, *intrinsically* 'hypothetical', underpinned by a 'systematic avoidance of formal definition', as Sheffy notes, then its status as a 'general idea' rather than a 'specific literary model' has, in part, an evident philosophical justification that is specific to Schlegel's writings, and that exceeds any straightforward reading of it as nothing more than an 'elitist' retreat into a 'sectarian aestheticism' of the type that Sheffy himself observes in the *Dialogue on Poetry*.²⁰ For as an 'idea' of art – indeed, an ideal form – *any* individual novel would appear, by definition, to be found incapable of

satisfying 'the requirement of the task' that Schlegel assigns to it.²¹ Indeed, it is precisely this that suggests it as a 'model' for an idea of 'art' as such, in so far as while each true work of art must in some way embody, in its very individuality, what it is to be a (modern) work of art, as a determinate, individual work it is *always* inadequate to this idea.²²

Still, even allowing for such a philosophical justification, Schlegel's comments on the actual eighteenth-century novel – which cannot, he writes, be 'anything else but sickly' – appear to go considerably beyond this. For, as Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy note, from the very moment that the novel is conceived, philosophically, as 'always more than a novel', the actual 'novel itself, in the restricted sense', becomes for Schlegel not only 'inadequate' to its idea – at best, a 'tentative outline of what ultimately ought to be realised' – but actually 'execrable'. In the words of *Idea II*, 'instead of an eternally rich, infinite poetry', we have 'only novels'.²³ How, then, is the 'execrable' character of these novels that are 'only novels' to be understood?

The first dimension to the inadequacy of the novel 'in the restricted sense' relates to the ambiguous relation established by Schlegel between a certain, specifically modern 'generalized notion of poetry' for which the idea of the novel might be the 'keystone' and what would appear, at the same time, to be the seemingly irreducible *prosaic* character of the actually

existing novel itself (even if, here, poetry is not of course limited to verse). 'This marvellous prose is prose, and yet it is poetry', writes Schlegel in his 1798 essay on Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* – a description that should be read alongside the assertion in the 'Letter' that poetry 'is so deeply rooted in man that at times, even under the most unfavourable circumstances, it grows without cultivation'. 'So in our unfantastic age', Schlegel continues, 'in the actual estate of prose ... we will find a few individuals who, sensing in themselves a certain originality of the imagination, express it, even though they are still far removed from true art.'²⁴ In this sense, what Benjamin declares to be the ground on which rests 'the entire philosophy of art of early Romanticism' – 'The idea of poetry is prose' – is considerably more complex than he would seem to allow, not least because this 'idea' is just as plausibly inverted: that is, in so far as the novel is, or might be, 'true art', it is not so much that the 'idea of poetry is prose' as it is that the idea of (artistic) prose *is poetry*.²⁵

Before coming to this, however, one would have to ask: what is it, then, about this new category of the novel that, even in its apparently radical abstraction from any actual 'execrable' literary works of Schlegel's time, allows, nonetheless, for its deployment as 'a general idea, an *organizing principle*' appropriate to 'our age'? The answer to this second question lies, I think, most obviously in what is taken to be the novel's problematic relation to genre. 'All the classical



poetical genres', states *Critical Fragment* number 60, 'have now become ridiculous in their rigid purity'. And it is the modernity of this 'now' – 'have now become ridiculous' – that precisely defines the exemplary modernity of the novel in the 'Letter': namely, as a genre that is, in some way, paradoxically *without* genre. 'I detest the novel as far as it wants to be a separate genre', Schlegel writes. 'I can scarcely visualize a novel but as a mixture of storytelling, song and other forms.' Anticipating what both Lukács and Bakhtin will therefore, over a century later, take to be most broadly definitive of the novel as a form – its *essential* heterogeneity or hybridity – as that which is always a 'mixture', the novel is here, as an idea, inherently anti-generic: a mongrel 'form' that can have only a 'negative' identity, made up, in its particularity, of a 'mixture' of fragments and combinations of other forms.²⁶

If, in this sense, the novel as a general idea can come to stand in for an idea of art in general – and, more specifically, the basis of *our* art – it is, first, because its freedom from 'genre' (or from any given 'idea') is intrinsic to what it is to be modern itself. Indeed, it is the specifically modern character of the novel, partially embodied in its association with prose, which means that it is not covered by those rules that delimit the 'classical' genres of epic, lyric, tragedy and comedy, and so has, by definition, a self-defining freedom from such conventions. (It is such 'freedom' that provides the non-philosophical condition for what Benjamin understands as the Romantics' philosophical transferral of the structure of Fichte's self-determining, autopoietic, absolutized subject to the structure of the modern artwork as a form of infinite reflection.) Hence, the importance of its simultaneous equivalence to and difference from the epic in Schlegel's 'Letter': not via its identification *with* the epic, as a means of reinserting the novel within an already existing organization of 'institutionalized' genre or type, and so effectively reducing its novelty (in the sense in which Morhof, for example, describes it as an 'unversed Epic', or Fielding, in the preface to *Joseph Andrews*, speaks of a 'comic epic in prose'²⁷) but as that which functions as a form analogous *to it* (in its 'image of the age', as *Athenaeum* fragment 116 has it). The novel is for the modern what the epic was for the ancient – the beginning of 'our' literature, just as 'the Greek began with the epic and dissolved in it' – but only precisely *as* modern: that is, it is modern by virtue of its very discontinuity from the kind of generic rules or standards, including those of epic, requisite for

other 'literary' forms, which are thought (however mythically) to descend directly from the hierarchical categorizations of ancient 'literature'. It is via this 'emancipation' that the novel can be conceived as, in Ian Watt's words, 'the logical literary vehicle of a culture which ... has [itself] set an unprecedented value on originality, on the novel.'²⁸

Freedom and individuality

As a separation of the novel from the ancient – the basis of 'our' literature as opposed to theirs – this evidently builds upon Schlegel's earlier 1795 *On the Study of Greek Poetry*, and, in particular, its account of modern poetry as that which has as its 'goal' an individuality 'that is *original and interesting*'. In this way, the idea of the novel inherits – or, rather, becomes the specifically modern manifestation of – the earlier text's definition of poetry as what it calls the 'universal' art because it 'is already incomparably more closely related to freedom, and more independent from external influence'. As the *most* free from 'external influence', or unconditioned, the novel would then be, logically, the most universal form of poetry *per se*.²⁹ It is this profoundly historical relation to 'freedom' that is consequently the basis for Schlegel's reading of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, written a couple of years before the 'Letter about the Novel', as a book which is to be valued because it is 'absolutely new and unique'. In Schlegel's famous words:

We can only learn to understand it on its own terms. To judge it according to an idea of genre drawn from custom and belief, accidental experiences and arbitrary demands, is as if a child tried to clutch the stars and the moon in his hand and pack them in his satchel.³⁰

