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THE VALUATION OF LITERATURE:
TRIANGULATING THE RHETORICAL WITH THE ECONOMIC METAPHOR

by

Melissa B. Gustafson

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Master of English
Department of English
Brigham Young University
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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

As chair of the candidate's graduate committee, I have read the dissertation of Melissa B. Gustafson in its final form and have found that (1) its format, citations, and bibliographical style are consistent and acceptable and fulfill university and department style requirements; (2), its illustrative materials including figures, tables, and charts are in place; and (3) the final manuscript is satisfactory to the graduate committee and is ready for submission to the university library.

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ABSTRACT

THE VALUATION OF LITERATURE: TRIANGULATING THE RHETORICAL WITH THE ECONOMIC METAPHOR

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Several theorists, including the Marxist theorists Trevor Ross, Walter Benjamin, and M.H. Abrams, have proposed theories to explain the eighteenth-century shift from functional to aesthetic conceptions of literature. Their explanations attribute the change to an increasingly consumer-based society (and the resulting commoditization of books), the development of the press, the rise of the middle class, and increased access to books. When we apply the cause-effect relationships which these theorists propose to the contexts of nineteenth-century America, Communist East Germany, WWII America, and 9/11 America, however, the causes don't correlate with the effects they theoretically predict. This disjunction suggests a re-examination of these three theories and possibly the Marxist basis which they share. I suggest that by triangulating rhetorical theory with Marxist theory we will gain a more comprehensive understanding of society's valuation of literature.

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Table of Contents

Chapter I: The Theories	1
The Eighteenth Century Change.....	2
The Theories	15
M. H. Abrams—Rise of the Middle Class.....	16
Trevor Ross—Consumption-Based Society	18
Walter Benjamin—the Mechanical Reproduction of a Work of Art.....	20
Conclusion	21
Chapter II: Nineteenth-Century America	24
Nineteenth-Century America’s Economic Climate	24
Rise of the Middle Class.....	24
Printing Presses in Nineteenth-century America	27
Consumer-based Climate	29
Results.....	33
Moral Instrumentality in the Nineteenth-Century.....	33
Political Instrumentality in the Nineteenth-Century	38
Chapter III: Communist East Germany and WWII America	43
American vs. East German Economic Environments.....	43
American economic environment—Consumer based.....	43
The East German Economic Environment—Producer based.....	44
Results.....	55
The East German Writer’s Congress	55
The American Writer’s Congress	64

Chapter IV: 9/11	67
A Change in Subject Matter.....	70
A Change in Consumer Attitudes	76
Methodology	76
Results.....	87
Books with a Higher Functional Value Sold Better After 9/11 than others	89
A Connection to Eighteenth-Century Bookshops in the Netherlands.....	90
Results in Terms of Ross, Benjamin, and Abrams	92
Chapter V: Conclusion	94
Triangulation Point #1: Allow an Un-limited Range of Motives/Factors	95
Triangulation Point #2—Acknowledge the effects of human agency and discussion	105
Works Cited	117

Table of Figures

Figure 1: 9/11 associated change in how society values literature based on the ratio of functional comments to aesthetic ones in <i>Amazon.com</i> customer reviews.....	88
Figure 2: A comparison of the average functional/aesthetic comment ratios for books which were generally popular in the year before and after 9/11/2001 and those books which rose in popularity in the two weeks following 9/11.....	90
Figure 3: Critical Space in 1976 Dutch Literary Field.....	106

Chapter I

The Theories

This week, driving to the airport and listening to our local classical music radio station, I learned that Tchaikowsky's *Swan Lake*, destined to become one of the most popular ballets of all time, was an initial flop. Reviewers considered its four-hour performance only a little short of torture, and they said as much in their reviews. Apparently, it was only later as it was revived in another time and place that it gained the popularity it enjoys today. As I drove along, listening, I realized that *Swan Lake*'s tale is a familiar one. Literary history is cluttered, in fact, with stories like it, featuring authors who were once famous, but have since faded from public memory, or similarly, works which were once relatively unknown, but have since been read, studied, praised, and anthologized. These rags-to-riches stories are fun ones to tell, but they also point to a rather intriguing mystery, a riddle which would be the book industry's golden goose (should one ever manage to unravel it): What factors determine society's taste in literature?

This mystery has drawn in a number of good detectives, including Trevor Ross, Walter Benjamin, and M.H. Abrams, and one of their primary crime scenes (to continue the analogy) has been the eighteenth century. The latter half of the eighteenth century saw a substantial shift in purposes for reading and definitions of literature—a shift which Ross, Benjamin, and Abrams attribute to material/economic alterations in a tapestry of change. However, when we test the economically based cause-effect relationships which these theorists propose in other historical contexts (such as nineteenth-century America, Communist East Germany, WWII America, and twenty-first century America), we find that the economic causes Ross, Benjamin, and Abrams propose don't always correlate with the effects they predict.

Because the reasons for this failure seem to me to be related to the small number of possible motives or factors which Marxist theories allow, as well as their disengagement from the felt motives of their subjects and their blindness to the potential of both human agency and dialectical discussion to influence society's view of literature, I suggest that we consider using a rhetorical approach to triangulate the question. While rhetoric and Marxism share an interest in societal influences, rhetoric allows for a much broader range of possible motives for human behavior. Furthermore, rhetoric remains connected to the felt motives of its subjects, and it is able to take into account the impact of human agency and discussion.

The Eighteenth Century Change

While the eighteenth century literary shift which Ross, Benjamin and Abrams attempt to explain is now a much more disputed phenomenon than it once was,¹ as Joost Kloek writes, "Literary historians agree that [during the eighteenth century] a dramatic shift took place in the production and the consumption of literature."² It was a shift not only in the physical aspects of the literary sphere (i.e. readership, title production, genres) but, according to several scholars (including Ross, Benjamin and Abrams), it was also a shift in society's attitudes and ways of valuing literature.

Most scholars place this shift, sometimes dramatically called "the reading revolution," somewhere in the later half of the 1700's. Rolf Engelsing, for instance, believes it began around

¹ Jose de Kruif explains that "The hazy picture of developments within the book-market as a result of a lack of analytical precision has become a cliché, and may well have led Darnton to upbraid his fellow researchers for concluding that 'the novel, just like the bourgeoisie, is for-ever rising'" R Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985) 250 cited in Jose de Kruif, "Classes of Readers: Owners of Books in 18th-century The Hague," *Poetics* 28 (2001):426. See also Barbara M. Benedict, "The Eighteenth-Century Anthology and the Construction of the Expert Reader," *Poetics* 28 (2001): 378, and Alberto Martino, *Letktüre und Leser in Norddeutschland im 18. Jahrhundert. Zu der Veröffentlichung der Ausleihbücher der HerzogßAugustßBibliothek Wolfenbüttel*. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1993) 479-494 cited in Joost Kloek, "Reconsidering the Reading Revolution: The Thesis of the 'Reading Revolution' and a Dutch Bookseller's Clientele around 1800," *Poetics* 26 (1999): 290.

² Kloek 289.

1750,³ and Ross claims the year 1774.⁴ Abrams sees earlier hints of it in England, (where he claims the trend emerged) as early as 1710 “in the writings of Joseph Addison and the third Earl of Shaftesbury,” although, Abrams admits, it reached a fuller development in Germany in Immanuel Kant’s writings of 1790.⁵

Geographically, research on the reading revolution has primarily examined Western Europe. Joost Kloek reports that researchers working during the 1980s and 1990s have identified “[a]n increase in book production, the growth in secular and popularizing reading matter and complaints about the avid consumption of reading matter, especially by readers from the lower social strata” in Germany, England, France, the Scandinavian countries, the Netherlands, and even New England.⁶ However, the original concepts of the reading revolution initially involved two countries: Germany and England,⁷ and many theorists, including our three theorists (Ross, Benjamin, and Abrams) largely maintain this focus. In 1912, Rudolph Jetzsch, one of the earliest theorists on the topic, completed a study examining the books for sale at the *Leipziger Messe* in 1740, 1770 and 1800 and noted a late eighteenth century shift in the

³ Kloek 292.

⁴ Trevor Ross, “The Emergence of ‘Literature’: Making and Reading the English Canon in the Eighteenth Century,” *ELH* 63 (1996): 410.

⁵ Abrams, “Art-As-Such: The Sociology of Modern Aesthetics,” *Doing Things with Texts: Essays in Criticism and Critical Theory*, ed. Michael Fischer (New York: Norton, 1989) 138-9.

⁶ Kloek is referring to the work of Robert Darnton, “Readers Respond to Rousseau: The Fabrication of Romantic Sensitivity,” *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*, (New York: Vintage, 1985) 249-251; Robert Darnton, “First Steps Towards a History of Reading,” *The Kiss of Lamourette. Reflections in Cultural History*, (London, Faber and Faber, 1990) 165; J. J. Kloek, “Lezen als Levensbehoefte. Roman en Romanpubliek in de Tweede Helft van de 18e eeuw,” *Literature* 1 (1984):136-142; Jan Fergus and Ruth Portner, “Provincial Bookselling in Eighteenth Century England: The Case of John Clay Reconsidered,” *Studies in Bibliography* 40 (1987):157; Margareta Björkman “Circulating Libraries in Late Eighteenth Century Stockholm,” *Documentatieblad Werkgroep Eeuw* 23(1991): 195; and William J. Gilmore *Reading Becomes a Necessity of Life: Material and Cultural Life in Rural New England, 178-1835* (Knoxville, TN: U of Tennessee P, 1989) 18; cited in Kloek 294.

⁷ Kloek 294.

production and consumption of literature in Germany. Ten years later, in 1922, Herbert Schöffler suggested a similar change in England.⁸ In 1974, Rolf Engelsing coined the term, “the reading revolution,”⁹ and wrote the 343 page work, *Der Bürger als Leser* (The Citizen as Reader) describing the eighteenth century change in Germany and attributing it (as Abrams also does) to a rising middle class’s desire to emulate the elite.¹⁰ In 1982, J.H. Plumb applied a version of Engelsing’s thesis to England, but argued that book production increased in the eighteenth century because the middle class now had more money to spend on books, and not because they were necessarily trying to prove themselves to the upper class.¹¹

Two of our three theorists also investigate England and/or Germany. In 1989, M.H. Abrams wrote of the change as it occurred in both England and Germany, since, as he claims, this shift “emerged in England and was developed in Germany,”¹² and in 1996 Trevor Ross wrote his article on the English change, “The Emergence of ‘Literature’: Making and Reading the English Canon in the Eighteenth Century.” Walter Benjamin is unique among our three theorists, in that, (as far as I can tell) he confines his observations to no such geographical area.

To give weight to their hypotheses, most researchers arguing for the eighteenth century shift generally point to a number of outward societal changes in the book market including a shift in genre, an increase in title production, an expansion of readership and several new institutional developments such as the lending library and reading circle.

⁸ Kloek 291.

⁹ Benedict 378.

¹⁰ Kruif 42.

¹¹ Kruif 42.

¹² Abrams, “Art-As-Such” 141.

One of the eighteenth century's most obvious changes was a shift in which genres its authors produced. Particularly well known is the advent of the novel, whose creator (at least according to Defoe) was the eighteenth-century-ite Samuel Richardson.¹³ Richardson and other eighteenth century authors such as Henry Fielding, Tobias Smolett, and Laurence Sterne are generally given credit as some of the first to write in the novel genre,¹⁴ and their work paved the way for the well-known novelists of the nineteenth-century such as Charles Dickens and Jane Austen.¹⁵ Yet, in addition to the novel, other genres, such as the anthology,¹⁶ the periodical essay, the newspaper, and landscape poetry also rose in prominence during the eighteenth-century,¹⁷ while older genres such as the epic, the song book, the sonnet, the allegory and the emblem book slipped quietly away.¹⁸

In addition to a shift in genres, literary historians have also noted that the raw number of titles produced in Europe rose substantially in the eighteenth century. As an example, Jose Kruif cites French title production, which leapt from 500-1000 new titles per year in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, to about 4000 new titles per year in the eighteenth century—between four to eight times as many!¹⁹ Similarly, as Kruif continues, German title production rose from 1200

¹³ M.H. Abrams, Editor, "The Restoration and the Eighteenth Century" The Norton Anthology of English Literature sixth ed. Vol. 1 (New York: Norton, 1993): 1767-1786. 1784.

¹⁴ Abrams admits, however, that while Richardson is credited with the first novel, there were predecessors to the genre before the eighteenth century, including Greek and French Romances, Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and Behn's *Oroonoko*.

¹⁵ Abrams "The Restoration" 1784-1785.

¹⁶ Benedict 377.

¹⁷ I acknowledge Nancy Christiansen's help and expertise here

¹⁸ Kloek 289.

¹⁹ Kruif 424.

new titles in 1764 to 4000 new titles in the year 1800²⁰—certainly a substantial growth. As a possible result, it was also during this time that writing was able to emerge as a profession.

Abrams explains: “By Dr. Johnson’s time, [1709-1784] in Germany as well as England, there existed for the first time a reading public in the modern sense, large enough to support, though in many instances on a level of bare subsistence, a substantial number of writers by the books they bought.”²¹

Furthermore, during the eighteenth century, the number (and variety) of readers surged. Benedict notes, “By the eighteenth century, not only professionals from the middle classes, but merchants, tradesmen, women from the aristocracy to the peasantry, urban servants and even laborers were reading.”²² This was due in part to increased educational opportunities and an expanding literacy,²³ but was also due to a number of institutional developments which made access to books less expensive. One of these was the development of the commercial lending library (“from which books could be rented for a limited period”) and another was the reading circle (which “bought books collectively and circulated them among [its] members”).²⁴ These two developments, in Kloek’s words, “were equipped, so to speak, to by-pass the purchasing of books as a precondition for reading.”²⁵ Unsurprisingly, many scholars link the development of the commercial library and the reading circle to the reading revolution.

²⁰ Kruif 424.

²¹ Abrams, “Art-As-Such” 145.

²² Benedict 382.

²³ Engelsing spends an entire chapter on the educational improvements which took place in Germany during the eighteenth century. Rolf Engelsing, *Der Bürger als Leser* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzlersche, 1974) 137-162.

²⁴ Kloek 301.

²⁵ Kloek 301.

But accompanying these eighteenth century historical changes in genre, production and readership, was, our three theorists claim, a change in what society valued in their literature—a shift in what people were looking for in the literature they read, wrote, praised and published. It was a shift which (as Ross, Benjamin, and Abrams describe it) was a change from what I will call a functional perspective to an aesthetic one.

Before the eighteenth century the way our theorists describe common conceptions of literature might be termed “functional.” Ross claims that before the 1700s, literature was intended to fulfill a “social function,”²⁶ promot[e] virtue,²⁷ and serve a “utility within a moral order.”²⁸ Pre-1700s society, according to Ross, valued literature—poesy, as they termed it—as a moral or didactic instrument in society—an instrument, says Ross, whose “value was measured wholly by its utility within a moral order that was determined less by economic profit than by symbolism, rhetoric, and representation.”²⁹ As an example, Ross alludes to Sir Phillip Sidney’s famous 1595 statement that poesy exists “to teach and delight.”³⁰ One of the things which literature was expected to teach was virtue, as Ross explains as he quotes/paraphrases the words of the 1730s schoolmaster, John Clarke, who wrote that “‘The Value therefore of the several Parts of Literature is to be measured by their Tendency;’ at the top for the promotion of virtue.”³¹ But literature was also a political teacher. Ross elaborates:

²⁶ Ross 397.

²⁷ Ross 404.

²⁸ Ross 399.

²⁹ Ross 399.

³⁰ Sir Philip Sidney, “An Apology for Poetry,” *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (New York: Norton, 2001) 331.

³¹ Ross 404.

In Cicero's much cited version, no other force approaches the power of poetic eloquence in helping "to gather scattered humanity into one place, or to lead it out of its brutish existence in the wilderness up to our present condition of civilization as men and as citizens, or, after the establishment of social communities, to give shape to laws, tribunals, and civic rights."³²

In short, for Ross, pre-1700s literature "was functional and select reading."³³

Benjamin concurs with Ross's functional estimation of pre-1700s literature. He claims that the pre-1700s story genre was one which (in contrast to the later genre of the novel) was inherently useful. In his essay, "The Storyteller," he writes:

An orientation toward practical interests is characteristic of many born storytellers. [. . . Every real story] contains, openly or covertly, something useful. The usefulness may, in one case consist in a moral; in another, in some practical advice; in a third in a proverb or maxim.³⁴

In another essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Benjamin adds that before the advent of a mechanical reproduction of art³⁵ people valued the arts primarily for their ritualistic "use value."³⁶ As an example, Benjamin reminds us that some of the earliest art—cave

³² Cicero, "Of Oratory" trans. E.W. Sutton and H. Rackham *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present*, ed. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg (Boston: St. Martin's Press, 1990) 204, qtd in Ross 417.

³³ Ross 405.

³⁴ Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller," *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969) 86.

³⁵ Benjamin claims that the shift away from the cult value of art and towards the exhibition value of art became apparent in the Renaissance and continued for three centuries, (1500-1800?) reaching a new climax in 1900 with the development of the photograph. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969) 224, 226.

³⁶ Benjamin "The Work" 224-225.

paintings—functioned not as aesthetic objects for enjoyment, but as magical objects which petitioned the spirits for a good hunt.³⁷ These paintings were a means to an end external to themselves, serving what Benjamin called a “ritual function.”³⁸

Abrams agrees with Ross and Benjamin that pre-1700’s readers considered literature not as an end in itself, but rather as an instrument of the social and political world. According to Abrams, it was “doctrinal or utilitarian or instructional”³⁹ and was generally seen as “thoroughly embedded in a particular institution or event, and as an integral component in a complex of human activities and functions.”⁴⁰

Several other researchers also agree with Ross, Benjamin and Abrams’ estimations. Rolf Engelsing, for example, calls pre-1700’s literature the “church-true personal library”⁴¹ and refers to these books as “books that supported the citizen in his position and helped him to endure as he lived.”⁴² Engelsing claims they offered “rules of conduct”⁴³ and “moved the people internally as Christians,” although according to Engelsing, they often offered merely “stereotyped recipes.”⁴⁴ As Kloek summarizes from Engelsing, pre-1700s literature was of “an improving nature.”⁴⁵

³⁷ Benjamin “The Work” 225.

³⁸ Benjamin “The Work” 224.

³⁹ Abrams, “Art-As-Such” 145.

⁴⁰ Abrams, “Art-As-Such” 149.

⁴¹ “kirchentreuen Hausbibliothek” Engelsing 182.

⁴² “An die Stelle des Buches, das den Bürger in seinem Stand bestätigte und ihm dayu verhalf, so fortzuleben, wie er lebte, trat eine [. . .]” Engelsing 182.

⁴³ “Verhaltensregeln” Engelsing 182.

⁴⁴ “Die Lektüre berührte die Bürger innerlich als Christen [. . .] stereotype Rezepte anboten.” Engelsing 182-3

⁴⁵ Kloek 292.

Northrop Frye concurs: “Nearly every work of art in the past had a social function in its own time, a function which was often not primarily an aesthetic function at all.”⁴⁶

In short, Ross, Benjamin, and Abrams (among others) see pre-1700’s literature as a literature intended to (and judged on its ability to) serve a function outside itself and be a means to an end—be it a moral, political, social, or instructional end. I will call this way of valuing literature a “functional” one.

But Ross, Benjamin, and Abrams characterize post-1700s ways of valuing literature quite differently from the overtly functional approach of the pre-1700s. They characterize it more “aesthetically.” Rather than being valued for its overt functionality and didacticism, Ross describes post-1700s literature as “allied neither to politics nor religion”⁴⁷ and Benjamin describes it as “devoid of counsel.”⁴⁸ This doesn’t mean, of course, that post-1700s literature no longer fulfilled *any* function in society; it just means that the function it fulfilled was now less overt, more subtly couched than it had been. Post-1700s literature was, in other words, hardly expected to be the didactic literature which society demanded a century earlier. Instead, Ross suggests that post-1700s literature was judged by its “literary merit,”⁴⁹ that it was “self-referential”⁵⁰ and was tied to taste, judgment and imagination.⁵¹ Rather than being read for

⁴⁶ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton U P, 1957) 344-345, qtd in Ross 397.

⁴⁷ Ross 411.

⁴⁸ Benjamin, “The Storyteller” 87.

⁴⁹ Ross 409.

⁵⁰ Ross 409.

⁵¹ Ross 408.

moral edification, Ross claims that it was often read with “detachment” and “without any other reason than the desire of pleasure.”⁵²

As an example, Ross points to the advent of Belles Lettres—a new distinction which arose in the eighteenth century to distinguish fictional, creative, “beautiful” literature from the technical, philosophic, moralistic, scientific, and rhetorical discourse with which, as Rene Wellek summarizes, it had formerly been grouped. Wellek writes: “To speak sweepingly one can say, summarizing, that in antiquity and in the Renaissance, literature or letters were understood to include all writing of quality with any pretense to permanence.”⁵³ However, during the eighteenth century, the definition of “literature” narrowed. Wellek continues, “The view that there is an art of literature, which includes both poetry and prose insofar as it is imaginative fiction, and excludes information or even rhetorical persuasion, didactic argumentation or historical narration, emerged only slowly in the eighteenth century.”⁵⁴ During the eighteenth century, then, we see the beginning of a narrowing in the definition of the word “literature” away from the practical, functional writings which it had formerly encompassed towards “artistic” or aesthetic works.

From Ross’s perspective, it is hardly coincidence that the first chair of Belles Lettres, Hugh Blair, was appointed in 1762. His appointment pointed to the gradual replacement of the humanist core of rhetoric by Belles Lettres. While the humanist curriculum employed reading functionally as a strategy to teach *facilitas*, or eloquence, skills intended to outfit the individual

⁵² Ross 412, 410.

⁵³ Rene Wellek, *What is literature* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1978) 20.

⁵⁴ Wellek 20.

for political and communal life by teaching “both reason and speech,”⁵⁵ Belles Lettres existed simply for the pleasure of reading alone. Belles Lettres, Ross summarizes, “are works that have no palpable designs on the reader.”⁵⁶ They are “works she may read and criticize at will for their beauty alone.”⁵⁷

This aesthetic shift is evident even in Blair’s lectures on “Rhetoric and Belles Lettres” in which, as Bizzell and Herzberg, point out, Blair “gives most [of his] attention to ‘polite’ literature”—the aesthetic Belles Lettres, rather than the more functionally oriented rhetorical genres.⁵⁸ Bizzell and Herzberg continue that, “modern scholars [including Gregory Clark and Michael Halloran] have charged that Blair shifted the attention of educators ‘away from deliberative, forensic, and epideictic discourse and toward poetic discourse’”—a shift which “downgrade[s] publicly *useful* forms of rhetoric.”⁵⁹ The rise of the aesthetically-oriented Belles Lettres and its replacement of the functionally-oriented humanist curriculum was a part of the general shift from functional to aesthetic views of literature which Ross discusses.

Benjamin also notes this shift from functional to aesthetic views of literature by contrasting what, for him, is the archetypal genre of the new period, the novel, with the earlier, functionalistic genre of the story. For Benjamin, the post-1700s novel (unlike the story) was written and read in isolation, and rather than containing tidbits of wisdom, like the functionalistic story, its primary message (says Benjamin) was usually an expression of the incommensurable

⁵⁵ Nancy Christiansen, “The Master Double Frame and Other Lessons from Classical Education,” *Intertexts* ed. Marguerite Helms (Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2002) 72.

⁵⁶ Ross 408.

⁵⁷ Ross 408.

⁵⁸ Patricia Bizzell, and Bruce Herzberg, “Hugh Blair,” *The Rhetorical Tradition*, eds. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg (Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2001) 948.

