

Literary History: A Systematic Approach

Lecture 9: Crisis? What Crisis? (c. 1750-1800)

1) Famous Definitions of the Novel

2) Crisis?

3) The Novel as a Romantic Genre?!

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1) Famous Definitions of the Novel

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, “Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik” (1835-38)

Das “*Romanhafte* im modernen Sinne des Wortes” steht im Zeichen des Konflikts zwischen

“Individuen mit ihren subjektiven Zwecken” und der “feste[n], sichere[n] Ordnung der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft und des Staats”, zwischen “der Poesie des Herzens und der entgegenstehenden Prosa der Verhältnisse”.

(Theorie-Werkausgabe, Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1970, Bd. 14: 219f. u. Bd. 15: 392f.)

Georg Lukács, *Die Theorie des Romans* (1920)

[D]ie Form des Romans ist, wie keine andere, ein Ausdruck der transzendentalen Obdachlosigkeit. [...] Der Roman ist die Epopöe eines Zeitalters, für das die extensive Totalität des Lebens nicht mehr sinnfällig gegeben ist, für das die Lebensimmanenz des Sinnes zum Problem geworden ist, und das dennoch die Gesinnung zur Totalität hat. [...] Die Epopöe gestaltet eine von sich aus geschlossene Lebenstotalität, der Roman sucht *gestaltend* die verborgene Totalität des Lebens aufzudecken und *aufzubauen*. [...] Kontingente Welt und problematisches Individuum sind einander wechselseitig bedingende Wirklichkeiten.

(Neuwied/Berlin: Luchterhand, 1971, 32/47/51/67)

Orientations of Meaning in Modern Fiction:

1) “objective” meaning

- narrative suggests that meaning resides in the world and can be “discovered”
- key categories: probability/(the illusion of) reference
- narrative draws upon conventionalized/“naturalized” views of the world
- events seem to “speak for themselves”

2) subjective meaning

- narrative suggests that meaning is “constructed” by individuals
- key categories: experience/time
- subjective meaning can emerge either in accordance with “objective” orientations
(> education, ‘Bildung’) or in revolt against them (> alienation, isolation)

3) narrative meaning / literary meaning

- narrative acknowledges that meaning is produced by plot structures and other narrative devices
- narrative devices can be supported by additional, specifically literary devices which can be either of traditional or of modern provenance
- reflexivity

Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759-67)

Volume I. Chap. I.

I wish either my father or my mother, or indeed both of them, as they were in duty both equally bound to it, had minded what they were about when they begot me; had they duly consider'd how much depended upon what they were then doing; - that not only the production of a rational Being was concern'd in it, but that possibly the happy formation and temperature of his body, perhaps his genius and the very cast of his mind; - and, for aught they knew to the contrary, even the fortunes of his whole house might take their turn from the humours and dispositions which were then uppermost: -- Had they duly weighed and considered all this, and proceeded accordingly, -- I am verily persuaded I should have made a quite different figure in the world, from that, in which the reader is likely to see me. - Believe me, good folks, this is not so inconsiderable a thing as many of you may think it; - you have all, I dare say, heard of the animal spirits, as how they are transfused from father to son, etc. etc. - and a great deal to that purpose: - Well, you may take my word, that nine parts in ten of a man's sense or his nonsense, his successes and miscarriages in this world depend upon their motions and activity, and the different tracks and trains you put them into; so that when they are once set a-going, whether right or wrong, 'tis not a halfpenny matter, - away they go clattering like hey-go-mad; and by treading the same steps over and over again, they presently make a road of it, as plain and as smooth as a garden-walk, which, when they are once used to, the Devil himself sometimes shall not be able to drive them off it.

Pray, my dear, quoth my mother, have you not forgot to wind up the clock? -- Good G -! cried my father, making an exclamation, but taking care to moderate his voice at the same time, -- ***Did ever woman, since the creation of the world, interrupt a man with such a silly question? Pray, what was your father saying? -- Nothing.***

Chap. II.

