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*Controlling the Imaginary*

From the groundbreaking work, *Control of the Imaginary* (1988), this chapter marks the first full articulation of the contours of such control in modern times. Here Costa Lima argues that, since the inception of modern reason, from the Italian Renaissance onwards, the imagination has been singled out as a potentially disruptive force, dangerous to the main centres of authority and power in a given society; it has therefore been kept under constant suspicion and control, relegated to marginal social activities, such as the field of fiction; an activity which can only proceed through the imagination forming a compact with reason. By rehabilitating the notion of mimesis – as the production of difference within a horizon of similarity – and examining the relationship between mimesis, the imaginary and fiction, Costa Lima identifies innovative avenues for theorizing such control.

“Controlling the Imaginary” is Chapter One of *Control of the Imaginary* by Luiz Costa Lima, p 3-53 © 1986 University of Minnesota Press, <http://www.upress.umn.edu/>. Translated by Ronald W. Sousa. All rights reserved. No further use, distribution or reproduction is allowed without the prior written permission of the publisher. Originally published in Portuguese as *O controle do imaginário: Razão e imaginação nos tempos modernos* by Editora Brasiliense, São Paulo, © 1984 by Luiz Costa Lima.

## CONTROLLING THE IMAGINARY

*While readiness to recognize alternative worlds may be liberating, and suggestive of new avenues of exploration, a willingness to welcome all worlds builds none. Mere acknowledgement of the many available frames of reference provides us with no map of the motions of heavenly bodies; acceptance of the eligibility of alternative bases produces no scientific theory or philosophical system; awareness of varied ways of seeing paints no pictures. A broad mind is no substitute for hard work.*

Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*

### The Itinerary of a Problem

What should we do when, in the course of life, a problem transfixes us, envelops us, obsesses us? A healthy constitution, one making its life between irony and irritation, would say: "Make it into a good steak and enjoy." But what if, because of either ambition on the one hand or laxity on the other, such a metamorphosis is not found to be a viable course of action—and if long walks, polite conversation, or the blue of the sea prove equally unproductive? And if the obsessed person, caught up in the web, is unable to transform the internal wolf into lambs and the problem into productive projects? Then that person simply has to live with it, like the patient with his bile, the gambler with his mania, or the dwarf with his stigma.

Some years ago a problem began to perplex me: even though the Italian *Cinquecento* had generated an extensive body of theorization on the poetic—one comparable in extent only to that produced in our own century—the more I read in its authors the more I became convinced that their common point of departure in fact amounted to a scandalous prohibition: a prohibition of fiction itself. But, as the rediscoverers of Aristotelian *Poetics*, the very thinkers who gave it to society and sought either to reconcile it with the Horatian and Platonic legacies or to combat those legacies in its name, how could they begin from that paradoxical position? The very question seemed nothing short of absurd. Unsure about how to get out of the circle thus created, I tried instead to acclimate myself. After all, one absurdity more or less brings no house down. Despite that approach, the circle's gravitation did not abate. After I had thus earned residency rights, the question, as though laughing at me, produced another: with what interests did this supposed prohibition correlate? Why should it have been promulgated precisely by those who dedicated themselves to the poetic and who therefore should have prized it most fully?

Although the question was still enigmatic for me, I began to see that it could at least be treated plausibly as the result of a line of thought opened up by my friend Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht in a course that he taught in Rio de Janeiro in August 1982. In one of his last sessions, Gumbrecht proffered a line of argument that analyzed the crisis that shook the late Middle Ages as the result of a relative lack of flexibility in the mental structure then predominant. That lack of flexibility, he argued, derived from two sources, namely, that the Christian cosmology of the time offered a single interpretation for every experience, and that it did not contain a temporal structure, and thus rendering itself incapable of dealing with change.

In support of the first point, we might do well to recall Huizinga's classical analysis: "So violent and motley was life that it bore the mixed smell of blood and of roses. The men of that time always oscillate between the fear of hell and the most naive joy, between cruelty and tenderness, between harsh asceticism and insane attachment to the delights of the world, between hatred and goodness, always running to extremes."<sup>i</sup>

In support of the second point, I would have recourse to Gumbrecht and his analysis of the Renaissance constitution of historical time as cyclical.

Given this atmosphere of crisis, the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries especially experienced the need to create mediating strategies. Among those that Gumbrecht examined in 1982, the one that will be key for the following discussion is the development of the experiencing of subjectivity. To the extent that the notion that truth had been inscribed by the Divinity in the things of this world and therefore revealed itself in unequivocal signs was being abandoned, phenomena were increasingly allowed multiple meanings; and it was the subject who was made responsible for apprehending the correct one. Subjectivity acquired what amounted to a supplementary function: because the traditional cosmic order, formulated theologically and grounded in the faith, was being found insufficient, the individual subject was charged with the discovery of a guiding logic.

I am well aware that the mode of exposition that I have adopted — one in which I endeavor to recall the moment when I began to comprehend a possible line of investigation for the problem that had so perplexed

me—cannot itself communicate to the reader a sense of the articulation between the rediscovery of subjectivity and my hypothetical prohibition of fiction. Even so, I have chosen this development in homage to the colleague who opened the way for me, and I hope that, by the time I reach its conclusion, this chapter will have demonstrated that articulation.

Not being a medievalist myself, I did not control materials necessary for the development of the propositions that Gumbrecht had formulated. I held them in a kind of area of intuition that had to be developed by subsequent reading. What follows is a synthesis of the results of that undertaking. I began by trying to understand more fully the aforementioned appearance of subjectivity in the late Middle Ages, to analyze it in relation to poetic praxis, and to ascertain its accommodation within sociocultural circumstances, all to bring it more nearly completely into the ambit of my problem.

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In his excellent study *Medieval French Literature and Law*, the American medievalist Howard Bloch observes that the recognition of subjectivity begins in the twelfth century and manifests itself over a large spectrum of areas of activity: "the writings of monastic reformers; the revival of Classical studies; renewed interest in letter writing and autobiography; the personalization of portraiture and sculpture; altered notions of intention, sin, and penance; the popularity of personal (mystical) religious experience; the appearance of the singular heroes of late epic and satirical forms; ... the valorization of the individual within the courtly novel and lyric."<sup>iii</sup>

Within that huge list, Bloch concentrates on changes in the judicial process, which he considers paradigmatic of the many other changes then taking place. In concert with the cosmology of the era, law in the early Middle Ages did not take the motivation of the offender into account because "under a system of immanent ordeal it is God, and not man, who alone is capable of assessing intent" (Bloch, 32). Therefore innocence or guilt would become apparent "only through the secondary effects, recompense or penalty, which they engender" (19). The truth or arbitrariness of an accusation would be proved, physically, by victory or defeat experienced by the accused or his or her representative in combat. God made the truth of what had happened manifest through visible and unequivocal signs, expressed in the outcome of the duel.

That mode of judicial resolution began to decay in the twelfth century and "significantly, the use of criminal expertise becomes increasingly frequent in the trial records of the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries" (132). It was a change directly related to the contending political interests of the time:

Judgment according to the notion of judicial truth depends upon the formulation of stable criteria independent of the act of judgment itself— and thus the existence of a state which, in contrast to feudal polity, could define itself through its laws as something more than a collection of separate subjective rights. Finally, judgment according a verbal rather than physical ordeal implies at least a modicum of civil organization, a state capable of enforcing its decisions without necessary recourse to arms. In general, the advent of inquest furthered the cause of political centralization, which emphasizes, once again, the impossibility of separating the evolution of judicial models from the historical struggle between monarchy and feudal aristocracy. (140-41)

The passage is reproduced at length because it demonstrates the connection between changes in judicial procedure on the one hand and the struggle between state centralization and feudal aristocracy on the other, the connection between the rise both of the individual and of the emphasis upon his or her subjectivity and an opposing resistance on the part of feudal-noble interests. Bloch can therefore argue that the medieval French epic, far from expressing the interests of the warlord aristocracy, is in fact the symptom of the crisis that it faced. It is a symptom that grew in dimension and took new directions with the "literary" forms that arose at that time or in the immediately subsequent period: "While in romance the rupture between individual and community is presented in terms of separation and reintegration and in the lyric it takes the form of a cyclical oscillation between unfulfilled expectations and short-lived satisfactions, the key concern within the explicitly bourgeois genres has to do with extracting the maximum of profit from the liberties that this peculiarly modern schism affords" (227).

In summary, Bloch stresses that, on the one hand, the emphasis placed on the individual subject pervades the "literary" and judicial manifestations of the era, and, on the other hand, it is related to interest in state centralization on the part of the royalty and the incipient bourgeoisie, in opposition to the principles and values of the feudal aristocracy, which functioned on the basis of group separateness articulated by blood kinship, preservation of tradition, and the concept of a divine justice made manifest through clear external signs—the defeat of the guilty party and the victory of the honest in combat, the last scene in the judicial process of

medieval times.

Bloch's conclusions find support in Jacques Le Goff's monumental study on the establishment of the concept of purgatory. In his *La Naissance du purgatoire* [The Birth of Purgatory] he points out that, despite the "discovery's" preparation by Augustine, Pope Gregory, and Bernard de Clairvaux, purgatory, used as a noun designating a location, did not exist prior to 1170: "It was at the crossroads of the two milieus [Paris and Citeaux], between 1170 and 1200, possibly in the decade from 1170 to 1180, surely by the last ten years of the century, when Purgatory appeared."<sup>iii</sup>

The movement in support of individualistic justice that pervaded the century brought with it emphasis on the ecclesiastical law court and intervention in judicial matters by kings and local princes to the detriment of the feudal lords, who continued to rely on the old belief in the immanence of divine justice: "In opposition to the feudal lords, who monopolized both justice as law, instrument of domination over the members of their seignories, and also justice as source of income, the kings and local princes laid claim to the ideal and reality of justice, and the ecclesiastics strengthened their influence over the collective aspirations of society by elaborating the Christian concept of justice" (Le Goff, 286).

It is most important here to emphasize the increasingly central role being played by the individual, a role already pointed to in the prior elaborations of the concept of sin, with their differentiation between guilt and penalty and their requirement of verbal confession:

Purgatory depends on a less solemn verdict [than one between Salvation and the eternal fires of Hell], on an individualized judgement made at the time of death. . . . The length of condemnation depends, then, beyond Divine mercy as symbolized in the Angels' efforts to snatch souls away from the Demons, on personal merits acquired by the deceased during life and on commendations from the Church instigated by friends and relatives of the deceased. (285)

Thus celestial geography was enriched by the addition of a new place, a place of passage, the time spent in which depended on a detailed examination of each case and on the *intervention of personalized prayer*. In this sense, in contrast to heaven and hell, the right to purgatory implied a mitigation of the concept of a truth inscribed in things; it was supplemented, and thus made more flexible, by an "analysis" of the deceased sinner's intentions and by the ecclesiastically mediated intervention of his or her friends. The individual had begun to be heard in the celestial sphere.

Whereas the foregoing analyses demonstrate the increasing ascendancy of the individual on a general level, those that follow operate similarly on a more specific one.

Focusing on the presence of the "I" in medieval poetry, Paul Zumthor defines two basic situations. The first, and more common, involves an "I" that is essentially without referent, that is, an "I" whose entire value is exhausted in holding together the components of the poem itself. Within a "literature" of fixed roles corresponding to secular topoi and an impersonal tradition, the lexical "I" does not correspond to the "I" of the writer:

The author's "person" appears for the purpose of confirming the text's objectivity, nothing more. His interventions represent before our eyes the textual projection of a situation. Normally transmitted orally, by a singer, recitant, or public reader, the medieval poetic work already possesses a concrete enunciator who is visually tangible—while it itself is not—but who in principle can change from performance to performance. If the author, who might be one of the many recitants, has made a specific poetic "I" the subject of the enunciation, that "I" functions as a virtual form the actualization of which varies according to the circumstances: it is highly unlikely that the medieval audience would have interpreted it in an autobiographical sense.<sup>iv</sup>

Personal experience was not incorporated into textual experience during this time, but rather, it crossed it and was transcended by it, as though the former had no existential content of interest to the latter. The "I" was a vicarious, fluctuating form merely denoting the voice that pronounced it. It is in this sense that Zumthor declares this is "an almost totally objectivized poetry." Through a purely textual analysis that does not undertake to determine the social causation of the transformation, Zumthor shows how that general situation underwent changes during the fifteenth century:

In the poetic forms that derived from it [i.e., the tradition of the courtly song] in the fifteenth century, we witness the invasion of a discourse of circumstance. The sign "I" comes to refer, in a wide, categorical manner, to the external subject that circumstance indicates; nothing further stands in the way of its identification with the person of the author. To be sure, moreover, that identification was often realized:

in Eustache Deschamps, Christine de Pisan, Charles d'Orleans. The discourse is seldom narrative, however; it rather proceeds through descriptive allusions: it becomes conflated with the discourse of the *dits*, in the same ambiguity. (Zumthor, 179)

The tack taken by Zumthor, the identification of an "I" saturated with personality, is expanded on by Jacqueline Cerquiglini. In an essay dedicated solely to the genre of the *dit* in the work of Guillaume de Machaut (circa 1300-1377), Cerquiglini locates motivation for the presence of the extratextually referential "I" in the problematization of truth. In other words, the autobiographical "I" comes to the aid of a frame of reference that is no longer sufficient to assign meaning to specific acts:

What is measured in Machaut's title, *Voir Dit*, is the path taken by that term since the beginning of the thirteenth century. The title in effect carries with it two premises. First and foremost, Machaut, in emphatically proclaiming the truth of his *dit*, leads us to the conclusion that the connection between the *dit* and truth is no longer an automatic one in his time. Second, in using a title . . . that eliminates allegory, Machaut makes it clear that for him—and here we see his great innovation—truth can no longer be guaranteed by recourse to an allegory but rather that it must be vouchsafed through appeal to lived experience. The *dit* is true only because *I* say that it is.<sup>v</sup>

Now whereas the medieval crisis in mental structures was by no means limited to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the flexibilizing strategies then introduced, all of which revolved around the issue of subjectivity, were favored by the subsequent development and expansion of the printing press. As is attested in the work of one of the great specialists in the field—work wholly independent of the analyses heretofore reviewed—typographical reproduction in effect led to a break with the esoteric atmosphere bound up with culture based, on the manuscript, no matter whether we see that culture in relation to the material or to the social conditions of its existence: "Advanced techniques could not be passed on without being guarded against contamination and hedged in by secrecy. To be preserved intact, techniques had to be entrusted to a select group of initiates who were instructed not only in special skills but also in the 'mysteries' associated with them."<sup>vi</sup>

Culture gradually lost its initiatory character, and, at the same time, the strategies of flexibility that had been introduced were expanding and carrying the day in the late medieval world. While not specifically referring to the problem that occupies us here, Eisenstein nonetheless corroborates our approach to it by insisting on the influence that the printing press exerted on daily life, on the educational process, and on the options left to religion:

Private life as well as public affairs underwent transformation; indeed the new medium encouraged a sharper division between these two zones. An unending stream of moralizing literature penetrated the privacy of the home and helped to precipitate a variety of domestic dramas. The "family" was not only endowed with new educational and religious functions . . . but the family circle also became the target of a complicated literary cross-fire. (Eisenstein, 133)

Loss of confidence in God's words among cosmopolitan elites was coupled with enhanced opportunities for evangelists and priests to spread glad tidings and rekindle faith. (701)

Moreover, if we concentrate on the question per se, it should be noted that a corroboration of the thesis advanced by Zumthor and Cerquiglini is to be found in an earlier text by Menéndez Pidal, in which he demonstrated both the appearance of the empirical "I" in Castilian prose of the fourteenth century and the importance of fixing that "I" through the writing process. Contrasting the Arcipreste de Hita with don Juan Manuel (1282-1349), Pidal interprets the former as the prototype of the "sense of impersonality" that "dominated the jongleur"<sup>vii</sup> and concludes that the latter, by naming himself directly and explicitly, confides to writing the wish that the transmission of his works remain forever accurate:

And I don Juan, because I fear—I think quite rightly—that the books that I have written are not going to be copied over very frequently and because I have seen what often happens in the process of copying—namely that, either through the scribe's contrary opinions or the letters' resembling each other, a given thought comes to be replaced by another . . . to guard against this to the extent that I can, I have had this volume prepared, in which are inscribed all the books that I have heretofore written. (Quoted in Pidal, 247)

Reference to the individual "I" and need of a specific mode of fixation, namely, written form, thus appear in concert. What Cerquiglini would later say of Machaut, that "the *dit*, which prizes discontinuity, is inconceivable save through the mediation of writing" (Cerquiglini, 159), was, then, valid for the Castilian writer as well.