⁵⁹ Bizzell and Herzberg, “Hugh Blair” 948. (emphasis mine)

nature of human life. As Benjamin explains, the novelist “is himself uncounseled and cannot counsel others. To write a novel means to carry the incommensurable to extremes in the representation of human life.”⁶⁰ Benjamin does acknowledge that novels were sometimes written or read with didactic intent, but he counters that “If now and then, in the course of the centuries, efforts have been made [. . .] to implant instruction in the novel, these attempts have always amounted to a modification of the novel form.”⁶¹ In Benjamin’s view, even *Don Quixote* is an example of the non-moral, non-didacticality of the novel. He argues:

Even the first great book of the genre, *Don Quixote*, teaches how the spiritual greatness, the boldness, the helpfulness of one of the greatest and noblest of men, Don Quixote, are completely devoid of counsel and do not contain the slightest scintilla of wisdom.⁶²

In “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Benjamin explains that after the mechanical reproduction of art became possible, the earlier ritualistic functions of the arts were replaced with what he calls “exhibition value.”⁶³ And “by the absolute emphasis on its exhibition value the work of art becomes a creation with entirely new functions, [. . .including] the artistic function [. . .].”⁶⁴ Benjamin, as we see from this quote, felt that the post-1700s literature still served functions in society, but that these functions manifested themselves more aesthetically. This aesthetic mode of valuing art is “characterized” writes Benjamin (of visual art in particular), “by the direct, intimate fusion of visual and emotional enjoyment with the

⁶⁰ Benjamin, “The Storyteller” 87.

⁶¹ Benjamin, “The Storyteller” 88.

⁶² Benjamin, “The Storyteller” 87-88.

⁶³ Benjamin “The Work” 225.

⁶⁴ Benjamin “The Work” 225.

orientation of the expert.”⁶⁵ It demands a degree of expertise in the viewer/reader⁶⁶ because it encourages the audience to “tak[e] the position of a critic.”⁶⁷ Furthermore, its technique is important⁶⁸ (perhaps more so than earlier ritualistic art), because art which relies on its exhibition value needs an “alluring appearance or persuasive structure”⁶⁹ to produce what Benjamin calls “shock effect”—the near tactile impact of sudden, surprising, constantly assaulting images, words or sounds on the viewer.⁷⁰

Abrams agrees with the functional/aesthetic shift which Ross and Benjamin note. While Abrams saw pre-1700s literature as connected to the moral, social, and political functions of society, post 1700s literature saw the emergence of Belles Lettres, which, claims Abrams, were “not doctrinal or utilitarian or instructional, but simply appealed to taste, as writing to be read for pleasure.”⁷¹ Furthermore, this post-1700s literature was subject to a different kind of appreciation—an appreciation governed by what Abrams calls the “art as such” mentality. Abrams writes that the “art as such” mentality demands for art to be “contemplated ‘disinterestedly’—that is, attended to ‘as such,’ for its own sake, without regard to the personal interest or the possessiveness or the desires of the perceiver, and without reference to its truth or

⁶⁵ Benjamin “The Work” 234.

⁶⁶ Benjamin “The Work” 231.

⁶⁷ Benjamin “The Work” 228.

⁶⁸ Benjamin “The Work” 237.

⁶⁹ Benjamin “The Work” 238.

⁷⁰ Benjamin “The Work” 238.

⁷¹ Abrams, “Art-As-Such” 145.

its utility or its morality.”⁷² It was, in short, no longer a means to an end, but an end in and of itself.⁷³ I will call this post-1700s way of valuing art an “aesthetic” approach.

To sum up, I quote Ross, who writes, “something happened in the late eighteenth century to the way works of art were valued. No longer considered rhetorical or didactic instruments, they became prized as autonomous creations.”⁷⁴ While such a change certainly did not occur overnight, and there were certainly exceptions (there always are), the causes of these changes have still been the source of much theory and speculation. Why did such changes occur? And why did they occur in eighteenth century Europe?

The Theories

The eighteenth-century functional/aesthetic shift has drawn its investigators largely from the Marxist camp. Classical Marxism asks questions about economic conditions and relationships of production (the base) and attempts to link changes in economic conditions and relationships of production to changes in other parts of society, such as literature (an example of the superstructure). While Althusser and other modern Marxist theorists have attempted to broaden this scope somewhat, modern Marxists, to greater and lesser extents, still retain this “stress on economic causes.”⁷⁵ In this respect Abrams and Ross are no exception, and even Benjamin, while more sophisticated, still emphasizes material conditions (such as technological advancements) over other influences.

⁷² Abrams, “Art-As-Such” 135.

⁷³ Abrams, “Art-As-Such” 140.

⁷⁴ Ross 397.

⁷⁵ Vincent B. Leitch, “Louis Althusser,” *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (New York: Norton, 2001) 1478.

M. H. Abrams—Rise of the Middle Class

Abrams attributes the functional/aesthetic shift to a rising middle class. According to Abrams, as the middle class grew in prominence and numbers, it began to pursue the signs of rank and affluence which had (hitherto) been limited to the rich. One of the leisure pursuits which had previously been beyond their reach was connoisseurship—the gentleman’s hobby of collecting and becoming an expert on a variety of rarities ranging from curiosities of natural history, contemporary contrivances, coins, statues and books/literature.⁷⁶ Connoisseurship, after all, Abrams notes,

had all along been ‘strongly class-conscious,’ flaunting a leisure-time avocation free of material and utilitarian ends as a sign of social rank unachievable by what a number of virtuosi, [. . .] had called ‘the vulgar’ and requiring a cultivated knowledge and taste that serves to distinguish the ‘polite’ class from social climbers.⁷⁷

Abrams reasons that when an “era of new wealth acquired by flourishing commercial and manufacturing enterprises”⁷⁸ created a new middle class with the leisure time and funds to pursue connoisseurship, they did. Abrams writes: “They [the rising middle class] simply took over from ‘the nobility and gentry’ the cultivation of connoisseurship, in part as a pleasant pursuit to fill a newfound leisure, but also, clearly because it served as a prominent indicator of the gentlemanly or ‘polite’ status to which they aspired.⁷⁹ This burgeoning cultivation of

⁷⁶ Abrams, “Art-As-Such” 142.

⁷⁷ Abrams, “Art-As-Such” 143.

⁷⁸ Abrams, “Art-As-Such” 144.

⁷⁹ Abrams, “Art-As-Such” 144.

connoisseurship resulted, Abrams claims, “in a conspicuous set of social innovations.”⁸⁰ Authors, for example, were no longer dependent on the patronage system for their livelihoods, writing instead to a general public which, for the first time, purchased enough of their works “to support a substantial number of writers by the books they bought.”⁸¹ Institutions, like the circulating library, emerged to make the fine arts available to the consumer, although usually for a fee. And publishers began to publish critical reviews and periodicals like Addison’s *Spectator*, which taught fine taste to a public willing to pay for the privilege of learning it. Literature (and literary taste) became, in short, commodities.⁸² As Abrams writes, “It was, then, in the eighteenth century that literature became a commodity, subject to the exchange values of the marketplace, with all the consequences of such a condition.”⁸³

A new market of connoisseurs “now composed in large part by tradesmen, and especially the newly idle wives and daughters of the tradesmen”⁸⁴ demanded new genres and forms which could accommodate what Abrams calls “a prime value of connoisseurship,” namely “its conspicuous uselessness, which makes it an index that one belongs to the leisure class.”⁸⁵ Because the uselessness of the hobby was important, the novel, according to Abrams, “at first pretended to be both true and edifying [...but] soon relaxed into the candid condition of being

⁸⁰ Abrams, “Art-As-Such” 144.

⁸¹ Abrams, “Art-As-Such” 145.

⁸² Abrams, “Art-As-Such” 145.

⁸³ Abrams, “Art-As-Such” 145.

⁸⁴ Abrams, “Art-As-Such” 145.

⁸⁵ Abrams, “Art-As-Such” 143.

produced to be read merely for the pleasure of the fiction.”⁸⁶ On a larger basis, this resulted in the functional/aesthetic shift.

Trevor Ross—Consumption-Based Society

Trevor Ross claims that the eighteenth-century shift happened when readers (with their consumer-perspective on literature) rather than writers (with their producer-perspective on literature) began to control what was written. Ross attributes this “recognition of readers, their judgment, expectations and requirements” to the “expansion of the reading public,” “the displacement of the patronage system by an expanding book trade,” and, “above all [. . .to] an ascendant ideology of commercial humanism,”⁸⁷ which, “in effect,” writes Ross, “turned the subject into a consumer.”⁸⁸

Before the eighteenth-century, Ross claims that literature was understood primarily from the producer’s perspective. Producers, such as writers and their wealthy patrons (rather than the general public) controlled what was written and published, and therefore, as Ross explains, “The poet was not a maker of commodities for an autonomous audience, but an agent of production working on behalf of established social relations.”⁸⁹ From the producer’s orientation, works were not thought of primarily as something to read, but (true to the perspective of a potential producer) rather as examples to copy and as tools to control society.⁹⁰ The producer’s perspective also overlooked readers. As Ross explains, “The requirements and responses of readers, as distinct from those of producers was rarely a consideration before the eighteenth

⁸⁶ Abrams, “Art-As-Such” 145.

⁸⁷ Ross 406.

⁸⁸ Ross 407.

⁸⁹ Ross 400.

⁹⁰ Ross 400-401, 399.

century.”⁹¹ Instead, pre-1700s writers wrote to an imaginary (and rhetorically constructed) “learned reader.”⁹²

But Ross claims that the “expansion of the reading public,” “the displacement of the patronage system by an expanding book trade,” and “above all... an ascendant ideology of commercial humanism,”⁹³ put the reader in control. Commercial humanism (as I cautiously gather from Ross’s difficult explanation) meant that as society became increasingly complex and specialized, the individual became a consumer of a wide variety of goods, which, due to her specialization, she could no longer make for herself. These goods then became commodities which she began to purchase not only to fulfill physical needs, but also to refine her being.⁹⁴

Commercial humanism and an expanding reading public produced a rising, consumer-driven book market which gradually replaced the patronage system, creating, for the first time, a real recognition of readers.⁹⁵ Among the expectations of these new commercial humanist readers seems to have been the “refinement of manners.”⁹⁶ After the shift, as Ross points out, we see the emergence of *Belles Lettres*, works to be read for their beauty alone, while works like Dryden’s *Aeneid*, whose Virgil, writes Ross, “was long considered an essential pedagogical model of expression in English” could be criticized as “too ‘political’ for young sensibilities.”⁹⁷ All in all, commercial humanism, the increased number of readers, and the decline of the

⁹¹ Ross 402.

⁹² Ross 402.

⁹³ Ross 406.

⁹⁴ Ross 406.

⁹⁵ Ross 406.

⁹⁶ Ross 407.

⁹⁷ Ross 411.

patronage system resulted in a consumer-based society which held more aesthetically-oriented conceptions of literature.

Walter Benjamin—the Mechanical Reproduction of a Work of Art

From Walter Benjamin's large body of work, I am concentrating on just two essays which have applicability to this project: "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" and "The Storyteller." From these two essays I am extracting Benjamin's causal claim that the ability to mechanically reproduce a work of art "changes the reaction of the masses towards art."⁹⁸ Since I am examining this claim alone, this study naturally only reflects on this claim and not on the complexities that lie in other parts of Benjamin's analysis.

According to Benjamin, the very reproducibility of art (and this includes literature) means that its value dwells less and less in the authenticity of its presence, or what Benjamin calls its "aura," and more in what Benjamin terms its "exhibition value" or its impact (shock value) on our senses. As Benjamin explains, "Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be."⁹⁹ Aura is connected, in Benjamin's view, to ritual. In a ritualistic setting the existence of the object is the crucial feature, rather than, necessarily, its appearance or its being on view. Hence, as Benjamin notes, "Certain statues of gods are accessible only to the priest in the cella; certain Madonnas remain covered nearly all year round; certain sculptures on medieval cathedrals are invisible to the spectator on ground level."¹⁰⁰ Aura provides the appeal upon which museums are based. Although I can see copies of works in books or on the internet,

⁹⁸ Benjamin, "The Work" 234.

⁹⁹ Benjamin, "The Work" 220.

¹⁰⁰ Benjamin, "The Work" 225.

these copies don't have the same aura for which I will travel long distances to see an original manuscript or a Picasso in person.

But according to Benjamin, when art becomes mechanically reproducible, this changes. "With the different methods of technical reproduction of a work of art," Benjamin explains, "its fitness for exhibition increased to such an extent that the quantitative shift between [the cult-value and the exhibition value] turned into a qualitative transformation of its nature."¹⁰¹ He further explains that "by the absolute emphasis on its exhibition value the work of art becomes a creation with entirely new functions [. . . including] the artistic function [. . .]."¹⁰²

Benjamin is speaking generally in terms of all the arts, and drawing his examples specifically from film and photography, but from his theory we can extrapolate the thesis as it applies to literature: as books become mechanically reproducible, society values them less and less as magical, sacred objects and more as aesthetic, artistic creations. An application of Benjamin's more general thesis would thus explain why, as the printing industry developed and printers turned out larger and larger runs of books, there was a change from functional to aesthetic ways of valuing literature.

Conclusion

To summarize, according to a number of theorists, including Ross, Benjamin and Abrams, a substantial shift occurred during the last half of the eighteenth century. There was a shift in preferred genres, an increase in the number of titles produced, a substantial growth in the size and scope of the readership, and the development of auxiliary institutions like the library and reading circle. But, according to these theorists, there was also a shift in society's purposes for reading and their definitions of literature. This shift, as they describe it, can be broadly

¹⁰¹ Benjamin, "The Work" 225.

¹⁰² Benjamin "The Work" 225.

characterized as a shift from valuing literature for functional reasons (its didacticism, patriotism, or informational content) to valuing literature for more aesthetic reasons (its form, style, technique and artistry).

Ross, Benjamin and Abrams attribute this shift to a number of economic causes. Abrams asserts that the shift from functional to aesthetic reading can be attributed to the rise of the middle class. Abrams claims that as the middle class acquired wealth and leisure time, they emulated the gentlemen's art of connoisseurship. The demand for the connoisseur's literature and expertise as well as the disinterested contemplation which connoisseurship required resulted in a shift toward a more aesthetic literature.

Ross argues that a shift from the production-based patronage system to a consumption-based consumer-economy changed the way society valued literature from a functional to an aesthetic orientation. As the readership expanded and gradually replaced the patronage system, and as the specialization of "commercial humanism" turned the book into a commodity and the subject into a consumer, readers began to influence what was produced. And because a commercial humanist readership was eager to refine their beings by purchasing commodities which could "sharpen their taste and judgment,"¹⁰³ an aesthetic orientation towards literature began to replace the previous functional one.

Benjamin's theory suggests that the development of the printing press deprived the book of its ritual value and aura and therefore shifted its value towards what Benjamin called "exhibition value." When literature's value and function centered in its ritual value and aura, its existence was enough to make it valuable. But when mechanical reproduction removed the physical uniqueness of a work of art's presence, its value then centered in its exhibitionary attributes. Its artistry and impact on the senses became paramount.

¹⁰³ Ross 411.

If the cause-effect relationships set up in these theories hold true, we should expect that a society with a rising middle class, a consumer-based book trade, and vigorous printing presses should value literature as the late eighteenth century did—for aesthetic rather than functional purposes.

Chapter II

Nineteenth-Century America

Interestingly enough, a largely middle-class, consumption-based society with access to presses is a fairly accurate description of nineteenth-century America. Nineteenth-century America, in fact, is usually singled out as the point at which the American middle-class arose. Furthermore, the nineteenth-century American book market was very consumer-driven (as we can see in the lives of some of its authors), it made active use of its presses, and had libraries and other lending institutions. Given this, we might expect (on the basis of the cause-effect relationships set up by Abrams, Benjamin and Ross) that we would find a society which valued literature for aesthetic rather than functional purposes. Strangely enough, however, this is not the case.

Nineteenth-Century America's Economic Climate

Rise of the Middle Class

To begin, let's examine America's economic climate and see what Ross, Benjamin, and Abrams would predict given the historical facts on nineteenth-century America, her middle class, her access to books, and her consumer-climate. If the rise of the middle class is an important element in society's connoisseurship and attitudes towards literature, as Abrams argues, then it is significant to our project that when social scholars try to pin down a date for the rise of a middle class in America, they often point to some part of the nineteenth-century. Post industrial theorists point to the end of the century, due to the "proliferation of white-collar wage earners."¹⁰⁴ But others, such as Archer and Blau, point to the early part of the century when we

¹⁰⁴ Melanie Archer and Judith R. Blau, "Class formation in Nineteenth-Century America: The Case of the Middle Class," *Annual Review of Sociology* 19 (1993): 20. (emphasis mine)

see the emergence of “middle class occupational groups.”¹⁰⁵ In his comprehensive study of nineteenth-century Philadelphia and New York, seeking to “determine the point at which middle-class identity took shape in both structural and cultural terms,” Blumin has “concluded that the middle class emerged in the three decades prior to the Civil War, primarily through a convergence in the structural circumstances and social experience of non-manual workers.”¹⁰⁶ Blumen thus places the rise of the American Middle class somewhere between 1830-1860.

The nineteenth-century rise in the American middle class was partially due to the industrialization for which the nineteenth-century is well-known. As Archer and Blau point out, “Industrialization expanded opportunities for ownership of retail shops and some types of business proprietorships, which increased the rate of upward mobility. [. . .] This helped to create middle-class social networks within emerging commercial districts.”¹⁰⁷ The nineteenth-century also saw “the ascendance of clerical and managerial work and the proliferation of workplaces that hired non-manual workers.”¹⁰⁸ San Francisco, for example, saw the number of clerical and managerial workers double between 1852 and 1880.¹⁰⁹ And, as Archer and Blau write, “wages (in real dollars) increased about 50% between 1860 and 1890.”¹¹⁰ The middle class, in short, was very much on the rise in nineteenth-century America.

¹⁰⁵ Archer and Blau 19.

¹⁰⁶ S. M. Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900* (New York: Cambridge U P, 1989) cited in Archer and Blau 22.

¹⁰⁷ Archer and Blau 28.

¹⁰⁸ Archer and Blau 29.

¹⁰⁹ P. R. Decker, *Fortunes and Failures: White Collar Mobility in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco* (Cambridge: Harvard U P, 1978) summarized in Archer and Blau 29.

¹¹⁰ Archer and Blau 30-31.

And this rising middle class had plenty of access to books in terms of having the education to read them, dropping book prices, and increased access to books through libraries and reading circles. Certainly, the nineteenth-century saw an expansion of educational opportunities and educational reform in America, especially after the civil war, and partly in response to industrialization and the rising middle class. But even early on education was a priority. As Lehmann-Haupt tells us: “In the New England states in 1790, laws existed requiring compulsory rudimentary education. The country as a whole was able to count fourteen colleges within its borders [in 1790], claiming an enrollment among them of 1200 students.”¹¹¹

Furthermore, lending libraries and reading circles, which Abram sees as a symptom of the rising middle’s classes hunger to emulate upper class connoisseurship, also existed early on in America. Benjamin Franklin, in fact, was instrumental in founding one such library himself. But he was not alone. Augst reports that “[b]efore the Civil War, dozens of mercantile libraries had been established in cities and towns across the nation.”¹¹² These institutions helped greatly in democratizing literature, as even contemporaries realized. For example, Augst cites a 1876 Federal Report, which praised mercantile libraries for their “great and indispensable service to the interests of literature,” and described how these institutions “open[ed] up access to books.”¹¹³

Bookstores and book peddlers were also numerous in colonial America. Even by the end of the seventeenth century, bookshops were well established in the new world. As Tebbel writes,

By the end of the seventeenth century, the bookshop was a fixture in colonial social, commercial and religious life. It was beginning to be a meeting place for

¹¹¹ Hellmut Lehmann-Haupt, *The Book in America: A History of the Making, the Selling, and the Collecting of Books in the United States*, (New York: RR.Bowker, 1939) 60.

¹¹² Thomas Augst, “The Business of Reading in Nineteenth-Century America: The New York Mercantile Library,” *American Quarterly* 50.2 (1998): 270.

¹¹³ Augst 271.

intellectuals, and it not only offered a marketplace for native talent but also provided an American outlet for books from abroad. A single shop might stock more than a thousand volumes.¹¹⁴

At the same time, traveling book peddlers like the famous Noah Webster traveled throughout the countryside dispersing yet more books,¹¹⁵ book clubs began to emerge in 1825,¹¹⁶ and by the mid nineteenth-century selling books by subscription was also beginning to take hold.¹¹⁷

Printing Presses in Nineteenth-century America

In addition to the rising middle class and their opportunities to take up connoisseurship, a thriving printing industry abounded. As Taubert writes, “The rapid development of printing [in early America] producing an abundance of material in addition to the voluminous importation of books from England, enabled a prospering retail trade to offer an imposing selection of books, all things considered.”¹¹⁸ The first North American press was established in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1639,¹¹⁹ and from that early start, the American book trade took off. Lehmann-Haupt writes that in 1790 “the total periodical publications of the nation numbered 103 titles, of which eight were daily newspapers, seven were magazines, and the remainder were weekly or semi-weekly newspapers.”¹²⁰ And the number of titles published was on the rise. The number

¹¹⁴ John Tebbel, “A Brief History of American Bookselling,” *Bookselling in America and the World*, ed. Charles B. Anderson (New York: Quadrangle, 1975) 4.

¹¹⁵ Tebbel “A Brief” 10.

¹¹⁶ Tebbel “A Brief” 24.

¹¹⁷ Tebbel “A Brief” 14.

¹¹⁸ Siegfried Taubert, “World Bookselling: Some Historical Comments,” *Bookselling in America and the World*, ed. Charles B. Anderson (New York: Quadrangle, 1975) 54.

¹¹⁹ Taubert 54.

¹²⁰ Lehmann-Haupt 60.

of titles went from 24,000 new titles produced in the 152 years between 1639 and 1791 (*including*, as Lehmann-Haupt reminds us, “newspapers, almanacs, and assembly laws and proceedings”) to 24,000 titles produced in just 32 years between 1820 and 1852, even when the newspapers, almanacs, and assembly laws and proceedings included in the former count weren’t included in later count.¹²¹ In addition to this number, there were also at least 486 periodicals published in 1850, excluding daily and semi-weekly newspapers.¹²² All of this added up to a sizable trade. According to Tebbel, over \$2,500,000 in books was sold in 1820.¹²³

This sizable trade was due, in part, to an increase in the number of presses. Lehmann-Haupt writes, “When the century opened, it has been calculated, there were in existence about one hundred paper mills. The census of 1810 reported a total of 202 mills. [. . .] By the year 1840 more than four hundred mills were in operation in twenty states and the District of Columbia.”¹²⁴ In fact, by the middle of the nineteenth-century, “many” (as Tebbel writes) “of today’s major book publishing houses were in existence.”¹²⁵

This impressive book trade is also due to an early colonial commitment to books and literacy. As Taubert claims, “Printing presses and the book played an important role from the beginning of the colonization of the North American continent. The political events in the New

¹²¹ Lehmann-Haupt 101.

¹²² Lehmann-Haupt 101.

¹²³ John Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States, Vol II: The Expansion of an Industry 1865-1919*, (New York: Xerox, 1975) 23.

¹²⁴ Lehmann-Haupt 78.

¹²⁵ Tebbel, “A Brief” 15.

