

SIMPLE FORMS

ANDRÉ JOLLES

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Introduction

I. THE THREE ORIENTATIONS OF LITERARY CRITICISM – BEAUTY, MEANING, STRUCTURE

Literary criticism has a threefold orientation. Using a somewhat outdated terminology, we could say that its three basic tasks are aesthetic, historical and morphological. Or, to put the matter more plainly: literary criticism undertakes to interpret literary phenomena with regard to their *beauty*, *meaning* and *structure*.

Now, even if these three are meant to form a trinity, still the motto holds: march separately, strike together. In other words: even if these three approaches are best used in concert to grasp the literary phenomenon in its totality, still each operates according to its own method.

To judge from the history of literary criticism, it would also seem that each method has sometimes been inclined to usurp hegemony for itself.

One part of eighteenth-century literary criticism was primarily aesthetic in character; from Christian Wolff to Immanuel Kant and in all parts of Europe, it joined in the currents and countercurrents that shaped the ‘doctrine of the Beautiful’ during this era. If we disregard its general speculations concerning the nature of beauty and restrict ourselves to what was asserted about the invention,

judgment and classification of the Beautiful, we can say that the aesthetic approach – or, since here a plural seems apposite, the aesthetic schools – gave us the science of genre criticism. With diligence and acuity, its proponents explored the aesthetic laws and effects of the lyric, epic, dramatic and didactic genres; within these main genres they attempted to differentiate and define the subgenres of elegy and ode, epic and novel, comedy and tragedy, didactic poem and epigram, and many others, again from an aesthetic perspective. There was no lack of critiques of their method. Some said they proceeded deductively: instead of beginning by studying works of art to arrive at insights into the nature of art, they had established their principles purely through speculation and then applied them to the facts afterward. Others reproached them with being too much men of the Enlightenment: they had failed to appreciate the irrational in art, viewing even ‘poetic creativity’ as a mode of thought and granting ‘reason’ the highest authority in matters of aesthetic judgment.

I shall not ask to what extent such reproaches identify real weaknesses of the method itself, nor to what degree they depend on a misunderstanding that the proponents of another approach, another method, seem unable to avoid. It will be more useful to note that, despite their reciprocal polemics, the eighteenth-century aesthetes made a remarkable attempt to adapt a tradition of art theory with roots in antiquity to the mentality of a new era, and that by making the effort to define certain genre concepts and describe the aesthetic significance of these genres, they helped the progress not only of literary criticism but also of literature.

For there is another thing we should not forget: in every one of its schools, the aesthetic literary criticism of the eighteenth century was firmly convinced that its theories could and should exert an active influence on life – in this case, on contemporary art. What was sought after by Gottsched and the Swiss, by the Scots and the

English, by Marmontel and the Encyclopedists in France, and by Johann Adolf and Johann Elias Schlegel, Mendelssohn, Lessing, Sulzer and many others in Germany, each in his own way, was finally always a serviceable poetics, a binding system of poetic art, which – however arrived at – could in any case claim validity for developing a national canon of poetry in the present.

Besides this pragmatic aesthetics we find – also already in the eighteenth century – a hermeneutic type of literary criticism whose goal is to explain the *meaning* of works of art; its fundamental idea is the concept of *genius*, as is well known. The beginnings of this approach can be found in the Renaissance, but it does not fully flourish until the early romantics. It opposes an *ars poetica* to an *ars poetae*, or poetics to the poet. ‘Poet’ is the epitome of all genius; poetry means creation by genius. Genius is ‘a natural inborn spiritual talent that surpasses the normal in every respect; it can neither be learned nor acquired’. In genius, inventive fantasy and original creative power converge in such a way and to such a degree that, for the activity of genius, only the term ‘creation’, in the deepest sense, seems adequate. Certainly, to finish an object begotten with intuitive creativity requires reflection, method and practice, but perfect natural ability remains the primary and essential condition. The work of art acquires its meaning through the act of the genius, just as the world acquires its meaning through the act of its Creator.

This is not the place to trace the development of the concept of genius. But because it is a matter of some significance in the history of literary-critical method, we will mention that although in Germany we are inclined to believe that this concept took definitive shape in the period known, correctly or not, as the *Sturm und Drang*, in fact England is where we can best observe its uniform and continuous development: that is, along a trajectory from

Shaftesbury to Shelley. In the nineteenth century, moving from England through France, the concept of genius affected European thinking in general, and with it the practice of literary criticism – an influence that has continued into the twentieth century. Shelley’s assertion that the poet is ‘the happiest, the best, the wisest and the most illustrious of men’ has survived many a statement on genius made by Goethe when he was young, ideas long outgrown by the older Goethe himself.

