

# Literary Field and Classes of Texts

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An *objet d'art* creates a public that has artistic taste and is able to enjoy beauty—and the same can be said of any other product. Production accordingly produces not only an object for the subject, but also a subject for the object.

Hence production produces consumption: 1) by providing the material of consumption; 2) by determining the mode of consumption; 3) by creating in the consumer a need for the objects which it first presents as products. It therefore produces the object of consumption, the mode of consumption and the urge to consume. Similarly, consumption produces the *predisposition* of the producer by positing him as a purposive requirement.

—KARL MARX, "Introduction" to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1857)

## *An Outclassed Concept*

Like the theories and the individuals by which they are produced, concepts are at once obsolete and mortal. Certain concepts, in favor for a time, are replaced by others dictated by what is convenient or in vogue. Others fall out of favor bit by bit, and still others suddenly find themselves read out of court. Such today is the case with the concept of "social class," which seems to be excluded from general discourse. Even in the discourse where it originated—sociology—it makes only discreet appearances, and then it is enveloped with all kinds of qualifications. The ideological stakes

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of such repression are clear enough (get rid of the word to deny what it represents), as is the sociopolitical context of those stakes (a society where the liberal illusion of "mobility" papers over the cleavages and antagonisms between classes). The decline of the concept also has a good deal to do with our modern skepticism toward the schematic divisions and prophetic visions inherited from the last century. The final confrontation of classes will not take place, at least not within the framework predicted by Marxism. And if the class struggle continues, it now only appears surreptitiously and indirectly. The relations of production and domination become more and more abstract and oblique. Even the apparently simple fact of belonging to a given segment of society within a generally mobile society like ours has become more than ever a complex and diffuse fact. All in all, it is far too easy to think that classes exist solely as superficial or peripheral effects, as in the attitudes and behavior by which individuals seek to set themselves apart from others.

Must we then give up inquiry into social relations and their power over human action? Every society is endowed with codes that sanction hierarchical structures as well as forms or forces of domination. Every society divides and classifies the diffuse masses of which it is composed. In short, every society practices social classification and institutes (when it does not institutionalize) relations between those classes.

Perhaps this outclassed and outdated concept will recover some of its acuity and its pertinence when it is introduced into the explanation of literary facts. Such an endeavor is simple though heavy with implications we shall endeavor to sketch out through a proposition that is intentionally limited and one-sided. How and to what extent can the operating notion of *class* be applied not to populations of authors or readers but to "populations" of texts? In fact, this is exactly what we do when we talk about the "society novel" or "popular literature" or when we classify cultural products as highbrow, middlebrow, or lowbrow. Yet literary sociology has never generalized or even theorized the concept of "textual classes." The discussion below is intended to lay the foundation for such a theoretical approach.

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### *Texts and Classes*

Marxist in inspiration, early work in the sociology of literature gave social class a prominent place. The primary objective was to define, in a given period, the relations between a social group and a group of authors or works, in other words, the ties between a class and a literary genre. This sociology of literature essentially aimed at confirming the hypothesis according to which given textual products express, in content and formal structure, the collective existence and the ideology of the social group from which they issue. Lucien Goldmann's work on seventeenth-century French literature and Erich Köhler's analyses of medieval genres uncovered convincing homologies.<sup>1</sup> More generally, the rigor and the success of this work did much to legitimize a sociological orientation within the study of literature.

At the same time, the work of Goldmann and Köhler showed that homologies between texts and social class could not account for every situation. Furthermore, homologies became especially problematic and difficult to verify for aesthetic products closer to modern times. As society became more mobile and more complex, the literary sphere of this bourgeois regime and its market economy asserted an unprecedented autonomy. The essential claim and result of that autonomy consisted in the mediation of the connections between literature and the larger cultural field. This autonomy obliged the theoreticians of homologies to concede that the systematic division of which they dreamed—the distribution and distinction of aesthetic works according to social class—had little relevance or concrete correlation in the social system of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Two divergent side paths then showed the way out of this dead-end street. One path led them to assimilate authors and works to a vast bourgeois (or petit-bourgeois) order that literature ineluctably either reproduced or opposed. The other path brought them to a complex set of mediations between literature and society. In both cases, whether by excess or by default, the reference to specific social conditions tended to evaporate, leaving very little of the original objective.

