

# Introduction: Is the Novel Democratic?

NANCY RUTTENBURG

In a February 2000 letter to the novelist Martin Amis, Saul Bellow wrote: "I long ago understood that what we call the art of fiction was withering because—well, because modern democracies were unheroic" (548). I note this not to consider the meaning of Bellow's statement but to point out that both novelists and novel scholars have associated the novel with democracy and democracy with the novel. This perceived relationship, although provocative, has further complicated the meanings of both of its already complex terms. The question has to be asked: if we are uncertain about the semantics of our key terms, *democracy* and *the novel*, how is it possible to assess the nature of their association? Questions beget questions: what are the criteria for identifying and evaluating evidence for this relationship in order to establish its legitimacy? What is the nature of the gravitational pull that keeps these enormous abstractions, democracy and the novel, orbiting one another? Is it historical, formal, discursive, ideological, structural, metaphorical, or some combination of these, depending on the inclinations, methodologies, and disciplinary field(s) of the analyst? Does the association of democracy and the novel, no matter what formal changes each undergoes, suggest a shared origin and evolution? Would the rationale for assuming a common origin and evolution then require us to theorize a shared logic or ethic, perhaps linked to the centrality of representation—the assertion of a relationship between the actual and the virtual—for both the democratic and the novelistic? Would the discovery of a logic or ethic common to both democracy and the novel help us discern that set of variables—structural, formal, figurative—which underwrites both so that we are better able to survey their common ground? Or, conversely, would we find that there is no limit to the idiosyncratic scenarios each generates, so that any legitimate theory of a shared logic or ethic would have to accommodate infinite content and an uncontainable fluidity of form? In that case, would any association of democracy and the novel be tautological, as each of the constitutive terms loses its specificity? And if we manage persuasively to repudiate that conclusion while conceding the necessarily tentative nature of these questions and their answers, how are we to imagine the dynamics of democracy and of the novel as they move from local to national and then global sites of conceptualization, production, and reception?<sup>1</sup> These were some of the questions addressed at the April 2012 conference held at Stanford's Center for the Study of the Novel, titled "Is the Novel Democratic?"

<sup>1</sup> At this point, we should note the distinction between liberal and nonliberal forms of democracy as they inform the cultural and political circumstances in which novelists write. There is a third way of thinking about the novel that is purely theoretical, in which democracy signifies the common rather than the elite characters and readers, humanity at large—the "people"—rather than a specific group. (The premise of universality, paradoxically, accompanies the individuation of characters.) In this introduction, we will see the dynamic interplay of all three concepts of democracy insofar as the twentieth century's most influential novel theorists wrote across the spectrum.

Although democracy and the narrative prototype for the novel arose in anti-unity, the conference was limited to an examination of the link between modern democracy and the modern novel. For our purposes, modernity extended from the European eighteenth century—the era of Enlightenment and democratic revolution—to the global postmodern. We did not intend by this framework to make a categorical claim about the European eighteenth century as modernity's point of departure but rather to reiterate a generally accepted literary-historical axiom: long prose narratives had evolved by the century's end into the modern realist novel, the template against which subsequent novelistic experimentation, within Europe and across the globe, established itself as such.<sup>2</sup>

The exemplary—in fact, paradigmatic—account of the link between the novel and democracy is Ian Watt's justifiably influential study, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding*. First published in 1957, it remains very much read and debated by novel historians and theorists. It seems indisputable that whether or not one agrees with Watt's foundational claim that the rise of the novel occurred in the English eighteenth century, his account of the prerequisites for the novel's appearance and importance is to a significant degree transferable to other places and times, as long as the literary historian or theorist attends to the nuances of cultural-historical translation.

