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## THEORETICAL AND HISTORICAL FORMS IN AND OF THE NOVEL:

## TOWARDS A THEORY OF NARRATIVITY AND MODALITY

by

Ntongela Masilela

*The novel and history have been closely related in the very century which witnessed their greatest development. Their link in depth, that which should allow us to understand at once Balzac and Michelet, is that in both we find the construction of an autarkic world which elaborates its own dimensions and limits, and organizes within these its own time, its own space, its population, its own set of objects and its myths.*

-Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*

The novel, like any other literary object, is constituted by the unity and the continual transformation of content into form, and form into content, within mediated historical instances and their signifying moments. The concrete immediacy of the novel is this continual process of transformation between form and content. What characterizes the novel as a unique literary object is the nature of the literary system from which it developed; the historical contradictions at the precise moment of its origination and their ideological systems; and lastly, the diversified unities and contrarities of temporality and duration in its historical existence. The novel as genre with particular forms, and modes of expression and comprehension, is a process of dialectical interfusion or interpenetration, in the historical development of literary forms within a literary system and a historical reality in which the novel finds its origination and premise. In short, the novel is the unity of *literary form and history* as processes of specification and praxis.

The novel as a literary form, in its dramatic structures of temporality and duration (in its narrativity) within the Western literary system and culture, developed from the Greek epic and later transformations and modifications in the Roman epic (Vergil) and from the novella as practised by Boccaccio (it also was transformed and modified as a novelle in twelfth and thirteenth century France).<sup>1</sup> The novella of Boccaccio

is the immediate historical precursor of the modern bourgeois epic, the novel. The novella depicted a view of the world in an epoch where bourgeois forms of existence were advancing. It was a process of destroying the medieval forms of cognition and comprehension (the novella as a literary and historical mode was an expression of the transition between the medieval and bourgeois epochs, whereas the 'novel' as a historico-literary form in the eighteenth century, was an expression of the ascendancy of the bourgeois epoch). The transformation of the novella as a literary form into the novel, was due to the concrete historical incapacity of the novella to comprehend and signify the totality of objects and of human relations unique to the bourgeois epoch.<sup>2</sup> It is in this respect that the novel specifies the concrete perspectives of the totality of a situation. Whereas the novella depicts a particular and singular situation, the totality of objects and human relations of the bourgeois epoch is what characterizes the literary form of the novel as an extensive totality.<sup>3</sup>

Another literary form from which the novel found its historical premise or presupposition, is the Romance literary form. The novel of Fielding as a comic epic developed from the conventions of the comedy of manners. The romance as a literary mode is characterized by the idealisation of heroism and purity. It is a literary mode in correlation (or homologous) with the ascendancy of the aristocratic class. In this way the romance is in many ways an expression of the historical illusion of aristocratic chivalry. It deals with heroes; whereas, the novel deals with concrete men of particular classes within particular historical contingencies.<sup>4</sup>

It is not an historical accident or coincidence that the first great bourgeois novel, *Don Quixote* by Cervantes, is a violent parody of the romance literary mode and its ideals. This novel destroys the conventions of the romance by parodying them, while it simultaneously reconstitutes the literary conventions of the novelistic mode (the novel form being the simultaneous unity and dissolution of the complex literary conventions and forms of the epic, novella and romance). It is this parodying of the novel at the moment of its origination that made the novel an *ironic* literary mode rather than a *sentimental* one.<sup>5</sup> The concrete difference between the novel and the romance lies in the conceptualization of characters (both the romance and the novel are fictions, but also are particular types of fiction, the novel distinguished by its narrativity) The romance has stylized figures with a powerful subjective intensity, idealize through reverie and individuality. The characters of the novel are objective expressions of personal subjectivity (individualism and their social masks are within a coherent view of bourgeois society).<sup>6</sup> It is this objectivity of the novel within subjective modes which makes it a fictional approach to history. Hence,



the continual dialectic between objective instances and subjective categories centralizes the complex modes of the novel. Therefore, the novel deals with the process of distinction between appearance and reality.<sup>7</sup> The reality which the novel attempts to demystify is the reality of bourgeoisie life, the disappearance of a harmonious community and the contradiction between country and city. Sartre characterizes the historical development of the form of the novel in the following manner:

*Passing from Boccaccio to Cervantes and then to the French novels of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the proceedings grow complicated and become episodic because the novel picks up along the way and incorporates the satire, the fable, and the character sketch. The novelist appears in the first chapter; he announces, he questions his readers, admonishes them, and assures them of the truth of his story. I shall call this primary subjectivity. Then, secondary characters intervene along the way, characters whom the narrator has met and who interrupt the course of the plot to tell the story of their own misfortunes. These are the secondary subjectivities supported and restored by the primary subjectivity. Thus, certain stories are re-thought and intellectualized to the second degree.* 8