### *Texts and Institutions*

More recently, the theory of symbolic fields or of the literary institution has posed in other terms and on other bases the question of the social

1. See Lucien Goldmann, *The Hidden God: A Study of Tragic Vision in the "Pensées" of Pascal and the Tragedies of Racine*, trans. Philip Thody (London and New York, 1964), and Erich Köhler, *Ideal und Wirklichkeit in der höfischen Epik; Studien zur Form der frühen Artus- und Graal-dichtung* (Tübingen, 1956); translated into French by Éliane Kaufholz, under the title *L'Aventure chevaleresque: Idéal et réalité dans le roman courtois, études sur la forme des plus anciens poèmes d'Arthur et du Graal* (Paris, 1974).

determination of aesthetic products.<sup>2</sup> This theory posits that in the modern world artistic creation and its agents operate in a specific space contained within the larger society where they function with relative autonomy. Literature thus becomes the concern of a self-regulating caste living partially within a closed space. The relative independence of this literary caste means that the symbolic profit taken by writers from the expansion of the book market frees them from their erstwhile guardians (principally individual or institutional patrons). The institutional theory can therefore no longer accept a simple homology between classes on the one hand and authors and works on the other. The apparatus that regulates literary activity serves as a screen between the two terms of the relationship. Does this theory set social divisions and distinctions outside the scope of its investigations? Of course not. On the contrary, one of its goals is to integrate those divisions in its explanatory models in a more dialectical mode, by defining the complex and often ambiguous relationships between the literary and the social spheres in modern society.

The period in which literature set itself up in a closed field and gave institutional form to its practices was also the time during which society showed a marked split between its components, a split characterized by violent antagonisms that were radicalized by class ideologies. However, the foundation of the literary field is not the general sphere of social conflict. Rather, the literary field follows the contours of the bourgeois sphere, which it sets up as an indefinite space that is both contained in and contains the bourgeois sphere. Literature thus belongs to the bourgeois order and goes beyond it. A mixed class, the bourgeoisie assimilated new social strata and was propelled by principles of progress and mobility. Since the nineteenth century it has fought to extend its prerogatives and its field of action, which is why it produces more and more strata between which there are very real possibilities of circulation. Education, marriage, careers, and money open many paths, which license changes of position. This mobility, celebrated by the liberal credo and described by contemporary novelists, is no doubt curbed by the forces of inertia that govern the reproduction of elites. Nevertheless, by virtue of their connections with several fractions of their own class, or even with one or more neighboring classes, more and more bourgeois eventually turn into social hybrids.

In its new definition, the literary sphere accelerates this mobility and the production of social hybrids. By vocation this is a domain of weak endogenous reproduction where sons seldom follow in their fathers' footsteps and where every new position originates in either a promotion or demotion. Upstarts and failures, social climbers and marginal figures

2. On symbolic fields, see the work of Pierre Bourdieu, especially "Le Marché des biens symboliques," *L'Année sociologique* 22 (1971): 49–126; on the literary institution, see Jacques Dubois, *L'Institution de la littérature: Introduction à une sociologie* (Paris and Brussels, 1978).

all inhabit the world of letters. Their interaction is facilitated in that the writer's professional status is very uncertain. Many authors take on a second job, which may well be in another socioprofessional category altogether. Thus, more than any other professional corporation, literature is permeable to social struggles and tensions and to ideological compromises, although these operate only indirectly. This is so because literature turns rivalries that are collective in origin into distinctive classifications of people and personages. The faint echoes of class conflict filter through countless networks of interpersonal relationships.

This indirection is an effect of the autonomy of literary activity, and once again that effect is ambiguous. If, on the one hand, the autonomy of the literary field favors hybridization, on the other, it tends to contain or even to neutralize such hybridization. To the extent that it strives to equalize its agents, every institution operates in the same way. But the literary institution goes about this crossbreeding by a sort of power play. Relatively unstructured and devoid of any explicit code (subject to no jurisdiction), the literary institution engenders an intense ideology, which is no doubt tied to its symbolic function but most particularly translates its marginal position within the overall system. Thus the literary institution transcends the specific social logic on which it is grounded and institutes a system of rivalries and classifications that seems like one big metaphor for more general social conflict. It has often been said that writers belong to a dominated segment of the dominant class. Strengthened by the ministry on which they depend and the mission which they internalize, writers recast their anomic status in positive terms. Anomie signals either membership in a community of the elect or a subversive distance from the establishment. In both cases, as Jean-Paul Sartre pointed out in his studies of Baudelaire and especially Flaubert, the writer claims to escape the hold of social determinants and class relationships.<sup>3</sup>

### *The Production of Differences*

These determinisms are so veiled in the modern literary field as to seem devoid of substance. More than simply participating in class antagonisms, the rivalries of literary groups and authors parody those antagonisms. This impression obtains only for the narrow scene of institutional infighting. It disappears as soon as one considers not the fine points of literary activity but that activity as a whole, as part of a vast system joining production and consumption. This broader point of view discloses a

3. See Bourdieu's essay on Flaubert in this volume, "Flaubert's Point of View," trans. Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, pp. 211–34. See also Jean-Paul Sartre, *Baudelaire*, trans. Martin Turnell (Norfolk, Conn., 1950), and *The Family Idiot: Gustave Flaubert, 1821–1857*, trans. Carol Cosman, 2 vols. (Chicago, 1981–87).

social dimension that appeared lost, from the supposedly passive pole of this system, namely, the reading public [*le lectorat*], receivers in the communication model, consumers for economics.

