The Alterity and Modernity of Medieval Literature

Hans Robert Jauss; Timothy Bahti


Stable URL:
http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0028-6087%28197924%2910%3A2%3C181%3ATAAMOM%3E2.0.CO%3B2-T

New Literary History is currently published by The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR’s Terms and Conditions of Use, available at http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html. JSTOR’s Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at http://www.jstor.org/journals/jhup.html.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is an independent not-for-profit organization dedicated to creating and preserving a digital archive of scholarly journals. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

http://www.jstor.org/
Mon May 31 16:32:56 2004
The Alterity and Modernity of Medieval Literature

Hans Robert Jauss

Thus is the skillful writer
Under the reign of the sovereign heaven,
Who from his treasure puts forth
As a clever and knowledgeable man
The old things and the new,
Which together are good and beautiful.
Guillaume le Clerc, Le Bestiaire

I. A Suggestion How to Legitimate the Contemporary Interest in Medieval Literature

The study of the literature of the European Middle Ages has at the present time a peculiar advantage. It has lost its place in the educational canon, and therefore it hardly shows up in courses of study or curricula. It stands far from the modern trend of the development of theory and began its reorientation almost without notice; it is therefore still more strongly challenged in terms of its universality and public reputation than are the neighboring historical disciplines. In the necessity to reestablish its intellectual interest, one can today see an advantage rather than a misfortune, as the following presentation of studies from 1957 to 1976 will seek to demonstrate.* Of all the demands of the student protest movement and the institutional reform of higher education in the idealist sixties, the establishment of interest is the very one which—for research as well as for teaching—is most to be hoped to outlast the technocratic regression of the pessimistic seventies.

If I now take a position vis-à-vis this demand, I gladly confess that my experience with medieval literature has neither sprung from an original and consistently maintained point of view, nor is it considered by me to be unique. The reasons which, in my opinion, even today still justify an interest in this direction of studies and this field of research

* Collected in Alterität und Modernität der mittelalterlichen Literatur (Munich: W. Fink Verlag, 1977).

Copyright© 1979 by New Literary History, The University of Virginia
only came to me little by little—and certainly not to me alone. To a
great extent, they are recognitions of a still unfinished "paradigm
change" of which I only gradually became aware. Since I am especially
eager to draw such insights into a review, I have opted for the attempt
at a reevaluation of my experience from the perspective of the posi-
tion I have now reached instead of the correction and completion of
earlier findings. Proceeding in this manner, perhaps I will come off
badly in answering my critics; but insofar as they themselves have a
stake in efforts toward a renewal of medieval studies, they will surely
concede to me that the order of the day is not to take up once again
certain esoteric polemics, but rather to work out new formulations of
the question.

The present dilemma of research into the Middle Ages may be
sketched as follows: the classical paradigms of the positivist research
of tradition as well as of the idealistic interpretation of works or styles
have exhausted themselves, and the highly touted modern methods
of structural linguistics, semiotics, and phenomenological or sociolog-
ical literary theory have not yet gelled into the development of
paradigms. In view of this situation, I propose to justify the research
and educational interest in medieval literature on three grounds: the
aesthetic pleasure, the surprising otherness, and the model character
of medieval texts. As one can easily guess, a proven method of literary
hermeneutics lies at the basis of this triad. The immediate or prere-
ferential reader experience, which always implicitly includes a test of
readability, constitutes the necessary first hermeneutic bridge. The
mediating effect or hermeneutic function of the aesthetic pleasure
proves to be that, whether through progressive agreement or through
a via negationis, through the displeasure which occurs during the read-
ing, one becomes aware of the astounding or surprising otherness of
the world opened up by the text. In order to become conscious of this
otherness of a departed past, a reflective consideration of its surpris-
ing aspects is called for, an activity which methodologically entails the
reconstruction of the horizon of expectation of the addressees for
whom the text was originally composed. This second hermeneutic
step meanwhile cannot in itself be the absolute goal of understanding,
if the knowledge of the otherness of a distant text-world so gained is
to be more than simply a sharpened variation of historical reification,
objectified through the contrast of horizons. In passing through the
surprise of otherness, its possible meaning for us must be sought: the
question of a significance which reaches further historically, which
surpasses the original communicative situation, must be posed. Or to
put it in Hans-Georg Gadamer's terminology: in the process of active
understanding, the contrast of horizons must be led on to the fusion of the past horizon of aesthetic experience with the present one. But here there is no guarantee in advance that the fusion of horizons will succeed. The initial aesthetic pleasure of the text can finally disclose itself as a naive, modernizing preunderstanding, and the first aesthetic judgment of unreadability can also prove to be incapable of being overcome. Then the text, as a document which only retains historical interest, drops out of the canon of contemporary aesthetic experience.

To be sure, such a separation is a sentence which may be commuted, for the text which can no longer be aesthetically concretized for us may be able to obtain significance again for later readers. Significance, which is unlocked through aesthetic experience, arises from the convergence of effect [Wirkung] and reception. It is no atemporal, basic element which is always already given; rather, it is the never-completed result of a process of progressive and enriching interpretation, which concretizes—in an ever new and different manner—the textually immanent potential for meaning in the change of horizons of historical life-worlds. The exceptionally fragmented history of the passing on of medieval literature demonstrates precisely this process of the development and preservation, the transformation and rejuvenation of the aesthetic canon, and does so in an exemplary manner: its repression by the aesthetic canon of the Renaissance; its continued existence as "subliterature" (bibliothèque bleue, roman gothique) during the Enlightenment; its rediscovery as a norm-giving origin by the secular and belated aesthetics of Christianity in Romanticism; its learned disclosure by nineteenth-century historicism; its reception by the ideologies of national literature; the countercurrent of its evaluation as the bridge of continuity of the Latin-European tradition; and, finally, the still isolated attempts of C. S. Lewis, Eugène Vinaver, Robert Guérite, Alfred Adler, and Paul Zumthor to establish the modernity of medieval literature in its "alterity." Whoever, as specialist and as aficionado of its texts, holds the experience of medieval literature to be irreplaceable can, therefore, certainly no longer convince the educated among its detractors by appealing to a timeless canon of masterpieces supposedly incapable of being lost. Rather, he would better convince them with the invitation that the literature of this particularly distant and yet still exemplary past translates itself into our present without recourse to thesaurus or tabula rasa, cultural heritage or modernism—insofar as the reader again makes use of his aesthetic "bill of rights" of a pleasurable understanding and an understanding pleasure.
II. The Aesthetic Pleasure of Medieval Texts

With this we turn back from the hermeneutic to the historical side of the problem. To what extent can the steps—which are supposed to lead from aesthetic pleasure, through the reconstruction of otherness, to the disclosure of concretizable significance—prove themselves with medieval literature and bring the particular characteristics of its text-world into view, so that a learned interest can reestablish itself at the same time that an amateur's interest can be won over? Those features are numerous which, conditioned by the period, often impede the enjoyment of medieval texts for a modern reader who still senses the aesthetic charm of the past: the priority of convention over expression, the impersonality of the style, the formalism of the lyric, the traditionalism of the epic, the mixture of the poetic with the didactic, the difficult, hermetic symbolism. So, at first it seems that an immediate aesthetic pleasure today still occurs only with texts from this past which—as productions of a flourishing imagination—allow one to forget such conventions, and which in fact have remained "readable" throughout the centuries: adventure novels, romances, and ballads. What Ariosto, Spenser, and Tasso found worthy at the apex of a process of renarration, and what also, as subliterature, survived all trivialization; what entered into Hegel's definition of adventuresomeness as the basic type of the Romantic, and what was so curiously mythified in Wagner's Lohengrin or Parsifal—as C. S. Lewis showed, this for the most part goes back to a pre-Christian but nonclassical heritage (as with the matièvre de Bretagne). Thus precisely the least orthodox field of medieval texts has proved itself to be the most enduring in the history of reception!

The elementary need for a fantasy world of adventure and lovers' rendezvous, of the mysterious and the wish-fulfilling, may explain the success of this "evergreen" of the medieval imagination. But this elementary level in no way exhausts the immediate pleasure of medieval texts. Aesthetic experience makes access possible on other levels as well, an access which does not need a bridge of historical knowledge. Robert Guiguet, who described the charm of the obscure, the still-unsolved ("symbolisme sans signification") as the primary attitude implicit in the medieval romance, has also rediscovered the aesthetic charm of poésie formelle, the conscious delight in variation. His attempts toward an aesthetics of reception of medieval literature may be collated into a scale of the modalities of aesthetic experience which arranges the process of reception according to literary genres, and which discloses the attitude particular to each:
(a) liturgical drama – cultic participation
(b) religious play – craving for spectacle / edification
(c) legend – astonishment / emotion / edification
(d) chanson de geste – admiration / pity
(e) symbolic poetry – deciphering the meaning
(f) romance – the delight in the unsolved (the obscure)
(g) fabliau (farce) – entertainment / amusement
(h) courtly lyric – the pleasure of formal variation

It is obvious that not each of these attitudes is immediately there for the asking for the modern reader. Only with difficulty can he transfer himself into cultic participation without the bridge of the Catholic faith which the liturgical drama presupposes. And he must first win back the particular sensibility for the symbolic, the invisible, and the supernatural, which was self-evident for the medieval reader as a "lecteur de symboles." And yet he can relearn it to a certain extent if he orients himself to the directions of the text. For exactly there lies the particular repercussion of aesthetic enticement: to take in bit by bit an unfamiliar attitude and thus to broaden one's own horizon of experience. For the modern reader who is accustomed to admire that something new in a work which makes it stand out against the received tradition, it furthermore means a reversal of his aesthetic expectations when it is demanded of him that he not dismiss endless didactic digressions as boring; the medieval reader could find texts enjoyable for exactly that reason, for they told him what he already knew, and because it satisfied him deeply to find each thing in its correct place in the world-model. The aesthetic pleasure of such recognition certainly presupposes the experiential horizon of the medieval life-world, which is only still available for us if it is reconstructed. Therefore, it cannot again become imaginable for the modern reader without historical mediation. If access to immediate enjoyment of the text remains denied to him here, then he nonetheless wins double on the reflective level: an aesthetic bridge to the foreign life-world which speaks to him again from literary sources and is more perceptible than it would be from historical documents; and on the other hand, the contrasting experience that recognition, and not just innovation, can define and enrich the sphere of the aesthetic attitude.

In the field of philology, however, historical knowledge has not only cleared away barriers to reception, but has often also erected new ones. The instance of Brunetto Latini's Tesoretto shows in an exemplary manner how an unrecognized aesthetic predeasion can obscure the historical significance as well as the poetic qualities of one of the high points of allegorical representation—indeed, how it can
totally exclude it from the canon of the values of tradition. Positivism and idealism—while methodologically quite contradictory, nonetheless also dependent upon Romantic aesthetics of Erlebnis and a proscription of didactics—here share the same prejudice against the non-poetry of allegorical representation, from the scaffolding of which "the author dumps all his knowledge down on top of us like a sack of potatoes." Vossler's interpretation of the Tesoretto proves to be an inverted reflection of classical taste, more interesting for that for which he was looking than for that with which he found fault in the text's supposedly hybrid structure: purity of style, uniformity of action, judicious harmony of part and whole, unity of form and content, shape and significance. The text which has been abused in this manner will be enjoyable again for a modern reader when one dismantles the classical barriers to reception, places oneself within the expectation implied by the text, and recognizes in which direction the rules of the genre are pointing, their having been changed by Brunetto. Then suddenly there appears the totally original "kaleidoscopic" principle of stylization, the ironic position (as opposed to the allegory of love imported from France), and the attitude of curiositas which here announces itself for the first time as an all-encompassing motif—that new dignity of one's own questioning, for which the allegorical "I" liberates itself and with which it crosses the threshold of the Renaissance.

The most difficult thing is surely to find aesthetic access once again to the literary forms of medieval allegoresis which lie the furthest from us. The author, who was once compelled—for the sake of the GRLMA—to study all the twelfth- and thirteenth-century instances of this genre, can frankly confess that he occasionally felt this reading to be atonement for some sin, for which then the all-excelling Roman de la rose compensated him. In this work he discovered particular poetic charm in deciphering the behavior of a lady, whose essence remains hidden behind a series of personifications. As a first aesthetic bridge and a first result of this sifting, one can recommend to the modern reader an unappreciated gem like the Roman de la poire or the genre's jocular forms of play. Like all parody or travesty, they make it thoroughly enjoyable to become practiced in the rules of the game and to take over the attitude which is demanded by a genre with which we are no longer familiar. Without noticing it, they lead us to the deeper aesthetic basis which even today can still—or again—make medieval allegorical poetry interesting, although through a contrasting experience: the perception of an inner world which represents everything which for the modern reader is the expression of subjective feeling, as the play and conflict of objective forces.
III. An Introduction to the Hermeneutic Concept of Alterity

With this attitude of an already reflective aesthetic pleasure which presupposes a recognition of the contrast with modern experience, we have arrived at the second hermeneutic step, that of surprise through alterity. It is not by accident that this term became the focus of interest in the debate over Paul Zumthor’s *Essai de poétique médiévale.* Along with his usage, I follow Eugenio Coseriu’s theory of language in order to identify, with reference to the hermeneutic problem of medieval literature, the particular double structure of a discourse which not only appears to us as evidence of a distant, historically absent past in all its surprising “otherness,” but also is an aesthetic object which, thanks to its linguistic form, is directed toward an *other,* understanding consciousness—and which therefore also allows for communication with a later, no longer contemporary addressee.