What specifies the singular uniqueness of the novel as a genre, with a complex unity of literary modes, is the individualization of its characters and the detailed presentation of their social background.<sup>9</sup> The formation of characters of the novel at its origin, is homologous with the individualism of the bourgeois class. The ideology of the novel at its origination, especially the English novel of the eighteenth century, is the ideology formulated by the English empiricists like Locke. For instance, the individualism of Crusoe, in *Robinson Crusoe*, is the individualism associated with the ideology of economic specialization and the Puritan spiritual being.<sup>10</sup> The novel portrays, in this instance, the conflict between the public and private spheres of bourgeois reality. It is this attempted comprehension of the reality between private and public spheres, which have been dislocated by the capitalist mode of production, that makes the novel the art form which expresses the ideological anxieties of the European bourgeois class.<sup>11</sup>

For a theory of the novel to be concrete and become an instance of historical praxis, it has to recognize the amorphous nature of the novel, and the variety of its origin in temporal and spatial horizons (whether in the epic or novella or romance) The specificity of the novel as a literary genre within literary history, and as a concrete historical object is the result of

the multiplicity of its points of origin and of their final complex unity.<sup>12</sup> Paradoxically, it is not the multiple points of origin of the novel which characterizes its nature but rather the complicated unity of its structural modes within the contemporary novel.

## II

The nature of the novel lies in the complex unity of its temporal and spatial processes as literary orders within a historical moment. The insurmountable breach between the individual and the world<sup>13</sup> within the bourgeois society is at the center of the novel as a literary epic genre. Goldmann analyzes the dichotomy of the novel in the following manner:

*Situated between the two [that is, between the epic and the tragedy], the novel's constitution is dialectical to the extent that it connects precisely the fundamental homogeneity of the hero and world which permits epic form and, on the other hand, their insurmountable rupture. The homogeneity of the hero and the world results from the fact that both are degraded in relation to authentic values; the opposition results from the different constitution of these two degradations.*<sup>14</sup>

According to D. Goldmann then, the novel genre characterized by the separation between the individual and the world, is the result of the transformation on the literary plane of everyday life within an individualistic society born of production for a market. Therefore, this rupture within the novel is merely the reflection of the reified relations within the capitalist mode of production. It is this reflection which posits the rigorous homology between the literary form of the novel and the society in which it is situated. The structure of the novel is in homology with the structure of society.<sup>15</sup> This conception of the nature of the novel is *critical* and *oppositional* in tracing the homologous history of the structures of the novel and the reified world. It is the homology of contemporaneous evolutions.

The critical and oppositional form of the novel structure was to a large extent determined also by its relation to the philosophy of Rationalism of the period of the Enlightenment in Europe. The novel incorporated within itself the rationality of doubt and skepticism towards *what is*. In its development, the novel is critical towards the sovereignty of reason and challenges the primacy of ideas.<sup>16</sup> Moving towards realism as against the idea of the fact, the novel paradoxically combines with sentimentalism as against feeling. It was no accident, therefore, that the principal subject-matter of the novel at



the juncture of its birth was, and continues to be, *LOVE* in one form or another. It coincided with the sexual division of labour at the onset of the Industrial Revolution. The historical epoch in which the novel came into being as a literary genre, was an era in which literature was viewed as something to be enjoyed in loneliness. Hence, the profound intimacy between the novel and the thematics of solitude, loneliness and individualism.

The development of the novel was in close and parallel relation to the growth of the press and the middle class reading public and with the rise of circulation libraries. In the context of these complex historical and social relations, the form of the novel was determined by the conception of art as a commodity. The novel became a mass-produced and mass-circulating commodity in an expanding mercantile economy.

From its inception, the novel has been fragmented in its nature and structure, due primarily to its several points of origin, and the ideological juncture of its birth. The novel at the moment of its origin was at the center of the divergence and convergence of genres, that is, the rise and withering away of new elements of form within the complicated process of interaction of history and literary form.

At this point it is necessary to relate the novel as a literary genre to literary history, for a fuller comprehension of its nature and structure.

According to Lukács' theory, the novel and the epic are the two major forms of great epic literature.<sup>17</sup> The central element which distinguishes them is not the intention of the authors, but rather, the concrete historical reality with which each genre is confronted. The novel, the modern epic, can no longer encompass the extensive totality of life (which is indirectly given) because the imminence of meaning in life has become a problem. The novel is a genre which seeks to totalize life, yet lacks the means to effect it; hence, the fragmented nature of its structure. While the epic gives form to a totality of life from within<sup>18</sup>, the novel seeks to give form to a totality of life by uncovering its imminence from the outside. The distinction between the structure of the object of the epic, and the structure of the object of the novel, and their singular imminent natures, is due to *tensions* and *fissures* of particular historical moments. The composition of the form of the genre is the reality of that particular historical situation. The central contradiction of the novel which affects its compositional structure, is the irreconcilable moment of its interiority and exteriority in relation to history.