Beginning in the nineteenth century, and far more than in earlier periods—when the potential reading public was not very diversified—literature stratifies according to highly differentiated publics. Outside the literary field, these publics are distributed along a scale of cultural levels and unwittingly reintroduce social effects into the autonomous literary order. The desocialization of producers, which correlates with the institutionalization of their practice, is balanced by the social diversification of consumers, who inscribe their class on the literary texts that, by implication, they order. This stratification of the field of texts by the reading public results from introducing literary production into a market economy where production has to cover all of the potential public and therefore meet the specific demand of every segment of that public. Each level of the reading public has the appropriate reading material and texts with which it can identify. There is a strong tendency for contemporary literature to classify its production (and to produce classified products) with reference to the real, assumed, or constructed classifications of the different reading publics in question.<sup>4</sup>

But who classifies? In principle, the producers create a hierarchy as a function of consumers.<sup>5</sup> Still, it would be wrong to assume perfect awareness and command of these classificatory maneuvers. The action in question—along with the “politics” implicit therein—is caught in a circular logic: whoever classifies also classifies himself or herself, and vice versa. This “tourniquet” originates in the fundamental fact, already noted by Marx, that the object produces the subject, the subject of consumption and, also, to a certain extent, the subject of production itself. Authors are the children of their texts, publishers of their books; texts and books are always implicated and defined in the vast system of modes and models.

4. Bourdieu notes, “The struggle over classification is a basic dimension of the class struggle.” Political power works the same way, because to classify is to “impose a vision of divisions” and therefore exhibit one’s “power to create groups, to manipulate the objective structure of society” (“Espace social et pouvoir symbolique,” *Choses dites* [Paris, 1987], p. 164). Thus there exists a “politics of literature” that acts through and on the scale of cultural degrees and plays on a subtle dialogue between production and consumption. This stratifying politics is already at work in classical literature in the three styles of poetics, but in modern literature it attains a degree of complexity (and perhaps duplicity as well) theretofore unknown.

5. That is, not only writers but all those who regulate literary institutions from within or without: publishers, critics, professors. Publishers determine the series that will present the product; critics select the works that they think are aimed at the public they represent; professors ratify “posterity’s triage” and stratify the literary corpus according to the degrees and the network of their teaching and according to their own conception of a given body of texts.

Asking “who classifies?” sets off an interminable process whose origin cannot be determined.

Thus, within the very heart of literary institutions, the procedures of classification along with the grid or grids of textual classes establish a discriminatory and distinctive system that serves as the symbolic guarantor for the social class system and its antagonisms. If this system is immediately recognizable in its crude form (everyone acknowledges the stratification of what we call literature among texts oriented toward distinct reading publics), it is misunderstood in its social extent and meaning (the only accepted criterion for selection is the quality of the work, and the only argument admitted is the intended public). This is why the social effects on textual categories have not really been examined very carefully. The omission is all the more astonishing because modern research, in scrutinizing the more readily accepted concept of genre, has explored an area where such effects are exceptionally dynamic.

### *Genres*

Genres represent the great literary classificatory form that subsumes all other modes of categorization. From the beginning genres have a determinant form insofar as they constitute the sole prescriptive code instituted as such. They are also a determining form to the degree that they designate what is literary and what is not. One should, perhaps, be wary of the notion of literature. Still, poetry or tragedy seem to have a universal acceptance that resolves all doubt. Basic givens of perception and experience, regulatory forms of the literary system, genres nevertheless occupy varying positions with respect to each other. Their value, their effect, what they look like—all can vary from one period to the next. Up to a certain point, genres bear the historical function Roland Barthes assigned to “écritures.”<sup>6</sup> For genres like “écritures” testify to a specific commitment on the part of the writer vis-à-vis society and the institution of literature. Choosing poetry in France meant something very different in 1820, in 1870, and 1920. To choose the sonnet over a free form in 1980 is an act that is every bit as “political” as it is aesthetic.

Governing from on high the space of forms, genres place that space under the double principle of liberty (the possibility of choice) and constraint (the necessity of choosing among limited possibilities). However, although genres are essentially prescriptive codes, their prescriptions vary in content and in severity from one time to another, from one aesthetic to another. The single law that is never abrogated is the proscription against mixing genres.

6. See Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York, 1968). Lavers and Smith translate “écriture” as “writing.”

