

WHY DID MODERN LITERARY THEORY ORIGINATE IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE?

(And Why Is It Now Dead?)

Galin Tihanov

At the outset of the twenty-first century, we seem at last positioned to recognize and admit the demise of literary theory as a distinct discipline of scholarship. Even the most dedicated proponents of theory are busy spelling out the dimensions of its irremediable crisis.¹ In retrospect, one can locate literary theory within a period of some eighty years, from its inception in the late 1910s until perhaps the early 1990s. The beginnings of the discipline were marked by the activities of the Russian Formalists. Wolfgang Iser's turn in the late 1980s from reception theory and phenomenology of reading to what he called "literary anthropology" presaged the end of literary theory per se, and the death of Yuri Lotman in 1993 confirmed it. Lotman had in any case come gradually to embrace semiotics as a global theory of culture rather than a narrowly conceived theory of literature.²

The earlier chronological boundary is by now commonly recognized: the

1. See, e.g., the forum "Theory and the University," *Literary Research/Recherche Littéraire* 18.35 (spring–summer 2001): 8–41.

2. Wolfgang Iser, *Das Fiktive und das Imaginäre: Grundzüge einer Literaturanthropologie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991). Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

Russian Formalists were the first to see literature as an autonomous domain for theoretical investigation, and in their work they steered away from aesthetics, sociology, psychology, and history, while seeking support in linguistics. There were, in Germany, earlier attempts to take an autonomous approach to art, but these involved music and the visual arts rather than literature. Heinrich Wölfflin's dream of a history of art without names was echoed in Osip Brik's belief that, had Pushkin never existed, *Eugene Onegin* would have written itself.³ Such was the sway of Wölfflin's innovation that when Oskar Walzel essayed to free the study of literature from the dominant framework of cultural history, he fell victim to parallels with art history. In proclaiming the theory of the "mutual illumination" of various arts, Walzel escaped the dangers of social and cultural history at the expense of allowing categories established as tools of art history ("style," for example) to intrude on the study of literature.⁴ The Russian Formalists, however, were determined to discuss literature in terms of "literariness," a feature that they presumed or hoped would provide an explanation for whatever was distinctly literary. By concentrating on the literary "device," especially in the early phase of their work, the Formalists were leaving literature to its own devices, uncontrolled by, and irreducible to, ethics, religion, or politics.

The later chronological limit, the early 1990s, I have set primarily with developments in philosophy and cultural theory in mind. The 1910s signaled the ambition of literary studies to emancipate itself from the master discourses of philosophy (though even then, literary studies worked, not infrequently, in tactical collaboration with aesthetics). But from the mid-1970s onward, and especially in the 1980s, literary theory was once again—now through the powerful impact of deconstruction—swerving back in the direction of philosophy. In championing ideas originating with Nietzsche and Heidegger, deconstruction set a new agenda, for which literature was no more than a business among others. Thinking and writing about literature thus lost the edge of specificity and uniqueness, and the boundary between literary and nonliterary texts, solemnly guarded since the Formalists' time, was rendered porous and eventually insignificant. Similarly, feminism, postcolonialism, and New Historicism were all ways of reading more than just literary texts; they were strategies of cultural theory, and many literary theorists tried to avoid them out of fear lest these methods conjure back the spirit of *Geistesgeschichte*. By the 1970s, however, there were clear signals, particularly in the writings of the Tartu School, that literary theory would itself try (in an increasingly ambitious union with semiotics) to assume the role

3. Osip Brik, "The So-Called Formal Method," in *Formalist Theory*, ed. Lawrence Michael O'Toole and Ann Shukman, *Russian Poetics in Translation*, vol. 4 (Colchester: University of Essex, 1977), 90.

4. Oskar Walzel, *Wechselseitige Erhellung der Künste* (Berlin: Reuther and Richard, 1917).

of a general theory of culture, though success would mean by definition the end of literary theory proper.

Hence my assumption that the early 1990s represents the last stage in the protracted demise of literary theory as an autonomous branch of the humanities. The abandonment of literary theory in favor of projects in semiotics as a form of cultural theory (Lotman), and in favor of forays into philosophical anthropology (Iser), were symptoms of ill health and of a decline in self-sufficiency. The main cause of these transformations was the changing status of literature and its consumption in a postindustrial society, increasingly globalized and dependent on an incessant flow of information and image-based communication. Over the past two decades, the economy of leisure has also changed dramatically, especially in the more affluent West: depersonalized and mediated but commercially successful forms of entertainment make the experience of private reading ever more demanding by comparison. Reading now has to compete, moreover, with sources of information that mobilize simultaneously a wider range of senses and present their material in a manner we think of as companionable ("consumer-friendly"). "The literary work of art" (Roman Ingarden's title is both dated and nostalgic) is no longer endowed with special status; it competes for attention as one of many commodities in the cultural marketplace.

Chronotope

Once we come to realize that literary theory is passé, it becomes possible to contemplate the subject historically, to establish its dynamic, and to estimate the extent to which it should be taken as culturally specific. Thus *chronotope* is the summary term for this section, in which my thesis is relatively simple: I submit that modern literary theory was born in the decades between the World Wars, in Eastern and Central Europe—in Russia, Bohemia, Hungary, and Poland—due to a set of intersecting cultural determinations and institutional factors.⁵

Before specifying those determinations and factors, I ought to recapitulate the contribution of Eastern and Central Europe to later developments in literary theory.⁶ They would be difficult to overemphasize. Indeed, the supposed

5. Despite the recent trend of bringing together Central and Eastern Europe under the umbrella designation "East-Central Europe," I prefer to preserve their differences, which in turn accentuate the many important similarities in the emergence of literary theory in these lands. For a powerful restatement of the differences between Central and Eastern Europe, see Iver B. Neumann, "Europe's Post-Cold War Memory of Russia: *Cui bono?*" in *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past*, ed. Jan-Werner Müller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 121–36.

6. For studies in English of East and Central European literary theory in comparative perspective, see Peter Steiner, "The Roots of Structuralist Esthetics," in *The Prague School: Selected Writings, 1929–1946*, ed. Steiner (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), 174–219 (an excellent comparison of Russian Formalism and the Prague School); Endre Bojtár, *Slavic Structuralism* (Amsterdam: J. Benjamins, 1985); Jurij Striedter, *Literary Structure, Evolution, and Value: Russian Formalism and Czech Structuralism Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989); Lubomír Doležel, *Occidental Poetics: Tradition and Progress* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990).

advances in literary theory in its second “golden age,” the 1960s and 1970s, were hardly more than elaborations and variations on themes, problems, and solutions played out in the interwar period in Central and Eastern Europe. French structuralism, however refined (and sometimes reluctant to acknowledge its predecessors), was of course made possible by the work of Ferdinand de Saussure. But structuralism also depended on the achievements of Russian Formalism and the Prague Linguistic Circle,⁷ as well as on the formulation of the principles of phonology by Nikolai Trubetskoi and Roman Jakobson in the 1930s.⁸ Narratology— notwithstanding the differences discernible in its later versions (those of Claude Lévi-Strauss, Algirdas J. Greimas, Claude Bremond, Gérard Genette, Eberhard Lämmert, Dorrit Cohn, Mieke Bal)—never quite severed itself from the legacy of Vladimir Propp, whose *Morphology of the Folktale* appeared as early as 1928.⁹ The continental version of reception theory in the 1970s was anticipated in works of the Prague Circle, above all those of Felix Vodička, who borrowed somewhat freely from Ingarden.¹⁰ Finally, Marxist literary theory in its later heyday was deeply influenced by the work of Georg Lukács in the 1930s.