A description of this alterity can begin with the observation that for us medieval literature is even more alien than that of the antiquity which is further away in time, for the latter—up until the threshold of the crisis of the universities in the sixties—had almost without dispute determined the canon of the ruling philological-humanistic education in Germany. Between the literature of the Christian Middle Ages and the aesthetic canon of our modern age there stands only an illusionary chain of an “unbreakable tradition.” If Ernst Robert Curtius could ignore the fact that the reception of Aristotelian poetics and of the aesthetic canon of antiquity (which henceforth became *classical*) by Renaissance humanism cut almost all connections with medieval literature and art, his own respectable attempt—to oppose the German Third Reich’s insanity for its own uniqueness with a belief in the continuity of the Latin development of the West—may justify this.

The alterity of medieval literature became even more hidden by an older illusion of historical continuity, namely, by the nineteenth century’s evolutionary model of history, according to which the beginning and essence of all later developments in European national literatures are to be sought in the vernacular texts of the medieval period. Of course, even preunderstandings which are *post festum* unfounded or ideologically transparent do not by any means bring only “false” results to light. This is proved by the extent to which the former finding is capable of a reinterpretation when the paradigm which had oriented research has materially exhausted itself. One can infer the chances for a new knowledge of the particular significance of medieval literature from this period’s breaches of continuity as well as from its character as an archaic, politically and culturally self-
sufficient historical world; these chances become more conceivable when one thinks of the concrete aspects of its alterity which have been covered up by the humanistic tradition’s philological ideal and concept of autonomous art.

The philological ideal, formulated in the age following the invention of the printing press, unconsciously equates literary tradition with written and printed tradition, and has therefore greatly overlooked the existence of a nonbook production and a nonreading, but rather almost exclusively aural, reception. The preeminence of the book not only misleads one to equate interpretation as the activity of the reading philologist with the original experience of the hearing public, and thus to miss the concrete purpose with reference to which the text was composed. The humanistic model of classical texts also makes the book into a “work,” a unique product of its creator. Certain basic distinctions follow from this which are as self-evident for the autonomous art of the bourgeois period as they are inappropriate for the medieval understanding of literature: the distinction between purposefulness and purposelessness, didactic and fictional, traditional and individual, imitative and creative. Medieval literature is a literature whose texts did not arise from the classical (and, later, Romantic) unity of author and work, and by the overwhelming majority of their addressees, the texts could only be taken in aurally—therefore, not by the self-contended contemplation of the reader. These aspects of the alterity of the Middle Ages first make clear the great extent to which our modern understanding of literature is formed by the written character of tradition, the singularity of authorship, and the autonomy of the text understood as a work.

The oral character of literary tradition is doubtless a symptom of the alterity of the Middle Ages which today cannot be fully realized by hermeneutic effort. The invention of the printing press is—to speak with Paul Zumthor—the event which more than any other has closed off medieval culture for us as “the time before.” Anyone who has grown up as a reader can only with difficulty imagine how an illiterate could have seen the world without writing, and taken in poetry without a text—and how he could have remembered it. Even if the mass media are supposed to have brought us back closer to the medieval experience of a poetry which is not mediated by the book than the solitary and mute visualization of an individual reading does, the modern listener can still hardly put himself back into a consciousness which had no choice other than that of aural reception. But familiarity with medieval literature may well allow us access to (or justification for, if we haven’t lost it) an enjoyment of texts which humanistic
aesthetics has undervalued if not forbidden. The self-submersion of the solitary reader in a book as work—that is so self-satisfying that it “means the world” for him—can describe the particular experience of autonomous art in the bourgeois era. And yet this relationship of the individual to the “auratic” work in no way exhausts the aesthetic experience of literary texts. The reader’s pleasure can spring today, as it already did with the medieval listener, from an attitude which does not presuppose a self-submersion in the unique world of a single work, but which rather presupposes an expectation which can only be fulfilled by the step from text to text, for here the pleasure is provided by the perception of difference, of an ever-different variation on a basic pattern. The character of a text as a work is therefore not constitutive of this aesthetic experience, an experience as natural to the modern reader of detective novels as it was to the medieval hearer of the chansons de geste; rather, intertextuality is constitutive, in the sense that the reader must negate the character of the individual text as a work in order to enjoy the charm of an already ongoing game with known rules and still unknown surprises. Elsewhere, I have called this experience the plurale tantum structure of reception, and have explained it with examples from various periods and genres. Before and after the classical period of art, one encounters at every step forms of an aesthetic experience which are not related to the classical ideal of the work. Indeed, one comes across them in medieval literature to such an extent that the relationship to the text as a work—both at the level of production as well as the level of reception—is much more the exception to a rule. Here we catch sight of an essential aspect of the alterity of this literature.

Let us begin with a well-known crux in romance philology, the problem of the “unity of the Chanson de Roland.” Here the long-standing orientation of research, which considers itself strictly positivistic, must accept Eugène Vinaver’s ruinous critique, according to which the whole argument and result of the more than a thousand treatises which have been written since Romanticism on the question of authorship have no foundation in fact, but rather are the unexamined result of an implicitly applied aesthetics which every French positivist carries around with him since his schooldays spent with Corneille. In fact, the old Romance epic poetry stands in a fluid tradition which cannot be traced back to the closed form of a work or original, and to impure or corrupt variants, and which therefore also requires special editing techniques. As recited poetry of the “formulaic style,” which was more or less improvised so that each performance left behind a somewhat different, never final form of the text, the chanson de geste was presented
in installments with the structure of a sequel. This ever-expanding cyclical movement yields yet another result, namely, to make the limits of the work appear as flexible and incidental.

But the epic fable itself can also be viewed as not being final. With the cycle of the Roman de Renart, I hit upon the remarkable fact that the core of the cycle—the fable about the lion’s court day—was retold no less than eight times. In this manner a series of later narrators always knew to give another occasion and another end to the judgment on the cunning fox. What positivistic research viewed as a series of “corrupt variants” of a lost original could be received by the medieval public as a succession of sequels which—in spite of constant imitation—always knew to develop an ever-new element of tension.

This principle, which runs completely counter to the humanistic understanding of the original and its reception, of the purity of the work and the faithfulness of its imitation, is not only found in the Middle Ages on the level of popular literature in the low style. The great Latin works of the high style of the philosophical-theological epic which were composed in the twelfth century by the school of Chartres following the allegorical tradition of Claudian and Boethius—Bernard Silvestris’s De universitate mundi and Alain de Lille’s Planctus naturae and Anticlaudianus, with which in the thirteenth century the Roman de la rose and finally Brunetto Latini and his Tesoretto tie in—can also be explained according to the principle of continuation within imitation and can be interpreted as sequels to a single allegorical fable. With this the question of the renewal of life within the progress of the world proves to be the motivating force of the literary series: in the mythical guise of a complaint by natura, it could always be remotivated and solved again, but it could also be critically turned against a predecessor in order to uncover his own unexamined mythology.

As concerns the religious play, one need only be reminded here that it had its telos not in the self-enclosed whole of a freely composed work, but rather in salvation history, the events of which it commemorated with ceremonial repetition with each performance. Within the sphere of texts of the vernacular lyric, the manifestations of medieval intertextuality include not only the spread of “song sheets,” or the tensone improvised according to rules in public competition, but also even the poésie formelle of the canzone. While ready to be considered as one of the beginnings of autonomous art, the canzone nonetheless was not isolated in the manner of a work, but rather was received as plurale tantum with the aesthetic charm of variation from text to text—as the absence of a definitive form in the handing down of the text (stanzas being rearranged, etc.) indicates.
All in all, these examples confirm a conclusion already arrived at by C. S. Lewis: "We are inclined to wonder how men could be at once so original that they handled no predecessor without pouring new life into him, and so unoriginal that they seldom did anything completely new." In the medieval understanding of literature, the singular work is generally viewed neither as a one-time, self-enclosed, and final form, nor as an individual production of its author, to be shared with no one else. The Renaissance first proclaimed such categories of the classical aesthetics of production, after the character of poetry as a work had attained a novel aura: the uniqueness of the original hidden in the distant past, the pure form of which is to be sought, reconstructed from out of the distortions of its use through the ages, and guarded from future profanation by an editio ne varietur. If it can be confirmed that the classical equation of work and original in general is only of humanist origin, then a hypothesis concerning the rise of the concept of autonomous art in the bourgeois era can be added: did the rising bourgeois class perhaps believe here that it was—in contrast to humanism as well as to the representative art of the princely courts—to create with its own power works of art in the form of contemporary "originals" which could compete with the past originals of antiquity, themselves incapable of being numerically increased?

IV. The Alterity of the Medieval World-Model

A further challenge to literary hermeneutics lies in the alterity of an understanding of the world which C. S. Lewis so impressively knew how to present in all of its pre-Copernican features. In historical retrospect, the situation of medieval man appears to be at once archaic and laden with tradition, equally distant from the myths and rituals of primitive life-worlds, and from the systems and roles of industrial society, from elementary lack of knowledge and from modern knowledge which relies upon observation. Faced with the necessity of doing away with the contradictions between ancient culture and Christian belief—which the lack of discrimination between the various truth-claims of religious, poetic, and philosophical texts had only sharpened—medieval culture developed a model which allowed for "saving the appearances" and harmonizing the contradictions of heterogeneous authorities in such a manner that one can place this medieval world-model alongside Thomas Aquinas's Summa and Dante's Divina Commedia as its greatest work of art. In contradistinction to a Romantic expectation, medieval man was less a wanderer and dreamer than a codifier and system builder, always intent upon find-
ing a place for each thing, and for each thing the right place, and not satisfied until even phenomena like love or war were codified to the last detail. It is obvious that the reconstruction of this world-model which is so distant from us would offer more knowledge of the collective imagination of the Middle Ages—and thereby, of its poetic experience of the world—than the heights of the history of ideas, or the substructure of medieval economic relationships.

C. S. Lewis's most surprising finding is certainly that man's place in the universe was defined differently by theological doctrine on the one hand, and the cosmology of the world-model on the other: for the former, he stood in the middle of space, while for the latter, he stood on the edge!17 If one follows C. S. Lewis's direction, namely, to imagine the pre-Copernican view of the cosmos, then the alterity lies in the fact that the medieval observer looked into and upon the starry sky at night, as if looking over the outermost wall of a city, while we look out; that to him the whole universe appeared as a bound ordering of spaces, already layered and populated with angelic essences, and filled with light and the music of the spheres, while we feel Pascal's horror of the silence éternel de ces espaces infinis when faced with the endless, empty, dark, and mute universe. This alterity furthermore includes the fact that for medieval man, the kingdom of nature remained limited to the sphere of mutability beneath the moon, reserved for natura in her astounding career in the Platonism of Chartres, while for us the laws of nature are supposed to govern the whole universe, with nature itself no longer signifying anything poetically since the retirement of imitatio naturae. The hierarchical ordering of essences in the cosmology, and the triadic principle which always offered instances of mediation between God and man, souls and bodies, indeed between all extremes, correspond to a representation of the conduct of things which is exactly opposed to the modern concept of evolution: while it was axiomatic for medieval cosmology that perfect things precede all imperfect ones, the originary cannot have any ontological priority over that which comes out of it for the developmental logic of the modern natural sciences (it is not accidental that "primitive" has assumed a pejorative significance for us).18 Thus even the object of art had an always already "built-in" significance for the medieval author; he did not have to search for it first, let alone confer it himself upon a reality without significance.19 He wrote with the particular humilitas of the medieval poet, in order to praise and to extend his object, not to express himself or to enhance his personal reputation.20

The insights into the medieval understanding of the world which we owe to C. S. Lewis have as yet hardly been exploited as hermeneu-
tic instruments for the interpretation of poetry as well as of forms of life. Today we may set alongside *The Discarded Image* the work of a historian which replaced the yellowed cultural histories with a sociohistorical approach, and which brought to light the communicative side of social modes of behavior via a structural interpretation of temporally contrasted sources: Arno Borst's *Lebensformen im Mittelalter*. The middle position of the Middle Ages—only hinted at by Lewis—in contrast to antiquity, to its archaic relatives, as well as in contrast to modern social formations, is here so developed in its alterity as to be almost tangible. Of particular interest to the literary historian is Borst's thesis that it is a mark of medieval expression "that they have a predilection for presenting living men in established modes of behavior," so that this period can stand as a paradigmatic "age of realized and effective forms of life," while "form of life was understood in antiquity primarily as an ethical demand, and is understood in modern times increasingly as an unimportant condition." The sphere of literature and art can certainly offer still more in support of this thesis if one does not content oneself with the—often paltry—source value of their imitative function, but rather inquires into the contribution of medieval texts and works of art toward the development, transmission, and legitimation of social norms.

As soon as historical observation frees itself from the confining aesthetic of *Widerspiegelung* which is so inappropriate for the alterity of this period, the latent history of aesthetic experience comes to light. This still unwritten history certainly stands closer to the slow change of social modes of behavior than it does to the grand history of events and actions. Thus it may be able to disclose from the so distant life-world of the Middle Ages forms of life which have become alien to us. Aesthetic experience gains this hermeneutic function not only through the idealizing and preserving contribution of art, but also as a medium of anticipation and compensation. One of the finest examples of the anticipatory function is the literary anticipation of matrimonial love since Chrétien de Troyes, which—according to the evidence provided by Heloise and Abelard—was not yet a sanctioned social mode of behavior in the twelfth century, and which was only recognized as a form of life in the late Middle Ages, when the new community of the house-family had replaced the earlier medieval clan-family.