Written form provided the basis for establishment of a new set of values. It was not stressed simply because, as

Pidal argued, don Juan Manuel was a learned writer whereas Juan Ruiz participated in the oral and popular tradition of the jongleurs. The opposition between learned and popular was not the basis of the question, for it was in fact merely a part of a larger conjuncture: while a link with music, with the memory, and with orality dominated in the poetry of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries that "poetry founded upon song" gave way to one founded "on sentiment, on the I" as a sort of surrendering of the memory in order to constitute itself as a "chest or strongbox" given over to the written form.<sup>viii</sup>

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The analyses that I have outlined helped to germinate the seed that Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht had sown. They formed a decently coherent bundle, whose practical application I originally intended to assay in work on Fernão Lopes. Indeed, my first notion was to try to work out the general problem that I had with the Italian preceptors by examination of the work of the great Portuguese historiographer. I had to abandon the plan, however, for it would have led to a study unpunishable because of its great length. I shall therefore make extremely spare use of Fernão Lopes, choosing for examination only those passages of his work that are absolutely indispensable to examination of the question at hand.

The first of those passages involves the debate over the validity or lack thereof of the marriage between King Pedro and Ines de Castro and the arguments advanced by each side. Whereas chapters 27 and 28 of the *Crónica de D. Pedro* [Chronicle of King Pedro] deal with the king's deposition concerning his secret marriage and those who had witnessed it, chapter 29 focuses on the misunderstanding produced among those who had listened to him. Lopes, after dividing the people who disagreed into groups of those "of plain and simple understanding" and those "subtler," seems to hint at his own position:

When the disputation that you have just heard was done, there being present both learned persons and many of the general populace, those who were of plain and simple understanding and who therefore did not distinguish well the structure of such things gave facile acceptance, believing that all that they had heard was pure truth. Others, of subtler understandings, learned and quite wise, looked into all the aspects of that very delicate matter trying to see whether or not what they had heard could be true, and they decided to the contrary, since it seemed entirely illogical.<sup>ix</sup>

Our suspicions about where the historiographer's judgment lies become stronger when we read: "Therefore, those who had exchanged these and other opinions amongst themselves in secret said that the truth, *which does not seek out beautiful words*, lay deeply concealed in those matters" (Lopes, 219; emphasis mine).

Indeed, were it not the case that it appears as the direct discourse of those who reject the argument for the validity of the marriage, this would be the author's own conclusion. Fernão Lopes in effect steps down from the position of omniscient narrator, limits his role to that of faithful chronicler of events, and assigns to the subjectivity of the individual reader the task of reaching a justifiable conclusion: "We, not in order to determine whether their conclusions were correct but rather only to note briefly what prior writers recorded, have put here a part of their deliberations, *leaving up to him who reads this which point of view he chooses to accept*" (219; emphasis mine).

The writer no longer feels himself in possession of the divine mandate, cornerstone of the cosmic and terrestrial order, that would establish univocal proofs of truth. What, however, does it mean to say that he leaves it up to the subjectivity of the hearer or reader to decide in situations of controversy or doubt? Doubtless that he assigns to that reader or hearer the role of supplementing the sense of things, which otherwise would not be revealed at all. The subjectivities, however, are not arranged uniformly on a single plane. Lopes, who may be considered the first European historian, clearly designated *his own place*, whether through primarily insinuating his own interpretation or deferring it in favor of a neutral transcription of his sources — "what prior writers recorded." Those two justificatory strategies, it must be added, are hierarchically ordered: the first has recourse to common judgment, allying itself with the analytical practice of those who form judgments according to the subtlest, or most discriminating, aspects of their understanding. *Over against* that backdrop, the historian's *own position* is constructed, a position defined as the one in which truth is to be declared. That implicit hierarchy is cemented in a phrase in the previous passage: "the truth, which does not seek out beautiful words." The user of beautiful words places himself or herself outside the realm of common judgment and thus constitutes the diametrical opposite of the historian. Represented in the practice of the poets in the early *cancioneiros* [songbooks], he would utilize his subjectivity for enthrallment and deception, whereas the historian would seek to neutralize his or her subjectivity to emerge as the controller of truth. To be sure, as Zumthor's analysis makes clear, I cannot say that the users of beautiful words employed their subjectivity to create deception. The historiographer's opinion on this score is anachronistic. Living within a different intellectual framework, he or she judged the

poets according to a set of values that simply was not their own, which consisted of a tradition of anonymous themes and motifs. The historiographer's conclusion does not become less important as a result, however, for it exemplifies the suspicion and latent hostility that had come to weigh on poets. In the Portugal of the first half of the fifteenth century, therefore, subjectivity has ceased to play the part of mere supplement to meaning; instead it displays a hierarchically ordered range of possible attitudes. It can be used as a disservice to truth—sacrificing it to beautiful words—it can give rise to a clash in judgment, or, in a culminating attitude, it can be subordinated to truth. The last is an instance the conditions for which are met only when subjectivity is directed toward *reason* as put into operation by those who know how to examine and order "what prior writers recorded."

A passage from the *Crónica de D. Fernando* [Chronicle of King Fernando] shows how, to achieve his centrality, the historian had to be prepared to guard his position against both the creators of "fabulous and poetic fictions" (Augustine) and the installers of "empty opinion," such as one Martim Afonso de Melo, whom Lopes cites:

There has been great damage created by some writers who have taken it upon themselves to write history having the kind of concept of history that they have had, for matters absolutely essential they have left with no mention whatsoever and to others they give only brief treatment, leaving them clouded in great confusion. If they were to write accurately and concisely, they would be praiseworthy, but as they omit much and remain so far from the truth, it would be better if they said none of the things that they do, especially since because of their words some people are ill judged, which is an outcome much to be avoided in such an undertaking.<sup>x</sup>

Reason, then, during the era we are studying, constitutes itself in opposition to opinion and to beauty. Subjectivity admits of all three paths. But, if one chose to speak the truth, the correct option was foreordained. The crisis in Christian cosmology, leads to a new centering, one less on humankind than on a specific area of human activity—the privileged area of reason.

That outcome is corroborated in a passage from the historiographer's most elaborate chronicle, dedicated to King John. The very outset of the prologue sets forth a univocal praise of the historian's activity: "Thus Generation, into which, in age-old process, mankind has been created, engenders so close a conformity between itself and human understanding that when we have to decide about something within it, be it praise or blame, we never recount that thing directly. This is because when it is praise we always exaggerate it and when it is the other we do not write of failings in the subtle forms in which they often occur."<sup>xi</sup>

The passage is so explicit that a detailed commentary would be redundant. The profiled subjectivity belongs to others, to those who recount the facts in ways that they prefer or according to the customs of the time in which they live. Both practices are contrary to "human understanding." In the service of that understanding—of 'reason'—the historian must comprehend those practices to avoid them just as the faithful must know the deceptions of the world to resist them. (The ambiguity proffered by the Arcipreste de Hita, according to which "good love" is reached through knowledge of the deceptions of "crazy love," is thus given up.) Curiously—or strangely—enough, the historian denies his own historicity to present himself as the transparent servant of truth. To consolidate his place in the hierarchy of knowledge, the historian denies the influence of his place in the world; he detemporalizes reason to present himself as dominated by it.

Later in the same prologue, Lopes reiterates the historian's opposition to those who "seek beauty and novelty of words" (3). The tripartite hierarchy apprehended in the two prior chronicles is here construed through focus on a fundamental opposition between those who seek beauty and those who listen only to the voice of reason: "And believe that I do not present something as true unless it is attested to by many and as well in writings of doubtless accuracy. I would prefer to remain silent rather than write falsehoods" (3).

It is clear, however, that the emphasis on the fundamental opposition does not annul the tripartite setup. Reason is located center stage. Opinion has no stable location and can either approach center stage as a function of the ingenuity of its user or be completely banished to the realm of the seekers of beauty. The realm of *doxa* is, then, Christianized as a purgatory. But its eventual entry into the celestial realm of the historian is far from a simple matter. Even though subtlety of understanding may direct the subject of *doxa* to center stage, the voice of reason and that of opinion are not to be confused, for the conformity engendered "in age-old process [in which] mankind has been created" renders the common human, even if astute, different from, and subordinate to, the agent of the "naked truth". The purgatory caused by "empty opinions" is overcome only in the historian's removal of himself from the world—that is, by his capacity to resist and overcome subjectivity. Thus my analysis of Fernão Lopes, slight though it may be, enables fuller understanding of the disruption created by the rediscovery of subjectivity documented in the literature of the fourteenth century. In the Middle Ages, poetic

discourse was legitimated by a Christianized "Platonic holdover," which, in turn, carried with it the moral requirement of verisimilitude: "The rediscovery of poetic fiction in the Middle Ages proceeded, then, along two paths — the one, of ontology, the other of a fictionalization of the sensorially-experienced world; the former could be justified as a 'Platonic holdover,' the latter as the moral requirement of verisimilitude."<sup>xii</sup>

Now that legitimation would clearly be damaged by the introduction of a referential "I" because personalization would involve a variable totally incongruent with the two legitimizing criteria. Hence the opposition set up by Fernão Lopes, who, conceiving of objectivity on the basis of a subjective focus, saw three elements thereby produced: one involving beauty and song, another subordinated to the interests and customs of the agent, and reason. The last presumes an inquiry like judicial ones, with an enlisting and examination of the facts, analysis of the pros and cons with regard to a certain position, and the ultimate *unearthing* of the truth. The outcome which, as a historian, Fernão Lopes arrived at was, then, predictable from the moment he took up a concept of truth that involved evaluation of subjectivity, for "truth is relativized; and if the "I" is deceitful, then truth becomes completely uncertain" (Cerquiglini, "Le Clerc et L'écriture," 167).

Reason, then, takes itself as the emblem of the truth that *inheres* in the facts as they are found recorded in written documents. And it is a truth that, conversely, is compromised by those who use their subjectivity to cultivate either opinion or beauty. History begins to be constituted, in an age significantly prior to the one that will be considered in chapter 2 [of *Control of the Imaginary*, "The Fates of Subjectivity: History and Nature in Romanticism"], as the discourse of reason *and* as a discourse disdainful of fictionality. Rhetoric will now be relegated to the domain of the latter: belles-lettres are ignorant of the path to center stage. How, then, could the fictional be accorded esteem, belles-lettres be defended, a poetology be created without either the denial of reason or the creation of a compact with it? The first of those possible options would not even be entertained by the poetologists of the immediately following centuries; their effort would in fact be directed at finding a route toward a compact. To that end, as we shall see, the contribution made by rhetoric would be decisive. It is noteworthy, however, that history opposed the middle discourse, founded on *doxai* (opinions). How, then, could the sin—admittedly, a minor one—on the part of these people destined for purgatory be avoided? Because the vice was characteristic of the common people, the historian's solution was to see himself as part of an elite. And there again rhetoric would give service, albeit in the process retarding acceptance of the practice of historiography as a science. A member of the elite would be one who could speak and write well. This criterion of judgment, outweighing the more "modern" criteria of Fernão Lopes, would make the "heaven" of discourse more open—and not dedicated solely to the sainthood of the historian. Even the poet would be saved, and the common people, so long as they wrote subtly, would be spared the pains of purgatory. It was necessary only that they should control their will to beauty.

If the historian thus postponed the recognition of his centrality, what would the poet have to lose to win salvation? Before I undertake an answer to the question, it must be recognized that one thing is certain: the salvation of a discourse would depend on the recognition that the subject being submitted to judgment is part of the higher estate of society.

## THE COMPACT WITH REASON

The thesis that begins to take shape—that classical theorization of the poetic had to start from the prohibition of the fictional — does not, however, appear to find corroboration in the work of the specialists on the era. The use I shall make of them will seem, then, a betrayal of sorts. My hypothesis will therefore have to find its support on the margins of their argumentation.

In the detailed description of the poetics written between 1250 and 1500, compiled by Concetta Carestia Greenfield, what is of present interest is her first point of articulation: the conflict between scholastic and humanistic poetics. Under attack by the clerics, especially the Dominicans, poetry had to secure its right to exist within Christendom. Therefore, a certain L. Ottimo, a fourteenth-century Dante commentator, denies that the value of poetry resides in its literality: "If the author believed in the literal level, there is no doubt that it would be heresy... but he poetizes. . . and painters and poets have such freedom."<sup>xiii</sup>

Therefore, too, in a line beginning with Dante and running through Mussato and Boccaccio, grounded in a misinterpretation of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, poetry is defended as similar to theology, as an alternative means of access to the divine. But that tactic, although it did argue for one area of activity, could not but exasperate professional theologians. It is true, however, that the poet-theologian was legitimated as the annunciator of Christianity, in a posture always open to compromise. Greenfield summarizes:

While the poets in ancient times knew that there was one God, they could not reveal these truths in plain words. They were speaking allegorically when they called Tethys and Ocean a god and a goddess respectively. They communicated to the people hidden mysteries that could not be revealed to them but through poetical figures. They devised, then, fables and myths to explain truths about divine mysteries and primal causes that people were not prepared to understand. Thus, the poet-theologians invented allegories because the words of the mysteries attract good souls, while poetry, by filling them with wonder, makes the reader more attentive, since he understands things that are beyond the words. Figurative language allowed the presentation of mystical truths under the guise of pleasant fables. (Greenfield, 82)

Even this, however, would have seemed insufficient to those who defended a strict Christian order, for, as Greenfield also makes clear in specific regard to the polemic between Sautati and Domenici, the conflict did not have a merely intellectual dimension, it also included the practice of establishment of a pedagogical program to be developed: "Both, then, were concerned not only with literary-issues, but with the civic and educational implications of these issues. It was not only a matter of proving the validity of poetry, or even of the liberal arts; *what was at stake was the place of poetry within the curriculum of secondary schools*" (148; emphasis mine).

On the one hand, then, the humanist sought a reconciliation through conception of poetry as theology, whereas, on the other hand, an orthodox scholar like Domenici admitted the poetic only as an element in education (see Greenfield, 155).