Be that as it may, if we are to draw a methodological conclusion from the notion of genius, then it is this: that the mission of literary criticism is to place these individuals, with their sublime, elemental ability and their matchless accomplishments – creators with their creations – into an ordered *historical* series. It is well known that the literary historians of the nineteenth century did in fact draw this conclusion. We need only open any handbook of literary history to see that what we have there is a history of poets and their poetry, a historical succession of poets’ biographies, in which the poetic achievements are then also ordered historically.

This method escaped the danger of superficiality thanks to its close connection with the other historical and historico-cultural disciplines then evolving everywhere. At the same time, however, its basic thesis – that the poet is a genius, a creator solely responsible for a unique work of art – was weakened by this connection. Increasingly, the historical poet became a man among men – and precisely the question of man’s responsibility for what he makes has been one of the most daunting problems of positivism. It is remarkable to witness the drama of an individualistic era robbing the individual of the essential elements of his individuality – a show that we can enjoy to its full extent in the notion of the ‘poet as a man among men’. The curve that ascends from Shaftesbury through to the *Sturm und Drang* or to Shelley then descends by strange twists and turns from Shelley to

Hippolyte Taine. We need not describe these flourishes in detail. Suffice it to say that the era strove to define works of literary art historically, sociologically and psychologically, but the path to such definition still passed through the maker of works of literary art. The poet was, as a man, a product of race, of milieu, of time and heredity, of economic and other circumstances; a thousand currents of the past and the present worked upon him, transformed him, undermined him, and thus the conditions of his artistic production were to be sought in the multiple contingencies of his situation as a human being. If we explain the man – so the logic went – if we regard him as a son of his parents, as a descendant of his ancestors, as a child of his time, brought forth by a milieu and subject to the influence of circumstances; if beyond that we analyse him psychologically and observe how, with his intricate and contingent constitution, he reacts to external events, then we have explained the genesis of his works of art. On such a logic, however, these works of art could appear little more than the expression, by an exceptional talent, of all the historical and cultural currents flowing through a particular individual.

Meanwhile, the conviction arose once again that a work of art, a great literary work, should represent something different from and spiritually greater than all this. ‘Phenomenology of Spirit’ was the call of a man whose voice was not that of one crying in the wilderness.¹ The philosophy of Spirit, the study of the principles of intellectual life, of the nature of Spirit and its products, of intellectual creation, of spiritual values and purposes, also made itself felt in the way people thought about literary works. An effort was made to interpret individual poetic works sympathetically, as part of a spiritual process, while literary art was wholly included in the history of Spirit. However, this method as well led not to the separate study of the literary work and of its creator, but to a peculiar transposition: the writer’s life and character were no longer

adduced to explain his achievements, but rather they were deduced from, and explained by, the work's intellectual significance. In a certain sense, this was the opposite pole to everything that had been implied in the concept of genius, but this pole was reached in a way that did not require any great methodological change. Whether the method of explanation begins with the writer and his work or with the work and its writer: either way, it regards this matching dyad as the 'historical' object of its research. It also distinguishes itself from a pragmatic aesthetics by remaining 'purely scholarly' from beginning to end – in so far as it manages to avoid degenerating into dilettantism. Unlike the aestheticians of the eighteenth century, its proponents – for all their differences of opinion – never believed that they could exert any influence on the progress of living literary art; nor did they ever attempt to do so.

Slowly, alongside these two approaches, the third became conscious of its mission and set out to conquer a method for itself.

'The Germans have a word for the complex of existence presented by a physical organism: *Gestalt* [structured form]. With this expression they exclude what is changeable and assume that an interrelated whole is identified, defined, and fixed in character.'²

We can posit this sentence from Goethe's writings on morphology as a foundation for morphology's mission within the field of literary as well as biological science. For the sum of all literary phenomena, too, it can be said that the *Gestalt* to be produced, the 'typically definite morphological manifestation of things', is 'the effective power in all that occurs' (G. Simmel).³

By likewise excluding everything that is temporally contingent or individually mutable in the realm of literature, understood in the broadest sense, we can isolate and define this structure and recognize its fixed character. With each individual work of literary art, we can ask to what extent the forces that limit form and

establish structure have produced a recognizable and distinct entity, to what degree a structure has become realized in a definitive manner. With respect to the totality of all literary art, we raise the question: To what extent might the totality of all known and definable forms constitute a unified, fundamentally ordered, internally coherent and structured whole – a system?

