

The Renaissance Subject and the Generic Object

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I shall talk about a “crisis in literary genres” in 16th century France, by which I mean the rather abrupt break between myriad Medieval literary forms that continued to flourish to the end of the 15th century and the new, and newly revived Greco-Latin forms that emerged in Renaissance and Reformation France. Although many medieval texts remained popular for some time, most of the genres fell into disuse around 1530 while a new French Renaissance literature achieved notable successes in five innovative genres: proto-novel (Rabelais); lyric code and sonnet (the Pléiade); the essay (Montaigne); the beginnings of a comic and tragic drama (Jodelle, Garnier); and the creation of a Renaissance epic (d’Aubigné). The two dramatic genres, however, did not develop until the seventeenth century.

Although historians have long conceded that a decisive shift in European affairs took place during the early decades of the 16th century, no comprehensive explanation has been offered for the vertiginous speed with which this cultural transformation happened, particularly noteworthy by contrast with the protracted “waning of the Middle Ages” (Huizinga). Nor have any startling insights been advanced to explain the new nature of the emerging Renaissance subject or “I” which heralds a new era of individualism. Why is there a demonstrable leap from Medieval collective anonymity to the bold assertiveness of Renaissance subjectivity? What has the “I” or human subject *per se* to do with the process of historical change? What has the evolution of literary genres to do, if anything, with the “self”-idea of individuals or a given society?

While literary history and aesthetic formalisms have generally been evoked in an effort to explain the creative dynamism of the Renaissance, I shall propose an additional way to try to answer the questions posed above. Rather than looking at formal properties and conventions, or historical influence or context, I look to the teaching of Jacques Lacan to consider the

“new” Renaissance genres as demonstrative of the following working hypotheses: 1) that literary genres are not inherently stable categories; 2) that the human subject is not an inherently stable or unified entity either, and 3) that no final boundaries exist between the subject and his or her thought-processes and language.

Lacan’s teaching ended an era when it is still possible to talk about *any* historical period without reference to the ethos of language and identifications that structure human mentality and identity *a priori*, conditioning all conscious and unconscious knowledge such that history becomes the condition of itself. If it is agreed that literary revolution somehow describes a phenomenon, it is not so surprising to imagine literature as speaking first about shifts others will later attribute to history. I view the crisis that we retrospectively call the Renaissance as calling forth the evolving awareness of a complex structure of the human subject. The Renaissance not only transcends that flat, two-dimensional universe of Medieval times with its sense of synthesis, *summa*, finiteness and static theocentricity, but more important, the Renaissance demonstrates a gradual sense of cutting free from the hierarchized institutions of the late Middle Ages—Church, Feudal Lord, etc.—producing cultural dislocation that actualized the creative energies of what Lacan calls a divided subject: a logical fact, not an historical one.

In the second place, Lacan’s theories are relevant to a scrutiny of the effervescence surrounding vigorous revival of Antiquity. For whenever writers and thinkers “reinvent” themselves linguistically, re-present themselves anew, their questioning of language *per se* (i.e. Humanist philology) is not only research into “words,” but also concerns the joy of rebirth. And re-birth means invention of a new subject of desire. Indeed, the tensions between Latin and the vernacular languages had existed since the 12th century, and by Rabelais’s day the vernacular languages were split into many styles. Given this state of affairs, Lacan’s theories regarding the interplay of a referential signifier for authority and the desire to speak *differently* heralds the appearance of *new* literary genres as a logical response to profound change. Lacan’s mirror-stage hypothesis states—in brief—that insofar as human animals are dependent on others

for their very survival for a rather long period of time, most human infants gradually acquire an ego as a fictional constellation created by the impact of identifying with certain images, words, and desires in dialectical opposition to what is “not me,” but the effect of an Other: the third term Lacan called the phallus. Thus, the Lacanian ego is neither fixed nor whole, any more than is a mirror image, both pointing beyond themselves to a *fading*, rather than a mastery. The ego cannot depend on “itself” for verification, then, but on the others who validate or nullify it as a set of ideals and judgments.