The menace to life was answered not only by religion and by the conventions of communal living which guarantee security, but also by the experience of art. It allowed for the illustration of abstract dogma as well as of the all-regulating world model; for the relief of man from the pressure of authorities; and for the satisfaction of his claim to
happiness in yet another way than the consolation and other-worldly hopes of religion. Not only Dante’s *Divina Commedia*, but even the most modest text of religious allegory, didacticism, and visionary literature—detaching themselves from biblical exegesis—had made the symbol system of medieval world interpretation visible for a wide public, as had the competing courtly and worldly vernacular poetries which had taken on an allegorical form in the thirteenth century. For the modern reader little more than a peculiar, abstract, and almost tiresome operation with personified concepts, allegory for the medieval public could represent not only the virtues and vices, but also the newly discovered inner world of the passions; not only the invisible hierarchy of religious instances, but also the happy world of fulfilled love which had been prefigured by troubador poetry and illustrated in the *Roman de la rose*. That which alienates us through indistinctness, cataloglike excess, and a lack of tension is only the other side of a poetry of the invisible, which might well constitute the most unique characteristic of the alterity of the Middle Ages.

How inappropriate and even misleading it is to judge the literature and art of this period exclusively according to the modern, *ideologiekritische* categories of the affirmation or negation of the existing order, can be shown by glancing, among other places, at the cosmological world model. The poetry and allegory of courtly love—which as a poetically mediated form of life competed with the religiously sanctioned institutions of marriage and sexual love, without expressly denying their norms—developed a unique topography which deviated from the theological as well as from the cosmological model in an interesting way. At the turn from the twelfth to the thirteenth centuries, the love allegory turned the model of the classical epithalamium upside down: the gods, Venus and Amor, no longer appear to the human pair as coming from outside, but rather the lovers themselves go on their way to seek out the love god in his own realm. This realm, however—topographically and ethically, with its three other-worldly spheres and the guiding function of the love god, a complete contrafactor of the Christian world order—has its *paradisus amoris* in the innermost circle and thereby constitutes a poetic-mythological counter-figure to the Christian-Ptolemaic world model, in which the heavenly paradise takes in the outermost, all-encompassing spheres.

V. Contemporary Tendencies toward a Renewal of Medieval Studies

Contrary to the expectation that the symbolic system of the medieval interpretation of the world is of a closed nature which
categorically rejects anything heteronomous as heathen, heretical, evil, and untrue (pagans are wrong and Christians are right—Roland, 1015), the poetry appears throughout to have claimed the license to cross frontiers; Andreas Capellanus, the theorist of fin amor, is here not a unique exception. Zumthor’s provocative thesis—“The reference of the text is the tradition. It is in relationship to it that the significance defines itself”—does not do justice to this transgressive achievement of aesthetic experience, although his Poétique médiévale has indeed built a new bridge between the alterity and the modernity of the Middle Ages.24 Even if the poetic tradition, as the code already given, always puts itself in the place of anticipated realities (réalités référentielles) in the language game of forms and “registers,” and the individual voice is retracted in favor of a general grammatical and anonymous “I,” the lyric experience nonetheless always goes beyond the affirmative function of once again confirming the authority of the world model as the single source of meaning. If one does not—in contrast to the current metaphysics of écriture—take the text as an ens causa sui, but rather as a vehicle of communication, then the receiving subject can not only discover the genesis of new significance in the enjoyment of formal variation, but can also become aware of the difference which always arises between the poetic and the nonpoetic traditions, between the insubordination of the beautiful and the authoritative meaning of the world model—thus not first arising with Zumthor’s last act of an éclatement du discours, which he locates in Villon. Precisely since the text of the medieval lyric—contrary to the aesthetics and poetic praxis of modern écriture—is not constructed as an autonomous work or a copyright-claiming original,25 but rather as a plurale tantum, that is, aimed at the variation and progressive concretization of significance, the poetic discourse here, in play with the code, is able to enrich the meaning of the code and thereby to surpass it. If Zumthor had given this different status of the text as a nonwork its due, then his interpretations would have had the benefit of the hermeneutic difference, interpretations which in their present form still lack a dimension of significance, given his unreflected symbiosis of medieval and modern “poeticity.” New insight into the alterity of the Middle Ages and new self-knowledge of our modernity condition themselves reciprocally in the hermeneutic circle. The new poétique médiévale puts both the medieval and the modern lyric in a new light: the former can now be appreciated in its “circularity of song,” as the play of language with and beyond itself, while the latter can be confronted with the fact that the medieval poet, however unself-consciously, proves to be still more modern than the authors of the Editions du Seuil—with the supposed anonymity of their hypostasized texts—could dream.26
If Zumthor’s implicit hermeneutics points to the prejudice that the continuum of an unsurpassable poetic tradition—that is, *écriture* as opposed to *parole*—is the origin of significance, then the reverse can also be entertained, namely, that for the mediation of the alterity and modernity of the Middle Ages, “the disjunction . . . is the place at which significance becomes manifest.” Walter Haug recently articulated this position in a programmatic inaugural lecture. Bertolt Brecht’s aesthetics is the godfather here, deepened through Walter Benjamin’s hermeneutics of dialectical montage. Disjunction is claimed in a threefold respect: historically as the moment in which the mediation of meaning breaks off (between medieval and modern literature, e.g., with the disparaging of the allegorical in the late eighteenth century); hermeneutically as the phenomenological correspondence of similar aesthetic experiences with different symptoms (“the actuality of the present casts its light upon historical correspondences and through these, as through an other, arrives at its own self-understanding”), and for the interpretation of medieval texts itself, as “the contradiction between the introjection of significance, and linear representation.”

I have nothing against the argument for the first and second disjunctions, except that the examples used for such correspondences are not actually “phenomenological,” for they always arise from mediation by modern aesthetic reflection, so that the prereflective level as the immediate access to aesthetic experience is ignored. But Haug’s third disjunction seems to me to obscure the relationship between religious and aesthetic experience in the Middle Ages, rather than to clear it up. In this period, the breaking of continuity is in no way poetry’s specific place for the manifestation of significance. It is much more the case that in the Middle Ages there was a contrary movement of aesthetic experience to retreat from religious experience first and foremost through the development and perfection of continuity, retreating from a religious experience which for its part answered such self-enjoyment of humanity’s trials with the evangelical call for a world-negating conversion. The knight-errant’s path does not first become significant through the episode of an “allegorical change” (Yvain’s falling on his own sword; Erec’s confrontation with Mabonagrin); it is already exemplary from the beginning with the claim to fulfill one’s being within the horizon of extraordinary accident and election, *res adventura* and *providentia specialis*—that is, thoroughly analogous to the *vita* of the saint, but also contrary to it, having as a telos the worldly discovery of identity.

In such contrariety one must also see that Haug tried to make his view of the “aftereffect” of the forms of thought and representation
of biblical and theological exegesis on the worldly medieval epic accord with modern techniques of alienation. Here he is fully conscious of the hermeneutic difference in apparently similar symptoms of the world-understandings: “For the Middle Ages . . . the disparity and brokenness of phenomena are givens; and thus the task of constructing continuity and identity presents itself exactly here. . . . On the other hand, in a historical position such as that occupied by Brecht, in which a dominant continuity appears from the beginning as the inhuman, there remains only the possibility of shattering the continuity.” But the medieval point of departure can be considered by one who names disparity and brokenness only insofar as the exegesis radicalizes the realities of belief such as the Fall, sin, conversion, and salvation in contrast to all immanent continuity of the world. Faced with this, then, even the medieval world model reconstructed by C. S. Lewis, with its harmonizing accomplishments, would already be an aesthetic objectification. In the meantime, to go this far presupposes a religious rigorism which in the Middle Ages might sooner be sought in the heretics of evangelical life than in the bosom of the church and the systems of theology, in which—to remark in passing—the explanation of the world in terms of a meaning derived from salvation history must in no way stand opposed to an explanation in terms of exemplary, moral modes of behavior: the former was built upon the latter as a legitimating superstructure. In addition, it is precisely the worldly-allegorical poetry, which at the turn from the twelfth to the thirteenth centuries was detaching itself from biblical exegesis, that demonstrates how the kind of “aftereffect” increasingly took on the form of competition, palpable in the—naturally unexpressed—ambition of the worldly poet to present aesthetic consistency instead of the revolutionary change in one’s natural attitude toward life demanded by exegesis.

The adoption of the motif of pity by the religious play is ambivalent. In figures such as Mary Magdalene or Longinus, which call for identification on the part of sympathizers, one can already see the crossing of an aesthetic frontier instead of a new form of religious experience, for the native Christian virtue of pity remained dogmatically bound to the *gloria passionis* and the divine *ius talionis*. The history of visions of the other world up to the *Divina Commedia* presents a striking development of the pity motif, which increasingly disengaged itself from its dogmatic ties until Dante finally articulated it as a basic conflict for his other-worldly pilgrim. The dogmatic phrase, *Here pity lives when it is altogether dead* (Inferno xx.28), can only dogmatically dispense with this conflict; the contradiction which aesthetic license had discovered between divine metaphysics of right and human pity,
and not some dogmatic "solution," is to be the motive force of future interpretation.

One can therefore record this as an instance of that which can again become interesting for us in medieval literature in the light of Brecht's aesthetics ("The playwrights who want to represent the world as changing and changeable must hold on to its contradictions, for it is these that change and make the world changeable"). But this hermeneutic key which enables one to seize upon a surprising modernity—or, better, a historical correspondence—in the face of all appearances of difference can scarcely suffice to make visible the heart of the alterity of medieval literature, namely, there where it is a matter of representing not the contradictions, but the order and hidden harmony of the world. But perhaps a bit of modernity also lies hidden for us today in this alterity, provided that not only variation, but also duration makes possible an understanding of the world.

VI. Modernity in Alterity as a New Orientation

The critical discussion of tendencies toward a renewal of the study of medieval literature should not allow us to forget the common orientation for the sake of a few differences. Put in the briefest possible manner, it is a new attempt to discover the modernity of medieval literature in its alterity. It hardly needs to be noted that "modernity" here is to be distinguished from the uncritical modes of an actualizing tendency which would find a contemporary interest exactly confirmed in the literature of the past. As opposed to such modernism, modernity means the recognition of a significance in medieval literature which is only to be obtained by a reflective passage through its alterity. The model character which this field of literature can provide for the current development of theories and interdisciplinary research in the human sciences might well be provisionally described as I already once tried to describe it elsewhere, in reference to the just-begun *Grundriss der romanischen Literaturen des Mittelalters*. The Middle Ages exhibits the following traits in its literature, traits which admittedly are not often found combined in exemplary fashion:

the model of a closed culture and society, in which art and literature are still understandable in the praxis of their normative functions; the at once archaic and schoolboy-like character of this culture, in which the cosmopolitanism of Latin textuality mixes with the everyday function of the spoken Romance vernaculars; the conservatism of a literature which developed its own principle of imitation and its own system of literature far from any reception of
Aristotle, and which showed a surprising power of appropriation in the face of antiquity and foreign cultures; the pre-established, scarcely changing system of expression in this literature which cuts its own path from sign to symbol and which yet thereby brings forth a flexible ordering of genre-like patterns and "tones," within which the communicative achievement of the literature of a developing society evolved.36

In the following I would like to outline the areas, familiar to me from my own research, where in my opinion the interpretation of medieval texts can begin to define more narrowly aspects of such a modernity which open themselves to our present via the bridge of aesthetic experience.

VII. Animal Poetry as a Threshold of Individuation

Medieval animal poetry, unlike almost any other sphere of texts, has been positioned in the history of scholarship up to the present under the unbroken influence of the philological paradigm of German Romanticism. While the study of epics has endured the crises of a number of paradigm-changes, the latest argument between Vozetzs and Foulet here basically revived the distinction between folk and "high" poetry [Volks- und Kunstpoesie] which was promulgated by the Brothers Grimm. In particular, the preunderstanding of German research rested upon the Romantic concept of the possibility of a beginning, which was to be sought prehistorically in the originality of a Germanic "animal saga" and which was to be located aesthetically in the unadorned purity and naivete of the so-called "animal tale." In contrast to this, French research, following Bédier's example, proposed the historically confirmed development of the Roman de Renart as a literary process which could be genetically explained from Aesopian sources and the Latin model of Isengrimus. The alterity of medieval poetry first struck me when I realized that the Romantic explanation of the animal tale (poetry of nature as an initial understanding of man and animal) as well as the anti-Romantic interpretation of the animal epic (the satirically spun fable of the lion's court day) could be traced back to an inexplicit interest on the part of the author and his medieval public. It is not the life of animals in nature, but rather the naturae et mores hominum which are discovered in a new way in the mirror of the simple as well as literary forms of medieval animal poetry. The pleasure derived from Renart's and Isengrin's stories was more ambiguous than mere joy in the simple relationships and natu-
ral characteristics of the animal world: it arose from aesthetic, moral, and finally even political reflection upon what the animal's essence could tell one about human nature. In the typical constellations of their animal figures, Aesop's fables already bring forth the role-determination of human behavior—and thereby create difficulties for both the Christian and the feudal reception of this classical heritage. In the heyday of courtly poetry, a new experience of human nature assumed its most unique form in the analogy of feudal society with the realm of animals: in Renart's total adventure, the exemplary being of knightly heroes is led back at every turn to the unideal nature of man, to his ineluctable desires and weaknesses. As an antitheroic contrafactor of the courtly epic, it also brings to the fore a closed and ahistorical world of types and characters which has still not been sufficiently appreciated as an influential pattern for human self-interpretation.