In the novel, the totality of objects and the totality of life is systematized in abstract formulations.<sup>19</sup> In contrast to other genres, the novel is a mode of literature that is a process of becoming, a form that is *problematical without having a problematic*.<sup>20</sup> This is the reason why the novel in its very structure is *ironic* and seeks to overcome its oppositional moment towards history. In its wholeness, the novel is an ironic process of becoming which attempts to effect a unity between the problematic individual and the contingent world. From this tension, the composition of the novel:

.....is the paradoxical fusion of heterogeneous and discrete components into an organic whole which is then abolished over and over again.<sup>21</sup>

also,

*The overlapping of the novel form into the epic, such as we have discussed, is rooted in social life; it disrupts the imminence of form only to the extent that, at the crucial point, it imputes a substantiality to the world it describes which that world is in no way capable of sustaining and keeping in a state of balance.*<sup>22</sup>

The novel, therefore, within the literary history of genre formation and dissolution, is the art form which indicates and expresses the irreconcilable contradictions between art and the capitalist mode of production. The novel, in its internal movement, expresses this historical contradiction.

The novel by its qualities of historical reflection and naturalness is a *problematical* genre. It is problematic in expressing the historical structures of the present and man's self-awareness and transcendence, as well as expressing the cognition of its particular mode.<sup>23</sup> In its immediacy and movement, the novel is an integral product of history, a moment towards transcendence, yet finding its originality in and within the historical limitations of the present. It is this movement of the novel, in its process of becoming and in its existence, between the particular and the universal of history, that fragments its interior structures and dynamics and characterizes it as formless. The novel transcends a particular historical instance by finding itself determined from those historical contradictions. The categories of the novel are derived from and are the product of the historical present, that is, the capitalist mode of production.

The formlessness of the categories of the novel, which are prosaic, correspond structurally to the chaotic and formless unity of bourgeois society, and its attendant progressive



and regressive instances. Hence, the novel expresses a moment of human emancipation in its content (the universality of the present) and in its form (the particular of the present). The form of the novel, in its becoming is a continual concrete transformation into history of the immediacy of the present. A concrete process of history that makes the novel an *ambivalent* problematic in its moment or process of *mimesis*. Through the process of *mimesis*, (the solidifying of a historical perspective) the novel is perceived as a moment or medium of dialectical reciprocity between the particularity of history and the ideology of the form or mode. In contradistinction to the epic's specificity and formal symmetry, the novel makes possible an increase in emancipation of the imagination within historical contexts. The novel, while indicating the unlimited possibilities of its formal unities and thematic hierarchies of historical instances, specifies the context of its becoming (bourgeois society) and the subsequent surpassing of that moment of becoming.

The novel therefore, in its reciprocal moment, within and between history and ideology, is dominated by a dialectical contradiction between describing and transcribing - a contradiction that continually asserts itself into new syntheses between the totality of a moment and its singularity. The forms of this phenomenon are the self-objectifications of history. Hence, there is a tendency of the forms of the novel to be and to represent themselves as moments in the openness towards historical projection. For instance, *Don Quixote* is governed in its structure by a movement between illusion and reality through the parodying of chivalry in order to transform the structure into a state of growth which will illuminate and mediate the future development of the novel as an example of intersecting history and ideology.

The novel, as a means of comprehension between history and ideology, determines the types of novelistic modes in accordance with particular manifestations of history. An important element in determining the typology of the novel is the relationship of the subject to its internal and external configurations. This relationship is mediated by the approximate dialectical homologies between the structure of the novel and those of society. It is these complex unities that specify the dialectical homogeneity of the subject within the novelistic modes. Each classification of the novel is characterised by the singular way it synthesizes the significance of its structure within itself and in relation to history.

The historical novel (e.g. *The Betrothed* by Alessandro Manzoni or *Shaka* by Thomas Mofolo) is characterized or constituted by the individuality, the perspective, the typicality of its characters in relation to the historical age which it portrays.<sup>24</sup> What is essential, therefore, in constituting a



*historical novel*, is not the retelling of great historical events, but the synthesizing process of these historical events through the imagination which renders them authentic without being a replication of the real events. It is the concreteness of a time and place and their interrelationship, within a moment of a particular historical movement that gives uniqueness to the *historical novel*. Hence, the portrayal of the intricacy and complexity of historical events in their authenticity, and their manifold interaction, is at the center of the *historical novel* which is therefore the entire process of the totality of objects<sup>25</sup> in relation to the process of *history* and *ideology*.

In contradistinction to the *historical novel*, a historical romance like the *gothic novel*, only dramatizes the sentimentality of subjective feelings peculiar to certain imaginative historical personages without incorporating within itself the principles of perspective and individuation in relation to history. The constant theme of the *gothic novel* is the flight of the heroine from the historical world into the world of evil forces, dominated by infantile fears.<sup>26</sup> Hence, its primary meaning lies in its substitution of terror for love and authentic analytical and projective spheres which would create a milieu for the real constrained movement of the historical process. In short, the *gothic novel* is the novelistic mode of the improbable.