The mission of this approach is determination of forms, interpretation of *Gestalt*.

The aim of the following chapters is to apply this approach experimentally to a particular range of literary phenomena.

II. LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

We have already seen that, in their analyses, both the aesthetic and the hermeneutic methods proceeded principally from the completed literary work of art; that they usually recognized ‘poetry’ only where it had achieved a singular and definitive end in the ‘poem’ or *poema*, the made thing; or that – to repeat – they regarded their proper object of study as poets and poetry, or poetry and poets.

Of course! Who would hold it against a ‘doctrine of the Beautiful’ that it grasps beauty where it is present in a most highly developed state? And how is one supposed to influence the life of literature if one does not understand it as ‘art’? With a ‘historical’ approach, which always regards literary products in relation to their producers, this point of departure is a given.

If however we mean to recognize and explain the structure of a literary phenomenon, we must proceed in a different manner. If it is our goal ‘to exclude what is mutable’, we cannot begin with the completed individual work of literary art; instead, we must end with it. We must grasp ‘poetry’ not in its final literary state, but rather where it begins: that is, in *language*.

Were we to elaborate the history of a method that interprets structure, we would see that the eighteenth century already gave thought to the project of building a science of literature commencing with language. We already find the beginnings of such an approach in Hamann's oft-quoted sentence from the *Aesthetica in nuce*, 'Poetry is the mother tongue of the human race.'⁴ No doubt we could also include the great double project of Herder's early years: the famous essay in which he investigates the origins of language as such, and his collection of *Old Folk Songs*,⁵ in which he gives examples of a language, still close to its origins, that he sees as a 'collection of elements of poetry' or 'a vocabulary of the soul which is simultaneously a mythology and a wonderful epic of the actions and speakings of all beings.'⁶ Finally, we find something similar in Jacob Grimm's concept of 'natural poetry' (*Naturpoesie*) – about which more later.

Yet at the time this did not issue in any stringent classification of forms. If we would continue the work then begun in a consistent fashion, we must use every resource of linguistic and literary study to discern the path that leads from language to literature, or – put more precisely, and in the idiom of the theory of objective spirit – to observe when, where and how language can and does become a *construct* without at the same time ceasing to be a *sign*.

Methodologically, this poses a series of problems.

From the units and structures of language, as given in grammar, syntax and semantics, we must ascend systematically, via the disciplines of stylistics, rhetoric and poetics, to the highest works of literary art, using comparisons to observe how a given phenomenon may repeat itself on another level in an amplified way, and how the same structuring (*gestaltbildende*) and form-delimiting force, increasing each time, dominates the whole system. For example, we might start with linguistic aspects of syntactic form to find the path to artistic composition, or derive the sense of a trope from the

meaning of a word.

We might in this way come to understand the force that consolidates itself by ever-ascending steps within the great domain of language and literature until it appears to us in a final, finished state as a definite individual unity. Yet it behoves us to attend as well to those forms that have also emerged from language but which seem not to have become complete in this way, forms consolidated over time into what we might call a different aggregate state – forms explained not by stylistics, nor by rhetoric, nor by poetics, perhaps indeed not even as a matter of ‘writing’; forms which, even though they are artistic, still do not become a work of art – in short, the forms we call legend, *Sage*, myth, riddle, proverb, case, *memorable*, fairy tale or joke.

If, without neglecting the first problem, we begin with the second, it is because neither the aesthetic nor the historical approach to literature has ever paid these forms much attention. To be sure, literary historians did have a sense that these forms might somehow be present in works of literary art – that, for example, one cannot speak of the *Nibelungenlied* without also discussing the Nibelung saga – yet its interpretive method failed to plumb their significance. Their study was left to ethnography or to other not entirely literary disciplines.

We thus have some catching up to do. If only to fill in the gap, this book – the first chapter of *our* approach to literary criticism – will attend to these forms. They are those that arise, so to speak, within language itself, developing themselves in language, without the aid of a poet.