The irreconcilability of the two positions is further demonstrated by the long polemic between the Ciceronians and the Augustinians, minutely analyzed by Marc Fumaroli. While the former, represented by Pietro Bembo (1470-1547), related the study of the classics to development of a personal style, which had as its corollary individualized knowledge—a position that would, then, lend autonomy to the search for a poetic language—the latter subordinated such study to its utility in service of the faith. The debate, very much as was the case with the one involving the Scholastics and the Humanists, did not so much question Christianity as it did the possibility, or lack thereof, of serving it in two different manners — as writer or as propagator of the faith—rather than through the direct religious path alone. Precisely because of this common ground, both the Humanists and the Ciceronians always ran the risk of being brought up short by accusations of heresy in their defense of the option that they followed, and consequently the risk of being condemned to the flames that had devoured Giordano Bruno and, in France, Etienne Dolet. Whether it was because of that pressure or because their focus of identity was the ancient world and not the cities and countries of their own time, it is noteworthy that both Bembo and his predecessor Petrarca made an effort to reconcile the principle of *imitatio*, cultivated in this regard from the first Humanists on, with expression of individuality. Hence Fumaroli's analysis in commenting on a passage from Bembo:

The theory of an innate idea that each person would have only to rediscover within himself and put into practice in the eclectic imitation of various models eliminates any notion of artistic perfection and, therefore, of a hierarchy between great artists and mediocre ones. Now imitation, which is itself a desire for perfection, establishes the distinction between those who are true artists and those who are not. If there is no longer an objective norm of beauty to refer to, mediocrity will know no bounds.<sup>xiv</sup>

It should be noted in Fumaroli's exegesis that, without the establishment of the model in which the power of *imitatio* is deposited, the "I" would become a *wild, uncontrollable* entity incapable of respecting any ordering principles, unable to determine whether its own legitimate place should come written in noble characters or lowly ones. Whereas the orthodox argument represented by the Scholastics and Augustinians solves the problem in one quick stroke—that writers gain value through the service that they perform to propagation of the faith—the Humanistic counterargument seeks to save an individuality that construes itself around a doubled center—one comprising both the Christian and the classical. We thus reach a key conclusion: the veto exercised against fiction is not directed categorically against subjectivity (indeed, as we shall see in chapter 2, *the pure expression of subjectivity can itself act as a veto of fictionality*). To the contrary, there exists a possible legitimation for the subjectivity to the extent that it presents itself according to a model acceptable to all, *doctores* and commons, Humanists and representatives of ecclesiastical thought alike. How was that form of presentation to be achieved? A point of general agreement immediately appears in the foregoing: both camps' positions consider nobility of language, *elegantia sermonis*, to be an indispensable condition for the literary work that they envision. Consequently, as Fumaroli polemically—and correctly—concludes, our concept of literature does not extend back to that period that lasted through the seventeenth century:

The status of what we call "literature" is, in the seventeenth century, greater than it will ever be again, for, under the far-reaching notion of Eloquence, it becomes the area of endeavor of all the "spokesmen" of the realm: aristocrats and men of law, ecclesiastics and magistrates, the "learned" and the "ignorant,"

and not only of specialists in "writing." But it is at the same time more lowly than we would like to allow, since, to the extent that "authors" wrote for the entertainment of an "ignorant" and "secular" public, they seemed like "sophists" among orators, working as they did in a sphere of activity that was useless to salvation, added little to knowledge, and offered nothing whatsoever to power save ornamentation. . . . *This "suspicion" is inherent to the very nature of Christian Humanist culture, to the very definition of Eloquentia, which is held in such high esteem only as an organ of Sapientia, wisdom and knowledge, science and virtue, responsibility and its exercise.* (Fumaroli, 23; emphasis mine)

The trumpeted polish of *elegantia sermonis* implied a divorce from the status of fiction, the effective possibility of reconciling service to the faith with reverence of classical models, and the necessity of bringing together individual expression and "objective parameters"—that is, those derived from the classics. Those three principles are in fact closely interrelated, departing as they do from a common pressure. As regards the first, it must be observed that while early Humanism sought an autonomous place for poetry, therefore casting it as the sister of theology, the "hard" Humanism of the sixteenth century, as we shall see, abandoned that tactic and grounded its argumentation in the admission that poetic discourse did not qualify as an expression of truth. As regards the second principle and its impact on eloquence, let us reread the time-honored observation of Petrarca himself:

Thus just as the true emanates only from the truth, so it is that only from eloquence can ornate and artful speech be learned; that poets and orators should have recourse to such eloquence not even Jerome denies, nor is any confirming proof necessary. . . . No, neither love of virtue nor thought of coming death should keep us from the study of letters, which, if it is carried out with good intentions, awakens the love of virtue and diminishes or destroys the fear of death.<sup>xv</sup>

I will spend some time discussing the third principle. One of the greatest contemporary specialists on the Renaissance, Paul Oskar Kristeller, has called our attention to the fact that the preeminence of rhetoric implied the creation of elegant phrases and of a "professional" language—that is, one from which the subjective conviction of the truth, or lack thereof, of what was being said was wholly absent:

They believed in the ancient rhetorical doctrine that a professional speaker and writer must acquire and show skill in making any idea that is related to his chosen topic plausible to his public. Consequently, a given idea is often expressed in phrases that aim at elegance rather than at precision, and many times, especially in a dialogue or in a speech, opinions may be defended with vigor and eloquence that are appropriate for the occasion, but do not express the author's final or considered view.<sup>xvi</sup>

But does this affirmation not conflict with the thesis, regularly advanced since Burkhardt, which sees in the Renaissance the first full expression of individuality and therefore of subjectivity? Very aware of that question, Kristeller observes that the forms through which subjectivity evinced itself during that time seem to clash with the classicism and formalism also then evident: "In a curious way, this individualism is blended in both art and literature with a strong classicism and formalism that might seem to be incompatible with it, but actually contributes to it a special color and physiognomy" (Kristeller, 65).

The last part of the reproduced passage omits explanation for the clash that it pinpoints. It seems to me, in fact, that we can formulate that explanation only if we start from the notion that *imitatio* was the instrument for the reconciliation of the conflicting directions represented by the Ciceronians and the Augustinians. Moreover, that reconciliation was successful only if *imitatio* permitted the *control* of the individual subjectivity and if one of its possible discourses, the fictional, were controlled aprioristically as well, through its subjugation to legitimated models. Only thus could classicism and formalism be rendered compatible with expression of individuality.

The viability of that explanation is reinforced if we juxtapose it to interpretations advanced by two more renowned specialists. In his deservedly famous *Renaissance and Resuscitations*, Erwin Panofsky distinguishes the Carolingian Renaissance and the period of proto-Humanism from the Renaissance proper through the fact that in the first two the Medieval mentality created a *disjunction* within the classical legacy in which the pagan dimension was either suppressed or given the vestments of Christianized allegory, whereas Renaissance Humanism saw the classical world as so distant from its own that to seek inspiration in it should not constitute evidence of paganism and heresy:

We need only to look at Michelangelo's *Bacchus* and *Leda*, Raphael's Farnesina frescoes, Giorgione's *Venus*, Correggio's *Danae*, or Titian's mythological pictures to become aware of the fact that in the Italian High Renaissance the visual language of classical art had regained the status of an idiom in which new poems could be written—just as, conversely, the emotional content of classical mythology, legend and history could come to life in the dramas (non-existent as such throughout the Middle Ages), epics

and, finally, operas devoted to such subjects as Orpheus and Eurydice, Cephalus and Procris, Venus and Adonis, Lucrece and Tarquin, Caesar and Brutus, Antony and Cleopatra.<sup>xvii</sup>

The examples that Panofsky cites, however, result from sporadic periods of liberalization, periods to be seen in counterposition to the more nearly constant zeal of the ecclesiastics.

The problem recurs in the work of the English scholar Walter Ullmann. As he demonstrates with elegance and precision, the rediscovery of subjectivity in the twelfth century was linked to the movement of secularization by means of which the century cast itself in opposition to the ecclesiastical centrality characteristic of the Carolingian period. While in the latter period the church is seen as endeavoring to create a *Christianitas* involving "baptism"—the constitution of a "new man"—the insuperable contradictions between civil and ecclesiastical powers might have been shown to demonstrate the necessity of combining *humanitas* and *Christianitas* through a reversal of the movement—through, that is, the secularization of power. Curiously, however, in various places in his work Ullmann emphasizes that the two directions did not conflict. While not considering the factors, political and practical in nature, that may have commended prudence to the Humanists — who would then be seen as having been pushed to justify their position as one complimentary to the ecclesiastical position—Ullmann writes:

Otto of Freising is an early example of the new thought-patterns which see no conflict between the ecclesiastical and the secular points of view. On the contrary, they are said to be in harmony with each other. One of the purposes of his writing *The Two Cities* was precisely to emphasize the permanence and immutability of the community in the *civitas Dei*, which stands in sharp contradistinction to the never ending change that occurred in the *civitas terrena*. . . . The observer here witnesses in Otto of Freising a cosmology that is in no wise opposed to the purely transcendental, religious or ecclesiologically oriented cosmology. On the contrary, both supplement each other.<sup>xviii</sup>

Panofsky and Ullmann have undeniably different concepts of the Renaissance. For the former, its ground lies in the rupture that its intellectual experiences with regard to the classical world; for the latter, it lies in the harmony between the humanistic and ecclesiastical lines, which led it to the common project of exploration of the classical legacy. The two have in common, though, that both suppose that in the period no conflict existed between those two intellectually powerful sectors. My hypothesis, by contrast, partially supported by Kristeller, Fumaroli, and Greenfield, presumes just such a conflict. Moreover, it adds a new element to their work, namely the thesis that the reconciliation between the two parties was effected through a double operation: the choice of classical *imitatio* as the one criterion above all others, and at the same time the a priori ascription of inferior status to the poetic word. Thus was "competition" over theological truth avoided and, too, valorization of poetic products that did not subscribe to socially preestablished models effectively blocked.

We are now in a better position to discuss in direct terms the sources heretofore used. To that end we shall enlist the collaboration of the superb *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance* by Bernard Weinberg. The value of Weinberg's own commentary completely aside, his study will have immense value for us in its transcription of long passages from works either seldom reprinted or in fact never edited beyond their original manuscript form. As it is neither my ken nor my purpose to comment in detail on those authors but instead simply to see them in regard to the problem of the "veto of fiction," I shall make wide use of those transcriptions — as well as of passages from French and English theoreticians who belong to the same period and are therefore also useful for treatment of that problem.

Let us begin by concentrating on the basic category in classical theory: the category of *imitatio*. Without formally defining *imitatio*, Bernardino Parthenio, in *Delia Imitatione Poetica* [Of Poetic Imitation] (1560), made a distinction between Aristotelian *imitatio*—that is, representation of the nature of human beings—and rhetorical *imitatio*: "It seems to me reasonable and necessary to recall that there are two kinds of poetic imitation. One, which consists in expressing in an excellent fashion the nature and characters of those persons whom we undertake to imitate. And this is the end of poetry. . . . But leaving this type of imitation to Aristotle, we shall treat only the other one, which consists in words and in figures of speech."<sup>xix</sup>

The characterization advanced by Tommaso Correa in *De Antiquitate, Dignitateque Poesis & Poetarum Differentia* [Of Antiquity, the Dignity of Poetry, and Differences Among Poets] (1586) is much more ambitious, having *imitatio* cover such apparently contrary activities as the imitation of the thing "exactly as it in itself is" (*qualis ipsa est*) and of the thing "contrived and invented" (*simulata et ficta*), "a kind of true and exact imitation which renders each and every thing exactly as it is; the second, contrived and invented, expresses each thing not as it actually is but as it appears to be, or else can appear to the many" (quoted in Weinberg, *Literary Criticism* 1:321).

The third modality of classical *imitatio* is advanced by Varchi in *Lezioni della Poetica* [Lessons on Poetics] (1590). Men of genius, he says, are in themselves insufficient unless "they make use of imitation, that is, in their own compositions, go about imitating the compositions of good poets, for in that way it would be like using art; indeed, nothing can be done of greater usefulness than to look to the works of the perfect masters" (quoted in Weinberg, *Literary Criticism* 1:430).

This third sense of *imitatio* reappears in Pierre Delaunay's *Art Poétique François* [French Ars Poetica] (1597): "Homer in his *Iliad*, Vergil in his *Aeneid*, and Bartas in his *Sepmaine*, the reading of all of which will be highly useful; and observing them closely, seeing their manner of using language, will so incite the reader that it will make him become a poet—unless he is made of stone."<sup>xx</sup> It also appears in Roger Ascham's *The Scholemaster* (1570):

But to returne to *Imitation* agayne: There be three kindes of it in matters of learning.

The whole doctrine of Comedies and Tragedies is a perfit *Imitation*, or faire livelie painted picture of the life of everie degree of man. . . . The second kind of *Imitation* is to folow for learning of tonges and sciences the best authors.... The third kinde of *Imitation* belongeth to the second: as, when you be determined whether ye will folow one or mo, to know perfitlie, and which way to folow, that one; in what place; by what meane and order; by what tooles and instrumentes ye shall do it; by what skill and judgement ye shall trewlie discern whether ye folow rightlie or no.<sup>xxi</sup>

In the light of the wide use of the concept of *imitatio*, it is hardly surprising that it became linked to criteria for excellence. Thus, in his *Oratione Contra gli Terentiani* [Oration against the Terentians] (1566), Benetto Grasso specifies: "One poet comes to be called more excellent than another insofar as he comes closer to what is natural, and this talent of expressing actions and characters and, in describing them, of representing faithfully the nature of things and their decorum, gives life, soul, and eloquence to the poet" (quoted in Weinberg, *Literary Criticism* 1:179).

Although this observation is hardly new, it might be noted that the criterion of proximity to the natural has nothing to do with what we now refer to as "naturalism" because the former is governed by a paradigm common to all these preceptors: the paradigm of "truth." That paradigm is not to be confused with proximity to the merely seen or observed. Partial though it be, that clarification leads us to the fragment that Weinberg attributes to Lorenzo Giacomini: "If, then, poetry is an imitation, and the poet an imitator, and to imitate is to feign and compose fables, it follows that the poet can imitate even if he speaks in his own person. . . . Poetry is thus a feigned and mendacious form of speech [*orazione finta et mendace*], which by means of narrated discourses not true in themselves, and with a certain lying and falseness, imitates true actions and real things" (1:63).

The very subordination of the "feigned" to the true shows that the theoreticians with whom we are dealing, even when translating or commenting on Aristotle, maintained themselves radically estranged from him on key issues. Aristotelian mimesis presupposed a concept of *physis* (to simplify, let us say, of "nature") that contained two aspects: *natura naturata* and *natura naturans*, respectively, the actual and the potential. Mimesis had relation only to the possible, the capable of being created—to *energeia*; its limits were those of conceivability alone. Among the thinkers of the Renaissance, in contrast, the position of the possible would come to be occupied by the category of the verisimilar, which, of course, depended on what *is*, the actual, which was then confused with the true. The subject needs no prolonged discussion, for the authors that I here transcribe are, to put it diplomatically, quite explicit. In a passage from his *Lezioni* [Lessons] (composed some time after 1581), Agnolo Segni observes: "The fable is thus always lying and falseness, but it is divided into two; one is the false language, as Plato says. . . which contains within itself false things, whatever they may be; the other is those false things themselves and particularly false actions, not true but invented" (quoted in Weinberg, *Literary Criticism* 1:301-2).