As Bernstein summarizes, effectively, at this point, transposing the Romantic philosophy of the novel into that of a philosophy of 'modernist' art *tout court*: as an idea in German Romanticism, '[t]he novel as "new and unique" is constitutive of what it is to be a novel; it must exceed genre requirements – as emblems of traditional authority – as a condition of it being an artwork.'³¹ Certainly it is at this point that the Romantic philosophy of the novel can most obviously seem to anticipate the 'modernism' of, say, Viktor Shklovsky's claim concerning Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, that it 'is the most typical novel in world literature', precisely because of its 'atypicality', its 'absolute' uniqueness and newness. Although where Shklovsky generalizes this, through the concept of *ostranenie*, to a recurrent, if dynamic, transhistorical

'poetic' feature of all 'literature', Schlegel already insists upon in its fundamental 'modernity' (as divided from the ancient) in a far more emphatic sense.³²

As a 'genre without genre', this means that the modernity of the novel is constituted, as Lukács will later rephrase the point, through its (formal) freedom to create itself in the absence of any given end. It is this that is the direct flipside of what the latter notoriously terms, in *The Theory of the Novel*, its 'transcendental homelessness'. In the novel, Lukács writes, we have 'discovered the *productivity* of the spirit', whereby, if human reality can no longer be taken to have an inherent meaning or necessity – a given social 'content' that is historically carried by a theory of genres (and their hierarchization) – then the meanings and logical patterns imposed upon such a reality by 'art' must necessarily be self-generated by each work itself. To the extent that this is why, as Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy point out, for Schlegel 'the novel, as opposed to the epic, is the "genre" of subjective freedom itself', so 'demonstrat[ing], in a perfectly coherent manner, that it is equal to romanticism', it is also precisely this 'freedom' that makes it so *usable* – in a pragmatic sense – as a trans- or anti-generic 'idea' of such unconditioned freedom or self-determination in general. Indeed, at its most extreme, this can be 'theorized' apparently quite separately from any actually existing novels themselves.

However, this 'breach' between the novel as 'idea' and the 'prosaic' reality of actual eighteenth-century novels, leaves a number of problems, already apparent in Schlegel's writings. The first of these is that the philosophical attempt to make sense of the novel anticipates (or, indeed, functions as the model for) that problematic situation of modern art which Adorno will much later refer to as an 'advance of nominalism' or the emergence of a *principium individuationis* across not only literature but *all* the arts: that is, a situation in which 'the universal is no longer granted to art through types', and in which, instead, individual artworks (such as *Wilhelm Meister* or *Tristram Shandy*) – which, Adorno writes, 'formerly held the status of exempla' for philosophy – demand to be judged on their own terms, *as individual*.³³

In the standard history of the novel, it is this *principium individuationis* that is said immanently to conjoin the novel to social and cultural modernity by virtue of its familiar connection to the modern (bourgeois) individual subject at the level of both its production and its consumption, as well as of its

narrative form and content – an individualism which finds one early canonical embodiment in the apparently 'self-governing subject' that is Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe ('Fichte's *I* – is a Robinson' writes Novalis famously).³⁴ While the epic is, according to such a story, generated from a social world whose 'homogeneity' allows for no 'separation between "I" and "you"', the novel has its birthplace, as the likes of Benjamin, Adorno and Watt concur, in 'the individual in his isolation': 'To write a novel is to take that which is incommensurable in the representation of human existence to the extreme.' What Benjamin terms Gide's doctrine of a *roman pur* is, from this perspective, a form of 'pure interiority', and, as such, 'the extreme opposite of the purely epic approach'. ('Nothing is more contrary to the epic style', notes Schlegel in the 'Letter', 'than when the influence of the subjective mood becomes in the least visible.') Or, to put it another way, 'alienation itself' becomes, as Adorno suggests, 'an aesthetic device for the novel'.³⁵

Yet, since it requires that its status as 'art' or 'literature' can *itself* be grounded only in its 'newness', or its freedom from generic conventions, the novel's 'individualism' – which has, in literary studies, generally been located principally in the ways in which its *protagonists* 'are set apart from the world', by contrast to the 'epic heroes [who] belong entirely to their cities'³⁶ – also takes on a larger, more 'abstract' significance in so far as it articulates a broader sense of the historical present as an ongoing dissolution of tradition at the level of artistic *form* (that is to say, as Watt observes, of an apparent 'formlessness').³⁷ 'Currently', Adorno writes in the late 1960s, 'art stirs most energetically where it decomposes its subordinating concept. In this decomposition, art is true to itself: it breaks the mimetic taboo on the impure and the hybrid.' But, significantly, this 'break' is *already* inherent to the discourse of the novel in this sense, long before the contemporary trans- or inter-medial forms of which Adorno is thinking, as Schlegel's writings in particular show. Indeed, if the novel as a 'romantic book' is, in principle, the beginning of 'our literature', and, hence, of 'our art' more generally, it is so precisely *because*, as an idea, the novel can already only ever be temporarily unified retrospectively, as what art 'has become'. It is understood, by virtue of its lack of routine conventions, 'only by its laws of movement, not according to any invariants. It is defined by its relation to what it is not'.³⁸

However, precisely because of this, the individuality of the novel, as an always paradoxical exemplum



of a 'genre without genre', is that which also harbours a necessary and peculiarly 'modern' danger for the Romantics. For, as that which cannot be judged 'according to any invariants', the problem resides in the fact that 'the radically particular work', the 'absolutely new and unique' – in which terms Schlegel depicts Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* – cannot but be continually haunted by the possibility that it will collapse into a mere 'contingency and absolute indifference' in artistic terms, since it lacks any given or *a priori* generic or disciplinary criteria of judgement from which some stable 'collective' poetic meaning can apparently be derived. Far from being, therefore, a merely 'philosophical' issue concerning the objectivity of 'universals', the increasing significance accorded to the individuality of works of art registers a certain socio-historical claim concerning the ways in which the social contradictions of individualism as a hegemonic form of the social in capitalist modernity return to the artwork, not only as a central aspect of the novel's 'subject matter', but as a problem of form.³⁹

What Watt describes as the 'widely agreed' 'critical difficulties' posed by the novel's emphasis on 'individuality' is, from this perspective, generalized by Adorno to become the 'sole path of success that remains open to artworks [which] is also that of their progressive impossibility':

The *principium individuationis* in art, its immanent nominalism, is not a given but a directive. This directive not only encourages particularization and thus the radical elaboration of individual works. Bringing together the universals by which

artworks are oriented, it at the same time obscures the boundary against unformed, raw empiria and thus threatens the structuration of works no less than it sets it in motion. Prototypical of this is the rise of the novel in the bourgeois age, the rise of the nominalistic and thus paradoxical form par excellence.⁴⁰

Rendered as a 'general idea' of the work, the essentially 'anti-generic' character of the novel as a paradoxical 'genre' inscribes, then, a 'progressive impossibility' in more general terms, whereby the 'directive' of the 'new' that drives the work towards an increasing individuality – essential to its claims to freedom – must continually negotiate the impossibility (or illegibility) of any *pure* individuation. At the same time, it is most obviously its *prosaic* 'nature', as this is understood by Schlegel (or, more emphatically, by Hegel), that 'threatens the structuration of works' by obscuring their very 'poetic' separation from 'unformed, raw empiria'. 'Unchecked aesthetic nominalism ... terminates in a literal facticity.'⁴¹ And if one recognizes in this, as Adorno no doubt meant us to, a certain dynamic of 'anti-art', of the readymade, found object and montage, as well as of a certain 'realism' – the 'reality hunger' instantiated in 'a deliberate unartiness: "raw" material, seemingly unprocessed, unfiltered, uncensored, and unprofessional', as David Shields puts it⁴² – it also touches upon what might well be regarded as a crucial dimension of the Romantics' appropriation of the novel as, in Benjamin's terms, the model for an idea of (modern) 'art' as such.