On the other hand, it is obvious, too, that there have been trends in modern literary theory that evolved away from the determining effects of Eastern and

7. The question of chronology is not irrelevant here: Jakobson set forth some of the important principles of his future understanding of poetry in a talk at the Moscow Linguistic Circle in 1919 (also attended by Mayakovsky), which was published in 1921 as *Novějšaja russkaia poezija* [The latest Russian poetry] (Prague: Tip. “Politika,” 1921). Pomorska points out that Jakobson was not acquainted with Saussure’s *Cours de linguistique générale* until 1920–21 (Krystyna Pomorska, “The Autobiography of a Scholar,” in *Language, Poetry and Poetics: The Generation of the 1890s—Jakobson, Trubetzkoy, Majakovskij*, ed. Pomorska et al. [Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1987], 6). However, Jakobson himself drew attention to the fact that Sergei Kartsevskii was the first to familiarize the young Moscow linguists with Saussure’s *Cours de linguistique générale* in 1917–19 (cf. Roman Jakobson, “Sergej Karcevskij: August 28, 1884–November 7, 1955,” *Cahiers Ferdinand de Saussure* 14 [1956]: 10). The first portions of Saussure’s work on likely anagrams in Latin poetry, which posed the question of phonetic sequences and regularities in verse that was also to occupy the Formalists, especially Jakobson and Brik, did not appear in print before 1954, when Jean Starobinski published some of Saussure’s work in *Mercure de France*. On Jakobson’s (mis)appropriation and criticism of Saussure, see, e.g., Ladislav Matejka, “Jakobson’s Response to Saussure’s Cours,” in *Jakobson entre l’Est et l’Ouest (1915–1939): Un épisode de l’histoire de la culture européenne*, ed. Françoise Gadet and Patrick Sériot, *Cahiers de l’ILSL*, no. 9 (Lausanne: University of Lausanne, 1997),

177–84; Roy Harris, “Jakobson’s Saussure,” in *Saussure and His Interpreters* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001), 94–108.

8. On the intellectual origins of structuralism in Eastern and Central Europe and on the connections between Saussure’s linguistic doctrines and those of Trubetskoi, Jakobson, and the Prague Circle, see Sériot, *Structure et totalité: Les origines intellectuelles du structuralisme en Europe centrale et orientale* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999).

9. For a study of Propp’s Russian predecessors, see Heda Jason and Dmitrii Segal, “Precursors of Propp: Formalist Theories of Narrative in Early Russian Ethnopoetics,” *PTL* 2 (1977): 471–516; see also Peter Gilet, *Vladimir Propp and the Universal Folktale* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998).

10. On Vodička’s appropriation of Ingarden, see Herta Schmid, “Zum Begriff der ästhetischen Konkretisation im tschechischen Strukturalismus,” *Sprache im technischen Zeitalter*, no. 36 (1970): 290–318; Rolf Fieguth, “Rezeption contra falsches und richtiges Lesen? Oder Mißverständnisse mit Ingarden,” *Sprache im technischen Zeitalter*, no. 38 (1971): 142–59; Doležel, “Structuralism of the Prague Circle,” in *From Formalism to Poststructuralism*, ed. Roman Selden, vol. 8 of *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), esp. 54–55.

Central European theory. A particularly good case in point is hermeneutics, which was widely present in the German humanities before being put to use in literary theory by E. D. Hirsch in the United States. In Germany, hermeneutics was slower to become literary theory as such, for it has always been more than literary. Nurtured by its deep roots in German theology and philosophy, hermeneutics (especially as practiced by H.-G. Gadamer) has had the status of philosophy of culture and cultural history—and this was so even in the case of works more obviously oriented toward literary analysis, such as Wilhelm Dilthey's *Poetry and Experience*. It was only with the explorations of Hans Robert Jauss, and with Peter Szondi's work on literature (specifically Hölderlin), that German hermeneutics unequivocally assumed the distinct profile of a literary theory.¹¹

In other words, the emergence of literary theory was conditional upon the process of disintegration and modification of monolithic philosophical approaches that occurred around the time of World War I. Though hermeneutics did not develop into a literary theory during the 1920s and 1930s, other philosophical paradigms were transformed to generate theoretical approaches more specifically germane to the study of literature. That sort of transformation is one of the major ways in which modern literary theory was born. The strongest case is, doubtless, the application of Marxism to the interpretation of literature in the 1920s and 1930s, most seminally in the work of Georg Lukács, a Hungarian Jew; but also crucial are the modifications, produced roughly at the same time, of Husserlian philosophy in the work of Ingarden, the Polish theoretician who rendered phenomenology pertinent to the study of literary art.¹²

A second venue we need to explore when discussing the birth of modern literary theory is that exemplified by the collective efforts—and for some years, the joint efforts—of the Russian Formalists and the Prague Circle. The emergence of literary theory in Russia and Czechoslovakia in the 1920s and 1930s followed a path different from those of Lukács and Ingarden. Russian and Czecho-

11. Hans Robert Jauss, "Limits and Tasks of Literary Hermeneutics," trans. Johanna Pick Marguiles, *Diogenes* 109 (1980): 92–119; Peter Szondi, *Einführung in die literarische Hermeneutik*, ed. Jean Bollack and Helen Stierlin (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1975); Szondi, *On Textual Understanding and Other Essays*, trans. Harvey Mendelsohn (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

12. The literature on Ingarden, especially in languages other than Polish and German, is still manageable. In English, see above all George G. Grabowicz, introduction to *The Literary Work of Art: An Investigation on the Borderlines of Ontology, Logic, and Theory of Literature*, by Roman Ingarden, trans. Grabowicz (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973), xlv–lxx, as well as Iser, *The Act of*

Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978). See also Eugene Hanes Falk, *The Poetics of Roman Ingarden* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), and Peter McCormick and Bohdan Dziemidok, eds., *On the Aesthetics of Roman Ingarden* (Boston: Kluwer Academic, 1989), as well as two earlier articles: Victor Michael Hamm, "The Ontology of the Literary Work of Art: Roman Ingarden's 'Das literarische Kunstwerk,'" in *The Critical Matrix*, ed. Paul R. Sullivan (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1961), 171–209; Hans Rudnick, "Roman Ingarden's Literary Theory," *Ingardeniana. Analecta Husserliana* 4 (1976): 105–19.

slovakian theory reflected a growing discontent with scholarly positivism, as well as—most crucially—a need to confront, make sense of, and give support to fresh and radical modes of creative writing that were making themselves felt in the futurist environment of the Russian avant-garde and the largely surrealist milieu of Czechoslovakia. Thinking about literature, in other words, altered radically in the earlier twentieth century because of changes, on the one hand, in literature itself, and changes in—exfoliations of—some important metadiscourses of continental philosophy. The separation of these two sets of factors is, of course, a heuristic abstraction, but it is both convenient for our purposes and to a large degree verifiable.