The preeminence and the overdetermination of the major genres are such that they tend to form institutions within the larger institution of literature. The novel, poetry, and the drama make up enclaves within the literary field. Their actors and their products come out of "separate worlds."<sup>7</sup> Each genre institutes and manages its own code (styles, attitudes, behavior, and so on) and at the same time competes with all the other genres. In France over the course of the nineteenth century the novel dispossessed poetry and drama of their exclusive prestige in order to express its conquest of vast territory, not to conquer great prestige. The essay tagged along. Drama and poetry found themselves relegated to minority positions that situated them in so many "separate worlds"—outmoded insofar as they rely on a symbolic capital that may well be depleted, and representing *en abîme* the closure of the system as a whole.

Besides guaranteeing literarity, a genre inscribes texts and authors within a specific population of texts and authors. It thereby contributes to the symbolic and/or institutional socialization of texts and authors that heed its injunctions. To select a genre is to pledge allegiance to a patrimony by grafting one's product onto the intertextual body of products that correspond to that canon. This same choice also accredits the symbolic guarantee that the genre confers on the literary product and its producer. To the degree that the modern literary system, at least the traditional pole of that system, favors generic specialization, it is at a loss with someone like Victor Hugo, an institution and counterinstitution all by himself.

### *Genres in the Literary Institution*

According to their major institutional effect, which joins authority and prestige, stability and segregation, genres give themselves as their own origin: they have the force of law and always appear to antedate any text. Whenever poetics has tried to translate generic order into ontological terms (or principles into what Gérard Genette has called "patchwork"), it only goes further in this same direction, in search of the originating essential category(ies) under the manifest literary product.<sup>8</sup> To a large extent this point of view reverses the actual order of things. For one, it neglects the historically defined status of many generic forms. Moreover, the systemic conception implies that genre depends on a construction after the fact. Thus, and first of all, today's generic system is

7. That we are more likely to speak of the "novelist" or the "poet" than the "writer" attests to the hold of particularistic generic representations, which also result, perhaps even more so, from transferring into the literary order the bourgeois principle of the division of labor.

8. "Bricolages" is Gérard Genette's term for the systematic constructions of poetics. See Genette, "Introduction à l'architexte," in Genette et al., *Théorie des genres* (Paris, 1986), pp. 89–159.



only too visibly an aggregate of forms tied to very diverse social strata. Further, even where it proves possible to assign an anthropological base to certain genres—narrative, for instance—their definition rests on the crystallization of circumstances around a few texts that serve as reference.

In sum, texts produce genres more than they reproduce them (the object always seeming to contain the category to which it belongs). This point brings us to the notion of textual classes, which Jean-Marie Schaeffer has proposed to counter simplistic classificatory schemes that neglect the dynamic dimension of genres.<sup>9</sup> Breaking with dominant ontological doctrine, Schaeffer confines himself to a strictly phenomenological point of view (moving from text to genre) to demonstrate the work of the *instituting force* under the *instituted product*. The instituted product corresponds to the normative power and the systemic regularity that lead us to contend that genres act as institutions. The instituting force covers the work of founding and transformation exercised by texts on genres, work that proves especially intense for modern literature. Thus, within a shifting field, a genre is not only a class but a class in the process of making and unmaking itself according to a dual logic of identity and difference, or better yet, of identity *in* difference. The preservation of a genre depends on its transformation, its paradoxical mobility in this sense recalling the mobility of bourgeois social structures.

### *Genres or Classes, Genres and Classes*

The order that directs the reader's orientation and the distribution of texts into categories is much more than an innocuous preliminary step: within this field of competing forces constituted by literature, genres and classes are at one and the same time the stakes and the weapons of continual confrontation. With these weapons actors conquer their status, and thanks to them, their rank in the institution. And so we come to the central question: if texts belong in generic classes, do these classes have a social dimension? In other words, are genres classes in themselves or do they simply enter into relationships with classes?

A relationship invariably links genres and classes, though it is neither univocal nor constant. Historically, this relationship seems to be expressed according to two distinct forms of competing alliances. The first tends to superimpose genres and classes on the assumption that social and generic hierarchies coincide. For the classical and romantic periods, poetry was a noble genre legitimated by its noble or upper-class practitioners. By the middle of the nineteenth century, with practitioners (like Paul Verlaine or Stéphane Mallarmé) who were petit-bourgeois civil servants,

9. See Jean-Marie Schaeffer, "Du texte au genre: Notes sur la problématique générique," in *Théorie des genres*, esp. pp. 186 and 202.

poetry had to invent a mythifying discourse to compensate for its social decline. It adopted a luxuriating opacity of language to preserve its endangered legitimacy. The second form of alliance between genres and classes resembles a vertical intersection between the two scales. Genres are stratified into hierarchical classes, and, by implication, classes are subdivided into genres. Next to high-level poetry there is a middle-level or bourgeois poetry and a low-level or popular poetry.