Montaigne’s “Self”-Fashioning by Stephen Greenblatt introduced “new historicism” by arguing that Montaigne’s *Essais* (1580-88) were not just preoccupations with Ancient philosophy, but also efforts at re-creating a “self.” Although Lacanians do not speak of a self, its being a concept of a totalized agent of being, Greenblatt was still trying to get at the idea of how a new sense of identity was created in the French Renaissance. Rabelais at the beginning of the century and Montaigne at the end of it were both preoccupied with donning multiple masks in their efforts to create new linguistic worlds, new words, new senses of being. More primordially, that pleasurable sensation of being fooled—what Freud called the infant’s *Fort! Da! game* and what we call Peekaboo!—might just as well be described as a becoming aware of identifications that come and go, dependence on otherness or difference. The repetition of such fluid play—such awareness of *being* dual was a literary device that had many meanings in the Renaissance. The obvious and often noted one is the avoidance of censorship attendant upon questioning the *status quo*. But the less obvious meaning that might be read into a literary emphasis of contradiction and paradox is the Renaissance recognition that there were myriad unresolved problems, not only within the quest for theological truth, but in the quest for metaphysical truth as well. Such recognitions were cultural admissions that the “self” had another existence, that is, meaning and value, apart from the theocentric meaning systems that already defined what the subject was *supposed* to be as a unified Oneness. That certain authors could step aside from what was, and in so doing give voice to what could be—creating new generic forms to embody

this—is not dissimilar from the creation of perspective in seeing things anew, askew. Indeed, Renaissance artists and theorists of art recommended the literal use of mirrors to achieve desired pictorial effects: the effort to see further, to know more. In the Italian Renaissance Giotto, for example, is reported to have painted with the help of mirrors and Brunelleschi [eski] 1420s (Cf. “Mirrors in Art,” *Psychological Inquiry*, Edgerton [1973]). Leonardo da Vinci had also recommended using mirrors to try to judge the accuracy of one’s work and to make a painting look like a reflected scene (“Mirrors in Art,”/Richter [1939]), Gombrich (1961). In “Mirrors of Art” Laurie Schneider has written: “mirrors have served artists as a compositional aid...for perspective or illusionism as in the Renaissance...[But] until the 16th century, most mirrors were small and convex, limiting self-portraits to the face and upper part of the body... [until] Dürer’s famous full-length mirror” (*Psychological Inquiry*, p. 287). I could go on and on with details. The Renaissance artist Alberti attributed the *invention of painting* to Narcissus (Ovid/*Metamorphosis*, iii, 342, ff/Schwarz [1959]), and to unspecified poets of Antiquity, looking for support to Plato’s moralizing idea that the mirror is a reflection of Man’s soul (“Mirrors of Art,” p. 288). But to go on in this vein would be a positivism, leading to an insistence on the medieval mirroring of ideals in the Lady and Knight, and so on.

My question is, rather, an inverted one: a 21st-century psychoanalytic one. What does mirroring have to do with a “beyond” in perspective that links mind, image, and body in a new way? A Lacanian psychoanalytic answer as to why theories never pin down final answers or final meanings would point to the real absences that inhabit language. Freud called this mysterious phenomenon a continent of powerful but mercurial knowledge: the unconscious. Lacan has pointed to the structure of language as being *like* the structure of the unconscious. That is, gaps and overlaps perforate every use of language, revealing the associative comings and goings of signifying chains, made up of multileveled intersecting orders Lacan called the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real, categories that join the individual to society in an explicit continuity, a phenomenon Lacan called the topology of the subject. That is, organizing functions or struc-

tures link meaning to being at various levels of overlap and join. Working by the metamorphoses of myriad transformations of context, these orders themselves are immutable structurings or scriptings of image, word, and effect on the body.