- Then, positively, there is nothing in the question, that I can see, either good or bad.
-- Then let me tell you, Sir, it was a very unseasonable question at least, - because it scattered and dispersed the animal spirits, whose business it was to have escorted and gone hand-in-hand with the HOMUNCULUS, and conducted him safe to the place destined for his reception.

The HOMUNCULUS, Sir, in how-ever low and ludicrous a light he may appear, in this age of levity, to the eye of folly or prejudice; - to the eye of reason in scientifick research, he stands confess'd - a BEING guarded and circumscribed with rights: -- The minutest philosophers, who, by the bye, have the most enlarged understandings, (their souls being inversely as their enquiries) shew us incontestably, That the HOMUNCULUS is created by the same hand, - engender'd in the same course of nature, - endowed with the same loco-motive powers and faculties with us: -- That he consists, as we do, of skin, hair, fat, flesh, veins, arteries, ligaments, nerves, cartilages, bones, marrow, brains, glands, genitals, humours, and articulations; -- is a Being of as much activity, -- and, in all senses of the word, as much and as truly our fellow-creature as my Lord Chancellor of England. - He may be benefited, he may be injured, - he may obtain redress; - in a word, he has all the claims and rights of humanity, which *Tully*, *Puffendorff*, or the best ethick writers allow to arise out of that state and relation.

Now, dear Sir, what if any accident had befallen him in his way alone? --or that, thro' terror of it, natural to so young a traveller, my little gentleman had got to his journey's end miserably spent; -- his muscular strength and virility worn down to a thread; - his own animal spirits ruffled beyond description, - and that in this sad disorder'd state of nerves, he had laid down a prey to sudden starts, or a series of melancholy dreams and fancies for nine long, long months together. -- I tremble to think what a foundation had been laid for a thousand weaknesses both of body and mind, which no skill of the physician or the philosopher could ever afterwards have set thoroughly to rights.

Chap. III.

To my uncle Mr. *Toby Shandy* do I stand indebted for the preceding anecdote, to whom my father, who was an excellent natural philosopher, and much given to close reasoning upon the smallest matters, had oft, and heavily, complain'd of the injury; but once more particularly, as my uncle *Toby* well remember'd, upon his observing a most unaccountable obliquity, (as he call'd it) in my manner of setting up my top, and justifying the principles upon which I had done it, - the old gentleman shook his head, and in a tone more expressive by half of sorrow than reproach, - he said his heart all along foreboded, and he saw it verified in this, and from a thousand other observations he had made upon me, That I should neither think nor act like any other man's child: -- *But alas!* continued he, shaking his head a second time, and wiping away a tear which was trickling down his cheeks, *My Tristram's misfortunes began nine months before ever he came into the world.*

-- My mother, who was sitting by, look'd up, - but she knew no more than her backside what my father meant, - but my uncle, Mr. *Toby Shandy*, who had been often informed of the affair, - understood him very well.

Chap. IV.

I know there are readers in the world, as well as many other good people in it, who are no readers at all, - who find themselves ill at ease, unless they are let into the whole secret from first to last, of every thing which concerns you.

It is in pure compliance with this humour of theirs, and from a backwardness in my nature to disappoint any one soul living, that I have been so very particular already. As my life and opinions are likely to make some noise in the world, and, if I conjecture right, will take in all ranks, professions, and denominations of men whatever, - be no less read than the *Pilgrim's Progress* itself - and, in the end, prove the very thing which *Montaigne* dreaded his essays should turn out, that is, a book for a parlour-window; - I find it necessary to consult every one a little in his turn; and therefore must beg pardon for going on a little further in the same way: For which cause, **right glad I am, that I have begun the history of myself in the way I have done; and that I am able to go on tracing every thing in it, as *Horace* says, *ab Ovo*.**

Horace, I know, does not recommend this fashion altogether: But that gentleman is speaking only of an epic poem or a tragedy; - (I forget which) - besides, if it was not so, I should beg Mr. *Horace's* pardon; - for **in writing what I have set about, I shall confine myself neither to his rules, nor to any man's rules that ever lived.**

To such, however, as do not choose to go so far back into these things, I can give no better advice, than that they skip over the remaining part of this Chapter; for I declare before hand, 'tis wrote only for the curious and inquisitive.