Watt's book amply demonstrates that and how the novel participated in a set of social, cultural, philosophical, religious, and political developments that occurred in eighteenth-century Britain. In the realm of philosophy, René Descartes's *cogito* and John Locke's "principle of individuation" (developed in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*) came to literary fruition in the form of long narratives featuring the ever-idiosyncratic ordinary person's psychological and social life. Individuated characters displace allegorical character-types; colloquial, referential language supplants elite and elaborately figurative language. The authenticity of the quotidian supplants literary artifice; the raw material of contemporary life overwhelms the expressive capacity of conventional forms. The novel erodes the unified world picture on which the epic relied, an observation central to both Georg Lukács's and Mikhail M. Bakhtin's accounts of what distinguishes the novel from other genres and their explanations for its preeminence in modernity. As Watt sees it, the novel entrains the ensuing fragmentation by substituting for the unified worldview of epic "a developing but unplanned aggregate of particular individuals having particular experiences at particular times and at particular places" (31). Watt's formulation is reminiscent of Walter Benjamin's concept of the "meanwhile," interpreted by Benedict Anderson as an eighteenth-century temporal category and structure of imagining central to both the novel and the newspaper (Anderson 22–26, 32–36).

<sup>2</sup> This claim in no way disputes the claims of novel historians from Mikhail M. Bakhtin to René Girard to Michael McKeon who assign an earlier date to the rise of the novel. McKeon, for example, provides an extensive account of origins from premodernity through the seventeenth century. His historical canvas is much more expansive than Ian Watt's (*The Rise of the Novel* is discussed below), and his literary-historical methodology is distinctive. But he does give pride of place to the canonical eighteenth-century British novelists, each of whom is given (along with Cervantes) an entire chapter.

The rise of the novel, according to Watt, is concurrent with (1) changes within the economic fortunes of the middle class (as opposed to the “poorer public,” which consumed cheaper and less complex kinds of prose fiction); (2) an increase in literacy and leisure time (particularly among women) and with it the appearance of the first circulating libraries; (3) the professionalization or democratization of the profession of letters; and (4) the marriage of the Protestant, introspective, and intellectually independent sensibility with the beginnings of industrial capitalism. Both Protestantism and capitalism emphasized the existential state and worldly prospects of the autonomous individual or “homo economicus,” whose very individuality made him or her *representative* of a multitude of others. On the one hand, we see the fostering of a private and egocentric mental life and on the other, the fantastic textual connection with innumerable similar lives. Watt cites Samuel Taylor Coleridge on the novel as the genre that “transmits the moving phantasms of one man’s delirium, so as to people the barrenness of a hundred other brains afflicted with the same trance or suspension of all common sense and all definite purpose” (Watt 200). He cites D. H. Lawrence as well, who wrote that the novel made possible “a sharp knowing in apartness” (Watt 185)—the fundamental condition, again, of what Benedict Anderson would later describe as “imagined communities.”

All of these factors can be grouped under the “democratic” rubric: the advent of the common person; the increasingly audible individual voice; the focus on interiority in tandem with representation, on self-scrutiny over authority, and on a growing middle, commercial class. The latter, as Jürgen Habermas, Ernst Koselleck, and others have shown, constituted the “public sphere,” which positioned itself in critical opposition to the state, giving rise to the spirit of revolutionary anti-authoritarianism.

Not surprisingly, some have criticized Watt’s literary-historical vision of the rise of the novel, largely having to do with the emphasis he places on the English eighteenth century.<sup>3</sup> Rather than rehearse them here, I will turn to two of the most influential novel theorists of the twentieth century, Bakhtin and Lukács. (I will refer to the century’s third literary titan, Erich Auerbach, only briefly because his magisterial *Mimesis* offers an account not of the novel’s history but rather of the development of literary realism from antiquity and across genres.) It is worth noting here that each engages the idea that Watt would later make the object of his seminal study. Both anticipate his account of the modern novel’s genesis, but they position it in relation to a theory of the rise and cultural-existential significance of democratic modernity. In his 1941 essay “Epic and Novel: Toward a Methodology for the Study of the Novel,” Bakhtin writes that the novel’s distinctive traits (discussed in more detail below) can be found in the literature of the Hellenic period and “again during the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance” but that they emerged “with special force and clarity beginning in the second half of the [Western European] eighteenth

<sup>3</sup> Watt was by no means the first to claim that eighteenth-century Britain gave rise to the novel. In his 1799 “Reflections on the Novel,” for example, the Marquis de Sade located the genesis of the modern novel in the works of Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding as well as Henri Rousseau and Antoine-François Prévost.

century" (*Dialogic* 5). This claim "takes on flesh," to use Bakhtin's metaphor, in the 1937 essay "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel." This essay offers a historical poetics of the novel from antiquity to the works of François Rabelais, who in Bakhtin's view was a foundational figure in the development of the modern novel (*Dialogic* 84). Rabelais, Bakhtin writes, was "profoundly democratic. In no sense is he opposed to the mass, as something out of the ordinary, as a man of another species" (*Dialogic* 241).