III. LANGUAGE AS LABOUR: PRODUCING, CREATING, INTERPRETING

How can we understand *language as labour*?

Right away the image appears of a human community of labour and of the people within it who perform the labour in their several ways: farmer, artisan, priest – the producer, the creator, the interpreter.

Producing, creating, interpreting are the activities that weld a community together as a work community.

I need hardly note that when we say ‘farmer, artisan, priest’, we have no ethnological theory whatsoever in mind, nor any classification of forms of economic life; nor do we intend to arrange these three figures as developmental stages in some historico-cultural sequence. What we would express with them is the division of labour visible as labour in the *world* and as labour in *language*.

Let us observe them in their activity.

The *farmer* produces: his labour consists of ordering things given in nature so as to organize them around man as their focal point. Nature, that which abides in itself, is taken up into the life of man – and since life means renewal, so too is nature renewed in this life, but such that the natural processes are allowed to continue unhindered. The farmer’s production transforms generative nature into culture. He scatters the seed in the ordered furrows and there grows a field of grain; he plants the seedlings of the wood in a tree nursery and a grove arises; he brings the steer to the cow and the stud to the mare and calves and foals grow. As he cultivates, uncultured nature orders itself around him. There is more to the farm than the cowshed, crop field, tree grove, pasture, fruit or vegetable garden. The animals gather around the farmer. Not only the dog, which may play a role in the work of cultivation, but also the cat. The swallow makes its nest under the farmer’s overhanging roof gable, the stork nests on its ridge; the spider lives in the attic. The seeds of plants are blown through the air – not only medicinal

and ornamental herbs, but also ones that seem to attach themselves to man without aim or use and which follow him everywhere he goes, like chicory and plantain. Even things he cannot use: he is accompanied by parasites, weeds and vermin that take advantage of the newly created conditions, subject themselves in a sense to his cultivation, move from the sphere of nature to that of human life.

What in nature was locally bound becomes mobile. Trees and bushes wander from one part of the world to another – and what we call landscape is ultimately just nature that has ordered itself, centred itself, around the human producer.

The *artisan* creates – his labour consists in ordering nature's givens in such a way that they cease to be natural. He is constantly interrupting and destroying natural processes. What he renews becomes truly new. He even seizes hold of what man has produced. The grains of cereal are no longer used to produce new grain; they are pounded, ground, pulverized, moistened, heated, and from this unfertile material, bread is made. The trunks that have grown in the tree nursery are chopped down, cut, sawn into beams, planks, rafters – and a house comes into being, or a wagon. But he goes beyond what has been produced: he takes the large stones and piles them to make a wall; the small ones he strikes together until they give sparks and a fire burns. Bones and the skeletons of fish become daggers and arrows or hairpins; a cow's horn becomes a horn for sounding or drinking from; sheepgut becomes a bowstring or the string of a musical instrument. Plants and metals are mashed to yield pigment; food is fermented and becomes an intoxicating beverage. He does not stop at what is objectively given in nature; he also takes hold of nature's invisible powers, analyses them, rearranges them, puts them to use: water and air are made to yield their force, become motion and light.

But how would all this work of production and creation be possible if the third type of labour – the work of *interpretation* –

did not constantly steer them, if each kind of labour did not have a meaning that made it obligatory, and if it were not understanding this meaning that brought the work as such to completion? Or, to stick with our terminology: if the work that *orders* and the work that *reorders* were not accompanied by the work that *gives orders*: the work that prescribes, decrees, regulates? Only once meaning is assigned to the manner in which things are produced and created, and the objects produced and created are themselves given meaning, can we call a community of labour complete.

Thus does the *priest* join the farmer and the artisan. Only in so far as the priest gives meaning to their labour does it become possible for the farmer to incorporate nature, with its natural processes, into his life, or for the artisan to disrupt nature and natural process and bring forth new things from it – which he does by imputing sense to this work, from its very beginnings to its utmost and final consequences, understood in the broadest sense.

How do I combine beams and stones in such a way as to protect me and mine and my possessions against nature – to isolate all of this from nature so that it can become a structure, a dwelling, a house? Further: What is the meaning of a house, a home, that includes a family, the life of a family, family possessions, from the forefathers down to the grandchildren? And then, further yet: What does that house mean in a broader sense when it is reflected in other types of home – in the house of the gods, in the house of the dead, in the temple, in the grave? Or if we would concentrate on details: What is the meaning of the swallow that makes its nest under the roof of the house? What is the meaning of the stork that lives on the roof ridge? What do they add? What do they contribute to the people who live in the house? What do the rose, the myrtle, the lily in the garden mean to us?

