

Shall We Continue to Write Histories of Literature?

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THE TITLE OF THIS ESSAY seems to announce a repetition of what I consider to be one of the worst habits in literary studies and in the humanities at large. For it may indeed look like one of those very dramatic self-referential questions that critics like to ask—with the implicit promise of arriving at the most reassuring answers, reassuring answers, to make things worse, whose merit seems to grow thanks to the pretension of having opened up, for a moment, the vision of a preoccupying future. I can certainly promise that my own question has a much more straightforward intention and will produce much less optimistic predictions—for a variety of reasons. In the first place, I believe that the humanities are subsisting—rather than existing—today in an institutional, economic, political, and even cultural environment where certain questions that used to be “barely rhetorical” may have turned, behind our backs, into perfectly serious and indeed threatening questions. In this sense, and secondly, we have every reason to pay attention to the, in and by itself banal, fact that all institutions, among them the academic disciplines in which we are working, had their historical beginnings and will therefore come to a historical ending one day. This is specifically obvious, thirdly, in the case of a discipline like ours whose historical origin, as I will try to demonstrate, was particularly improbable. After all, whether we are ready to admit it in public or not, literary critics know all too well that humankind would easily survive without literary criticism—and most likely even without the humanities at large.

With these rather candid, I hope, opening remarks, I have already traced the structure of the argument in which I will try to cope with my assignment, that is, in which I will address the problem of what we can do and what we should do, under present-day conditions, with the intellectual and discursive heritage of “literary history.” More precisely, my reaction will have five parts. I will begin with a very brief description (1) of the historical emergence, in the early nineteenth century, of literary studies as an academic discipline, whose initial institutional form, as it is important to underline, did not yet contain the subfield of “literary

history.” On this basis, I will then show how, a few decades later and in the epistemological context to which we have been referring, since Michel Foucault, as “the crisis of representation,” literary history emerged as a specific intellectual fascination and as a discursive possibility (2). In the third and central part of this narrative, I will speak about the situation of literary studies towards the end of the nineteenth century when, paradoxically, a first crisis of its institutional form not only triggered the emergence of literary theory as a further subfield of the discipline but also inaugurated a golden age of literary history through a remarkable proliferation of new perspectives and questions. In the subsequent step (4), I will claim that the very type of historicity that had been the basis for the emergence of literary history in the earlier nineteenth century has vanished as recently as since the final decades of the twentieth century. This thesis, quite obviously, will lead back to the situation of our initial, our final, and our very serious question (5)—it will lead back to the question what we shall do, today, with the intellectual and institutional legacy of literary history.

I

While it is certainly true that multiple professional ways of dealing with texts called “literary” have existed since the age of Hellenism, I propose that we do not identify these mostly philological practices as the historical beginning of “literary criticism”—for they are not related to our present within any institutional and intellectual continuity. A strong claim can be made for our own tradition to go back to a number of German (more precisely, Prussian) universities in the second and third decades of the nineteenth century.¹ The larger sociohistorical context for this development was an emerging tension, in the early postrevolutionary or postreform “bourgeois” states, between a new, normative image of society and of social relations that they propagated, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the prevailing everyday experience in the existing societies that was falling short of those high-spirited promises. As a domain of mediation and compensation within this conflict, a no longer class-specific sphere of leisure began to establish itself where, under institutional conditions of play and fiction, all those new promises implicit to the normative image of society were “kept” and “made true.” If, for example, equality of opportunity, as it belonged to the fundamental values of the new states, was far from being an everyday reality, certain forms of leisure offered it as an illusionary experience.

Now, we have every empirical reason to believe that literary writing and, above all, literary reading, in the early nineteenth century, played

a core role within the core institution of leisure. This role indeed can explain the Prussian state's interest in launching and in financing an academic discipline (that is, literary studies in the form of *Germanistik*) whose initial function was to develop a national culture and form of reading through which the new mediating function of literature in the context of leisure would be guaranteed and which, in addition, would use literary texts as a repertoire for the illustration and exemplification of an equally new normative image of society. During the following decades, literary studies began to develop, within the larger European and North American context, under two different structural premises and into two different institutional forms. Wherever the new, bourgeois society saw itself as the result of a successful revolution, as it did in Great Britain, in France, and in the United States, the normative horizon of reference with which everyday experience had to be mediated in the reading of literature consisted of abstract and tendentially metahistorical concepts in the tone of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*. There was a prevailing habit, in this context, to read literary texts as allegories of those abstract values and concepts, and the early protagonists of the new discipline, Matthew Arnold in England, for example, and Paulin Paris in France, played a public role as reading pedagogues, rather than as highly specialized scholars (before they became professors, Arnold had been an inspector for secondary education and Paris had been a librarian).

