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Reception Theory and the New Historicism: The Metaphysical Poets in the Nineteenth Century

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The essays in this volume contribute to an open-ended project in reception history, that is, the study of specific individual as well as institutional responses to literary texts over time. During the last two decades especially, literary theorists have questioned and often wholly repudiated traditional (philologically based as well as "new critical") approaches to literary study. These decades of explosive theoretical controversy and innovation have been salutary for literary studies, liberating and enriching the discipline. Yet post structuralist discussions of literary activity in largely philosophical or psychoanalytical terms, for instance, can become dangerously solipsistic, arbitrary, and even self-subverting. As the most recent arguments "against theory" suggest, anti-historicist and non-historical literary theory appears to have already attained its outer limits of usefulness, and new, theoretically aware historical studies in literature are beginning to assert their value. These include studies of the ways in which literary works operate upon readers and are socially and institutionally assimilated. They involve analysis of texts in their particularized historical contexts.

Contributing to the current movement to reconstitute historical studies of literature, the essays which follow mark out limited territories in the landscape of literary relations between different historical eras and attempt to explore those territories. While two authors concern themselves with general matters of reception history in the nineteenth century (Haskin and Granqvist), the others attend more particularly to matters of literary genealogy, the ways in which presently canonical Romantic and Victorian poets in their own writing interpret, evaluate, appropriate, and imitate the work of seventeenth-century authors whose position in the literary canon was in the nineteenth century uncertain or largely marginal. These later authors thus valorize, validate, or devalue the language, style, literary forms and ideologies of their

metaphysical precursors whose work they feel compelled to attend to—or, as in the case of the Tractarian poets, for instance, largely to ignore.

Studies such as these assist in the project of rewriting literary history by raising anew several crucial questions that have been widely discussed in recent years. Such questions include not only the obvious ones of influence and interpretation but also more sophisticated and thorny problems of hermeneutics, canonicity, intentionality, ideology, epistemology, and literary historiography.[1] These articles make the assumption that all literary works are, as Robert Weimann has described them, "structures" which "function in terms of a . . . profound dialectic of objectivity and subjectivity. . . . By relating the activities of writing and those of reading to some comprehensive social context, we can view literature as both the (objective) product and the (subjective) 'producer' of a culture." Structure thus

> reflects the mode of representation of a given reality; as such it is related to both the expressive and mimetic dimensions of literature, which, necessarily, reflect the premises, needs, and perspectives of the age in which it is created. At the same time, structure is related to the complex process of mediation (between author and reader, but also between past writing and new writing), and it reflects the historicity of this process itself. In other words, the creation and the interpretation of structure are affected by the changing dialectic of tradition and originality that is characteristic of the writing as well as of the reading of literature. But whereas the process of writing is associated with the period of origins, the process of reception (or reading) is not so limited.[2]

Reception historians might therefore appropriately ask such questions as those which the essays in this volume touch on. What particular historical circumstances, for instance, determined Coleridge's perceptions of Donne or Christina Rossetti's responses to and appropriation of Herbertian language and poetic forms? What changes in the particular meaning of religious and amatory language itself might have served as a barrier to a nineteenth-century reader's understanding of metaphysical writers? What specific historical circumstances—beyond those of his immediate biography—would have encouraged Hardy's familiarity with

Donne? Or what centers of power and ideology allowed the metaphysicals to regain a position of importance among English and American readers late in the nineteenth century?

Thorough, but by no means exhaustive or theoretically self-aware studies in the reception history of Metaphysical poetry and especially of Donne have been available for some time.[3] The essays presented here extend the work of these studies. My concern in the following remarks is not to recapitulate the discoveries and arguments of the essays in reception history that appear in this volume and speak eloquently for themselves, but rather to suggest some additional theoretical and practical directions for studies like these, directions which have been opened up by the work of theorists in literary historiography and by reception theorists during the last two decades.