World emanating from the strong, individual beliefs of the immigrants living in more or less isolated communities, assigned a key role to the book trade.”¹²⁶

Furthermore, printing presses in the first half of the nineteenth-century were undergoing improvements which enabled them to mechanically reproduce even more and more efficiently than before. As Lehmann-Haupt writes, “There have been two great periods in the development of typography as a mechanical art—the last half of the fifteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth.”¹²⁷ He continues by summarizing some of these improvements:

[T]he printing press completely changed its form and the mechanical principles of its operation in the period between 1790 and 1814. In relatively the same term of years occurred important advances in the hand-casting of type by means of automatic hand-molds and through the introduction of type-casting machines for the quantity production of foundry type. Almost coincident with these came in 1822 the first patent for a composing machine employing the basic principles of the machines with which the modern shop is equipped. It was in this period, too, that the third great change in printing development was effected, that is, the ability to manufacture paper by machine in great quantity and in sheets of any desired size.¹²⁸

Consumer-based Climate

Nineteenth-century America was also fairly consumer based. We can see this in that publishers responded to the consumer market. When Franklin perceived a consumer interest on

¹²⁶ Taubert 54.

¹²⁷ Lehmann-Haupt 63.

¹²⁸ Lehmann-Haupt 74.

the Indian Treaty of 1744, for example, he “dramatically increased his production from the couple hundred copies usually printed for almanacs to over 400, and sent quantities of these documents to different locations based on perceived interest.”¹²⁹

Furthermore, we can tell by briefly examining some of the nineteenth-century’s authors that the consumer market was a powerful, powerful force in their careers—either making or breaking them, and authors sometimes went to extraordinary efforts to cater to the consumer market. James Fenimore Cooper is a strong example of the kinds of power the market held over these authors. Cooper supported himself (though scantily at times) with his writing, and seems to have been very concerned with its financial success, despite what he may have said to the contrary. As Railton remarks of Cooper’s first novel, *Precaution*,

Cooper told his printer that he wrote *Precaution* to amuse himself, but his concern with making the book salable is obvious enough. The length of the novel he determined by estimating the number of words in one of Walter Scott’s popular *Waverley* novels; its content was carefully patterned after the type of domestic comedy that was currently fashionable and out of which Jane Austen had made enduring art. Cooper, it must be said, was interested in being fashionable, not in creating art.¹³⁰

Throughout his life, Cooper’s audience wielded power over what he wrote. Consumer interest encouraged him to write sequels to his better-sellers (such as the Leatherstocking tales), and a lack of consumer interest derailed planned sequels (such as *Lionel Lincoln*).¹³¹ Even when

¹²⁹ Lehmann-Haupt 86.

¹³⁰ Stephen Railton, “James Fenimore Cooper,” *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, ed Joel Myerson, vol. 3 (Detroit: Gale, 1979) 78.

¹³¹ Railton 83.

Cooper's writing goals conflicted with those of his audience (as in the case of Cooper's *European Trilogy*), he was eventually forced (as "no other means of making a living offered itself"¹³²) to write for the consumers anyway, as he did when he chose in the end to complete his very popular Leatherstocking tales rather than the European works that had so badly distanced his audience from himself. All in all, we can see in Cooper's writing, a very consumer-based (rather than producer-based) orientation. The American market, rather than Cooper's own personal wishes and program, governed what work he could afford to write. So well does his work parallel his audience's preferences, in fact, that his writing has been called "the barometer of a gusty generation."¹³³

Nor was Cooper alone in the degree to which the market dominated his writing. In an advertisement in Charles Brockden Brown's *Alcuin*, in 1798, the advertiser (Brown's publisher) claims "The following Dialogue [*Alcuin*] was put into my hands, the last spring, by a friend who resides at some distance, with liberty to make it public. I have since been informed that he has continued the discussion of the subject in another dialogue. The reception which the present publication shall meet will probably determine the author to withhold or print the continuation."¹³⁴ We can see here, too, that Brown's production was also governed by consumer interest to some degree.

Melville also found himself bound to write what his audience wanted to read even when, as often occurred, this did not necessarily correlate with what he wanted to write. Of *Redburn* and *White Jacket*, for instance, Melville once said, "These are two jobs ... which I have done for

¹³² Railton 84.

¹³³ Railton 90.

¹³⁴ Bernard Rosenthal, "Charles Brockden Brown" *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, ed. Emory Elliot, vol. 37 (Detroit: Gale, 1985) 71.

money—being forced to it as other men are to sawing wood.”¹³⁵ In short, Melville, like the other authors of this period, was somewhat limited and governed by the demands of his readers.

Even Hawthorne sometimes found himself frustrated when confronted with the demands of America’s reading public. In an 1855 letter to his publisher, Hawthorne complains: “America is now wholly given over to a damned mob of scribbling women, and I should have no chance of success while the public taste is occupied with their trash—and should be ashamed of myself if I did succeed.” He continues, asking, “[w]hat is the mystery of these innumerable editions of *The Lamplighter* (by Maria Susanna Cummins), and other books neither better nor worse? Worse they could not be, and better they need not be, when they sell by the hundred thousand.”¹³⁶ As an author whose works rarely earned enough to support him, Hawthorne is frustrated by the sometimes incomprehensible taste of the buying public which wielded the cash. In short, we can see from the lives of Cooper, Brown, Melville and Hawthorne, that the nineteenth-century American readership did seem to wield control over its authors. Furthermore, even the presence of literary critics in nineteenth-century America confirms a consumer-based culture. Ross himself notes that the change from producer to consumer-based literature was evidenced by a shift from studying how to write well to studying how to read well (407). The fact that America had people whose full-time jobs were simply to “read well”—i.e. critics—seems to indicate that the art of consuming literature and connoisseurship had already been developed into a science of some kind, replacing the previous fascination with composition.

Given what I have shown here—namely that nineteenth-century America was highly consumer-based, had a rising middle class, access to books, and technological development, we

¹³⁵ Hennig Cohen, “Hermann Melville,” *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, ed. Joel Myerson, vol. 3 (Detroit: Gale, 1979) 230.

¹³⁶ Hawthorne qtd in Fred Lewis Patee, *The Feminine Fifties* (NY: Appleton-Century, 1940) 110.

should expect from the cause-effect relationships set up by Engelsing, Abrams, Ross, and Benjamin that we would find a very aesthetically based way of valuing literature. But do we?

Results

To test this hypothesis, I examined the criticism that nineteenth-century critics levied for and against the works of four major romantic nineteenth-century American authors: Brown, Cooper, Hawthorne, and Melville. Because these authors were major, well-read authors in their day (as shown by the fact that they were able to support themselves to greater and lesser extents by their writing alone), their writing has produced the large, varied body of criticism which I wouldn't have been able to obtain with lesser-known authors, and which will be helpful in getting the most accurate conception of the criticism of the day. To find this criticism I relied on the multi-volumed *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism* as my primary source, and carefully combed through the criticism given for each of these authors up to 1900.

After carefully examining this body of criticism, I found that there is clearly an emphasis from the critics (and even from the authors) that whether the text succeeded or failed, in their opinion, it was because it succeeded or failed in its function to 1.) present the group's morals and 2.) accomplish social tasks (such as defining what it meant to be American, and glorifying the American).

Moral Instrumentality in the Nineteenth-Century

Charles Brockden Brown, wrote in a 1798 essay that "The value of such works lies without doubt in their moral tendency,"¹³⁷ and his critics seemed to agree with him. John Greenleaf Whittier wrote an essay in 1866 on Brown's *Wieland*, pleased that at least it, unlike

¹³⁷ "Brown," *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*, ed. Janet Mullane and Robert Thomas Wilson, vol. 22 (Detroit: Gale, 1989) 3.

Wuthering Heights “has an important and salutary moral.”¹³⁸ Another critic exclaims of Brown’s *Arthur Mervyn*:

How much more is Brown to be commended for giving to this highly-finished portrait of a villain, a colouring and a fate so dismal and forbidding, than the far-trumpeted author who has attempted to give attraction to the wickedness of Paul Clifford? Brown’s mind was too pure—he was too sincerely a lover of integrity and good morals, to render vice captivating by meretricious decorations. His great genius was never prostituted, like that of some of our more recent writers of unworthy celebrity, for the purpose of undermining virtuous principles, or of bringing into contempt the most useful and most sacred institutions of society.¹³⁹

Even though *Arthur Mervyn* may have made no outright statements about what society considered morally right and wrong, Brown still reinforced the moral message by giving his villain his moral due, and the critic praises him for it. Notice the words that the critic uses—Brown’s mind was “pure”—a strikingly positive term. He is a “lover of integrity and good morals.” He is to be “commended” for giving the villain his morally-deserved just desserts. He would never undermine “virtuous principles,” or the “sacred institutions of society,” by which I presume the critic means the church. Clearly the critic was measuring Brown up against a standard of moral instrumentality in his writing, and found him worthy of praise in this respect.

Morality drew similar attention in Cooper’s writing. Another critic, G. S. Hilliard, commended Cooper’s writing in 1862 because “no one reproved [America’s] faults more courageously, or gave warning and advice more unreservedly, where he felt that they were

¹³⁸ “Brown” 16. [sic]

¹³⁹ “Brown” 13.

needed.”¹⁴⁰ Here the critic seems to suggest a prophetic-like duty on the part of the writer. Like a prophet, it was his duty to warn, and reprove faults—a task which, when well completed, deserved praise—clearly a writer had a moral function.

Like Brown, Cooper himself seemed to expect that moral instrumentality would be expected of his books. In an essay by Cooper written in 1850, Cooper went to the effort of identifying a moral in Natty’s behavior from the *Leatherstocking Tales*: “In a moral point of view it was the intention to illustrate the effect of seed scattered by the way side.” Cooper goes on to explain that “it appeared to the writer that his hero [Natty] was a fit subject to represent the better qualities of both conditions [White and Indian], without pushing either to extremes.”¹⁴¹ Statements like these show that Cooper was clearly anticipating an audience expectation of moral instrumentality in his books. And anyone who has read some of Cooper’s writing itself knows that such moral didacticism certainly comes in the form of Natty’s numerous speeches and Ishmael’s moral sermons.

Hawthorne likewise expected that people would value his work based on its moral function. “Not to be deficient in this particular,” wrote Hawthorne in 1851 in regard to *The House of the Seven Gables*, “the author has provided himself with a moral,—the truth, namely, that the wrong-doing of one generation lives into the successive ones, and, divesting itself of every temporary advantage, becomes a pure and uncontrollable mischief.”¹⁴² Here, Hawthorne portrays a work without a moral as “deficient.” And, wishing to protect himself from this

¹⁴⁰ “Cooper,” *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*, ed Janet Mullane and Laurie Sherman, vol. 27 (Detroit: Gale 1990) 127

¹⁴¹ “Cooper,” *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*, ed. Laurie Lanzen Harris, vol. 1 (Detroit: Gale, 1981) 206.

¹⁴² “Hawthorne,” *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*, ed. Laurie Lanzen Harris, vol. 2 (Detroit: Gale, 1987) 299.

deficiency, he continued to justify the subtlety by which his morals were conveyed by explaining that, in his opinion, morals are most effectively taught through a subtle process balanced with an ostensible one.¹⁴³ The fact that Hawthorne felt the need to justify the lack of overt morality in his work is yet further evidence that he felt that readers expected overt morality in their literature.

Hawthorne's effort to meet the moral instrumentality requirement was well rewarded. Henry W. Longfellow, in a 1837 essay about Hawthorne's *Twice Told Tales*, praised Hawthorne as a "spiritual star" whose light reflected in his works."¹⁴⁴ The *American Review* published an essay in 1846 praising Hawthorne because

he has lashed the vices of his countrymen and times with unequalled keenness and effect, and yet has handled his cat-o'-nine-tails of scorpions with such exquisite dexterity and benevolent humor, that even those who winced and suffered most have been compelled to smile and look in his eyes, that they might drink out healing from the Love there.¹⁴⁵

Again we see the prophet-like role the writer was expected to have.

One critic, Henry T. Tuckerman, in an 1851 essay even attributed romance's particular atmospheric quality to the moral life it reflects. He wrote, "around and within the principal scene of this romance, there hovers an alternating melancholy and brightness which is born of genuine moral life. . . . [We deem that one of Hawthorne's most felicitous merits is] that of so patiently

¹⁴³ "Hawthorne" 299.

¹⁴⁴ "Hawthorne" 291.

¹⁴⁵ "Hawthorne" 293.

educating artistic beauty and moral interest from life and nature, without the least sacrifice of intellectual dignity.”¹⁴⁶

Even critics who disliked Hawthorne were still judging his writing against that same moral standard—the difference being that where others had found his work morally instrumental, these critics felt that it had failed in this important requirement. One anonymous critic, who wrote in 1852, complained that Hawthorne “[had] an eye for the beautiful, but only dim perceptions of the right, the good, and the true. [The reader’s] moral faculties are unhealthily excited, when excited at all.”¹⁴⁷ The British novelist, George Eliot, writing in 1852, concurred: “Hawthorne has a rich perception of the beautiful, but he is sadly deficient in moral depth and earnestness. His moral faculty is morbid as well as weak; all his characters partake of the same infirmity.”¹⁴⁸ Eliot is even clearer later when she laments, “But here, again, Hawthorne disappoints us, and again through his lack of moral earnestness. Everybody will naturally regard this, whether fact or fiction, as a socialistic drama, and *will expect its chief interest as such to be of a moral kind.*”¹⁴⁹ Eliot calls the moral element the “chief interest.”

Melville, too, was judged against a standard of moral correctness. William Bourne complained in 1846 that Melville’s *Typee* “excuses and willfully palliates the cannibalism and savage vices of the Polynesian.”¹⁵⁰ Another critic, Horace Greeley, accused *Typee* and *Omoo* as “unmistakably defective if not positively diseased in moral tone, and will very fairly be

¹⁴⁶ “Hawthorne” 298-299.

¹⁴⁷ “Hawthorne” 300.

¹⁴⁸ “Hawthorne” 300.

¹⁴⁹ “Hawthorne” 301. (emphasis mine)

¹⁵⁰ “Melville” *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*, ed. Laurie Lanzen Harris, vol. 3, (Detroit: Gale, 1983) 325.

condemned as dangerous reading for those of immature intellects and unsettled principles.”¹⁵¹

Notice the words used there: a lack of moral instrumentality constitutes a work which is “diseased” and “unmistakably defective.” The assumption is that moral functionality represents the standard, the healthy, the normal. Deviations are necessarily negative.

Political Instrumentality in the Nineteenth-Century

In addition to moral instrumentality, the work of Brown, Cooper, Hawthorne, and Melville was also judged on its political instrumentality—in particular, its ability to help the new country define itself. Initially troubled by a sense of cultural inferiority to Great Britain, America called upon its literature as a tool to define America as an independent and culturally competitive nation.

As early as 1798, Brockden Brown was seeking to define America. Brown wrote then, “To the story-telling moralist the United States is a new and untrodden field. He who shall examine objects with his own eyes [. . .] and adapt his fiction to all that is genuine and peculiar in the scenes before him will be entitled at least to the praise of originality.”¹⁵² In 1799 Brown added,

America has opened new views to the naturalist and politician. [. . .] The sources of amusement to the fancy and instruction to the heart that are peculiar to ourselves, are equally numerous and inexhaustible[. . .] The incidents of Indian hostility, and the perils of the Western wilderness, are far more suitable; and for a native of America to overlook these would admit of no apology.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ “Melville” 326.

¹⁵² “Brown” 3.

¹⁵³ “Brown” 3.

His efforts at setting his books in America and taking advantage of those things “peculiar” to America did not go unpraised by the critics. One anonymous critic wrote in 1804 that “The scene, through the greater part of [Edgar Huntly], is laid in America; and on the whole, American scenes and manners are not inaccurately described.”¹⁵⁴ Another commented that “[Brown] was a good fellow; a sound, hearty specimen of Trans-Atlantic stuff.” And yet another concluded, proudly, that “Brown was an American to the back-bone—without knowing it [. . .] Brown was one of the only three or four professional authors, that America has ever produced [. . .] By great good luck, surprising perseverance, and munificent patronage—for America—poor Brown succeeded.”¹⁵⁵ In Brown these critics found a writer whose writing fulfilled a political function: Brown laid down the specifics of the scene which made America, and Brown’s successes and character reinforced America’s place as culturally competitive with Great Britain.

Sometimes establishing America as unique required down-sizing Europe. One critic, George Barnett Smith, exulted in 1878 that

The sensitive mind of Brown, and his pride as an American citizen, revolted from European manners and customs. There is no peasantry, as such, in the United States; hence, between the freeholder, however poor, and the richest citizen, there existed none of those sharp class distinctions which pertain to English society. Brown longed for the time when, just as America had triumphantly thrown off English tyranny, she would be able to throw off English customs and the prejudices derived from English literature.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ “Brown” 5.

¹⁵⁵ “Brown” 7.

¹⁵⁶ “Brown” 19.

Smith later added, “In Brown we not only behold a pioneer in the world of fiction, but one of the earliest of those writers who have endeavored to give a native tone and character to American literature.”¹⁵⁷ Clearly, Brown’s distinctive American-ness was important to the critics. It was politically instrumental; it helped define America’s place.

Cooper’s writing was equally valued for its functionality in defining America. “We have to thank our author for having demonstrated so entirely to our satisfaction, that an admirable topic for the romantic historian has grown out the American Revolution,” thanked the *North American Review* in 1822.¹⁵⁸ “We have ever viewed Mr. Cooper as a national writer,” gushed the *Southern Literary Messenger* in 1838. The *Southern Literary Messenger* continues that Cooper was a national writer “who had borne in triumph—conscious of the great burthen—the grand features of his native land to the incredulous vision of Europe.”¹⁵⁹ These are not comments about the author’s prose, aesthetics, or his creative metaphors or imagery. Essentially, these critics are praising Cooper for writing successfully about American themes: the “Revolution” and American scenery—“the grand features of his native land.” Doing so was praiseworthy because it fulfilled the political function of making a place for America, and this was apparently one of the measures of good literature in nineteenth-century America.

Critics took up the American/European distinction with relish. A 1838 article in the *North American Review* praises Cooper because “[t]he differences between American and European institutions are ever uppermost in his mind, and he loses no opportunity to discuss these points of contrast, and strike the balance favorably to his own countrymen.”¹⁶⁰ “No one of

¹⁵⁷ “Brown” 19.

¹⁵⁸ “Cooper” vol. 1 196.

¹⁵⁹ “Cooper” vol. 1 201.

¹⁶⁰ “Cooper,” vol. 1 201.

our great writers is more thoroughly American than Cooper;” wrote another critic, G. S. Hillard, in 1862, continuing that “no one has caught and reproduced more broadly and accurately the spirit of our institutions, the character of our people, and even the aspects of Nature in this our Western world. He was a patriot to the very core of his heart.”¹⁶¹

Hawthorne’s nationalism was also the subject of praise. “Hawthorne is national—national in subject, in treatment and in manner” wrote an anonymous 1846 reviewer for *The American Review*.¹⁶² “I little expected so great a work,” wrote William James in a letter to Henry James in 1870. James explains his reasoning, continuing that

[i]t made a deep impression on me and I thank heaven that Hawthorne was an American. It also tickled my national feeling not a little to notice the resemblance of Hawthorne’s style to yours and Howells’s. [. . .] That you and Howells with all the models in English literature to follow, should needs involuntarily have imitated (as it were) this American, seems to point to the existence of some real American mental quality.¹⁶³

The need to define a distinctive America during Hawthorne’s time was, for these critics, strong enough to even give value to being bereft of (otherwise admired) European influence. As Henry James, in an 1872 essay concluded, “Exposed late in life to European influences, Mr. Hawthorne was but superficially affected by them. . . We seem to see him strolling through churches and galleries as the last pure American.”¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ “Cooper,” vol. 27 127.

¹⁶² “Hawthorne” 293.

¹⁶³ “Hawthorne” 306.

¹⁶⁴ “Hawthorne” 307.

Over time, this value of being “American” continued, though critics and authors gradually placed less emphasis on America’s landscapes and Indian encounters, and more emphasis on her democratic political system. Of Melville’s *Moby Dick*, Evert A. Duyckinck stated proudly that “His book is thoroughly American and democratic” because Melville “tests all his characters by their manhood. . . There is no patronage in his exhibition of a sailor, any more than in his portraits of captains and commodores. He gives all fair play in an impartial spirit.”¹⁶⁵ The literature was good because it was essentially American, even if what it meant to be American had evolved. Society valued the literature because it fulfilled a political function in defining America.

It seems clear that the literature of Brown, Cooper, Hawthorne and Melville was subject to criticism that valued literature largely for its utility within a moral and social order. Nineteenth-century criticism seemed to hold this functional orientation towards literature despite the fact that nineteenth-century America had a rising middle class, greater book availability in the form of education, more presses, and innovations such as the lending library and the reading circle, as well as technological advancements in the printing press and a very consumer-based book market. If the factors enunciated by Ross, Benjamin, and Abrams are indeed the only factors which influence how society values literature, we shouldn’t have seen the functionally-oriented criticism which we saw in her literary reviews.

¹⁶⁵ “Melville” 329.

Chapter III

Communist East Germany and WWII America

As we examined nineteenth-century America, we found a society that seemed to be thoroughly consumer-based, yet thoroughly functional in its approach to literature—a phenomenon seemingly contradictory to the theories of Ross, Benjamin, and Abrams. But one case hardly proves a point, so this chapter will examine the same problem from a different angle. In this chapter we will compare two countries with economic systems as different from one another as possible to see if a producer-based or consumer-based economic system does indeed result in a difference in how the two countries value literature. Two such countries are mid-twentieth century United States, with its capitalistic economy, and mid-twentieth century East Germany, with its communist one.

American vs. East German Economic Environments

American economic environment—consumer based

Twentieth-century America simply expanded on its nineteenth-century heritage, increasing the numbers of libraries, publishers, and the extent and inclusiveness of public education, improving national literacy, and advancing the industrialization and technology which underlie the publishing industry. Frase, writing in 1965, notes the tremendous economic growth that America and the publishing industry underwent from 1935-1965:

The size of the American economy has more than doubled in the last three decades as measured by the gross national product in dollars of constant purchasing power. Total population has increased by almost 50 per cent.

Enrollment in educational institutions has greatly increased, especially at the

higher levels. High school enrollment has more than doubled, and college and university enrollment is more than three times as high as in 1930. *The book industry has more than matched this quantitative growth in the American economy and population.* In dollar volume, book sales are almost seven times as high as they were in 1931. In physical volume as measured by the number of copies sold, the increase has been about six times over the same period.¹⁶⁶

This growth was not isolated to just these thirty years either. Tebbel, writing in 1975, noted that book production has increased *each year* in the US despite the advent of television and radio.¹⁶⁷

Furthermore, I believe that Ross would have, without doubt, classified twentieth-century American book-trade as consumer-based, given its extensive marketing efforts, its best-seller lists, and its consumer reviews. Twentieth-century America's consumer-driven nature is also apparent from the existence of the many documents like the 1930 *Economic Survey of the Book Industry*, a comprehensive survey of the book publishing industry undertaken to carefully identify potential readers from each state, potential markets and actual markets.¹⁶⁸

The East German Economic Environment—production based

East Germany had many things in common with America during the middle part of the twentieth century. East Germany had a strong middle class. The communist goal to equalize people's material conditions ensured that. East Germans also had access to books (inexpensive, government subsidized ones at that!).¹⁶⁹ There were also plenty of educational opportunities,

¹⁶⁶ Robert W. Frase, "Introduction," *Economic Survey of the Book Industry 1930-1931* (New York: R.R. Bowker, 1965) xix. (emphasis mine)

¹⁶⁷ Tebbel "A Brief" 24. (emphasis mine)

¹⁶⁸ O.H. Cheney, *Economic Survey of the Book Industry 1930-1931* (New York: R.R. Bowker, 1965) 1.