In those national contexts, however, where bourgeois reforms had been undertaken as a reaction to an experience of national defeat and humiliation, such as in the German countries and, later on, in Italy, Russia, or Spain, the normative horizon of society was typically occupied by an idealized image of each nation's past, which condition produced a logic that made it necessary for literary texts to be presented and read as documents illustrating that glorious past. This was how scholars, rather than pedagogues, like Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm used their highly developed philological skills. But while the emphasis in their work with individual texts was always on historicization, most of them were not interested yet in writing histories of their national literatures.

II

Even in the Prussian context of early literary studies and despite its strong and quite sophisticated inclination towards historicizing, "literary history" did not become a concern and a discursive form before the advent of the epistemological crisis, in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, that Foucault described under the heading "*crise de la représentation*." Borrowing a central concept from Niklas Luhmann's

philosophy (a concept, by the way, that Luhmann himself never used in any strictly historical way), I propose to refer to the same historical syndrome as the “emergence of the second-order observer.”² The position of the second-order observer, as it became an institutional reality within Western culture during the nineteenth century, is a role in which she who observes the world cannot help observing herself in the act of observation. It is the role of self-reflexivity, as it has probably been available, in the status of an option, for all human cultures of all times, but it is now turned into an institution, into structural law.

As a new and inevitable condition for any kind of world appropriation, the emergence of the second-order observer had a number of long-reaching consequences within nineteenth-century epistemology and culture, among which the one that interests us here can be called “perspectivism.” An observer who observes himself in the act of observation will discover that his perception and experience of the world depend on his perspective (both in the literal and in the metaphorical sense)—which discovery fast leads to the insight that, for each object of world reference, there are as many potential forms of experience, of knowledge, or of representation, as there are observer perspectives. The most extreme potential consequence to be drawn from this proliferation of perspectives is, of course, the fear of a vanishing (and even of a non-existence) of any “objects of reference” outside the world-observer himself.

I believe that, since the 1820s, a switch from a mirrorlike (“one-to-one”) to a narrative principle of world representation became both the long-time successful solution to this problem and the basis for what we have ever since called “nineteenth-century historicism.” But how could historicization become a solution to the threats of perspectivism? This happened because a discourse in which a nation is identified through her history, or in which a species is identified through its evolution, will always be able to integrate, within a narrative sequence (the potential infinity of) its different representations. Within this very context, it became plausible to use not just individual literary texts as punctual “evocations” of a glorious national past but to see in the histories of national literatures, as intentional objects and as discursive forms in their own right, a formula, and even a king’s way that would give access to the true understanding of a nation’s identity.

In the German context, above all but certainly not exclusively, the formal possibilities of literary history as a discourse seem to have developed, since the mid-nineteenth century, between two opposite possibilities. Not surprisingly, there was a strongly teleological, visibly Hegelian type of literary history that tried to shape the history of national literature as a trajectory towards the self-revelation of national identity. Georg Gottfried Gervinus’s and, several decades later, Wilhelm Scherer’s writings

tried to explore this possibility. The other style could be characterized as “historical anthropology” and would use different types and forms of literature from different moments of a national past in order to constitute a complex image of the nation in question, without having a central thesis about the nation’s identity or an idea of its systematic unfolding. Gustav Freytag’s books on German culture (and probably those of the majority among the then new literary historians) belonged to this variety.³

Now, together with historicism’s discursive formations and partly within them, a complex structure of imagining time and, through it, of experiencing change emerged and was so universally accepted that people soon tended to confuse it with “historical consciousness” in the sense of a metahistorical condition.⁴ Its most basic feature was the asymmetry between an open future lived as a horizon of expectations and a past that the ongoing time, at each moment, seemed to leave behind as a closed space of experience. Between that future and this past, the present appeared to be, as Charles Baudelaire once stated, “an imperceptibly short moment of transition,” a moment of transition that also seemed to be a necessary condition for the existence of the “subject” and its specific functions. For it was expected to be the subject’s task, within that small present, to adapt experience from the past to the conditions of the present and to project it into the future in the status of expectations. The topology within which all these aspects came together was that of a progressive movement constantly leaving the past behind in order to cross the ever-renewed thresholds between present and future.