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In 1970 Hans Robert Jauss concluded his essay, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," with a provocative question: "toward what end and with what right can one today still—or again—study literary history?"[4] Delivered originally as a lecture at the University of Constance entitled "Literary History as Provocation," Jauss's "challenge" almost immediately evoked heated responses in Europe, initiating a debate, the texts of which over the last sixteen years largely comprise the literature of reception theory and, to a lesser extent, reader-response criticism.[5] As recently as 1984, Robert Holub has explained the historical importance of Jauss's "Provocation" essay: "Using the criterion of its own reception [in Europe] as a chief indicator of significance, . . . one would have to consider [it] the most significant document of literary theory in the last few decades."[6]

Jauss opens his essay with a discussion of the bankruptcy of traditional literary historical studies: "the received form of literary history scarcely scratches out a living for itself in the intellectual life of our times."[7] His explanation of this phenomenon applies not only to the state of affairs in Germany of 1969 but equally to the fate of traditional historical criticism in American and English, as well as most European, critical circles, up to the last four or five years. Traditional literary historians have been trammeled by their acceptance of an already sanctioned canon. For the sake of convenience they have attempted to present their discussions within closed historical "periods," setting the lives and works of writers one after another chronologically or presenting literature by genres and registering changes from work to work as each follows or departs from the unique laws of form governing the genre to which it belongs. Such historical studies tend to frame "the unclarified character of the literary

development with a general observation . . . concerning the *Zeitgeist* and the political tendencies of the age."[8] In an attempt to attain an ideal of "objective" historiography, authors of these studies avoid judging the quality of past literary works, thus eluding the "difficult" task of asserting criteria of "influence, reception, and posthumous fame." In place of this tradition of literary historiography, Jauss elaborates seven theses that set out "what . . . a historical study of literature [should] be today."[9]

Borrowing from the work of Karl Kosik, Jauss finally emphasizes in his theory the "ongoing influence of the work of art as a process formative of history," non-literary as well as literary. Jauss cites Kosik's insistence that, "the work [of art] lives to the extent that it has influence. Included within the influence of a work is that which is accomplished in the consumption of the work as well as in the work itself. . . . The work is a work and lives as a work for the reason that it demands an interpretation and '*works*' [influences, *wirkt*] in many meanings."[10] Jauss's understanding of Kosik here is crucial to his early theory:

> The insight that the historical essence of the work of art lies not in its representational or expressive function but also in its influence must have two consequences for a new founding of literary history. If the life of the work results "not from its autonomous existence but rather from the reciprocal interaction of work and mankind," this perpetual labor of understanding and of the active reproduction of the past cannot remain limited to the single work. On the contrary, the relationship of work to work must now be brought into this interaction between work and mankind, and the historical coherence of works among themselves must be seen in the interrelations of production and reception. Put another way: literature and art only obtain a history that has the character of a process when the succession of works is mediated not only through the producing subject but also through the consuming subject—through the interaction of author and public. And if on the other hand "human reality is not only a production of the new, but also a (critical and dialectical) reproduction of the past," the function of art in the process of this perpetual totalizing can only come into view in its independence when the specific achievement of artistic form as well is no longer just mimetically defined, but rather is viewed

> dialectically as a medium capable of forming and altering perception, in which the "formation of the senses" chiefly takes place.[11]

The notion of a process of "perpetual totalizing" is fundamental. The world of human social relations is never quite the same once a given work has been assimilated (or consumed). That work enters into history and reconstitutes the "facts" of history as well as its processes.

Because Jauss's theory is still unfamiliar in most English and American critical circles, a summary recapitulation of his seven theses is necessary before discussing the ways in which reception theory may be usefully allied with the "new historicism" in order to outline a new, theoretically informed project in literary historical studies.

1) Preliminary to any attempt to revise the bases of literary history, in Jauss's view, is the task of removing "the prejudices of historical objectivism and the grounding of the traditional aesthetics of production and representation in an aesthetics of reception and influence."[12] Any useful literary history must concern itself fundamentally with the experience of literary texts by readers and by authors in the continuing process of production. 2) Analysis of such experience begins by describing an "objectifiable system of expectations that arises for each work in the historical moment of its appearance, from a pre-understanding of the genre, from the form and themes of already familiar works, and from the opposition between poetic and practical language."[13] According to Jauss, the process of reception for the individual reader is determined by the "horizon of expectations" a work elicits. A reader's response to a given work is not at all merely a series of subjective impressions, but rather the result of carrying out "specific instructions in a process of directed perception, which can be comprehended according to its constitutive motivations and triggering signals."[14] These, Jauss maintains, can be described by a textual linguistics. 3) Entering society and the individual reader's world at a particular historical moment, therefore, a work sustains an "aesthetic distance": the "disparity between the given horizon of expectations" and the constitution of the new work itself. Its reception can thus "result in a 'change of horizons' through negation of familiar experiences or through raising newly articulated experiences to the level of consciousness." Aesthetic distance can be "objectified historically along the spectrum of the audience's reactions and criticism's judgment" of it.[15] These might include immediate success or rejection, "scattered approval, gradual or belated understanding."