Before dwelling in more detail on these two scenarios, I should emphasize one vital point in my account. In three of these four instances (the Russian Formalists, the Prague Circle, and Roman Ingarden), we are dealing with a resurgence of creative freedom in the aftermath of radical historical events. In both Czechoslovakia and Poland (if not in Horthy's Hungary), the interwar years were a period of a secondary national revival after the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It is essential to realize that both Russian Formalism and, even more straightforwardly, the Prague Circle were inherently linked to the process of constructing a new state with a new political identity; and there was a neo-Romantic pride in belonging to the vanguard of these transformations. Jakobson and Brik's close association with Vladimir Mayakovsky, as well as the gravitation of a number of Formalists to the Left Front of Art and its journals *Lef* and *Novyi Lef*, furnish incontestable evidence. What is more, we find a striking parallel in the Russian Formalists' and Prague Circle's decisions to address in their scholarship political figures of the highest profile. The Prague Circle in 1930 honored President Masaryk's eightieth birthday with a volume entitled *Masaryk and Language*, featuring contributions by Jakobson and Jan Mukařovský. In 1924, the Formalists published a number of interconnected articles devoted to Lenin's language and style.¹³ Although this latter move may appear merely pragmatic, if not ironic or cynical, the Formalists' engagement with constructivism, the literature of the fact, and other developments in leftist art was much more than a perfunctory demonstration of loyalty or a ploy designed to gain tactical advantages.¹⁴ After all, the two most seminal and innovative theoretical pieces of the mature Formalists—Yuri Tynianov's "On Literary Evolution" (1927) and Boris Eikhenbaum's "Literature and the Literary Everyday [*byt*]"

13. See the contributions by Viktor Shklovsky, Boris Eikhenbaum, Lev Iakubinskii, Iurii Tynianov, Boris Kazanskii, and Boris Tomashevskii in *Lef*, no. 1 (1924): 53–148.

14. Cf., e.g., Aleksandr Galushkin, "Neudavshiisia dialog: Iz istorii vzaimootnoshenii formal'noi shkolly i vlasti" [A

failed dialogue: From the history of the relations between the Formal School and political power], *Shestye Tynianovskie chteniia: Tezisy dokladov i materialy dlia obsuzhdeniia* (Riga: 1992), 210; Carol Any, *Boris Eikhenbaum: Voices of a Russian Formalist* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), 90.

(1927)—were both published in *Na literaturnom postu* [On literary guard], the journal of a radical leftist faction (the RAPP). (Eikhenbaum's article indicated his departure from Formalism to sociology of literature, for which he was criticized both by fellow Formalists such as Viktor Shklovsky and—less expectedly—by his own orthodox Marxist disciples.)

Thus, the attitude of the Formalists in Russia and the Prague Circle in Czechoslovakia to political power ought to be reevaluated in the light of their active engagement with the cultural agendas of the two newly established states.¹⁵ Yet the shaping force of the political environment should not be overstated. Modern literary theory developed at the intersection between national enthusiasms and a cultural cosmopolitanism that transcended local encapsulation and monoglossia. For a number of years, the activities of the Russian Formalists took place in a climate of enhanced mobility and benefited from the exchange of ideas between metropolitan and émigré Russian culture. The most gifted ambassadors among the Formalists were Shklovsky, during the time he spent in Berlin, and Jakobson, while in Czechoslovakia.¹⁶ In equal measure, the foundations of Formalism were laid by scholars, many of them Jewish, who were steeped in more than one cultural tradition and felt at ease with the ethnic and cultural diversity of both Moscow and imperial St. Petersburg: Jakobson, Brik, Eikhenbaum, and the Polish linguist (of French descent) Baudouin de Courtenay, among others. Jakobson is a particularly important example: his emigration from Russia to Czechoslovakia was crucial in internationalizing the Prague Circle, as were his cooperation with Peter Bogatyrev and the Russian émigré Nikolai Trubetskoi (based in Vienna). Jakobson was also associated with Tynianov, who stayed in Russia but was involved in the activities of his Prague colleagues.¹⁷ Thus the work of the Circle proceeded in a context that rendered narrow nationalistic concerns anachronistic. Here is a telling piece of evidence from the memoirs of a contemporary:

The language of the meetings was another characteristic of the Circle. Seldom was a Czech without an accent heard. Even those who hardly knew how to speak any other language but their native Czech acquired a kind of queer pronunciation after some time. The guests from abroad added to this linguistic confusion. There would be, for example, a guest speaker from Denmark. He had to speak in French or German, or in a Slavic language, and this he did with an accent, of course.¹⁸

15. See also Galin Tihanov, "Marxism and Formalism Revisited: Notes on the 1927 Leningrad Dispute," *Literary Research/Recherche Littéraire* 19.37–38 (2002): 69–77.

16. On the complex semantics of nostalgia and estrangement in Shklovsky's exilic texts, see Svetlana Boym, "Estrangement as a Lifestyle: Shklovsky and Brodsky," *Poetics Today* 17.4 (winter 1996): 511–30.

17. Cf. Jakobson, "Yuri Tynianov in Prague," in *The Problem of Verse Language*, by Yuri Tynianov, ed. and trans. Michael Sosa and Brent Harvey (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1981), 135–40.

18. Milada Součková, "The Prague Linguistic Circle: A Collage," in *Sound, Sign, and Meaning: Quinquagenary of the Prague Linguistic Circle*, ed. Matejka (Ann Arbor: Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, University of Michigan, 1976), 2.

We should also recall that Jakobson, Trubetskoi, and Bogatyrev were writing in at least two languages, as were Lukács and Ingarden, who availed themselves of German as well as their native Hungarian and Polish. Lukács himself spent more than two decades away from home, in Vienna, Berlin, and Moscow.¹⁹

The lives of Lukács, Jakobson, Trubetskoi, Bogatyrev, Shklovsky, and also of René Wellek, urge us to consider the enormous importance of exile and emigration for the birth of modern literary theory in Eastern and Central Europe. Exile and emigration were the extreme embodiment of heterotopia and polyglossia. Drastic historical changes had brought on traumas of dislocation, but also and concomitantly, the productive insecurity of needing to use more than one language and live in more than one culture.²⁰ The same pattern became productive again after World War II when, in the 1950s through the 1970s, the center of theory gradually shifted toward France and francophone theorists: the Romanian-Jewish Lucien Goldmann, the Lithuanian-born Algirdas Greimas, and—on the crest of another wave of emigration—the Bulgarian-born Tzvetan Todorov and Julia Kristeva significantly enriched semiotics, narratology, structuralism, poststructuralism, Marxist literary theory, psychoanalysis, and feminism. Their work came to embody the potential of what Edward Said was later to praise (when analyzing the impact of Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness*) as “travelling theory”: “The point of theory is . . . to travel, always to move beyond its confinements, to emigrate, to remain in a sense in exile.”²¹

Yet exile and emigration in the 1920s and 1930s differed—in their cultural status—from the parallel experience after World War II. While the newcomers on the Paris intellectual scene (Greimas, Todorov, Kristeva) received their doctorates from French universities, the prominent figures of the generation

19. In the end Lukács would feel a stranger even in Budapest, as reports by those who knew him in the late 1940s suggest. Too Eastern for the West and too Western for the East, he seemed to have exemplified the fluidity entailed in being a *Mitteleuropäer*, with all its blessings and predicaments (cf. Károly Kókai, *Im Nebel: Der junge Georg Lukács und Wien* [Vienna: Böhlau, 2001]: 235–36).