----- Shut the door. -----

I was begot in the night, betwixt the first *Sunday* and the first *Monday* in the month of *March*, in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and eighteen. I am positive I was. - But how I came to be so very particular in my account of a thing which happened before I was born, is owing to another small anecdote known only in our own family, but now made publick for the better clearing up this point.

My father, you must know, who was originally a *Turky* merchant, but had left off business for some years, in order to retire to, and die upon, his paternal estate in the county of --, was, I believe, one of the most regular men in every thing he did, whether 'twas matter of business, or matter of amusement, that ever lived. As a small specimen of this extreme exactness of his, to which he was in truth a slave, - he had made it a rule for many years of his life, - on the first *Sunday night* of every month throughout the whole year, - as certain as ever the *Sunday* night came, -- to wind up a large house-clock which we had standing upon the back-stairs head, with his own hands: - And being somewhere between fifty and sixty years of age, at the time I have been speaking of, - he had likewise gradually brought some other little family concernments to the same period, in order, as he would often say to my uncle *Toby*, to get them all out of the way at one time, and be no more plagued and pester'd with them the rest of the month.

It was attended but with one misfortune, which, in a great measure, fell upon myself, and the effects of which I fear I shall carry with me to my grave; namely, that, from an unhappy association of ideas which have no connection in nature, it so fell

out at length, that my poor mother could never hear the said clock wound up, - but the thoughts of some other things unavoidably popp'd into her head, - & *vice versâ*: - which strange combination of ideas, the sagacious *Locke*, who certainly understood the nature of these things better than most men, affirms to have produced more wry actions than all other sources of prejudice whatsoever.

But this by the bye.

Now it appears, by a memorandum in my father's pocket-book, which now lies upon the table, »That on *Lady-Day*, which was on the 25th of the same month in which I date my geniture, - my father set out upon his journey to London with my eldest brother Bobby, to fix him at *Westminster* school;« and, as it appears from the same authority, »That he did not get down to his wife and family till the *second week* in *May* following,« - it brings the thing almost to a certainty. However, what follows in the beginning of the next chapter puts it beyond all possibility of doubt.

-- But pray, Sir, What was your father doing all *December*, - *January*, and *February*? -- Why, Madam, - he was all that time afflicted with a *Sciatica*.

Chap. V.

On the fifth day of *November*, 1718, which to the æra fixed on, was as near nine kalendar months as any husband could in reason have expected, -was I *Tristram Shandy*, Gentleman, brought forth into this scurvy and disasterous world of ours. - I wish I had been born in the Moon, or in any of the planets, (except *Jupiter* or *Saturn*, because I never could bear cold weather) for it could not well have fared worse with me in any of them (tho' I will not answer for *Venus*) than it has in this vile, dirty planet of ours, - which o' my conscience, with reverence be it spoken, I take to be made up of the shreds and clippings of the rest; -- not but the planet is well enough, provided a man could be born in it to a great title or to a great estate; or could any how contrive to be called up to publick charges, and employments of dignity or power; - but that is not my case; -- and therefore every man will speak of the fair as his own market has gone in it; - for which cause I affirm it over again to be one of the vilest worlds that ever was made; - for I can truly say, that from the first hour I drew my breath in it, to this, that I can now scarce draw it at all, for an asthma I got in scating against the wind in *Flanders*; - I have been the continual sport of what the world calls Fortune; and though I will not wrong her by saying, She has ever made me feel the weight of any great or signal evil; - yet with all the good temper in the world, I affirm it of her, that in every stage of my life, and at every turn and corner where she could get fairly at me, the ungracious Duchess has pelted me with a set of as pitiful misadventures and cross accidents as ever small HERO sustained.

Chap. VI.