4) Reconstructing horizons of expectations not only exposes as valueless traditional attempts to produce generalized statements about the

spirit of an age, but it enables literary historians to enter specific sociohistorical moments in a highly particularized way, formulating "questions that the text gave an answer to" at the time of its production and thereby discovering "how the contemporary reader could have viewed and understood the work." Of equal importance, such a procedure "brings to view the hermeneutic differences" among the ways in which a work has been understood at the various moments of its existence; it "raises to consciousness the history of its reception" as a field of study; and it calls into question the "platonizing dogma" that a literary work has a single "objective meaning" accessible at all times to the interpreter.[16] 5) Similarly, ascertaining the horizon of expectations for a work enables the literary historian to place it in its proper "literary series," that is, "to recognize its historical position and significance in the context of the experience of literature"[17] in which authors are recipients of and—formally, stylistically, linguistically, ideologically—respondents to works of their predecessors. Such an approach to literary history, however, must be scrupulously nonteleological and eschew concepts of literary "evolution": "The standpoint of the literary historian becomes the vanishing point—but not the goal—of the process."[18]

6) Unlike traditional literary history whose perspective is largely if not exclusively diachronic, reception historians must integrate synchronic and diachronic perspectives on literary works in order "to discover an overarching system of relationships in the literature of a historical moment. From this the principle of representation of a new literary history could be developed" if, in addition to extrapolating all matters concerned with a work's contemporaneous reception "cross sections" of reception history "diachronically before and after" the appearance of a work "were so arranged as to articulate historically the change in literary structures in epoch-making moments."[19] 7) The historian's final representation of literary production and reception must appear not only as a self-contained "succession of systems" but also as a "'special history' in its own unique relationship to 'general history.'" "The social function of literature," Jauss properly insists, appears fully "only where the literary experience of the reader enters into the horizon of expectations of his lived praxis, performs his understanding of the world," and thereby also affects his social behavior.[20]

Since Jauss formulated these seven theses in 1969, the focus of his own work has changed. In what we might describe as his recent sociohistorical reader-response theory, Jauss significantly revises, if he does not entirely repudiate, at least the last of the "Provocation" essay's seven theses, because it implicitly adopts an aesthetics of negativity.[21] The essay's first six theses, however, remain rich sources of theoretical

thought for literary historians. Despite the publication in this country during 1969 of an early version of the "Provocation" essay and despite the widespread response to Jauss by European theorists, nonetheless, "the reception of reception theory in the English-speaking world" has, according to Robert Holub, been a "restricted matter." But Holub looks hopefully to a future in which reception theory may "enter into a productive relationship with other modes of contemporary thought [and] provide, as it has provided for a generation of German critics, a welcome 'provocation' to literary scholarship."[22] On the English and American theoretical scene, a potentially strong ally of reception theory is the "new historical" criticism, which often has as its sources and precursors formalist and Marxist critical thought, just as Jauss's theory does.[23] In the following remarks, I hope to suggest the sort of results such an alliance might produce.[24]

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As Jauss has made clear, the most profitable reception history will define its approach and draw conclusions by locating points of intersection between synchronic and diachronic "cross sections" of history. He explains that, "it must . . . be possible to take a synchronic cross-section of a moment in the development [of aesthetic values and attitudes], to arrange the heterogeneous multiplicity of contemporary works in equivalent, opposing, and hierarchical structures, and thereby to discover an overarching system of relationships in the literature of a historical moment. From this the principle of representation of a new literary history could be developed, if further cross sections diachronically before and after were so arranged as to articulate historically the change in literary structures in its epoch-making moments."[25] Jauss's program, to some skeptical readers, may seem hardly, if at all, "possible," and his assertive rhetoric might appear facile in light of the obviously enormous obstacles to accomplishing his project even in an exemplary fashion, not to mention a comprehensive one. Moreover, as Marilyn Butler has observed, Jauss's theory "promises great things," but his last two theses problematize his project because "he is here clearly bent on retaining [the Marxist and formalist] belief that literature has its own distinct history [Jauss's 'special history'], which evolves in an autonomous series within the study or academy, rather than in society at large." Further, he has "formalized and institutionalized" the initially "democratic tactic [of] giving the text to the reader to remake, so that it is all too clearly the critic or professor whose authoritative readings we are to study." Jauss's approach to the project would not be *truly* historicist and contextual,

therefore, but rather inappropriately restrictive, selective, and delimiting. It would "surely in practice turn out to be an unskeptical, conservative reconstituting of literary history."[26]