It is tempting to assume that genres and classes coincide in a traditional literary field and that genres are stratified into classes when literature is on the open market. From this point of view the second half of the nineteenth century proves especially interesting. The collision of the two systems ended up producing some flagrant distortions. The Parnassian poetry of Charles-Marie Leconte de Lisle, Théophile Gautier, and their disciples in the 1850s and 1860s, and even the symbolism of Mallarmé and others later in the century, could still claim first place according to the first system. But the novel had already won the game in terms of the second system, which also led it to diversify ("popular novel," "experimental novel," "psychological novel"). Even as the democratization of literature produced the novel for "everybody," it produced a novel for each social class, heavily dependent on the market.<sup>10</sup>

In either the first or the second system, to what extent are the hierarchical arrangements admitted, displayed, accepted, recognized? The point calls for investigation, grounded in contemporary practices and the sliding scales of legitimacy. The last two centuries reveal certain tendencies. As a general rule, genre is not aligned on class. However simple they may seem, the exceptions to the rule—the "popular novel" or the "society novel"—turn out to be ambiguous. Are these novels *by*, *for*, or *about* the lower classes/high society? To the degree that a genre carries a social connotation, it prefers to sidestep the whole question. Until late in the nineteenth century and despite the evident triumph of the genre, "novel" sounded so trivial that the term was left off the cover of most novels. Does this mean that genre systematically erases its social referents? It is more accurate to say that it reveals these referents in the very act of hiding them. Because genre functions as an indicator, it always more or less serves as a metonym for its class and the properties of that class. Whatever their position, users never make a mistake. They recognize themselves in the genres made for them and which, albeit obliquely, are aimed at them.

Take, for examples, four current labels, which can be distributed along a single scale: (1) "gothic novel," (2) "detective novel," (3) "novel,"

10. For the second half of the nineteenth century in France, Charles Grivel has described the modern structure of the novel, set out in four levels: realist or naturalist, bourgeois, honnête, and popular. See Grivel, *Production de l'intérêt romanesque: un état du texte (1870–1880), un essai de constitution de sa théorie* (The Hague, 1973).

(4) "fiction." The most neutral of these—"novel"—seems to fit the average (traditional) production for any average (general) public. The other terms go in two directions. Avant-garde literature pares down to essentials or covers its tracks with "fictions" or "narratives" at the same time that production for a mass or semi-mass public embellishes the base term by specifying content, for example, "detective novel" or "gothic novel." Although they move in opposite directions, these two extreme tendencies represent the same process of diversification and specification. The aim is not only to refine the classification (a genre for everyone) but just as much to refine the classification code itself. Neither understatement nor hyperbole deludes readers, who all know which side they are on and happily recognize a familiar code.

### *From Hierarchy to Layers*

Thus, under the (pseudo)system of genres lies a more organic and more determined system of textual classes. Far from being a closed or fixed structure, this system of classes is continually enriched and remodeled by additions. Further, beyond the overall division into spheres of production and consumption on which this system of classes is based, there is a potentially unlimited layering into strata that cut across subclasses. How can such a distributive scale be objectified? How can levels be fixed, if only for a given state of the literary field? Two types of criteria—external and internal—point to a preliminary model. External criteria isolate these strata in terms of the choices and practices of given readers.<sup>11</sup> Such an approach, however, runs the risk of foundering on the difficulty of merging textual classes with the classes of the groups receiving those texts, groups that may or may not be those intended by the textual classes. There is no dearth of examples of such discrepancies. Hermetic poetry is enjoyed by middle-class readers who ratify their social promotion by such prestigious reading, whereas the detective novel appeals to intellectuals who like to slum about in a popular genre and also to play around with a strictly regulated narrative form. Recourse to internal criteria means picking up on the semiological indicators that configure a classification and operate as much in literary terms as in sociocultural ones.<sup>12</sup> In this

11. For a good example of this approach, see Patrick Parmentier, "Bon ou mauvais genre. La classification des lectures et le classement des lecteurs," *Bulletin des Bibliothèques de France* 31 (1986): 202–23.

12. The social destination of aesthetic products can be seen in a series of recurring elements within and especially at the periphery of texts, which essentially function as semiological indicators of classification. On the "threshold" of the book, the producers (and particularly publishers) make use of a set of marks more or less under their control but that sooner or later end up by getting out of their control, even, in certain cases, taking on a meaning other than the original one. In *Seuils* (Paris, 1987), Genette gives a very

case the risk is having to work within parameters as strict as they are plentiful, and sometimes imponderable.