Looking back at this thesis, I in no way fail to recognize that it does not simply render superfluous the Romantic tradition of interpretation. The insight into the anonymity and oral transmission of the medieval epic has not only made Grimm's concept of a "self-narrating" poetry of nature more comprehensible for us again. The category of "beginningness" also gains new significance if one de-mythologizes it in Grevinus's sense and relates it to the simplicity of representation of the "most general human relations from an ever-valid point of view"; the later historical development of the potential for satire of the upper ranks also can be deduced and interpreted from the basic pattern thus understood. Even if one laughs at the search for the original German ("All of antiquity knew no joy in nature, and joy in nature is one of the basics of these poetries") as one of the most gorgeous projections of Romantic "woodsiness," a distinction between the ancient and Germanic or, let us say, medieval traditions first recognized by Grimm nonetheless still remains valid: the bestowing of names of Germanic origin, which makes singular beings out of the antagonists and figures of the cycle. Between the generic names of the ancient figures of the fable and the proper names of the medieval animal epic lies a threshold of individuation.

What does this threshold signify? The same poetry which had reduced the ideal, mental being of man to his creaturely nature, and then had unfolded this into a multiplicity of ethical characters, contrariwise confers the appearance of individuality upon its figures, not only through proper names, but also through the rule of the game that each species of animal may be represented by only one exemplar. At least two questions remain open in this strange, contradictory state of affairs and thus allow an investigation of the larger historical context to appear to be profitable. One is the character of the species
which is written into the faces of the animals, so to speak (according to H. Lipps)—not an objective character, but doubtless only read into the animals by man. The ethical characters of the animal figures must thus be interpreted from the perspective of historically changing motifs of human self-interpretation. The other question is the form of the individuality which in the cases of Renart, Isengrin, Brun, Noble, and so forth, surely arose from their literary uniqueness as fox, wolf, bear, lion. They thus present only an appearance of individuality: as the main figures of the animal epic, not yet a singular, but only a typical fate is fitting, which in the meeting with the knave Renart proves to be the misfortune typical to their natures.

This appearance of individuality is nonetheless still the beginning of an individualization (however formerly underestimated by me). Although the epic heroes already embody a singular fate in the contingency of the action through their entanglement in historico-mythical conditions, they nonetheless appear, in their exemplary perfection, as more one-sidedly characterized and incomparably less differentiated than their opposites in the animal epic—than Renart, Isengrin, and their like, who achieve exemplary significance through their imperfection. The beautiful has only one type, the ugly has a thousand: if one applies Victor Hugo’s bold claim to our case, then Pierre de Saint Cloud’s work dating from 1176–77 can be defined as a literary-historical step toward a new form of individuation. Renart’s adventure, announced as “unheard of,” not only plays down the perfection of heroic poetry and along with it the personified ideal of knighthood in favor of the imperfect nature and quotidian appearance of men. It thereby at the same time characterizes this material side of human nature in an unexpected multiplicity of types and roles.

This literary threshold is reached at a time when persona—for the first time with Otto von Freising’s usage—could mean not only the interchangeable (masks, roles), but also the unexchangeable individualitas of secular man. In literature, the canon of the general is not broken through by, say, the biographical type of text, for which the “perfect fulfillment of the general norm was still to be valid for a long time as the highest form of individuality.” In order to break the spell of ideality—and that means here, the perfection of the good, the true, and the beautiful—which had taken on such a monotonous, thoroughly hierarchical form in the text of the vernacular epic, a new license is presupposed, allowing for the representation of human nature beyond good and evil in its imperfect cross section—a license which was first to become public in the fiction of the animal realm. Among the most tantalizing perspectives which open out of the Middle Ages onto the prehistory of our modernity is certainly the tracing
of how this world of characters as types, being the mirror of various social formations, was historically transformed; and the tracing of the thresholds through which, in the progress of the modern age, individuals in their singularity took the place of ethical characters, to the point where no particular license was needed any longer in order to represent individual life without a transcendent or social telos.

VIII. Allegorical Poetry as the Poetry of the Invisible

Allegorical poetry has been so convincingly rehabilitated—for the Middle Ages, since C. S. Lewis; for the Baroque, since Walter Benjamin; and for literary hermeneutics, since Hans-Georg Gadamer—that it is no longer worthwhile to go back to the history of and reasons for its initial disavowal.43 But it is another question, whether the reawakened historical interest in this dry-as-dust group of texts can also be transformed into an aesthetic perspective. I see a far from exhausted perspective in the old basic definition of the allegorical modus dicendi, still used by Winckelmann, as making possible "the presentation of invisible, past, and future things." To my mind, this not only opens up a formal relationship between such heterogeneous literary genres and traditions as allegoresis, personification, allegorical fiction, typological visionary literature, psychomachia, bestiaries, and love-allegory. It also establishes a connection of content, against the background of that which H. Blumenberg once called the still-unwritten "Geistesgeschichte of the invisible," that "world, afar and beyond, of the invisible, which for the Middle Ages was at once the sphere of religious authority."44 Since that sphere cannot be represented mimetically, but only allegorically, medieval allegory can be interpreted as the poetry of the invisible, and its history can be rewritten under this title.

Its Christian origin, then, would lie in the Pauline phrases to which medieval authors continually referred: that God's essence and magnificence are invisible, but are perceptible in His works since the Creation (Rom. 1:20); that man must undergo the battle of the soul with the body in an invisible theater (Gal. 6:17); and, furthermore, that he must continually struggle with powers that are not of flesh and blood, with the invisible evil spirits beneath heaven (Eph. 6:12). In the progressive illustration of these three spheres of the invisible—the hidden beauty of the Kingdom of God, to which the world of the senses refers us back; the transcendent world-between of religious instances, between heaven and earth; and the transcendent inner world of the soul's struggle—I see today the sharpest line of demarcation in
medieval literature between the ancient and Christian canons of the representable and of that which is worthy of representation.

On the other hand, the distinction of a genuine poetics of Christianity appears to be historically less sharp: it was overshadowed in the Middle Ages by the particular predominance of a Platonic and neo-Platonic aesthetics which produced a rigorous "canon of transcendence" (M. Fuhrmann), and which almost completely intercepted the new beginning of a creaturely "realism," arising from the figural understanding of history as well as from the mixing of styles of the *sermo humilis*. The discussion, "Is there a Christian aesthetics?" completely convinced me that there is therefore an explicit poetics of Christianity only after a remarkable delay, namely, only at the end of the predominance of the Christian religion, at the threshold between the Enlightenment and Romanticism, with Hamann, Schelling, Chateaubriand, Jean Paul, and Hegel (J. Taubes).45

The results of my research into the classical and Christian justifications of the ugly could today be reevaluated from the perspective of a poetry of the invisible. The polemical starting point for this research was the attempt to rehabilitate the thesis of Erich Auerbach's book on Dante, that "the story of Christ fundamentally changed the conceptions of man's fate and how to represent it,"46 against its apodictic rejection by Ernst Robert Curtius, for whom the substantial, uninterrupted continuity of the classical heritage (supposedly visible in a sort of natural history of *topoi*) made all distinctions between heathen and Christian antiquity unessential in the Middle Ages.47 In Curtius's influential work, this model of interpretation so completely covered up the alterity of medieval Christian literature, poetics, and art that both nonclassical phenomena like the *sermo humilis*, the mixing of styles in the religious play, or the typological explanation of history, as well as autochthonous productions of medieval literature such as the troubador lyrics, fell victim to the belief in Western continuity.

This orientation toward the unbroken survival of antiquity also allowed for the misunderstanding of surprising aspects of genres such as the *chanson de geste*, which at most owes a couple of rhetorical patterns and literary *topoi* to the classical model of the *Aeneid*. While this genre, in full bloom in the twelfth century, is unthinkable without the reception of a specific late-classical heritage, namely, the above-mentioned aesthetic canon of transcendence, the latent Platonic and neo-Platonic aesthetics certainly brought forth strange fruit on medieval soil—so strange that it falls right out of the tree of the Latin tradition's continuity. The *chanson de geste* developed a rarely broken set of rules upon the unquestioned dichotomy of beautiful and ugly, good and evil, Christian and heathen, that may, as the scarcely sur-
mountable barrier of a dogmatic alterity, serve to explain why the medieval Christian epic did not cross the threshold to the modern age. The materials of the Charlemagne cycle were absorbed into the highly successful Arthurian romance, and in this manner were entirely taken in by the romantic epic of the Renaissance. For later readers who, after the high point of the Chanson de Roland, ventured upon the ninety other nearly forgotten epics, the division of all the plot’s personae into perfect Christian heroes on the one hand, and enemies counter-idealized as evil on the other (when not simply abstract and strange) must have had a monotonous, all-too-heroic, and therefore unappealing effect—compared with the current success of comics or of Astérix. Nothing seems to be further from Christian humilitas than the medieval Christian epic with its hyper-correct separation of the heroic sublime from the practical everyday, and with the narrowest possible aristocratic ethos of rank that only admits the lower ranks to the fringes of the poem, and then with the attributes of the ugly vilain, only to exclude them totally in the end from the solidarITY of the exclusively good. And yet the broad success of this genre in its time, sung by jongleurs at markets, is not to be doubted in the least!48

This paradoxical state of the medieval epic surpasses the Platonic canon of transcendence in its rigid formulation. If the counter-typicality of the ugly and the evil corresponds to a great extent to its classical definition, as just being a privation of the good, the true, and the beautiful, and as ultimately referring to the invisible beauty of the divine order, there is nonetheless missing in the medieval epic and hagiographic traditions—as far as I can see—the attachment of the ugly to the good which is likewise asserted in Platonism. The beauty of ugly Socrates which is only visible to the inner eye was evidently without stylistic influence on the figures of the heroes in the Christian Middle Ages. The most interesting case of an inverted attachment of the beautiful to the evil—the corporeal beauty of the traitor Ganelon in the Chanson de Roland—in the end only again confirms the canon of transcendence, for Ganelon refers typologically to the fall of Lucifer. Here the poetry of the invisible rests upon the temporally most distant event, the fall from angelic beauty into the ugliness of the (medieval?) infernal princes, and perhaps also upon the mythological conception that nature itself was included in the fall into sin and thus became ugly. Is there a relationship between this and the fact that there is hardly any description of nature in the Chanson de geste? In the Middle Ages, the fallen condition of nature is literally manifest only in man himself, not represented in deformations of extrahuman nature. Only the antinaturalism of a post-Romantic modern period realized
in praxis this postulate of the early Christian tradition (Prudentius), following the model of Baudelaire’s *Fleurs du mal.*

But one does find an association of the ugly with the recognition of the good in the Victorin theory of visions, which, according to Uda Ebel, one can use as a key to visionary poetry. To make visible to worldly life the meaning of visions, the secrets of the otherworldly (following Theophilus’s formulation), a journey from the *visibilitia* to the *invisibilitia* was called for which, according to Hugh of St. Victor, could ensue in two ways. In the first way, from which the three-tiered nature of the typology of visions can be explained, “the *visibilitia* of this world lead through the *sensibilibus similia* of the described otherworldly to the *invisibilitia*, the essence of God hidden behind the forms of appearance of the glimpsed otherworldly, or hidden in the future.”

In the second way, by which the greater detail of the descriptions of the ugly in hell and purgatory can be justified, greater significance is granted to the analogical knowledge gained from the *dis similia*: while the beautiful threatens to bind us to the world of the senses, the ugly *via negationis* awakens a stronger desire for perfection. Alfred Adler discovered, in the admittedly rare case of the *Jeu de la Feuillée*, that this mystical poetry of the invisible could also be transformed into worldly poetry; there, the student starting out for the university, in parting from his young bride, praises her in a curious way, publicly complaining about the decay of her bodily charms, but knowing that, through this *dissimilis simililitudo*, he is secretly praising her beauty.

The aesthetic canon of transcendence receives its sharpest formulation there where the relationship between the presence of the visible and the hidden evidence of the invisible transcends the possibilities for obvious representation and must appeal for a “not seeing, but still believing.” The joining of that which is shocking and awful with that which is edifying—which one encounters continually in hagiography and which probably can only irritate the modern reader—stands in service to the religious doctrine of the *gloria passionis*. According to this doctrine, compassion for the suffering creature must be reserved for the heathens who see without recognizing, while it is expected of the believing Christian that he will set himself out of the present and find edification in thinking of the previously guaranteed blessedness of the saints and God’s still-hidden justice. I have already mentioned that this dogmatic rigorism, often attested to in the legends of martyrs, allowed for a contrary process of aesthetic experience on various levels. It is in this context that the development of the motif of pity belongs (although not it alone), which in the popular otherworldly visions could occasionally yield such strange fruit. Here, let one only
be reminded of the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani*, in which the saint, moved to tears, obtains an extension of the weekend “until early Monday” for Judas, who is most hideously tortured throughout the rest of the week. If in such instances the aesthetic compensation is essentially an appearance of that which Jean Paul called the “poetry of superstition,” then the high point of medieval visionary literature shows how a great poet knew to make use of the canon of transcendence in a different manner. With Dante, it legitimated the representation of a sphere of immanence formerly thought to be unworthy of representation: the secular world as the place of historically acting and suffering individuals. In the *Divina Commedia*, the world beyond, the highest object of the poetry of the invisible with all of its layered order, refers back to this world via the memory of a half-thousand personae. From the final fate of the damned, the penitent, and the blessed, there arises a sum total of worldly historicity, and with this the poem attains the great, already “modern” theme of a new poetry of the visible.