In the beginning of the last chapter, I inform'd you exactly *when* I was born; - but I did not inform you, *how*. No; that particular was reserved entirely for a chapter by itself; - besides, Sir, as you and I are in a manner perfect strangers to each other, it would not have been proper to have let you into too many circumstances relating to myself all at once. - You must have a little patience. I

have undertaken, you see, to write not only my life, but my opinions also; hoping and expecting that your knowledge of my character, and of what kind of a mortal I am, by the one, would give you a better relish for the other: As you proceed further with me, the slight acquaintance which is now beginning betwixt us, will grow into familiarity; and that, unless one of us is in fault, will terminate in friendship. -- *O diem præclarum!* -- then nothing which has touched me will be thought trifling in its nature, or tedious in its telling. Therefore, my dear friend and companion, if you should think me somewhat sparing of my narrative on my first setting out, - bear with me, - and let me go on, and tell my story my own way: -- or if I should seem now and then to trifle upon the road, -- or should sometimes put on a fool's cap with a bell to it, for a moment or two as we pass along, - don't fly off, - but rather courteously give me credit for a little more wisdom than appears upon my outside; - and as we jog on, either laugh with me, or at me, or in short, do any thing, - only keep your temper.

2) Crisis?

Fielding died in 1754, Richardson in 1761, Smollett in 1771, and Sterne in 1768. In only four decades the English novel had made some giant steps forward. After the work of these four great writers, a relatively barren period followed. Though the stream of fiction broadened continually, nothing of intrinsic literary value was written in the form of the novel.

Peter Wagner, *A Short History of English and American Literature*. Stuttgart: Klett, 1988: 73.

The Novel in Transition:

- Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy* (1759-67)
- Charlotte Lennox, *The Female Quixote* (1752)
- Tobias Smollett, *Humphry Clinker* (1771)
- Henry Mackenzie, *The Man of Feeling* (1771)

Gothic Novels/Oriental Tales:

- Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto* (1764)
- Clara Reeve, *The Old English Baron* (1777)
- William Beckford, *Vathek* (1786)
- Ann Radcliffe, *The Myteries of Udolpho* (1794)
- Matthew Lewis, *The Monk* (1796)

- William Beckford, *Modern Novel Writing* (1796)
- William Godwin, *Things as They Are, or The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794/1831)
- Elizabeth Inchbald, *Nature and Art* (1796)

Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story* (1765)

Preface:

It was an attempt to blend the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern. In the former all was imagination and improbability: in the latter, nature is always intended to be, and sometimes has been, copied with success. Invention has not been wanting; but the great resources of fancy have been dammed up, by a strict adherence to common life. But if in the latter species Nature has cramped imagination, she did but take her revenge, having been totally excluded from old romances. The actions, sentiments, conversations, of the heroes and heroines of ancient days were as unnatural as the machines employed to put them in motion.

The author of the following pages thought it possible to reconcile the two kinds. Desirous of leaving the powers of fancy at liberty to expatiate through the boundless realms of invention, and thence of creating more interesting situations, he wished to conduct the mortal agents in his drama according to the rules of probability; in short, to make them think, speak and act, as it might be supposed mere men and women would do in extraordinary positions.

[...] Yet her own situation could not help finding its place in her thoughts. She felt no concern for the death of young Conrad, except commiseration; and she was not sorry to be delivered from a marriage which had promised her little felicity, either from her destined bridegroom, or from the severe temper of Manfred, who, though he had distinguished her by great indulgence, had imprinted her mind with terror, from his causeless rigour to such amiable princesses as Hippolita and Matilda. [...]

Yet where conceal herself! How avoid the pursuit he would infallibly make throughout the castle! As these thoughts passed rapidly through her mind, she recollected a subterraneous passage which led from the vaults of the castle to the church of Saint Nicholas. Could she reach the altar before she was overtaken, she knew even Manfred's violence would not dare to profane the sacredness of the place; and she determined, if no other means of deliverance offered, to shut herself up forever among the holy virgins, whose convent was contiguous to the cathedral.

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Take – An old castle, half of it ruinous.

A long gallery, with a great many doors, some secret ones.