The *psychological novel* (for example, *The Radiance Of The King* by Camara Laye, or *Mission To Kala* by Mongo Beti) or as especially practised by Dostoevsky, is governed by the central concept of the *idea*; an abstract philosophical conception that serves as the dominant synthesizing element of the novelistic structure - a conception that unifies the complex and multitudinous hierarchies of the narrative.<sup>27</sup> The idea regulates the diversity of certain psychological intrigues and complexities that determine the structure of the *psychological novel*. Hence, the idea unites the events of the plot. Although it is unified and centralized, this sub-genre of the novel is characterized by a fragmentary structure with its complex characterizations.

The sub-genres of the novel, historical, gothic and psychological, do not by any stretch of the imagination exhaust the complex forms of the novelistic genre. They merely indicate a particular form of the novel and its nature; nor are they rigid in the structure. They are flexible modes which have the capacity to interpenetrate each other in different, complex ways. The uniqueness of the structure of the novel is its relation to the process of interaction between history and ideology.

## III

The novel, since its inception in Boccaccio, the romance and the epic (its many points of origination and the attendant complex relations), through the development process in *Don Quixote*, located in history and ideology, has been and continues to be a *problematical* genre without a *problematic* within itself. This distinction is of historical importance, since it enables one to avoid the hypostatized abstraction of literary positivism which posits the problemativeness of the novel as being imminent to its nature, rather than being a *process* of relations between the elements of the structure of the novel and the situational context of its becoming and being. Therefore, from a Marxist point of view, the novel is problematical because of the following: the relationship between literary form and history, the class contradictions and relations within the process of history, the relation between the novel and ideology - the very fact that the novel in its structure and movement cannot be reduced to the ideology contemporaneous with it; and the multiplicity of its points of origination. To a Marxist then, the *problematicness* of the novel is the *product* of the simultaneous complex nexus of contradictory relations between it and history, ideology and the history of forms.

The fundamental question that a Marxist would ask regarding the novel is: what is the *process* of the *historical problematic* in the *structuration* of the novel? A theory which seeks to comprehend the structuring of the novel has to recognize its multivalent and multicolored form, acknowledge that central to the novel is the *narrative process*, the interfusion of spatial and temporal moments and recognize the thematic and characterological problems of the novel. Taking cognizance of these historical recognitions, it is necessary, therefore, to delineate the formation of the structure of the novel. To begin, what is the structure of the novel?

Following Bakhtin,<sup>28</sup> one can classify the structure of the novel into two modes, the *monological* structure of the *homophonic* novel, and the *dialogical* structure of the *polyphonic* novel. The structural characteristics of the *polyphonic* novel are complex and multi-leveled, whereas those of the *homophonic* novel are characterized by familial and monological unity.

The composition of the homophonic novel is *synchronous* and less complex than that of the polyphonic and its structural principles are derived from the idealist philosophy which reduces and transforms the unity of existence into the unity of consciousness. This conception of the structure of the novel refuses to recognize the dialectical unity and complexity of the reciprocal process. Consequently, ideology and characterization within the narration are governed by a single conscious-



ness. However, in actual existence, the unity of existence is composed of a multitude of human consciousnesses.

The monistic type of novel does not facilitate the free interaction of the characters' consciousness within the temporal and spatial processes of the narrative. Hence, the complex cognitive interaction of consciousness is negated. Its conception determines the formal accents and movement of the novel, and the ideological perspective is concerned with the artistic style and tone of the novel. As a consequence, the object of representation of the novel is dominated by authorial consciousness, rather than the free movement of ideology as it relates to the characters in their development and interaction within the narrative process. Hence, the ideological position of the characters, events or situations in the novel, is a mere reflection of authorial ideological dominance. Therefore the richness of poetic composition of the novel is reduced to the static dominance of an ideological perspective.

The monological structure of the homophonic novel is static and does not facilitate an authentic interaction between itself, history and ideology. It is dominated by the author's ideological vision which does not make possible the linkage with the processes of history. Nevertheless, great novels such as *Oblomov* by Goncharov and mediocre novels such as *Jagua Nana* by Ekwensi have been produced under this conception.

The dialogical structure of the polyphonic novel, on the other hand, is multi-leveled and *diachronic* in its narrative form. It conceptualizes the temporal and spatial dimensions as moments of a process in relation to ideology, history and the history of forms.

The multifarious elements of the polyphonic novel, such as the voices of characters, their situation within the narrative process (their ideological perspective) remain independent of authorial dominance which elevates them to a higher unity of formation and expression than that of the homophonic novel. This is precisely because within the dialogical structure of this novel, the unity of existence is not reduced to the unity of consciousness. The structure facilitates mediation between temporality and duration. The ideological situation of the novel is the combined unity of multifarious factors and instances.