From the angle of our topic, the important point to understand is that, since the emergence of the second-order observer and, subsequently, of nineteenth-century historicism, every literary text had turned into a potential element for potential histories of national literature. Whether this possibility was actually used depended mainly on the larger political contexts. It ended up happening indeed—that is, histories of national literatures became an institution—wherever and whenever a nation underwent a moment of national defeat and humiliation. In the French case, for example, we can associate this beginning with the exact moment of the nation’s defeat in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870–71.⁵ But there were other nations, England, for example, or the United States, where, for the same reason (or, more precisely, for the opposite reason, that is, for the lack of a moment of national defeat),⁶ literary history never became a true discursive option for literary criticism. It would be an intriguing task to investigate under which specific horizons of national self-reference Antonio Candido’s project of reconstructing the “formation of Brazilian literature” came first underway.

III

Without any doubt, the nineteenth century was the happy age of literary criticism at large and of literary history in specific, for it was a time in which, as Wolfgang Iser once said, if literature tended to fulfill the function of a national religion, our discipline served as its theology. In this form and status, literary criticism underwent its first crisis towards the end of the nineteenth century—but this crisis turned out to be productive in a double sense. It caused, in the first place, the emergence of “literary theory” within literary criticism, and it produced, secondly, through literary history, a number of new questions and concerns that triggered a motivation to experiment, since the early twentieth century, with different discursive forms and new functions for literary history.

What I believe caused this disciplinary crisis was a growing skepticism regarding the traditionally ontological status of those concepts and images that, since the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, had occupied the normative horizons of different societies and nations as frames of reference for the early institutional moments of our disciplines. All of a sudden, values like those condensed in the moral concepts of the Enlightenment tradition, or the reality status of the romantically idealized images of different nations were no longer as obvious and plausible as they had been for almost an entire century—and this process of emotional and ontological devaluation was intensified, exponentially indeed, by the impact of World War I as an existential crisis (for the victorious nations almost as much as for those defeated). If literary criticism lost its original horizon of reference in this process, a new series of self-reflexive questions and concerns about the discipline emerged that, ever since, have been mapping “literary theory” as a new subfield.⁷ If, during the nineteenth century, the mediation between a normative concept of society and its everyday reality had been the frame of reference for literary studies, the question arose, as a first question for literary theory and within growing skepticism towards that horizon of reference, as to what the function and the self-assignment of literary criticism should be. For if, during the nineteenth century, any text that could function within the mediating function of literary criticism was called “literature,” the problem emerged, all of a sudden, as to whether there was a possibility for a coherent, perhaps even metahistorical and transcultural, definition of “literature.” (This concern, above all, seems to have moved different literary theories, since their first materialization, that is, since the foundation of Russian Formalism during the years preceding World War I and the October Revolution.) Another “literary theory” question, within a potential infinity of new concerns, would try to determine the status of the history of literature in relation to other “historical series”

(as the formalists used to say), that is, the history of music or of art, but also political history or economic history.

For literary history, specifically, this crisis was certainly not accompanied yet by a complete loss of the belief in its different explanatory powers. Rather, what seemed to be affected was that “naturalness” with which, since its romantic foundations and, more explicitly and decidedly, since the emergence of the second-order observer, the historicity of literature and the discourses of literary history had been taken to be a kings way towards different national identities. The crisis of literary criticism and the appearance of literary theory produced the complexifying new concern about the different ways in which the phenomenal and discursive identity of “literature” would determine its specific possibilities of historical understanding and historical insight. If the productivity of a certain naiveté that went along with literary history during the nineteenth century had vanished forever, a new precision in the reflection about the status of literary history and in the use of its epistemological potential appeared as a compensation for this loss. As a consequence, we can observe, since the beginning and almost until the end of the twentieth century, a broad range of new reflections and of new practices emerging, both within the more teleological and the more anthropologically inspired discourses of literary history.