However, if we construct an alliance between reception theory and the "new historicism," accepting only Jauss's first five theses and expanding the scope of his sixth, his project and the theory behind it retain their original promise. Required (among other things) on the part of the reception historian, is a thorough knowledge of a given culture at a given historical moment, as well as the conditions of that culture on the diachronic "axis" before and after that moment. This includes knowledge of influential cultures preceding and surrounding it. Such a scope of precise historical knowledge allows the critic to fully contextualize a work, bringing to bear upon it the totality of *relevant* circumstances surrounding its production, its interaction with works produced contemporaneously as well as with its precursors, and its reception over time. As Jerome J. McGann properly insists, "any current interpretation of a work of poetry issues from the previous history of the work's meanings. One of the functions of criticism is to elucidate those meanings on their own terms. To do this is to hypothesize a structure of differentials and continuities (periodization) in the history of meanings. This hypothesis is commonly called 'historicism.' It is a heuristic methodology for setting in motion a critical point of view into the immediate act of interpretation." Moreover, "the historicist hypothesis, in the human sciences, is the necessary (but not sufficient) ground of any critical activity. Without it, the dialectic of investigation must remain purely intersystemic."[27]

As one of the leading theorists of the "new historicism," McGann has argued for a thoroughgoing renovation of the original (nineteenth-century) program for historical literary criticism, properly insisting that such criticism can "no longer . . . treat any of its details in an untheorized way."[28] It cannot be satisfied to paint a static "picture of great detail," because the significance of literary works has always "remained in process of realization." Therefore, "the project of historicist work, its insistence upon matters of fact and accidentalities, is a critical reflection (and redeployment) of poetry's [own] incommensurable procedures. Far from closing off poetic meaning, factive reconstructions operate such an array of overdetermined particulars that they tend to widen the abyss which is the communicative potential of every poem."[29]

Like Jauss, McGann perceives a literary work as always self-evolving while existing in a dialectical relationship with each cultural moment through which it evolves. Because art constructs "human nature" in the

course of mankind's social development, what it "imitates" or "has reference to" finally is

> This totality of human changes in all its diverse and particular manifestations. Since the totality neither is nor ever can be *conceptually* completed, however, art works must always intersect with it at a differential. That is to say, art must establish its referential systems—including its reference to the totality—in the forms of dynamic particulars which at once gesture toward the place of these particulars in the ceaseless process of totalization, and also assert their freedom within the process. Such freedom is relational, and it illustrates a key element in the maintenance of the process of dynamic totalization: that the particulars which are to count in art, the particular acts, events, circumstances, details, and so forth, along with the textualizations through which they are constituted, are those which in fact *make (and/or have made) a difference*—particulars which will be seen to have been (and to be still) positively engaged in processes of change.[30]

As distinct from the traditional historicist and philological critic, the new historicist displays an awareness of the dynamic and dialectical relations between a work and the historical particulars that partially constituted its "meaning" upon composition or first publication. He must also demonstrate such an awareness as he attends to subsequent moments in the history of the work's existence, including the critic's own historical moment, for a text's meanings and interpretations are not static. They change according to the expectations, values, social milieu, and aims of the reader. Moreover, any attempt critically to explore a work's meanings over history will be influenced by these same considerations as they relate to the critic. His project, therefore, must be undertaken at a high level of self-consciousness.

Marilyn Butler, a new historicist whose work complements that of McGann, has usefully extrapolated five principles for a "genuinely historical" method in criticism, emphasizing (1) that literary works be examined "as far as [is] possible from within their own discourse or code or cultural system"; (2) that "the definition of literature . . . should not be exclusive," because "canons" are determined by readers and institutions with ideological biases—all texts are possible objects of the critic's

scrutiny, including letters, sermons, and advertisements, as well as what are traditionally considered to be "great" or "major" works; (3) that the full complexity of intertextual relations, that is, a work's or author's relationship to precursors—whether dependent, revisionist, or competitive—must be carefully examined; (4) that the modern historicist critic must "acknowledge his own position . . . as bound in time and place," aware that his task is not the impossible one of reconstructing the past but rather of understanding "how writing functions in its world, in order to understand writing, the world, and ourselves"; and (5) that "a genuinely historical perspective discourages dogmatism, by obliging us to foreground the difference between our circumstances, aims, and language, and those of the past."[31] These general principles are fundamental to the endeavors of new historicist criticism. They in no way conflict with McGann's more highly theorized program or with Herbert Lindenberger's detailed descriptions of "A New History in Literary Study" that appeared in 1984.[32]