It is through the interpretive work of the priest that labour first becomes complete, becomes fully labour. We have for the concepts

‘complete’ (*vollständig*) and ‘whole’ (*ganz*) a word in Old High German whose meaning shifted somewhat in Middle High German, and which is still used in the same sense in Low German and Dutch: the word *heil*. The work of the priest cannot be described better than with this word *heil*, for it also indicates his activity in the largest sense. By interpreting the world, he makes it *heil* – that is, complete, whole, healthy, *sanus*. But in so far as he makes the world *heil*, he acts as a mediator between the work community and another sphere: not only does he make this community whole (*heil*), he makes it *holy* (*heilig*). Anything that is to endure must be interpreted from its beginnings as holy. The first day of the new year is holy, as is a child’s first day of school. Holy is the first furrow drawn by the plough through barren land – like ‘whole’, ‘holy’ and ‘heal’ (*heil*, *heilig*, *heilen*), so are the words *colere* (cultivate), *cultus* (cult) and *Kultur* (culture) interrelated. This first furrow signifies all the ones that will follow, in their totality: it means the coming harvest; it means the fecundity of what is to be produced. When a house is to be built, we set the foundation stone; this action gives meaning to and sanctifies all the actions to follow; the foundation stone condenses the entire significance of the house within itself. Just as it is laid, so shall the other stones be laid; just as it is solid, so shall the others be solid; upon this stone shall rest the house and everything that will occur in the house, from the tranquility of its inhabitants to the authority that resides in the *paterfamilias*. Every principle of order and disposition rests within this stone. Such actions are undertaken solemnly, with feasts and fasts; this imbues them with meaning as they are completed, and expresses their originary integrity. Everything that is active or objective in culture, everything in culture that adopts a *Gestalt* or takes on form, must be hallowed by interpretation so that it may become *heil*, and its holiness can be renewed at any moment through reference to this interpretation; every cultural activity is

ultimately cult activity, every cultural object a cult object.

It is clear – although given the tendency of today's disciplines to misunderstand each other, I must repeat the point – that here we are not engaging in cultural history in an evolutionary sense. We cannot say: first man produced, then he created, then he interpreted. It would be pointless to search remote corners of the earth for a people that may have come to a halt in the production phase, in a rustic stage. There is no such thing; there cannot be. Of course, I am aware that human economies have passed through developmental stages; but here, while regarding labour in its individual forms, our aim is to understand it holistically – and in this sense, there is nothing that man has acquired through work in which we do not recognize him as farmer, artisan, priest.

This bears repeating, now that we find ourselves in a position to compare the spheres of these three cultural actors. The three spheres are concentric, their periphery broadening from instance to instance. We have already seen that what the artisan creates amplifies what was given with the farmer's production. Not only did he make bread from the grain grown in the field: he went far beyond what the farmer produced to involve in his labour everything that seemed accessible and useful to him in uncultivated nature. And with the priest the sphere becomes larger still – he does not content himself with giving meaning to what man has produced and created, but his work of interpretation extends to everything that is not, and cannot be, produced and created: he imputes meaning to the sun, the moon and the stars; his interpretations go beyond what can be seen and grasped, to the invisible and the ungraspable.

This is how we may regard these three figures before us – this is how we can envision them in their spatial definition, in their movement through space. The farmer belongs to his clod, he is located in the countryside – if he should leave it, he ceases to be a

farmer. The artisan roams the world as a journeyman, and then he settles where the countryside ends, in a locus where everything has been reordered and removed from nature, and where the natural processes in life have been modified – he moves to the settlement, to the city. In a certain sense, the farmer remains alone with his family – if he associates with others, it is usually for reasons that have to do with artisanship; the artisan, meanwhile, joins up with other artisans in a guild, in a union. The priest, finally, is both steadfast and mobile – he does not wander the world, but instead seeks a point from which he can survey it; he is solitary in that he does not band together with others of his kind, but at the same time he constitutes the focal point of a crowd, of a community that gathers round him. And in the three expressions family, guild, community, we once again see our three figures clearly before us.

All the work that is done by the farmer, the artisan and the priest is recapitulated in language.