Three murdered bodies, quite fresh.

As many skeletons, in chests and presses.

An old woman hanging by the neck; with her throat cut.

Assassins and desperadoes, *quant. suff.* [lat. *quantum sufficit*, as much as suffices']

Noises, whispers, and groans, threescore at least.

Mix them together, in the form of three volumes, to be taken at any of the watering places, before going to bed.

(aus *The Spirit of the Public Journals for 1797*)

Henry Mackenzie, *The Man of Feeling* (1771)

[“a young man from the country named Harley goes on an errand to London (he never gets there), meets with various pathetic people along the way, returns home, and dies” (Pinch 2005, 58)]

3) The Novel as a Romantic Genre

19th century Realist fiction in England is a form of Romantic art, but it differs from Romantic art itself in throwing emphasis on the importance of reproducing the external conditions of life and the material laws. It emerges from Romanticism by a process of natural development of central Romantic ideas under the influence of new social forces.

Ioan Williams, *The Realist Novel in England: A Study in Development*. London/
Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1974: xii-xiii.

Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*

Vol. 1. Chap. I.

The family of Dashwood had been long settled in Sussex. Their estate was large, and their residence was at Norland Park, in the centre of their property, where, for many generations, they had lived in so respectable a manner, as to engage the general good opinion of their surrounding acquaintance. The late owner of this estate was a single man, who lived to a very advanced age, and who for many years of his life, had a constant companion and housekeeper in his sister. But her death, which happened ten years before his own, produced a great alteration in his home; for to supply her loss, he invited and received into his house the family of his nephew Mr. Henry Dashwood, the legal inheritor of the Norland estate, and the person to whom he intended to bequeath it. In the society of his nephew and niece, and their children, the old Gentleman's days were comfortably spent. His attachment to them all increased. The constant attention of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Dashwood to his wishes, which proceeded not merely from interest, but from goodness of heart, gave him every degree of solid comfort which his age could receive; and the cheerfulness of the children added a relish to his existence.

By a former marriage, Mr. Henry Dashwood had one son: by his present lady, three daughters. The son, a steady respectable young man, was amply provided for by the fortune of his mother, which had been large, and half of which devolved on him on his coming of age. By his own marriage, likewise, which happened soon

afterwards, he added to his wealth. **To him therefore the succession to the Norland estate was not so really important as to his sisters; for their fortune, independent of what might arise to them from their father's inheriting that property, could be but small.** Their mother had nothing, and their father only seven thousand pounds in his own disposal; for the remaining moiety of his first wife's fortune was also secured to her child, and he had only a life interest in it.

The old Gentleman died; his will was read, and **like almost every other will**, gave as much disappointment as pleasure. He was neither so unjust, nor so ungrateful, as to leave his estate from his nephew; - but he left it to him on such terms as destroyed half the value of the bequest. Mr. Dashwood had wished for it more for the sake of his wife and daughters than for himself or his son: - but to his son, and his son's son, a child of four years old, it was secured, in such a way, as to leave to himself no power of providing for those who were most dear to him, and who most needed a provision, by any charge on the estate, or by any sale of its valuable woods. **The whole was tied up for the benefit of this child, who, in occasional visits with his father and mother at Norland, had so far gained on the affections of his uncle, by such attractions as are by no means unusual in children of two or three years old; an imperfect articulation, an earnest desire of having his own way, many cunning tricks, and a great deal of noise, as to outweigh all the value of all the attention which, for years, he had received from his niece and her daughters. He meant not to be unkind however, and, as a mark of his affection for the three girls, he left them a thousand pounds a- piece.**

Mr. Dashwood's disappointment was, at first, severe; but his temper was cheerful and sanguine, and he might reasonably hope to live many years, and by living economically, lay by a considerable sum from the produce of an estate already large, and capable of almost immediate improvement. But the fortune, which had been so tardy in coming, was his only one twelvemonth. He survived his uncle no longer; and ten thousand pounds, including the late legacies, was all that remained for his widow and daughters.