Lindenberger's primary goal is to distinguish "old" historicist criticism from the work of the "new" historicists. The conceptions of their respective projects are deeply opposed. "Traditional literary historians viewed themselves in a relatively subservient role" as "essentially guardians of a tradition . . . whose task was to preserve and transmit what had long since passed as sanctified." They adopted a characteristic stance of self-effacement, most often refusing to recognize the "cultural biases and the interpretive conventions" built into their method. Rooted in nineteenth-century German philological traditions, the "older history . . . sought to emulate the objectivity that the natural sciences of that time conceived for themselves," hoping to construct a "temple of knowledge that would last into perpetuity," and they did so most often with a decidedly nationalist bias, whether German, English, or American.[33]

By contrast, the new historicist critics see their own relation to literary history and to history itself as problematic. Like Butler, Lindenberger describes these critics as suspicious of dogma and certainty. They are interested in tracing changes in the canon from one historical moment to the next, "seeking out the motivations behind these changes, studying the ideological and institutional framework that creates a particular canon at a particular time."[34] With no "illusions about a work's unity, autonomy, or . . . its need for enshrinement," they draw aggressively upon work in disciplines as diverse as music, anthropology, linguistics, and theory of science to pursue their projects in literary history. In doing so they are not only intellectually versatile, but often self-consciously playful: "conditioned as they are by the theoretical advances of recent years, they readily suspect any method that, like the older history, claims

itself to be natural or in tune with common sense." Further, the new historicists do not always structure their "narratives" about literary events in the chronological order of their occurrence. They realize that "the juxtaposition of works or events from diverse periods can often reveal more about temporal sequence than a narrative that is forced to reconstitute this sequence." They realize that an original understanding of events can arise not only "from a new factual discovery" but also "from looking at phenomena from a new, often even a strange, angle of vision" or in previously unexamined contexts.[35]

Like the project of the new literary history, that of reception history must be undertaken by scholar critics sensitive to the obstacles to their endeavor posed by the work of authoritative institutions of the past and present; they must be skeptical of "history" as closed narrative; they must be widely knowledgeable in diverse disciplines and in the historical shape of these disciplines; and they must possess an unstinting awareness of their *own* cultural values and predispositions that bias or determine their understanding of the cultural moments which they attempt to analyze. If Jauss's project is expanded and allied with the new historicism, the resulting literary and sociohistorical endeavors of specific critics will be partial and relative. The enlarged project as a whole must be understood as a *dynamic* one, not circumscribed by a sense of the historian's present as the goal of history, or even by some future historical endpoint.[36] Precisely because of the relativism and dynamism of such a project, it provides fertile soil for the growth of literary historical knowledge and understanding, but only if "historical," "knowledge" and "understanding" are construed as fluid rather than rigidified categories.

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Sensitive to such objectives and constraints, a general sketch of a truly historicist reception theory might begin by delineating three descriptive rubrics: discursive modes of reception, subject matters of reception, and issues of reception. These rubrics are elaborated as follows.

Discursive Modes of Reception

The discursive—as opposed to ritual or iconographic or other semiotically realized—modes of reception are either public or private. They are described in five categories: (1) *editions* of works (including letters); (2) published *critical* (that is, evaluative) *commentary* on the author, including critical monographs, reviews of editions, biographies, and explicit but "incidental" allusion to him and his works; (3) *epistolary discussion;*

(4) *quoted conversation*; and (5) overt or covert *appropriation* of an author's work by a subsequent writer.

These modes of reception occur synchronically and diachronically, and they take place on a variety of sometimes overlapping social and cultural *levels*, often involving a reciprocal mediation (or exchange) of power among authors, their readers and cultural institutions. (For instance, on the level of intertextuality one author can provide various enabling conditions for the work of another.) In addition to the reception of one writer by another, reception relations work at numerous other levels, including those of author and editor; author and "common" reader (including the author and the popular media); and author and intelligensia. The last level may well involve the relations between an author (that is, his reputation) and cultural institutions which determine values and taste, such as religious groups or the academy. In every case the "recipient" of an author—from mere reader of his work to those who wish to make his work "public" in various ways—is empowered by that author, whether he derive simply pleasure or something in addition—prestige or ideology—from valorizing work by the author in question or even from devaluing it.