Everything that the farmer, the artisan and the priest have accomplished belongs to life, passes away with life, renews itself in life, or endures with life. Through the labour of language, however, it acquires a new stability in language itself.

This occurs in two ways. First, everything that is produced, created, interpreted, is named by language. Second, however – and here we go deeper – language itself is a producing, creating and interpreting entity; it is something in which ordering, reordering and prescribing occur in a very particular way.

In the ‘Commentary’ section of his *Essays in Sound Analysis*⁷ Gunther Ipsen has shown what ‘naming’ means – how it endows the world with a kind of ‘air’ that envelops and penetrates everything, in which everything lies embedded; how humans breathe this air and inhale with it everything that surrounds them, how with the act of exhalation the air becomes resonant, and how

these resonant tones make up the names of things.

In its work of naming, language is as much a constant as the inhalation and exhalation of breath; it is as omnipresent as the ‘air’ of which we have spoken.

However: *nomen est omen!* Something issues from language; it is a seed that can grow, and as such it is *productive*. We know this, and we sense it especially, naively and instinctively, in moments of fear when we may have used words to produce something we would rather not have. ‘Unbidden’, we say, or ‘misspoken’, and we try through some action to limit the productive power of words. We can call it superstition, but we need to be clear about the fact that there is something to this so-called superstition – a knowledge that words can become realities. If we investigate the etymology of words like *loben, geloben, glauben, erlauben* (‘praise’, ‘plight’, ‘believe’, ‘allow’), and all the other words derived from the Indo-European root **leubh*, we sense everywhere how they suggest the possibility of appropriating or producing something. To promise (*versprechen*) is much more than to announce a binding intention. It means: to speak (*sprechen*) in such a way that something will come about – just as in certain parts of Germany one can call up or summon a ghost (*einen Geist versprechen, heraufbeschwören*). In quite the same way, language is used to bind fire with water when both are spoken of together. Λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο (*logos sarx egeneto*) – we know that a word can become flesh and live among us. In this context, what we often call magic – badly misapplying the term under the influence of an uncomprehending positivism – should be understood as the productive aspect of language. And again, productivity is here an *ordering of things* that does not hinder the natural course of events, but rather allows it to enter into and assimilate itself to the life of man.

Just as language produces, so too does it *create*; just as a word can become something real, so too can it engender something new,

through a process of *rearrangement*. Language creates structure, in that language poetizes (*dichtet*) i.e. weaves into form – we use the German word *dichten* in its proper sense. What language has created is as solidly fixed as what the artisan creates in the sphere of life. We know Odysseus, Don Quixote, Mr Pickwick – we know these figures of language better than we know many people who live in our personal ambit. The pact that Faust made with the Devil has had its legal validity investigated by noted jurists. These persons and facts may remind us so much of specific writers that we are disinclined to consider them creations by language. But I would recall Serenissimus,⁸ who cannot be connected with any writer in particular, and point to what happened to the burghers of Schilda⁹ when they set about building their town hall – events more familiar to many, perhaps, than today’s daily politics.

We tend to say that, where language operates poetically, literature arises. With this we have found the transition we sought. And we know that language, understood as a work of rearrangement, here leads directly to literature, even if this literature does not originate with a particular poet or is not fixed in a particular work of art. At the same time, we can see how something is seized upon by language or literature, and is changed and renewed; something that – to put it boldly – had been given in nature.

A living person who is widely visible in his time is in essence doubly present. We know one Mussolini from reports, stories, anecdotes – but we do not know to what extent he is the same as the ‘real’ Mussolini, Mussolini *in natura*. This second Mussolini is related to the literary Mussolini as grain is to bread: he has been pounded, ground, pulverized, moistened, heated – he is made poetic, created. He craves interpretation, for only interpretation can establish the relationship of Mussolini I to Mussolini II.

We have thus arrived at the third labour of language. In analogy

to production and creation, we have talked of completion and poetic condensation by language. In this third case, the case of the interpretive labour of language, we can apply the words *knowing* and *thinking*.