Although this type of study or inventory can certainly yield forms of measurement, the theory of textual classes must take specific note of the fact that these classes are fully recognizable and definable only in conjunction with certain *relationships* and certain *effects*. Evanescent entities that fade away as soon as the classified and classifying subjects (readers, publishers, authors) cease to be aware of them, textual classes belong above all to the order of representation. In part, today, the role of the production system is to outline these subjects (without too much emphasis) and to remodel them according to the possible development of the market.

As for the "relationships," they are absolutely basic. Every class is defined dialectically according to its position with respect to others. Better yet, there is no classification that is not subject to reciprocal definition and readjustment. This is the heart of the theory of distinction, according to which anyone who classifies anything is necessarily classified in the process [*quiconque classe se classe en classant*].<sup>13</sup> Our options and our preferences steer us toward objects or practices that are already socially defined and that send us back to our class origins in such a way as to confirm those choices. The circular movement reinforces the social definitions of the objects chosen.

The relationship between publishers and readers gives a good sense of the importance of this interaction. Publishers confer certain generic marks on their products in order to reach certain groups of readers. The signs of these choices are displayed, but as a function of a public which, at that moment, remains potential, even fictive. Even as they classify products and their hoped-for consumers, publishers also classify themselves. To this we should add that they classify products only according to their notions of their own classification. At this point the actual public enters the scene and reproduces the same procedure in the opposite direction. The choices of these consumers, who of course are also socially defined, reinsert the publisher's position into the heart of sociosymbolic hierarchies, and, in so doing, give a subtle definition of their own position. However it may occur, classification is both reproduction and adjustment. On the one hand, individuals reflect and reproduce their social status by the

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detailed inventory of this territory of the authorial and editorial paratext made up of these indicators. (For a partial translation of *Seuils*, see "Structure and Functions of the Title in Literature," trans. Bernard Crampé, *Critical Inquiry* 14 [Summer 1988]: 692–720.) From the point of view of their classificatory effect, the most efficacious indicators are the cover design (figurative or abstract), the title, the generic notation, the names of the publisher and the series, and the acknowledgments. They constitute a summary code of proven efficiency in book sales where the book is an object first of all. It is unfortunate that Genette does not get beyond the perspective of poetics, which leads him to overlook the social investment of these paratextual markings, on the (to us fallacious) pretext that this investment is not easily theorized.

13. See Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, Mass., 1984).

interplay of their choices; on the other hand, and in a perpetual movement of refinement, they project into their choices an idea of themselves that touches up their reality. In this way this circular classificatory process escapes a vicious circle.

### *Autonomy/Heteronomy of Genres or Textual Classes*

If literary classifications are able to resist a theoretical mode, it is undoubtedly because they come from a complex interaction between the forces of production and consumption. But this resistance also stems from their ability to produce or reproduce themselves at the crossroads of two great orders of determination, one symbolic, the other social. Here we find not only the most basic economic requirements (making a profit from a particular genre, like "bodice-ripper romances") but also the subtlest symbolic marks (supplying a small group of intellectuals with their signs of distinction).

It would be unwise to limit the establishment of textual classes to the reciprocal action of the literary field and those fractions of the larger society—reading publics—oriented toward the literary field and toward which in turn that field is oriented. It is essential to recognize the capacity of this field to exercise its own logic. The ceaseless remodeling of genres and the variation in their hierarchical distribution result partially from a strictly institutional regulatory apparatus. In other words, internal factors mediate, in various ways and according to specific times and conditions, the influence of external factors. Beginning with romanticism, genres joined in the competition between writers seeking symbolic glory and power. Starting with the Parnassian poets and the realist novelists at mid-century, rival aesthetic programs played one genre against another, even one genre against itself. From the Parnassians to surrealism, from Émile Zola to Alain Robbe-Grillet, the duel between poetry and novel fed a century of controversy. Subgenres and minor forms like the avant-garde theater (symbolist and postexistentialist) or the essay (from Jules Michelet to Barthes) joined in these quarrels from a distance.

### *Genre and Behavior*

For those who believe in them, genres are not simply strategic instruments or means for conveying a message that alone counts. For if the generic system constitutes a socializing medium that guarantees a status for writers and literarity for their products, every genre tends as well to impose thematic or formal structures on texts and also to dictate a code of behavior and a mode of being to authors. Thus the symbolists, Mallarmé in the lead, translated the principles of their generic credo into the ritual of their meetings and into certain strategic behavior. The

surrealists' concern with restoring an "aura" to poetry led them to raise this credo into an existential principle that was meant to provoke revolutionary action. This much said, we may legitimately wonder whether such objectifications result from an identification with the genre in question or from an aesthetic program invested in that genre. An "arty" novelist like Barbey d'Aureville—or Oscar Wilde, for an English example in drama as well as the novel—undoubtedly owed less to the genre that he practiced than to his aesthetic credo, his reactionary dandyism, and his somewhat scandalous behavior. Still, from romanticism to surrealism, and in spite of programmatic variation of different schools, a strongly codified genre like poetry provokes similar attitudes in all of its adherents and the same quasi-religious consciousness of their status and their "mission."