I now come to my third idea: that Lacan's psychoanalytic teaching offers some tools that can help us further understand the nature of literary genres. It is the human subject first pinpointed by Lacan in the Schema L, worked out in his more advanced topology as the Borromean chains I described above. The singling out of one vector from the circularity of ordinary discourse gives rise to a stance to which certain rhetorical devices correspond; from which they arise. Although language tropes formalize themselves into the conventions of a genre, these conventions change in response to the historical specificity of an era, thus explaining why they mutate, or why others defy classification. Freud sought proof for his theories regarding the governing existence of an unconscious part of the mind by looking to literary texts and myths. I wish to reverse this procedure with a Lacanian look at literary genres as themselves proof that the limits of linguistic comprehensibility—that is, grammar stretched to the limits of convention—depict the points of impasse in conscious thinking. At the same time, literary genres suggest that the linguistic limits of human mentality extend far beyond the pared down sentences that linguists and philosophers often work with. Indeed, any reduction of literary texts—whether referring to high or popular culture—to their sociological, historical, or linguistic properties does little to describe their affective power, and their “eternal return” in human life. To discount literature as just being there for fun, fiction, and entertainment—or merely as a social mirror—is not so different from discounting dreams or desire. But if one is to take literature, desire, and dreams seriously, then it has to be considered that they have something to tell us about meaning, language, and knowledge. Lacan argued that fiction has the structure of truth: “structure” referring to the ordering of the language of Symbolic, Imaginary, and Real dimensions.

In today's academic climate, there is no reality of universals except as the logical form of natural laws. Fiction, for instance, is not looked at as a source of knowledge as it

was in Ancient times. In the *Poetics* Aristotle assigned poets the task of giving unity to events, a task that the 18th century rhetorician Hugh Blair would assign to historians (H. Fain, *Between Philosophy and History*, Princeton, 1970). Today history often takes over the function of ascertaining a kind of second-order truth in the service of interpretation. Moreover, the concerns of history are those of epistemology, objectivity, evidence, and method. Psychoanalytic “history,” on the other hand, concerns itself with the meaning of a particular person’s life and desire: with how the past impinges on the present to give a certain shape to that future. In 1953 Lacan described the unconscious as that “chapter of my history that is marked by a blank or occupied by a falsehood: it is the censored chapter. But the truth can be rediscovered: usually it has already been written down elsewhere. Namely: in monuments: this is my body...—in archival documents: these are my childhood memories, just as impenetrable as are such documents when I do not know their provenance;—in semantic evolution this corresponds to the stock of words and acceptations of my own particular vocabulary, as it does to my style of life and to my character;—in traditions, too, and even in the legends which, in a heroicized form, bear my history;—and, lastly, in the traces that are inevitably preserved by the distortions necessitated by the linking of the adulterated chapter or the chapters surrounding it, and whose meaning will be re-established by my exegesis” (Lacan, “Discours de Rome,” 1953). I submit that it is nearly as difficult to find a suitable place for literary discourse—seemingly sufficient unto itself—within a university structure as it is to insert psychoanalysis into the academy. For both psychoanalysis and literature reek of the personal and subjective, as against the more public acceptance of the academic “we” that uses methods, tools, and distance to study objects—including language—thus holding the interference of the “desiring subject” at bay.

Michel Foucault argued that the 16th-century Renaissance episteme was resemblance—similitude and veri-similitude—not sameness (Goldberg’s thesis). The historical changes and upheavals—political, natural, demographic, and economic—that hastened the end of the medieval ecclesiastical system

toward the close of the 15th century, joined to spiritual and intellectual factors such as Dante's questioning of first causes, the diminished prestige of the papacy under the Borgia and Medicis, and Erasmus's exegetical scrutiny of the Bible, and so on, awakened the beginnings of the sense of being a critical or judging "I," sensible of a divinity withdrawing its transcendent (immanent) presence from human affairs. Thus, Foucault argued that the cut in the knowledge of Western civilization that the Renaissance represents has its foundations in the intuition of the autonomy of a human subject that gradually, believed it had the right to judge or criticize. Lacan goes another way, asking how the capacity to judge is established at all? Still, if the Renaissance could be credited with having discovered perspective, what Lacan 400 years later named the mirror-stage logical moment of identificatory perception, one may ask how this "perceptual" leap was made? To count to the one of "I am" by identification with another—the mirror stage—would describe the structure of judgment in terms of an accounting for difference or distance, required to establish the concept of perspective or the recognition of that dimension in space.