¹⁶⁹ Reinhild Köhler-Hausmann, *Literatubetrieb in der DDR: Schriftsteller und Literaturinstanzen* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1984) 91.

libraries, and so forth since the communist party highly advocated universal education. And finally, East Germany had printing presses—approximately ninety of them in a relatively small country. But there was at least one significant difference: while America of the mid-twentieth century was decidedly consumer-based, East Germany was very producer-based.

When the Soviet Union took control of the eastern sector of Germany in 1945, it imposed on East Germany the centrally planned economy common to other East European communist states.¹⁷⁰ Having a centrally planned economy meant that a central State Planning Commission and National Economic Council set production goals for all sectors of the economy, including the publishing industry, mapping these goals out in one and five-year plans.¹⁷¹ Each individual production area's governing body (VVB) was then given some flexibility in determining how exactly to allocate funding, utilize technology, and allocate manpower and resources to meet these goals.¹⁷² In the publishing industry, this arrangement meant that the ministry-appointed press-leader was responsible for all decisions. He and the chief lecturer were jointly-responsible for the intellectual development of the people.¹⁷³

The government was able to regulate production like this because the means of production (as stipulated by Marxism) were communally (state)-owned. When the Soviet Union took control of East Germany in 1945, it confiscated and nationalized all governmental and military property, the property of Nazi activists and war criminals. Over the course of the next

¹⁷⁰ Stephen R. Burant, *East Germany: A Country Study*, (United States Government as Represented by the Secretary of the Army, 1988) 122.

¹⁷¹ Burant 122,49.

¹⁷² Burant 49.

¹⁷³ Köhler-Hausmann 99.

fifteen years the newly established German Democratic Republic (GDR)¹⁷⁴ gradually confiscated and added other private properties and land to the national ownership until “[a]t the close of 1960, private enterprise controlled only 9 percent of total industrial production,”¹⁷⁵ and in 1985, “state-owned enterprises or collectives earned 96.7 percent of total net national income.”¹⁷⁶

The presses were no exception to state ownership. Of the 90 or so presses found in East Germany, “[a]round 70 of these presses could be roughly classified as folk, party, or organization-specific presses. The remaining 20 presses were at least partially privately owned, [but that] meant that their permitted production share was required to be fairly small.”¹⁷⁷

Furthermore, these privately owned presses were often privately owned by religious or political parties. “The Union Verlag” for example, “belonged to the East German CDU, the political mouthpiece of the Christian Churches, including the Evangelische Verlags-Anstalt in Berlin and the Catholic St Benno Verlag in Leipzig.”¹⁷⁸ In short, by virtue of their ownership, no GDR presses were truly free simply to meet market demand. They were all either owned directly by the government and therefore under the control of governmental quotas, production goals and regulations, or they were owned by and under the control of church/political organizations.

Since the presses were subject to governmental or church control, they participated in forming state policy and ideology. Hallberg notes that “[w]riters and even scholars knew

¹⁷⁴ In German, the GDR is referred to as the Deutsche Democratic Republic or DDR

¹⁷⁵ Burant 48.

¹⁷⁶ Burant 122.

¹⁷⁷ “. . . lassen sich überschlagsmäßig 70 Verlage volks-, partei-, bzw. Organisationseigen einordnen. Rund 20 Verlage befinden sich also zumindest teilweise noch in Privatebesitz, wobei ihr mengenmäßiger Produktionsanteil relativ gering sein dürfte.” Köhler-Hausmann 98.

¹⁷⁸ J. H. Reid, “Christians, Pacifists and Others: West German Literature Published in East Germany,” *German Writers and the Cold War 1945-61*, eds. Rhys W. Williams, Stephen Parker and Colin Riordan (New York: Manchester U P, 1992) 34.

themselves to be participants in GDR society and even in the formation of state policy.”¹⁷⁹ They felt pressure to produce socially correct documents. As Gerhard Wolf noted, ‘Our critics are constantly under pressure, consciously or unconsciously, to proclaim solemn ideological allegiances.’¹⁸⁰ Many writers, scholars and critics did participate voluntarily, feeling that in socialism they were forwarding a noble cause, or that they could at least make a difference. But for those who didn’t participate voluntarily, there were structures in place to ensure their compliance none-the-less. Hallberg records the fact that was painfully obvious to many East Germans: “The most important feature of professional life in the GDR generally was the shadow structure of nearly every sector”¹⁸¹—the Stasi. The Stasi was an undercover organization of citizens-turned-informers. It was difficult to know who they were and many East Germans were amazed once the records were opened at the fall of the wall to find that their friends and neighbors had written reports on them which had caused them to lose jobs and opportunities. One surprising example of the Stasi’s pervasiveness in German life emerged when even one of the most avant-garde writers, Sascha Anderson, admitted a fifteen-year cooperation with the Stasi. As Hallberg writes, “[E]ven the avant-garde or alternative Prenzlauer Berg scene was proven to be deeply implicated in the state apparatus.”¹⁸² Occasionally, the Stasi even gave financial support to those writers of whose work they approved.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁹ Robert Von Hallberg, ed. *Literary Intellectuals and the Dissolution of the State: Professionalism and Conformity in the GDR*, trans. Kenneth J. Northcott (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1996) 8.

¹⁸⁰ Qtd in Hallberg 22.

¹⁸¹ Hallberg 12-13.

¹⁸² Hallberg 27.

¹⁸³ Hallberg 27.

While those who cooperated ideologically were rewarded, those who acted against the mandates of the party could be punished. “There was no career decision,” Rolf Schneider wrote, ‘in which the Stasi did not have a say.’¹⁸⁴ Eva Manske, appointed chair over American studies in Leipzig, explains that she wasn’t allowed to travel outside of the GDR because “I once made a reckless political remark in a private conversation. Someone must have reported it. It went as far as the ministry.”¹⁸⁵ But when these more mild deterrents failed, force sometimes became necessary in the form of imprisonment, arrest, and deportation.¹⁸⁶ Hans Joachiim Schädlich was just one of the many East German writers who experienced the government’s displeasure. After he signed a petition “protesting the expatriation of Wolf Biermann in 1976, he lost his position at the academy,” and after publishing a collection of short stories in a West German press, he was declared an “enemy of the state” and was eventually expatriated in 1977.¹⁸⁷ He explains that

[t]here were articles in the penal code that were as flexible as rubber: for subversive incitement, for illegal contact with the west, for degradation of leading representatives of the state, all that sort of thing. The article that was most frequently used was called “subversive incitement.” That can mean anything. In the early years of the GDR people were condemned for making a joke about Walter Ulbricht.¹⁸⁸

Although the governmental authorities over production were instructed that “production decisions be made on the basis of profitability, that salaries reflect performance, and that prices

¹⁸⁴ Hallberg 12-13.

¹⁸⁵ Hallberg 59.

¹⁸⁶ Burant 54.

¹⁸⁷ Hallberg 213.

¹⁸⁸ Qtd in Hallberg 219.

respond to supply and demand,”¹⁸⁹ the quota system and governmental ideological bias produced a rather poor fit between what the presses produced and what the readers wanted to read. Renate Feyl, an author from the GDR, mentions that while the normal figures for first editions might be ten thousand copies, “you always saw that the state bigwigs got an edition of one hundred thousand for novels and books that the state wanted.” On the other hand, even though books like Feyl’s would sell out in less than a week—clearly indicating market demand, they would only get an initial run of ten thousand. Furthermore, despite their popularity, reprints would be delayed for years.¹⁹⁰

In addition to the inevitable problem of ideological bias in the quota system, demand for books, as Köhler-Hausmann explains, was constantly greater than the supply that the presses could put out. This production shortage was a result of both the ideological slant in production decisions and a chronic paper shortage. This was the case with the Liepziger Buchmesse, for example, when in 1975 demand for books from the Liepziger Buchmesse was 40% greater than what the presses could supply, and in the realm of belletristic literature, things were even more extreme, as presses could only supply about 20% of the public demand. Supply was sometimes so poorly fitted to demand that often it could not even keep up with its own advertising. In a 1974 study of TV commercials for literature, conducted by the Leipzig commission on the book industry, researchers found that “[o]f 164 titles which were advertised on TV, only 27 titles (16.5%) were actually available in bookstores. Even with DDR contemporary lit, the relationship wasn’t much better. Of 42 TV advertised titles, only 6 were actually available in

¹⁸⁹ Burant 49.

¹⁹⁰ Hallberg 175.

bookstores.”¹⁹¹ The ever-poor fit between production in the GDR and the market did have at least one advantage for writers, however. As Feyl notes, as an author “you could work without being under pressure from the market” and as slowly as you wanted.¹⁹²

Despite the circumstances which I have described—the physical and ideological control of the government and the poor fit between what was produced and what the market wanted—East German writers felt very connected to their readerships. A close relationship between writers and their readers is natural in a consumption-based society, since, as we saw with Cooper, authors who have to write for the market need to stay very connected with what the market wants. East German writers may initially seem to fit that bill, since they treasured the letters and contact they had with their readers as vital grass-roots type contact with the people. As Hallberg notes,

[GDR writers] often piously referred to the letters they received from readers (*Leserbriefe*). Christoph Hein, for instance, in March 1990 said that he got so many letters from readers that he didn’t trust himself to go away for more than three days at a time. How many photographs one has seen of GDR writers signing books for grateful fans queued up to get a signature or exchange a few words!¹⁹³

GDR writers sincerely felt that they were supplying something which met the needs of the readers, as Hallberg notes: “Writers like Wolf often said that they could not in clear conscience

¹⁹¹ “Von 164 in der DDR erschienenen Titeln, die in Sendungen behandelt bzw. verfilmt wurden, waren nur 27 Titel (16,5%) im Buchhandel lieferbar. Auch bei DDR-Gegenwartsliteratur war die Relation kaum besser. Von 42 im Fernsehen behandelten Titeln waren 30 als Buch erschienen, jedoch nur 6 (20%). Köhler-Hausmann 102.

¹⁹² Hallberg 174.

¹⁹³ Hallberg 9.

emigrate and leave their readers without the human support writers could supply.”¹⁹⁴ This sort of close relationship between writer and reader may initially seem very consumer-based. But this closeness was, unfortunately, mostly an illusion. In truth, the distance between the GDR writers and their readers was more similar to the what writers in a production-based patronage system felt, as they wrote to their “learned readers.”

The distance between the writers and the readership became startlingly clear when the wall fell in 1989. Only weeks before the fall, prominent authors (as well as the GDR leadership) professed their confidence in the longevity of the GDR government and the people’s dedication to the principles it espoused. One infamous example was Christine Wolf, who in an interview on October 9, stated,

Obviously, I can only speak for myself, But I know from a great many people, I know from all the artists and art institutions, including the theater, the artists’ unions, the Academy of Arts, that this great opportunity does exist, that the changes which are needed have the support of large segments of our society. In the past I hardly dared hope that there were still so many people in the GDR who can say: ‘Yes, I would like to live in this nation, and I would like to help make it a place where I and my children really want to live.’¹⁹⁵

But “the surprise of the next month” writes Hallberg “was rather that so many people were prepared to leave the GDR.”¹⁹⁶ How was Wolf so wrong when she claimed that she “[knew]

¹⁹⁴ Hallberg 9.

¹⁹⁵ Hallberg 12.

¹⁹⁶ Hallberg 12.

from a great many people”)? Analyzing the above quote Hallberg explains that the professional structures kept the authors distanced from their readership:

Consider how she knows what she claims to know. In the second sentence here, she speaks as any westerner might, that is, for herself, her own individual experience. But the third sentence is that of a social analyst grounding observations in representative experience. She turns not to opinion polls, as a westerner might, but to the professional structures of the East German literary intellectual sector: the theaters, the galleries, the unions of artists, and the elite Academy of the Arts. Among these large segments not of GDR society but of GDR intellectuals, there were many who wished to live in a socialist Germany, but these professional organizations in fact kept intellectuals well screened from the truly large segments of GDR society outside these organizations that wanted no part of any socialist experiment, as all intellectuals would learn from the elections of March 1990.”¹⁹⁷

In regard to the readership, “I think to a large extent we were practicing self-deception,” says Marianne Streisand, a GDR scholar, “[o]r self-gratification. And that’s something I didn’t realize before November-December 1989 or January 1990. The election results in March 1990 were a rude awakening, to see how we had been living in limited circles and had always been writing for ourselves.”¹⁹⁸ Streisand wasn’t the only author who found herself baffled at the distance between how she thought and how the people thought. Hallberg writes that “Heym, Braun, and many other intellectuals discredited themselves by completely miscalculating the

¹⁹⁷ Hallberg 12.

¹⁹⁸ Hallberg 65.

direction in which democratic processes would lead citizens of the GDR.”¹⁹⁹ The same feeling of disjunction came in wave upon wave with further elections. Hallberg records, “Less than a week before the March 1990 election, Christoph Hein had felt convinced by letters from his readers that there was no gulf between intellectuals and the people. At the end of October 1989 he had told *Der Spiegel* that the intellectuals and the people of the GDR were united in the wish for an improved socialism.”²⁰⁰ Yet the wall fell, and the common people voted in overwhelming majorities against the socialists.

In consequence of the sudden disjunction between the readers they thought they had been writing to and their actual readers, many of GDR intellectuals felt betrayed by the people who, up until that point they had felt that they had been serving. Günter de Bruyn, for example, “acknowledged that many East German writers felt betrayed by their very readers”²⁰¹ Norbert Krenzlin, a professor at Humbolt University in Berlin sums it up:

As far as the ‘people’ were concerned, GDR writers were naïve. They weren’t skeptical, they weren’t euphoric. They were above all naïve, sociologically and from the point of view of the social sciences. Basically they did what the party fooled them into: they claimed to speak for the people [. . .] the artists [. . .] believed that they were the mouthpieces of the people. But that was an illusion. They were naïve. They were talking to a small section of the population that was interested in literature and politics. [. . .] And then came the festival of the revolution.²⁰²

¹⁹⁹ Hallberg 5.

²⁰⁰ Hallberg 5.

²⁰¹ Hallberg 5.

²⁰² Hallberg 43.

In trying to determine whether East Germany was consumer-based or producer based, then, we find that East Germany was much closer to a system of patronage (and Ross's descriptions of producer-based) than it was to a market-based or consumer-based system. The market, first of all, had only an indirect influence on book production since all production orders had to come from the government. And while the government claimed to try to meet consumer demand, we can see from the serious gap between market demand and the publication supply that the fit was a very poor one indeed. The patron (the government) also owned the means of production and was not afraid to censor, imprison or upbraid those authors who wrote inappropriately. The authors knew that they had to write to please the government if they wanted to be published, and although they believed that they also wrote to please their readers, when the wall fell down, they found that this was mostly imaginary. When the wall fell, it became apparent that writer's ideologies had a lot more in common with their patron (the government) than with the sentiments of the common German worker, who was eager for a new economic and political system. In short, the East German book economy was producer-based. As one East German critic wrote, "No matter how justified the increased attention to literary 'consumption,' it is production [in the GDR] which in the last resort is the predominant factor which mediates the mode and content of the reception."²⁰³

Economically speaking then, in America and East Germany, we have two very different economies. The American economy is very market driven; it is an example of what Ross would call a consumer-based society. The East German economy, on the other hand, was controlled in a very top-down way. It was very similar to the patronage systems of the pre-1700's that Ross

²⁰³ Weimann qtd in Colin B. Grant, *Literary Communication from Consensus to Rupture: Practice and Theory in Honecker's GDR*, (Amsterdam: Cola Minis und Arend Quak: 1995), 29.

classified as producer-based. Given these economic conditions, we should expect that these two countries viewed literature very differently. But did they?

Results

The East German Writer's Congress

The GDR writer's congress (which nearly all publishing writers were required to attend in East Germany) is an excellent place to look for statements which reflect prevailing attitudes about the purpose and function of literature. It is an excellent place to look because speaking writers explicitly stated their goals in the congress, and given the large attendance, the statements presumably reflected the sentiments of many of the writers—an assumption we will try to verify later. I therefore chose the opening and closing statements of the Eighth Writer's Congress of the German Democratic Republic as a primary source.²⁰⁴ The congress took place in Berlin, Germany between the 29th and 31st of May 1978, and boasted the presence of many government officials, including Erich Honecker, the leading GDR official, as well as delegations from other socialist and communist nations throughout the world. Both the opening and closing statements were delivered by Hermann Kant, an “author of a number of best-selling novels” and the president of the Writer's Union,²⁰⁵ who spoke on the congress theme: “The Responsibility of Writers in the Battles of our Time.”²⁰⁶

What view of literature did this congress espouse? Ross reports that rather than being prized as “autonomous creations,” works of literature in production-based, pre-1700s society are

²⁰⁴ Hermann Kant, “Die Verantwortung des Schriftstellers in den Kämpfen unserer Zeit,” *VIII. Schriftsteller Kongress der DDR*, 12-38, 179-181, (München: Damnitz Verlag GmbH, 1978).

²⁰⁵ Hallberg 143.

²⁰⁶ “Die Verantwortung des Schriftstellers in den Kämpfen unsere Zeit”

valued as a “rhetorical or didactic instruments.”²⁰⁷ The opening and closing statements of the eighth congress, as I will refer to it, are indeed rife with surprisingly direct examples of this functional orientation towards literature. Even the title, “The Responsibility of Writers in the Battles of our Time” establishes literature as a rhetorical or social tool. While this functional orientation immediately contradicts the predictions of Benjamin, Abrams, and Engelsing, from whose theories we would have expected the literate, middle-class, press-filled society of East Germany to have been very aesthetically oriented, it does nothing to disprove Ross’s theory.

We can see the functional orientation of the speaker even in the initial metaphors he uses to describe the writing situation and literature. The title of the speech, “The Responsibility of Writers in the Battles of our Time,” indicates a battle metaphor of some kind. But what battles are the writers are supposed to be fighting? Among other things, Kant states, “In these battles we aren’t fencing against some kind of men from Mars, rather with those. . . real existent enemies of socialism and against that which, for real existent socialism, is hostile, against that which in those things quarrels against [socialism], or also against that in those things which it is yet [to socialism] unbearable.”²⁰⁸ Kant summarizes, “That’s why one is in this profession in the end,” he says, “for the human rights.”²⁰⁹ Although the eighth congress is focused on fighting against such enemies as the anti-socialists rather than traditional immorality, we see that literature is indeed being seen as a rhetorical tool, fighting against the socialist version of immorality. Referring specifically to class struggles, Kant surmises that “in other times and in other battles,

²⁰⁷ Ross 397.

²⁰⁸ “Und diese Kämpfe fechten wir ja nicht mit irgendwelchen Marsmenschen aus, sondern mit den, mit Verlaub, real existierenden Feinden des Sozialismus und dem, was dem real existierenden Sozialismus feindlich ist, was mit ihm unverträglich oder auch in ihm noch unerträglich ist” Kant 22.

²⁰⁹ “für ihn ist man in diesen Beruf; und die Menschenrechte schließlich. . .” Kant 38.

literature has proved itself, how should it not in this time and in these battles?”²¹⁰ “No one can hold himself outside of the battle of his time, and especially not a writer,”²¹¹ states Kant.

“Socialism needs us!”²¹² “What is keeping our new hero?”²¹³ The rhetorical power of literature is emphasized so strongly that it is no longer spoken of in terms of “persuasion,” but “war.”

Writers are no longer artists, but heroes.

From the initial metaphor of battles and heroes, we continue with a concept of literature’s moral instrumentality. Says Kant,

Our books have contributed considerably to the self-awareness of the citizens of this land, they took part in the release of personality, they were beneficial to knowledge and clarity processes, they have kept fun and conflict in gait, served to the true emancipation of men, the unfolding of the citizen mind, sociability and solidarity; have helped many to find, keep, or to rediscover enthusiasm for life, and our books have done their part to strengthen the determination to heartily defend this life[style].²¹⁴

²¹⁰ “In anderen Zeiten und anderen Kämpfen hat sich die Literatur bewährt; wie sollte sie es nicht in dieser Zeit und diesen Kämpfen?” Kant 28.

²¹¹ “niemand sich heraushalten kann aus den Kämpfen seiner Zeit, und ein Schriftsteller schon gar nicht” Kant 35.

²¹² “Der Sozialismus braucht uns!” Kant 181.

²¹³ “Wo bleibt der neue Held?” Kant 23.

²¹⁴ “Unsere Bücher haben zur Ausformung des Selbstbewußtseins der Bürger dieses Landes erheblich beigetragen; sie waren beteiligt an der Freisetzung von Persönlichkeit; sie waren Erkenntnis und Klärungsprozessen förderlich; haben Spaß und Streit in Gang gehalten; dienten der wirklichen Emanzipation von Menschen, der Ausfaltung von Bürgersinn, Gesellschaftlichkeit und Solidarität; haben so manchem geholfen, die Lust am Leben zu gewinnen, zu behalten oder wiederzufinden—und unsere Bücher taten ihr Teil, die Entschlossenheit zu kräftigen, dieses Leben kräftig zu verteidigen.” Kant 18.

Kant sees literature as beneficial in developing all of these good qualities in the citizens.

“Literature is a democratic thing,” he notes, “for it looks after the broad dispensation of knowledge and recognition.”²¹⁵—clearly a didactic approach.

When talking about what makes “good writing,” Kant (like Ross’s pre-1700s examples of production-based views on literature) classifies “good” literature as literature which promotes “virtue.”²¹⁶ Kant advises young writers: “Do something; do it differently, but do it well! That ‘good’ to us isn’t handled as a politically value-free term is understood. So, dear friends, do it well, do it as your socialist land has need of.”²¹⁷ Here, Kant equates “well” with doing something “as your socialist land has need of”—certainly a virtue in Kant’s eyes. Kant later refers to Anna Seghers, from whom he says everyone can learn.²¹⁸ He praises her novel, *Seventh Cross* (*Siebten Kreuz*), because it “supplies one with courage, and with confidence, and with the great composure that he/she needs for great battles.”²¹⁹

Kant’s statements correlate yet further with Ross’s predictions on the level of their effect. Ross notes that “early defenses of poetry’s utility rarely detailed the nature of these effects at the level of individuals. These effects were rather benefits to the community at large.”²²⁰ We see this production-based communal evaluation of benefit when Kant, praising Anna Seghers’ book,

²¹⁵ “Sie [die Literature] ist eine demokratische Sache, denn sie sorgt für breite Umverteilung von Kenntnissen und Erkenntnissen.” Kant 14.

²¹⁶ Ross 404.

²¹⁷ “Macht mal; macht es anders, aber macht es gut! Daß “gut” von uns nicht als politisch wertfreier Begriff gehandelt wird, versteht sich wohl. Also, lieber Freunde, macht es gut; macht es so, wie euer sozialistisches Land es nötig hat” Kant 17.

²¹⁸ Kant 27.

²¹⁹ “und die einen mit Mut versieht und mit Zuversicht und mit der großen Gelassenheit, die es für große Kämpfe braucht” Kant 27.

²²⁰ Ross 400.

raves that “[i]t made a storm. That book made a storm. Books can do that. The world is a degree different since that ‘Seventh Cross.’ She made a step towards freedom. That is what literature can do.”²²¹ Notice that in describing the power Anna Segher’s writing has, Kant doesn’t describe its effect on himself as an individual or on any other particular people. He describes it broadly as having changed the world. This way of measuring literature’s impact is indeed what Ross predicted in a production-based society which lacks a clear concept of its consumers—a society which therefore fills in the reader gap with vague generalizations about societal improvement, or further, with the construct of the “learned reader.”