Whatever poetry touches is, then, turned into falseness. As examples of its activity, there are matters that are naturally false because they belong to poetry, and, too, there are matters that become false simply from being treated poetically. Segni's declaration is by no means less condemnatory than one by the celebrated Robortello in *In Librum Aristotelis de Arte Poetica Explicationes* [Commentaries on Aristotle's Poetics] (1548): "Since, then, poetics has as its subject matter fictitious and fictional discourse, it is clear that the function of poetics is to invent in a proper way its fiction and its untruth; to no other art is it more fitting than to this one to intermingle lies. . . . In the lies used by the poetic art, false elements are taken as true, and from them true conclusions are derived" (quoted in Weinberg, *Literary Criticism* 1:391).

We have seen that the iron law of "truth" carved an abyss between the proponents of *imitatio* and Aristotle's *Poetics*, which, theoretically, they were making known. In the following passage (Lombardi and Maggi, *In Aristotelis Librum de Poetica Communes Explanaciones* [Common Explanations of Aristotle's *Poetics*] (1550), the principle of verisimilitude is transformed into the rationale for the law of unity of time with which classical theater would be handcuffed: "Since, then, tragedy and comedy . . . attempt to approach as close to truth as is possible, if we were to hear things done in the space of a month presented in two or at most three hours, in which time certainly a tragedy or a comedy is acted, the thing will absolutely produce an effect of incredibility" (quoted in Weinberg, *Literary Criticism* 1:419).

From that position the prohibitions simply proliferate. The aforementioned Delaudun tries to prevent the placing of the fantastic on stage, with the allegation that "if a god or goddess, false entities, were to be introduced, the argument would itself also be false and consequently would not represent the deeds of illustrious men according to truth" (quoted in Weinberg, *Critical Prefaces*, 39).

And Jacques Grévin, in his *Théâtre* (1561), in the name of that same verisimilitude, is of the opinion that song should be banned from tragedies: "Since tragedy is nothing less than the representation of truth, or of that which has its appearance, it seems to me that wherever republics have experienced disruptions . . . the simple people have had little occasion to sing and that therefore they should be made to sing no more when acted on stage" (quoted in Weinberg, *Critical Prefaces*, 185).

Not much later, the influential Castelvetro would justify opposition to the time of action supposedly prescribed by Aristotle—a period of twelve hours—because, among other reasons, the spectator would be unable to spend that many hours in the theater, "because of bodily necessities, such as eating, drinking, eliminating waste substances from the stomach and the bladder, and sleeping[!]"<sup>xxii</sup> But why was so much care expended in restricting poetic fable to a reality marked by severe limitations? Why did the idealization of the model have to be carried out through progressive subtractions? A more extended consideration of Castelvetro may help answer such questions. It should be observed, first of all, that his theory, which would play a pivotal role in the French Renaissance, involves the explicit subordination of the poetic to the principle of reality. At the outset of his treatise, he declares: "Since truth is naturally prior to verisimilitude and the thing represented naturally prior to the representation, and verisimilitude therefore refers to, and depends entirely upon, the truth and the representation refers to, and depends entirely on, the thing represented . . . it is more necessary to have first of all a thorough and rational knowledge of the truth and of the thing represented than of verisimilitude and the representation" (Castelvetro, 3).

As an immediate consequence, poetry is made dependent on history, with "poetry taking all its light from the light of history" (4). Thus the writing of a poetics like Aristotle's has its only rationale in that there had been no history writing up to his time. When such logic is carried to its ultimate conclusion, poetics becomes "a superfluous and empty thing, to be laughed at" (4). What is more—and far from an arbitrary gesture—for Castelvetro poetry enjoys less freedom than science, history, and philosophy because it is conceived of for "the common people":

Poetry was invented only to delight and to entertain, by which I mean to delight and entertain the souls of the rude multitude and the common people, who understand neither the reasonings nor the distinctions nor the arguments, subtle and far from the talk of the stupid, used by philosophers in investigating the truth of things and by artists in organizing the arts. Since they do not understand them, it is only natural that when others use them they feel annoyance and displeasure, for it is bothersome beyond all measure when others speak in a way that we cannot comprehend. (16-17)

We are, then, now in a position to answer that question of why this model for *imitatio* was constructed by subtraction. It is simply because it was grounded in the parameters of day-to-day reality—or, better yet, in the parameters of a pragmatic reason geared to the most routine aspects of daily life. It should not surprise us, then, that, taken to its ultimate consequences, that theorization implied a condemnation of the imaginary, enemy by definition of the routine. Cogent as he is, Castelvetro arrives at precisely that point. He expounds it first in relation to prose: "Not only should prose involve firm argumentation but also its subject should be truth, and not some imagined thing" (13).

And immediately afterward he expands on that interdiction through extension of it to poetry: "And how can we seek to have things we seek to dramatize seem to be true if we confess, still reasoning in our own minds, that they are in fact not true but rather imagined, or that we merely have others speak" (14).

The turn toward the concrete, which is so noticeable in the poetry of the fourteenth century and was so ingrained

in the sensibility of the period that it permitted even someone like Fernão Lopes, who disdained "beauty," to envision the plight of the people of Lisbon when their city lay under siege by the Castilians (see *Crónica de D. Joao*, chap. 148), is now transformed through its restriction to sterile norms. The imagination comes to be seen as frightening, even when allowed into the author's internal stage and no farther because it distances us from the "truth"—for which, read "routine." For "*poetry is the similitude and resemblance of history*" (Castelvetro, 16; emphasis mine). The old fear of uncontrollable subjectivity and the constant need to temporize with the power of the church made the Renaissance poetologist in fact the enemy of his own field of endeavor.

A detailed examination of Castelvetro makes it clear that efforts to give primacy to reality and to limit expression of it to a narrow and idealized model through a process of subtraction are articulated by an *ethical rationalism* that attempts to expurgate the fictional of everything that threatens "honest" understanding. It is for that reason that verisimilitude refers back to the principle of decorum, a category that has the peculiar feature of combining the ethically good with the verisimilar. As Weinberg writes on the question, "according to that theory, poetry was by its nature an imitation or representation of reality, made to conform as nearly as possible to that reality in order to produce moral effects desirable both for the individual and for the state" (*Literary Criticism* 2:801). Hence the assignment of responsibility by Lodovico Dolce in his *Osservazioni nella Volgar Lingua* [Observations about the Vulgar Language] (1550) is in fact very common among these theoreticians: "For the function of the poet is to imitate the actions of men, and his end, under lovely veils of useful and moral inventions, to delight the soul of him who reads" (quoted in Weinberg, *Literary Criticism* 1:127).

It is according to precisely the same line of thought that Ronsard, in the *Abbrégé de l'Art Poëtique Français* [Summary of French Poetics] (1565), interpreted the poetry of the "first age" as "an allegorical theology" (quoted in Weinberg, *Critical Prefaces*, 196), in what amounts to the repetition of the old topos of poetry qua theology, now, however, purged of any risk of "competition." Reason and ethics pressed in on the poets, limited their use of imagination, forced them to approach the natural not through verism but rather, so that nature might be made sublime, through a rhetorical imitation of the ancients. Thus the poets' primacy presupposed their mastery of the sublime, which, in the final analysis, implied alleviating their readers of care and directing them to "the good path." Such principles are common to the Italians, French, and English of the period. In order not to weigh this text down with examples, I will leave to George Puttenham (*The Arte of English Poesie*, 1589) the task of speaking for all the others:

But the chief and principal [end of poetry] is the laud, honour, and glory of the immortall gods . . . secondly, the worthy gests of noble Princes, the memoriall and registry of all great fortunes, the praise of vertue and reproofe of vice, the instruction of morall doctrines, the revealing of sciences naturall and other profitable Arts, the redresse of boistrous and sturdie courages by perswasion, the consolation and repose of temperate rayndes: finally, the common solace of mankind in all his travails and cares of this transitorie life. (Quoted in Hardison, 157)

Under the weight of such thinking, Sperone Speroni, in his *Dialogo dell' Historia* [Dialogue on History] (1595), cannot maintain the Aristotelian position except at the price of spiritualizing and moralizing the poetic:

The poet does not narrate the fact, but he imitates the fact as narrated in history; and he imitates it by abstracting it from the essence of the particular fact, that is, as it really happened, and he considers it as it could have come about according to reason and usage; therefore, although he does not desert the particular for the universal, nevertheless because he considers it as it could have or should have been, he abstracts himself from the particular and goes to the universal. (Quoted in Weinberg, *Literary Criticism* 2:688-89)

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Up to this point, I have concentrated on the construction of the edifice of *imitatio* and on the part played therein by truth, adapted to that end by the category of verisimilitude and by ethics, the latter in its turn adapted through the category of decorum. The edifice reached its completion in the sublimation of nature through the operation of the idealized model—an operation, as I have shown, carried out by subtraction. The work of art is thus immunized, spiritualized, made impervious; and poetry, as Bacon says in *The Advancement of Learning* (1605), "serveth and conferreth to magnanimity, morality, and to delectation."<sup>xxiii</sup> In completing the construct, however, it was necessary to maintain a special vigilance over its motive core, that is, over fiction. Pedemonte, in his *Ecphrasis in Horatii Flacci Artem Poeticam* [Description of the Ars Poetica of Horatius Flaccus] (1546), proffers the paradigmatic solution: fiction is conflated with the false and mendacious, and, to cure its original sin, the very poets who invented it also set forth the corresponding remedy, namely, that it had come "to envelop, in the wrappings of fables, doctrinal mysteries and moral instructions and a way of life" (quoted in

Weinberg, *Literary Criticism* 1:115). According to Charles Estienne, in his 1542 preface to Terence's comedy *Andria*, awareness of fiction's poisonous effect had in fact been acknowledged by the Roman emperors, who imposed the change from tragedy to comedy and mandated that the latter treat its subject matter "as in the manner of historical faith," thereby making it "quite positive for the society" (quoted in Weinberg, *Critical Prefaces*, 91). In truth, declarations in restraint of fiction occur in almost all the authors of the time. I find only one brief passage in which poetic license is favored over the shackling of fiction. I refer to a portion of Annibale Caro's *Apologia degli Academici di Banchi di Roma* [Apology by the Academicians of the *Banchi di Roma*] (1555):

Don't you know, nevertheless, that where opposite opinions exist the poets may attach themselves to one of them, whether it be the better or the worse? and that in different places they may use now the one, now the other? Don't you know, further, that they may follow not only the opinion of the wise but also the errors of the common people? . . . The license of the poets is such that they may use not only opposite opinions, but those which are clearly false and ridiculous, without being blamed for so doing. (Quoted in Weinberg, *Literary Criticism* 1:277)

While the passage is important as a virtual habeas corpus, the principle of poetic license that it sets forth does not really go beyond the status of a special grant always subject to the censors' scrutiny. Under normal conditions, at most it could be invoked for the prudent defense of the fantastic, such as is carried out by Torquato Tasso in his *Discorsi dell'Arte Poetica* [Discourses on Poetics] (1587): "Thus one and the same action may be marvelous and verisimilar, marvelous looking at it in itself and circumscribed within natural limits, verisimilar considering it removed from these limits in its cause, which is a supernatural force powerful and accustomed to produce marvels of this kind" (quoted in Weinberg, *Literary Criticism* 2:650).

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To close this descriptive section of my investigation, I shall set forth a short inventory of what we have established. *Imitatio* was, unquestionably, the centerpiece of classical poetics. Estranged from Aristotle's sense, it came to imply the absolute privileging of similitude, represented terminologically in the category of verisimilitude. Moreover, Tasso shows us that the equation was a purposeful and conscious one, for, as he declares in the treatise just cited, "poetry is, in its nature, nothing but imitation," which "cannot exist without verisimilitude" because verisimilitude "is proper and intrinsic to its essence" (quoted in Weinberg, *Literary Criticism* 2:650). Therefore the verisimilar governed *inventio*—that is, it governed the essential issue for the orator and the poet. In a work of 1560, *The Arte of Rhetorique*, Thomas Wilson emphasizes the openness of invention to the verisimilar: "The finding out of apt matter, called otherwise Invention, is a searching out of things true, or things likely, the which may reasonable set forth a matter, and make it appear probable" (quoted in Hardison, 33).

The verisimilar was, however, still the mainspring which, released, would produce public credence and make its enjoyment possible. What remains for me to do is to deal briefly with the issue of decorum. As I have already said, it was through decorum that the verisimilar received its ethical charge. Nevertheless, it would seem that the poets' practice, not the theoreticians' words, should reveal that the ethical proposition came accompanied by an aesthetic counterpart. The vehement defense of the English poetry of the period that Rosamond Tuve engages in persuades me of that probability: "An Elizabethan or Jacobean poet . . . will make clear what a thing symbolizes to him by his manner of using it; a Symbolist poet does not do so. I am quite sure that an earlier poet would see this use of obscure symbols as a fault of *decorum*."<sup>xxiv</sup>

It may be the case as well that, for the author, all this legislation did not appear oppressive, despite how it may seem to us today, for it may have weighed on his sphere of activity much less than it excluded from that sphere the vulgar, the masses, to whom the norms of humanism did not even reach. In other words, *the legislation just demonstrated directed itself to the functioning of an estate society*. It is, then, probable that the poets and the public that they projected did not feel constrained because they partook of the same ethical and aesthetic principles. Although she avoids recourse to Weberian terminology, Tuve supports us in that hypothesis, all the while explaining the difference between the artistic production involved therein and the poetry of modernity: "The most truly revolutionary change with respect to decorum in poetry must come when men are no longer able to accept the principle upon which it is erected, a principle which underlies both classical poetic and medieval culture. *When the notion of a hierarchy of values becomes suspect, the principle of decorum simply ceases to operate*" (Tuve, 234; emphasis mine).

Nevertheless, it is one thing to use the idea of estates to explain why legislation in favor of reason may not have created any unbearable sense of oppression among authors and public, and it is quite another to overlook in the

process the motives that governed that legislation. Must it not of necessity be asked why the great representative, the chameleonlike ambassador, of *imitatio* was verisimilitude? Martin Fontius pinpoints the reason in explaining the importance of verisimilitude as a means of avoiding conflict with the church: "The fact that the concept of 'verisimilitude' had so extraordinary a significance for Aristotle's sixteenth- and seventeenth-century commentators was intimately related to the fact that through that category the risk of a possible conflict with the requirement of truth exacted of poetry by the Christian religion could be contained."<sup>xxv</sup>

It is obvious that the centrality of verisimilitude has roots in the very presence of the potential for conflict between secular and religious elites and therefore in the necessity of the compact of which I have spoken. But, rather than remain content with my findings up to now, I think it would be better to ask: why did Aristotelian mimesis come at this point to inform a model underlying the concept of *imitation*. The beginnings of an answer are provided by Tuve. For her, our shock when confronted with Elizabethan poetics and our relative failure to understand the metaphysical poets stem from the fact that whereas we, as postromantics, concentrate on personal experience, those theoreticians and poets gave primacy to the need to affirm the universal: "Techniques vary extremely; what is shared is the common refusal to narrow the task of images to that of a truthful report of experience. Even when he writes on 'Going to Bed', Donne is ready to desert the particular for the personified universal" (Tuve, 42).