A grandiose quotation from Jean Paul's *Vorschule der Ästhetik*—from which stems my outline of the rise of allegorical poetry in the Romance vernacular—formulates beautifully as well as inexhaustibly the historical (although admittedly undatable) epochal change between classical and Christian literature:

Christianity destroyed, like a Last Judgment, the whole world of the senses with all of its charms, pressed it into a grave mound, into one step toward heaven, and replaced it with a new world of spirits. Demonology became the proper mythology of the corporeal world, and devils, as seducers, moved within men and the statues of gods. All earthly presence evaporated in favor of the future of heaven. And what still remained for the poetic spirit after this collapse of the outer world? Why, that into which it fell, the inner one!

The symbolization of the extrasensory otherworld comes out of the negation of “the whole world of the senses”; the prefiguration of a still-invisible future follows upon the negation of all “earthly presence”; and the discovery of the inner world arises from the collapse of the outer one—this is how Romantic aesthetics saw the origins and possibilities of a “poetics of Christianity”! For Christian poetry, the truth of that which was to be represented henceforth lay in the invisible, so that it needed allegorical (or typological) discourse in order always to maintain a difference within the correspondence of form (or event) and significance. For the addressees, this difference embodied the appeal to imagine that which transcended the evidence of the sayable. When the difference between form and significance disap-
peared, the signifiers only reified already-known signifieds, and allegorical discourse decayed into manifestations of literary automation. The resulting combinations of personified concepts, or the abstruse accumulations of *distinctiones* which can be raised to the level of the subtlest mannerism, contributed to no small extent to the ill repute of the allegorical *modus dicendi*.

The discovery of the inner world can be traced along the steps which lead from a surprisingly abstract character through the formation of new fields of images up to the development of the enclosed landscapes of the soul. The abstract character of *psychomachia* results from the fact that by the struggle *in* the soul a struggle *for* the soul can also be signified, just as the whole cosmos can be signified by the body of man, and the salvation history of mankind by the situation of a single Christian. The medieval tradition of the genre created new overlappings of images when the long-unrepresented individual soul stepped onto the stage *in persona*, to be fought over by virtues and vices; when the dreaming “I” of the lover in the *Roman de la rose* recognizes the ever-invisible “you” of the chosen lady from out of her changing figurations, from which the reader is supposed to glean the ideal story of a love-relationship; and, finally, when an already historical “I” knows to ask its own questions, and in Brunetto Latini’s *Tesoretto* steps out from under the spell of ideal essences which prefigure all experience, thereby at once destroying the form of the genre.

A new system of *topoi* of allegorical poetry which blossomed around the turn from the twelfth to the thirteenth centuries can often be traced back genetically to the mystical writings of Bernard Silvestris and others; the motifs come out of allegoresis and gather together in image-fields or in constellations of personifications, forming a syncratic repertoire. At first, this was not infrequently of service to religious poetry, in order to remind the audience of the human situation in between fall and salvation, and was later usurped by worldly poetry to interpret the inner experience of the lovers in between solitude and consummation. The preferred image-fields for this poetry of the invisible were: the “four daughters of God,” the “three enemies of man,” the *castellum amoris*, the path and the gate, the *hortus conclusus* of paradise, the “tree of virtues,” the *armatura Dei*.

A history of the discovery of the inner world would always come upon two thresholds in this period. The first becomes definable through C. S. Lewis’s statement that Chrétien de Troyes could not concern himself with the inner world of the passions without at once falling into allegorical discourse; wherever the medieval poet becomes “psychological,” he also has to become “allegorical.”53 The second threshold comes to light with the epochal event that Guillaume de
Lorris, in the first *Roman de la rose*, symbolized the inner world and new experience of courtly love along the journey of the lover through the allegorical landscape and the changing constellations of the *verger d’amor*; in the personified passions and norms of the Provençal poets, this courtly love remained imperceptible. With this, Guillaume de Lorris allowed the promised, still invisible paradise of *joy* to shine through in a perceptible form.

This situation, at the very least, indicates a limit to the delayed reception of the poetics of Christianity by Romanticism: Jean Paul recognized the “demonology” or new “mythology of the corporeal world” as a result of the collapse of the ancient world of the senses, but not—*sit venia verbo*—the “paradisology”⁵⁴ or new mythology of a happy world! From this recognition it follows that the threshold between the medieval and postmedieval functions of allegorical poetry can most clearly be indicated if one opposes the results of this observation to the analysis contained in Walter Benjamin’s rehabilitation of allegory. The allegory in Baroque “tragedy” [*Trauerspiel*] “expresses the experience of the sorrowful, the oppressed, the unreconciled, and the failed, the experience of the negative, and resists a symbolic art which gives the illusion of and encloses a positive happiness, freedom, reconciliation, and fulfillment.”⁵⁵ It is therefore totally in accord with the historical logic of the “history of reception” of Christian poetry of the invisible that one of the ancestors of our modernity, Charles Baudelaire, took up in praxis his opposition to Romantic aesthetics of *Erlebnis* of the symbolic art form. He reoccupied the subjective world of the passions as a *paysage moral* with an objective mythology of the corporeal world, the capitalized personifications of *Spleen*.⁵⁶

IX. The Little Genres of the Exemplary as a Literary Communications System

The theory of literary genres belongs among the fields of literary studies which in the sixties first found a lively research interest again. It is here that the challenge of the new linguistics was probably best received by philological historicism, the challenge to acknowledge finally basic structures, in respect to which the supposedly unquestionable assemblage of instruments—the literary genres—rests upon “universals”; is definable according to characteristics and thus is also “operationalizable” with exact methods; and finally can be described as a system of literary communication which could be used by neighboring disciplines to their own advantage. Medieval romance philology is here no exception. The change of paradigms which here
became due can scarcely be more nicely illustrated than through an anecdote from the history of scholarship. The editors of the *GRLMA*, faced with the difficulty of convincing a strong group of their colleagues of the not just chimeric existence of literary genres, were motivated as late as 1965 in a circular to call upon no less an authority than that of the Pope himself, against Croce's reigning individualistic aesthetics. It was Pius XII who, in the papal bull *Divino afflante spiritu*, had recently recommended the method of studying the history of forms, the method of the "literary history of the Bible" developed by Protestant theology, as the indispensable foundation for an understanding of Holy Scripture. The question of the "place in life" [*Sitz im Leben*]—or, in contemporary terms, the social function and communicative achievement—of literary genres was in fact a particularly profitable and new one to ask of medieval literature.57 For this period, equally distant from the preliterary myths of an archaic society and from the autonomous forms of art of the bourgeois era, exhibits among the rising vernacular literatures a series of characteristics which make it interesting for the theory of literary genres.

Here a literary communications system can be traced *in statu nascendi*, from its first beginnings and with the successive insertions of the various genres. Here the literary evolution neither stands under the spell of an authoritative theory (as, for example, French classicism stood under the ruling concepts of Aristotelian poetics), nor follows the principle of individual creation (whereby one work arises against another), so that the history of genres can be observed in the progressive concretization of historical norms. The much-criticized lack of normative descriptions of genres proves in this respect to be the other side of the coin, and to be a lack which is thoroughly compensable hermeneutically. And since in this process a gap scarcely arose between production and reception, between the intention of the (mostly anonymous) authors and the expectation of their public, the primary social and communicative function of literary genres is also immediately to be assumed, and is in principle reconstructable, even if evidence from the medieval life-world is rather sparse.

Perhaps today it can be seen as a result of the debate over the theory of literary genres that both the Platonism of atemporal definitions of essences and the nominalism of historically unique creations, both the expectation of "pure forms" and constant characteristics and the skepticism concerning the theorizability of any historical change at all, are scarcely still represented seriously. It appears much more that a growing consensus is taking shape, according to which literary genres as historical groups or families can only claim generality, not universality, and therefore also cannot be defined as classes according to
characteristics. This "middle generality" between the universal and the singular corresponds to the status of norms in linguistic change, which according to Eugenio Coseriu historically and selectively consolidate the ideal possibilities of a language system into patterns of interaction. It also corresponds to the exemplary character of aesthetic judgment, which according to Kant does not fall under the rule-and-instance schema, but rather is constructed upon agreement; such an indefinite norm must be further defined by each new concretization. With the postulate that literary genres can be viewed as historical groups, their diachronic and synchronic investigation is in no way turned over to a merely intuitive understanding. A historical repertory of realized literary genres can very well be described and interpreted, diachronically as well as synchronically, via the heuristic approach which asserts the existence of universals in the form of textually internal and pragmatic components. But with this, it should not be expected that the specificity itself of historically realized genres can be traced out of the possible combinations of such universal genre-components per se. The step toward the demarcation and identification of a literary concretization is not to be achieved without a hermeneutic explanation of the preunderstandings of the horizon of experience.

The concept of "sorts of texts," which unfortunately becomes ever more pervasive, obscures the boundary between universally definable text-components, and historically conditioned patterns of realization which are always composite and which demand the recognition of the particular system-individualizing "dominants." One can therefore only agree fully with Wolf-Dieter Stempel, who in 1972 at a colloquium on "sorts of texts" drew the conclusion "that one ought to draw back from the investigation of 'sorts of texts,' in favor of a description of the 'sorts of components' of textual communication, and of the systematics of their possibilities of combination." His own suggestion takes off from discourse as discourse-action, and more particularly from various kinds of reference to the partner, and explains components such as direct or narrative discourse, actual delivery (e.g., recitation, performance), instrumental codes of elocutio (modi dicendi), sociolinguistic codes, and general components of content and reception. Since then, various projects for a theory of genres have been published by text-grammarians, semioticians, linguistic pragmatists, and communication theorists; with reference to medieval literature, there is above all the one erected by Paul Zumthor from typological characteristics of discourse. Most of these attempts still face the task of applying the preferred systematics of components of textual communication to a historical repertoire of literary genres. In
this regard, by far the most advanced is Zumthor's *Poétique médiévale*
with its three-tiered system of types (the level of *topoi* in Curtius's sense),
registers (the level of the choice and combination of types),
and poetic genres (the level of *modèles d'écriture*).

Instead of a renewed discussion of his literary system of the "high
genres," concerning which the most essential has already been said by
Wolf-Dieter Stempel, Peter Haidu, and Pierre-Yves Badel, I would
like in what follows to look into a sphere of texts which Zumthor's
assemblage of instruments is least capable of including, although the
texts are most informative for the question of the alterity and modern-
nity of medieval literature. I am speaking of the so-called "simple
forms," in the sense of André Jolles's morphology, or—already formu-
lating it with reference to the Middle Ages—the sphere of the little
literary genres of the exemplary. That it is here possible to delimit a
medieval system of nine genres of exemplary discourse, I should like
to prove with the aid of a catchwordlike overview (see the Appendix
to this essay). It presents in provisional form the results of still-
incomplete research, and can be developed later in its particulars;
here it will only be explained in general, in reference to the historical
specificity of the communicative norms. Along the way I also hope to
be able to indicate what can be taken over for a model of textual
communication from the overwhelming supply of universal (and os-
tensibly universal) components, and could be made useful for a
primarily hermeneutical attempt at the interpretation of the horizon
of expectations of a past literature.

When Zumthor doubts that the theory of simple forms can be
applied to medieval literature, because these forms are "not purely
enough" represented there, there come to the fore both the limits of
his poetics and the misunderstandings which today burden the be-
lated reception of Jolles's theory in France. The narrative short-
forms appear in the Middle Ages for the most part as literary genres
of exemplary discourse; they mediate a religious truth or a profane
teaching and are therefore primarily constituted from components of
communication, of reference to the addressees' expectations, of the
mediation of knowledge in various *modi dicendi*, and of implied modes
of reception. They provide the nicest view of that which our so mod-
ish "narratology" prejudices or even suppresses when, for every im-
aginable literary or historiographical genre, it presupposes *narrative*
to be a uniform matrix, which it then at once divides up according to
variants or sequences of action; these are themselves not infrequently
only paraphrases of the Aristotelian categories of the fable (begin-
ning, middle, and end). The selection and significance of events
meanwhile turns out to be quite different when something is not
directly narrated, but rather is cited, prophesied, interpreted, or testified to; when the speaker wants to awaken insight through a feigned example, or through a *historia docet*; and finally when a narrator has aimed at a fairy-tale-like unreality, a witty *pointe*, or a morally open-ended conclusion (see Appendix, 1.2).

Such specific generic distinctions must escape a poetics which is primarily interested in the purely linguistic components of a text, and which grants such a precedence to the poetic function of language (that is, self-referentiality) that all other functions of language are almost eliminated. Components of textual communication and of social function are missing in Zumthor, both in his description of the narrative function of the *lai* (pp. 387–89), and in his generative model for the whole corpus of narrative short-forms (pp. 399–403). The latter has only two operative matrices: the linear construction of the plot and the status of the personae in the text; where, in this sphere of reference, generally characteristic distinctions come into view, such as with the question of didactic quality, these are made dependent upon the presence of an explicit moral, and thereby the specific ability to differentiate within this sphere of texts according to the implied doctrine is dispensed with. With such premises, it can scarcely be surprising that precisely the striking exception constituted by the *Châtelaine de Vergi* is said to come closest to the “ideal form” of the novella (as the “narrative montage” of a song it is not allowed any exterior reference, pp. 380 ff.); that not only in the *lais* of Marie de France (p. 384) but even in the *fabliaux* (p. 391), the “return of narrative upon itself” is found; that *exemplum* and legend—despite the opposition of intrahistorical and extrahistorical reference!—are said to be “scarcely distinguishable” (p. 392); and that in the end all historically established characteristics become “superficial characteristics,” and thus inessential, when opposed to a “common deep-structure.” For many, the less than modest formula of “a narrative discourse coherent both in its intention and in its structure” (p. 403) may imply the unintended moral, that in the last analysis it is more rewarding to differentiate than to identify, even in the most generative depths.