The learned reader, according to Ross, was another symptom of pre-1700 producer-based literature.²²² Ross cites Defoe’s “impartial reader,”²²³ and Jonson’s “Reader extraordinary.”²²⁴ This “learned reader” emerges in Kant’s description of Segher’s writing in terms of its impact on a mysterious “one” who would be filled with the courage, confidence, and composure he or she would need “for great battles.”²²⁵ In addition to the “one,” we also have something Kant refers to lovingly as “reader land,”²²⁶ by which he means the general population of the DDR. But “reader land” seems to actually be a sort of mass ideal reader. Kant describes the inhabitants of “reader land” standing in long lines—lines longer than similar lines outside dance cafes, simply

²²¹ “es machte einen Sturm. Das Buch hat einen Sturm gemacht. Bücher können das. Die Welt ist um einen Grad anders seit jenem ‘Siebten Kreuz’; sie hat einen Schritt zur Freiheit getan. Das ist, was Literatur vermag” Kant 27.

²²² Ross 403.

²²³ Ross 402.

²²⁴ Ross 403.

²²⁵ “und die einen mit Mut versieht und mit Zuversicht und mit der großen Gelassenheit, die es für große Kämpfe braucht” Kant 27.

²²⁶ “leser land” Kant 17.

to see their favorite author in person and get him or her to sign a book for them. He describes a demand for books greater than the supply. He describes East Germans proudly giving away East German books to their West German friends.²²⁷ Again, in preference to describing individuals, Kant describes a general mass behavior which is warmly flattering to the authors. Norbert Krenzlin, a professor of aesthetics at Humbolt University in Berlin and a former citizen of the GDR, confirms the fictionalization of “the people” in an interview. He explains, “The people and the masses are not, in the strict sense, social categories but merely metaphors. And that’s the way they are used. For some the people were those who followed the utopian political ideas of the writers with enthusiasm—the ideal readers; for others the people were a principle of reality, if necessary, a rod that beat into the intellectuals what reality really was.”²²⁸ “The people,” was merely a metaphor, a fictionalized “learned reader” to whom authors could address their prose.

So far, we see a remarkable connection between Ross’s description of pre-1700 producer-based attitudes towards literature and the attitudes demonstrated by Hermann Kant’s speech in the Eighth Writers Congress of the German Democratic Republic. However, we need to ensure that we can trust what we have found. First we need to make sure that the eighth congress was representative of GDR conferences, then we need to ensure that it is not the congress-genre itself which lends itself to these kinds of functionalistic, pre-1700 conceptions of literature. And finally, we need to find out if Hermann Kant’s statements were representative of most East German writers of the time.

²²⁷ Kant 15.

²²⁸ Hallberg 43.

To address the first question, I briefly consulted the two other GDR congresses available to me (held in 1969 and 1973)²²⁹ and found that they do indeed contain roughly the same sentiments as the eighth congress which I studied, which suggests that the eighth congress was a fairly representative East German Congress.

After that I briefly compared the eighth-congress remarks with those made in a comparable West German congress to find out if a functional view of literature was inherent in the congress genre itself. A West German congress was ideal for the purpose since West Germans and East Germans share a common cultural heritage (diverging only after the second world war). The opening addresses of the West German Fifth International-Germanist-Congress come from roughly the same time period (1975) as the East German Congress (1978) and yet are drastically different from Herman Kant's address. Instead of examining the social, moral and political functions of literature, the West German congress spent the opening speech of its conference talking about money and thanking donors.²³⁰ While the capitalist West German preoccupation with money may be laughably ironic when seen from the communist perspective, it does go to show that not all congresses, not even all German congresses from the cold-war period were so concerned with the rhetorical and didactic forces in literature as were the authors of the DDR. However, it is still arguable that the eighth congress speeches, since they are the voice of only one man (albeit an influential one), Hermann Kant, hardly prove a larger trend. It is especially important to establish a correspondence between Kant's sentiments and the attitudes of other East German authors of the period, since Hermann Kant, as the president of the Writers

²²⁹ *Protokoll VI. Deutscher Schriftstellerkongreß vom 28. bis 30. Mai 1969 in Berlin.* (Altenburg, German Democratic Republic: Maxim Gorki, 1969). and *Protokoll VII. Schriftstellerkongreß der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik.* (German Democratic Republic: Druckerei Neues Deutschland, 1974).

²³⁰ *Akten des V. Internationalen Germanisten-Kongresses Cambridge 1975.* vol. 1 Leonard Forster und Hans-Gert Roloff, eds (Frankfurt/M.: Hebert Lang Bern, Peter Lang, 1976) 7-17.

Union, was more entangled in the political arena than many of his colleagues and therefore may have been more likely to use literature as a tool for building up the GDR.

To investigate this question, I researched GDR writers and discovered that the attitudes I noted in the eighth congress do seem to have extended beyond the congress itself. They were of course present in the political structure under which all the writers wrote. Alexandra Schichtel notes that Stalin had given the writers the station “Engineer of the Soul,”²³¹ and that the leaders of the DDR, recognizing the tremendous influence on the ideological development of the people, determined that the writers should serve political purposes by “influence[ing] the masses in the ideals of socialism.”²³² She also notes that simply in order to publish, a writer was required to belong to the “Schriftsteller-Verband” (Writer’s Union) of the DDR, which officially recognized the workers and the socialist party, and had as its stated goal outfitting its writers to create “worthy and useful”²³³ literature.

But the writers themselves, to some extent, also reflected and confirmed the eighth congress speech. Speaking generally, they did enjoy the importance their mandate to create “worthy and useful” literature gave them. As Hallberg notes, “the greatest privilege enjoyed by writers and scholars in East Germany was altogether immaterial: they felt a sense of consequence.”²³⁴ “People needed me,” Christine Wolf said. “People needed something to give

²³¹ “Ingenierure der Seele” (Alexandra Schichtel, *Zwischen Zwang und Freiwilligkeit: Das Phänomen Anpassung in der Prosaliteratur der DDR* (Opladen/Wiesbaden, Germany: Westdeutscher Verlag GmbH, 1998) 30.

²³² “Die Schriftsteller, denen Stalin in der attribuierung als <Ingenieure der Seele> großen Einfluß bei der ideologischen Erziehung der Bevölkerung zusprach, sollten der Politik dienen indem sie die ‘Massen im Geiste der Ideale des Sozialismus’ beeinflussen.” Schichtel 30.

²³³ “würdige und nützliche Literatur zu schaffen” Schichtel 32.

²³⁴ Hallberg 8.

them strength.”²³⁵ According to Hallberg (who interviewed more than two dozen of them after the wall fell), many GDR writers agreed with Helga Königsdorff, who stated, “We believed in reforming the GDR state from within; in the possibility of coming one step closer to the beautiful utopia.”²³⁶ Hans Joachim Schädlich, a GDR writer, explains that people often saw literature as a handmaiden to the state: “The ideal of autonomy [of literature] was opposed to the doctrine of the state, *and for most people it was also opposed to their own understanding of their role in this comic society*”²³⁷ He continues, “Literature always had a sort of enlightening pedagogical function [. . .] There are very enthusiastic proponents of a view that literature has, from the outset, a specific task to perform. This always ends up in some sort of idea of bettering the world or improving society or sensitizing the reader’s ability to perceive, etc.”²³⁸ Frank and Therese Hörnigk, two other GDR writers, agree: “Many people who are still alive [. . .] were ready to instrumentalize their social roles: they had to be advocates for socialism vis-à-vis literature. That penetrated into their language, into their fundamental understanding of literature.”²³⁹

This functionalistic, pro-socialist attitude was not, of course, universal. Other GDR writers often saw literature as a vehicle for dissent in an otherwise repressive state. They saw their literature as a way of speaking out against the government, of giving voice to their frustrations. But even this view of literature politicizes it, giving it a social function in its time. Even those who choose to use their writing to tear down repressive states or urge reform are

²³⁵ Hallberg 9.

²³⁶ Hallberg 10.

²³⁷ Hallberg 217. (emphasis mine)

²³⁸ Hallberg 215.

²³⁹ Hallberg 77.

viewing literature as a tool rather than a purely aesthetic object. This clearly represents a functionalistic viewpoint.

All in all, it appears that East Germany, as represented by the writer's congress and her authors did seem to have a very functional view of literature (whether the individual writers supported the GDR or not). The East German writers seemed to hold this functional view despite the fact that they lived in a society with a strong middle class, access to books, and printing presses—a fact which seems to contradict the theories of Abrams and Benjamin. Ross's theory, however, which hypothesized that East Germany's producer-based economy would result in a functionalistic-orientation toward literature, seems (so far) confirmed.

The American Writer's Congress

To compare this production-based result against a consumption-based result, I found an American "Writers Congress" which took place in 1943, at the height of W.W.II, and briefly studied its opening speech. I chose 1943 because, among my limited available selections of American writer's congresses, it alone mirrored the war-time context of the East German Congress (a variable which I feared might otherwise skew my data if it wasn't held constant).²⁴⁰ 1943 America was capitalistic and market-driven. We might expect, then, that its literature would be less didactic, less rhetorical in nature. But was it? Robert Gordon Sproul, president, announces the purposes of the congress as follows:

[T]his Congress will serve only, and serve well, these purposes, namely: To analyze propaganda techniques as weapons of victory; to sharpen the creative

²⁴⁰ After reading the opening and closing statements of the East German Writers Congress (which made several fearful references to nuclear war) I became concerned that war could be an influential factor in how a society values literature. If war did make a difference in how a society valued literature, comparing an at-war production-based society with an at-peace consumption-based society would produce skewed results. Only limited "Writer's Congresses" were available to me, so while I acknowledge that WWII America may not be the perfect comparison to Communist East Germany, it was the best available to me at the time.

skill of writers by pooling their creative experience and knowledge; to investigate the most effective use of new media of expression; to strengthen firm and continuous cultural understanding among the United Nations; to mobilize the entire writing profession in a program of action for the free world of tomorrow.²⁴¹

A congress that plans to “analyze propaganda techniques as weapons of victory,” “strengthen firm and continuous cultural understanding among the United Nations,” and “mobilize the entire writing profession in a program of action for the free world of tomorrow” is viewing literature very functionally—as a tool, a weapon, and a political force. Let’s look at another example, again from this speech in the American Writers Congress:

Teachers and writers should be the first to become aware of the importance of the changes that are coming and to make adjustment to them. In proportion as they do this, or at least rearrange their prejudices to meet them, so far will they fulfill their function in a changing society and fortify their traditional position as permanent and indispensable agencies of social progress. Believing these things to be true, we of the University have joined with the writers of America in this Congress to avert a common danger, to destroy a common menace in the threat of a totalitarian new order, and to build for a finer America in the happier world of the future.²⁴²

²⁴¹ *Writers’ Congress: The Proceedings of the Conference held in October 1943 under the sponsorship of the Hollywood Writers’ Mobilization and the University of California*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1944), 4. (italics added).

²⁴² *Writers’ Congress* 5. (italics added).

The assumption that writers have a function in society and play a role as an “indispensable agency of social progress” is a clearly functionalistic idea. I offer one last quotation from the same congress opening:

Out of this Congress we also hope will come many other things—the most important of which is the direct contribution made toward the winning of the war and the utter destruction of the most evil force the world has ever known, Fascism. [. . .] The enemy knows this. [. . .] I was told recently that in the Soviet Union the Nazis sent over a squadron of twenty bombers to destroy completely the home of Sholokov, the great Russian writer, so much of an enemy did he represent to them. I wonder how many bombers it would be worth to the enemy to destroy this Congress, if it were possible—I think a great many.²⁴³

Amazingly, despite living in a very consumer-based, capitalist society, these American writers maintained an attitude towards literature every bit as functional as the attitude held by the East Germans. Their functionalistic orientation throws yet more doubt on the theories of Benjamin and Abrams, for whom WWII America’s technological advancements, strong middle class, and availability of books should have predicted a strongly aesthetic view of literature. Yet the 1943 American writer’s congress also throws doubt onto Ross’s theories. If having a producer-based and a consumer-based economy was the only or even the primary factor that made the difference in whether or not a society viewed literature functionally or aesthetically, America and East Germany (with their drastically different economic bases) should have held very different views on literature’s role. But they didn’t. Perhaps there are other factors at work here.

²⁴³ *Writers’ Congress 7.*

Chapter IV

9/11

In examining nineteenth-century America, and in comparing World War II America with Communist East Germany, we discovered that there was no clear correlation between a functional or aesthetic view of literature and elements of the economy, such as a rising middle class, printing presses, libraries and lending circles. In addition, we have also found that having a producer or consumer-based society seems to make no necessary change in how society views and values literature, thus throwing significant doubt onto the validity of Ross, Benjamin, and Abrams' theories.

Perhaps there are other motives and factors (beyond economics) which influence how we value literature. Perhaps the conditions of war (and the resulting feelings of fear and vulnerability) which communist East Germany and WWII America shared are significant. After all, both Hermann Kant and Robert Gordon Sproul expressed (in fairly emotional terms) a fear of destruction. Sproul cites the stories of the Nazi bombers who bombed the Russian writer Sholokov's home and asks, "I wonder how many bombers it would be worth to the enemy to destroy this Congress, if it were possible—I think a great many."²⁴⁴ And during the course of his speech, Hermann Kant comments fearfully on the nuclear threat:

But what is far, far worse is that time, perhaps not too far away to measure, when by the will of those who rule, the land between the Saar and the Unterelbe [East Germany] will become a stationing place for nuclear weapons. At that point, they

²⁴⁴ *Writers' Congress* 7.

won't count on nots, but they will count on people, on the many who are called "brothers and sisters." They will count, honored ex-colleagues, on your brothers and sisters, on your fathers and mothers, and on that little girl from next door. I know, I know that these perverse devices are only intended for the case of defense. Yes, and I know that the story of war is a story of defense and "defense." The largest war up to this point began with the bellow, "since 4:45 this morning we've returned fire."²⁴⁵

Consider, too, the fact that nineteenth-century America also shared a war-time context. Fresh from the Revolutionary war, nineteenth-century America found herself fighting the British again in 1812. By 1845 America again faced potential war with Britain over the Oregon territory, and in 1846 she declared war against Mexico. After the three year Mexican American War, America spent the next thirteen years building up to the Civil War, which began in 1861 and lasted until 1865. And again, in 1898 America declared war on Spain during the Spanish American War. Nor should we forget that, interspersed with these official wars were a number of Indian conflicts. In short, every generation of nineteenth-century Americans experienced war, including the war which has often been called the bloodiest war fought on American soil: the Civil War. Perhaps the wars (and accompanying feelings of fear and vulnerability) which nineteenth-century America, communist East Germany, and WWII America experienced contribute to the consistently functional orientation of literature which we have uncovered in each of these contexts.

²⁴⁵ "Aber, was weitaus, weitaus schlimmer ist, nicht allyu bemessen ist dortzulande die Zeit, bis, geht es nach dem Willen der Herrschenden, das Gelände zwischen Saar und Unterelbe Stationierungsplatz von Neutronenwaffen geworden ist. Die zielen dann nicht ins Nichts, die zielen dann auf Menschen, auf die vielberufenen „Brüder und Schwestern“ zielen sie, auf, werte Exkollegen, auf eure Brüder und Schwestern, auf eure Väter und Mütter, und auf das kleine Mädchen von nebenan. Ich weiß, ich weiß, diese perversen Geräte sind ja nur für den „Verteidigungsfall“ gedacht. Ja, und ich weiß, die Geschichte der Kriege ist eine Geschichte der Verteidigungsfälle und der „Verteidigungsfälle“. Der bislang größte begann mit dem Gebrüll: „Seit heute früh 4.45 Uhr wird zurückgeschossen.“ Kant 29.

So, I hypothesize: While economics may be one factor which influences how we value literature, other factors including (among others) war, fear and feelings of vulnerability, and strong religious or ideological beliefs may also influence how a society views literature.

If it *is* the case that war and feelings and fear and vulnerability impact our view of literature, 9/11 is a good case to study. On September 11, 2001, for the first time in a long while, Americans were attacked on their own soil, and they were attacked in a random, senseless sort of a way that put *every* American, not just the armed forces, in temporary fear for his or her life and for the lives of their loved ones. Americans felt very vulnerable; many people felt afraid. They didn't want to fly; they were worried for acquaintances in New York. They tightened security. They bought flags. If feelings of fear and vulnerability make people grasp for literature which is morally strengthening, instructional and informative rather than for literature which is simply aesthetically pleasing, 9/11 is the perfect case to study.

In view of that, I collected research and conducted an empirical study to determine how the book trade was influenced by the events of September 11th, and I have discovered four things:

1. 9/11 influenced the subject matter of the books that were bought and published. After the attacks, people showed greater interest in books which provided them with information relevant to the attacks and books which offered spiritual comfort—both functional characteristics.

2. 9/11 also influenced how people judged the books they read. Post-9/11 consumers were more concerned with the functional contents of their books than they had been before the attacks, and they judged their books accordingly.

3. The way that people judged books after 9/11 manifests itself in sales. Books which consumers judged to have a more functional content than others (regardless of subject matter) climbed the best-seller lists over the weeks following 9/11, while more aesthetic, less functional books dropped down the rankings.

4. War aside, even in twenty-first century, consumption-driven America, consumers were still very concerned with function.

A Change in Subject Matter

The events of 9/11 precipitated an immediate change in the subject matter of books that sold—a change that eventually reached even to the best-seller lists. While post 9/11 consumers continued to purchase the typical action/suspense, romance, and historical/biographical fare that typically made up the best seller lists, post-9/11 consumers particularly hunted for books which offered information relevant to the terrorist attacks and also for books which provided spiritual comfort in an unsure time.

Firstly, consumers after 9/11 wanted literature that would give them information on what had just happened. Emily Eakin, a reporter for the *New York Times*, wrote on September 18, 2001, that “[w]ithin hours after last Tuesday’s terrorist attacks, sales of books related to the disaster surged as people desperate for information and explanations rushed to purchase treatises on terrorism and the Arab world and biographies of the World Trade Center.”²⁴⁶ She went on to quote from several bookstore supervisors and owners:

“Our Islam section has really emptied out” said Virginia Harabin, a supervisor at Politics & Prose, a bookstore in Washington. Among the books selling well, she said, were two by Karen Armstrong—a history of Islam and a biography of

²⁴⁶ Emily Eakin, “Suddenly, It’s Nostradamus, The Best Seller,” *New York Times* 18 Sept. 2001: E1.

Muhammad and the works of the Palestinian-American literary critic Edward Said. At the Strand, a second-hand bookstore in Manhattan, customers sought copies of Eric Darton's "Divided we Stand: A Biography of New York City's World Trade Center" [. . .]²⁴⁷

Eakin further records that by Wednesday morning several presses had already sold out of 9/11 related books and were planning to reprint more. Rutgers University Press was running its second largest reprint ever on *Twin Towers: The Life of New York City's World Trade Center*,²⁴⁸ and Northeastern University Press was running its largest reprint ever on *The New Jackals Ramzi Yousef, Osama bin Laden and the Future of Terrorism*.²⁴⁹

These changes weren't immediately manifest on the New York Times Best Seller Lists because the sudden demand quickly lapped up the small pool of available books on the topic and it takes time to reprint more copies or publish new books. But over the months following 9/11, publishers did get the books published, and many of them hit the bestseller lists. As Minzesheimer records, "The destruction of the World Trade Center quickly became the most rapidly documented single event in history inspiring about 200 non-fiction books."²⁵⁰ We can see several of these on the New York Times Best Seller List. For example, *Germs*, a "report on biological weapons and America's response to them" placed eleventh on the best-seller list on October 7th, returning again on October 14th along with *Fire*, "a collection of pieces about firefighters and other people who confront 'situations that could easily destroy them'" and *War*

²⁴⁷ Eakin E1.

²⁴⁸ Eakin E6.

²⁴⁹ Eakin E6.

²⁵⁰ Bob Minzesheimer "Fiction deals with Sept.11 in ways journalism can't," *USA Today* 27 Feb. 2003, final ed.: D07.

in a Time of Peace. The week following they were joined by *Twin Towers*, “a history of the World Trade Center” and then later by *Islam* and *The New Jackals*, a book about terrorist networks and Osama bin Laden.²⁵¹ Minzesheimer sums up interest in 9/11 books for the year following the attack:

After the 9/11 attacks, a hunger arose for books that would help explain the terrifying events. Demand peaked during the holidays. Interest was steady but slower through spring 2002, but was quiet during the summer and picked up again at the end of August, when more books were released.²⁵²

According to booksellers and publishing industry executives, this demand for informational material was not unusual, given the situation. Eakin notes that booksellers and publishing industry executives report “that the demand for books providing background information on the attacks was consistent with the response to previous national and international incidents—including the 1993 World Trade Center bombing and the Gulf War.”²⁵³

In addition to information directly related to the attacks, post-9/11 consumers sought out books of a spiritual or ideological nature. Eakin noted that in the week after 9/11, books on the prophecies of Nostradamus became immensely popular. She reports, “At the Barnes & Noble bookstore on Court Street in Brooklyn, clerks were keeping an informal tally of requests for Nostradamus’s prophecies ‘So far today 20 people have asked for Nostradamus,’ said Wayne Cuberbatch, a store manager, ‘And we’ve been sold out since Wednesday.’”²⁵⁴ Similarly, in the

²⁵¹ “Best Sellers,” *New York Times* 7 Oct. 2001: 442; “Best Sellers,” *New York Times* 14 Oct. 2001: BR30; “Best Sellers,” *New York Times* 21 Oct. 2001: BR34; “Best Sellers,” *New York Times* 28 Oct. 2001: BR30.

²⁵² Bob Minzesheimer “Events of Sept.11, in words and pictures; On the best-seller list: Analysis, advice, photos, interviews.” *USA Today*. 9 Sept. 2002, final ed.: D05.

²⁵³ Eakin E6.

²⁵⁴ Eakin E1.

weeks following 9/11, the book *Crossing Over*, a book about a psychic medium's experiences, rose in rank on the best-seller lists. In addition to the interest in spirituality and mysticism, there was also an ideological shift towards conservative patriotism as represented by the titles. As Edwin Feuler humorously explains in March 2002,

[T]he big news at the cash registers is this: Not a single book on the prized New York Times nonfiction best-sellers list denigrates America, past or present. Not a single book argues that we need to turn all guys into misty-eyed, politically correct wimps. Not a single book celebrates the achievement of communism, socialism, Stalinism, Leninism, Maoism, Taosim or even Clintonism. Not a single book argues that the values of the cave-dwellers are the moral equivalent of our Western values, only different. And not a single book can be described as “poignantly delicious,” or by any of the other code words or fab phrases so dear to the literary high and mighty. No the big news is that the nonfiction best-sellers list, where “rankings reflect sales,” is dominated by full-blooded conservative titles.²⁵⁵

Indeed, by November 11th—two months after the attacks, the top fifteen non-fiction books on the New York Times Best-Seller list included six related to 9/11: *The Final Days*, *Germes*, *Islam*, *War in a Time of Peace*, *Fire*, and *Twin Towers*, two of a spiritual nature: *Crossing Over* and *The Christmas Box Miracle*, three of a patriotic tone: *John Adams*, *Wild Blue*, and *Roosevelt's Secret War*, three politically conservative titles about big business or conservatism: *The No Spin Zone*, *Jack: Straight from the Gut*, and *Good to Great*, and finally, only one title which was neither 9/11 related, spiritual, patriotic, or conservative: *Q*—the auto

²⁵⁵ Edwin Feuler, “Book Lists Take More Loyal Turn,” *Washington Times* 6 March 2002: A15.

biography of musician Quincy Jones. Even among the fiction best sellers (where thrillers, action and romance typically dominate the scene), there was at least one book directly connected to 9/11 and the ensuing war—*Separation of Power* about a top CIA agent who must stop Saddam Hussein from getting control of nuclear weapons. In addition, there were at least three books of a somewhat spiritual/moral nature: *The Corrections*, *The Mitford Snowmen*, and *Journey through Heartsongs*, a “collection of poems by an 11-year-old boy with muscular dystrophy,”²⁵⁶ and one of a clearly patriotic tone—*The Best-Loved Poems of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis*.