1) *Editions* of an author's work (whether posthumous or contemporaneous) operate at all levels of reception relations, for they make that work easily available in the public domain. As we shall see when discussing "issues" of reception, however, editions are "discursive" even when they lack any non-ontological material, that is, even when they exist only as an unembellished text. All publications present themselves in such a way as to imply self-commentary. The design of a volume or periodical, its price, the quality of its production, indeed the very publisher or place of publication make a statement about the circumstances of a work's author, its anticipated audience, and the values and "horizon of expectations" that audience is likely to have. As we well know, a novel published today by a university press will probably have a very different audience (intellectually elite and academic) from one published by a commercial press; though the latter may reach both audiences, the former almost certainly will not.

2) Reviews of work by an author, along with other published *critical commentary*, biographies, and direct and explicit allusions to him and his writings together comprise the most visible, systematic, and comprehensive mode of (his) reception. These materials operate directly only at fairly restricted levels of reception, appealing to specialized audiences, especially afficianados and academics. Their indirect effects—for instance, through oral transmission—can be powerful and widespread. If unusually successful or even sensational, these materials become

empowering not only for the author they treat but also for themselves, expanding the levels of reception available to an author and sometimes even creating an audience. In this respect, as well as other respects, such materials are cumulative and complementary. At any particular historical moment, of course, they largely constitute and simultaneously determine an author's "reputation."

3) Unlike critical commentary, biography, and published allusion to a writer's work, *epistolary discussion* operates, for a time at least, in a strictly private sphere. Thus it may be seen to reinforce, expand upon, supplement, or undercut published commentary. Epistolary reception is especially useful to the literary historian in its revelation of critical evaluations or beliefs that may run counter to a publicly accepted ideology which a correspondent fears to transgress openly. This mode of reception is valuable, too, in occasionally providing responses to an author or his work from sometimes unexpected, normally "invisible" or silent audiences. Nonetheless, epistolary evidence of reception, like the "public" commentaries discussed above, usually comes from the pens of the clerisy, the educated classes or intelligensia who participate in or govern the culture-determining and culture-preserving institutions of their era. At the same time, epistolary discussion of work by contemporary or past authors is available to historians in self-limiting ways. That is to say that by the time such letters become available to the historian, they are usually (though not always) edited. The editor's choices involved in publishing letters restrict their usefulness for purposes of cultural generalization. Such choices include not only those matters which apply to the other forms of published commentary cited above, but also the choice by an editor of the very figure whose letters are being edited and published.

4) *Quoted conversation* can be published or unpublished and entirely ephemeral therefore. Though word-of-mouth reception relations are ultimately not open to analysis, we can expect that in quantity, quality, and influence on public opinion, they will parallel an author's reception in the other modes available for analysis. Before the twentieth century epistolary reception and quoted conversation may be expected to approximate word-of-mouth reception. Once published, quoted conversations, like letters, publicly fix this mode of reception. Such conversation can appear within letters as well as in influential published works such as biographies (Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, for example). This mode of reception is special in its uncertain authority. The form in which it is available and the contexts in which it appears constitute an interpretation (or itself a reception) of a reception.

5) An author's open or covert *appropriation* of writings (style, language, literary forms, ideology) by a contemporary or a precursor is a mode of reception discussed widely in recent years. Often used exclusively, rather than in concert with analyses of the other modes of reception, explorations of authorial appropriation appeal especially to contemporary psychoanalytical critics and those who undertake to trace the lineage of particular literary forms, topoi, and traditions. (In recent years the writings of critics as methodologically divergent as Harold Bloom, Gerard Genette, M. H. Abrams, and Linda Hutcheon, for instance, focus often on issues which require them to discuss reception largely in terms of appropriation.) As "appropriation" implies, this mode of reception is fundamentally hermeneutical, involving interpretation, but often also revisionism. This mode of reception, as it appears both synchronically and diachronically, frequently demonstrates alternate (synchronic) or altered (diachronic) values in specific spheres (religious, literary, social, moral, economic, political, etc.) or, more comprehensively, alternate or evolved ideologies.