In the Middle Ages the vertical sense of theocentric identification with the One-with God—would have annulled the possibility of valuing intra-subjective registers. In the medieval period, it makes sense that the individual was not a "value" in and of him or herself. In this same period of flat, impersonal texts, history was thought of as being an intelligible process guided by the inherent law or transcendent design of a divine intelligence (Hans Meyerhoff, *Philosophy of History in Our Time*, Doubleday, 1959). But, despite the apparent homogeneity of the Middle Ages, we are today well aware of the serious efforts to solve the problem of what was generic—that that is what is characteristic of a whole group or class—in relation to objects thought to have essence. Neo-Scholastic realists argued that such essence was permanent and real, be it that of a soul or a stone, characterized by the real property of stoniness.

Nominalism put an end to the raging medieval debate regarding real essences by arguing that essence is not real. In brief, nominalism was the medieval doctrine that viewed the word—the *nomen*, noun or name—as the only universal. By

arguing against the idea of universal essences within reality, nominalists proposed that the mind can frame no single concept or image corresponding to any universal or general—*generic*—term. Only individuals—i.e. the visible—really exist. Whether generic or specific, terms are due to the more or less arbitrary necessities of thought and the convenience of speech. Thus, no abstract entities (essences, classes, or propositions) exist. Two British Franciscans, Duns Scotus and William of Occam in the 13th and 14th centuries developed Nominalism to the point that it would finally put a stop to the all-pervasive medieval belief in real essences. Today the term “Occam’s razor” means a scientific and philosophical principle or rule which argues that entities or essences should not be multiplied except by necessity. The “by necessity” meant that certain essences or abstract “realities” had to be kept because it was unthinkable not to retain them: concepts of divinity, faith, love, justice, immortality, and so on. But philosophically and psychoanalytically speaking, the tool that Nominalism gave to thought was the idea that essence was in the word and in the speaker—not in things.

Thus, around 1475-1500 there was a clearly growing division between a new Renaissance subject and the generic object. By the generic object I mean the specific forms through which Man re-represented himself to his world in literature and in art. In literature the *nomen* was thought to be sufficient to establish the *genus*. Typically, in the proto-novel of Rabelais, one finds chapter after chapter of words piled up one on the other. It is as if by combining every known way to use words, and by inventing new ones, Rabelais could re-invent the world. In reading his Books—both early and late (1532, 1534, 1546, 1552)—one feels that he is literally drunk with the pleasure of using words. Not only does Rabelais use words to build a utopia—*Fais ce que voudras*—, but he also criticized the Church, and writes prologues where he disguises himself to position himself as a critic (or non-critic) of the Book that is to follow. This unified use of strategy—albeit a ragbag of styles and verbal fragments—characterizes Rabelais as a Renaissance subject who uses his generic object or text as a critical/political device. Such a positioning of subject and object was new. Up until 1500 most thought systems projected themselves outward onto

the world, finding God immanent in all things, or all things immanent in gods. The idea that the human subject was itself a judging or critical principle barely existed.

Among the many changes that culminated in what was retrospectively called the Renaissance—one of the great turning points in the history of conceptualizing subject/object relations—was the end of medieval realism or essentialism. Once the stone, for example, no longer contained the essence of stoniness, but was ranked according to genus by its name, which became a universalizing function, the shift from medieval to pre-modern perspective could occur. Indeed, I would argue that by placing the essence in the *nomen*, and the *nomen* in the individual speaker, Nominalism has triumphed in Western epistemology since that time until today, even within deconstruction. One could rewrite Descartes' *cogito* to "I name, therefore I judge." Although objects lost their pantheistic vibrancy, their essentialism, they gained the new dimension of depth or distance or perspective that previously had been described by such awkward medieval concepts as "visible accident." Since artistic movements always proceed philosophical change, Renaissance paintings had perspective before the concept was theorized by Descartes to join epistemology to ontology.