The polyphonic novel found its full realization in Russia during the nineteenth century, where a form of capitalism was in the process of emerging into the daylight of historical contradictions.<sup>29</sup> Structurally, the polyphonic novel requires the plurality of complex unified voices and tones of characters within the single process of the artistic object. At the center

of this mode of the novel is the inability of its hierarchical determination to be finalized in order to decide the totalizing instance of its movement. Here resides the problematic between the internal unfinalized nature of the characters and the determining moment of their ideological perspective. The polyphonic novel is *par excellence* a mode of open form, or of incompleteness, or as Umberto Eco said, it is a mode of *opera aperta*.<sup>30</sup>

The structure of the polyphonic novel is determined and mediated by dialogical relationships whose elements are contrapuntally poised as a process of synthesis. It is the moment of their convergence and divergence as a process that gives meaning and significance to this structure. The activeness of the authorial ideological position is subordinated to the authenticity of these dialogical relationships in their constant and continual incompleteness. Within this structure, the dialogical field of vision is given maximum plausibility. The dialogical structure of the polyphonic novel allows for a deep organic unity between the ideological formation of characters and the theme that made their existence possible. It is at the center of the polyphonism of the dialogical structure, that the profound and complex transformation of the unity of existence into unity of consciousness, and vice versa is fully realized.

The process of the dialogical relationships is a synthesis between the ideological formation of characters and the stylistic modes of their presentation within the narrative process. The word is the means by which style is brought to realization. Dialogical intercourse of characters in the polyphonic novel is the sphere of language. Hence, dialogical relationships are permeated by linguistic processes and the commonality of language and its process of realization make them possible. Bakhtin traces the relationship in the following manner:

*Dialogical relationships are not reducible to logical or concrete semantic relationships, which are in and of themselves devoid of any dialogical aspect. In order for dialogical relationships to arise among them, they must clothe themselves in the word, become utterances, and become the positions of various subjects, expressed in the word.*<sup>31</sup>

Therefore, dialogical relationships possess their own specific nature. Hence the complexity in the structure of the dialogical relationships of the polyphonic novel. The novels which exemplify this complex movement of the polyphonic novel are, among many others, *The Brothers Karamazov* by Doestoevsky and *Bound to Violence* by Ouologueni.



The existence of the polyphonic novel as a complex mode of the novel genre, does not and cannot mean the nullification of the existence of the homophonic novel. Each has a sphere of existence, which is irreplaceable and irreducible, in the development of historical poetics. It is the contest between the structural modes of the novel that enhances and widens the horizon for literary history to realize itself as a moment of the intersecting process determined by the systems of history, the novel and ideology. The structures of the modes of the novel genre are processes of discontinuous continuity within the multiplicity of the points of origin of the novel - that is, with the epic, the novella of Boccaccio, and the romance and novelle of twelfth and thirteenth century France.

## IV

A theme of the novel is contingent upon the particular processes of history and ideology as they are objectified as instances of meaning in the structural formation of the novel. The theme (what is being projected as a unifying moment of the object of representation) of the novel unifies and gives meaning to the separate and disparate sentences; simultaneously, they are transformed into coherent structural modes.

A theme is constituted by the unifying system of historical modes and composed of smaller thematic elements arranged in two definite orders: the thematic elements in which causal-temporal relationships exist and are governed by the narrative process (for example, the novel and the epic); and those thematic elements in which there is no internal exposition of causal connections and in which the thematic elements are contemporaneous (for example, poetry).<sup>32</sup> A plot is the simultaneous and parallel process within the thematic system. It arranges and connects the order of events in the sequence determined by the narration of the particular object of representation (for example, the novel).

The theme of an artistic object of representation has meaning and significance only as it signifies a moment within the narrative process; therefore, it is necessary to examine the configuration of *narrativity* in the process of structuring the novel.

## V

The form and nature of the structure of the novel, within the intersecting process of history and ideology, is determined by the narrative process. It is this process which places the epic and the novel within the same fundamental literary genre. The narrative process is the system that unifies the

different variants of the novel; it acts as a *mediating process*<sup>33</sup> between the temporal and the spatial dimensions; it is, in short, a dialectical movement that gives coherence, precision and wholeness to the structural organization of the novel (the modern bourgeois epic). The mediacy of the novel therefore finds its concrete expression in the narrative process or situation.

The thematic moments of the novel in their interaction, interfusion and interdependence, as hierarchical and interpenetrating determinants, is structured by the narrative process, which is also at the center of the fictional mediacy of the novel.

A narrative process is not unique to the modern novel, but has a long tradition from antiquity to the present; it is a constituent of any literary genre which is fictional. The narrative originated in the epic and developed into two antithetical forms as the epic disintegrated - the *empirical* and the *fictional* narration.<sup>34</sup> The empirical narrative as a moment of epic synthesis transformed the allegiance of history to reality. The fictional narrative on the other hand, transforms historical allegiance to myth and into immediacy with the ideal. The history of narrative is governed by this tension between the real and the ideal, the non-fictional and the fictional, the particular and the universal, the prosaic and the poetical.