Poetry of the novel, prose of the world

My claim is, then, that it is this problem of the paradoxical form of 'individualism', and thus of the danger of art's self-dissolution into 'contingency' and 'literal facticity', that is first played out in a tension internal to Jena Romanticism concerning what we are to understand by the novel as a 'genre without genre'. Indeed, this is, in large part, what constitutes its 'transdisciplinary' legacy. However, it is also therefore important that to be 'without genre' can be read, albeit rather crudely, in two different ways.

First, it can be understood as a *unification* of genres; speculatively at least. That is to say, as that which does not itself constitute a genre, the novel can become for the Romantics, *ideally*, the non-genre that gathers all genres within itself. ('It is probably in allusion to the unifying function of prose', Benjamin suggests, 'that Novalis says: "Shouldn't the novel comprehend all genres of style in a sequence differentially bound by a common spirit?"'⁴³) In this case, a 'genre without genre' would point towards a kind of meta- or absolute genre (whether this is called art or literature); what in the famous *Athenaeum* fragment 116 is defined as a 'progressive, universal poetry'. To the degree that this then 'embraces everything that is purely poetic', it alone, Schlegel continues, 'can become, like the epic, a mirror of the whole circumambient world, an image of the age'.

This does not mean that the novel returns to the epic, however, but, to reiterate the formulations of the 'Letter about the Novel', that, just as 'the Greek began with the epic and dissolved in it', so, for Schlegel, 'our literature began with the novel', precisely because it 'embraces *everything*'.⁴⁴ Consequently, this 'totalizing' embrace is understood by Schlegel to operate in a radically different fashion in the novel than it does in the 'pre-modern' epic. 'The epic work', Hegel famously wrote, echoing Vico, 'is the Saga, the Book, the Bible of a people, and every great and important people has such absolutely earliest books which express for it its own original spirit'.⁴⁵ Hence, precisely as *pre-literary* in this sense, the epic is less a genre among others than it is the expression of a certain social form of life – a 'people' – and the poetry of a common *world*. (It is in this sense, too, that Novalis suggests Greek 'genius' must 'be regarded in the mass': 'A cultured Greek was only indirectly and only in very small part his own creator.') However, if, on this account, the 'totality' of the pre-modern epic may be embodied in an individual work (the Book), in Schlegel it is, instead, projected not onto any direct modern equivalent but rather onto that 'everything'

produced by the *process* of 'infinite becoming' itself: its 'real essence: that it should forever be becoming and never be perfected'. 'It alone is infinite, just as it alone is free.'⁴⁶

If as Benjamin says, then, citing *Athenaeum* fragment 252, a "philosophy of the novel ... would be the keystone" of a philosophy of poetry in general in Romanticism, it would be so in the form of a conception of art as 'the continuum of forms', of which 'the novel ... is the comprehensible *manifestation*'.⁴⁷ Benjamin further cites here from a 1798 letter from Novalis to August Schlegel: 'If poetry wishes to extend itself, it can do so only by limiting itself ... It will acquire a prosaic look.' But, Novalis continues, 'it *remains poetry* and hence faithful to the essential laws of its nature ... Only the mixture of its elements is without rule; the order of these, their relation to the whole, is still the same.'⁴⁸ While the *idea* of the novel might, therefore, certainly be one name given to what Benjamin calls this 'comprehensible manifestation', by virtue of its 'unlimitedness' and 'mixture of its elements', Schlegel's own rejection in the 'Letter' of any *actual* 'so-called novel' as anything like an adequate individual manifestation of this points to a second troubling possibility: that of a 'without genre' understood not as that which 'remains poetry', as Novalis suggests, but as a dissolution that opens up onto the very dissolution of *poetic* unification per se – an unendingly particular 'mixture of elements without rule' which, while having to go via prose, precisely does *not* become (or 'remain') poetry again.

It is important in this respect that the centrality of the 'prosaic' to the Romantic conception of the poetic, as Benjamin divines, is itself immediately related to the former's freedom from genre, in so far as, by contrast to poetry as verse, it is subject only to a *minimal* formal determination. 'The idea of poetry has found its individuality (that for which Schlegel was seeking) in the form of prose', writes Benjamin. However, this emphasis on 'the individualizing mode of prose', which is the basis for Benjamin's reading of the essential 'sobriety' of the Romantic Absolute, also notoriously relies, as Winfried Menninghaus has exhaustively shown, upon Benjamin's own elision of the differences between the prose of the novel and, as it were, the prosaic per se. ('Romantic prose is not purely "prosaic"', as Menninghaus baldly puts it.) While for Benjamin himself this relates to a desire to connect the novel to a more general 'prosaic spirit', in the sense of the ornamented, ordinary and sober, which would underpin his account of the Romantic Absolute as that which has 'forfeited its

transcendence', it also opens up a question of the implicitly troubling relationship established in the 'Letter About the Novel', between the modernity of the prose of the novel – which might be the 'keystone' for a philosophical idea of poetry – and of what is called, by Schlegel, 'the actual estate of prose'.⁴⁹

In Hegel's *Aesthetics*, it is this relationship between novelistic prose and 'the actual estate of prose' that constitutes a central part of his response to the Romantic determination of the novel. Here, however, it will not be as the idea of an infinite poetry, which 'can become, like the epic, a mirror of the whole circumambient world, an image of the age', that the novel will be understood as the beginning of 'our literature', but, rather, as the foundation of the *bourgeois* epic. Hegel's reasoning is worth citing at length:

But it is quite different with the novel, the modern bourgeois epic. Here we have completely before us again the wealth and many-sidedness of interests, situations, characters, relations involved in life, the wide background of a whole world, as well as the epic portrayal of events. But what is missing is the *primitive* poetic general situation out of which the epic proper proceeds. A novel in the modern sense of the word presupposes a world already prosaically ordered; then, on this ground and within its own sphere ... it regains for poetry the right it had lost, so far as this is possible in view of that presupposition. Consequently one of the commonest, and, for the novel, most appropriate, collisions is the conflict between the poetry of the heart and the opposing prose of circumstances and the accidents of external situations. ... So far as presentation goes, the novel proper, like the epic, requires the entirety of an outlook on the world and life, the manifold materials and contents of which come into appearance within the individual event that is the centre of the whole. But in the more detailed treatment and execution here all the more scope may be given to the poet the less he can avoid bringing into his descriptions the prose of real life, though without for that reason remaining himself on the ground of the prosaic and commonplace.⁵⁰

If, in this way, Hegel submits the division of ancient and modern to what Franco Moretti calls a more 'merciless historicization', this also, and most fundamentally, locates such a division not only in the difference between the epic and the novel, but in the very distance that it identifies between the 'worlds' of the poetic and the prosaic themselves.⁵¹

In fact, although Moretti doesn't mention it, this is a somewhat different version of the so-called 'end of art' thesis: that 'art, considered in its highest vocation, is and remains for us a thing of the past'. Poetry, Hegel famously argues,

is the universal art of the mind [or of Spirit] which has become free in its own nature, and which is not tied to its final realisation in external sensuous matter, but expatiates exclusively in the inner space and inner time of the ideas and feelings. Yet it is also at this highest stage of art that art *ends* by transcending itself, in as much as it abandons the medium of a harmonious embodiment of mind in sensuous form, and passes from the poetry of imagination into the *prose* of thought.⁵²

Among other things, one might say that it is here that the problem of art's relation to the 'aesthetic' is played out, in the question of its relation to an embodiment in 'sensuous form' – a problem which might no doubt be related to the difficulties posed by the linguistic work in general – something already broached in Schiller's 1793 'Kallias or Concerning Beauty', for which, by contrast to the plastic arts, the fact that the 'poet's medium is *words*' entails that poetry take a 'long detour through the abstract realm of concepts in which it loses much of its vividness (sensuous power)'.⁵³ But it is also noticeable that it is re-posed by the novel in a particularly acute way that the *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics* do not themselves register.

First, because of its pivotal role within the production of a new concept of literature, as opposed to poetry in its given sense, it is this connection of the novel to *both* the prose of thought and the prose of the world, on Hegel's account, that will in the twentieth century result in a widening distance between the discipline of literary studies and (philosophical) 'aesthetics'. Second, it raises a question concerning the *artistic* status of 'prose', precisely to the degree that novelistic prose is apparently always shading into that which is proper not to 'art', but rather to either 'thought' or 'real life'. (If the latter is most obviously figured in a certain issue of 'realism', and an indiscernibility of 'literary' language from everyday discourse, its shading into thought encapsulates an idea of the novel as itself already, in the words of Robbe-Grillet, a 'becoming-world of philosophy'.⁵⁴) As such, the contemporaneity of the 'aesthetic regime' and the 'literary regime' – which Rancière, for example, renders effectively interchangeable in his recent work – harbours a rather more profound and dissonant complexity. For in so far as literature explains 'art' in general, as Benjamin suggests of Schlegel, it is also never quite contained *by* 'art', it would seem; and not only in an aesthetic sense. Or, to put it another way, it is regarding the question of how to think the novel *as art*, historically, that the irreducibility of 'art' to 'aesthetics' is most powerfully posed.⁵⁵

Of course, the assertion that the novel is the modern (bourgeois) epic – whose material *is*, above all, prose – contains an inherent (and for Hegel self-conscious) paradox. The ‘primitive [or originary] poetic situation out of which the epic proper proceeds’ designates, Hegel insists, a life which is displaced by one which has as its condition the separation of the individual from a progressively objectified, supra-individual, and abstract world:

[T]he individual as he appears in this world of prose and everyday is ... intelligible not from himself, but from something else. For the individual man stands in dependence on external influences, laws, political institutions, civil relationships, which he just finds confronting him, and he must bow to them whether he has them as his own inner being or not. ...

[T]he greatness of the whole event and the total aim ... appears only as a mass of individual details; occupations and activities are sundered and split into infinitely many parts, so that to individuals only a particle of the whole may accrue.⁵⁶

While the epic is thus the poetry of an already poetic world, the novel is, on Hegel’s account, tasked by Romanticism with (impossibly) *re-poeticizing* modern life – to ‘regain for poetry the right it had lost’. Yet it must, in fact, always register the unavoidability of ‘bringing into [its] descriptions the prose of real life, though without for that reason remaining ... on the ground of the prosaic and commonplace’.

It would not be hard to show that, under rather different historical circumstances, it is this dialectic that determines, at every point, Lukács’s later accounts of the novel. And it is telling that at least one legacy of this Romantic theorization of the novel is the ways in which someone like Lukács himself will thereby come to associate what he calls realism proper (by distinction to ‘naturalism’) not, as one might expect, with prose but explicitly with *poetry*, in his writings of the 1930s. One does not have to follow the dubious conclusions Lukács draws from this – let alone the critical judgements upon naturalism or modernism that they entail – to note the very real dilemmas concerning the novel’s status as ‘art’ that they thereby inscribe. For if prose or the prosaic is the condition of the novel’s modernity as art, exemplified



by its urtext *Don Quixote*, it cannot but also register the novel’s essential relationship to the (‘non-art’) character of the ‘opposing prose of circumstances’, as Hegel calls it, constitutive of social modernity’s world – and not only as a bourgeois world, but, finally, as a world governed by capital itself. The Hegelian prose of the world becomes here, specifically, the ‘domination of *capitalist* prose over the inner poetry of human experience’.⁵⁷ Indeed, it is on this basis that Lukács can make his claim that the apparently all-too-concrete prose of naturalism masks, in its focus on Hegel’s ‘mass of individual details’, what is in fact a more fundamental *abstraction* in which it is subsumed by neither poetry nor philosophy but by the ‘reality’ of the Hegelian ‘bad infinite’ that is embodied in the endless accumulation of prose in work and world alike. By reducing ‘detail to the level of mere particularity’, both modernism and naturalism, Lukács avers, replace ‘concrete typicality with abstract particularity’, in which ‘[e]very person, every object, every relationship can stand for something else’.⁵⁸

In the earlier *Theory of the Novel*, Lukács described the novel’s *principium individuationis*, which breaks ‘the circle whose closed nature was the transcendental essence’ of the Greeks’ world, as follows:

We have invented the productivity of the spirit: that is why the primaeval images have irrevocably lost their objective self-evidence for us, and our

thinking follows the endless path of an approximation that is never accomplished. We have invented the creation of forms: and that is why everything that falls from our weary and despairing hands must always be incomplete.⁵⁹