One of the earliest and most influential among them was Georg Lukács’s attempt, in “Theory of the Novel” (1920), to determine what he claimed to be the specific relation between literature and the process of history, based on a reflection on literary form. For Lukács, the specific feature of the discourse of literature, above all in comparison to that of historiography, was its concreteness and, thereby, its illustrative power. Thanks to them, he believed that literature was capable of identifying certain regularities within certain “laws” of historical change, earlier and with greater depth than even the most intellectually daring historians—and often against the grain of the literary historians’ political orientations. Lukács’s favorite example was the monarchist Balzac’s profound understanding of the world of capitalism as it was shaping up at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Likewise, one might try to establish an association between a redemptive dimension in our approach to the past (of which Walter Benjamin, a good decade later, speaks in his “Theses on the Philosophy of History”⁸) and, on the other hand, a specific capacity of literary texts to conjure up long-gone worlds. “Reception history,” since the late 1960s, was the scholarly dream to identify literature’s impact on the changing world through the mediation of its impact on readers. With the historical study of literature as a medium, finally, a new movement came up during the 1980s that offered to establish a connection with the idea of humankind’s evolution in which the

history of technology appears as a continuation of biological evolution with different means.⁹

Within the larger discursive paradigm that I have characterized as “historical anthropology,” I would locate, for example, Erich Auerbach’s chef d’oeuvre *Mimesis* as it tries to illustrate how “literary realism” since the early Christian age has been the paradoxical convergence between the most “humble” level of discursive decorum (*sermo humilis*) and the most sublime content of human existence, that is, the tragic flavor of its everydayness.¹⁰ Only two years after the appearance of Auerbach’s book in 1946, Ernst Robert Curtius claimed to have documented, in his monumental work on *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, how the continuous presence of a certain repertoire of rhetorical and literary forms provided a rootedness of modern Western culture in a millenary tradition, much needed in the bleak existential situation that followed World War II.¹¹ Inadvertently returning to a practice that resembled the earliest literary historiography in the age of romanticism, there has been a tendency, since the 1970s and 1980s, to use literary history as a medium of tracing and producing identity.¹² Whereas Mikhail Bakhtin, with the concepts of “carnival” and “dialogue,” and Iser, with the concept of “fiction,” tried to offer topoi of convergence and of comparison for approaches to literature that were eager to illustrate historical variation within a stable framework of conditions, Foucault’s famous essay “What Is an Author?” stands and was motivation for the opposite tendency, that is, for the most sophisticated and most rigorous type of conceptual historicization in the analysis of literature and its institutions.¹³ It was thanks to this effort of extreme historical differentiation, above all, that, during the 1980s and early 1990s, the possibility of construing a truly metahistorical and transcultural concept of literature, as literary theory had wanted to do since its early twentieth-century origins, became subject to growing skepticism. For the new intensity in the practice of historicization began to problematize the metahistorical concept of “literature” that had implicitly given continuity to all previous attempts at writing “literary history.”

IV

It was my intention, in the previous section, to show how the crisis that the predominant nineteenth-century form and function of literary history had entered around 1900 turned into the source of an enormous intellectual and discursive productivity. From the angle of literary criticism as an institution, this proliferation had a rather centrifugal effect, an effect, as we have seen, that produced doubts about the epistemologi-

cal legitimacy of any concept of “literature” that would be capable of offering the foundation for an academic discipline. But if these were all problems of the kind that can be turned easily into “intellectual merits,” we are now beginning to understand that, right before the ending of the second millennium, we went through a process of epistemological transformation that, in a much more profound and radical way, has undermined forever the premises on which “history” as our modern relation to the past had been relying.