The new synthesis of the fictional and the empirical narrative modes into a new literary genre was effected by Cervantes in *Don Quixote*; hence, the fundamental historical importance of this novel, besides its own artistic greatness. The novel therefore, is the product of the *new* synthesis of the empirical and fictional elements of the narrative process.<sup>35</sup> Hence the close similarities and resemblances between the novel and the epic. Both of these genres are governed by the syntheses of these two narrative modes, the distinction lying in the nature of the dialectical unification.

This dialectical reunification in the novel of the empirical and fictional elements of the narrative process, has determined the representational aspect of the plot and the illustrative aspect of the theme.<sup>36</sup> It is this dialectical synthesis which is at the center of the profane and sacred histories of the novel; hence the historicity of the novel in relation to history and ideology. In this sense the novel is the recording of the passions of classes in history and its meaning is conditioned by the dialectical tension between the fictional and empirical elements of the narrative process, which is part of the sacred and profane moments of history. Therefore the rationality of the novel is contingent upon the concrete unification of these fictional and empirical elements.



It is by means of this dialectical unification that the narrative process constitutes itself as a discourse between the thematic and plot elements of the novel and a unifying act of explanation and interpretation:

.....*the unities of action, which are segmented and organized.....the extremities of these sequences are only switching points in the narrative, such that if one element is changed, all the rest are different. The logic of action consists then in a linking together of action kernels (....) which all together constitute the narrative's structural continuity; the application of this technique results in a "dechronologizing" of the narrative, so as to make apparent the narrative logic underlying narrative..... Ultimately, the narrative is reduced to a combination of a few dramatic unities..*37

A narrative process is a system whose unities of action is governed by movement of the temporal and spatial dimensions and is therefore constituted by the chronological and non-chronological successive movement of *time* within the *space* of the novel.

Constituted then, by two simultaneous moments of the temporal sequence in relation to the spatial; the time of the 'telling' of the narrative and the time of the 'told' of the narrative,<sup>38</sup> the narrative process is a system of temporal transformations whose object is the chronological sequence of events,<sup>3</sup> while the spatial movements of the sequence of events and situation is its duration. This duality of time renders the complex movement of narration - its convolutions, distortions, inversions and conversions.

The discourse of the narrative process is the alternating movement between the 'telling' and 'told' moments of the theme as subject of the novel. A narrative is the unity of time and space. It is the narrative process *in* the novel as a dialectical reciprocity of discourse that mediates and conjoins the moment in which the novel and ideology (mediated by a non-fictional narrative process) intersect as particular histories. The novel intersects with history through the *categories of time* ("temporal relationships between the narrative and the 'actual' events that are being told"); and through the *categories of mode* ("relationships between the narrative and the narrating agency itself: narrative situation, level of narration, status of the narrator and the recipient, etc.")<sup>40</sup> By these categories the novel as a literary text contains or incorporates the historical substratum of historicalness. 41

The dialectical unity of the categories of time, mode and voice engenders the system of duration, the interrelationships

of events and the narrative, and the system of frequency, the repetition between the events and the narrative. The conversion, inversion, symmetry of the dialectical systems of frequency and duration as a unifying process establishes the threshold of comprehension where the novel and history converge and diverge as transformational instances of each other. The novel and history form the threshold of an interactional process through the following variants of transformation - instances of inversion, expansion, reduction, contamination, intensification and attenuation.<sup>42</sup>

It is necessary now to examine the concrete specification of the problematic (the plurality of narrative acts) of the narrative process as a system.

The narrative process, which is transcultural, interactional and transhistorical, is composed of a hierarchy of levels - the level of functions, the level of actions and the level of narration<sup>43</sup>-whose totality is to project the parallel concatenations of the narrative onto a vertical axis. They constitute a collective mode of integration.

The *level of function* is the combination of the smallest units or segments (motifs) of the narrative; they determine the actions and mode of the narrative discourse. The functionality of the narrative unit is determined by the integrative and distributional moments of temporality.<sup>44</sup> The *level of action* defines the participation of characters as a mediated moment of praxis within the spatial instant of the narrative.<sup>45</sup> The *level of narration* activates the other two levels in a dialogical fashion by transforming them into actatives (singularities of presentation) of the narrative process.<sup>46</sup> The narrative process is a continual temporal movement between moments of the integration and disintegration of these three unified levels.

Temporality is the fundamental determining principle of the narrative process; temporality transforms time of presentation within the narrative, into discontinuous unities in contradiction to the sequential time of events or situations. Temporality is a dominant effect on the narrative process; a process governed by the two principles of *succession* and *transformation*.<sup>47</sup> The narrative process is composed of these two principles; they are modes or forms of temporality and duration. This then is the *process* of the narrative in the novel as it mediates itself between history and ideology.

The novel among all the other literary genres is the most comprehensive in encompassing the totality of objects and the totality of relationships within a historical moment; hence, it is pre-eminently a recorder of *historical passions* (philosophical, ideological, class contestations, etc.).