Subject Matters of All Reception Modes

The subject matters with which the various reception modes concern themselves clearly overlap and interact with one another. To organize our understanding of the dynamics of reception, however, it is useful to categorize these subject matters as prospective emphases in a given instance of reception in one or more modes. Subject matters include the *writings*, the *personality*, the *biography*, and the *ideology* (or composite value systems) of an author.

Commentary on the *writings* of an author, whether it appear in critical, epistolary, or appropriative modes, is most often dependent upon texts (rather than hearsay or reputation, for instance). That is to say, for those whose focus of attention is upon writings, an author becomes virtually synonymous with his topics, style(s), employment of literary forms and genres, his "development" in these areas, and so on. With this subject matter as the focus of attention, an author's writings are thus reduced to formal, generic, and linguistic categories. Other readers may interest themselves in another subject matter, such as the author as *personality* or character, which may include selected ideological concerns that emerge in the author's writings, as well as selected biographical materials. But as a subject matter, personality (as in the case of Byron or Swift or Baudelaire, for instance) has as its focus an author's emotional and intellectual self-manifestations and self-representations in social relations, including his perceived or anticipated relationships with readers.

By contrast, in the taxonomy of subject matters, *biography* involves *interpreted patterns* of development and *projected patterns* of meaning in relation to the totality of an author's circumstances, the events of his life (including his writings), his social relationships, and ideology (or changing ideologies) over the course of his lifetime. Such projections and interpretations arise from sources other than the author. When they do appear as authorial self-representation or self-commentary, then they more properly operate under the subject matter of personality. Biography also encompasses the practical effects of ideology upon an author's specific actions and general behavior patterns.

More fully than the writings, personality, and biography of an author, his *ideology* as a subject matter of reception implies a reciprocal interaction between author and reader. This phenomenon makes ideology also an *issue* in reception relations. That is, a reader's interest in an author's value system and beliefs—aesthetic, economic, political, moral, religious, etc.—presupposes a corresponding ideological system on the part of the reader, indeed a mentality or world view that derives pleasure from attempting to understand systematically and explain comprehensively relationships among the various codes of belief and behavior that are seen to preside over an author's writings as well as his actions and the events of his life. While biography may include these events and actions (that is, ideology in praxis), ideology itself remains largely as an ideational, indeed epistemological, phenomenon.

The subject matters delineated here, as I have said, hardly exclude one another. But one subject matter or several in succession, tend to inform and dominate any particular instance of reception activity.

Issues of Reception

For the historian or the theorist of reception all modes and subject matters are problematic in the relations between writer and reader (at all levels), and therefore they become "issues," as do other writerly and readerly circumstances surrounding the production and reception of texts. Matters of taste, canonicity, ideology in all its aspects, power relations, economics, and even attitudes toward historicity and what history "means"—for instance—become the enabling issues of his investigative enterprise. They raise the questions to which he pursues answers. Such issues are always hypostatically involved in all reception activity, and they are of special concern to those who wish to record or analyze that activity, participating in it at second remove—as recipients of the combined phenomena of reception. Thus, the issues which must occupy such theorists and historians of reception at a conscious level constitute what might be termed the thematics of reception history and

exist in a dialogical relationship with a given author, his readers, and the historian or theorist himself. He is compelled, however, in a way that author and reader are not, to be explicitly aware of the particular values, beliefs, predispositions, and historical circumstances that influence each of them separately, that determine the interactions among writer and reader, as well as historian, and that therefore powerfully affect the dynamics of his investigative project. Structuring, rather than impeding, his understanding, an explicit awareness of such issues on the part of the theorist or historian as he investigates each level, mode, and subject matter of reception, enables him in good faith to hypothesize, to formulate tentative conclusions when his materials impel him to do so.

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The essays that follow concern themselves with the ways in which works of literature perpetually reconstitute themselves, both *as* they are experienced over history by readers with changing horizons of expectations and *in* the works of subsequent writers, where the originary text serves as palimpsest. Claus Uhlig employs this term in connection with Michel Foucault's notion of cultural archaeology and Julia Kristeva's semiological formulation of *intertextualité*. In brief, Uhlig understands the evolving relations between literary texts and their precursors as a process of "palingenesis" or the founding of new texts upon stratified layers of (formally, stylistically, or thematically) related antecedent ones. Palimpsests are texts which have been perpetually reconstituted in discrete texts by new authors and are thus "saturated with history."[37] From the point of view of the "new historical" critic concerned with the operations of reception, all texts which outlive the immediate historical moment of production (that is, all texts which remain available for "recovery" and reconstitution) might function as palimpsests, but only those which have been repeatedly appropriated are true palimpsests and largely comprise the "canon." Working in one mode of reception history, analysis of the reception relations between given authors and their texts in one era and those who reconstitute them in another, will help us achieve a degree of "social self-consciousness"[38] higher than that previously possessed. Such analysis will also further our understanding of man's future potential to generate beauty and meaning in literary works.