This 'endless path of an approximation' contains a clear echo of the basis that Schlegel and Novalis give for the privileging of the artwork as the means to a presentation of the unrepresentable Absolute. However, this is not only rendered here in a profoundly melancholic form by Lukács – in a way that effectively reapplies Hegel's judgement on art to the 'historico-philosophical reality' of a 'bourgeois' modernity per se – but is transformed into a movement of the 'unendingly particular' (to borrow another of Hegel's own definitions of the prose of the world) that involves a very different conception of prose's 'unfettered plasticity'. Most crucially here, prose's lack of any 'natural' or intrinsic limit on what the novel might depict or incorporate mirrors, from the perspective of a later Marxian reworking of the Hegelian prose of the world as the 'unendingly particular', a parallel lack with regard to what can be exchanged specifically in the universalization of the form of *exchange value*. It is no surprise, then, that Lukács should consequently seek to resurrect genre against the threat of nominalist dissolution posed by prose's 'unendingness':

The theory of genres provides the sphere of objectivity and objective criteria for individual works and for the individual creative process of each writer. ... Ideological capitulation to capitalist philistinism is reflected in nihilism regarding genres.⁶⁰

Understood in this fashion, the very anti-generic character of the novel as 'prose' – and, hence, what Lukács will term that 'form-problem' generated by the lack of any intrinsic limit on what the work might incorporate (or its 'plasticity' and 'freedom') – also marks its troubling relation to that indifference with regard to what can be concretely exchanged via the equalizing force of money's abstract regime of generalized equivalence, or to 'the domination of capitalist prose'.⁶¹ (It is this that the later Lukács's redefinition of novelistic realism as a form of epic poetry in Scott, Balzac or Tolstoy will seek to overcome.) The anxiety, in other words, is not so much one concerning a dynamic of dissolution or 'unworking' of unity per se as it is one about the possibility that such 'unification' might finally be that constituted by capital's own 'objective' production of a new prose of the world, through the formation of an increasingly universal

equivalence and exchangeability. The (endless) 'unification' of all relations under capital is what continually 'unworks' the speculative unification of poetry in the 'idea of prose', which the artwork as 'infinite becoming' seeks to inscribe, against the *actual* prose of the world.

This throws a rather different light on Watt's observation that among the most obvious results of 'the application of primarily economic criteria to the production of literature was to favour prose as against verse', whereby 'bringing it under the control of the law of the market-place ... assisted the development of one of the characteristic technical innovations of the form – its copious particularity of description and explanation'.⁶² In his early *Soul and Form*, Lukács suggests, in exemplary fashion, that the novels of Lawrence Sterne 'are formless because they could have carried on to infinity'. Yet this prosaic logic of 'potentially infinite addition', as Moretti terms it in *The Modern Epic*, where 'there exists no "organic" fetters to hold it in check', and which is (as he writes of *Ulysses*) 'capable of connecting everything with everything else', is not only that of 'mechanical form', but is itself reflective, formally, of a certain internalization of the logic of 'the market-place' in what we might term the prosaic equivalences of the real abstraction of the *commodity form* itself.⁶³ To the extent that naturalism, as Lukács declares, 'deprives life of its poetry, reduces all to prose', this is thus far from unique to Zola and his contemporaries, but reflects a tension between the poetic and the prosaic that is immanent to the 'realism' of the novel as the 'epic form' of a capitalist *world* per se.⁶⁴

Literary transdisciplinarity

Let me come back finally, then, to my central issue. It is not a facile question of asserting the primacy of the prosaic over the poetic, or vice versa, in historical understandings of the novel as *the* modern 'genre without genre'. Rather, it is a question of pointing out the ways in which it is precisely the 'collision' between the two, as Hegel terms it, that is played out, again and again, in the history of attempts to grasp it as an *idea*. Still, if these two tendencies have always been in play, it is the novel's prosaicness which has, historically, presented a specific problem for its theorization; not least within the terms of philosophical aesthetics. For if it is the anti-generic character of the novel as a genre which marks it out as the exemplary form of the modern artwork – the basis for what Bakhtin describes as an increasing 'novelization' of *all* art forms within capitalist modernity⁶⁵ – it also

renders the 'integrity' of the novel itself, as a form, necessarily problematic, and thus threatens its very reunification as 'art'; that is, on Schlegel's terms, as *poetic*. As such, to the degree that it is a condition of modern art's remaining both 'modern' and 'art' – in a strong sense – that it continually derives its newness and critical meaning from its immanent engagement with and incorporation of the 'opposing prose of circumstances' – from, that is, what is *not* art – it is indeed, in this very specific sense, an encapsulation and extension of what can be understood as a generalized 'novelization' of art's 'concept'.

In this sense, while it is true that Adorno's negative dialectics entails that any 'generic identification' of poetry or literature (as *Poesie*) 'with art as such' is 'strictly excluded, or at least subject to criticism',⁶⁶ this criticism is itself at least partly derived from the immanent critique of 'generalized poetry', which emerges through the theory (and practice) of the novel since Romanticism. There is, as such, more than a simple analogy at stake in the historical relationship between the philosophy of the novel and someone like Thierry de Duve's account of the more recent emergence of a 'generic art' through the recovery of the Duchampian readymade in minimalism and early conceptualism, and its determinate negation of the medium-based Greenbergian dialectic of modernism. For while de Duve's suggestion that such a generic art emerges, specifically, through an 'art that has severed its ties with the specific crafts and traditions of either painting or sculpture' may convince as a genealogy of post-1960s art after painterly abstraction, and of what Osborne terms its 'postconceptual condition', it has to be understood, if it is not to be reduced to some purely 'internal' logic of the visual arts alone, as one trajectory within a far broader problematic intrinsic to the modern 'idea' of art in general.⁶⁷

Historically, the modern concept of literature emerged in large part through the strain placed upon an earlier idea of poetry by the newness of the novel, and by the contradictory social forms of capitalism and bourgeois individualism that it registers, as that which is at once both work of art and commodity. As Raymond Williams notes in *Keywords*, if the 'specialization' of literature 'towards *imaginative writing*, within the basic assumptions of Romanticism', entailed its taking the place of poetry as the 'word [that] did service for this before the specialization', it is 'probable' that the broadly contemporaneous 'specialization of *poetry* to verse, together with the increasing importance of prose forms such as the novel, made literature the most available general

word'.⁶⁸ In other words, the concept of literature – to the extent that is constructed through the sublation of any existing arrangement of genres – is already that of a kind of 'generic art' in De Duve's sense.