In a critique which representatively summarizes the state of German research, H. Bausinger casts light upon the misunderstandings suggested by Jolles’s theory of simple forms because of its terminology which sounds so extravagant today. The controversial points are “the assumption of the *ubiquity* of the simple forms, their equation with genetic *Urformen*, and in connection with this the hypothesis of an unequivocal *hierarchy* of forms.” What Jolles was looking for were simple forms “which are not comprehended within stylistics, nor within rhetoric, nor within poetics, perhaps not even within 'textual-
ity," consequently preliterary forms which "occur, so to speak, in language itself without the assistance of any poet." As such, they lie in advance of the historically realized manifestations of a literary culture, but not as archetypes (which must be available to all periods), rather as possibilities which can be selected, realized, or also not realized according to cultural codes and social conditions. Considered methodologically, they have the status of heuristic categories: the communication system of the simple forms is characterized not by a supposed ubiquity, but rather by the particular selection and manner of utilization. That they arise not as the result of a conscious choice and activity on the part of the poet, but rather "occur in language itself," cannot be understood as an anticipation of the self-referentiality of modern poetic language. Jolles intended thereby a condition with which the philosophy of language and the sociology of knowledge are thoroughly familiar: that attitudes toward reality have the character of a preunderstanding resulting from prior experience taken in with the learning of one's native language, and that therefore they do not spring primarily from conscious selections. The great merit of the theory of simple forms is that it allows for the explanation of the implicit horizon of experience of such attitudes toward reality, or such "heavenly bearings" of world experience (as Jolles once strikingly formulated it). The idealist concept of a Geistesbeschäftigung, for a relation to the world, the horizon of which changes the significance of things for the person concerned, can therefore easily be replaced today with the concept of a "subuniverse" [Subsinnwelt], and can thereby be "operationalized."

This concept of the subuniverses, introduced by William James for the style of being of different orders of reality, is used by the sociology of knowledge in order to grasp the spheres (or "provinces") of reality with finite meaning-structure in which, in all societies, the subjective experience of reality is arranged. Such a subuniverse has in common with the Geistesbeschäftigung (occupatio) in Jolles's sense that it is "not constituted through the ontological structure of their objects, but rather through the meaning of our experience"; put another way, that "all experiences that belong to a finite province of meaning... point to a particular style of lived experience—viz., a cognitive style. In regard to this style, they are all in mutual harmony and are compatible with one another." In each case the changeover from one province of meaning to another can be accomplished "only through a leap," or respectively, with the help of a formula for transformation (Jolles: "just put a princess from a fairy tale next to a princess from the novella, and you can tell the difference"). When the accent of reality is bestowed upon a province of meaning, the other provinces of
meaning appear only as "quasi-realities," including the everyday life-world which certainly represents the "primal types of our experience of reality," but so "that at the same time, from the scientific attitude or from religious experience, the everyday life-world can be seen as a quasi-reality." Since the sociology of knowledge has but now begun to work out a systematic typology of the various provinces of meaning with their particular cognitive styles, a problem of interest to both disciplines has presented itself: how do the great subuniverses of the everyday life-world, religious experience, science, play, or phantasy, explored by A. Schütz, Thomas Luckmann, and others, relate to the provinces of meaning of the simple forms of aesthetic experience, which are evidently still more finely arranged?

With the qualification, "aesthetic experience," Jolles's theory is to be rendered more precise, to the effect that his simple forms are concerned with the style of a world experience which is certainly preliterary, that is, still lying before the relation to art in the form of "works," but which yet already has an aesthetic character to the extent that it makes possible the thematizing and the mastering of various claims of reality, allowing man to gain an ever-greater distance from its demands, and to withdraw from pragmatic, everyday urgencies. Considered methodologically, the horizon of experience of the simple forms of aesthetic experience, which today for the most part is no longer self-evident for us, can be reconstructed with the assistance of a hermeneutics of question and answer. What is and is not included at all in the horizon of expectation of a tale; what kind of religious experience made the legend possible; what type of events can be thematically relevant for an exemplum—one hardly finds out this sort of thing from a generative model, but one does with the regaining of the fundamental question to which the former, or today's, reader could receive an answer from a text of this genre. So the tale answers the question, "What would the world be like, in which our wishes were fulfilled?"; the legend, the question, "How can virtue become visible in a man?"; the exemplum, the question, "What does the past teach me about the future?"; and so on (see Appendix, 1.4). With this, I am of course not maintaining that the former reader was conscious of such questions, or that today's reader first has to pose the questions in these formulations to understand the meaning of a tale, legend, or exemplum. For the preunderstanding of a genre, it is only a matter of entering upon the direction of questioning which allows all events to be recognized as "parts of a whole," that is, as belonging to a particular province of meaning. But the implied direction of questioning must, via hermeneutic reflection, be thematized into an explicit question which is verifiable vis-à-vis the accord of the text's answer, if the
tale's province of meaning is to be more closely distinguished theoretically and defined as a world of dreamlike fulfillment of happiness; the legend's province of meaning as a world of the increasing manifestation of the holy; the exemplum's province of meaning as a world of experience through stories (see Appendix, 1.4).

The attempt to apply Jolles's theory of simple forms to a historical repertory of medieval literature, namely, to the Romance literatures of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, confirms that the value of the system of nine forms (legend / saga / myth / riddle / aphorism / case / memorabile / tale / joke) cannot be more than a heuristic one. The conception that it is a matter of a self-sufficient system of genetic Urformen out of which literary genres must organically develop—a conception not even represented rigorously by Jolles himself—is totally historicized with the first glance at their medieval rearrangement. In the synchrony of the vernacular literature of the High Middle Ages, only five of the nine forms are represented: aphorism (as proverb) / legend / tale (as lai) / joke (as fabliau) / and case (as itself, and as novella). Four other forms, missing in Jolles, must be added in order to complete the analogous communication system of the exemplary: parable / allegory / fable / exemplum.

In answer to the question of the alterity of the Middle Ages, one can read from this historical inventory that the simple forms of the Romance literature of this period appear as already "literaried" genres of the exemplary, and therefore are only on the way to the narrative freedom which the fictional verse romance had already reached with Chrétien de Troyes, but which the prose short-forms would first claim with the art form of the novella shaped by Boccaccio. From this historical inventory one can further read that the total system of the nine simple forms described by Jolles is first evident in the literature of the modern age, and therefore can only claim historical generality, not archetypal universality and completion. This does not detract from their important hermeneutic value: precisely their status of "middle generality"—that they are not established in each period and in all literatures, but rather can be conceived, exhausted, forgotten again, reconcretized, rearranged, and extended as an open class of possibilities—allows for the inference of the particularity of a period's and literature's cultural code from the particular historical constellation of the forms.

Thus, for example, it is significant for antiquity that Pindar's victory ode (contrary to Jolles) does not "make literary" the simple form of the legend, which was first created in the Christian era. On the other hand, it is not an incorrect analogy, but rather explains a provocative secularization of this genre of Christian transcendence, when one
follows Jolles in associating the modern sports story with the simple
form of the legend, for the sports story—think of the *vita* of a well-
known football star—similarly answers the question as to how athletic
“virtue” can appear in a man and be directly measurable in his “rec-
ord.” And thus it also characterizes our modern age, that simple
forms such as the *proverb*, the *fable*, the *exemplum*, or the *tale* have taken
on an anachronistic character since Romanticism; they are collected,
edited, and revised for textbooks, but they are no longer recognizably
produced, with the exception of certain attempts which do so at the
cost of reconcretizing them, against the grain, as art forms represent-
ing the heights of literary production. It was then all the more effec-
tive, after a long period of abstinence, for this age of mass media and
subcultures to call the simple forms back out of their submersion: to
post the proverb as an advertising slogan; to install the fable as a
“thought model” in political rhetoric; to recommend the *exemplum* as a
modern story for reflection; or to transform the old idyll of the fairy
tale into new worlds of happiness. An investigation of such recoveries
of temporarily submerged genres could be contrasted with the more
resistant, universal, and yet most rapidly deterioratable forms of the
*riddle* and the *joke*.

In considering the contemporary system of simple forms, however,
one must bear in mind that the *myth*, which rarely appeared in the
Christian Middle Ages and then only as a highly literary form, has
experienced an astounding boom since the nineteenth century as a
new mythos, on the basic level of the development and legitimation of
political identities. Finally, the *memorabile*, not accidentally demon-
strated by Jolles with the example of a newspaper report, lives and
prospers today in the *fait divers* as well as in the reporting of contem-
porary history. It achieved its highest literary stature as the basic form
of Saint-Simon’s *histoire particulière*, and then again in Johann Peter
Hebel’s didactic reworking of history, but it does not reach back be-
hind the threshold of the modern understanding of history: its spe-
cific province of meaning, of a facticity the unfathomable meaning of
which comes to light in scattered, unsubsumable details, lies on the far
side of an experience of history, the consistency of which was guaran-
teed by God’s omnipotence.78

In contrast to this, what does the medieval system of simple forms
look like? Here our observations must necessarily restrict themselves
to what has already come down to us in a literary form—while not yet
in the form of a work—by virtue of having been recorded. It would be
sheer idleness to uncover *ex silentio* the thoroughly imaginable simple
forms of the *riddle* or the *joke*. Among the texts of vernacular litera-
ture, they appear at best in other genres as elements of a fable, but
evidently were not considered worthy of being recorded. The fact that the _myth_ was not produced can, on the other hand, scarcely be explained except by the suppression of pagan mythology when biblical world history and salvation history attained sole authority. The procedure of this suppression was the allegorical reduction of the stories of gods to the moral epithet, or to the personification of virtues and vices; the allegory arrested the myth, and then set in motion the observer as a pilgrim through the stations of an allegorical landscape. This structure of the allegorical plot as a journey and its emanationist reversal (the appearance of a heavenly being who interferes in the process of the world) lie, as a simple form, at the basis of the great Latin epics of the school of Chartres. Cloaked in the allegorical garment ( _sub integumentum_ ), new myths were here created on Christian ground in order to answer the fundamental question of the renewal of life.

Similarly, the _saga_ is comprehensible in the vernacular literature of our period only as the substratum of a large genre. The _chanson de geste_ points back to it as a simple form just as, on the other hand, its competitor, the Arthurian romance, points back to the simple form of the tale. In the saga a historical event takes on the reduced (often scarcely recognizable) form in which it arrived at significance for the collective memory; most often this remains only a historically attested place or person’s name, through which the _chanson de geste_ factually roots itself in history. Its province of meaning is an ideal antiquity, the age of heroes of Carolingian Christianity (“the past such as it ought to have been”), not the _Geistesbeschäftigung_ , “in which the world constructs itself as a family,” and out of which, according to Jolles, the Nordic family sagas came forth. In the Romance tradition, the saga did not develop any independent simple form; the correlative to the so-called folk saga, which aims at the explanation of historical or demonic givens, is only found in Latin anthologies of texts, designed for a priest’s use, of which Caesarius von Heisterbach’s _Dialogus miraculorum_ is a good example.