I am referring to that widespread debate in which the identification of the present as either “postmodern” or as a “continuation of modernity” seemed to be at stake.¹⁴ In today’s retrospect and independently of the political emotions (and aggressions) that went along with this discussion, we can see that it often was a confused reaction to two very different, but fundamental, epistemological changes. Above all, it marked the end of the belief that had resulted from the emergence of the second-order observer as a solution that became fundamental for nineteenth-century historicism, the end of the belief that a narrative principle in the identification of phenomena would be able to absorb and thereby neutralize all problems of perspectivism. Hence the insistence, in the early diagnoses of the “postmodern moment,” at first in Jean-François Lyotard’s *Postmodern Condition*, on the inviability of all (mostly Hegelian) kinds of master narratives (*grands récits*).¹⁵ Complementary to this skepticism regarding historicization as an epistemological tool, a new appreciation of the literary qualities in the writing of history came up, beautifully argued and illustrated by Hayden White’s book *Metahistory*¹⁶—and later on transformed into a very respectable intellectual and academic style that we have come to call New Historicism. Literary variation in the representation of the past had become the law, as no referential truth claims were made anymore.

The new question that authors like Lyotard and White had been pushing, a question that, somehow astonishingly, had not been asked for a century and a half, was why a “great narrative” should be more independent from its perspective than any smaller description; the question, too, why there should not be an infinity of possible narratives identifying, say, the Latvian nation, as there was, of course, a potential infinity of definitions and images for the same object of reference. It is interesting to register how this new attitude of dealing with the past coincided, at least chronologically, with a true phobia regarding history and any discursive form that could be called “narrative,” as was central for the work and notorious in the public persona of Jacques Derrida.

Much more important, however, as a second contemporaneous transformation on the epistemological level, was the change that the basic topology of “history” and “historicism,” as it had emerged in the early

nineteenth century, was now undergoing. Whether and, if so, in which specific ways the crisis of the *grands récits* and the change in the topology of "historicism" were interconnected will have to be worked through and discussed by future research and reflection. But it is clear that, during the final decades of the twentieth century and within Western culture at least, the future progressively lost its quality of being an "open horizon of expectations," and turned into a zone that now appears both inaccessible for our predictions and tendentially unappealing for our desires. At the same time, we have endlessly developed our technological and artisanal capabilities of preserving and reproducing artifacts from the past. Thus it has become possible, quite literally, instead of constantly "leaving the past behind ourselves," to immerse ourselves, in a very material sense, into worlds that preceded our own. Between a future that seems to be closed and a past open to inundate our present, the present has begun to expand from that "imperceptibly short moment of transition" into a broad dimension of simultaneities.¹⁷ But why would this transformation be epistemologically relevant?

V

It is epistemologically relevant because the vanishing of that narrow past of modernity takes away the marked threshold position that used to be a structural part and a functional condition of what we call the "subject." What is at stake then, what explains (and, I think, fully justifies) the title question of this essay is the immediate need to rethink our relation to the past in a changed intellectual environment, where we can no longer rely on the "modern," that is, on the Cartesian tradition of a subject-based philosophy and epistemology. This is a challenge to our ways of experiencing and thinking the world that by far exceeds the confines of historical culture or of history as an academic discipline; this is a challenge, finally, within whose complexity our problems as literary historians appear comparatively marginal (and why don't we simply say: unimportant?). By pointing to this challenge, I have arrived at the main point that I wanted to make in my essay, that is, I have arrived at the observation that the ultimate range of philosophical problems with which the writing of literary histories is confronted today will require a much more profound effort of thought and reconsideration than all the provocations that had emerged from the centrifugal but altogether productive proliferation of questions and new paradigms in literary history during the twentieth century. Today, it becomes clear that a new start for literary history would presuppose a series of discussions, answers, and solutions that cannot be produced by literary studies alone.

Then again, the deductive implication of the previous sentence—that is, that we have to solve certain epistemological questions before we can tackle “smaller” disciplinary and discursive problems—does not quite grasp how intellectual life, not even how academic disciplines, really function. The truth is that, already today, we can see literary historians efficiently working towards solutions “below” the epistemological level,¹⁸ in some cases even without having fully assessed and understood the magnitude of the philosophical problems involved. Starting out, however, in due deductive rigor, with the unsettled subject-position as an epistemological problem, we should ask ourselves what exactly the new uncertainties are that follow from the dilution of the “short present” that used to be the subject’s habitat. I can see two major changes.