Jena Romanticism's attempts to think together art, poetry, the novel and 'literature' (*Poesie*) as interlocking forms of generality must then be understood to reflect such a historical shift at one of its earliest, pivotal moments. Yet while it is partly through such thought that the modern discipline of literature will emerge in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the writings of Schlegel and Novalis simultaneously both prefiguratively exceed these subsequent disciplinary limits by locating in literature the model for a transdisciplinary idea of art in general (as Benjamin recognized) and yet, in subsuming such an idea under a generalized poetry, ultimately seek to expunge from it the specifically 'worldly' prosaicness of the actually existing novel. Bernstein suggests that in offering a 'prescient account of modernism', Schlegel's essay on Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* 'unnervingly anticipates some of the burdens the novel would be required to undertake', but also 'overburdens the novel, pushing it in a direction where it ceases to be a work of art'; ceases, that is, to 'remain poetry'.⁶⁹ Yet, from the above perspective, it is precisely this 'directive', as Adorno calls it, that explains why the relationship between the modern concepts of 'art' and 'literature' should have been marked by such persistent tension. It is the generic character of the idea of literature (*Poesie*) in Romanticism that models the idea of art, yet the dual relations of literature to the novel, on the one hand, and poetry in its narrower modern sense, on the other, give it a specificity that belies the actualization of this generic character as such. This doubtless explains, too, why the trans- or counter-disciplinary dynamics immanent to the modern idea of literature have themselves often provoked a search for an essence of 'literariness' through which the borders of the new (academic) discipline of literature could be secured in the face of the collapse of the existing idea of poetry. Roman Jakobson's famous complaint of the early 1920s is emblematic:

The object of a science of literature is not literature, but literariness – that is, that which makes a given work a work of literature. Until now literary historians have preferred to act like the policeman who, intending to arrest a certain person, would, at any opportunity, seize any and all persons who chanced into the apartment, as well as those who passed along the street. The literary historians used everything – anthropology, psychology,

politics, philosophy. Instead of a science of literature, they created a conglomeration of homespun disciplines.⁷⁰

However, Jakobson's need to locate 'that which makes a given work [of art] a work of literature' in language's *poetic* 'function', and hence in a form directed against its contamination by either the prose of thought or the world, means that the attempt to identify the 'specific difference' of literariness was effectively doomed to failure from the outset, since the very concept of literature (as distinct from 'poetry') is constituted, historically, precisely *through* such contamination. This is not simply a question of a heterogeneity of approaches to the literary work, spanning anthropology, psychology, and so on, as Jakobson bemoans, but is internal to the 'novelization' of literature per se, since it is through the impossibility of separating a purely 'literary' language from other discourses that a transdisciplinary idea of literature is itself constructed as, in the words of Stefan Jonsson (writing of Musil), a 'discourse of discourses that could contain all other linguistic registers and rhetorical codes: scientific, colloquial, narrative, religious, political, poetic, social, visionary, sexual, legal and more'.⁷¹ If the 'name "literature"' designates in this way what Derrida identifies as 'a certain promise of "being able to say everything"', it is the historically open form that this 'everything' takes, and the 'paradoxical form' that the literary work must thereby assume (as that which can never be 'literary' in its entirety), that has made literary studies, since the 1960s at least, such a lively and productive site for transdisciplinary work across the humanities as a whole.⁷²

Notes

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1. Gustave Flaubert, Letter to Louise Colet, January 16th 1852, in *The Selected Letters of Gustave Flaubert*, trans. Francis Steegmuller, Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, New York, 1953, p. 128.
 2. Friedrich Schlegel, 'Letter about the Novel', trans. Ernst Behler and Roman Struc, in J.M. Bernstein, ed., *Classical and Romantic German Aesthetics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003, p. 293 (emphasis added). The full English translation, from which this extract is taken, can be found in Friedrich Schlegel, *Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms*, Penn State University Press, University Park PA, 1967.
 3. Cf. David Cunningham, 'Capitalist Epics: Abstraction, Totality and the Theory of the Novel', *Radical Philosophy* 163, September/October 2010, pp. 11–23.
 4. That is, 'art in the singular' in that sense which 'has only existed for two centuries' – i.e. since romanticism itself – and which 'meant the upheaval of the coordinates through which the "fine arts" had been located up to then'. Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill, Continuum, London and New York, 2004, p. 52.
 5. See J.M. Bernstein, 'Introduction', in Bernstein, ed., *Classical and Romantic German Aesthetics*, pp. xxx–xxxii.
 6. See Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art*, Verso, London and New York, 2013, pp. 37–69. For Osborne, contemporary art as postconceptual art 'actualizes the idea of the work of art to be found in the Jena Romantic philosophy of art, under new historical conditions' (p. 10).
 7. It is also to be found no doubt, in a different if connected way, in a theory of the fragment, although I leave this aside here. For some thoughts on the romantic fragment with regard to theories of the avant-garde specifically, see David Cunningham, 'The Futures of Surrealism: Hegelianism, Romanticism and the Avant-Garde', *SubStance*, vol. 34, no. 2, 2005, pp. 47–65. The seminal account of the fragment as the romantic 'genre' par excellence is to be found in Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*, trans. Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester, SUNY Press, Albany NY, 1988; heavily indebted to Maurice Blanchot, 'The Athenaeum', in *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. Susan Hanson, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1993, pp. 351–9.
 8. Walter Benjamin, 'The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism', trans. David Lachterman, Howard Eiland and Ian Balfour, in *Selected Writings*, Volume 1: 1913–1926, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1996, p. 118. This English translation even omits the word 'art' from the title, translating *Kunstkritik* simply as 'Criticism'.
 9. Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, pp. 82–3.
 10. See Larry Shiner, *The Invention of Art: A Cultural History*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2001, pp. 83–5; and on the concept of 'literature', by contrast, pp. 192–3.
 11. Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, p. 12.
 12. It is this that made the novel 'a paradigmatic illustration of the new literary institution as prefigured mainly by the Early Romantics at the turn of the century'. Rakefet Sheffy, 'Strategies of Canonization: Manipulating the Idea of the Novel and the Intellectual Field in Eighteenth-Century German Culture', paper delivered at the Dartmouth Colloquium, 'The Making of Culture', Dartmouth College, 22–27 July 1994, www.tau.ac.il/~rakefet/papers/rs-strat.htm. See also Rakefet Sheffy, 'The Late Eighteenth-Century German "Trivialroman" as Constructed by Literary History and Criticism', *Texte* 12, 1992, pp. 197–217.
 13. M.M. Bakhtin, 'Epic and Novel', in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, University of Texas Press, Austin TX, 1981, p. 3.
 14. Friedrich Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1991, pp. 31–2; Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, p. 97.
 15. Schlegel, 'Letter about the Novel', pp. 288, 290.
 16. Friedrich Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, p. 85. This would, of course, also concur with the argument made by Larry Shiner and others that a key factor in the 'invention' of the modern idea of 'art' itself – coincident with the emergence of the modern conception of 'literature' – was 'the replacement of patronage by an art market and a middle-class public'. As Shiner continues, one exemplary issue at stake in the eighteenth-century Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns was 'the question of whether the emerging art public rather than the scholarly elite were to be judges of literature and, more specifically, whether