His son was sent for, as soon as his danger was known, and to him Mr. Dashwood recommended, with all the strength and urgency which illness could command, the interest of his mother-in-law and sisters.

Mr. John Dashwood had not the strong feelings of the rest of the family; but he was affected by a recommendation of such a nature at such a time, and he promised to do every thing in his power to make them comfortable. His father was rendered easy by such an assurance, and Mr. John Dashwood had then leisure to consider how much there might prudently be in his power to do for them.

He was not an ill-disposed young man, unless to be rather cold hearted, and rather selfish, is to be ill- disposed: but he was, in general, well respected; for he conducted himself with propriety in the discharge of his ordinary duties. Had he married a more amiable woman, he might have been made still more respectable than he was: - he might even have been made amiable himself; for he was very young when he married, and very fond of his wife. But Mrs. John Dashwood was a strong caricature of himself; - more narrow-minded and selfish.

When he gave his promise to his father, he meditated within himself to increase the fortunes of his sisters by the present of a thousand pounds a- piece. He then really thought himself equal to it. The prospect of four thousand a-year, in addition to

his present income, besides the remaining half of his own mother's fortune, warmed his heart and made him feel capable of generosity. - **»Yes, he would give them three thousand pounds: it would be liberal and handsome! It would be enough to make them completely easy. Three thousand pounds! he could spare so considerable a sum with little inconvenience.«** - He thought of it all day long, and for many days successively, and he did not repent.

No sooner was his father's funeral over, than Mrs. John Dashwood, without sending any notice of her intention to her mother-in-law, arrived with her child and their attendants. No one could dispute her right to come; the house was her husband's from the moment of his father's decease; but the indelicacy of her conduct was so much the greater, and to a woman in Mrs. Dashwood's situation, with only common feelings, **must have been** highly displeasing; - but in her mind there was a sense of honour so keen, a generosity so romantic, that any offence of the kind, by whomsoever given or received, was to her a source of immoveable disgust. Mrs. John Dashwood had never been a favourite with any of her husband's family; but she had had no opportunity, till the present, of shewing them with how little attention to the comfort of other people she could act when [...]

Chapter II

Mrs. John Dashwood now installed herself mistress of Norland; and her mother and sisters-in-law were degraded to the condition of visitors. As such, however, they were treated by her with quiet civility; and by her husband with as much kindness as he could feel towards any body beyond himself, his wife, and their child. He really pressed them, with some earnestness, to consider Norland as their home; and, as no plan appeared so eligible to Mrs. Dashwood as remaining there till she could accommodate herself with a house in the neighbourhood, his invitation was accepted.

A continuance in a place where every thing reminded her of former delight, was exactly what suited her mind. In seasons of cheerfulness, no temper could be more cheerful than hers, or possess, in a greater degree, that sanguine expectation of happiness which is happiness itself. But in sorrow she must be equally carried away by her fancy, and as far beyond consolation as in pleasure she was beyond alloy.

Mrs. John Dashwood did not at all approve of what her husband intended to do for his sisters. To take three thousand pounds from the fortune of their dear little boy, would be impoverishing him to the most dreadful degree. **She begged him to think again on the subject. How could he answer it to himself to rob his child, and his only child too, of so large a sum? And what possible claim could the Miss Dashwoods, who were related to him only by half blood, which she considered as no relationship at all, have on his generosity to so large an amount. It was very well known that no affection was ever supposed to exist between the children of any man by different marriages; and why was he to ruin himself, and their poor little Harry, by giving away all his money to his half sisters?**

»It was my father's last request to me,« replied her husband, »that I should assist his widow and daughters.«

»He did not know what he was talking of, I dare say; ten to one but he was light-headed at the time. Had he been in his right senses, he could not have thought of such a thing as begging you to give away half your fortune from your own child.«

»He did not stipulate for any particular sum, my dear Fanny; he only requested me, in general terms, to assist them, and make their situation more comfortable than it was in his power to do. Perhaps it would have been as well if he had left it wholly to myself. He could hardly suppose I should neglect them. But as he required the promise, I could not do less than [...]

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