In the series of the nine little genres which, in my judgment, form a specifically medieval system of literary communication, the _proverb_ is the shortest form. Its “place in life” is best conceived there, where it is called upon in the context of a plot to comment upon the situation in question; as when, for example, at the well at the meeting of the two pails, Renart enlightens the already once-fooled Ysengrin with the ironic commentary: “as the ones go, the others come, / It’s the custom” ( _Quant li uns va, li autres vient, / C’est la costume qui avient—_ Roman de Renart, IV, 353–54). The experience of how the world runs (the “custom”) is unforeseeable and yet necessary; the wisdom of the prov-
erib is therefore—in Jacob Grimm's unforgettable formulation—"not the product of solitary meditation, but rather in it a long-felt truth breaks forth like lightning." This is most beautifully illustrated by the uniquely medieval form of the Proverbes au vilain:

> Often, as it seems to me,
> I have seen many together,
> The honest and the bad;
> But he who's worth the least
> Will be the one who chatters the most;
> Nothing will make him quiet.
> The bad wagon-wheel always screeches,
> so says the vilains. (No. 33)

Since here the moral commentary is presented in advance (the reverse of the exemplum, in which the explained maxim is often first presented), the proverb "breaking forth like lightning" retains a moment of surprise which makes it superior to its rationalization.83

If the proverb leads to retrospective insight into the unavoidable course of things, then the parable breaks through all the pragmatic urgencies of the everyday world in order to bring man to a conversion and change of his life. Precisely this appellative function par excellence, because of which the parable is to be considered as the prototype of the literary forms of Christian prophecy created with the New Testament, is scarcely found in the medieval tradition. In the Romance literatures only one instance is known to me which approaches the model of the New Testament in the specific openness toward the addressees. This is found in Joinville's Histoire de Saint Louis, in the chapter which tells of a difficult embassy which must be undertaken to the Sultan of Damascus, and on which hangs the liberation of Jerusalem. Brother Yves is given this embassy as an interpreter. Before his departure, the following occurs:

As they went from their lodging to the Sultan's house, Brother Yves saw an old woman that was going across the street, and she carried in her right hand a vessel full of fire, and in her left a phial full of water. Brother Yves asked her, "What doest thou with these?" She answered him that with the fire she would burn up Paradise, so that there should be none ever again, and with the water quench Hell, so that there should be none ever again. And he asked her, "Why would ye do this?" "Because I would not that any should do good to have the guerdon of Paradise nor for the fear of Hell; but only to have the love of God that is of [unique] worth and can do to us all good."84

As in a parable, there are features from the most everyday world (drawing water, carrying a torch) which point to the most distant
world (the missing Kingdom of God); the antidogmatic message (denying the rewards of heaven and the punishments of hell); and the appellative openness (the addressee must say to himself that which remains unsaid). In the communicative situation, a simple old lady says that which otherwise could only be said with the authority of a "master." The meaning of her figural discourse is to encourage a radical conversion: if all men were willing to act, not in expectation of future reward, nor in fear of future punishment, but rather for the love of God alone, then this Crusade would at once end and the Kingdom of God could break out on earth. Since this memorable instance of medieval Ideologiekritik is probably a matter of a unique case in the history of the genre, the alterity of the Middle Ages is characterized once again by its dogmatic surplus. The subuniverse of religious experience extra ecclesiam is in this period almost exclusively thematized in the little genres of the allegory (the divi), the legend, and the miracle. The tendency to take away the extravagant character of figural discourse through allegorical interpretation, in order to transform it into direct doctrine, already begins in the New Testament (e.g., Matt. 13:18–23) and permeates the Middle Ages. The authoritative allegory makes itself master of the undogmatic parable through the procedure of decoding uninterruptedly the historia according to previously given norms of significance, the meaning of which ought to open up for the hearer of the figural discourse only from out of the pointe of the whole, and only ad personam. Nevertheless, the predominance of religious allegory was not as absolute as it is often taken to have been: its dogmatic monopoly on interpreting according to the duplex sententia was broken by worldly poetry around the turn from the twelfth to the thirteenth centuries, and even in the sphere of the simple forms of the exemplary, it stood in competition with other genres from the beginning.

Of these, it is above all the exemplum and the fable which in the ancient tradition were already fully developed literarily, and which also were the object of rhetorical theory. Here let one only be reminded of the Aristotelian theory of paradigm (Rhet. 2:20). Its result for Christian lay instruction can be summarized to the effect that the exemplum as well as the fable fed upon the aesthetic evidence of the perceptible, but the fictitious example was covered by the greater power of the factual, and considered as an original model granted through action. In Christian usage, the exemplum could be played off against heathen philosophy and its claim that knowledge of the true was reserved for conceptual thought and its logical means. The Christian conviction of the greater importance which must be due to the historically evident over the merely thought, to the eventful, percep-
tible act over the mere system of doctrine (*Christus primo docuit factis quam verbis*), can be a reason why the *exemplum* gained a new worth and literary rank with the spread of Christian teaching.

It is different with the Aesopian *fable*: it was employed as a textbook, rather like a child’s reader, for use in teaching Latin. An early adaptation, the so-called *Romulus Nilanitus*, to which the vernacular tradition referred since Marie de France’s *Esope*, indicates how the fable entered into the tradition of the Christian Middle Ages, although not altogether smoothly. The author-monk was evidently aware of the difficulties involved in making Aesopian fables serviceable to Christian instruction. The essential world of the classical fable is one in which all figures of the plot are inextricably bound to their natures, and are paradigmatic precisely because of the lack of freedom in their roles. The existential claim of Christian morality, on the contrary, demands room for the decision between good and evil. Between these two there gapes a contradiction which here was supposed to be bridged by a naive recourse to the Socratic doctrine that one does not knowingly do evil. For although the pious author subordinates Aesop to the Christian intention, *ostendi vias malorum, confirmavi vias bonorum*, he recognizes Aesop’s wisdom in showing us how to distinguish between the *humiles atque sapientes* and the *maliuros et insipientes*. The fable’s plot and its moral do not deviate so far from one another again in the later tradition of the genre. And yet the tensional relationship between plot model and doctrine remains the most interesting aspect of the “history of reception” of the fables of antiquity, the range of which was considerably broadened in the Middle Ages by the taking up of heterogeneous materials. Marie de France, for example, had no small difficulty in interpreting the Aesopian fable, with its inherent “theory of life for the subjugated,” for a knightly public. Her apology, therefore, unnecessarily turned out to be a powerful reinterpretation of the fable. Since fable and apology are related not as instance and rule, that is, not in a relationship of logical subsumption, but rather stand in a relationship of perceptible model and exemplary norm of action, then the genre itself has the freplay which each fable can reconcretize in the history of its reception.

Legend and tale stand opposed to one another in the system of the little genres of the Middle Ages, in that the supernaturalism of the legend is to be believed, while the wonders of the tale presuppose a “suspension of disbelief,” an enjoyment of the unreality of the action. And distanced from both of these genres is the farce, which in the medieval form of the *fabliau* denies both the supernatural truth of the legend and the inner-worldly transcendence of the tale, and instead presents the reality of the everyday life-world as an object of laughter.
In the medieval context I have only one historical remark to add to the description of the legend’s subuniverse as a world of the holy in the process of becoming evident, and to the definition of its modus recipiendi as imitabile, through which virtue is to become active and measurable. The perfection of perfectus, which does not allow for any change and which is exalted above pity and fear, evidently leaves so little room for the duration of active imitatio that the new norm of an imperfect hero had to be opposed to the twelfth-century model which had itself become unattainable. It was the fallible, quotidian bearer of the miracle of Mary who corresponded better to the need for sympathetic identification, but who then also could easily slip into a sentimental or magical relationship (e.g., with the holy as an emergency helper for all of life’s situations).

The tale, on the other hand, has not come down to us in the Romance tradition of the Middle Ages in its now-classical form which Jolles described with reference to Grimm’s fairy tales. There is, to be sure, a medieval Little Red Ridinghood in Egbert von Lütich’s Fecunda Ratis, and even in this version one can find the plot-structure of the tale-like inversion, according to which the hero knows the answer before the question has been posed—which in this case means that the girl already has the gift (a red baptismal garment) before she is able to recognize its use (as an instrument for escaping from the wolf). But the expected marvel of the tale proves to be one of divine intervention (Mitigat inmites animos, auctor eorum, 485) which then the later tradition of the tale also rejected as a heterogeneous marvel from a legend. As if the province of meaning of fairy-tale-like wish-fulfillment could not be tolerated on its own, the lai, which lives on its motifs, weaves in problems of courtly love; and the romance justifies it, when it discovers this province of meaning in the secretive aura of the matière de Bretagne, with the claim to interpret the adventure’s path to happiness as the experience of education through love.

The nine little genres, which in my classification might constitute a medieval correlative to Jolles’s system of simple forms, collectively suggest an analysis which considers the forms and pragmatics of exemplary discourse on the one hand and the gradual appearance of an autonomous narrator on the other. With this, I certainly do not mean to fuel the genetic illusion, as if it was a matter of a literary evolution which displayed continuity. The exemplary forms with their province of meaning remain permanently standing next to one another in synchrony: of course they exhibit diachronically internal changes of norms, but these do not reach the threshold at which autonomous narration first began. Referring to H.-J. Neuschäfer, this threshold can be defined as the temporalizing and problematizing
of the older little genres: temporalizing the paradigmatic as well as fictional plot-model (with this, the already narrative genres of the tale and the farce are also transformed), and problematizing the normative, preexisting significance (the exemplary genres were drawn into, and discussed within, the casuistry of life’s praxis). To be sure, the later production of novellas in their great quantity repeatedly fell back into the old exemplary and farcical models, their function in the life-world having in no way been discharged by the invention of a higher narrative genre. The system-individualizing dominant of the high form of the novella can still not be grasped better even today than through Jolles’s hypothesis of its medieval origin in the simple form of the case, which we also recognize in this period as a separate literary form.91

Thus our consideration ends with the genre which is the most complicated of the simple forms, and, with its open form, also the most modern. I began with a hermeneutic case which is complicated for the modern observer, but which, however, was not even a case yet for the medieval observer. As the motto says, it was still self-evident for the sage escriven, that “the old things and the new / only together are good and beautiful.” Why shouldn’t we also rediscover in this alterity of the Middle Ages an aspect of its modernity for us?92

(Translated by Timothy Bahti)

NOTES

1 See Introduction to Vol. I, Grundriss der romanischen Literaturen des Mittelalters (hereafter referred to as GRLMA) (Heidelberg, 1972), v–xii.
2 [For Jauss’s use of the concept of “concretization,” see Felix Vodička, “Konkretizace literáriního díla” (1941), in Struktura vývoje (Prague, 1969); and his own “Geschichte der Kunst und Historie,” in Literaturgeschichte als Provokation (Frankfurt, 1970), esp. pp. 246–49. Tr.]
3 The expression history of effect [Wirkungsgeschichte] distorts this state of affairs, as H. Blumenberg has already made clear for the history of the reception of myths: “Significance . . . is a result, and not an established supply or fund: myths do not ‘always already’ signify what they are interpreted or made out as being, but rather arrive at this out of the configurations into which they enter or into which they are brought. Polysomy is a consequence from their history of reception, reflecting upon their basic condition” (in Poetik und Hermeneutik, IV, ed. M. Fuhrmann [Munich, 1971], 66).
4 Pierre-Yves Badel, in his critique of Zumthor’s Poétique médiévale (in Poétique, 18 [1974], 259), has analyzed the considerably shrunken catalog of medieval texts which today still find more than a specialist’s interest; and he establishes why “the savor that one tastes in ‘old things’” is still a better approach to medieval literature than the new poetics of écriture.
6 According to C. S. Lewis, ibid. pp. 200, 203.
7 Above all in Peter Haidu’s critique, but also with Pierre-Yves Badel, Wolf-Dieter Stempel, and Eugene Vance; see n. 25.
8 Eugenio Coseriu, “Thesen zum Thema ‘Sprache und Dichtung,’” in Beiträge zur Textlinguistik, ed. Wolf-Dieter Stempel (Munich, 1971), p. 187. The language of medieval texts, as one from the past, makes the alterity of their world visible to us and at the same time, as one that is poetic, also makes this world accessible again in spite of the distance in time. That which, as a nuance of poetic expression, does not allow for accurate transmission only apparently stands opposed to the principal translatability of past poetry. All translation stands conditioned by the unending reception, that is, the progressive concretization of new significance, in view of which the ideal of a “true” or integral reproduction of the significance contained in a text in its supposed totality represents a substantialist illusion.
9 Essai de poétique médiévale (Paris, 1972), p. 42: “The diffusion of printing . . . renders the last blow to the old universe globally perceived by all the human senses; it dissociates it, reduces it to a visual and linear perception. The signification of writing modifies itself.” The estimate provided by Thomas Gossen gives a glimpse of this epochal change: at the end of the fifteenth century in France, out of approximately fifteen million persons, only about forty thousand could read.
10 [Jauiss’s use of the term aura refers to the central concept of Walter Benjamin’s examination of the work of art in the bourgeois era, in “Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit” (1936), now available in English in Illuminations, tr. Harry Zohn (New York, 1968), pp. 217–51. Tr.]
11 “Der Leser als Instanz einer neuen Geschichte der Literatur,” Poetica, 7 (1975), 341, from which I draw several passages in what follows.
13 One owes these insights to the Romance philologist Jean Rychner, who with his pioneering work, La chanson de geste: Essai sur l’art épique des jongleurs (Geneva, 1955), caused a change in paradigms in the study of Romance epics.
14 Daniel Poiron has brought to light the absence of the fixed form of a work in the case of the thirteenth-century prose romance: the various divisions and illustrations of different manuscripts yield so many interpretations by the scribes; and their practical use also indicates that such books were “an instrument that one manipulates, skims, consults, and reads slowly day after day” (“Roman en vers et Roman en prose,” in GRLMA, IV/1 [Heidelberg, 1977].)
15 The Discarded Image, p. 209.
17 “Their theology might be thought to imply an Earth which counted for a good deal in the universe and was central in dignity as well as in space; the odd thing is that their cosmology does not, in any obvious sense, encourage this view”: “Imagination and Thought in the Middle Ages,” ibid., p. 46.
18 The Discarded Image, p. 220.
19 Ibid., p. 204.
20 Ibid., p. 211: “For the aim is not self-expression or ‘creation’; it is to hand on the ‘historial’ matter worthly; not worthly of your own genius or of the poetic art but of the matter itself.”
22 Borst therefore prefers verbal and written sources, with the reference “that medieval works of art illustrate the forms of life atmospherically, but do not imitate them in the risk of their performance” (ibid., p. 22).


30  The lion in *Yvain* (cited in *ibid.*, p. 3b), who almost commits suicide, can also be related to the guilty conscience of his lord as a contrasting reflection, which at the very least makes the comedy ambivalent.


32  *Ibid.*, pp. 3b, 4b. [Haug's formulation directly echoes those of Walter Benjamin's “Geschichtsphilosophische Thesen” (1940): “The awareness that they are about to make the continuum of history explode is characteristic of the revolutionary classes at the moment of their action” (XV); and “The historical materialist...remains in control of his powers, man enough to blast open the continuum of history” (XVI); in English in *Illuminations*, pp. 261, 262. Tr.]

33  See *ibid.*, p. 2a.

34  See *ibid.*, p. 3c.


36  *GRLMA*, p. xii.