- a new (female-identified) genre, such as the novel, was to be accepted as a successor of epic poetry'. See Shiner, *The Invention of Art*, pp. 7, 79. Famously, this is one of the central concerns of Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel* and its detailed analysis of a new 'reading public' emergent in the eighteenth century. Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1972. As Watt notes, the relationship between the novel and the epic was consistently framed through this historical division, as exemplified by Voltaire's 1727 *Essay of Epic Poetry* that contrasts the 'most learned' readers of the *Iliad* with 'that Eagerness and Rapture, which a woman feels when she reads the novel of Zaida' (cited in Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, p. 280).
17. Schlegel, 'Letter about the Novel', p. 293.
 18. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, Verso, London and New York, 1984, p. 38. As John Brenkman puts it: 'The novel is commodity form and artistic form wrapped in one, the first type of artwork in which the object the artist creates (the novel) is indissociable from the object manufactured to be sold (the book).' John Brenkman, 'Innovation: Notes on Nihilism and the Aesthetics of the Novel', in Franco Moretti, ed., *The Novel*, Volume 2: *Forms and Themes*, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 2006, p. 829.
 19. See, for example, Peter Bürger, 'Literary Institution and Modernization', in *The Decline of Modernism*, trans. Nicholas Walker, Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park PA, 1992, pp. 3–18.
 20. Sheffy, 'Strategies of Canonization', citing Jochen Schulte-Sasse, 'The Concept of Literary Criticism in German Romanticism 1795–1810', in Peter Uwe Hohendahl, ed., *A History of German Literary Criticism, 1730–1980*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln NE, 1988.
 21. Diana Behler, *The Theory of the Novel in Early German Romanticism*, Peter Lang, Bern, 1978, p. 10. 'Yesterday when the argument became most heated', the writer of the 'Letter' says to his addressee Amalia, 'you demanded a definition of the novel; you said it as if you already knew that you would not receive a satisfactory answer'. This is, then, the prompt for Schlegel's assertion that the novel is a 'romantic book'. Schlegel, 'Letter about the Novel', p. 293.
 22. It is in this vein that Benjamin's argument that the 'idea of poetry is prose' is, in turn, 'the final determination of the idea of art' requires that the 'theory of the novel' through which it is articulated be 'freed of an exclusively empirical reference to *Wilhelm Meister*'. Benjamin, 'The Concept of Criticism', p. 173.
 23. Schlegel, 'Letter About the Novel', p. 289; Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, p. 98; Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, p. 95 (emphasis added).
 24. Friedrich Schlegel, 'On Goethe's *Meister*', in Bernstein, ed., *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*, p. 275; Schlegel, 'Letter about the Novel', p. 289. If the actual novel is 'sickly', it is, then, because 'what has grown in such a sickly environment cannot be anything else' (ibid.). In *Idea 11*, the 'triviality' of actual novels is more specifically related by Schlegel to the modern 'lack of religion' (*Philosophical Fragments*, p. 95). While this informs Schlegel's own later conversion to a conservative Catholicism, and accompanying medievalism, it should also be understood in relation to the argument of Bürger and others that 'the institution of art/literature in a fully developed bourgeois society may be considered as a functional equivalent of the institution of religion', in part through its encouragement of 'the loss of validity of religious world-views'. Bürger, 'Literary Institution and Modernization', pp. 18, 9. See also Terry Eagleton, 'The Rise of English', in *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1996, pp. 15–46.
 25. Benjamin, 'Concept of Criticism', p. 173 (emphasis added). The complexity of the relations at stake here can be registered by comparing Novalis's assertion of 1799–1800 that a 'novel must be poetry [*Poesie*] through and through', with his claim (in 1798) that, just as, 'wrongly', the novel has been 'regarded as prose', so the 'highest, truest prose is the lyric poem [*lyrische Gedicht*]'. Cited in Lilian R. Furst, ed. *European Romanticism: Self-Definition*, Methuen, London, 1980, pp. 134, 138.
 26. Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, p. 8 (emphasis added); 'Letter about the Novel', p. 293. For Lukács, the 'homelessness' of the novel is partly reflected in the ways in which, within it, 'genres now cut across one another, with a complexity that cannot be disentangled'. *The Theory of the Novel*, p. 41.
 27. Georg Morhof, *Unterricht Von Der Deutschen Sprache und Poesie* (1682): 'It is another type of narrative / yet in prose / which however is entitled with full justification to be called (heroic) Epic. For it is not different from the other types / except only in metrics / yet it was granted by Aristotle / that there may also be a *poem* without versification (metrics). These are the so-called *novels* (Romainen), about whose origins there is no univocal opinion.' Cited in Sheffy, 'Strategies of Canonization'.
 28. Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, pp. 13–14.
 29. Friedrich Schlegel, *On the Study of Greek Poetry*, trans. Stuart Barnett, SUNY Press, Albany NY, 2001, pp. 32, 42.
 30. Schlegel, 'On Goethe's *Meister*', p. 275.
 31. Bernstein, 'Introduction', in *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*, p. xxx.
 32. Viktor Shkolovsky, 'Sterne's Tristram Shandy', in Dorothy J. Hale, ed., *The Novel: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory 1900–2000*, Blackwell, Oxford, 2006, p. 52.
 33. Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1997, pp. 201, 333.
 34. Nancy Armstrong, 'The Fiction of Bourgeois Morality and the Paradox of Individualism', in Moretti, ed., *The Novel*, vol. 2, p. 358; Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia: Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, trans. David Wood, SUNY Press, Albany, NY, 2007, p. 132 [trans. modified].
 35. Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock, Merlin, London, 1971, p. 32; Walter Benjamin, 'The Crisis of the Novel', trans. Rodney Livingstone, in *Selected Writings*, Volume 2, Part 1: 1927–1930, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1999, pp. 299, 300; Schlegel, 'Letter about the Novel', p. 294; Theodor Adorno, 'The Narrator of the Contemporary Novel', in *Notes to Literature*, vol. 1, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen, Columbia University Press, New York, 1991, p. 32.
 36. Thomas Pavel, 'The Novel in Search of Itself: A Historical Morphology', in Moretti, ed., *The Novel*, vol. 2, p. 3.
 37. Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, pp. 14–15.
 38. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, pp. 182, 3; see also the 1967 essay 'Art and the Arts', trans. Rodney Livingstone, in *Can One Live After Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader*, Stanford University Press, Stanford CA, 2003, pp. 368–87. On the relation of this to the theory of the novel, see David Cunningham, 'After Adorno: The Narrator of the Contemporary Novel', in David Cunningham and Nigel Mapp, eds, *Adorno and Literature*, Continuum, London and New York, 2006, pp. 188–200.
 39. Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, p. 38; Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 202.
 40. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, pp. 202, 201.
 41. Ibid., p. 220.
 42. David Shields, *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto*, Penguin, London, 2011, p. 5.
 43. Benjamin, 'The Concept of Criticism', p. 174.
 44. Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, pp. 31–2.
 45. G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, 2 vols, trans. T.M. Knox, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1975, vol. II, p. 1045.
 46. Novalis, 'On Goethe', in Bernstein, ed., *Classical and Romantic German Aesthetics*, p. 232; Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, p. 32. Although see *Idea 95*: 'The new, eternal gospel that Lessing prophesied will appear as a bible: but