The use of distance to establish perspective took many forms, Pléiade poets, for instance, took upon themselves the task of using poetic forms from the Ancient world to give new life to the French language. Even the effort to accomplish such a task was described in a manifesto, manifestos already implying distance and critical awareness, as do prologues. Joachim du Bellay's *La Défense et Illustration de la langue française* (1549) enunciated the following general principles: to enrich the French language and make it illustrious, not only must Ancient and Italian models be used, but new forms and new words must be created as well. The shift from classifying objects by genres to a conscious injunction to poets to create new genres shows the Renaissance subject intuitively becoming aware of its capacity to judge; of the split between creating a "self" in language and the *desire* to do so from within the secular world of one's *own* thoughts. Now that essence has passed into the world; and the word was seen to reflect the Renaissance sub-

ject, it makes sense that such representational vibrancy will show up in new literary creations. Such “experimental” turns as the new genres were to take is well summed up in Montaigne’s preface to the reader where he warns: “So, reader, I am myself the substance of my book, and there is no reason why you should waste your leisure on so frivolous and unrewarding a subject” (March 1580).

Lacan wrote in *Seminar III* that “there is poetry each time that an écrit introduces us to a world other than ours, and, giving us the presence of a being, of a certain fundamental rapport, makes it become ours as well...Poetry is the creation of a subject assuming a new other symbolic relation to the world” (S. III, p. 91 in French). And by “poetry” he means other genres as well. In the Renaissance the development of perspective also attested to the subject’s ability to see with greater clarity, not only optically, but also in reference to whom and what he was. A century later Descartes formalized these changes in philosophy and argued in *The Method* (1637) that even ideas have become clear and distinct. But in the French Renaissance, the subject still retained the fluidity and uncertainty of perception that placed him closer to an unconscious source of knowledge than perhaps any other literary period prior to Romanticism.

In the Renaissance genres, subjects vacillated between the security of a static worldview and the terror and exhilaration of its dissolution. While Marguerite de Navarre wrote poems in the 1530s in which she was in God and God in her, in which she trod with care upon the soul of the stones, François Rabelais disguised himself in his prologues so as to confuse the reader about the purpose of the Books to follow. Rabelais’s skeptical caution, echoed in Italian art, in historical episodes such as the return of Martin Guère, takes on its fullest expression in Montaigne’s poignant question: *Que sçais-je* which not only echoes Ancient Skeptical philosophers, but suggests that human affairs are not pre-planned by God so as to exclude doubt. And, indeed, doubt (and its twin brother anxiety) lead us to Foucault’s idea that similitude was the trope sought by Renaissance man. I would suggest that as long as a person feels at one with their surroundings, their first response on closing

that firm grounding would be to look for similitude in objects: un *vrai-semblance*. Fittingly, Rabelais wrote chapter after chapter on affinities among words, materials, people, sounds, and so on. The Pléiade poets sought to invent a new French voice, only insofar as it was similar to voices and forms of the greats of an Ancient past. They sought to imitate the Ancient poets, and, thus, to be different by being similar. Montaigne, as well, developed his unique voice by quoting Ancient greats, by playing his ideas off against theirs. The importance of Renaissance imitation might even allow one to suggest that the advance of writing and printing was a result, not a cause, of a move from an oral culture to a Gutenberg galaxy. Indeed, Gutenberg printed in order to make identical copies; that is, to multiply similitude.