This conservative, spiritual, patriotic post-9/11 collection of titles was a substantial change from that of July 15, 2001—two months before the attacks—which sported *Nickel and Dimed*, a book about poverty in America in its non-fiction best seller list, as well as a number of titles which were neither spiritual, nor political, neither patriotic: *The Botany of Desire* (a book about flowering plants), *French Lessons* (a book about French cuisine) and *Napalm and Silly Putty* (a collection of comedy pieces). Among the fiction best-sellers, I found only one book which seemed to be of a moral or spiritual nature—*Back When We Were Grownups*. There were also two historical fictions: *Cane River* and *The Wind Done Gone*—both about slavery. All the rest fell under the general categories of murder-mystery thrillers or romances. In short post-9/11 best-seller lists were much more prone to patriotic, conservative, and moral/spiritual subject matter than the pre-9/11 best-seller lists.

Normally, as academics and literary scholars, we like to think of the book industry in our modern 2000-something society as very avant-garde, very intellectual, very aesthetic. As Von Hallberg notes in his collection of interviews with East German intellectuals “From an American viewpoint [an] account of the literary function as an aid to living (*Lebenshilfe*) is too naïve to

²⁵⁶ “Best Sellers,” *New York Times* 11 Nov. 2001: BR30.

utter publicly.”²⁵⁷ But the books consumers looked for after 9/11 seem to indicate something different. After 9/11, consumers looked for books whose content filled a functional need. They looked for books which gave them information on the events around them, offered spiritual comfort, and reinforced their ideology—every one of these a functional need.

Even novelists themselves seemed to recognize the functional implications of their work. Bob Minzesheimer interviewed a number of authors in January 2002, four months after the attack, and several of them specifically assigned literature a functional role in helping us to deal with our experiences. For example, one novelist, Chita Benerjee Divakaruni, observed in January 2002, “Terrible things have happened before—the Holocaust, the world war, the atomic bomb in Japan—and fiction has found a way to deal with them.”²⁵⁸ Richard Hoyt, a thriller writer, observed that “the secret of most thrillers is that they ‘do not thrill. They reassure.’ They appeal to ‘readers who yearn for some measure of justice. In fiction the forces of good triumph, where they don’t always in reality.”²⁵⁹ Yet another novelist, Margot Livesy adds, “Novels are a way of organizing our experiences, even with massive events.”²⁶⁰

In short, 9/11 had a dramatic impact on the subject matter of what was sold. After 9/11 we see an influx of books, both fiction and non-fiction, which attempt to deal with, explain, or analyze the events. We see a general shift in attitude towards a more conservative, functionally-oriented literature, and finally we see that the writers themselves make comments which assign functional roles to literature.

²⁵⁷ Hallberg 9.

²⁵⁸ Bob Minzesheimer, “Novelists find new reality after 9/11; Explosions and evil-doers are nothing new to authors. But now the reality of terrorism has caught up to their worlds of fantasy. What happens next? Keep reading . . .” *USA Today* 17 Jan. 2002, final ed.: A01.

²⁵⁹ Minzesheimer, “Novelists find” A01.

²⁶⁰ Minzesheimer, “Novelists find” A01.

A Change in Consumer Attitudes

In addition to the change in subject matter came a change in what people looked for in the books they read. To find out whether consumers valued books more functionally after 9/11 than before, I examined the customer reviews from Amazon.com for 12 books for the month preceding and the month following 9/11/01.²⁶¹

Methodology

I chose to examine customer reviews of the books because in a customer review format, the reviewers are generally (though not always) frank and up-front about what they either liked or didn't like about the book in question, and thus, it is fairly easy to get an idea about what criteria they are using to judge the book. I also wanted to use customer reviews rather than professionally conducted book reviews because the customer reviews represent a much more accurate picture of the attitudes of book-buying consumers. The customer reviews do have the disadvantage that they are somewhat self-selecting and consequently less than completely random). And by virtue of the fact that they are online reviews, they also exclude those individuals who are not computer-competent, or those who do not own a computer or have internet access. However, I believe these weaknesses will not harshly undermine the accuracy of this study.

Choosing the customer reviews from Amazon.com had a couple of distinct advantages. First, each entry was dated so that I could know exactly what day the customer entered the review. Second, because it was an online review, there was no publication lag. The date that the customer posted was the day he/she wrote. Third, Amazon.com has a fairly large consumer

²⁶¹ For two of the books, *The Art of Happiness* and *The Brethren*, I actually reviewed the customer reviews for a period of three months on either side of 9/11. I did this because, despite the fact that these were best sellers, too few reviews existed in the one-month window to make any sort of accurate study.

base. For some of the books the numbers of reviews were up into the several thousands. Over 1,600 customers have currently reviewed *Tuesdays with Morrie*, for example.

Since I obviously could not examine the reviews for all the books in publication, I had to make a selection of some sort. For my first six books I wanted the longest running best sellers over the entire year before and the year after 9/11, because they would have reviews over a long time span and more reviews in total—ie. a larger, more accurate base to draw on and study. Therefore, I simply chose those books which were the longest-running adult²⁶² best sellers on the New York Times Best Seller List, whose rankings are based on sales “at almost 4,000 bookstores plus wholesalers serving 50,000 other retailers”²⁶³ for the year previous to 9/11 and the year following 9/11 (September 11, 2000-September 11, 2002). These books were *Tuesdays with Morrie*, *The Greatest Generation*, *The Art of Happiness*, and *John Adams*, each of which stayed on the top 15 of the New York Times Best Seller list for over 50 weeks, and in the case of *Tuesdays with Morrie*, 202 weeks.

All of the longest running books turned out to be non-fiction, however, and I wanted to include some fiction samples for my study since fiction is often judged by more aesthetic standards than non-fiction and I didn't want to bias my study. So from the same time period (Sept 11, 2000-Sept 11, 2002) I selected the longest running two fiction titles (although they weren't nearly as long running, topping off at about 30 weeks). These books were *The Corrections* and *The Brethren*. My complete group of overall-best selling non-fiction and fiction books therefore includes the following six titles:

²⁶² I chose not to examine children's books because these have a reputation for didacticism, and I didn't want this to affect my study.

²⁶³ “Best Sellers,” *New York Times* 17 Sept. 2000: BR 38.

Generally Best-Selling Books

(September 11, 2000-September 11, 2002)

1. *Tuesdays with Morrie* (non fiction) by Mitch Albom (Doubleday, \$19.95)
 “The author tells of his weekly visits to his old college mentor who was near death’s door.”²⁶⁴
2. *The Greatest Generation* (non fiction) by Tom Brokaw (Random House, \$24.95) “The lives of men and women who came of age during the Depression and World War II.”²⁶⁵
3. *The Art of Happiness* (non fiction) by the Dalai Lama and Howard C. Cutler (Riverhead, \$22.95) “What Buddhism and common sense tell us about everyday problems.”²⁶⁶
4. *John Adams* (non fiction) by David McDullough (Simon & Schuster, \$35)
 “A biography of the country’s first vice president and second president.”²⁶⁷
5. *The Corrections* (fiction) by Jonathan Franzen (Farrar, Straus & Giroux \$26) “A multigenerational saga in which a mother tries to bring her dysfunctional family together for a final Christmas at home.”²⁶⁸
6. *The Brethren* (fiction) *The Brethren* by John Grisham (Doubleday \$27.95)

²⁶⁴ “Best Sellers,” *New York Times* 17 Sept. 2000: BR 38.

²⁶⁵ “Best Sellers,” *New York Times* 17 Sept. 2000: BR 38.

²⁶⁶ “Best Sellers,” *New York Times* 17 Sept. 2000: BR 38.

²⁶⁷ “Best Sellers,” *New York Times* 30 Jun. 2002: 18.

²⁶⁸ “Best Sellers,” *New York Times* 9 Sept. 2001: BR 30.

“Three former judges, doing time at a federal prison in Florida, concoct a mail scam that goes awry.”²⁶⁹

These six books were the overall best sellers during the year before and the year after 9/11.

However, in looking closely at the best-seller list during the two weeks following 9/11, I noticed that there was another important division that I should examine. In the two weeks following 9/11 (September 16th and 23rd), most books on the New York Times Best Seller List (including all six listed above) either fell down the rankings or merely maintained a steady ranking. There were, however, six books which actually climbed the New York Times Best Seller list in the two weeks after 9/11. These books actually became more popular following the disaster. These books included three non fiction books, *Crossing Over* (which advanced from fifth to third place in the two weeks following 9/11), *Seabiscuit* (which advanced from tenth to fourth place) and *Ava's Man* (which advanced from twelfth place to ninth place) as well as three fiction books: *The Smokejumper* (which moved from fifth place to third place in the two weeks following 9/11), *Cane River* (which advanced from eighth place to sixth) and *Suzanne's Diary for Nicholas* (which moved from fourth place to third). Every other book on the best-seller list either fell in popularity, maintained a constant popularity or was a new addition to the best-seller list (in which case I had no previous record to compare it with).²⁷⁰ My complete list of books which became especially popular after 9/11 therefore included:

²⁶⁹ “Best Sellers,” *New York Times* 17 Sept. 2000: BR 38.

²⁷⁰ For books which appeared for the first time on the best seller list during the two weeks following 9/11, I had no way of telling if their place on the best seller list was 9/11 related, or if their new appearance was simply due to a publication date that put them newly out on the market during this time. I chose to restrict my sample only to books which I knew had already been on the market and had actually moved up on the best-seller lists.

Books which sold particularly well

(moved up the ranks on the best seller list while other fell)

during the two weeks following 9/11: Sept 16 & 23

1. *Crossing Over* (non-fiction) by John Edward (Jodere, \$23.95) “A ‘psychic television host’ discusses his work and recounts conversations with those who have crossed the bar.”²⁷¹
2. *Seabiscuit* (non-fiction) by Laura Hillenbrand (Random House, \$24.95) “A biography of a great horse whose career culminated in a 1938 match race with the Triple Crown winner War Admiral.”²⁷²
3. *Ava’s Man* (non-fiction) by Rick Bragg (Knopf, \$25) “A journalist reconstructs the Depression-era Deep South through a portrait of a grandfather he never knew.”²⁷³
4. *The Smokejumper* (fiction) by Nicholas Evan (Delcorte, \$26.95) “A cataclysmic wilderness fire forces a woman to choose between the two men she loves.”²⁷⁴
5. *Cane River* (fiction) by Lalita Tademy (Warner, \$24.95) “The story of four generations of African-American women from 1834 to 1936.”²⁷⁵
6. *Suzanne’s Diary for Nicholas* (fiction) by James Patterson (Little

²⁷¹ “Best Sellers,” *New York Times* 9 Sept. 2001: BR30.

²⁷² “Best Sellers,” *New York Times* 9 Sept. 2001: BR30.

²⁷³ “Best Sellers,” *New York Times* 9 Sept. 2001: BR30.

²⁷⁴ “Best Sellers,” *New York Times* 9 Sept. 2001: BR30.

²⁷⁵ “Best Sellers,” *New York Times* 9 Sept. 2001: BR30.

Brown \$22.95) “A woman who thinks she has found the perfect man discovers he has disappeared, leaving behind someone else’s journal.”²⁷⁶

Finally, I needed some way to tabulate the data. Setting up categories and counting how often customers made use of them in their reviews seemed like the simplest way to measure whether readers were reading for functional or aesthetic values. I tried to base my categories on Ross, Benjamin, and Abrams’ descriptions of functional and aesthetic literature.

Functional literature, as defined by Ross, Benjamin, and Abrams, is literature which serves a “social function,”²⁷⁷ promotes virtue,²⁷⁸ and serves a “utility within a moral order.”²⁷⁹ It exhibits “an orientation toward practical interests,”²⁸⁰ and is a means to an end external to itself such as morality, politics, education, etc.²⁸¹

Aesthetic literature, on the other hand, as described by Ross, Benjamin, and Abrams, is “allied neither to politics nor religion.”²⁸² It is judged by its “literary merit,”²⁸³ and is understood as an end in and of itself.²⁸⁴ An aesthetic attitude towards literature’s function emphasizes its physical or technical composition as a work of art.

²⁷⁶ “Best Sellers,” *New York Times* 9 Sept. 2001: BR30.

²⁷⁷ Ross 397.

²⁷⁸ Ross 404.

²⁷⁹ Ross 399.

²⁸⁰ Benjamin “The Storyteller” 86.

²⁸¹ Abrams, “Art-As-Such” 136.

²⁸² Ross 411.

²⁸³ Ross 409.

²⁸⁴ Abrams “Art-As-Such” 136.

In order to translate these theoretical concepts into statements that customers and readers actually made, I began scanning through the consumer reviews to see what kinds of comments readers did make. I came up with six categories of comments which readers often made. These six categories covered nearly all of the comments which readers made in the 519 reviews which I read:

1. Informative—the reader learned something, found out something or understood something better for having read the book.
2. Inspirational—the reader felt that the work was of an “improving nature.” It encouraged or modeled good virtues, taught a moral lesson, helped him/her to understand the meaning of life and/or helped him/her to remember what is “really important”
3. Emotionally Moving—the book made the reader either laugh or cry. (This category refers *only* to the book’s tendency to make the reader either laugh or cry, two emotional outbursts which readers seemed to use therapeutically. Those emotions which indicated that the reader felt some kind of spiritual renewal or uplift I classified under the category “Inspirational.” Readers really didn’t discuss any other emotional reactions, such as a feeling of transcendence, or feelings of aesthetic pleasure in their reviews, so this category should not be understood to include such emotions.)
4. Well Written—Customers praised/criticized the book for its prose, character development, plot, imagery, coherence, voice, pacing, etc., or they simply wrote, as many customers did, that it was “well-written.”

5. Easy to Read—the reader found that he or she was able to read the prose with ease and quickly. The author managed the plot, crisis, development in such a way that the book was “hard to put down.”
6. Identification—the reader found that he or she could identify with the characters or “see him/herself” in the characters.

Given Ross, Benjamin, and Abrams’ descriptions I labeled the first three categories, (“instructional,” “inspirational” and “emotionally moving”), as functional criteria. I classified these three categories this way because they were describing what the literature *did* to a person and in one way or another. Or, said another way, customers who described books as instructional, inspirational, or emotionally moving seemed to see literature as a means to an end. While “instructional” and “inspirational” were fairly easy to place in the functional category, “emotionally moving” was a little more difficult. It was difficult to categorize because theorists sometimes discuss an aesthetic emotional response, but it is my opinion that these theorists were not talking about humor or pity, per se, as much as they meant a sort of emotional transcendence provoked by raw beauty. Therefore, in the end, I chose to classify “emotionally moving” as functional because most of the readers who made comments about the book’s emotional impact seemed to praise the book because it had served an almost therapeutic need of theirs: they had read it because they needed a good cry, or they had wanted something to make them laugh.

The next two categories, “well written” and “easy to read,” both seemed to be primarily concerned with the writing itself, rather than with the writing as a means to some external end, so both of these response-categories I classified as indicating an aesthetic orientation towards literature.

The final category, “identification,” I couldn’t place. On the one hand, creating real, believable characters with whom readers can relate is a component of the artistic value and composition of the text itself—a rather aesthetic orientation. But on the other hand, if a person is reading a book to find out that he is not alone, or to understand himself and his fellow beings a little better, he is reading it as a means to an end—a rather functional orientation. In the end I decided that, as a category, “identification” was too borderline to label as either functional or aesthetic, and so I dropped the category from my results entirely to avoid unfairly skewing the data. Following is a chart which lists some typical comments and the categories I placed them in:

Functional			Aesthetic	
Informative	Inspirational,	Emotionally Moving	Well-Written	Easy to Read
Well-researched, Informative, Well-balanced, New perspective, Educational, Biased—not the full story, I learned more, Revealing, Insightful, Answered a question I have	Makes me think, Power of character, Integrity, I am a better American because of it, Affected my life, Affected my relationships, Should be required reading for life, Touched my soul, Makes you despair about being human	Brought tears, You will be moved, Laughing, Trite, Kleenex, Moving, Tear-jerker	Grabbed my attention, Not boring, Pacing, Description, Finely written, Lack of coherence, Great tone, Lack of vigor in voice, Beautiful prose, Engaging, Straight-forward, Plot, Character, development, The ending, Climax	Slow in spots, Impossible to put down, Page turner, Easy to read, Quick read, Couldn’t wait to turn the page

Once I set these categories, I collected all of the customer reviews for the books in question in the month preceding and following September 11, 2001 (Aug 11-Oct 11, 2001). For

three of these books, *The Greatest Generation*, *The Brethren*, and *the Art of Happiness*, I actually collected a three-month sample on either side of September 11, 2001 (June 11-Dec 11, 2001) because the number of consumer reviews in a one-month sample wasn't large enough to be representative.

I then went through each review and recorded the categories that the reviewer used to judge the book. For the purposes of this study, it didn't matter whether the customer praised the work for being informative or whether she criticized it for not being informative enough. I was simply interested in the fact that she used the category "informative" as a criteria for judgment. In short, I was interested in reviewers, not reviews. Furthermore, because I was only interested in whether the reviewer used the category or not, I did not attempt (it would have been very complicated anyway) to count how many times a given reviewer used a criteria. Whether he wrote five sentences about how informative the book was, or only one sentence, the result for me was the same: I recorded that that reviewer used the criteria of "informative" as a basis for judgments about literature. Following is a sample review, the first review collected for the book *John Adams*, dated August 12, 2001 from Amazon.com. It is followed by an explanation of how I categorized it:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful:

★★★★☆ **History with Humanity**, August 12, 2001

Reviewer: [Stephen Hall \(see more about me\)](#) from Voorhees, NJ USA

My grasp of US History during the lifetime of John Adams is greatly improved. I'm not a historian, nor have I studied much about the Revolution other than what I learned in High School. So for me, in a 700+ page book, there are bound to be many "ah ha's". And there are!

It's much more than a chronicle of John Adams's life. This is a love story that makes me think deeply about relationships, and even a little about religion (but, this isn't dwelled on). Due to the extensive time John lived away from home, he

and Abigail were constantly writing letters to each other. I never knew how much correspondence from that time survived! But it did, and both the words in the letters, and McCullough's commentary, paint a picture of a deeply devoted couple.

We see the lives of Jefferson (especially), Franklin, Alexander Hamilton, and others through John Adams's eyes. I have to remind myself that this is a single viewpoint; other histories should be consulted before I firm my judgement on those characters!

What about the 700 pages? For me, it went very quickly through the first half and then bogged down.

I was afraid that there would be too much information in this tome. Perhaps true, but despite the fact that I could not previously have said which President he was, or for how many terms, McCullough managed to grab my attention and bring the period alive as no one has done for me before.

Was this review helpful to you? yes no ²⁸⁵

Because this reviewer referred to how many “ah hah” experiences he gained, I recorded that this reviewer used the “informative” criteria in his judgments on literature. Furthermore, because he wrote about how this book made him “think deeply about relationships and even a little about religion,” I recorded that he also used the “inspirational” criteria. The reviewer, however, did not mention that his emotions were moved, nor did he complain that his emotions were not moved, so I did not record that he used the “emotionally moving” criteria in his judgments on literature. Then, because he discussed how McCullough was able to “grab his attention” I marked that he did judge literature on the basis of how “well written” it was, and when he complained that it got bogged down after the first half, I recorded that he was also interested in how “easy to read” the literature was.

²⁸⁵ “Customer Reviews for *John Adams*,” online posting, 12 Aug. 2001, *Amazon.com* <<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/0743223136/ref=cm/rev/all/1/104-7922940-9165568?v=glance&s=books&vi=customer-reviews&me=ATVPDKIKXODER>>

Finally, in reporting the results, I am using the ratio of functional comments to aesthetic comments as my basic unit because the ratio expresses the relationship I am interested in—the frequency of functional comments compared to the frequency of aesthetic comments. By focusing on the ratio as my unit of measurement (rather than raw numbers) I also avoid skewing my data by irrelevant variables such as the frequency of comments. Furthermore, by concentrating simply on how the ratio changed, rather than on the ratio itself, I can compensate for the fact that I was only able to identify two distinct classes of aesthetic criteria vs. the three functional classes I distinguished.

Results

After examining all 519 reviews, I found that the results did indicate that post-9/11 reviewers were, in general, more interested in the functional qualities of the literature than were pre-9/11 reviewers. Some books, in fact, showed significant change in their ratios of functional to aesthetic comments after 9/11. Pre-9/11 reviewers of *Tuesdays with Morrie*, for example, typically made about 3.3 functional comments for every aesthetic comment which they made. But after 9/11 they made 9 functional comments to every aesthetic comment—almost three times as many. *The Greatest Generation* also tripled its ratio of functional to aesthetic comments after 9/11, and *The Art of Happiness* quadrupled its ratio of functional to aesthetic comments.

In fact, of the twelve books I studied, eight of them *did* have higher ratios of functional to aesthetic comments after 9/11, and the average ratios for all the books combined reflected this increase in the frequency of functional comments, moving from an average ratio of just over one functional comment per aesthetic one (1.16) before 9/11 to one and a half functional comments to every aesthetic one (1.50). Only three books actually showed a decrease in their ratios of functional to aesthetic comments: *John Adams*, *The Brethren*, and *The Smoke Jumper*. And for

one book, *Ava's Man*, the ratio didn't change at all. While I don't have any explanation for why these particular books don't show the shift towards functional comments that the others show, it may be significant that of these, two are novels. In general, however, reviewers were more concerned with functional qualities of literature after the terror of 9/11.

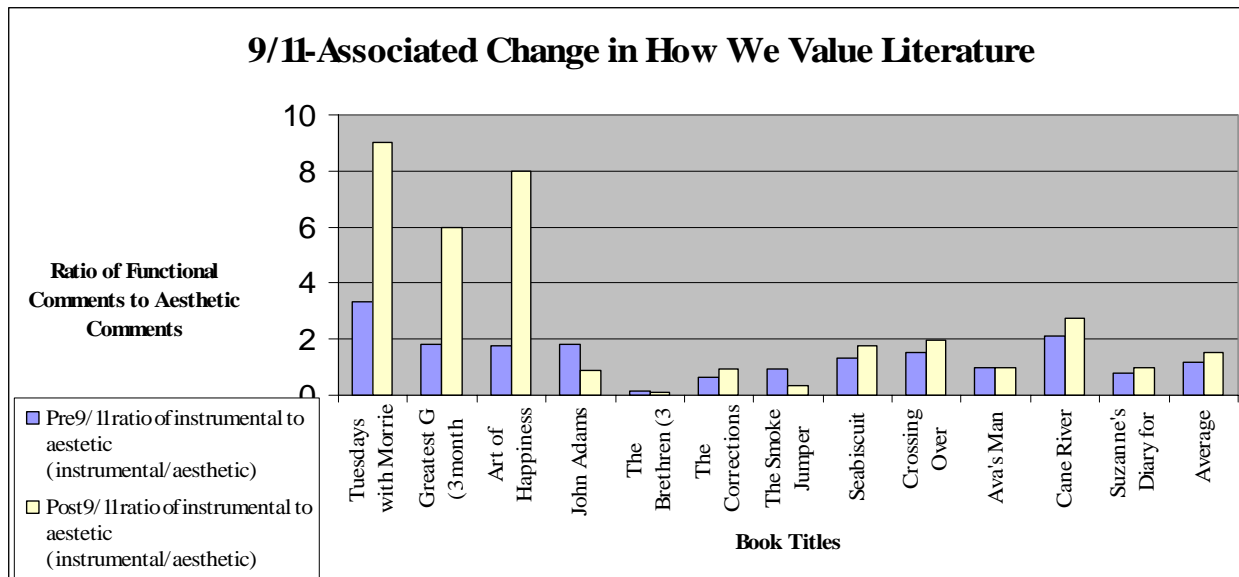


Fig. 1. 9/11 associated change in how society values literature based on the ratio of functional comments to aesthetic ones in *Amazon.com* customer reviews.