20. In a different context and with different tasks in mind, Stephen Greenblatt forcefully asserts that in order to write cultural history we must “understand colonization, exile, emigration, wandering, contamination . . . , for it is these disruptive forces that principally shape the history and diffusion of languages, and not a rooted sense of cultural legitimacy” (Stephen Greenblatt, “Racial Memory and Literary History,” in *Rethinking Literary History: A Dialogue on Theory*, ed. Linda Hutcheon and Mario J. Valdes [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002], 61).

21. Edward W. Said, “Travelling Theory Reconsidered,” in *Critical Reconstructions: The Relationship of Fiction and Life*,

ed. Robert M. Polhemus and Roger B. Henkle (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), 264. In this article, Said refined some of the arguments of his earlier article “Travelling Theory,” in *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 226–47, where he constructed a somewhat rigid opposition between the environments in which Lukács’s theory of reification was born (Budapest) and appropriated (Paris). Suffice it to say that *History and Class Consciousness* was only partly the product of what Said called “the Hungary of 1919” (237): a good half of the essays included in the book were written by Lukács in exile in Vienna, in a somewhat different cultural and political context. For an early discussion of the limitations of “travelling theory” in the present globalistic climate, see James Clifford, “Notes on Travel and Theory,” in *Traveling Theories, Traveling Theorists*, ed. James Clifford and Vivek Dhareshwar (Santa Cruz: Group for the Critical Study of Colonial Discourse and the Center for Cultural Studies, University of California at Santa Cruz, 1989), 177–85, esp. 184–85.

active in the 1920s and 1930s were educated and had matured in their countries and cultures of origin (the exception is Jakobson, who received his doctorate in Czechoslovakia). Similarly, while Greimas, Todorov, Kristeva, and to a lesser extent also Goldmann, may be confidently described as culturally assimilated, Lukács, Jakobson, Bogatyrev, and Trubetskoi, in what was one of the most productive stages of their careers, did not go so far in adopting their host cultures. More exiles than established émigrés, they were immersed in a genuinely heterocultural environment and, more important, made a point of preserving a fully bilingual existence as intellectuals.

The theorists' personal circumstance in exile is the most dramatic and recognizable manifestation of deeper structural reasons for the direction that literary theory took, and to argue from exile alone would leave out of the picture outstanding theorists like Ingarden, Mukařovský, and Vodička. We require a more inclusive account, one that explains the conditions that shaped the work of both the exiles and those who stayed behind in the newly formed independent states. Although these countries gained independence from the Austro-Hungarian empire (in Poland's case, also from Germany and Russia), national pride and zealous labor on behalf of the new states did not in any sense mean a break from the German cultural orbit. In Prague, a German university continued its activities; intellectuals educated in Germany remained leading authorities in various spheres of Hungarian and Polish social life. German periodicals and bilingual editions were printed and freely circulated. The Hungarian German-language newspaper *Pester Lloyd*, in which Lukács as a young man published several texts, appeared in Budapest for eight decades from the 1850s until World War II. Now on firmer ground, more stable, and enjoying support from the young independent states, the Czech and Polish intelligentsia regarded the German cultural presence with less anxiety. In Czechoslovakia, the Prague Circle distanced itself from the parochialism of anti-German purism; the Circle also recognized the existence of Slovak as a separate language, though the constitution of the new republic spoke of a single "Czechoslovak" nation and a single "Czechoslovak" language.²² It was not by accident that the new departures in linguistics and literary theory in Czechoslovakia should have originated in Prague rather than Bratislava, whose scholarly community feared lest the Slovak language be overwhelmed by Czech influence. More reassured of its own strength and possessing a more stable position in society, Czech academia was better placed to mediate between its own inheritance and the new developments in European, including German, thought. Indicative of the new terms of the Czech-German dialogue after World War I was the polemic on the place of the smaller Central European nation-states in

22. Cf. L'ubomir Ďurovič, "The Beginnings of Structuralism in Slovakia and the Bratislava Linguistic Circle," in Matejka, *Sound, Sign, and Meaning*, 54.

the political future of Europe: while Germany wanted to see them subjected to German cultural supremacy and strategic goals, these countries were prepared to harness the German legacy to the advantage of their own refashioning as modern, forward-looking, and uncompromisingly independent states. Friedrich Naumann's *Mitteleuropa* (1915) and Tomáš Masaryk's book *The New Europe* (1918) seem to be the clearest statements of these divergent views.²³

Thus Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary (though in Hungary's case for different political reasons) attentively followed German intellectual developments (and in the case of the Prague Circle, also Russian ones), but they did so from a pragmatic perspective consistent with their independent political existence. After World War I, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary shared the cultural identity of countries that, due to their German legacy, were more than enclosed nation-states but not in themselves empires. Their ambiguous status meant that cultural intersections and polyglossia were, in these countries, a matter of course. They found themselves neither too close (with the exception of Horthy's Hungary) nor too far from German (and Russian) culture—and this cultural location was apparently propitious for the rise and cultivation of new directions in thinking about language and texts. The possibility of “estranging” the sanctity and naturalness of one's own literature by analyzing it in another language or by refracting it through the prism of another culture seems to be of paramount significance for the emergence of modern literary theory. It is symptomatic that Fritz Mauthner, in his memoirs, attributed his later interest in the psychology and philosophy of language to the condition of polyglossia in Prague before World War I: “I don't know how a Jew born in a Slavonic district of Austria would not be driven to [take up] linguistics; he would learn to understand simultaneously no fewer than three languages”: German, Czech, and Hebrew.²⁴ It is equally characteristic that one of the

23. For debates on “Mitteleuropa”/“Central Europe,” see Roman Szporluk, “Defining ‘Central Europe’: Power, Politics, and Culture,” *Cross Currents* 1 (1982): 30–38; Milan Kundera's influential text “The Tragedy of Central Europe,” *New York Review of Books*, April 26, 1984, 35; Brodsky's reply “Why Milan Kundera Is Wrong about Dostoevsky,” *New York Times*, February 17, 1985, 31; Jenö Szücs, “Three Historical Regions of Europe,” in *Civil Society and the State*, ed. John Keane (London: Verso, 1988), 291–332; Ferenc Fehér, “On Making Central Europe,” *Eastern European Politics and Societies* 3.3 (1989): 412–47; George Schöpflin and Nancy Wood, eds., *In Search of Central Europe* (Cambridge, U.K.: Polity, 1989); Matejka, “Milan Kundera's Central Europe,” *Cross Currents* 9 (1990): 127–34; Robin Okey, “Central Europe/Eastern Europe: Behind the Definitions,” *Past and Present* 137 (November 1992): 102–33; Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994);

Gerard Delanty, “The Resonance of Mitteleuropa [Central Europe]: A Habsburg Myth or Antipolitics?” *Theory, Culture, and Society* 13.4 (November 1996): 93–108. For a historical survey, see Jacques Le Rider, *La Mitteleuropa* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1994), and the summary discussion in Heikki Mikkeli, *Europe as an Idea and an Identity* (Basingstoke, U.K.: Macmillan, 1998), esp. chap. 9. On Russia's place in discussions of Central Europe, see Aleksei Miller, “Tema Tsentral'noi Evropy: Istoriia, sovremennyye diskursy i mesto v nikh Rossii” [The theme of Central Europe: History, contemporary discourses, and Russia's place in them], *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, no. 52 (2001): 75–96, and Iver B. Neumann, *Russia and the Idea of Europe: A Study in Identity and International Relations* (London: Routledge, 1996).