Perhaps, the solitary character of Rabelais's prose, of Montaigne's *Essais*, and of lyric poetry itself worked against the growth of drama: a genre that generally expresses a modicum of social cohesion. By the 17th-century the moment of openness that characterized the Renaissance had begun to find the calm and closure which signals that the Wars are over. By linking his own doubts to reason, and to a passion for certainty, Descartes found a way to give birth to what Lacan has called the modern (or empirical) sciences by anchoring doubt in thought. But even though Descartes's claim for Man was his stability and rationality, Descartes's admission of his own *passion* for certainty reveals a more tenuous calm than that characteristic of the relatively confident Middle Ages. Against a medieval sense of eternity and a Renaissance admission of doubt, it would make sense that the apparent calm of the 17th century barely hid an insistent anxiety. And, strangely enough, at this same historical moment, a fourth dimension—that of time—was given greater attention than previously in history. Indeed, the first portable clocks for individuals were made around 1500. And in literary theory and practice the concern with imposing the unity of time became increasingly important. Put another way, one might speculate that it follows logically that Descartes's thinking subject or *res cogitans*—the temporal or repetitive dimension—be added to his *res extensa*—the three spatial dimensions.

In the final part of this presentation I shall extend the psychoanalytic theory I have brought to bear on the question of why the cultural transformation theory we call the Renaissance happened so rapidly. On the one hand the medieval Rhétoriquer poets stand between the Renaissance and the Middle Ages, marking the end of a period when literary forms had become petrified. In their poetry, rhetoric had become artificial style and word games. Indeed these poets loved the fixed medieval genres which they tried to make ever more complex at the level of rhyme. But they could not stop the newness in the wings of the courts and elsewhere in society. Instead of viewing the new genres that followed the Rhétoriqueurs as evidence of historical change, I would turn this argument on its head and suggest the following idea. Periods characterized by notable flourishing of newly dynamic artistic forms tell of increased understanding of what the human is and how it is constituted.

By bringing a psychoanalytic theoretical perspective to bear on the Renaissance, I would argue for what I consider another cut in the knowledge of Western civilization, another advance in understanding subject/object relations: That is, Freud's discovery of an unconscious repository of language and images that give body to individual knowledge and to the social Other. The only *apparently* absent memory base insures that human response draw on a fundament of knowledge already inscribed within a given person. Jacques Lacan has extended Freud's early work on the unconscious to argue that human perception is itself centered on various planes and surfaces such that the subject seems decentered. But rather than being finally decentered, the human subject is simply more complex and contradictory than it gives itself credit for being because it resides in more discretely and contradictory ways than it can imagine because it resides in disunified parts in separate (and separable) spaces. Put another way, there is a space in space that only shows itself intermittently. But in Lacan's extension of Freud there is, nonetheless, rationality to be found in seemingly irrational acts and thoughts; one that gives a key to the complexity of human mentality and identity.

Viewed within the psychoanalytic retrospective I have proposed, the rapid birth of new Renaissance genres could

demonstrate that the development of perspective and depth was in an intuitive awareness of a split between language and being: The one Descartes solidified in the enigmatic axiom: “I think. Therefore I am.” Moreover, I would argue that psychoanalysis (after Lacan) gives us new tools by which to assess the past, and not only that of individuals. If I am correct, Lacan’s linking of psychoanalysis to language marks the end of the modern age when essence was still thought to reside clearly in individual consciousness. Thought was totalizing insofar as “reason” was its tool. In the post-Modern era, essence no longer dwells in an objective use of meaning, but as opaque, multi-leveled and usually a bit off-center (or off-kilter) because its fundamental source is the unconscious signifier and the object *a*. Given this perspective the subject of consciousness is in an elliptical position to its own knowledge and judgments.