Truly, as Balzac put it, the novel ".....is the private history of nations."

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Footnotes

1. It would be valuable and fascinating to launch a historical investigation as to the reason, or reasons why the Occidental and Chinese cultures were able to initiate the development of the novel from the epic (in dissimilar ways and at contradictory historical moments); whereas the African, Indian and Indian-American cultures were not successful in launching a dialectical transition from the epic to the novel. This would illuminate concretely the profound dialectical unity and contradiction between literary form and history. For instance, the direct linking of the development of the novel to the rise of the bourgeois class within Occidental culture (though correct) is rendered extremely *problematical*, when one recognizes that the Chinese novel developed within the high point of the medieval epoch (feudal mode of production) not at the moment of its dissolution into another epoch. This also holds true for the Japanese novel. These complex problems of literary history and system are the unique moments of the dialectical process within history.
2. Lukacs, Georg, *Solzhenitsyn*, p. 7.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
4. Frye, Northrop, "Specific Continuous Forms (Prose Fiction)", in *The Novel: Modern Essays in Criticism* ed. Robt. M. Davis, p. 33.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
7. Schroder, Maurice Z., "The Novel as Genre", in *The Novel: Modern Essays in Criticism* ed. by Robert M. Davis, p. 44.
8. Sartre, Jean-Paul, *What is Literature?*, p. 132.
9. Watt, Ian, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*, p. 17.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 74.
11. Knight, Everett, *A Theory of the Classical Novel*, p. 55. This identification of the novel as art form with the ascending bourgeois class is prevalent among Occidental theorists of the novel, notwithstanding their different ideological leanings. Though true within a European context, it becomes

- more problematical when one takes as a context the whole world in tracing the historical development of the novel as a literary mode. See Note 1.
12. Freedman, Ralph, "The Possibility of a Theory of the Novel", in *The Disciplines of Criticism: Essays in Literary Theory, Interpretation, and History* ed. Peter Demetz, et. al., p. 60.
  13. Goldmann, Lucien, "Introduction to the Problems of a Sociology of the Novel", in *Telos*, Winter 1973-1974 No. 18, p. 123.
  14. *Ibid.*, p. 123.
  15. This close approximation of the novel and the society in which it finds itself, is illuminating, though dangerous, since it leans towards dialectical mechanism. This is limiting, because it minimizes the literary history of the form of the novel, that is, the dialectic between literary form and history.
  16. Fielder, Leslie, *Love and Death in the American Novel*, p. 4.
  17. Lukacs, Georg, *The Theory of the Novel*, p. 56. Though this theory of the novel was formulated during the Kantian period of Lukacs' intellectual development, it has a more profound and comprehensive understanding of the structures and categories of the novel than his later Marxist and Hegelian periods. The reason for this paradoxical situation is complex, and would in and of itself require a long treatise to untangle.
  18. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
  19. *Ibid.*, p. 70
  20. *Ibid.*, p. 72
  21. *Ibid.*, p. 84.
  22. *Ibid.*, p. 144.
  23. Feher, Ferenc, "Is the Novel Problematic?" in *Telos*, Spring 1973 No. 15, p. 48.
  24. Lukacs, Georg, *The Historical Novel*, p. 198.
  25. *Ibid.*, p. 92.
  26. Fielder, Leslie, *op. cit.*, p. 108.
  27. Grossman, Leonid, *Balzac and Dostoevsky*, p. 63.



28. Bakhtin, M.M., *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics and Rabelais and his World*.
29. The historical reasons for the development of the polyphonic novel in Russia as opposed to some other place are complex and not easy to specify. The polyphonic novel emerged with Dostoevsky.
30. See Preface, for elucidation of this conception in relation to the novel as a text.
31. Bakhtin, M.M., *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 150. The above paragraphs are a synthesis of the "Bakhtin Schools" conception of historical poetics.
32. Tomachevsky, Boris, "Thematics", in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays* ed. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis, p. 66.
33. Stanzel, Franz, *Narrative Situations in the Novel*, p. 6.
34. Scholes, Robert and Kellogg, Robert, *The Nature of the Narrative*, p. 13-14.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
37. Ricoeur, Paul, "What is a Text? Explanation and Interpretation" in *Mythic-Symbolic Language and Philosophical Anthropology: A Constructive Interpretation of the thought of Paul Ricoeur* by David M. Rasmussen, p. 142-143.
38. Metz, Christian, *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, p. 18.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
40. Genette, Gerard, "Time and Narrative in *A La Recherche Du Temps Perdu*", in *Aspects of Narrative* ed. J. Hillis Miller, p. 93.
41. Iser, Wolfgang, "Indeterminacy and the Reader's Response in Prose Fiction", in *Ibid.*, p. 5.
42. Propp, Vladimir, "Fairy Tale Transformations", in *Readings in Russian Poetics*, ed. Ladislav Matejka and Krystyna Pomorska, p. 102-104. The specification and delineation of those variants of transformation is extremely complex. Hence their mere mention, which does not lessen their importance in acting as a moment of praxis between history and the novel.