39  Günther Buck in his review, in *Ruperto-Carola*, vol. 25, p. 294.


41  According to A. Borst, “Statement” to *Poetik und Hermeneutik*, VIII (forthcoming).

42  A. Borst, “Barbarossia 1971,” in *Poetik und Hermeneutik* VII.

43  Representative of the contemporary interest is on the one hand, *Verbum et Signum—Beiträge zur mediävistischen Bedeutungsforschung: Festschrift für Friedrich Ohly*, ed. H. Fromm, W. Harms, and U. Ruberg (Munich, 1975); on the other hand, *Poétique*, No. 23, devoted to the problem of “Rhétorique et herméneutique.”


48  The most informative evidence for this (and a tidbit for *Ideologiekritik!*) is from Jean de Grouchy’s *De Musica* (late thirteenth century): “That song is to be offered to the aged
and the working people and the common people, consulting it while resting from work, and hearing of the miseries and calamities of others, they might suffer their own more easily, and one may undertake his (own) work with more eagerness"; commented upon by Daniel Poirion, "Chanson de geste ou épopée?", Travaux de linguistique et de littérature, Université de Strasbourg, 10, No. 2 (1972), 13.

49 For particulars see Poetik und Hermeneutik I/II (1968), 601, 602.

50 "Die literarischen Formen der Jenseits- und Endzeitvisionen," in GRLMA, VI/1, 184–89.

51 Ibid., p. 186.

52 Alfred Adler, Sens et composition du Jeu de la Feuilée (Ann Arbor, 1956).


54 Its theological origin lies in the commentaries on Genesis, the richness of which—still unexploited by literary history—is best presented in Reinhold R. Grimm, Paradisis coelestis—Paradisus terrestris: Zur Auslegungsgeschichte des Paradieses im Abendland (Munich, 1976).


58 See the comprehensive report on research by K. W. Kempfer, Gattungstheorie: Information und Synthese (Munich, 1973). I agree with his own synthesis in the definition of genres as "communicative norms," but not in its constructivist foundation, as the following shall make clear.

59 Synchronie, Diachronie und Geschichte: Das Problem des Sprachwandels (Munich, 1974).


61 [Jauss is using the concept of the dominanta, developed by the Russian formalists Eichenbaum and Tynyanov to describe the dominant quality or distinguishing feature of a literary work, usually the preeminence in the text of a particular property or of a particular group of elements. Tr.]


63 See K. W. Kempfer, Gattungstheorie: Information und Synthese, and the volume, Les genres de la littérature populaire (Poétique, No. 19 [1974]).

64 I rely here on the still-unpublished results of the seminar which I gave in July, 1976, at the Centre d'Études médiévales in Poitiers; and on my students' monographs, which are indicated in n. 92.

65 Essai de poétique médiévale, p. 392.


68 Objection raised by Wolf-Dieter Stempel, who provides examples for this and who draws this conclusion from his whole critique: "One only becomes aware of this if one does not do away with the characteristic differences between the individual types of texts as 'superficial differences' which can be traced back to a common deep-structure. . . . For then either this deep-structure . . . proves to be insignificant, or else the superficial differences are in reality the same as the 'deep' ones" (Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen, p. 452).

69 Formen der "Volkspoesie" (Berlin, 1968), p. 60.
71 See Bausinger, Formen der "Volkspoesie," p. 54.
73 Ibid., p. 23.
74 Einfache Formen, p. 196.
75 The Structures of the Life-World, p. 25.
76 Here I refer to my more extensive argument in my recently published book Ästhetische Erfahrung und literarische Hermeneutik (Munich, 1977).
78 According to Thomas Holapfl, in his University of Constance dissertation on this genre (in preparation).
79 In the Provençal devinalh the riddle was raised to the level of a special, esoteric lyric form; see N. Pasero in Cultura neolatina, 28 (1968), 1–34.
81 Einfache Formen, p. 74.
82 See H. Bausinger, Formen der "Volkspoesie," p. 178: "The saga... seeks to banish the unheard of, the inexplicable, and that which oversteps the quotidian norms, to banish them into the explanatory categories and forms which have been prepared by folk beliefs and in traditional patterns of motifs. Thus the uncanny is not only experienced in the saga, but also exercised and banished."
83 The basic contradiction between ruled experience and the reality of life which is never capable of being contained was presented most profoundly by Cervantes in the relationship of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza; I have written of this elsewhere, in "Über den Grund des Vergnügens am comischen Helden," in Poetik und Hermeneutik VI.
85 Paul Ricoeur characterized the intention of specifically biblical modes of discourse such as metaphor, eschatological aphorisms, and proverblike sayings as "to dissuade the hearer from the plan of making something which displays continuity out of his life," in Evangelische Theologie (special issue on metaphor) (Munich, 1974), p. 67.
86 In what follows I borrow several sentences from my statement on the exemplary in Positionen der Negativität (Poetik und Hermeneutik VI), ed. Harald Weinrich (Munich, 1976), pp. 311 ff.
87 In what follows I am referring back to the first chapter of my Untersuchungen zur mittelalterlichen Tierdichtung (Tübingen, 1959), pp. 24–55.
89 A formulation with which M.-L. Tenèze has enriched the research of tales with a fundamental category, in "Du conte merveilleux comme genre," Arts et traditions populaires, 18 (1970), 11.
90 Boccaccio und der Beginn der Novellistik (Munich, 1969).
91 See Paul Zumthor, Essai de poétique médiévale, p. 403, on Martial d'Auvergne's Arrêts d'Amour.
Appendix: An Overview of the Little Literary Genre of Exemplary Discourse in the Middle Ages

1. Communicative Situation

1.1. Who speaks? Who is addressed?

An anonymous authority (I, we), a speech which is passed on (even to itself)

A renowned authority, to believers and the still unsignificant (Jesus and his disciples)

A textually learned exegete, to the lay public

Originally, the speaker to a gathering; legitimated through custom as an author

1.2. Modus Dictendi

Citing a proverb in an imagined and pointed "one sentence" form

Appellative (anti-dogmatic) preaching of a doctrine

Interpretation through allegorization (aliud verbiis, aliud sensu ostendit)

Persuasion through a feigned example

1.3. Province of Meaning

1.3.1. Space

For the most part, a peasanitike environment

The everyday world of experience (including work); the spatially and temporally nearest things often in relation to the farthest things

The world as the stage for salvation history, the events of which are related to the present time

Reduction of contingency to a world under the sheer conditions of the action; constant circumstances

1.3.2. Time

Natural cycles

Known (often complementary) characters (therefore animals are favored), foreseeable roles

1.3.3. Agents

Living beings and things (each representing its species)

Relationships between men, also events in nature

Man in contrast to God and the powers of the world

Model for the perceptual recognition of a rule of action

1.3.4. Plot model

For the most part, bipartite and with a pointe (in a contrasting illustration)

Piercing the probable

Human action within the framework of salvation history of the Fall and Redemption

What am I getting into when I take on this role?

1.4. Message (an answer to . . .)

What does everyday experience say about this instance?

What should I do, in order to experience the truth?

What must I do in order to stand before God's judgment?

The world of purposively rational action

1.4.1. Message (an answer to . . .)

What should I do, in order to experience the truth?

What must I do in order to stand before God's judgment?

The world of purposely rational action

1.4.2. Province of Meaning

The world within an ironic perspective of resignation: "Such is life!"

The Kingdom of God as the hidden meaning of the world

The world in the light of dogmatically interpreted belief

2. The Relationship to Tradition

2.1. Diachronically

Widely spread in the vernacular tradition: in the Middle Ages, also built into the fabliau and the romance, commented upon in the Proverbs and Jael

Originally of an appellative function, in the Middle Ages assimilated into allegorical instruction (the didactic)

Autochthonous medieval genre for the instruction of laymen (after the end of the twelfth century)

In ancient rhetoric, a form of inductive proof, in the Middle Ages, broadened through Dick-and-Jane-like usage

2.2. Synchronously

Vs. the preceptive maxim

Vs. the aphorism: favoring the exception, not the rule; vs. allegory: not to be decoded with a key (or a dogma)

Protest of the spiritual poet against the fictions of worldly courtly poetry

Vs. the exemplum, which requires a historical precedent

3. Place in Life

3.1. Modus Recipiendi

Called in to comment upon a situation which has arisen

Imitatio as a unity of recognition and action

Recognition and decoding of duplex sententia (parole coverta—parole overt)

Taking in a doctrine per analogiam

3.2. Model of Behavior

Resignation or irony

A conversion which is demanded (Du musst dein Leben anders! [Rilke])

Christian norms for leading one's life (virtue vs. vice)

Self-recognition within a role

3.3. Social (ideological) Function

A stock of everyday experiences shared by speaker and hearer, which for the most part evaluates the world negatively

Formation or legitimation of a religious group-identity (a parabolically hidden discourse renders protection against those that are not among the chosen)

Reinforcement of orthodox belief

Explanation of worldly wisdom, often formulated from the perspective of the oppressed
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXEMPLUM</th>
<th>LEGEND</th>
<th>TALE</th>
<th>JOKE (Fabliau)</th>
<th>NOVELLA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The authority of a teacher, to one willing to learn</td>
<td>An anonymous witness, to the community of believers</td>
<td>An anonymous narrator: a figure of folk wisdom, to a naive circle of listeners (the chain from &quot;old&quot; to &quot;young&quot;)</td>
<td>For the most part, an anonymous narrator, to a circle of hearers who seek entertainment</td>
<td>A narrator who appears as being individual and well known, to a reading public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstration through a historical precedent</td>
<td>Testimony of a holy life</td>
<td>Narration as if no given of reality were operative</td>
<td>Narration aimed at a witty pointe</td>
<td>Narration in open tension (&quot;if-anything&quot;), and without any predecided significance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factum probabile, laudabile, memorabile, localized in space and time</td>
<td>Signlike, restricted to events which stand in the relation: active virtue—confirming marvel</td>
<td>Familiar, closed space vs. strange, outer space</td>
<td>Everyday environment with the multiplicity of human activities, yet with caricaturelike optics</td>
<td>Historical concretization of place and time, a new circumstantiality and license to describe even the &quot;unsayable&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A famed person, exemplary through an action</td>
<td>Famed, canonized person; the community-in-the-making vs. the unbelieving; the dualism of supernatural powers</td>
<td>The hero as the transgressor of boundaries; pairs of agents (according to Propp and Greimas)</td>
<td>Typical personae, mostly of the lower ranks (distinguished by cunning and folly)</td>
<td>Individuated personae in social roles and conflicts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plot details related to a timeless moral type (conversion, facit ad rem est narrandum)</td>
<td>Typified in: predestination, crisis (the Passion), and posthumous influence</td>
<td>Happenings which occur within the principle of the miraculous (&quot;adventure&quot; vs. epic action)</td>
<td>Plot details related to the discrepancy between expectation and fulfillment</td>
<td>An unheard-of incident which raises a moral case</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What does the past teach me about the future?</td>
<td>How can virtue become visible in a man?</td>
<td>What would the world be like if our wishes were fulfilled?</td>
<td>Where can the events manifest their cheerful side?</td>
<td>According to which norm is this event to be evaluated?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The world of stories as a wealth of experience</td>
<td>The world of the holy in the course of becoming manifest</td>
<td>The world of dreamlike wish fulfillment</td>
<td>The world without a higher truth, as the object of laughter</td>
<td>The world in the autonomous problematic of intersubjective experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In antiquity: a mythic-historical paradigm in rhetoric: usage in Christianity: an instrument for the structuring of laymen (movere et probare)</td>
<td>First specifically formed in the era of Christian belief: a substratum of the political legends of the modern age</td>
<td>Widely spread in the folk tradition; in the Middle Ages, only a substratum to the lar and the Arthurian romance</td>
<td>Widely spread in the folklore tradition; in antiquity; a farce of the gods, apophthegma, facetiae; a special medieval form: the farces of the animal epic</td>
<td>Shaped by Boccaccio as an autonomous form through the temporizing and problematizing of older genres (examplem, miracle, farce, and vita)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical authenticity vs. logical proof, and vs. eridged examples</td>
<td>Vs. the miracle (with its imperfect holy ones), and vs. the exemplum (where virtue is an act of will)</td>
<td>Vs. the saga (rooted in the collective memory), and vs. the legend (a believed miracle)</td>
<td>In contrast to the symbolism of the spiritual, as well as to the idealism of worldly genres</td>
<td>Removed from the world of rigid poetry, as well as from the genres teaching a direct moral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing a rule of action in the precedent</td>
<td>Admiring identification (vs. sympathetic identification in the miracle)</td>
<td>Enjoying the other world of fiction</td>
<td>Stupefaction, pleasure in the pointe, a laughing recognition</td>
<td>Surprise and reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imitable, that excites toward virtue or warns against vice</td>
<td>Imitable, where virtue becomes active, measurable, conceivable</td>
<td>Relief from the stress and earnestness of the everyday</td>
<td>Suspension of the norms and taboos of the ordered life</td>
<td>An educated public's discussion submitted to moral casuistry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exempla maiorum in a legitimating function; historia docet in a moralizing function removed from aesthetic identification</td>
<td>Broadening and confirmation of belief: practically, the ability to appeal to the holy (saints' names, emergency help)</td>
<td>The utopia of a happy world, awakened through poetic justice</td>
<td>Only a contrasting &quot;realism,&quot; relieved from norms without having to call them into question</td>
<td>Conversation as a form of &quot;emotional observation of secular life,&quot; and of reflection upon social norms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>