It is a difference in expectations between them and us, a difference grounded in different concepts of reality. Tuve approaches the concept held by the Elizabethans and Metaphysicals when she writes: "the poet as gardener assisting nature has but to make her intentions clearer and her fruits more sure" (147). As this is hardly the place to undertake a discussion of classical and modern concepts of reality, I shall merely refer to Foucault's analysis of the classical *episteme* and add that the estate society of the classical era favored the constitution, among its educated sectors, of a homogeneous frame of reference that had as its basis a specific concept of reality grounded in a continuity between the order of "words" and the order of "things," and the endowing of that continuity with a religious point of view. With respect to concepts of reality, it must also be added that the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries regarded the inalterability of humankind and of nature as given; both were governable by permanent laws on both the physical and the moral planes. Without that premise, the very principle of *imitatio*, the adoption of models furnished by selected works from antiquity, and the *organic* role of rhetoric would have been at best difficult to maintain. The ancients could not have been adduced as a model if human actions and passions had been considered culturally relative. The belief in immutability, by contrast, was in fact so strong that, as I will show in chapter 2, even when it had been overturned by the relativizing of values and by romanticism, it would continue to be defended by the traditionalists. Beyond that issue, too, the idealization of nature implicit in Renaissance *imitatio* hindered the exploration of any new directions, for the work of art, under the vigilance of decorum, could not escape from the prescribed ambit of the use of *figural language* (i.e. rhetorical imitation). In the light of these explanations, consider Tuve's defense: "The 'artificiality' is explicable by their [the Renaissance writers'] intention to imitate by making an artful construct, an artifact (to wrench the word somewhat). This artifact was designed to please on grounds of its formal excellence rather than by its likeness to the stuff of life—a relatively formless subject matter not to be identified with the poetic subject and evidently not even loosely identified with 'reality'" (25).

The following notions from that passage should be singled out: that the excellence attained by rhetorical devices did not depend on their similitude to life, which, in turn, should not be confused with reality—the former being fortuitous and personalized, the latter, constant and unrefined; and that coherence, considered a qualitative criterion for the work of art, depended on the author's ability *to select images in relation to their propriety in the verbal artifact*, an ability to be measured by that artifact's success in surpassing the individual dimension and entering into contact with the universal.

It is by means of the link between the homogeneity of representation carried out by the "cultured" estate and this universalizing vision of the laws that govern humankind and nature that the work of the metaphysical poets achieved its high degree of internal self-explanation, in contrast to the obscurity frequently encountered in the poetry of modernity.<sup>xxvi</sup> I limit myself here to transcription of Tuve's remarks: "Few readers would dare claim that they surely read what Yeats surely wrote; more than that, these connections are seldom the same in two consecutive readings by the same reader. A great many connections are possible, and not any are surely intended" (Tuve, 270).

In summary, the universality presumed by the classical period provided the basis for the cult of reason that is transparent in its poetics; it was, moreover, a restrictive reason, both because of the interdictions raised by the theoreticians and also because of the necessity that the parameters of Christianity not be contradicted. But several questions might still be raised: How is it possible to postulate a collaboration between that rationality

and the Christian-religious outlook without taking into account the sectarian disputes that characterized the era? In the specific case of England, how was it possible to overlook the battle launched by the various branches of Protestantism against the Roman Catholics? I will leave conclusive answers to specialists in the history of religion, but I shall point out that the religious differences between England and the Catholic city-states of Renaissance Italy and, indeed, of Renaissance France did not prevent the same rationalistic ambience from holding sway in the former as well: "As Leslie Stephen was to remark, Protestantism inevitably became a screen for rationalism."<sup>xxvii</sup>

My reading of Keith Thomas's work leads me to conclude that the struggle carried out by various Protestant groups against the practice of magic and superstition, identified, by the assailants, with the interests of the Roman Catholic church, made them even more zealous in defense of reason:

Indeed the conventional distinction between a prayer and a spell seems to have been first hammered out, not by the nineteenth-century anthropologists, with whom it is usually associated, but by sixteenth-century Protestant theologians. It was well expressed by the Puritan Richard Greenham when he explained that parishioners should not assume that their ministers could give them immediate relief when their consciences were troubled. (Thomas, 61)

That emphasis on reason also served to reinforce the separation between the cultured estate and the rest of the population. Indeed, with regard to the latter, as Thomas declares, "fundamental changes are not accomplished overnight. 'Three parts at least of the people' were 'wedded to their old superstition still', declared a Puritan document of 1584" (73).

Be all this as it may, the answer here presented remains unsatisfactory. To justify *imitatio's* privileged status on the basis of immutable laws that govern humankind and nature and on the basis of the collaborative role of religion still seems more than a bit insubstantial. Why, after all, was this atemporal, restrictive version of reason taken up by the intellectuals of the era? And especially, why was it brought into harmony with the dominant political interests? Even though the France of the classical era has not been studied here—because, as regards the interests of this chapter, it represents little more than a torchbearer for the Italian preceptors—reference to that country now becomes necessary. Two matters stand out: (1) the cult of the imitated was not limited to the poetologists but indeed was taken up by the very court itself; (2) in France, the cult of classical laws led to and supported proclamations of national "superiority." Both factors are put in evidence through their apprehension by an author whose factualism disdained "interpretation"; I refer to René Bray. For proof of (1), Bray has recourse to a text of 1722, *Huetiana ou Pensées Diverses de M. Huet* [Huetiana or the Diverse Thoughts of M. Huet]; for (2), to a text of 1711, *De Quelques Livres* [On Certain Books]. Bray's first passage is as follows:

If we believe Huet, the Court itself shared the writers' opinion on the matter: "Although natural beauties may be preferable to artistic ones, such is nonetheless not the taste of this century. Nothing is pleasing that is not costly. A spring bubbling up at the foot of a hill spilling upon golden sands the clearest and freshest water in the world would not please the members of the Court as much as a stream of stale, muddy water brought at considerable expense from some pond."<sup>xxviii</sup>

Whence came the bestowal of such superiority on the imitated? Let us not forget that the two texts to which Bray turns for documentation were published either just before or just after the end of Louis XIV's reign (1714), at which time absolutist centralism had been achieved. The cult of a reason incarnating permanent, universal laws came in service to, and at the same time was the desideratum of, political centralization. The imitated bespoke the human capacity to control the world through obedience to laws that were themselves seen as central, that is to say, as universal. If the signs of Divine Will had long since ceased to manifest themselves immanently in things, then the use of the faculty of reason and the capacity for imitation were to be fomented, for they could reveal the truth hidden within things. As had been the case with the sixteenth-century preceptors, for whom *imitatio* played the role of reconciler with the church's pretensions to truth, so in France *imitatio*, rationally channeled, became an instrument of absolutist politics. *Imitatio* was, then, a principle that paralleled foundation of the political institution: both centralized, both mounted vigil against the unconverted, the unbeliever, the heretic. Further, so channeled into "norms," human behavior became subject to "objective" supervision, became open to judgment according to principles seen as "just."

Bray's second passage is self-explanatory: "The Chevalier de Méré" speaks of the 'bizarre Spaniards'. Saint-Evremond is not satisfied with their nature and explains the irregularity of their poetry in his own way: 'Since all the gallantry of the Spaniards came from the Moors, it retains an undefinable flavor of Africa, different from other nations and too eccentric to adapt itself to the strictures of rules'" (Bray, 30-31).

Thus, it is argued, French drama's observance of the three unities proclaims a Europeanness superior to the Moorish barbarism of a Lope de Vega, who, although thoroughly acquainted with the best classical authors, preferred an undisciplined form of theater that would merely appeal to those who attended. The consequences of that argument will be revealed in chapter 2, when I discuss the polemics about Racine and Shakespeare in nineteenth-century France. Nevertheless, in speaking of France, Saint-Evremond was assuredly not speaking of its entire population but of only the upper estate, of those who participated in what we today would call "the apparatus of state." Analyzing that same period, and specifically the "literature" under Louis XIV, Auerbach has concluded, with his characteristic lucidity: "This notion of *vraisemblance* is typical of cultivated society. It combines the arrogant rationalism that refuses to be taken in by imaginative illusion with contempt for the *indocte et stupide vulgaire* which is perfectly willing to be taken in."<sup>xxix</sup>

It should be noted, however, that much as has been the case with the foregoing argument about the interests that favored emphasis on individual subjectivity, I do not here propose to take political centralization as the one and only cause for the character of French classical poetics after it freed itself from ecclesiastical vigilance. I merely point out, in opposition to purely aestheticist modes of inquiry, that the cult of reason, viewed as able to crystallize eternal norms to be obeyed by the poet, and as well the concomitant disdain for anything that transgressed its canon, were bound up with the form in which social power was organized, a form no longer grounded in medieval theocentrism. Is it really surprising that the church was able to adjust to changed times? (The question obviously does not address the situation of Italy, where lack of national unity aided in maintenance of ecclesiastical power.) "The patronage of the saints gave a sense of identity and of corporate existence to small and otherwise undifferentiated institutions. Hence their enduring popularity as names for colleges and schools even in a Protestant era" (Thomas, 28). Religion adapted itself to the new order to the extent that it continued to contribute to the formation of identity constructs, now national in character. Thus the above quotation from Martin Fontius is perfect for the *Cinquecento*: at that time verisimilitude was the recognized quantity enabling avoidance of conflict with religion. In the later, nationally constituted states, however, that concern became subordinate to motives of a more strictly political nature. Aside from that difference, explanation remains the same: verisimilitude was accepted in relation to the allegiance between the *cour et la ville*—that is, in relation to the upper estate of absolutist society—because nobles and wealthy bourgeois saw in the exercise of the imagination — in the exercise of a form of thematization of the world that might deny perceived reality rather than endorse it—both the presence of a barbarous, undisciplined mentality and a defiance of their own "arrogant rationalism." Thus was the receiver borne in mind—a fact implied in what I have written about Castelvetro — in absolutism's need to legislate him effectively. It should not come as a shock, then, that early romanticism produced the germ of a poetics that was not only antinormative but also what we would today call immanentist, that is, a poetics concerned only with the properties of the poetic text and not with the mode of its reception.

In summary, analysis of classical poetics can serve as a point of departure for opposite conclusions. For one of them, all but impervious to a historical inquiry into aesthetics, art is endowed with an internal energy that enables it to affirm itself in varying situations. After all, even if there did exist a veto of the fictional, even if hostility on the part of the church resulted in a compact incarnated in the concept of *imitatio*, what importance did those matters have? Who can deny the strong presence of the fictional in Racine and Molière? Art eternally holds out to man the possibility of his projection beyond the span of his short lifetime.

The other interpretation insists, by way of contrast, that human achievements are radically historical and that it is necessary to bear that fact in mind so that we resist making of the world a vast mirror in which we see only our own poor self. If mimesis was given by its commentators and interpreters of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries a connotation contrary to that in Aristotelian thought, it was not because they were particularly narrow in outlook but rather because at that time reason had been given the charge to decide when the power of the individual subjectivity was correct and when it was in error. To take the fictional *finto, favoloso* ("pretended," "fabulous"), as did Varchi (Weinberg, *Literary Criticism* 1:8), and have no contemporary oppose you, to have it identified, then, with the false and mendacious, implied taking the script out of the poet's hands and obliging him or her to behave as the legislators of subjectivity disposed. The theoretician of "literature" of that period began from a premise similar to the one we saw at work in Fernão Lopes. (If Renaissance historiography did not follow the path opened up for it by the Portuguese chronicler, it was because the criteria for truth in the classical age were not grounded in a logic of fact but rather in verbal, rhetorical justification having eloquence as its pinnacle. Therefore, history remained closely attached to poetry, as a part of the *studia humanitatis*.) Poetry does not possess truth; at most it approaches it, through verisimilitude. Its savage core is feigned and mendacious, and only beautiful composition vouchsafes it the right to exist at all. The Renaissance poetologists work like advocates who know beforehand that their case is lost. Their efforts consist in avoiding the maximum sentence, and they achieve that goal by locating the fictional on the lowest plane of human knowledge and

restricting its field of operation.

As I initially proposed for this introductory development merely to understand what seemed to me a shocking hypothesis, and as that hypothesis now seems explained, I shall not undertake additional work on the further development of Renaissance poetics in the seventeenth century. Taking it as a background premise that matters remained relatively little changed in that era, let us instead turn to examination of how the problem of fictionality is presented in three essays written at the outset of the nineteenth century. And let us begin with the essay that radicalized the study of fiction by carrying it beyond the realm of belles-lettres, the *Theory of Fictions* by Jeremy Bentham.

### THE INEVITABILITY OF THE FICTIONAL

In 1814 the juriconsult and philosopher Jeremy Bentham began the writing of an essay that he would never see published and which would advance his reputation as a thinker not in the least—not because *The Theory of Fictions* was a work to be ignored but because it was so far ahead of the concerns of its time. What Bentham proposed was, in fact, truly disorienting for the era: the grounding of philosophical inquiry in language itself. He thereby put into question the bases upon which the real and the fictional, the safe port of truth and the phantasmagorical, had been kept separate.

According to its modern editor, C. K. Ogden, the writing of the essay was motivated by Bentham's anguished recollections of an infancy dominated by an old aunt, fear of ghosts and specters, and a strong aversion to children's storybooks. As an old man, Bentham exacted his revenge, all the sweeter in that those early causes lay well hidden within it. They had been replaced by other, more recent annoyances: his experiences as a law student and his later law practice, at odds with the interpretive twists to which legal briefs were subjected. Be they remote or recent, the phantasms had to be exorcized.

Bentham takes as point of departure the concept of entity, "a denomination in the import of which every subject matter of discourse, for the designation of which the grammatical part of speech called a noun-substantive is employed, may be comprised."<sup>xxx</sup> Thence emerge his basic categories: entities can be real or fictitious; the real ones comprise perceptual and inferential categories; the latter can be either material or spiritual. Highlighting only those points relevant to the subject at hand, let me first establish that a real entity is defined as "an entity to which, on the occasion and for the purpose of discourse, existence is really meant to be ascribed" (Bentham, 10).

Immediately afterward comes the first collision with normal realist thought: because they can be either perceived or inferred, the class of real entities excludes anything deriving from mere mental apparatus: "Faculties, powers of the mind, dispositions: all these are unreal; all these are but so many fictitious entities" (10).

The origin of the presumption that those entities, which are really fictitious, are in fact real is lost in bygone ages, when a supposed equivalence between the real and the existence of a name for it was concretized. For it is the name that created the presumption of reality "between the idea of a name and that of the reality of the object to which it was applied, an association being thus formed, from a connexion thus intimate, sprung a very natural propensity, viz. that of attributing reality to every object thus designated; in a word, of ascribing reality to the objects designated by words" (17).

It is not Bentham's point, however, to attack this type of fictional entity. Carrying on his initial conceptualization, he continues: "A fictitious entity is an entity to which, though by the grammatical form of the discourse employed in speaking of it, existence be ascribed, yet in truth and reality existence is not meant to be ascribed" (12).

Moreover, he adds that it is characteristic of the fictional entity to exist as a shadow projected by a real entity; "Every fictitious entity bears some relationship to some real entity, and can no otherwise be understood than in so far as that relation is perceived—a conception of that relation is obtained" (12).