In the first place, the new observer position vis-à-vis the world is no longer really an outside position. It is no longer on the threshold (and thereby doubly on the outside) between the past and the present, and it also does not seem to be a position outside the world of objects anymore. In the second place, if our observer position is no longer an outside position in relation to the world of objects, then the traditional ontological contrast between a Cartesian observer that was all spirit/consciousness and the world of objects as a purely material world is getting blurred and will ultimately disappear. The new “fragmented subject” (this is the phrase with which Luiz Costa Lima is referring to the same problem) can no longer be a purely Cartesian subject for it will include physical—somatic—components and thus reestablish a stronger sensual contact with the world of objects. It is as if, all of a sudden, we found ourselves in the middle of time and in the middle of objects, with a desire to become part of this material world (and perhaps even of its temporality)—which experience, for a sheer lack of familiarity, is confusing for us. In other words, we have to learn what it is to be an observer who stands, with his body, in the middle of a material world to be observed.

Perhaps this situation explains the new and still growing desire among historians and their readers (and I speak of a vague but powerful desire rather than of a “paradigm”) to immerse themselves into past worlds as material worlds. Peter Eisenman’s Holocaust Memorial in Berlin is not a symbol, not a representation of the most unheard of collective crime in the history of humankind. It is an uneven field of grey concrete blocks, capable of producing, like the Nazi concentration camps, feelings of terror and angst in those who walk through it. There might well be an affinity between this monument and some much more harmless experiments organized by curators and authors. I am speaking of experiments that try to produce effects of full “historical immersion,” an immersion that will affect, as much as possible, the visitors’ or the readers’ bodily and emotional beings.¹⁹ Now, there seems to be a consensus among those who

have undertaken such experiments that “literary” texts (and I will not come back here to the endless problem/the impossibility of a definition of “literature”) are particularly good at making the past present, present as the impression of a material and sensual environment. Why is this so? It could have to do with a potential inherent to many literary texts that we long overlooked and for which we are becoming more sensitive under today’s specific everyday conditions of self-reference that we tend to find all too Cartesian (because we sometimes feel we are nothing but a fusion of consciousness and software).

The effect that I am referring to belongs to the aesthetic dimension of literature and could be called its “concreteness.” A “concreteness” of literature—not simply in Lukács’s sense of texts and their contents illustrating abstract concepts, but “concreteness” as the capacity of giving readers the feeling of being surrounded by a material world and of being inscribed into its rhythms’ transformation.²⁰ We feel that we are wrapped (and we *are* actually wrapped) by the sounds of the seventeenth century when we recite a Shakespearian sonnet or verses from *The Lusiads*. But even prose texts like Robert Musil’s *The Man without Qualities* manage to make us feel surrounded by and immersed into the atmospheres of their past worlds.²¹

Now if my impression is correct that what many of us seek in the historicity of literature under present-day epistemological conditions is (a glimpse of) the sensual feeling of being part of and inscribed into the material world that surrounds us, then this function is as far away as one can imagine from the task that the early histories of national literatures wanted to fulfill, that is from the—very Hegelian—task of developing, through an extended narrative, the image and the concept of a nation. What a growing number of readers and scholars seem to be interested in today, more than in conceptions of collective identity, is, to say it one last time, the punctual feeling of being inscribed into the (not only) material world. As this is a punctual feeling, a feeling that has to be found and established in each specific case, I strongly associate it with a new type of literary history that is fragmented into hundreds of short “entries.” For this extremely dense historical contextualization brings back to life and presence what we call “literary events,” while these short “entries” use literary texts to conjure up worlds of the past—but they do not converge in any larger concepts that try to capture the identity of a nation.²²

Of course I am not claiming that this is the one and only way of experiencing the specific historicity of literature under present-day epistemological conditions. I also imagine, for example, that in the middle of the broad present of ours, canonized literary texts might become points of concentration because, like black holes in physics, they have absorbed and now carry with them many historically different layers of

interpretation and reception. Rather than retranslating such condensations of meaning layers into narratives of reception history, classical texts as “black holes” of past meaning could become the place of yet another type and dimension of historicity.