### *Transfers and Transactions*

The struggle over classifications, which correlates with competition between schools, undoubtedly opposes very localized strata of the textual field. At the same time this struggle engages the system as a whole. In principle, because each category or class is defined relative to the others, every transformation at one point of the literary structure can diffuse from stratum to stratum, eventually altering the whole. This rather excessive theoretical perspective is at least partially confirmed by the series of intermutations that appear in the historical analysis of textual classes. Thus, innovative breaks set off a regulatory process, itself self-regulated, which guarantees the "economic" stability of the system. On the one hand, this regulatory process checks the momentum of chain reactions, and on the other, it initiates the necessary reciprocal reorganization.

Three examples, of increasing complexity, reveal this process in action. The first covers the simple case of two subgenres that begin to interact whenever one of them is caught in a transformative movement against which the other reacts. The second case is already more subtle, since it shows a dialectical adjustment between two separate genres. The third example represents a complex case of symbolic "transaction" insofar as this transaction no longer takes place between two types of literary production but, more broadly, between two types of discursive production.

The last five years of the Second Empire, 1865–70, witnessed the double appearance of the "artistic novel" of Edmond and Jules de Goncourt and the judicial novel of Émile Gaboriau, ancestor of today's detective novel. No one noticed this coincidence, which was overlooked all the more easily in that these two types of novels originated in very different sectors of the literary institution. With *Manette Salomon* (1867) and *Madame Gervaisais* (1869) the Goncourt brothers firmly committed the novel to "modernity," which in literary terms meant a weakened plot, fragmented narrative, indirect point of view, and ineffectual hero-subject. From the serial novel Gaboriau appropriated a type of fiction that adheres to a

strict narrative logic and whose authoritative investigator-hero is always on center stage running everything. In sum, what one subgenre gave up, another took up in an insistent, hyperbolic form. Compensation was thus provided by a new "genre," which started from the "bottom" of the generic hierarchy and rose step by step on the scale of values. The judicial novel occupied abandoned territory at the same time that the very excess of its narrative structure alerted "literary consciousness" that the rejections of the avant-garde endangered the system. In any case, the two competing forms realigned the novelistic sector.<sup>14</sup>

A few years later, in the 1880s, an analogous phenomenon of compensatory competition occurred between the novel on the rise and poetry on the decline. Its credo of a purely linguistic and self-reflexive practice prompted symbolist poetry to question the subject of poetic enunciation in negative and radical terms. Pushing to its limits the Parnassian precept of impassivity, Mallarmé and his disciples preached and practiced an "impersonal" poetry, which resulted in "the elocutionary disappearance of the poet."<sup>15</sup> In this way the poetic movement that dominated the end of the century broke with the romantic representation of lyricism as a mirror of the self or a diary of complex and subtle emotions. It is striking that a new school emerged at the same time, led by the novelists Paul Bourget and Maurice Barrès, which proclaimed the absolute primacy of the individual subject, exalted the "cult of the self," and endorsed the psychology of the passions as an explanatory model for social behavior and as the scientific basis of narrative imagination. On the basis of a process already at work for the Goncourt/Gaboriau duo, these "psychological novelists" built their school on the ruins of a domain that had been deserted by the poets. This opportunistic occupation of an abandoned site was also a strategic takeover of a traditional canon whose abandonment had been roundly condemned by a public confused by strange new poetic practices. In this instance, the transposition of one genre to the other was probably mediated by the symbolist novel, which transferred to the novel the Mallarmean precept of the eradication of the self through a constant decentering of a fragmented subject, diffused in the wanderings of a fading consciousness (as in Edouard Dujardin's *Les Lauriers sont coupés* [1888], which anticipated the interior monologue later associated with James Joyce and the novels of Rémy de Gourmont). In this fashion the psychological novelists maneuvered on two fronts. They blocked the avant-garde novel tied to symbolism and proved their conformity with an established literary canon. At the same time they offered the ordinary reader "realistic" novels validated by their supposed scientific base. These essentially strategic stakes testify to the competition and the domination at work in the reciprocal redeployment of textual classes.

14. See Dubois, "Un Cas de transfert symbolique. Roman artiste et roman judiciaire à la fin du second Empire," *Oeuvres et critiques* 12 (1987): 35–47.

15. Stéphane Mallarmé, "Crise de vers," *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Henri Mondor and G. Jean-Aubry (Paris, 1945), pp. 360–61.