If that shadow — to use a metaphor not employed by Bentham himself— is immediately projected by the real entity that gives rise to it, it is designated a "fictitious entity of the first remove," which is "a fictitious entity, a conception of which may be obtained by the consideration of the relation borne by it to a real entity, without need of considering the relation borne by it to any other fictitious entity" (12).

It is a property of fictitious entities of the first remove to be treated *as* if they were real. They thereby belong to

the class of ideas of movement and rest. In an explanation that is essential for the development of his thought, Bentham writes: "A body is said to be in motion. This, taken in the literal sense, is as much as to say—Here is a larger body, called a motion; in this larger body, the other body, namely, the really existing body, is contained" (13).

The root of fictionality is to be found, then, in language itself. Moreover, real fictionality does not constitute an error from which we must extricate ourselves. Such would be unthinkable—indeed, it would be so in the strictest of terms, for it is impossible for us to think without fictions: "To language, then—to language alone—it is, that fictitious entities owe their existence; their impossible, yet indispensable, existence" (15).

Making that analysis clearer, Bentham formulates the point with exemplary precision: "Of nothing that has place, or passes in our mind, can we give any account, any otherwise than by speaking of it as if it were a portion of space, with portions of matter, some of them at rest, others moving in it. Of nothing, therefore, that has place, or passes in our mind, can we speak, or so much as think, otherwise than in the way of *Fiction*" (17).

By way of contrast, the root of real entities is to be found in what we see. In its strict, basic sense, the real is very limited. In fact, at the outset of his chapter "Of Fictitious Entities," Bentham declares that of the Aristotelian categories—substance, quantity, quality, relation, and so on—only the first is not actually an example of a fictitious entity. The rationale on which the distinctions are based is to be inferred from prior definitions: real entities function like receptacles within which fictitious entities are held, their presence there being considered natural and self-evidently present. That argument, reiterated tirelessly throughout the treatise, is exemplified in the passage: "The ideas respectively designated by these corresponding words [i.e., matter and form] are fractional results, produced from the decomposition of the word *substance*" (24).

The concepts of matter and form, therefore, are mental projections imposed on the real receptacle, the substance; those projections, being immediately present within the horizon of the receptacle, become fictitious entities of the first remove. Such, for Bentham, is the mechanism through which the fictional receives its right to be, the right to its impossible yet indispensable existence. The fictional, one might say, derives from the fact that we cannot speak using only the substance that presents itself to us. (In other words, we are inhabited by a world that is not to be confused with its physical coordinates.) Bentham therefore takes the entity called "relation" as the first fictitious entity of the first remove: "Once introduced upon the carpet, the fictitious entity called relation swells into an extent such as to swallow up all the others. Every other fictitious entity is seen to be but a mode of this" (29).

As a consequence of its primacy, relation becomes an object of perception itself, that is, it comes to be "seen": "Whatsoever two entities, real or fictitious, come to receive names, and thus to receive their nominal existence, *Relation* would be the third; for, between the two—they being, by the supposition, different, and both of them actual objects of perception—the relation of difference or diversity would also become an object of perception" (29).

Whereas relation is therefore the first of the fictions that articulate our world, space presents itself as a mixed entity—one between the real and the fictional: "Substance being a real physical entity; perceptions real psychical entities; matter, form, quantity, and so on, so many fictitious entities: both descriptions being in part applicable to space, neither of them applicable entirely—space may be regarded and spoken of as a *semi-real entity*" (27).

It must be observed too that the area of the fictional is not to be confused with the field of the inferential real, which comprises "the soul in a state of separation from the body," God, and other lesser spiritual entities. (The development of this dimension is not of concern to us, especially because in it the philosopher becomes enmeshed in his own religious convictions.) This weak point, however, functions in such a manner as to make it clear that, despite the redemption that Bentham allows to fictitious entities of the first remove—I use the term redemption because I consider it an absolutely essential feature of his argument—he retains a degree of caution regarding that entity. That caution keeps him from classifying God as anything other than a real entity: "Author, and Creator—those alone, and not the word *cause*, can, with propriety, be employed in speaking of God. These, as well as God, are names of real entities, not names of fictitious entities" (44).

From the résumé here presented, it might be thought that the relative lack of recognition with which Bentham's treatise met resulted from its defense of fictionality. Although that analysis may have some merit, the fact is that Bentham did not endeavor to rescue poetic fiction from the secular prohibition that accompanied it. Indeed, he is quite harsh with that sort of fiction. It is not even identified with fictional entities of the second remove—that is,

those that acquire their qualities via borrowing from those of the first remove. Poetic fictions instead receive the specific title fabulous fictions. If acceptable fictions—that is, those without which the 'games of language' cannot function—presuppose a real entity, the "fabulous fictions" find their origin in entities unreal in themselves: "*Fabulous* may be the name employed for the designation of the other class of *unreal* entities" (17).

For Bentham, such "fabulous" entities are simply to be depreciated; they are to be seen as akin to the hypocrisy of the priest and the chicanery of the pettifogger, "very different the Fiction of the Logician from the Fictions of poets, priests, and lawyers" (18).

As the reader will have perceived, my purpose has not been to "popularize" a relatively little-known treatise but rather to show that Bentham's effort, with its attempt to ground discourse about reality in an explicitly established rational structure, was one of the first to radicalize thinking about truth. The fact that reason must recognize that it competes with necessary fictions, even though that recognition represents an important rejection of realist epistemology, offers no immediate surcease for poetic fiction. To reiterate, necessary fictions involve an operation that originates in the body of a real entity, of a real receptacle, of categorical "substance." Reason absorbs this impossible but necessary fictionality, naturalizes it, obliterates its bastard nature, and uses it to serve the discourses that deal with reality. In that operation no concessions are made to those spurious individuals who persist in dealing with fables and in adorning themselves with the "beauty" that is so suspect. If Bentham's treatise foreshadows Vaihinger's philosophy of the "as if," as Ogden notes, and anticipates the central role that language will command in the neopositivist circle and in analytical philosophy, by contrast it offers nothing anticipatory of a theory of poetic fictionality. To be sure, nothing would prevent our extracting from it ingredients in explanation of the sense of reality engendered by poetic fiction. Poetic fictionality crystallizes within an object, and its persuasive power would doubtless be diminished if it did not produce an illusion of reality. (As any casual observation shows, that illusion is the first effect produced by confrontation with an art object, and that effect, if it does not efface itself, negates the experience of the art itself.) Such results, however, would be marginal ones that would hardly require study of Bentham's treatise for their formulation. I have examined that treatise as a kind of end point in the historical construction of a reason, of a form of rationalism, that could justify its own existence only through depreciation of poetic fictionality. In the light of that history, the debt that we owe "advanced" romantic thought becomes all the more evident. It is a debt that traditional education, based as it is on the suspect practice of reading "selected texts," makes difficult to recognize. Early romanticism in fact squarely confronted the tradition I have outlined. Its success, or, rather, that of its sharpest cutting edge, was at best relative; that success was, however, great enough for us to become aware of the veto that our tradition practices with regard to the fictional.

### **THE REASSUMPTION OF SUBJECTIVITY: CHATEAUBRIAND AND STENDHAL**

When the *Essai sur la littérature anglaise* [Essay on English Literature] was published in 1836, romanticism was already fully consolidated in France. What is more, Chateaubriand's book vacillated between holdovers of classical patterns and ideas of a properly romantic stamp. I shall, therefore, ignore chronological order and consider it before I examine Stendhal's *Racine et Shakespeare* (1823). Just as in the preceding discussion, my purpose here will not be exhaustive exposition, for the two titles are of interest to us as symptoms of a new cultural scene.

One new element is obvious: the principle of the nation, the political criterion of nationality is no longer a secondary or correlative issue; it is now the very foundation of the machinery of judgment. The change is so pervasive that the anachronism of Chateaubriand's vision is in fact astonishing: he treats the medieval situation as though he were speaking of the Europe of his own time. It is through such leveling of the differences between historical periods that Chateaubriand not only takes the national spirit as an element productive of artistic quality but also accuses foreign influence of creating erroneous situations along the lines of what supposedly happened in medieval England, where, he says, Saxon writings lost their "native originality" because of the introduction of "French and Provençal poetry." In chapter 2 I will discuss the importance assumed at this time by the notion of nationality and its role in the constitution of the golden age of literary historiography, but for now I shall merely observe that Chateaubriand carried his conception of nationalities as self-enclosing, sealed compartments to such an extent that he actually came to doubt that one could understand a foreign author: "In judging impartially the totality of foreign works as well as our own (if, after all, one can in fact judge foreign works, which I very much doubt), one will find that, although they are equal in strength of thought, we prevail as regards form and logic of composition."<sup>xxxix</sup>

The last part of the argument suggests that the hypothetical difficulty in interpretation may derive less from the declared reason than from Chateaubriand's retention of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century evaluative criteria.

Moreover, at no time is he inclined to question the universality of the rules of classical poetics. The very fact that those rules reached their culmination in the France of Louis XIV—not to mention that the essay was written during the Restoration and its author had been one of the émigrés—made him all the more adverse to such questioning. He therefore contradicts the general direction of his own work when he declares in no uncertain terms that "in a living literature no one is a competent judge save of works written in his own language" (Chateaubriand, 261).

The feature that today seems to us the central one in romanticism, the *historicization of judgment*, Chateaubriand wholly bypasses. At the same time, his choice of *l'ordre et la raison de la composition* as typical French attributes suggests a pattern characteristic of the *restaurateurs* of the era and of the conservative thought that accompanied and/or followed that pattern: to condemn the literature and thought of the eighteenth century, which led to the Revolution, those of the seventeenth century were taken to constitute the mirror of what was truly French. Nationality is, then, exalted as a *defensive* principle, as a substance much in the sense in which Bentham used the term, that is, as the only strictly real entity. That very substantialization of nationality manifests how, in the nineteenth century, literary historiography became inextricably bound up with the interests and values of the national state.

At the same time that he preserves the old poetics, however, Chateaubriand also introduces elements foreign to it. Thus, however timidly, he recognizes the role played by the imagination, even though he reserves it—in a reservation that is of capital importance for my thesis—for the beguiling excesses of distant times or of young and naive peoples:

The Middle Ages is not a time of style, properly so called, but it is a time of picturesque expression, naive painting, and fertile invention. We note with a smile of admiration what naive peoples produced from the beliefs that were taught them: to their great, lively, and far-reaching imagination, to their cruel customs, to their indomitable courage, to their uncontrollable instinct for adventure and conquest, priests, missionaries, and poets offered marvellous torments, eternal perils, invasions to be attempted, but in some unknown locale without changing place. (36)

"Barbarians," then, have their allure for noble, civilized humans, who, correspondingly, maintain their reserve and recognize them as constituting an element to be kept a prudent distance away. The imagination is admired as the fruit of "early youth" that awakens in the writer of mature age—especially if he or she be *restauré*—a touch of envy but above all a goodly dose of caution. Admiration and caution: exactly the formula for exotic literature that Chateaubriand had used in *Renée* and *Atala*.

Couched in a more complex set of combinations, that same formula will be present in Chateaubriand's very approach to Shakespeare, which is an important issue since the *Essai* is basically a reflection on Milton and Shakespeare. The combinations are more complex because, although he takes up categories that had coin at his time—national spirit, barbarism, imagination—Chateaubriand still implies, in a passage that from the point of view of French classicism is quite daring, that Shakespeare's power stemmed from his raw material—life itself: "He mixes, *just as in the real world*, king and slave, patrician and plebeian, warrior and laborer, the prominent man and the anonymous man; he makes no distinctions of genre: he does not separate noble from ignoble, serious from comic, sad from merry, smiles from tears, happiness from misery, good from evil. He sets the entire society in motion, just as he sets out entirely the life of one man" (111; emphasis mine).

Does such language in fact explicitly deny categorizations of genre? Observant and nimble, Chateaubriand sees that he has to control the scope of the implications extractable from the above paragraph; he therefore immediately adds: "Let us be sure to affirm that writing is an art, that that art has genres, that each genre has its rules. Genres and their rules are not at all arbitrary; they spring from nature itself: art has merely made discrete what nature has thrown together. . . . Racine, in all the excellence of his *art*, is more *natural* than Shakespeare, just as Apollo, in all his divinity, has more of *human* form than an Egyptian colossus" (HI).

While not wholly refractory to romantic innovation, Chateaubriand strives to maintain the profile of classicism. A perfect fit was unachievable, and the entire arsenal of classicism was therefore not saved. If the gravitation of a nature to be made sublime is retained through affirmation of a place for well-defined rules and genres, nonetheless *imitatio* is not spoken of. No matter the strength of our viscount's will to compromise, *imitatio* had to be banished. For, as we have seen, Renaissance *imitatio* presupposed an estate society with a homogeneity of representation that brought author and public together, thereby enabling the decoding of allusive literary tropes by means of references known beforehand. *Imitatio* did not presuppose life but rather a model of reality, not life as a model but rather a model of style. Now Chateaubriand is aware of the diversity of his time and of the fact that "literary society" had been invaded by alarming aliens. In that situation, a return to the old *imitatio* would

imperil the fame that was his life goal. What seemed viable—indeed, necessary—to him, then, was to throw up a barricade against the barbarians: "Even so it is not my intent to contradict the forced changes that time and revolution have wrought upon literary opinion, as well as upon political opinion; those changes, however, do not justify the corruption of taste" (112).

It was a corruption that made him tremble with revulsion before "that love of the ugly," "that enrapturement with the bandy-legged, the crippled, the one-eyed, the dark-skinned (!), and the toothless" (112). The old, estate-based paradigm endeavors, then, to maintain the categories that we have seen at work, categories through which it governed, now not in the name of an objectivity for *imitatio* but in the name instead of an aristocracy of spirit. Therefore, Chateaubriand, as exponent of that outlook, says of Racine that "he purged his masterpieces of only such elements as ordinary spirits would have put there" (112). That is to say, the principle of decorum now assumes precisely the political function of differentiating between estates, if not between classes. The cornerstone, *imitatio*, had been pulled out from the old edifice, and a means was now being sought to keep that construction from falling in entirety. To the ex-émigré that task is the fundamental one, for, to his educated eyes, the barbarians had already broken into the house: "There do not even remain either actors to play Classical tragedy or a public to enjoy it, understand it, and judge it" (113).

How, then, could he reconcile all his objections with the high praise that he accords Shakespeare? Our essayist faced the challenge unabashed. For this task too his intimacy with classical eloquence served him well. The great English playwright was, simply put, a special sort of barbarian, "standing out amid the ranks of a civilization in progress and redirecting it toward the past" (125).

It is as a result of this special position that the admiration that Shakespeare incites, as well as the reserve that must be maintained with regard to his work, are justified. More so in fact because, even beyond ignoring decorum and rules of art, Shakespeare did not rise to the service of his country either, and praise of life, taken to be the proper function of artistic materials, is conditioned by a higher value: that of the state. The English playwright is therefore seen, in a comparative light, as inferior to such predecessors or contemporaries as Tasso, Lope de Vega, Calderón, Ercilla, Cervantes, and Camões, who had in their work something "that partakes of the beauty of their countries." Shakespeare, by contrast, "would have needed a different career," since if he is "enraptured in his work, he is seldom noble: his style frequently lacks dignity, just as does his life" (132). Consequently, it is for Milton that Chateaubriand reserves his categorical admiration. Is that not a strange choice, we might ask, since Milton was a republican and supporter of the regicidal Cromwell? No, the viscount answers, because at the bottom of it all Milton, "that fierce republican, was a noble" and had his arms (223).