24. Fritz Mauthner, *Erinnerungen* (Munich: G. Müller, 1918), 32–33.

first journals of comparative literature, *Acta Litterarum Comparationis* (1877–90), should be edited in the multicultural city of Klausenburg (in Hungarian, *Kolozsvár*; in Romanian, *Cluj*).²⁵

The process of crossing cultures was, however, uneven. It was hampered by monological and chauvinistic trends in Hungary (where there was a strong populist, anti-Romanian, anti-Slovak, and anti-Semitic current), as well as in Poland under the Piłsudski regime. Appropriating literature theoretically meant being able to transcend its (and one's own) national embeddedness by electing to position oneself as an outsider contemplating its abstract laws. That feat was not always feasible in undemocratic political environments. Jakobson, in an article titled "About the Premises of the Prague Linguistic School" (1934), presented somewhat idealistically the strengths of Czech and Central European interwar intellectual life, while choosing to disregard the harsh reality of cultural competition (and often conflict or oppression) in the region:

Czechoslovakia lies at the crossroads of various cultures and its distinctive cultural character throughout history . . . has consisted in the creative merging of streams whose sources are at some distance from one another. The great charm of Czech art and social ideology during the most productive periods of its history stems from the masterful crossing of diverse, at times even contradictory, currents.²⁶

However beset with difficulties and countered by adverse political conditions, Central Europe now resembled a subcontinent with its own distinct if somewhat self-enclosed culture. (The work of the Prague Circle remained on the whole poorly known in Europe, except perhaps among Slavic scholars, down until the 1960s.) But it was here that the impulses of the dominant Western philosophical traditions could be bent and transformed without facile irreverence, but also without timidity and imitative self-abnegation.

First Scenario: Re-forming Philosophy

This conclusion about the relationship between modern literary theory, as it developed in Central Europe, and the standard metadiscourses of philosophy applies—perhaps especially—to the work of Lukács and Ingarden. Both set out to make a contribution to continental philosophy and ended up practicing literary theory and aesthetics. (Literary theory never managed to emancipate itself entirely from aesthetics, a trend one can observe as much in Mukařovský's work

25. See Moritz Csáky, "Die Ambivalenz der Moderne in Zentraleuropa," *Lukács: Jahrbuch der Internationalen Georg-Lukács-Gesellschaft* 4 (2000): 167–87, here 180.

26. Quoted in František Galan, *Historic Structures: The Prague School Project, 1928–1946* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), xii.

from the mid-1930s as in that of Lukács or Ingarden.)²⁷ Typically, Ingarden, writing *The Literary Work of Art* in Lwów, proclaimed in the preface that, “although the main subject of my investigations is the literary work, or the literary work of art, the ultimate motives for my work on this subject are of a general philosophical nature, and they far transcend this particular subject.”²⁸ Phenomenology was the guiding star of Ingarden’s investigations, yet in a fashion suggesting a critical appropriation and alteration of Husserl’s premises. When discussing the gradual disintegration of philosophical metadiscourses such as phenomenology and Marxism, we need to be careful to discern their traces in the subsequently emancipated theoretical narratives of literary theory and/or aesthetics. The weight of phenomenology varied from environment to environment. Its influence was of the first importance for Ingarden, but less systematic and powerful on Russian Formalism, where Gustav Shpet was the main intermediary between German phenomenology and the Formalists; nor was the impact of phenomenology especially strong on the Prague Circle.²⁹ Jakobson was the one clear exception in both schools.³⁰ His theory of rhythm and verse was underwritten by a phenomenological understanding of “poetical time” as “time of expectation” (*Erwartungszeit*), a concept forged on the frontier of phenomenology and Gestalt psychology.³¹

But returning to Lukács and Ingarden, neither thought of himself consistently as a literary theorist. Certainly the intellectual traditions that Lukács inherited or adopted through his Hungarian-Jewish-German milieu in the first two decades of the last century were those of aesthetics and the philosophy of culture. His later attention to literary theory, in the 1930s, in particular the theory of genre and the novel—and even his self-definition at the time as a literary theorist—were the result of frustrated hopes to accommodate art in a larger philosophical framework. Lukács’s early career, his attempts to fit in the Heidelberg environment of systematic, predominantly neo-Kantian, philosophy of

27. There is a substantial body of literature on Mukařovský; most recently, see Vladimir Macura and Herta Schmid, eds., *Jan Mukařovský and the Prague School/und die Prager Schule* (Potsdam: Ústav pro českou literaturu AV ČR, Universität Potsdam, 1999). Of particular interest from a comparative perspective might be Lotman’s posthumously published account: Iurii Lotman, “Jan Mukarzhovskii—teoretik iskusstva” [Jan Mukařovský, a theoretician of art], in Ian Mukarzhovskii, *Issledovaniia po estetike i teorii iskusstva* [Studies on aesthetics and the theory of art], ed. Lotman and Oleg M. Malevich (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1994), 8–32.

28. Ingarden, *Literary Work of Art*, lxxii.

29. For a brief account of Shpet’s role, see Douwe Fokkema, “Continuity and Change in Russian Formalism,

Czech Structuralism, and Soviet Semiotics,” *PTL* 1 (1976): 153–96, esp. 164–65. On the Prague Linguistic Circle and phenomenology, see Oleg Sus, “On the Genetic Pre-conditions of Czech Structuralist Semiology and Semantics: An Essay on Czech and German Thought,” *Poetics* 4 (1972): 28–54, esp. 30.

30. See, above all, Elmar Holenstein, *Roman Jakobson’s Approach to Language: Phenomenological Structuralism*, trans. Catherine Schelbert and Tarisius Schelbert (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976).

31. See Jakobson, *O chesbskom stikhe preimushchestvenno v sopostavlenii s russkim* [On Czech verse, primarily in contrast with Russian], Brown University Slavic Reprints, vol. 6 (Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 1969), 19.

culture and art, ended up in embittered disillusionment with the metropolitan German tradition of scholarship. He abandoned his attempts at a systematic philosophy of art (to which he would return, but from a Marxist perspective, only in the 1960s) in favor of work on the social aspects of literature.³²

Both Lukács and Ingarden, in their own ways, sought to break free from the neo-Kantian philosophy of art. Ingarden did so by embracing a modified Husserlian approach, which allowed him to include in his account of the literary work of art the layer of "represented objects," to which he thought the neo-Kantians gave insufficient prominence. Lukács followed a different path. He drew on his earlier work concerning genre, in particular his *History of the Development of Modern Drama*. In 1910 he had written an article on the theory of literary history in which he posed, albeit in a compromised fashion, the question of the social nature of form. But it remains clear that Lukács's most significant contribution to literary theory—his work in the 1930s on realism and the novel—followed his engagement, in a rather unorthodox way, with Marxism as a philosophical metadiscourse in need of further "concretization." His *History and Class Consciousness* (1923) laid the foundation for an understanding of Marxism that was compatible with more holistic and culture-based approaches and that challenged crude materialism. It is this "revisionist" strain in Lukács's Marxism that enabled him to reclaim the classical examples of the nineteenth-century bourgeois novel as models that the new (socialist and proletarian) novel should try to emulate. Lukács's writing on realism and the novel, done mostly during his time in Moscow, placed him in an internationally constituted field of literary theory to which he had not before fully belonged. This field was shaped by the Prague Circle's deliberations on realism, most notably Jakobson's article of 1921, "On Realism in Art."³³ But the field was also shaped by the lingering presence in the 1930s of a fatigued Russian Formalism (above all, by Shklovsky, who polemicized openly and covertly against Lukács) and by Mikhail Bakhtin's powerful responses to Lukács's theory, which were unpublished (if not unheard) at the time.³⁴