43. Barthes, Roland, "An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative", in *New Literary History*, Winter 1975, p. 243.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 246.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 258.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 265
47. Todorov, Tzvetan, "The Two Principles of Narrative" in *Diacritics* Fall 1971, p. 39.

#### GLOSSARY

1. HISTORY: *History* is a process; a process that is the unity of the history of men and the history of nature. It is a process defined by, and determined by concrete material conditions of existence. It is through periodization of particular production systems and social relations in determining singular social formations, that *history* becomes a scientific enterprise. *History* is a transformational process governed by the class struggle; a class struggle dialectically determined by the material contradiction between productive forces and production - social relations.  
Reference: *Collected Works*, Vol. 5, by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Politics and History* by Louis Althusser, and *Revolution in Guinea* by Amilcar Cabral.
2. IDEOLOGY: *Ideology* is a 'lived' and imaginary relation of particular men within particular concrete material conditions. Though having no history, *ideology* is governed and determined by the process of history through various mediations. *Ideology* is a function by a singular consciousness, whether true or false, of a particular class or social group. It is a product, to a large extent of a particular material contestation.  
Reference: *Collected Works*, Vol. 5, by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *For Marx* by Louis Althusser, and *The Wretched of the Earth* by Frantz Fanon.
3. LITERARINESS: A concept developed by the Russian Formalists, Roman Jakobson, Boris Eikhenbaum and Jurii Lynjanov, which attempts to specify the uniqueness and essence of literature; that which is imminent to literature itself. *Literariness* is 'what makes a given work a literary work' - R. Jakobson. *Literariness*, therefore, is constituted by the literary forms and modes of a literary system. The Russian Formalists' presentation of this concept was false, since to them, it was not mediated by the dialectical process of history through periodization; to them, *literariness* is constant



and ahistorical. This is incorrect. Marxist poetics defines *literariness* as the ideological functioning and contestation of literary forms and modes within particular literary systems as mediated by contentious moments of history. *Literariness*, in accordance with the principles of historical poetics (Marxist), is a changing object, whose specification is determined, to a large extent, by the objective ideological contestation of a particular period.

Reference: *Readings in Russian Poetics* ed. by L. Matyka and K. Pomorska, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* by Mikhail Bakhtin, and *Writing Degree Zero/Elements of Semiology* by Roland Barthes.

4. PERIODIZATION: A concept that specifies the nature and process of a particular historical trajectory. *Periodization* is a moment of unity, which concretizes the antithetical elements or categories of a historical conjunction. For instance, it is through the concept of periodization that one can historically understand the localization of literary relations within production relations. Through mediation, interpenetration, and the unity of opposites, *periodization* traces the movement of concrete determinations in a process of historical conjecture. It illuminates the continuous and discontinuous moments of literary history.  
Reference: *Structure and Society in Literary History: Studies in the History and Theory of Historical Criticism* by Robert Weimann.
5. POETICS: *Poetics* is the system of literary genres. A genre is constituted by a specific configuration of literary modes and forms to constitute a literary object like the novel, novella or epic. *Poetics* studies the process of particular literary formations within a particular literary system which is mediated by the process of history. *Poetics* is historical in its approach and presentation, since genres tend to develop or come to fruition in moments of historical crisis or rupture.  
Reference: *Analysis of the Poetic Text* by Jurii Lotman, *The Historical Novel* by Georg Lukacs, *Anatomy of Criticism* by Northrop Frye, *A Theory of Semiotics* by Umberto Eco, and *The Fantastic* by Tzvetan Todorov.
6. PROBLEMATIC: A critical conjecture, governed by the presence and absence of problems and concepts of historical trajectory. The process of a problematic is unique and singular to a particular historical determination. "A word or concept cannot be considered in isolation; it only exists in the theoretical or ideological framework in which it is used: its problematic." - Ben Brewster in a glossary *FOR MARX* by Althusser.  
Reference: *For Marx* by Louis Althusser, *Reading Capital*

by Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Illuminations* and *Understanding Brecht* by Walter Benjamin.

7. PROCESS: *Process* is a development and movement of a particular totality in relation to the real conditions of history. For Marx, *process* is governed by a dialectical system which is mediated by material and concrete determinations; for Hegel, it is mediated by the Logos. While *process* is for Hegel an expressive totality mediated by teleological trajectories; for Marx, it is a function of a concrete totality. Hence, the controversy between Louis Althusser and Lucio Colletti is around the concept of process; for the former, *process* is a movement without a subject; whereas for the latter, it is a movement governed by the particular functioning of a subject.

Reference: *Marxism and Hegel* by Lucio Colletti, and *Politics and History* by Louis Althusser.

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This is the first part of a two-part essay. The second part will appear in Vol VII, no. 3.

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