In summary, Chateaubriand oscillates between the old set of precepts and the cult of life. As regards the former, he writes, in reinforcement of his praise of Racine and reservations against Shakespeare: "It must be said, however, to be honest, that if the criticism of detail has lost its power through the lapse of recognized rules, through the revolt of entrenched *amour-propre*, historical and general criticism has on the other hand made considerable progress" (260).

As regards the latter point, life is exalted in the hope of attaining individual salvation through expression of that life itself. It is doubtless an awkward hope to maintain, being, as it is, common to all *littérateurs*: "one after another, we each of us believe, with all candor and conscience, that we are the man of our century" (260). Perhaps because of its very struggle to maintain interchange between the old and the new, the *Essai* does not offer a thinker of the weight of a Coleridge or of the German romantic theoreticians. I have chosen it as an exemplary case—indeed, a somewhat tragic one—of the effort to sustain an impossible accommodation: one between the paradigms of an aesthetics that had rejected its own cornerstone and the vitalistic, particularistic, and individualized paradigm of romanticism.

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When Chateaubriand's *Essai sur la littérature anglaise* appeared, thirteen years had already passed since Stendhal had scandalized *restaurateurs* and academicians alike with his short, ironic, aggressive *Racine et Shakespeare*. In my examination of the *Essai*, I showed quite clearly that allegiance to classical aesthetics was wholly consistent with Chateaubriand's political conservatism and with his effort not to be confused with the walking corpses from earlier times. The controversy sparked by Stendhal's manifesto of 1823 makes that relationship all the clearer—less, really, because of Stendhal's own words than because of the inflamed rejoinder that the then president of the French Academy, the long-forgotten Auger, directed against it. It is as defender of restored monarchical institutions that Auger undertakes to speak. The aesthetic principles that he defends are those that he thinks are endangered by the advent of the "nascent sect," the propagation of which could

undermine established power. Therefore, the academy, as part of the established order, running the risk of giving too much attention to the adversary, takes up arms:

A new literary schism raises its head today. Many men, brought up with a religious respect for the old doctrines consecrated in innumerable masterpieces, are worried, indeed frightened, by the projects of the nascent sect and seem to call for reassurance. Shall the French Academy remain indifferent to their outcries? . . . The danger is perhaps not yet very great, and it might be feared that it will only be increased if too much importance is attached to it. Should we then wait until the sect of *Romanticism* (for that is what it calls itself), carried beyond the goals to which it tends—if indeed it proposes goals for itself — arrives there, casts doubt upon all our rules, insults all our masterpieces, and perverts, through some illegitimate successes, that mass of fluctuating opinions in which it is always fate that disposes?<sup>xxxii</sup>

Few literary documents manifest their political correlatives so clearly. Indeed, they are so explicit that in his response Stendhal advises the classicists to "have a tender regard for the police. Otherwise, they will be ingrates."<sup>xxxiii</sup> Even though we can understand Auger's fears through a look at the political vicissitudes that France underwent during the decades in question, nonetheless, precisely whence came that danger that the president of the academy so needed to dispel? Not disguising the nationalistic principle upon which he based himself, Auger saw his adversary as a member of an international conspiracy mounted by a barbarous people, the Germans (see Auger, 28). Recently over the Revolution that had shaken the entire continent, recently liberated from the "usurper" Bonaparte, France now spoke through the voice of the *restaurateurs*, who desecrated enemies everywhere. The Necker family, already suspect because of its illustrious relative who had not moved to save Louis XVI from bankruptcy and doubly feared as foreign and Protestant, had the misfortune of beginning, through one of its daughters, Mme. de Stael, the introduction of Germany and of German romantic ideas into the country. It little mattered that no precise political program accompanied those ideas, or that Mme. de Stael had in fact been banished under Bonaparte, or that Stendhal's first pamphlet dealt only with literature. The integrity of the restored state did not seem the less endangered for such reasons, for advocacy of freedom in matters of art was seen as equally threatening to that bourgeoisie that had quickly forgotten its alliance with the people. Over against freedom of production and evaluation, that is, over against the *relativization of values*, Auger insisted on the atemporality of humankind and of nature: "Truth, in the arts, consists first of all in representing nature and man just as they are in all countries and at all times; and secondarily in marking the accidental differences that modify their exteriors in accordance with their locale or era" (19).

Moreover, the atemporal perfection of genres is derived as a corollary from the general atemporality: "The genres have been identified and fixed; their nature cannot be changed or their number increased. Only if one jumbles them together and combines them in monstrous forms can one believe that he has created new ones" (24).

Auger's diatribe, in itself an insignificant piece, is nonetheless very valuable in that it manifests in obvious ways the direct link between normative aesthetics and political interests. That normativeness, albeit both diluted and shorn of the majority of its supporting categories, endured—and continues to endure—much beyond the ambience of the French Restoration. Its survival is achieved through the veto of fiction, a prohibition carried out in the name of common sense. We have seen Auerbach interpret the adoption of the unities of time, place, and action as the product of an arrogant rationalism cultivated by the members of *la cour et la ville*. To deal with the survival of the normativeness implicit in that rationalism, I must add that by the second half of the seventeenth century it had transformed its arrogance into a defense of mean, common reality: "Even though the formulae for imitation of nature seem all but identical from the start of the century to its close, the notion of nature tends to narrow around 1660 and to begin to apply less to the school of Boileau than to mean, everyday reality" (Bray, 148).

With that narrowing, it became possible for the veto of the fictional to be transmitted down to our own time, under the name of realism. Even in speaking of the most enduring aspect of the old normativeness, Stendhal did not foresee that his classicistic adversary would endure every bit as long as his own work: "The Academician [in defense of his principles]: Because it is not credible that an action represented in two hours should encompass a week or a month; or that in a few moments the actors should go from Venice to Cyprus, as in Shakespeare's *Othello*, or from Scotland to the English court, as in *Macbeth*" (Stendhal, 19).

In defense of what, then, did the young, then unknown author write? Of nothing less than the position that the articulating principle of literary production and reception should be the rendering of life itself: "What one should imitate in that great man [Shakespeare] is his manner of studying the world we live in and the art of giving to our contemporaries precisely the kind of tragedy they need but do not have the boldness to demand, because they are so terrified by the reputation of the great Racine" (42-43).

Romanticism, then, saw itself as characterized by a reflection carried out on the basis of the *hie et nunc* and no longer as a function of a verisimilitude with the permanently and universally present. If verisimilitude had had its ground in *imitatio*, the resemblance now sought was one with the vicissitudes of a life that was social, individual, and everywhere differentiated. The latter could never be made synonymous with the former, for to abstract life and then frame it in a rhetorical treatment subject to models was in fact to break faith with that life. Therefore, the concept of *imitatio* would be replaced by the notion of *expression* by an individual. Subjectivity seemed to be rending the veil that had covered it over, and reason, identified with mean truth, that is, common sense, to be losing its position as guardian of the temple. A new principle was beginning to be raised, one founded on the explanation of the subjective richness of the individual: "Either I am mistaken, or these changes of the passions in the human heart are the most magnificent thing that poetry can hold up to be viewed by the eyes of men, whom it at once moves and instructs" (44).

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My description of the struggle between classicism and romanticism in the French milieu may lead to the mistaken presumption that the struggle assumed the virulence that I have noted because of its articulation with political positions linked to the outcome of the French Revolution. If such were the case, how could one explain why the exile of *imitatio*, supposed translator of mimesis, took place throughout Europe, soon thereafter to be effected in the Americas as well? The theoretical elimination of the principle of imitation is bound up with life conditions in the modern era. If Schiller reserved "naïve poetry" for the Greeks, it was because, as Fontius observes, the Greeks were unaware of a separation between the sensory and the intelligible, creating instead an "undivided sensory unity," whereas the modern science of nature emphasizes a dismembering analytical reason and that principle pervades the very organization of education: "Neither Antiquity nor the Middle Ages knew systematic instruction under State supervision. After the development of modern education, which emphasizes detailed analysis, a form of learning based on demonstration and imitation seems to belong to a historical stage profoundly separated from the life of modern civilization." (Fontius, 236)

Rather than by the actual fate of *l'ancien régime*, or the tedium and loss of opportunity for young people that came as a result of Napoleon's fall, the interment of *imitatio* was, then, in fact effected by the passage from an aristocratic estate society to a national, class society articulated by the scientific spirit. But if it was thus that *imitatio* was led to its grave, what of the more distant concept of mimesis? Its ostracism by contemporary theoreticians is well known. And it is just as well known that the romantic cult of individual expression transformed itself into the immanentist aesthetics that dominated uncontested the first sixty years of the present century.<sup>xxxiv</sup> At the present moment, when signs are being seen of a crisis in that immanentism, signs all the more evident after the vogue of structuralism—and signs of which Hans Robert Jauss's well-known inaugural lecture at Konstanz in 1967 was the first overture—would it not be opportune to rethink that old concept? And would it not be appropriate to relate that reexamination to the clearly intriguing fact that, albeit under veto, fiction is recognized both in classical works and in realistic ones, that is, in precisely those works on which the veto most imposes itself?

## THE IMAGINARY AND MIMESIS

Among Saint Augustine's merits, those of defender of poetry and the arts cannot be counted. Very much to the contrary, his Christian zeal caused him to concentrate on one task alone: the employing of his undeniable gifts as writer and thinker for the strengthening of the church, making it the unifying institution amid the fragmentation that marked late antiquity. To the extent that classical thought had weight with him and the poets did not escape his scrutiny, they still were subordinate to that guiding purpose. In the very treatise to which I shall shortly be referring, he evidences his mode of thinking: Vergil is rejected because, in opposition to Christian tenets, he had said that the unburied could not enter the Stygian bark, while Lucan is praised for allowing that the heavens could serve as the required roof for the unburied. The classical legacy was, then, acceptable to Augustine in direct proportion to its correlation with ecclesiological thought. Despite that guiding direction in his work, however, it will be in Augustine that we shall find material to understand how works that either limited the use of the fictionality available to them—those of a Moliere, for example—or actually rejected such use altogether because their author chose to remain shackled to reality—the supreme case coming in the works of Zola—are nonetheless still recognized as works of fiction. To mount such an inquiry, it will be necessary for me to violate the purpose, though to be sure not the spirit, of Augustine himself.

In his *De Cura Gerenda pro Mortuis* [On the Care to Be Taken for the Deceased], Augustine discusses the origin of the argument that the dead can appear to the living in dreams, asking something of them or pointing

something out to them. His thesis is that, in that case, "it is not necessary to believe that the dead act as real, conscious beings. . . . For the living too appear to the living in dreams, and without knowing it."<sup>xxxv</sup> He illustrates his position with an anecdote that one might very well imagine as the source for a Borges short story:

While I was still in Milan, there occurred to Eulogius, rhetoric teacher at Carthage and my student in that art, the following event, as he himself told it to me when I returned to Africa. As his course dealt with Cicero's rhetorical works, he was preparing his lesson for the coming day when he came across an obscure passage of which he could make no sense. In his irritation, he had to use every device he knew to fall asleep. I then appeared to him during his sleep and explained the phrases that he had not been able to understand. It was not really I, of course, but rather my image, totally apart from myself. I was far away, on the other side of the ocean, involved in another matter or having another dream, totally unaware of his concern.

How that happened I do not know. But no matter by what means, how can we not believe that the dead do not appear to us as images in our dreams just like the living? Who will see them and where no one either knows or cares. (Augustine, 494-95)

Whether we be alive or dead, we can therefore be the stimulus for someone else's dreams, all the while not being responsible for what we say therein, or do, or counsel. We are not responsible for images of ourselves, precisely because we are not to be identified with them.

Can the reader see what I am driving at or do doubts persist even where enough has been said? Dreams operate along a line like those established by poetic—if not all artistic—experience: they convert perceived material, the "day residue," into images that then assume their own activity, achieving an autonomy for which the originating material is not responsible. It is possible, then, to enter into communication with the fictional only when one learns to see it as a whole that one's imagination invokes. Or, rather, when one receives messages structured less through utterances than through images. To be sure, not all experience of the imaginary is aesthetic experience. The experience of hallucinations is, of course, wholly lacking in aesthetic content. While the imaginary presupposes the destruction of reality—that is, abandonment of the thematization of perception grounded in that concept—creating a diffuse magma in which anything can signify anything, aesthetic experience involves the negation of the negation of the imaginary: my interpretation of the poetry that I read cannot be strictly my own but must be formulated on the basis of the potential created by the schema contained in what I read.<sup>xxxvi</sup> What I wish to argue, then, is the following: it is proper to fictional discourse, be it aesthetic or other, that it be perceived as an articulation of images, that it be thematized by the imagination. Therefore, just like Augustine with regard to his disciple's dream, the author of such discourse does not control its reception, and it can be received as a fictional product, even though a veto may have been imposed on the use of fiction or the author in fact may have prohibited it.

The following options present themselves as consequences of this line of thought: one may either conclude that exhaustive analysis of the thematization of the imaginary represents a sufficient basis for a theory of the poetic or one may endeavor to link such an analysis to a reexamination of mimesis.<sup>xxxvii</sup> I opt here for the second of those courses, in the conviction that the ostracism of mimesis has depended more on historical reasons than on its internal exhaustion. I shall endeavor, then, to show what those historical reasons have been and how it would be possible to revivify the concept of mimesis.

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We have seen, through recourse to the work of Martin Fontius, how the edifice of *imitatio* had become inadequate in relation to the institutions of modern life. The according of centrality to analytical, dismembering reason came at the time of the breakdown of the frames of reference supporting classical estate society and at the time of the rise of a new political institution, the nation-state, which, in the area of the arts, served as a pole around which society's legitimated historians and critics would revolve. It was in the light of that set of factors that the romantics proposed life itself as the new raw material for art. The work of art was to acquire veracity to the extent that it expressed life well. It was a mode of expression different, and distant, from the course of *imitatio* because it was not subordinated to significations previously established and socialized. Instead, expression involved personalized motifs and therefore became communication only when it touched on experiences that were intersubjectively common (as cultivated in the "normal" romanticism of a Lamartine, a Vigny, or a Musset, or even in that of Hugo). Beyond those boundaries, expression was enveloped in a necessarily faint aura, as Nerval's work clearly manifests. If, in *Racine et Shakespeare*, Stendhal was still battling to conquer the public for romantic art, and Hugo sustained that conquest throughout his long life, artists in general would soon abandon the cause. The artists' language began to retreat from communicative

interchange and, as with Baudelaire, became an act of aggression, a "shock experience" (Walter Benjamin). This entire phenomenon is but one way of observing that the public had adopted the cause of the victorious entrepreneurial bourgeoisie, leaving the artists immersed in a marginalized Subjectivity all their own. As a result, criticism, once it abandoned the hostility that it had directed against the rebellious poets, and after ascertaining that their rebellion could easily coexist with the politico-economical status quo, either took up biographical criticism, which kept faith with romantic pretensions by aestheticizing life itself or, in a gesture of rectification, rejected biographical criticism for concentration on study of the poetic process in a sort of revival of rhetoric, with the hope of describing the integrity of a new substance, the substance of the poetic.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

It is interesting to note—and in all likelihood has been noted—that this deprecation of common language did not arise only among artists and analysts of art at the beginning of the twentieth century. The very concept of the avant-garde, which at that time was expanding from the area of politics to that of art, shares in the same presupposition. Common usage and common values were also disdained by those involved in a new logic, formal and mathematical in character, as projected by the Vienna Circle on the one hand or, in far-off England, by Bertrand Russell on the other. The true producers, be they considered avant-garde artists or not, were to create either closed, clandestine political apparatuses or a purified language shorn of the ambiguities of daily usage. And even when one of those authors, Wittgenstein, changed his line of investigation, it took a long time for that change to be accepted and have its impact. In his later period:

Wittgenstein focused his attention instead on *language as behavior*, concentrating his analysis on the pragmatic *rules* that govern the uses of different expressions, on the *language games* within which those rules are operative, and on the broader *forms of life* which ultimately give those language games their significance. The heart of the "transcendental" problem thus ceased (for Wittgenstein) to lie in the formal character of linguistic representations.<sup>xxxix</sup>

Results, to be sure, of different conditioning factors, various areas of contemporary culture began from the premise that a new language should be created and that the public should receive from political and/or philosophical and/or artistic avant-gardes doctrines, manifestos, and studies that would liberate that public from oppression, misery, and automatism. As a consequence, it is not surprising that concern with mimesis did not appear in the field of art, in the strict sense of the term, for there it would be seen as representing an objectionable compromise with the figurative and the traditional; rather, it was taken up, albeit in a marginal way, within a project which was not supported by any previously constituted tradition and which, in requiring the presence and participation of an individual "of no special character," could not take part in the rejection of day-to-day language. The project was that of psychoanalysis. Elaboration of the subject will require a space other than this one, not to mention an author other than myself. I shall limit my development of it to some brief observations based on the work of Freud.