Human beings are faced with a given manifold of phenomena; they discover similarities, they look for what the phenomena have in common. Let me present an example, which I have derived from Porzig's 'Etymological Studies' and Ipsen's 'Reflections on Linguistics'.¹⁰

A person observes the phases of a heavenly body that shows him a form completing itself by rounding itself out from a narrow crescent to a disc, and this completion to form becomes a standard for him when observing how time also fulfills itself. He carries within him a *feeling* that presses for completion, and an *ambition* to round out thought to a form. At the same time, he recognizes how he himself as a living being unfolds his own powers over the course of this life. But how, from what perspective, shall he apprehend what these various things have in common, these things that signify to him a world of development, unfolding, completion? This is where language begins its work; through interpretation, it comprehends all this in a sign; and this sign, mobile like the phenomena and yet still enclosing their shared identity entirely within itself, becomes the regulatory centre from which that unfolding proceeds and to which it returns. We call such a sign a *root*.

We shall see later that 'root' is a word that indicates a particular mental attitude, but which fails to do justice to the central position of the sign. Still, we do not want to change the terminology where this does not seem absolutely necessary; in any case, the word *root* shows us how deep within language the interpretive activity lies.

The root that underlies our example – with which we find ourselves in the sphere of Indo-European cognition and thought – is

**men*. And from the perspective of this regulatory principle, the heavenly body must be called *mond* ('moon'), the derivative time segment *monat* ('month'), the feeling *minne* ('courtly love'), the mental ambition *meinen* ('meaning'), the living creature *mann* or *mensch* ('man', 'human being'). Were we to adduce other Indo-European languages besides the German, we would find many more examples, beginning with the Latin *mens* or the Greek *μαίνομαι* (*mainomai*), *μάντις* (*mantis*), and *maenad*.

We would then also see how this **men* not only functions as a root word, but also takes formal hold of additional material and forces it into its sphere; how as a formative principle it endows very disparate things with meaning, objects both natural and instrumental: things *filled with power by being formed*, so that – to take one example – the meaning of the Latin word *semen*, which is etymologically distant from the words just mentioned, is extended by virtue of its *mn* ending to things that round themselves out like the moon, and which by becoming full also unfold their power.

Allow me to mention again the foundation stone, in which every action related to building and everything man understands by the word *house* is present and regulated, and we will understand how, beginning with what we have called *roots*, language not only indicates similarity so to speak radially, but also integrates the connotations of objects that manifest themselves disparately, such as when it assigns figures on the chessboard and troops on the battleground equally to a *field*.

IV. LITERARY FORMS

To some, this image of a world built up through production, creation, interpretation, in which we find the farmer, artisan and priest, and in which language recapitulates their labour, may seem

too much a world of products of labour, a world of sown fields, ground cereals, baked bread, built houses, set foundation stones – in short, a world of objects, a world of particulars.

If this is so, then we need only think for a moment to see that the world does not generally appear to man in this way. Taken as a whole, in its blurry diversity, in its tumult and surge, to him it seems more a wilderness and a confusion. To understand the world, he must immerse himself in it, he must somehow reduce the endless number of its phenomena, he must intervene in it to set one thing apart from another. Humans in the world may remind us of the girl in the fairy tale who is placed before a chaotic heap of seeds of all kinds, and is then set the task of sorting them all out properly by the end of the night. We know how this story goes: friendly birds or insects come to her aid. The work is accomplished, and as the immeasurable pile is reduced to measurable smaller piles, what was in this pile comes into its own and becomes valuable. With like thus coming to like, what was but a confusing part of a greater confusion acquires its own characteristics, becomes itself. When the magician appears at sunrise, chaos has become cosmos.

The human being intervenes in the world's confusion; engaging with it, reducing, combining, he condenses what belongs together, sunders, divides, disperses, and collects in his little piles what is essential. The differences widen; ambiguities are excluded, or resolved and restored to clarity. Construing, constraining, he pushes through to the basic forms.

As we shall see, what is happening here is no fairy tale. That which lies massed in the world's confusion does not possess its own form a priori, as do the various seed types, or a pea, or a bean; instead, what is separated by differentiation acquires its proper form only as it converges in the process of analysis. And this is exactly the process we have to consider. Like comes to like, but in this case it does not form small piles of individual items, but rather

a manifold whose parts interpenetrate, unite, become mutually intimate, and thus generate a structure [*eine Gestalt*], a form – a form that can be understood objectively as such; one that has, so to speak, its own *validity*, its own *concision* (*Bündigkeit*).

Where *language* has contributed to the generation of such a form, where it intervenes in such a form by a process of organization and rearrangement, where it reconfigures the form from within itself – there we can speak of *literary forms*.