Indeed, the representations from which meaning arises cluster first around a few primordial matrices that cause desire as irrecoverable sources of effect and affect. Thus, Lacan, after the Existentialists, teaches us in yet another way, that existence precedes any attribution of essence. That is, language and images exist and they combine with infant corporal experience to build up an unconscious memory bank of meanings to which people only later attribute fixed meanings, usually, said Lacan, in an essentialist or totalizing way (*Seminar XX*, p. 34 in French). The degree to which such closure characterizes each individual consciousness derives, within a Lacanian perspective, from the paradox that being depends on meaning—not on reality—drawn from the unconscious. Thus, when signifiers disappear in one place, they can appear in another (*Rencontre*, p. 457). In this perspective, any human subject constitutes and reconstitutes itself only by *supposing* itself, its knowledge. And any extended use of language—even a literary one—reveals a subject’s or author’s knowledge as emanating from repressed signifiers—archaic or dead letters—that live the conscious subject of meaning as if he were already dead, and thus immortalized by “essence” (*Seminar III*, p. 202 in French). Put another way, there is no final distance between “self,” ontology, mind and language in Lacan’s carefully refined theories of meaning. From a Lacanian point of view, Aristotle’s “first cause”—what

things are made of or the material cause—is explanatory of his final cause (or *telos*). Any individual life, in this view, is lived in the future perfect tense. The same would not be untrue of historical moments. What *this* tells us is not only what *was* beforehand, but intimates what may well be in the future. Thus, the fragmented prose that dwelt alongside subjective poetic voices in Renaissance genres, revealed one world order in dissolution. Not surprisingly, this baroque historical period pointed to a prior fixity in cultural conventions, and ushered in another period of fixity in the following century.

In my theoretical framework the endless enigmas of literature become ever-moving chains of substitutive desire (lack) that reveal human beings as the mirrors of their own cultural ex-sistence. Thus, literary language—like dream language and like regular discourse as well—always means more than it says. Always palpably dynamic, literary texts are the Pantagruelic material that negotiates desire, replicates symbols of self-believed descriptions, and undergoes myriad transformations throughout time. For that reason, literary studies are precariously placed within the university discourse whose characteristic mode Lacan has described as nominalist (Lemaire). What is Nominal or universal in Lacanian terms is the unconscious signifier. But paradoxically it is a signifier whose unique specificity annuls any finally universalist quality because it gives rise to essence as *jouissance* which is radically singular. What one can do is speak of the signifier at the level of the word (*mot*) as a local universal. But once the word exerts an *effect* on an individual perception, and links up to images and sensations, then the signifier has become *real* and “true” as constitutive of the very components of human mentality. Basing their assumptions on a *savoir naturel*, any person—reader or author—individuates the world through a set of “self”-believed descriptions. Another way to put this is that once the *mot* has become inscribed, it is soon drenched in the specificities that constitute any given person’s history. The word has become *parole*, signified, subjective, *sens*, *lalangue*.

In conclusion, I arrive at a circular, yet tentative, proof of my early hypothesis: that literary texts constitute one category of the Lacanian Real. This hypothesis argues: 1) that the uni-

versal would belong to the realm of structure; 2) that the Real gaps in language give rise to new forms, seeking to cover over what is unbearable to know by words and images; 3) and that the topology of the subject advanced by Lacan would obviate the need to think in terms of universals, at the same time that it would show us why we tend to be “essentializing” creatures despite ourselves. On the one hand, if “truth” can be equated with individually repressed meaning, there would be a death of humanism based as it is on the myth of a substantialist subject. But, on the other hand, the permanent gap in being that Lacan called a hole in the Symbolic, a void in the Real, drives humans to fill it up with words, images, and ideologies to which essence—or permanence—is then attributed as *jouissance*..

Finally, I would argue that literary genres serve as a mirror of the many impacts of culture on beings. Literary genres paradoxically open up the gaps in the heart of knowledge, and at the same time close them by the use of grammatical language and identificatory possibilities, making texts seem innocent, provocative, and enigmatic while still giving individuals a mirror in which to see themselves *almost* as they are. Is it not time, then, to consider that literary genres are monuments to the fluidity of the human subject in its complex interweave of language, desire, images, and body? I submit that new genres emerge to fail or “succeed” in a given socio-historical moment, insofar as they reflect some “truth” about the complex structuration of the human subject in crisis.