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Notes

[1] See, for instance, *Canons*, ed. Robert von Hallberg (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1983); Robert Weimann, *Structure and Society in Literary History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1984); "On Writing Histories of Literature," a special issue of *New Literary History* 16, no. 3 (1985); Jane P. Tompkins, *Sensational Designs* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1984); Annette Kolodny, "The Integrity of Memory: Creating a New Literary History of the United States," *American Literature* 57 (1985), 292-307; and Marilyn Williamson, "Toward a Feminist Literary History," *Signs* 10 (1984), 136-47.

[2] Weimann, p. 8.

[3] See especially Joseph E. Duncan, *The Revival of Metaphysical Poetry: The History of a Style, 1800 to the Present* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1959); and Kathleen Tillotson, "Donne's Poetry in the Nineteenth Century (1800-72)," in *Mid-Victorian Studies*, ed. Geoffrey and Kathleen Tillotson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1959), pp. 307-29.

[4] Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1982), p. 45.

[5] Jauss and Wofgang Iser are the foremost theorists of the "Constance School" and of reception theory in general.

[6] *Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction* (London: Methuen, 1984), p. 19.

[7] Jauss, p. 3.

[8] Jauss, p. 5.

[9] Jauss, p. 5.

[10] *Geschichte der poetischen Nationalliteratur der Deutschen*, p. 123.

[11] Jauss, pp. 15-16.

[12] Jauss, p. 20.

[13] Jauss, p. 22.

[14] Jauss, p. 23.

[15] Jauss, p. 25.

[16] Jauss, p. 28.

[17] Jauss, p. 32.

[18] Jauss, p. 34.

[19] Jauss, p. 36.

[20] Jauss, p. 39.

[21] Especially as such an aesthetics is formulated by Thodor Adorno in his *Aesthetic Theory*, 1970. See Jauss's *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1982), pp. 13-22.

[22] Holub, p. 163.

[23] For a succinct discussion of significant developments in "new historical" criticism, see Herbert Lindenberger, "Toward a New History in Literary Study," in *Profession '84* (New York: MLA, 1984), pp. 16-23. For extended illustrations of the new historical methodology, see especially the recent work of Jerome J. McGann, Stephen Greenblatt, Louis Montrose, Jean Howard, Jane Tompkins, and Marilyn Butler.

[24] In "Against Tradition: The Case for a Particularized Historical Method," Marilyn Butler suggests the possible usefulness of such an alliance. Her essay appears in *Historical Studies and Literary Criticism*, ed. Jerome J. McGann (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1985), pp. 25-47.

[25] Jauss, *Reception*, pp. 37, 36.

[26] Butler, p. 36.

[27] Jerome J. McGann, *The Beauty of Inflections: Literary Investigations in Historical Method and Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), pp. 343-44.

[28] McGann, "Introduction: A Point of Reference," in *Historical Studies*, p. 11.

[29] McGann, "Introduction," p. 15.

[30] McGann, "Introduction," pp. 13-14.

[31] Butler, p. 44.

[32] See n. 23.

[33] Lindenberger, pp. 16-21.

[34] Lindenberger, pp. 16-17.

[35] Lindenberger, pp. 17-19.

[36] "Positively speaking, [the] task is to stimulate a *Praxis* by which the culture that we receive and the culture that we leave behind can be made to meet and engage in struggle through potent interaction. In this view, tradition is a product of the past that helps produce the present; it is—to adapt my previous phrase—past culture turned present function. As such, it is meaningful history in the process of its present regeneration, application, and modification. It is a phenomenon ever changing, ever in motion, on which the impress of the past and the impact of the present constantly interact. This interaction produces a meaningful point of contact between both the genesis of a living literature and its past and present *Wirkung* and reception. It is this capacity for relating the living past and the life of the present, the ability to interconnect them and make them interact, that constitutes the historical dialectics of tradition," Weimann, p. 87.

[37] "Literature as Textual Palingenesis: On Some Principles of Literary History," *New Literary History* 16 (1985), 503.

[38] McGann, "Introduction," p. 18.