Lukács's theory of the novel was, in John Neubauer's apt phrasing, an "inscription of homelessness," cultural, social, and—one might add—methodological.³⁵ In the late 1920s and early 1930s in Moscow, Stalinist orthodoxy meant (as Lukács's friend Mikhail Lifshits has recalled) that it was extremely difficult to promote unsanctioned disciplines such as Marxist aesthetics, let alone

32. For more on this episode of Lukács's intellectual career, see in Tihanov, *The Master and the Slave: Lukács, Bakhtin, and the Ideas of Their Time* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 39–43.

33. Jakobson, "O realismu v umění" [On realism in art], *Cerven*, no. 4 (1921): 300–304.

34. See Tihanov, "Viktor Shklovskii and Georg Lukács in the 1930s," *Slavonic and East European Review* 78.1 (2000): 44–65.

35. Cf. John Neubauer, "Bakhtin versus Lukács: Inscriptions of Homelessness in Theories of the Novel," *Poetics Today* 17.4 (winter 1996): 531–46.

literary theory, as autonomous branches of scholarship.³⁶ With Lukács's articles on realism and the historical novel, literary theory on the Left finally gained firmer ground and respectable standing: it joined an established mode of inquiry, pursued internationally beyond the level of political expedience. Characteristically, Lukács's concept of realism was more than a weapon in the political struggles of the Left in the 1930s: he was responding to Hegel's notion of totality, which had featured prominently in *History and Class Consciousness*. Lukács was in equal measure replying to the neo-Kantian juxtaposition of essence and appearance, and to the feeble attempts of *Lebensphilosophie* to reconcile form and life, a problem central to Lukács's theorizing from the start. His passion for realism was enthusiasm for a literary form that cancels itself (a paradoxically creative act, according to Engels) in order to yield to the vigor and richness of life. Realism offers the ideal situation in which the writer neither imitates reality nor departs from it. If realistic works voluntarily surrender their specificity and significance in the service of transparency, then realism concerns nothing less than the reconciliation of culture and life.

Second Scenario: Re-forming Literature

Having briefly explored the facilitating role played by the disintegration and transformation of philosophical metadiscourses, we may turn to our second premise or scenario: that modern literary theory emerged in Eastern and Central Europe as a response to radical changes in literature and its social relevance. The history of the interaction between literary theory and literature among the Russian Formalists and in the Prague Circle is by now well known, which makes it possible for me, without further rehearsal, to concentrate on one resilient misapprehension.³⁷ It has become customary among students of this period to claim

36. Mikhail Lifshits, "Iz avtobiografii idej" [From the autobiography of ideas], in *Kontekst 1987* (Moscow: Nauka, 1988): 264–319.

37. The literature on Russian Formalism and the Russian avant-garde is vast; for earlier comprehensive statements, see, e.g., Aage Hansen-Löve, *Der russische Formalismus: Methodologische Rekonstruktion seiner Entwicklung aus dem Prinzip der Verfremdung* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1978); Christopher Pike, "Introduction: Russian Formalism and Futurism," in *The Futurists, the Formalists, and the Marxist Critique*, ed. Pike (London: Ink Links, 1979): 1–38; more recently, and with special reference to Jakobson, see Stephen Rudy, "Jakobson-Aljagrov and Futurism," in Pomorska et al., *Language, Poetry and Poetics*, 277–90; Boris Gasparov, "Futurism and Phonology: Futurist Roots of Jakobson's Approach to Language," in Gadet and Sériot, *Jakobson*

entre l'Est et l'Ouest, 109–30. On the relations between the Czech avant-garde and the Prague Linguistic Circle with reference to aesthetics, semiotics, and linguistics, see Věra Linhartová, "La place de Roman Jakobson dans la vie littéraire et artistique tchécoslovaque," in *Roman Jakobson: Echoes of His Scholarship*, ed. Daniel Armstrong and C. H. van Schooneveld (Lisse: Peter de Ridder, 1977), 219–35; Thomas G. Winner, "Roman Jakobson and Avantgarde Art," in Armstrong and Schooneveld, *Roman Jakobson*, 503–14; Vratislav Effenberger, "Roman Jakobson and the Czech Avant-garde between Two Wars," *American Journal of Semiotics* 2.3 (1983): 13–21; Jindrich Toman, "A Marvellous Chemical Laboratory . . . and Its Deeper Meaning: Notes on Roman Jakobson and the Czech Avant-Garde between the Two Wars," in Pomorska et al., *Language, Poetry, and Poetics*, 313–46; Winner, "The Czech Interwar Avantgarde and the Prague Linguistic Circle," in *Semantic*

that both Russian Formalism and the Prague Circle were born of avant-garde experiments with form that demanded scholarly rationalization. It has not been sufficiently acknowledged, however, that the programs and ideas of these two groups reached back to preoccupations emblematic of the Romantic literary and critical tradition. In Russia, the keen interest of the Symbolists in metrics and the theory of verse was a mediating link. As Jakobson reminisced in conversations with Krystyna Pomorska, Andrei Bely's "idea of verse as the immediate object of analysis made an indelible mark on me."³⁸ More important, Jakobson credited Fedor Buslaev, a Russian scholar in the Romantic tradition, with passing on to the young Formalists some of their essential ideas and principles:

The tradition of tying the study of language closely to that of literature was established at the University of Moscow in the eighteenth century, and was particularly cultivated by one of the greatest Slavists of the last century, Fedor Ivanovich Buslaev (1818–1897), who had inherited from Romanticism the idea of the existence of an intimate link between linguistics and the study of literature in both its aspects, written and oral.³⁹

In light of this recognition, we can better understand Jakobson's and Mukařovský's criticism of Saussure, and especially of the opposition that he posed between synchrony and diachrony. By making room for the historical modifications that language and literature undergo in the process of their dissemination and appropriation, the Prague Circle attempted to explain language from the dialectical perspectives of product and function, identity and change, thus taking up and fleshing out Wilhelm von Humboldt's idea of language as always both *ergon* and *energeia*. This theoretical baggage could be "borrowed" from Romanticism and rendered relevant only by means of a parallel engagement with Romantic poetry and prose.⁴⁰ A significant number of the key Formalists' studies dealt with Pushkin and Lermontov, while the Prague Circle rediscovered the Romantics Karel Hynek Mácha (the object of important studies by both Mukařovský and Jakobson) and Karel Erben.⁴¹ Another Czech Romantic poet,

Analysis of the Literary Texts, ed. Eric de Haard, Thomas Langerak, and Willem G. Weststeijn (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1990), 637–47; Toman, "Where Jakobson and the Dadaists (Temporarily) Converged," in *Roman Jakobson: Texts, Documents, Studies/Těksty, Dokumenty, Issledovaniia*, ed. Henryk Baran et al. (Moscow: RGGU, 1999), 897–906; Frank Illing, *Jan Mukařovský und die Avantgarde: Die strukturalistische Aesthetik im Kontext von Poetismus und Surrealismus* (Bielefeld: Aisthesis-Verlag, 2001).