I shall take as my starting point the phenomenon of identification. Freud says that "identification is known to psychoanalysis as the earliest expression of an emotional tie with another person"; it can arise from a wish for identity, either positive or negative, with the object to be imitated.<sup>xl</sup> That is, the symptom may be one involving identification with a rival object—the daughter coughs in the manner of the mother with whom she competes, thereby "bring[ing] about a realization, under the influence of a sense of guilt [*Schuldbewusstseins*], of her desire to take her mother's place: 'You wanted to be your mother, and now you *are* — anyhow so far as your sufferings are concerned'" (Freud, 106). Or it may involve identification with the love object, as with Dora, who imitates her father's cough (106). In a third possibility, "the identification leaves entirely out of account any object-relation to the person who is being copied," grounding the very mechanism of identification "upon the possibility or desire of putting oneself in the same situation [as the person being copied]" (107). The affective tie to a referent—to a person being copied—engenders a similitude of action or attitude, a similitude conceived only through the mediation of interpretation, that is, not based on a simple congruency of a visual nature. In many of Freud's cases, as Sérgio Paulo Rouanet observes, "The theory of identification is literally a theory of mimesis—a making-oneself-like through appropriation, be it partial or total, of the model."<sup>xli</sup>

Even when similarity to the model is visual, it is not that visuality that is its basis; what is essential *is not its nature as copy or substantive trace but the process of transformation that is in operation*. That affirmation can be substantiated by supplementing the paraphrase of Freud's analysis with this one, which appeared in one of his earlier essays:

When, now, I perceive a movement like this of greater or lesser size in someone else, the surest way to an understanding (an apperception) of it will be for me to carry it out by imitation, and I can then decide from the comparison on which of the movements my expenditure [*Aujwand*] was the greater. An impulsion of this kind to imitation is undoubtedly present in perceptions of movements. But actually I do

not carry the imitation through, any more than I still spell words out if I learnt to read by spelling. Instead of imitating the movement with my muscles, I have an idea of it through the medium of my memory-traces of expenditures on similar movements.<sup>xliii</sup>

Physically realized imitation—that is, one visibly evidenced—constitutes a stage preparatory to an imitation carried out through internal representation. What is decisive in the constitution of mimesis, then, is the creation of a *staging*, which is not so much the repetition of a model as *the organization of a response to that model carried out at the level of the sensorial*. Let us briefly recall the incident of the *fort-da*. A one-and-a-half-year-old boy, apparently mature enough not to cry when his mother left the house, instead exhibited the strange behavior pattern of scattering his toys at a great enough distance from himself that gathering them up again would require concerted effort. Moreover, in scattering them our small actor would voice a long "oooh" and, in gathering them together, would punctuate each recovery with a happy "da."<sup>xliii</sup> The game symbolically staged the mother's leaving (her *Fortgehen*) and the joy at her return (*da*). In such analysis Freud took a step which, although compatible with the romantics' position, was not one that they contemplated. Psychoanalysis, one might say, is born of the horizon of inquiry opened up by the romantics. That inquiry was decisive in demonstrating that reason, as it was conceived by classical thought and classical poetics, could not serve as an explanatory criterion for art. Reason sets up *conscious* models to be internalized through either direct or sublimate action. It therefore confuses them with the *reality* to be imitated. Replacing the model of a *conscious imitatio* with reflection on scenes experienced in life, the romantics implicitly showed that reality does not become a *da* by the simple fact that it is formed of objects that offer themselves up before us [as *Gegenstände*].

As Schütz will observe (see chap. 3 [of *Control of the Imaginary*, "What are the Building Blocks of History?"]), man lives in contact with multiple realities, and each of them is constituted around a set of rules that enable his inter-subjective experience. It is the case, however, that those multiple realities are constituted on the basis of one dominant reality, namely everyday reality, within which—I maintain, here independently of Schütz—perceptual thematization dominates over a thematization deriving from the imagination.<sup>xliv</sup> Hence the tendency to interpret the different *provinces* of the real—the provinces of dream, of art, of religion, and so on—as subcategories of the province of everyday reality alone, governed by its laws and thus explainable by recourse to the same rules that are applicable to everyday experience. (Parenthetically, we should note that whereas Schütz has the great merit of pointing out the simultaneous and multiple layers of reality, he nonetheless adheres to rationalistic tradition in binding the other provinces too closely to everyday reality. Thus, to my reading of him here, a very positive one for the construction of a basis for fiction, another reading could be counterposed emphasizing his continuation of the veto of the fictional.)

In opposition to the "arrogant rationalism" of the classical era, Stendhal foresaw a province of art possessing its own rules, as he demonstrates in discussing the problem of illusion: "When one says that the spectator imagines that the time necessary for the events represented on the stage has passed, one does not mean that the spectator's illusion extends to the point of believing that all this time has really elapsed" (Stendhal, 21).

Moreover, that observation was not entirely unprecedented. In 1719, in his *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et la peinture* [Critical Reflections on Poetry and Painting], Jean-Baptiste Du Bos wrote:

People of spirit thought that the illusion was the prime cause of the pleasure that plays and paintings give us. According to that impression, the staging of the *Cid* gives us so much pleasure only through the illusion that it elicits. The poetry of the immortal Corneille, the theatrical apparatus, and the actors' declamation exercise such force on us that we believe that we are in the presence not of a representation of an event but rather of the event itself, that we are seeing the real action and not an imitation. That interpretation seems to me an untenable one.<sup>xlv</sup>

Du Bos's comments show that classicistic legislation presupposed that the reader or spectator was guided only by the principle of *perceived* time and operated on that premise. For the romantics—and Du Bos's sensualistic aesthetics as well—the basic premise was that the average spectator knew that stage time was not to be confused with time on the clock. Now I am not here arguing that among the ruins of *imitatio* the romantics discovered the figure of mimesis (it would be partially true in relation to Coleridge alone; see chap. 2). I do, however, wish to argue that, in the current crisis of the immanentist theory of poetics, it becomes both possible and desirable to reread the romantics with an eye to these lines of inquiry, which have heretofore been ignored. Especially those lines that, in giving specific definition to the province of art, do not divide it from the other provinces in life's repertoire. Now such specificity and interrelatedness can easily be apprehended from the point of view of mimesis. Our short incursion into Freud shows that psychoanalytic theory involves a mimesis that is carried out—and effaced—on a daily basis. What difference, then, can there be between those fields of its operation? The major difference seems to be the following: day-to-day mimesis operates within the province of everyday

reality, thus obeying laws necessarily different from those governing artistic experience. That factor becomes evident in a comparison of the reading of a literary narrative with the compiling of a case history. As Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht writes:

Literary narratives—we can summarize—like all narratives, enable the receiver to experience life processes. Nevertheless, while, like all literary texts, they suggest by means of corresponding signs the neutralization of the question of their referentiality, they can act as representations of the (author's) imagination and as stimuli for the (reader's) imagination. Since these processes (and not an inventory of experiences or motivations to action) represent and stimulate the imagination, they can pre-direct the mode of their own realization through the receiver's imagination.<sup>xlvi</sup>

When, by contrast, the psychoanalytic subject is a mimesis located in the province of the day-to-day, our relationship to it changes: "Referentiality and the loss of reference by the presentations of identity proffered by day-to-day fictions are equally "relevant to the hearer. The referential passages serve as signs of the speaker's identity, the non-referential ones are symptoms of his or her hypertrophied self-evaluation. . . . Day-to-day fictions . . . are conventional signs or symptoms for the speaker's identity" (Gumbrecht, 417).

Therefore, whereas identification of a discourse as literary-fictional has an effect on the reader's constitution of the world, recognition of a psychoanalytical "case" as fictional leads to judgment of the subject: he or she is a storyteller, someone untrustworthy, a boaster.

With such issues in mind, let us look again at what happens in literary mimesis. Just as in day-to-day mimesis, it presupposes a correspondence between what it enunciates and the receiver's frame of reference. That correspondence is translated into a sense of *similarity* between the utterance and what the receiver can postulate as thinkable. In fact, then, the presumption of such a correspondence operates in both the receiver and the producer. From the point of view of the former, such is the case because his very perceptions have been oriented by the culturally socialized expectation of what he should see: "Perceptions are not discoveries, but instead they have an essentially prognostic character. The prognosis refers to the form that must arise if and when we act."<sup>xlvii</sup>

From the point of view of the producer, the same central role for similitude results from: "The usual will always be the most seemly point of departure for the representation of the unusual; an already-existing representation will always exercise its ascendancy over the artist, even while that artist is seeking to capture the true" (Gombrich, 102).

Thus the experience of mimesis is historically and culturally variable because the first sensation that it produces, the sensation of similarity, stems from correspondence to frames of reference and expectations themselves historically and culturally variable. Nevertheless, the category of correspondence and its immediate corollary, "sensation of similarity," do not exhaust the area of experience of literary mimesis. Instead, it must be added that it is carried out within a specific sphere, that of aesthetic experience. That sphere, in its turn, presupposes that those who participate in it understand, as Stendhal argues, that time inside the theater is not the same as stage time, that time within a poem is not the same as the time in which the everyday, empirical "I" of the poet exists, that the experiences and values of narrators and characters are distinguishable from the experiences and values of the author. Between author and work there is neither a schizophrenic separation nor a simple continuity. The work of literature stages experiences imaginable on the basis of that aforementioned frame of reference and admissible on the basis of its author's values. (If Brecht is not *Mother Courage*, it is nonetheless still inconceivable that he would offer us a Nazi "hero.")

These are not rules dependent on formal education; if they were, only students of literature would be able to know and use them. Literary mimesis presupposes this sensation of similarity, to which a sense of difference is subsequently added.<sup>xlviii</sup> To take up Searle's analysis—although our conclusions will be opposite to his—a fictional utterance supposes suspension of the vertical rules that, in linking the normal utterance to the province of day-to-day reality, subjects the reader to their sanctions. (Vertical rules are those that make us the object of either praise or censure according to whether we have acted in accordance with their sanctions or not.) That experiencing of the difference created by literarily articulated mimesis—that is, of a difference occasioned by aesthetic experience—seems to be normal in a reasonably prepared receiver.

That receiver also recognizes a second difference: while a quotidian narrative is prized to the extent that it is complete—that is, to the extent that it gives thorough and coherent information—a literary narrative exacts of its reader more than the mere capacity for verbal *decoding* of what he reads or hears. Since its constitutive elements do not possess the fluent, cogent concatenation of the quotidian—or scientific, or philosophical—narrative, since, in fact, those elements frequently conflict and contradict, *holes* are created, according to Wolfgang Iser,

holes that must be filled by the reader's interpretation.<sup>xlix</sup> The reader's role is not limited to making sense of what the text already possesses as implicit form, for to affirm such a notion is to postulate the existence—at very least, the ideal existence—of a single correct interpretation. The receiver's role is, rather, a pluralizing one, for it depends on the activity of his own imagination. *Mimesis is, then, a process whose concretization is established under the form of fiction.* In the realm of day-to-day life, fiction is synonymous with deceit, fabrication, falseness, fantasy, or pretense. It is only within literary or artistic experience that it finds the desideratum necessary for the process of mimesis. It is a process that is therefore not to be confused with the expression of the "I," but, instead, must be seen in connection with its unfolding.

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<sup>xxxii</sup> M. Augur, "Discours sur le Romantisme," in Augur et. al., *Recueil Factice de Manifestes pro et antiromantiques* (1824; reprint, Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1974), 24.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Stendahl, *Racine and Shakespeare*, trans. Guy Daniels, forward Andre Maurois (New York: The Crowell-Collier Press, 1962), 133.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> This understanding on our part does not mean that its course is now completely run. Two clear issues seem to have considerable import: the appearance, between romanticism and contemporary immanentism, of the scientific and impressionistic critical modes launched in the second half of the nineteenth century, the latter continuing, albeit with an increasing marginalized status, into the present century; and the development of Marxist thought about art, which, although it should have been able to counter the immanentism begun in German stylistics, after showing promise in the first decades of this century, rigidified under the Stalinist model and remains today weighed down by reflectionist doctrine.

<sup>xxxv</sup> Saint Augustine, "De Cura gerenda promortuis," *Oeuvres de Saint-Augustin* 1<sup>re</sup> Série, Opuscles 2, Problemes Moraux, trans. (from Latin into French) Gustave Combès (Paris: Desclée de Brouweret Cie., 1948), 12.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> For further clarification, see Wolfgang Iser, "Akte des Fingierens. Oder: Was ist das Fik-tive im fiktionalen Text?" *Poetik und Hermeneutik* 10 (1983): 121-51.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> This is Iser's position in "Akte des Fingierens."

<sup>xxxviii</sup> See Costa Lima, *Mimesis e Modernidade*, 128-33.

<sup>xxxix</sup> Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973), 223.

<sup>xl</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud 18 (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), 105.

<sup>xli</sup> Sérgio Paulo Rouanet, *Édipo e o Anjo. Itinerários Freudianos em Walter Benjamin* (Rio de Janeiro: Tempo Brasileiro, 1981), 146. Some years ago too, Jean-Luc Donnet and Andre Green, in a simple footnote, referred to the "primary identification without objective bond" as "mimesis" (within quotation marks). See their *L'Enfant de ça. Psychanalyse d'un entretien: La psychose blanche* (Paris: Minuit, 1973), 79.

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<sup>xliv</sup> Regarding those two thematizations, see Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'Imaginaire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1940).

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<sup>xlviii</sup> For a more detailed exposition of this issue, see Costa Lima, "Social Representation and Mimesis," *New Literary History* (Spring 1985), 447-66.

<sup>xlix</sup> See Iser, *Der Akt des Lesens. Theorie ästhetischer Wirkung* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1976), esp. chap. 4. The English translation is *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).