Some of these readers even directly grounded their comments in 9/11. For example, one reviewer wrote on September 16th, “With the current state of the nation with the terrorist attacks in the U.S. [. . .] I think this is a book that people should read to see what is really important in life. To those who lost loved ones in the wake of the terrorist attack, my sympathy. [. . .] we will overcome.”²⁸⁶

²⁸⁶ “Customer Reviews for *Suzanne's Diary for Nicholas*,” online posting, 16 Sept. 2001, *Amazon.com* <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/0446611085/ref=cm_rev_all_1/102-0419248-1815338?v=glance&s=books&vi=customer-reviews&me=ATVPDKIKX0DER>

Books with a Higher Functional Value Sold Better After 9/11 than others

As I mentioned before, I collected data on two sets of six books—one set which were simply all-around best sellers, and one set which was distinguished by the fact that during the weeks following 9/11 they went up on the bestseller lists. Since “Rankings [on the New York Times Best Seller List] reflect[s] sales ... at almost 4,000 bookstores plus wholesalers serving 50,000 other retailers (gift shops, department stores, newsstands, supermarkets), statistically weighted to represent all such outlets nationwide,”²⁸⁷ we know that something about these books made people after 9/11 more willing to purchase them than other books? What is the crucial factor?

At least one of the crucial factors appears to be whether the books lent themselves to a functional experience. Following is a table which compares the average ratio of functional vs. aesthetic comments in the customer reviews for both those books which were generally popular and those books which were particularly popular after 9/11 (i.e. those that actually climbed the best-seller list in the weeks following 9/11. When we examine the average functional/aesthetic ratios for these two groups, we find that the books which climbed the lists after 9/11 had a higher ratio of functional comments to aesthetic ones.

²⁸⁷ “Best Sellers,” *The New York Times* 16 Sept. 2001 BR30.

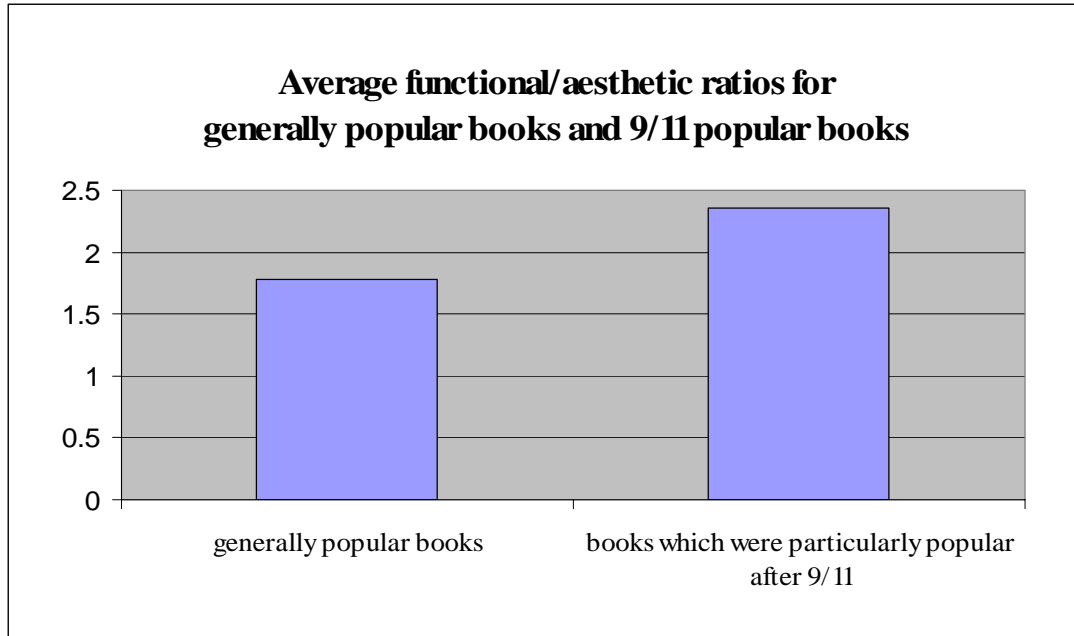


Fig. 2 A comparison of the average functional/aesthetic comment ratios for books which were generally popular in the year before and after 9/11/2001 and those books which rose in popularity in the two weeks following 9/11.

Perhaps it is a coincidence that after 9/11 customers bought books which they perceived as better suited to a functional reading, but then again, perhaps not.

A Connection to Eighteenth-Century bookshops in the Netherlands

Post 9/11 America's interest in functional literature may also help us to explain something that Joost Kloek discovered in his investigation into early nineteenth-century Dutch book-selling records. As I mentioned earlier, the eighteenth-century reading revolution was famous for a dramatic increase in titles, the introduction of the novel as a new genre, and a shift from functional to aesthetic reading. But a shift from functional to aesthetic reading, a shift from bibles to novels, wasn't what Kloek found.

Kloek examined the 1808 records of a Dutch bookseller, Van Bentham, whose bookshop was the major bookshop in the Dutch town of Middelburg. Because the Dutch recordkeepers (including Van Bentham) were remarkably fastidious in their record keeping, Kloek was able not only to discover who nearly every one of Van Bentham's customers were in terms of occupation

and social class, but also which books they bought, the subject matter and variety of all of these volumes, and how much they cost for the year 1808.

Expecting that the bookshop's records would confirm the thesis of the reading revolution, showing a shift from functional to aesthetic literature, Kloek was surprised to discover that "the great majority of the books purchased at Van Bentham's can be considered to belong to the area of functional reading,"²⁸⁸ which Kloek defines as "reading matter that fulfilled a function for the reader's occupation, for social interaction, for public religious life, and for the household."²⁸⁹ Furthermore, while the theories claim that novels were supposed to be a significant addition to the eighteenth century, only 10% of Van Bentham's clients purchased even one novel: 90% percent of his clients didn't buy a single one.²⁹⁰ The reading circles (of which the town had eight) didn't seem to be any different. As Kloek writes, "[T]here was no question of any spectacular consumption of novels in the reading circles either."²⁹¹

Kloek is puzzled by the apparent discrepancy between what he thinks he should have found (lots of novels and aesthetic reading) and what he did find (lots of functional reading). But what Kloek barely even bothers mentioning in his article (as he searches for economic explanations) is the fact that, for the clients of Van Bentham's bookshop, the general period of Kloek's study had been a period of "war and French occupation."²⁹² If, as seems likely from this chapter, the feelings of fear and vulnerability which accompany situations like war and foreign occupation have the potential to affect how people conceive of literature's function, Kloek

²⁸⁸ Kloek 298.

²⁸⁹ Kloek 298.

²⁹⁰ Kloek 299.

²⁹¹ Kloek 302.

²⁹² Kloek 296.

should not have lightly passed over this detail. In short, Van Bentham's customers may have been unusually functionalistic in their tastes because the inhabitants of Middleburg felt threatened with war and occupation: two events that may have strongly influenced them. Possibly there is more going on here than simple economics.

Results in Terms of Ross, Benjamin, and Abrams

Examining 9/11 literature benefits us in another way which I haven't discussed as of yet in this chapter: it allows us one more chance to compare the economic factors suggested by our theorists with the attitude towards literature which they are supposed to predict. American society in 2001 had a strong middle class, a very consumer-based economy, plenty of printing presses, schools, and libraries. In view of this economic situation, the number of functional comments which consumers made is surprising. I counted 476 functional comments. This was more than the 419 aesthetic comments which I counted, although given the fact that I only had two aesthetic categories and three functional categories, this is not altogether surprising. However, the fact that a highly consumer-based society with presses and a thriving middle class should make 476 functional comments at all, I find impressive. Even fiction books (which according to my study were less functionally perceived by customers) received a surprising number of functionally-related comments. One reviewer said of the fiction *Smokejumper* on August 26, 2001 that "This is a story about friendship, spirituality, and courage. It's about abandonment and individuality. It's about sadness and it's about hope."²⁹³ "Another reviewer wrote of *Suzanne's Diary for Nicholas* on August 25,th

You will go through a box of Kleenex while listening to this one but it is well worth it. Men, women, wives, husbands, mothers, fathers, sons and daughters

²⁹³ "Customer Reviews for *The Smokejumper*," online posting, 26 Aug. 2001, *Amazon.com*
<<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/browse/-/283155/ref%3Dtab%5Fgw%5Fb%5F3/102-0419248-1815338>>

should read it and learn the valuable lessons of love and family ties that we need to share with our dear ones. Then share it with someone you love!²⁹⁴

Overall, it seems that contemporary American book consumers, while living in a consumer-based, technologically advanced, relatively literate, middle-class country, still seek a highly functionalistic literature. So I add 9/11 to the cases which we have already examined—cases which Ross, Benjamin and Abrams’ theories also failed to predict. Perhaps one of the reasons for this failure was that Ross, Abrams and our application of Benjamin’s theory failed to take into account a sufficient range of possible motives—especially motives like war and the resulting feelings of fear and vulnerability which, based on the results which I presented in this chapter, are indeed important factors.

²⁹⁴ “Customer Reviews for *Suzanne’s Diary for Nicholas*,” online posting, 26 Aug. 2001

Chapter V

Conclusion

Of course, it should not surprise us to find that the theories of Ross, Benjamin and Abrams overlook elements which (in retrospect) are important. All theories, as Kenneth Burke explains in his discussion of terministic screens, are necessarily semi-blind by virtue of the same terminologies which give them sight. As he writes, “[e]ven if any given terminology is a *reflection* of reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must be a *selection* of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a *deflection* of reality.”²⁹⁵ Consequently, I think it unlikely that any single theoretical approach will ever be able to offer a complete view of “reality.” However, like the French cartographers of the seventeenth century who discovered that they could determine positions and distances more accurately by measuring angles and distances from at least two points, I, too, propose that we triangulate multiple theories together (and rhetoric in particular) to gain a more accurate map of the way society and individuals shape and change their purposes for reading and the way they value literature.

I suggest rhetoric not only because it is a tremendously flexible and useful theory in itself, but also because it overcomes some of the particular blind spots entailed by Marxism, and especially the variety of Marxism practiced by Ross and Abrams. Specifically, rhetoric considers an unlimited range of possible motives for action (a difficulty which Marxists have long struggled under, and which, as we have seen, is a problem with Ross, Abrams and our application of Benjamin’s theories). Furthermore, rhetoric considers the impact of human agency and discussion on our conceptions of literature (an important detail since many theorists

²⁹⁵ Kenneth Burke, “From *Language as Symbolic Action*,” *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present*, Ed. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2001) 1340.

have recently suggested that rhetorical moves between individuals in the literary social structure are, in fact, the *key* factors influencing how literature is valued).

Triangulation Point #1: Allow an Un-limited Range of Motives/Factors

As I suggested in the last chapter, there may be a great many factors/motives which affect how a society views literature. And, as we saw with Kloek's analysis of Van Bentham's bookshop, a single-minded focus on any one set of factors may cause one to overlook other significant factors (such as occupation by another country and fear of war) and consequently may produce confusing results. Therefore, I suggest that the range of motives/factors which we consider should be unlimited.

This is difficult to accomplish with a Marxist model, however. A single-minded focus on economic concerns has perhaps been the leading complaint leveled against Marxist theories in general over the years. This narrow focus originates with Marx himself who, in his early work, *The German Ideology*, grounds his theory on the postulate that people first begin to distinguish themselves from animals at the point at which they begin to "produce their means of subsistence,"²⁹⁶ and that the production of these means of subsistence, in turn, constantly determines their conceptions and ideas. This grounding postulate necessarily subjugates a number of other possible motives for human action. As Marx himself writes, "The phantoms formed in the human brain are also, necessarily, sublimates of [human's] material life-process Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence."²⁹⁷ These "phantoms formed in the human brain,"—morality, religion, metaphysic, etc. no longer "retain the

²⁹⁶ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, ed. C.J. Arthur (New York: International Publishers, 2001) 42.

²⁹⁷ Marx and Engels 47.

semblance of independence.” Instead, they are determined, according to Marx and classical Marxist theory, by the processes and conditions of material production.

Many Marxists have realized the limitations that such a narrow range of influential factors imposes and have tried to expand the range of motives/factors which Marxism can take into account. For instance, in the 1960s, Althusser “set out to redefine the Marxist relationship between base and superstructure,” positing instead a model where “all the elements in the base-superstructure system—whether moral, aesthetic, political or economic—influence each other.”²⁹⁸ Althusser accomplished this by sharing some of the economic base’s power with those superstructural societal mechanisms which, according to Althusser, reproduce relationships of production. These societal mechanisms include RSAs (Repressive State Apparatuses—such as the police or the military) and ISAs (Ideological State Apparatuses—such as literature, art, schools, families, and churches).

Yet even though he considers the influence of a broader range of motives/factors, Althusser still “retains the classical Marxist stress on economic causes, which [Althusser] admits are decisive ‘in the last instance’.”²⁹⁹ As Althusser wrote, “the floors of the superstructure are not determinant in the last instance, but [. . .] are determined by the effectivity of the base.”³⁰⁰ And “if they [the elements of the superstructure] are determinant in their own (as yet undefined) ways, this is true only insofar as they are determined by the base.”³⁰¹ The economic base is still the deciding factor.

²⁹⁸ Mike Austin, “Marxist Criticism,” *The Critical Experience* ed. David Cowles 2nd Ed, (Dubuque, IO:Kendall/Hunt, 1994) 204.

²⁹⁹ Leitch, “Louis Althusser” 1478. (emphasis mine)

³⁰⁰ Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (New York: Norton, 2001) 1486. (emphasis mine)

³⁰¹ Althusser 1486. (emphasis mine)

Still attempting to overcome the narrowness of classical Marxism, recent theorists have tried crossing Marxism with other disciplines. Many feminists, for instance, have recognized that the traditional Marxist range of motives was too limited to explain what they wanted to explain. As Gayle Rubin argues, “No analysis of the reproduction of labor power under capitalism can explain the foot-binding, chastity belts, or any of the incredible array of Byzantine, fetiched indignities [. . .] which have been inflicted upon women in various times and places.”³⁰² Consequently, some feminists have tried instead to cross Marxism and Feminism in order to expand the range of motives which it considers. “Socialist feminists,” as Allison Jagger explains, “begin from the fact . . . that human material needs include not only food, shelter, clothing etc. Equally fundamental to the survival of the species are the social and often individual human needs for bearing and rearing children, for sexual satisfaction, and, on one view for emotional nurturance.”³⁰³

Some of the most successful applications of Marxist theory have only been possible by crossing Marxism with other disciplines to create a broader pool of possible motives. The Frankfurt school, for instance, recognized that, as Joseph Childers and Gary Hentzi explain, “positivist or deterministic Marxist models of historical development were unsuitable for cultural analysis.”³⁰⁴ They therefore “incorporated analytical tenets from a number of disciplines, including psychoanalysis, cultural criticism, and sociology into their work.”³⁰⁵ Another similar

³⁰² Austin 206.

³⁰³ Qtd in Austin 206.

³⁰⁴ Joseph Childers and Gary Hentzi, eds. “Critical Theory,” *The Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism*, (New York: Columbia U P, 1995), <http://80-lion.chadwyck.com.erl.lib.byu.edu/searchFulltext.do?id=R00787769&divLevel=0&queryId=../session/1086394919_17577&area=ref&forward=critref_ft> para. 2

³⁰⁵ Childers and Hentzi para. 2.

example is that of Frederic Jameson, a recent and well-known Marxist theorist, who is credited with “single-handedly reviv[ing] Marxist literary studies within the American academy”³⁰⁶ through his creative combination of Marxism, psychology, and narrative theory. And another theorist, Jürgen Habermas, who “criticized Marx for viewing history and human emancipation reductively, in terms of labour”³⁰⁷ supplemented Marx “with theoretical perspectives drawn from sociology, linguistic philosophy and hermeneutics. [. . .] and claimed that interaction, involving communication and social norms, is an independent dimension of social life.”³⁰⁸

The narrow range of factors/motives which Marxism allows has long been recognized as a limitation even by its own adherents. Although modern Marxists have recognized and worked to overcome Marxism’s reductivism and narrow focus, they remain bound to some extent by what Austin calls the “Marxist fascination with economic systems.” And, as Austin explains, this “Marxist fascination with economic systems—which was only partially mitigated by Althusser’s revision—often causes critics to ignore other important elements of a text.”³⁰⁹

These overlooked elements of a text may sometimes include important factors like the war and occupation which Kloek overlooked in his study of Van Bentham’s bookshop, but they may also include people’s own interpretations of their experiences and motives. In fact, any theory with a limited set of possible motives necessarily discredits people’s own interpretations of their experiences and motives whenever these felt motives fall outside the theory’s permitted

³⁰⁶ Vincent B. Leitch “Frederic Jameson” *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (New York: Norton, 2001) 1933.

³⁰⁷ John Torrance, (1998). “Marxism, Western,” *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* ed. E. Craig, (London: Routledge, 1998) Retrieved May 17, 2004, from <<http://80-www.rep.routledge.com.erl.lib.byu.edu/article/S038SECT3>> para. 3

³⁰⁸ Torrance para. 3

³⁰⁹ Austin 207.

range. Discrediting people's felt motives presents ethical concerns to me since it assumes an arrogant superiority on the part of the scholar and denies people ownership over their own motives, so I suggest that we need to use a theory which considers an unlimited range of motives.

Since considering an unlimited range of motives is difficult for Marxist theory, I suggest that rhetorical theory might be useful in triangulation here precisely because it doesn't limit the range of potential motives and would, therefore, be able to cover some of the blind spots left by Marxist theory. Rhetorical theory doesn't limit the range of potential motives because it isn't as interested in *what* the motives are, but rather it is interested in *how* the motives interact and operate to persuade people or motivate them to action. Thus Kenneth Burke, in his *A Grammar of Motives*, is more concerned with the interactions and transformations of motives (the how) than with any specific motives themselves (the what) and Aristotle brings up specific motives (the what) only in order to discuss how they can be made to persuade (the how). The motives which rhetoric considers, then, are as unlimited as the motives which influence people to action.

Historically, this unlimited range of potential motivators has revealed itself in the sweepingly broad array of motives that rhetoricians produce whenever they try to list the motives that they consider. Aristotle, for example, who defines rhetoric as "the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion,"³¹⁰ finds himself listing motives for speakers to consider as varied as the age, the social class, and the moral orientation of the individual, as well as things like the individual's emotional state, and some basic human psychology. For example, he begins chapter XII in Book 2 of his *Rhetoric* by explaining,

³¹⁰ Aristotle, "from *Rhetoric*," *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present*, eds. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg, 2nd ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2001) 181.

Let us now consider the various types of human character, in relation to the emotions and moral qualities, showing how they correspond to our various ages and fortunes. By emotions I mean anger, desire, and the like; these we have discussed already. By moral qualities I mean virtues and vices; these also have been discussed already, as well as the various things various types of men tend to will and do. By ages I mean youth, the prime of life, and old age. By fortune I mean birth, wealth, power, and their opposites—in fact, good fortune and ill fortune.³¹¹

Bizzell and Herzberg explain that classical rhetoric included considerations such as “the psychology and moral assumptions of the different kinds of people who comprise an audience,” as well as things such as social class, political interest, history.³¹² Quintillian, for example, argues that “no man will ever be thoroughly accomplished in eloquence, who has not gained first a deep insight into the impulses of human nature [. . .]”³¹³ and proposes to train the ideal rhetor through, as Bizzell and Herzberg note, “what modern readers might regard as an interdisciplinary effort involving educational psychology, sociology, literary criticism, and moral philosophy.”³¹⁴ Cicero, along the same lines, defines rhetoric’s scope broadly as “human life and conduct.”³¹⁵ In addition, early rhetoricians advised speakers to consider motives which depended on the

³¹¹ Aristotle 218.

³¹² Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg, “General Introduction,” *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present*, eds. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg, 2nd ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2001) 3.

³¹³ Quintillian, “From *Institutes of Oratory*,” *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present*, eds. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg, 2nd ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2001) 419.

³¹⁴ Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg, “Quintillian,” *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present*, eds. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg, 2nd ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2001) 361.

³¹⁵ Cicero, “*De Oratore*,” *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present*, eds. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg, 2nd ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2001) 299.

audience's ability to reason and evaluate facts; they considered the motives latent in the audience's previous experiences, the influence of the basic tenants which the audience was already likely to agree with, motives buried in the audience's opinions of the speaker, and even the motivating influences of the aesthetic embellishments, form, and style of the appeal itself. And classical readers were taught to read with the same awareness of motive and rhetorical savvy which guided classical speakers. Nancy Christiansen reminds us, for instance, that the Hellenistic rhetorical curriculum produced careful readers which sought to "understand and then evaluate" texts as "motivated behavior."³¹⁶

Modern rhetorical scholarship, where the division between speaker and listener collapses, has expanded an already broad list of motives which classical rhetoricians explicitly considered. In Kenneth Burke's work, for example, as Bizzell and Herzberg note, "rhetoric merges with political, psychological, sociological, religious and aesthetic investigations of human behavior."³¹⁷ Rhetoricians Chaim Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca have examined persuasive influences as wide ranging as laughter and group membership,³¹⁸ and rhetorician Gregory Clark has done work on such influences as landscapes and jazz music. Rhetorical theory, in short, is not interested in the "what" but rather the "how" of motives, and therefore is able to comprehend an infinite range of possible motives.

Perhaps because rhetorical theory considers the "how" rather than the "what," in my experience, not only does rhetorical theory not *limit* my perception of motives, but it actually *expands* them by forcing me to consider sides of the situation which I might normally have

³¹⁶ Christiansen 86.

³¹⁷ Bizzell and Herzberg, "General Introduction" 14.

³¹⁸ Ch. Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation* trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver (Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 1969)205,321.

overlooked. One particular rhetorical theory which helps me to brainstorm motives is rhetorician Kenneth Burke's theory of dramatism.³¹⁹ Burke suggests that we divide the broad world of motives into five general groups which are based on elements of theater: scene, act, agent, agency, and purpose. These five groups (Burke's dramatic pentad) are tools to help us think creatively and flexibly about motives. For an example, let's turn to 9/11.

In examining 9/11, the rhetorician using Burke's theory might first look at scene. Burke defines the scene as "the background of the act, the situation in which it occurred" and offers the natural environment and the social-economic climate as examples.³²⁰ Certainly elements of the scene might have made a difference in how post-9/11 America read. The attacks would have made people feel vulnerable and afraid and might have encouraged them therefore to cling more tightly to what gave them security against death—religion—and to what they perceived as a source of physical security—the American government and military. This circumstance would explain why *Crossing Over*, a book about a psychic medium, climbed the best-seller lists after 9/11, and it would explain the fact that a few months after the attacks, the best-seller lists were full of conservative, pro-American literature. Furthermore, the rhetorical theorist might note (where the Marxist one probably wouldn't) that warfare threatens family relationships with death and separation—a circumstance heightened by a number of publicized interviews with those who had lost loved ones and a number of parting cell-phone calls and television programs. If nothing else, 9/11 reminded individuals that they could lose their loved ones at any time. This reminder would explain why many of the books which surged in popularity after 9/11 (*Ava's Man*, *The Smokejumper*, *Suzanne's Diary for Nicholas*) related to the family. Furthermore, the rhetorician might also be interested in the fact that 9/11 threatened an economic recession—a scenic change

³¹⁹ Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1945).

³²⁰ Burke, *A Grammar* xv, 9.

which also threatens feelings of security and might prompt a shift to a preference for functionalistic literature.