38. Jakobson and Pomorska, *Dialogues* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983), 5.

39. Jakobson and Pomorska, *Dialogues*, 10.

40. Jakobson understood structuralism as a synthesis derived from "European romantic scholarship" (serving as a thesis) and positivism (antithesis); cf. Jakobson, "Společná řeč kultury: Poznámky k otázkám vzájemných styků sovětské a západní vědy" [The common language of culture: Notes on the problems of contacts between Soviet and Western scholarship], *Země sovětů* 4 (1935): 110.

41. Jakobson and Pomorska, *Dialogues*, 143.

Milota Zdirad Polák, though today regarded as minor, drew the attention of Mukařovský, who analyzed his poem “The Sublimity of Nature” in a major treatise published in 1934.⁴² This persistent interest in Romanticism, among both Russian and Czechoslovak theorists, may have been grounded in the intrinsic links between Romanticism and the avant-garde, whose experiments the Formalists and the Prague Circle held in high esteem. The connection, often mediated and thus overlooked, between modern literary theory and the agenda of Romantic art and philosophy of culture may be observed also in the genesis of the modern German discourse on literature, which was shaped through impulses originating in the literary output of Romantics like Novalis and E. T. A. Hoffmann. The two streams—the home tradition and the tradition of German (and English) Romanticism—converged in a seminal way in Russia, where the ground for the Formalist idea of autonomous literary art was prepared with the important mediation of Viktor Zhirmunskii. His expertise on German Romanticism and, above all, his early work on the composition of lyric poems (1921) helped set the scene of Formalist inquiry during the years before his interest in the comparative history of Romanticism (Byron, Pushkin) began to be thought insufficiently radical by old colleagues among the Formalists.⁴³

Furthermore, the intimate link between Romanticism and the inception of modern literary theory is once again suggestive of the dialectic between national and cosmopolitan tendencies in Eastern and Central Europe. Historically, in these countries Romanticism (and the various strains of post-Romanticism) became the chief provider of literary texts for the new national canons. No other literary movement was able to institute a better diet of local pride, national enthusiasm, and universalist human values. The significance of Romantic literature here was twofold: it promoted the virtues of national independence and uniqueness while advocating interest in perennial human passions, independent of historical settings and landscape. The Romantic text was thus cognate with the foundational paradox inherent in some of the best examples of early literary theory. That paradox can be formulated in one ramified sentence. It is possible to think about and theorize literature per se, beyond national constraints, yet the importance of literature per se as a subject of theory is validated by analyzing texts that had been—or are being—canonized as nationally significant; the process of canonization results from practices that are often consonant with, and modeled on, the construction of nation-states.

42. See Galan, *Historic Structures*, 45.

43. Cf. Viktor Zhirmunskii, *Kompozitsiia liricheskikh stikhotvoreniĭ* [The composition of lyric poems] (St. Petersburg: OPOIAZ, 1921); Zhirmunskii, *Bairon i Pushkin: Iz*

istorii romanticheskoi poemy [Byron and Pushkin: From the history of the Romantic poem] (Leningrad: Academia, 1924).

Regimes of Relevance

The Romantic background of modern literary theory, and the major role of Romanticism in Eastern and Central Europe as a reservoir of texts for the national literary canons, brings us to the crucial issue of institutional factors in the rise of modern literary theory. To deal with this issue requires my introducing the principle of relevance. The history of ideas about literature can be told as the history of attempts to conceptualize the changing regimes of its relevance. By "regime of relevance" (a concept of Foucauldian provenance), I mean the prevalent mode of literary consumption in a society at a particular time. Any given regime or mode is shaped by social and institutional factors that tend to function in competition and conflict with each other. It seems to me that the rise of literary theory as an autonomous discourse was dependent on the pronounced belief in (a very specific type of) relevance of literature to society. The preoccupation with literature in strictly theoretical terms, as sublimely detached from social and political concerns and struggles, represented itself solely as a reaction against a long-established Eastern European tradition of glorifying literature as the most important voice in public debates over the nature of political life and the values of society. Literary theory purported to represent a clean break from the very idea of literature's relevance. But that self-representation deserves a closer look.

The exceptional respect for literature as a social tribune and national voice in Eastern Europe was reflected in the early institutionalization of its study. At the university level, the first chair of Russian literature in Russia was established in 1835 (though survey courses were offered even earlier).⁴⁴ For comparison, the first chair of English literature in England was not established until 1852 (at University College, London), and the first chair at Harvard was not occupied until 1876. At Oxford, a school of English did not exist before 1894; at Cambridge, undergraduate degrees in English were not awarded before 1916.⁴⁵ Anglophone discourses on literature were determined by a regime of relevance somewhat different from that in Eastern Europe: while the idea of the social value of literature was firmly shared in both cases, English literature was viewed from early on less as a tool of nation building or a channel of political influence and more as a practice that contributes to the well-being of society by enhancing the life of the

44. Andy Byford is writing an interesting doctoral thesis at Oxford on the history and the institutions of literary scholarship in Russia; I am grateful to him for directing my attention to some important sources of information on the subject.

45. A concise and useful survey of the history of the institutionalization of English as an academic subject (including most of the dates adduced above) can be found in Wallace Martin, "Criticism and the Academy," in *Modernism and the New Criticism*, ed. A. Walton Litz, Louis Menand, and Lawrence Rainey, vol. 7 of *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, chap. 14.

individual.⁴⁶ I. A. Richards's practical criticism, a pedagogy more than a theoretical program, predominated. Even though Richards, like the Russian Formalists, was adamant that criticism should be freed from biography and that the link between author and text should be diminished, his overall principles differed more significantly from theirs than is commonly believed.⁴⁷ Poetic synesthesia, which interested Richards, was said to mobilize all human faculties and contribute to improving "intimate relations with other human beings."⁴⁸ Even when Richards moved to Harvard and, in his later years there, experienced the influence of Jakobson, he never embraced the notion of a "poetic function" separating literature from other discourses. Bentham's utilitarian equation of distinct practices and discourses can be heard in Richards's recommendation of "the lure of high mountaineering" as an activity providing stimulation not substantially different from that obtained in any other endeavor.⁴⁹

Given the widely shared belief in the practical value of literature—however differently that value may have been interpreted in Eastern Europe and the West in the early twentieth century—writing about literature from the perspective of pure literariness appeared to many in Eastern Europe as such a crucial change that it concealed an otherwise obvious continuity. The practice of literary theory was just another manifestation, in a very different guise and a very different set of historical circumstances, of belief in the relevance of literature. Literary theory—it is perhaps time to summarize—came about at a certain point and dwindled away at another point in time as, precisely, the conceptual product of a new regime of relevance for literature. Just as there are historically distinct regimes of relevance, so too there are distinct forms of conceptualizing particular regimes and the transitions between them. A new form of conceptualization is the reliable, if often belated, sign of the arrival of a new regime of relevance, as whose product it eventually emerges. Thus despite the many, if subtle, links and shades between regimes of relevance in the twentieth century, we can say that literary theory emerged in Eastern and Central Europe in the interwar decades as one of the conceptual products of the transition from a regime of relevance

46. In a different context, Cornis-Pope and Neubauer rightly observe that literature was institutionalized earlier in societies with problematic national identities—such as in Eastern and Central Europe (including Germany)—rather than in nations that had "a robust self-image," such as England and France (cf. Cornis-Pope and Neubauer, *Towards a History of the Literary Cultures in East-Central Europe: Theoretical Reflections*, American Council of Learned Societies Occasional Papers, no. 52 [New York: American Council of Learned Societies, 2002], 12).