Strictly speaking, the final exemplary case concerns the consequences for the literary field of the expansion, after 1885, of mass-produced news media and the concomitant accelerated growth of a "para-" or "infra-" literary production. Literary milieux at the time hotly debated the rapid development of newspapers, fearful that mass media would destroy the aura of "the written word" by offering the public a lesser version of written culture. This fear was at least partially founded. Around 1890 the press inundated the market with mediocre works, thereby undermining the prestige of the book and producing what contemporaries called the "publishing crash." Marc Angenot has suggested that journalism provoked writers, and notably poets, to reactions of defensiveness and withdrawal, which they expressed in aesthetic programs that broke totally with the aggressive discourse of the mass media.<sup>16</sup> And in fact, symbolist manifestos frequently referred to the menace of journalism. Moreover, Mallarmé's definition of poetic language as anticomunication, as well as the hermeticism included in and legitimated by that definition, depended in large part on this rivalry between literature and the media.

Thus once again there was a reactive and negative redeployment. However, a closer look shows that certain agents of elite literary production adopted a position that was both less radical and more dialectic. Mallarmé presents the most interesting case. His theoretical work, which talks endlessly about the newspaper, sought to go beyond this crisis, and it did so no longer, or not only, by enjoining the poet to set poetic practice apart from media discourse. Mallarmé also invited the poet to reclaim from the newspaper what in fact belongs to poetry, that is, to convert to aesthetic ends that which in the newspaper has a solely pragmatic and informational purpose (for example, the double and extra-large sheet, the interplay of typographical styles, and so on). Mallarmé himself at the end of his life gave a stunning example of this conversion. *Un Coup de dés* (1897) uses typographical variation to great effect. Scattered throughout the "book" and set out on different levels on each page, titles made up of entire sentences stand out in big, thick capital letters against the mosaic of the text. That this poetic transposition of the newspaper model has attracted so little attention has to do with a complex phenomenon of assimilation and differentiation, which cleared the way for numerous avant-garde projects of the twentieth century.<sup>17</sup>

### *The Symbolic (Re)production of Social Classes*

These transactions, with their dialectic of takeover and rejection, disclose the imaginative conflict of form and theme in and behind the

16. See Marc Angenot, "Ceci tuera cela, ou: la chose imprimée contre le livre," *Romantisme* 44 (1984): 83–103.

17. See Pascal Durand, "D'une rupture intégrante: Avant-gardes et transactions symboliques," *Pratiques* 50 (June 1986): 31–45.



conflict of classes and classifications, of which the former seems partly the cause and partly the effect. In this manner we have stressed the capacity of the system to constitute itself, to produce and to reproduce itself. The objection might be raised that, without realizing it, we have only transposed into the order of textual classes the system logic of the order of genres as elaborated by poetics.<sup>18</sup> Such an objection would disregard what we have stressed all along, namely that these classes, precisely because they mask their impact of division and stratification, never cease to bear a social signification as active as it is hidden. Our current research focuses on the points and modalities of engagement between this social sense of textual classes and, on the one hand, the configuration of collective literary institutions and, on the other, the general economy of the larger society.

Unless it reverts to illusions of homology, this research will not be able to overlook the fact that, however immersed in this social sense, these symbolic divisions undoubtedly have their share of autonomy. Moreover, from within a cultural system as highly structured as literature, these divisions are capable of producing effects of social construction, either fictive or operative. A given group of texts can aim at, or rather generate, a class of readers that straddle two or more social fragments, readers who are socially disparate though united by a secondary collusion that turns out to be their (aesthetic) class-consciousness. The public for detective novels, for example, mixes intellectuals and nonintellectuals, lower middle-class and lower-class readers.

Literature does not only stand humbly before (or in) society as a passive receiver of determining stimuli, which it then translates into symbolic classifications. Literature is also in the position of analyzing, of dissecting and rearticulating the social system according to its own logic. At once the terrain and the instrument of analysis, literature offers sociologists one of the most powerful instruments available for their criticism, on the condition that they keep in mind the specificity of literature and avoid turning it into a mirror and, hence, the accomplice of the social order. Without going as far as Mallarmé's contention that "social relationships and their measurement . . . constitute a fiction, which belongs to literature,"<sup>19</sup> it seems clear that sociology ought to learn from literature, among other things, that the symbolic never stops manipulating the social.

18. This is the place to specify that if this article has sometimes given the impression of basing the hierarchy of classes as a function of the distribution of genres, this methodologically convenient procedure in no way precludes further research from taking into account classificatory criteria other than genres. It is clear, to take a couple of examples, that certain authors (for example, James Michener, Joyce Carol Oates) or certain publishers (Harlequin, Reader's Digest Books) virtually function as classes unto themselves. The class effect of Reader's Digest Books is to level out texts previously published elsewhere (in their entirety).

19. Mallarmé, "Sauvegarde," *Oeuvres complètes*, p. 420.