In addition to the scene, the rhetorician might look at the act itself and wonder if the act of reading itself motivates a certain response. Burke defines act as “what took place, in thought or deed” or “what was done.”³²¹ Reading’s nature as an individual activity, for instance, might impact how people perceive it. Or, its position in relation to other similar acts, such as watching television, might impact how people understand its function. For example, for a long time reading has been symbolically placed in opposition to watching TV. Perhaps this opposition has pushed the perceived respective functions of books and shows to opposite ends of the spectrum. If TV has taken the role of providing aesthetic entertainment and shock value, perhaps reading (as its perceived opposite) has been pushed to the other extreme and has taken on a functionalistic role—a tendency heightened by traditional associations between reading and edification (the Bible)? This might explain the functionalistic replies we read from 9/11 book consumers.

The rhetorician would also examine the agent, defined by Burke as “what person or kind of person [. . .] performed the act”³²²—in this case the American public. Might it be our nature as Americans which prompts us to act certain ways? Do Americans have, as part of their national identity, any preconceptions about how someone who is attacked should act? Do Americans (and post-9/11 Americans in particular) have anything in their national identity which might make them sympathize with the underdog—a tendency which might have manifested itself in the sudden post-9/11 popularity of the book *SeaBiscuit*—the story of an undersized racehorse who comes out on top. Perhaps we should consider, too, that Americans have always been a

³²¹ Burke, *A Grammar* xv.

³²² Burke, *A Grammar* xv.

fairly religious people and a fairly pragmatic people. America's religiosity and pragmatism, too, might motivate the way we read literature and might explain the strong functionalistic orientation in customer reviews even before 9/11.

The rhetorician using Burke's theories might also investigate the agency—or “what means or instruments [were] used.”³²³ Particularly the rhetorician might be curious whether the literacy (and the schooling it represents) of the reader had an influence of its own or whether the appearance of the books themselves might have made a difference. Or further, since the 9/11 study collected reviews completed online, the rhetorician might also study the impact of the internet on perceptions of reading.

Finally the rhetorician using Burke's pentad might consider the purposes motivating the agents. As an example of purpose, Burke suggests Aristotle's quote, “Men, individually and in common, nearly all have some aim, in the attainment of which they choose or avoid certain things. This aim, briefly stated, is happiness.”³²⁴ Purpose seems to encompass the conscious goals which motivate individuals. This is important because it is one example of the credence that rhetorical theory is equipped to give to the felt motives of individuals. Reviewers writing around 9/11 tell their own story about their motivations: they were motivated to look for morality in what they read simply because they wanted to have a life-changing experience, or because they wanted to feel good again after what happened, or because they liked the way they feel when they read inspirational material. Or they wanted to read informative material simply because they enjoyed knowing more.

What I have offered here is not intended to be a comprehensive rhetorical analysis of how Americans perceived literature before and after 9/11. I merely want to suggest that rhetorical

³²³ Burke, *A Grammar* xv.

³²⁴ Burke, *A Grammar* 292.

theory may be a useful tool to use in exploring questions like literature's function, because rather than limiting the range and variety of motives which it considers, rhetoric actually helps us to think more creatively and flexibly about motives—an advantage in an admittedly complex world with a web of inter-influential factors, and a flexibility which allows us to give credence to people's felt motives without (necessarily) disregarding other influences. Rhetorical theory is able to allow an unlimited set of motives because, unlike Marxist theory, rhetorical theory is not united by an assumption about what the basic motives for human action are, but is unified rather, by an interest in how motives are spread, how they interact (or can be made to interact), and how they are transformed into action.

Triangulation Point #2—Acknowledge the effects of human agency and person-to-person discussion

A further way we could improve the Marxist model would be to triangulate it with a theory which considered the effects of human agency and person-to-person discussion. Again, individual agency and persuasion are elements which the Marxist model generally struggles with. Marxists, such as Ross, Benjamin, and Abrams, generally consider the agency and influence of lone individuals as insignificant deviations in the face of massive economically-motivated movements, if they consider the individual at all. However, evidence supplied by a number of scholars from the institutional approach (Van Rees, Nooy, Barker-Nunn and Fine) suggests that, for the literary field at least, the opposite is true. Scholars, writers and critics do have an effect on each other and the definitions of literature which they communally espouse.

The institutional perspective views literature's value as a social construction of the literary institution (and the scholars and critics within it), independent of any actual literary merit on the part of the work. Unfortunately, their perspective has many of the same disadvantages of

the Marxist perspective, since, like the Marxists, their theory centers around a particular set of motives (the social relationships and dialectic within the literary institution) which they believe are the determining factors in literary value-judgments (the what). This means, however, that they overlook other motives in determining literary value, such as any actual literary merit on the part of the text. Despite this, their research makes a valuable argument for triangulating Marxist theory because it provides evidence that what people say, how they say it, and their relationships within a group are among the deciding factors in determining literary value—a point which will help us to revise our theoretical model even while we don't accept theirs.

What the institutionalists have found, among other things, is that literary value is influenced by who thinks what—a combination of people, relationships, positions and ideas. In his article, “A Literary Playground: Literary Criticism and Balance Theory.”³²⁵ Wouter de Nooy examines Dutch literary criticism in the 1970s, coding over 500 judgments on 28 authors and twelve critics. In doing so, he was able to diagram the social structure of the Dutch literary institution as shown in Fig. 3.³²⁶

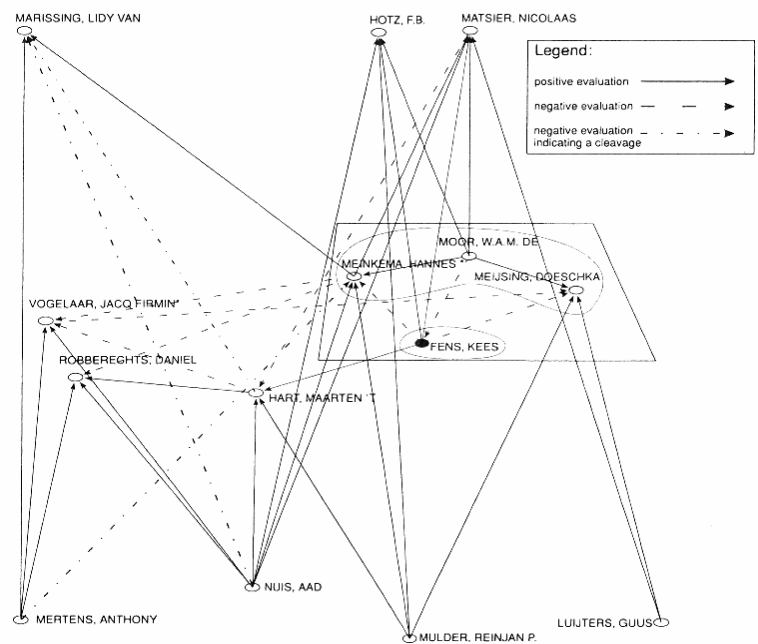


Fig. 3: Critical Space in 1976 Dutch Literary Field

³²⁵ Wouter De Nooy “A Literary Playground: Literary Criticism and Balance Theory,” *Poetics* 26 (1999): 385-404.

³²⁶ Nooy 398.

In diagramming this system of hierarchy and alliances and in examining the criticism levied by the individuals within it, Nooy found that the authors' and critics' "judgments show predictable patterns which are not to be expected unless authors and critics adjust their judgments to one another."³²⁷ Nooy's research also supported the claim that authors and critics use "agreement strategies and disagreement strategies" in order to make a name for themselves.³²⁸ Nooy writes that,

critics and authors sometimes act like children in a playground. Their literary evaluations follow general, social-psychological rules for friendship formation and social ranking. [. . .Judgments expressed in reviews and interviews] probably serve a higher goal than just informing anonymous readers about new books. They also address an inner circle of authors and critics. To them, judgments express affiliations, deference, or contempt. They help shape or (re)define group structure [. . .]³²⁹

In shaping and defining group structure, individuals in Nooy's study appeared to adjust their judgments to one another. Nooy concludes, "[authors' and critics'] judgments reflect factions, ranking, and cleavages within the literary field [. . .]"³³⁰ rather than literary value per se.

In a study of Melville's fall from literary grace, Jeanne Barker-Nunn and Gary Alan Fine confirm Nooy's observations. Barker-Nunn and Fine follow the rivalry of two nineteenth-century literary camps in America—the Knickerbockers and the Young Americans—and examine how their rivalry shaped criticism and crushed Melville. Barker-Nunn and Fine write

³²⁷ Nooy 396

³²⁸ Nooy 386.

³²⁹ Nooy 401.

³³⁰ Nooy 385.

that “[a]s one might imagine, the rivalry between the two groups often caused them to denounce the work of writers associated with the other group while ‘puffing’ writers allied with their own.”³³¹ Barker-Nunn and Fine continue that “[s]elf-interest played a part as well; critics who were also publishers or editors were likely to praise in print those who published in their magazines (sometimes in lieu of payment) or with their publishers. Of course, a critic’s personal prestige also depended on the prestige of ‘his’ authors.”³³² According to Barker-Nunn and Fine, the social and political interactions of the individuals of the literary field “influenced Melville’s self-concept, the content and form of his work, and the changes in his critical reputation.”³³³ They conclude that, “Melville’s career provides a dramatic example of the popular artist whose reputation is destroyed, at least in part, by the workings of literary politics.”³³⁴ But according to Barker-Nunn and Fine, Melville is not the only author who was/is influenced by “the workings of literary politics.” Instead, Barker-Nunn and Fine suggest, “all authors are caught within socio-political webs that influence their reputations and the evaluations of their creations.”³³⁵

Perhaps the most interesting thing which the institutionalists have discovered is that in addition to social rankings, hierarchies, alliances and divisions, another important factor in determining literary value was what we might call the critic’s “rhetorical strategy” in presenting his/her argument to the other critics. By rhetorical strategy I mean the critic’s ability to use signs and weight motives in a manner adapted to persuade. C.J. van Rees notes, “[s]ocial

³³¹ Jeanne Barker-Nunn and Gary Alan Fine, “The Vortex of Creation: Literary Politics and the Demise of Herman Melville’s Reputation,” *Poetics* 26 (1998): 92.

³³² Barker-Nunn and Fine 92.

³³³ Barker-Nunn and Fine 81.

³³⁴ Barker-Nunn and Fine 82.

³³⁵ Barker-Nunn and Fine 81.

acceptance of a critic's discourse as a plausible account of the nature and quality of a literary text" depends on the individual critic's "proficiency in couching his discourse in compliance with the normative premises and the essentialist definitions derived from the conception of literature currently prevalent among his peers;" in other words, his effective use of signs.³³⁶ Van Rees goes on to explain,

In order to be accepted as legitimate, these [critical] discourses have to satisfy a number of conditions. These pertain to the terminology employed, the argumentative strategies connected with the normative premises concerning the nature and function of literature and the selection of works suitable for discussion.³³⁷

Another condition for the critic's acceptance is the critic's "proficiency in employing a conception of literature."³³⁸ As Van Rees writes, "in order to obtain a ready ear for his discourse, a critic has to commit himself to one of the existing conceptions of literature and to defer to its norms."³³⁹ These norms include such things as terminologies (or terministic screens as Burke would have called them).³⁴⁰ To be critically accepted, the critic will also "have to draw up discourses on literary texts which, by their subtle use of generally accepted argumentative strategies, are thought to be convincing."³⁴¹ The critic forms these arguments, according to Van Rees, through a strategic selection of textual fragments which valorize the

³³⁶ C.J. Van Rees, "How a Literary Work Becomes A Masterpiece: On the Threefold Selection Practiced by Literary Criticism," *Poetics* 12 (1983): 397.

³³⁷ Van Rees 409.

³³⁸ Van Rees 413.

³³⁹ Van Rees 415.

³⁴⁰ Van Rees 408.

³⁴¹ Van Rees 415.

critic's technique³⁴² and the employment of argumentative strategies such as, according to Van Rees, "argument by analogy, dialectic reasoning, tacit shifts of meaning [. . .]."³⁴³ In other words, the particular way the critic phrases and structures his/her argument makes a difference in how well it is received, and its effect on the literary community and prevalent conceptions of literature.

As Pierre Bourdieu wrote, "The literary or artistic field is a *field of forces*, but it is also a *field of struggles* [. . .]"³⁴⁴ In particular, as we have seen from the work of the institutionalists, literary value emerges from a state of struggle between different groups, hierarchies, alliances and divisions in the literary field, combined with the rhetorical effectiveness, the arguments, terminological proficiency, and strategic evidences of their discourse. In short, in the literary community at least, individuals influence conceptions of literature through their own persuasive argumentation.

If members of the literary community can influence one another's perceptions of literary value, it is significant that in several of the contexts we have studied here, including nineteenth-century America, WWII America and communist East Germany, we were studying members of the literary community who had ample opportunity to influence each other.

In nineteenth-century America, for example, representatives from the publishing houses met a couple of times a year for trade sale auctions, thus giving ample opportunity for people to influence each other's opinions on literary value. Additionally, nineteenth-century American authors, because of geographic proximity, also had frequent contact with one another.

³⁴² Van Rees 413.

³⁴³ Van Rees 411-12.

³⁴⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, "The Field of Cultural Production, or: the Economic World Reversed," *Poetics* 12 (1983): 312.

Hawthorne and Melville were well acquainted, for example, as were the transcendentalists in general. Furthermore, the newspaper industry, which had been publishing in America since the early eighteenth century and had produced a daily paper since 1783,³⁴⁵ increased the influence that an individual journalist could have.

Similarly, communist East German writers participated in writer's conferences, such as the one we've studied, which offered them opportunities to influence each other, and their communal membership in the Writer's Union meant that they had frequent contact with each other. Furthermore, although the government had a great deal of control over what was actually published, private conversations were still (generally) safe venues for critics to influence one another.

WWII American writers also had opportunity to influence each other in the form of writer's conferences, as well as a number of journals. *PMLA*, for example, has been published since the 1800s. Overall, the MLA bibliography records 5833 articles published in literary journals before the end of 1943. Clearly, WWII American literary critics also had a substantial opportunity to influence each other.

By 2001 the internet was making it possible for individual non-academic consumers to write reviews persuading and influencing one another. And as I examined the customer reviews on Amazon.com, it became clear that individuals, while not part of the established literary institution, nevertheless influence one another. In fact, reviewers sometimes mentioned details from other reviews, confirming that customers were indeed reading and being affected by each other. Read, for example, the following review, for John Edward's book *Crossing Over* entitled, "In response to Striking While the Iron is Hot":

³⁴⁵ Jeb Byrne, "The Comparative Development of Newspapers in New Zealand and the United States in the Nineteenth Century," *American Studies International* 37.1 (1999): 55.

★★★★★ **In response to Striking While the Iron Is Hot**, September 4, 2001

Reviewer: **Bringing Attention to** from Sometimes I wonder myself

Take a look at the posting of Striking While the Iron Is Hot
Then click on the icon that invites you to read more about the author. Take a look at the other reviews posted by hhufm's here on Amazon.
Titles such as "Stuff Blows Up Real Good" Or how about the film that got his highest rating. . .4 stars NIGHTBREED he states "it has a very dark atmosphere" Does this alone speak for the angle that this reviewer comes from? Preference of dark look at life. A taste for violence?
John Edward represents Compassion, Hope, Light and the possibility that life is full of miracles and can actually be a good thing, if you are in the right mindset. So, if you have some kind of faith or attraction to the things we cannot always see, or you would like to possibly learn more about spiritual concepts and possibilities then I would recommend checking out ANY of John Edwards work. He delivers his words with wisdom, enlightenment, and also some wonderful humor. I think Mr Edward is right where he is supposed to be at this point in time. And I think he is doing a fabulous job portraying the work of a professional psychic, medium, and lightworker. This review written to bring in that wonderful essence that is so needed in life. . .BALANCE =)
Keep Sharing ³⁴⁶

The author of this review assumes that someone may read what she writes and be influenced by it. But her defensive stance has also clearly been influenced by the previous posting. Other readers were less pronounced in their responses to other readers but were clearly influenced nevertheless. For example, one wrote that "Despite all the negative comments I have seen, I still think that this was a very good book."³⁴⁷ Another agreed with another reviewer: "But as one insightful reviewer put it, the story reflects the male perspective entirely."³⁴⁸

³⁴⁶“Customer Reviews for *Crossing Over*,” online posting, 4 Sept. 2001, *Amazon.com* <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/1588720020/ref=cm_rev_all_1/102-0419248-1815338?v=glance&s=books&vi=customer-reviews&me=ATVPDKIKX0DER >

³⁴⁷ “Customer Reviews for *Suzanne’s Diary for Nicholas*,” online posting, 13 Aug. 2001.

³⁴⁸“Customer Reviews for *Suzanne’s Diary for Nicholas*,” online posting, 14 Aug. 2001.

Furthermore, I often noticed, as I examined the Amazon.com postings that their rankings would often come in groups. A strong positive review on a book would often be followed by several other positive reviews. A strong negative review would similarly be followed by a string of negative reviews. For example, on August 11, 2001, a reader gave *Suzanne's Diary for Nicholas* five stars, calling it "touching." The next eight reviewers also gave it either four or five stars, and several of them also mentioned that it was touching or that they had cried as they read it. However, that string of positive reviews was broken when, on August 14th, reviewer "Joan Fox" gave the book only one star, entitling her review "What a waste of time." Her main complaints were that the book was sappy and "poorly written."³⁴⁹ The next reviewer, "Linda Dambra," also gave the book only one star, entitling her review "life is too short!"—a title which clearly echoes the preceding title. This sort of grouping was not uncommon.

Given the expanse of the internet, the number of people one person influences is quite literally unbounded. The following review, for example, was marked as being helpful or not helpful by more than forty people:

41 of 43 people found the following review helpful:

★★★★☆ **Entertaining and Thought Provoking**, August 24, 2001

Reviewer: **A reader** from Norman, OK USA

While I haven't been a fan of every "Oprah Book Club" selection (I respect her, but how many "poor, sexually abused" child stories can one person read?) I continue to read many of the queen of talk show's recommendations because she has led me to some of my favorite books, and introduced to me authors, for example Wally Lamb, whom I probably wouldn't have discovered without Ms. Winfrey's encouragement. "Cane River" is another one of those "Oprah Books" I can easily recommend. It's a great read which is also great history. An intriguing "based on a true story" novel, this story details the struggle of a Southern family as they transform from slave, to Negro to Colored. (The tale ends before they hit Black or African-American.) As a non-African American, this book was a real

³⁴⁹Customer Reviews for *Suzanne's Diary for Nicholas*," online posting, 14 Aug. 2001.

insight for me into the racism that lives within racism. Sure, I knew that the South was hardly a bastion of political correctness, but I was basically ignorant of the social standing based on skin color that lived (and likely still exists to some extent) within the black community. It's not only a story about color, it's also a story about women's place in society. Real women, not the wealthy, privileged elite. "Cane River," written by a former female CEO of a Fortune 500 company, puts into perspective just how far we've come as a society, and how far we have yet to go. It also lends hope that, with each succeeding generation, progress is, in fact, made, even though it's sometimes hard to see until you step back and look at the big picture. And, yeah, the fact that Lalita Tademy, the great-great granddaughter (I think that's right), of a slave can become a corporate bigwig IS the big picture. --*This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title*

For the book *Ava's Man* for example, the reviews I sampled were read (and reviewed as either helpful or not helpful) by an average of over fourteen people each. What makes this number more impressive is the fact that this figure only includes those who actively reviewed the review, and probably only represents a fraction of the actual readers. People do influence one another.

And if people do influence each other in evaluating literary value, as Van Rees, Barker-Nunn, Fine, Nooy, and Bourdieu argue and as seems particularly likely in the 9/11 Amazon.com reviews and the other contexts I've studied, then we need a theory which is prepared to examine how people influence each other. This is a difficulty for most Marxist theories, but not for rhetorical theory, which specializes in persuasion.

Initially, rhetoricians such as Isocrates, Plato, and Aristotle, and Cicero defined rhetoric almost exclusively in terms of persuasion or how people influenced each other. Quintillian summarizes this early view by explaining, "[t]hose accordingly, have appeared to themselves more exact, who [. . .] have pronounced [rhetoric] to be the *power of persuading*."³⁵⁰ While early rhetoricians recognized this power of persuading as a primarily oral art, as in Quintillian's

³⁵⁰ Quintillian "Institutes of Oratory" Bizzel & Herzberg 386.

own definition for rhetoric, “the art of speaking well,”³⁵¹ later rhetoricians have broadened rhetoric to include the use of all signs, whether verbal, visual, physical, musical or otherwise.³⁵² And while, for early rhetoricians rhetorical persuasion was generally intentional, as we see in Cicero’s definition of rhetoric as “to speak in a way *adapted* to persuade”³⁵³ or in a way “*suited* to convince,”³⁵⁴ later rhetoricians have expanded rhetoric to include even unintentional and unconscious persuasion such making meaning.³⁵⁵

Because rhetoric is interested in how people persuade one another and persuasion appears to be an influential force in determining literary value, triangulating rhetoric with Marxist theory might give us additional perspectives on what caused changes like the eighteenth century literary shift. In reviewing, for example, Abrams’ account of the eighteenth-century shift, in which Abrams reports that “the perceiver’s stance and the contemplation model [. . .] *appeared* at the end of the first decade of the eighteenth century, in the writings of Joseph Addison and of the third Earl of Shaftesbury,”³⁵⁶ the rhetorician might wonder if “appeared” is the correct word to use here and might begin examining how Addison and Shaftesbury’s texts actually *contributed* to the movement by developing the concepts and effectively persuading other thinkers through their skillful arguments and weighting of motivations. The rhetorical theorist would not see Immanuel Kant’s aesthetic philosophy only as a pure product of his circumstances, but would

³⁵¹ Quintillian 389.

³⁵² Christiansen writes, “The ‘text’ is motivated behavior, composed of signs (verbal only one kind)” Christiansen 86.

³⁵³ Qtd in Quintillian 386. (emphasis mine)

³⁵⁴ Cicero “De Oratore” 311. (emphasis mine)

³⁵⁵ I am thinking here of Kenneth Burke’s quote “Wherever there is persuasion, there is rhetoric. And wherever there is ‘meaning’ there is persuasion.” Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1962) 172.

³⁵⁶ Abrams, “Art-as-Such” 138-139. (emphasis mine)

also recognize in his philosophy, well argued, one of the circumstances of change itself. The rhetorical theorist would examine the criticism of nineteenth-century America not simply as evidence of the change, but as an influential force in the change itself, and the East German and WWII American writer's congresses take on a similar importance in and of themselves.

Naturally, rhetoric, too, has its limitations. Namely, while allowing an unlimited range of "what" in terms of the motives it considers, it considers only a set range of "how" these motives are used to persuade. It considers the "means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols."³⁵⁷ But there are means inducing cooperation which exist outside the symbolic realm. As Quintillian notes, "money, likewise has the power of persuasion"³⁵⁸ but bribery, force, violence and similar persuasions are not encompassed by rhetoric. However, once again, by triangulating rhetoric with Marxism, which does consider force and violence in the form of Repressive State Apparatuses, and bribery in the form of class repression and economics, we can broaden our perspective.

We are not likely to find the book industry's golden goose anytime soon. As we have seen from applying the theories of Ross, Benjamin and Abrams to a number of contexts (nineteenth-century America, WWII America, communist East Germany, and 9/11), classical Marxism alone is not always adequate to the task of accounting for why literature is valued as it is. I suggest that we can improve our perspective by considering an unlimited range of motives/factors and by considering the impact which human agency and discussion can have on concepts of literary value. To this end, I suggest that we triangulate the Marxist model with the rhetorical one.

³⁵⁷ Burke, *A Rhetoric* 43.

³⁵⁸ Quintillian 387.

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