47. The snappy label describing Richards as "the English Shklovsky" (cf. Pike, "Introduction: Russian Formalism

and Futurism," 30) ought to be strongly qualified. For more on New Criticism (which recognized Richards as its founder) and Russian Formalism, see Ewa M. Thompson, *Russian Formalism and Anglo-American New Criticism* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971).

48. I. A. Richards, *Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgement* (1929; reprint, New York: Harcourt Brace, 1966), 295.

49. My discussion of Richards draws here on Paul Fry's excellent analysis in Litz, Menand, and Rainey, *Modernism and the New Criticism*, chap. 8, esp. 191–93.

that recognizes literature for its role in social and political practice to a regime that values literature primarily for its qualities as an art. Literary theory, however, was only one such form of conceptualization, though probably the most representative and interesting: the regime of artistic relevance (as opposed to that of social and political relevance) had been in evidence, after all, since long before the seventy years during which literary theory flourished. This regime emerged in the last quarter of the eighteenth century as a response to the changing status of art in the bourgeois marketplace; it made its first important, but self-contradictory and not always consequential, moves in the work of the Romantics (hence the significant if often vague role of Romanticism in the work of modern literary theorists); it continued through the years of aestheticism and *l'art pour l'art*, down into the first decades after World War II, with the American New Criticism as its high point and death knell. The demise of literary theory has by now confirmed the transition to a third regime of relevance, where increasingly literature is not recognized for its social and political weight, nor indeed for some presumed aesthetic uniqueness, but is rather evaluated in a more low-key regime of relevance for what it can provide in terms of practically useful experience or entertainment or therapy.

In any given period, different regimes of relevance are of course simultaneously available. Instead of working in isolation, they are engaged in forms of exchange and competition. This competition is reflected, for example, in the inner diversity of Russian Formalism, with the Opoiiaz group more uncompromisingly inclined to judge literature on the basis of literariness, and the Moscow Linguistic Circle interested to an extent in the sociological aspects of verbal art.⁵⁰ A good example of this interpenetration and competition of regimes within the space of a single article is Jakobson's 1919 piece "The Tasks of Artistic Propaganda," where he uses Marxist parlance and arguments to champion a Formalist and futurist agenda.⁵¹ The interaction of regimes of relevance also explains, to a degree at least, the attempts of the Formalists and the Prague Circle to participate in the struggle for the distribution of social and cultural capital in the new states. Perhaps needless to say, the regime of social and political relevance was eventually imposed by force at the expense of the regime of aesthetic relevance,

50. A good description of the way in which the study of folklore and dialectology were imbued with elements of sociological analysis is offered in Matejka, "Sociological Concerns in the Moscow Linguistic Circle," in Pomorska et al., *Language, Poetry, and Poetics*, 307–12. Matejka singles out the attention to sociological analysis as a major difference between the Moscow wing of Formalism and Opoiiaz (of which Jakobson and Bogatyrev wrote as early as 1922 in their article "Slavic Philology in Russia between 1914–1921"; cf. Matejka, "Sociological Concerns," in Pomorska et al., *Language, Poetry, and Poetics*, 311).

51. Jakobson, "Zadachi khudozhestvennoi propagandy" [The tasks of artistic propaganda], *Iskusstvo*, no. 8, September 5, 1919. Jakobson adduced a quotation from Marx to promote novelty and experiment in form: "There comes a moment for all forms when they 'are transformed from forms of development of productional forces into their chains'" (quoted in Rudy, "Jakobson-Aljagrov and Futurism," in Pomorska et al., *Language, Poetry, and Poetics*, 285).

and with devastating consequences for literary theory in Russia. Similarly, in the 1960s we can begin to discern the complex overlap of all three regimes that I have described: a lingering appreciation of literature on the basis of literariness; the eruptive sway of literature in social and political discussions at universities in Paris, Prague, and Berkeley; and finally, the withdrawal into private consumption of literature as a largely escapist medium in the face of increasingly mediated forms of communication and the enhanced commodification of leisure. Today, the regime of relevance validating literature as a source of experience and entertainment overlaps with the freshly transfigured regime of social and political relevance exemplified in the struggle for “representative” national and global canons. What we need especially to bear in mind while studying literature and literary culture is that, while quite different regimes of relevance coexist at any one time, one of them comes to the fore—whether manifestly or obliquely—as the leading component in the mix.

Modern literary theory, then, is the product of a regime of relevance that validates literature for its presumed artistic originality. That regime emerged as primary in interwar Central and Eastern Europe because historical conditions happened to be most propitious there and then. A summary of these conditions would single out three basic points. First: in none of the four countries involved (Russia, Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia) was there a strong domestic tradition of philosophy that could impose its authority and thereby prevent the purposeful transformation and modification of established philosophical discourses into tools of literary theory. The intelligentsia in these countries lived after World War I on borrowed philosophical capital, mainly of German-Austrian provenance; and it was intellectuals from these four countries who were most active in the process of bending traditional German philosophy in the direction of aesthetics and literary theory. Second: having been parts of (by-then-defunct) empires before World War I (or having been an empire in its own right, in the case of Russia), each of the four countries was a natural locus of polyglossia and heterotopia (exile), providing—sometimes at the cost, and in the form, of bitter ethnic conflicts—a painfully beneficial environment for theoretical contemplation of literature beyond the presumed naturalness of native tongues and traditions. Third: in all four countries, there existed a unique blend of alienation from and identification with the type of nation-state formation characteristic of the period—an ambivalence suggestive of the complex interaction between the inherited and new regimes of relevance by which literature was judged and consumed.

It was only because of the confluence of these historical conditions that avant-garde literary practices—not at all specific to Central and Eastern Europe—demanded and triggered the process of their rationalization in literary theory

precisely in those countries.⁵² The centrality of Central and Eastern European literary culture to that process was therefore, like any great cultural achievement, a product of both deeper structural trends and unpredictable contingencies. Unraveling this combination cannot unravel the achievement or diminish the credit due to those who attained it. And I might add, by way of closing: the inverse may be said of those involved in the accomplishment's demise.

52. Versions of this article were given in oral presentations at the 2001 convention of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies; the Whitney Humanities Center, Yale University; the University of Pennsylvania; McMaster University; and the University of Western Ontario. The author wishes to thank Thomas Seifrid, Michael Holquist, Peter Steiner, Nina Kolesnikoff, and Clive Thomson for their invitations and comments. He also wishes to thank Svetlana Boym, Katerina Clark,

Caryl Emerson, Laura Engelstein, Maroussia Hajdukowski-Ahmed, John MacKay, Irina Paperno, Brian Poole, Michael Wachtel, Alexander Zholkovsky, and especially John Neubauer for suggestions and criticism. An earlier and significantly shorter version of this paper appeared in Russian in *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, as well as in Slovene and Bulgarian translation. Research was supported by a Lancaster University research grant.