How the concreteness of literature and literary texts as black holes of meaning, how such new ways of experiencing the historicity of literature may relate to each other—I don’t know. I do not have a master plan or a program for the future of literary history. As I said at the very beginning: I am not even sure whether such a future will ever come. We will have to think, to experiment, and to wait—if we have an interest in continuing to write histories of literature. The one thing that I believe is certain is that we will not find any ready-made solutions to our problems in the works of our great predecessors. Not even in the works of heroes like Erich Auerbach or Walter Benjamin, for they, too, lived under epistemological conditions that are no longer ours.

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NOTES

1 For more detailed, historically documented versions of the following narrative, see my essays: “‘Un souffle d’Allemagne ayant passé’: Friedrich Diez, Gaston Paris and the Origin of National Philologies,” *Romance Philology* 40, no. 1 (1986): 1–37; “Historia da Literatura—fragmento de uma totalidade perdida,” in *Histórias de literatura: As novas teorias alemãs*, ed. Heidrun Krieger Olinto (São Paulo: Editora Ática, 1996), 223–40; preface cowritten with Jeffrey Schnapp, in *Medievalism and the Modernist Temper*, ed. R. Howard Bloch and Stephen G. Nichols (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1996), 475–81.

2 For more historical detail and conceptual precision regarding the emergence of the second-order observer, see my essay “Cascais de Modernização,” in *Interseções: A materialidade da comunicação*, ed. Joao César de Castro Rocha (Rio de Janeiro: Imago/UERJ, 1998), 23–39.

3 See Georg Gottfried Gervinus’s *Geschichte der poetischen Nationalliteratur der Deutschen* (Leipzig: Engelmann, 1942); Wilhelm Scherer, *Geschichte der deutschen Litteratur* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1883); and Gustav Freytag, *Bilder aus der deutschen Vergangenheit* (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1863).

4 The detailed description and the rehistoricization of this array may be considered the central lifetime achievement of Reinhart Koselleck. See, above all, the essays brought together in his volume *Vergangene Zukunft: Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979).

5 See my essay “Gaston Paris en 1871,” in *Le Moyen Âge de Gaston Paris*, ed. Michel Zink (Paris: Jakob, 2004), 69–80.

6 Interestingly, in this sense, the first impulses towards a serious concern with the history of literature at American universities came as late as the 1960s and 1970s (with Michel Foucault’s work as a main inspiration)—which means that literary history in the United States emerged in the post-Vietnam moment of national depression.

7 See my essay “The Future of Literary Studies?” *New Literary History* 26, no. 3 (1995): 499–519. (Portuguese translation in my book, *Corpo e Forma* [Milan: Mimesis, 2001].)

- 8 Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1968), 253–64.
- 9 Friedrich Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1990), and Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and K. Ludwig Pfeiffer, eds., *Materialities of Communication* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1994).
- 10 Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1953).
- 11 Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (New York: Pantheon, 1953).
- 12 See, as a documentation for work in this direction mainly produced in Brazil, José Luis Jobim, ed., *Literatura e Identidades* (Rio de Janeiro: Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, 1999).
- 13 Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?" in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1977), 113–38.
- 14 See my entry "Postmoderne," in *Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturwissenschaft*, vol. 3, ed. Jan-Dirk Müller (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003), 509–13.
- 15 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1984).
- 16 Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1973).
- 17 See my essay "Die Gegenwart wird (immer) breiter," *Merkur* 629/630 (2002): 769–84.
- 18 See, as an eminent example, Luiz Costa Lima's book, *História, ficção literária* (Sao Paulo: Cia. Das Letras, 2006).
- 19 My own experiment in this sense was the book *In 1926: Living at the Edge of Time* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1997). (Brazilian translation, *Em 1926: Vivendo no limite do tempo* [Rio de Janeiro: Editora Record, 1999].)
- 20 See my short text "Einladung ins Reich der Sinne: Romanische Konkretion und romanistische Prägnanz," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, September 28, 2005.
- 21 The German concept that I try to render with "atmosphere" is "*Stimmung*." See the beginning of an ongoing series of reflections on "*Stimmung*" under the title "Erinnerung an Herkuenfte: Stimmung—ein vernachlaessigtes Thema der Literatur," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, November 30, 2005.
- 22 See Denis Hollier, ed., *A New History of French Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1989), and David Wellbery, ed., *A New History of German Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2004).