- not as a single book in the usual sense. Even what we now call the Bible is actually a system of books'. Schlegel goes on to offer the following 'example': 'All the classical poems of the ancients are coherent, inseparable; they form an organic whole, they constitute, properly viewed, only a single poem, the only one in which poetry itself appears in perfection'. (ibid., p. 102).
47. Benjamin, 'The Concept of Criticism', p. 173. To quote the fragment more fully: '[A] philosophy of poetry as such ... would waver between the union and division of philosophy and poetry ... of poetry in general and the genres and kinds of poetry; and it would conclude with their complete union. ... The keystone would be a philosophy of the novel.' Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, p. 53.
 48. Novalis, Letter to A.W. Schlegel, January 12th 1798, cited in Benjamin, 'The Concept of Criticism', p. 174 (emphasis added).
 49. Benjamin, 'The Concept of Criticism', p. 173; Rodolphe Gasché, 'The Sober Absolute: On Benjamin and the Early Romantics', in Beatrice Hanssen and Andrew Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin and Romanticism*, Continuum, New York and London, 2002, p. 66; Winfried Menninghaus, 'Walter Benjamin's Exposition of the Romantic Theory of Reflection', in Hanssen and Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin and Romanticism*, p. 36. This early account of prose as a 'sobering' of the Absolute, in which the latter is 'de-sacralized, de-divinized', as Gasché puts it, has a complex relation to Benjamin's somewhat enigmatic assertion that the 'idea of prose coincides with the messianic idea of universal history' articulated in one of his very last texts, the 'Paralipomena to "On the Concept of History": "Its language is liberated prose – prose which has burst the fetters of script [*Schrift*]'. To be fully understood, this would no doubt have to be related to Benjamin's remark, in the same text, that 'In the idea of the classless society, Marx secularized the idea of messianic time.' Significantly, as regards Marx's own distance from historicism, this is elaborated by Benjamin specifically in terms of the latter's 'liquidation of the epic moment' in *Capital*, as opposed to 'the idea that history is something which can be narrated'. If Marx does this through a 'process of construction' underpinned by 'the broad, steel framework of a theory', he also does so, Benjamin argues, as a means of honouring 'the memory of the anonymous' by contrast to the 'monumental', heroic narratives of an (epic) historicism. Walter Benjamin, 'Paralipomena to "On the Concept of History"', trans. Edmund Jephcott and Howard Eiland, in *Selected Writings*, Volume 4: 1938–1940, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 2003, pp. 404, 401, 404, 406.
 50. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. II, pp. 1092–3.
 51. Franco Moretti, *The Modern Epic: The World System from Goethe to García Márquez*, trans. Quintin Hoare, Verso, London and New York, 1996, p. 12. In this, Hegel is close to someone like Diderot, who similarly 'thinks that great epic and dramatic poetry can only develop in an archaic society'. In this way, as Peter Bürger puts it, 'Poetry (the term already designates what we now call art) is brought into radical opposition to modernity (in the sociological meaning).' Bürger, 'Literary Institution and Modernization', p. 13.
 52. G.W.F. Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, trans. Bernard Bosanquet, Penguin, London, 1993, p. 96 (emphasis added).
 53. Friedrich Schiller, 'Kallias or Concerning Beauty', in Bernstein, ed., *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*, pp. 181–2.
 54. Alain Robbe-Grillet, *Why I Love Barthes*, trans. Andrew Brown, Polity, Cambridge, 2011, p. 56.
 55. The mirror image of this, and counter-movement to it, would perhaps be the progressive 'lyricization' of poetry in an alternate 'post-Romantic' heritage of twentieth-century literary aesthetics. As Marc Redfield puts it: 'Associated with voice, subjectivity, and intensity of expression and feeling, lyric began to become, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, an available name for the essence of poetry, and ultimately, by extension, literature or literariness itself'. Marc Redfield, *Theory at Yale: The Strange Case of Deconstruction in America*, Fordham University Press, New York, 2016, p. 62.
 56. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. I, p. 149.
 57. Georg Lukács, 'Narrate or Describe?', in *The Writer and Critic and Other Essays*, trans. Arthur Kahn, Merlin, London, 1970, p. 127. See also Cunningham, 'Capitalist Epics'.
 58. Georg Lukács, 'The Ideology of Modernism', in *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, trans. John and Necke Mander, Merlin, London, 1962, pp. 43, 42.
 59. Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, p. 34.
 60. Ibid., p. 58; Georg Lukács, 'The Writer and the Critic', in *The Writer and Critic*, p. 210.
 61. As I have argued elsewhere, it is this that complicates Rancière's association of both the literary and aesthetic regimes with a democratic politics (or, at least, meta-politics), since the forms of equivalence and indifference at stake can never be clearly disentangled from those forms of equivalence and indifference definitive of money and the commodity form. See David Cunningham, 'Flaubert's Parrot', *Radical Philosophy* 170, November/December 2011, pp. 46–50.
 62. Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, p. 62.
 63. Moretti, *The Modern Epic*, pp. 96, 152, 217. This is hinted at earlier in the book, by way of the young Marx, in Moretti's discussion of money in which 'the concrete contents it assumes remain wholly undetermined', but the point is never really developed (p. 91).
 64. Georg Lukács, 'Critical Realism and Socialist Realism', in *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, p. 125.
 65. Bakhtin, 'Epic and Novel', p. 6.
 66. See Stewart Martin, 'Literature and the Modern System of the Arts: Sources of Criticism in Adorno', in Cunningham and Mapp, eds, *Adorno and Literature*, pp. 19–20.
 67. Thierry de Duve, *Kant After Duchamp*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1996, pp. 205, 154. For de Duve, the general plausibility of this argument is confirmed by the sense in which the aesthetic claims of post-1960s' painting can no longer be made in terms of their status as *paintings*, but only *as art*, in a way that is still not quite the case for, say, musicians or architects. However, it is worth noting that this looks rather different from the perspective of 'literature', since the latter is itself already a kind of generic category. At any rate, the equivalent to 'painting' here would not be 'literature' but, say, the poem in its narrower sense.
 68. Raymond Williams, 'Literature', in *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985, pp. 186–7.
 69. Bernstein, 'Introduction', in *Classical and Romantic German Aesthetics*, p. xxxi.
 70. Roman Jakobson, cited in Boris Eichenbaum, 'The Theory of the "Formal Method"', in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, trans. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln and London, 1965, p. 107.
 71. Stefan Jonsson, 'A citizen of Kakania', *New Left Review* 27, 2004, p. 140.
 72. Jacques Derrida, 'This Strange Institution Called Literature', in *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge, Routledge, London and New York, 1992, pp. 40, 37. As Derrida reminds us here, the 'name "literature" is a very recent invention. The set of laws and conventions which fixed what we call literature in modernity was not indispensable for poetic works to circulate' (p. 40).