Lukács and Auerbach locate the origins of the novel a bit later, in the early nineteenth century. In *The Historical Novel*, Lukács credited Walter Scott's Waverley novels with initiating the genre, while Auerbach claimed that Stendhal was the "founder" of novelistic realism, the novel proper, because he was the first to register the politically and socially destabilizing effects of the French Revolution. In contrast to his eighteenth-century English predecessor Henry Fielding, who similarly focused on the quotidian life of unexceptional individuals but in a "satiric moralistic key" (Auerbach 481), Stendahl represented individuals as "embedded in a total reality, political, social, and economic, which is concrete and constantly evolving" (Auerbach 463). If English and French realism are "basically the same," the former "came about more quietly and more gradually, without the sharp break between 1780 and 1830," and it "carried on traditional forms and viewpoints much longer, until far into the Victorian period" (491).

Bakhtin and Lukács express most powerfully the democratic character of the modern novel in their comparisons of the epic and the novel.<sup>4</sup> For both theorists, the epic of antiquity is the novel's most significant predecessor, allowing us to discern what distinguishes the modern novel from other long prose genres. Both describe the epic of antiquity similarly: it represented a total, homogeneous, and complete world, separated by "an unbridgeable gap," as Lukács wrote in *The Theory of the Novel*, from the naturally unfinished and thus inauthentic present, a "time of paradox" (31). In the epic of antiquity, meaning is not in dispute for author, character, or reader because the external world and the epic subject, the hero, are organically related—individual life and essence coincide, so that meaning is "ever-present," "ready-made" (32). In contrast, the novel, along with other forms of modern art, is severed from any "original form-giving principle" and is compelled instead to engage in "a historico-philosophical dialectic" in which the hierarchy of genres is lost (40). This is precisely Bakhtin's view as well.

In contrast to Bakhtin and Lukács, Erich Auerbach does not differentiate epic and novel. On the contrary, he locates in Dante's epic poem the *Divine Comedy*, and specifically in *The Inferno*, the first appearance of the modern novel's most distinctive characteristics, at least according to Bakhtin and Lukács. In the eighth chapter of *Mimesis*, "Farinata and Cavalcante," Auerbach identifies in *The Inferno* a "mixture of stylistic levels" (184): on the one hand, the "spontaneous and unstylized speech of everyday conversation among ordinary speakers," including the "humdrum, grotesque, or repulsive" (183, 184); and on the other, the elevated style

<sup>4</sup> In his Introduction to Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination*, Michael Holquist notes the inevitability of the Bakhtin-Lukács comparison, particularly in their assessments of the relationship of epic and novel (xxxii–xxxiii).

appropriate to “the unity of the transcendental order” (190). The absolute claims of a divine ethics are realized in the structure of the inferno and the eternal suffering of its inhabitants, but such claims are undercut by the representation, through the pilgrim Dante’s dialogue with the sinners he encounters, of “other hierarchical systems of a physico-cosmological or historical-political order” (190). In the end, the poet Dante achieves an unprecedented “figural realism” (196) in which “the historical and individual man” eclipses “the realm of timeless being” (202).<sup>5</sup> The divine realm becomes a mere “stage” or “setting” for the historical and individual man; “The image of man eclipses the image of God” (201, 202).

To return to Bakhtin and Lukács: if they agree that the ideal totality of the epic is separated by an unbridgeable gap from the record of fragmentation that is the modern novel, they disagree on how that gap should be evaluated. Is it comic or is it tragic? Although Lukács acknowledges that the modern individual “cannot breathe in [the] closed world” of the epic, his account of the appearance of the novel in modernity is a sober one (33). In *Theory of the Novel*, he describes the modern novel as the most compelling expression of what he famously called “transcendental homelessness”; the universality of loneliness, in fact, exceeds and ultimately replaces the sublimity of tragedy (41). Given this existential fact of modernity, the function of literature is to “carry the fragmentary nature of the world’s structure into the world of forms” (39). The novel’s world is one of infinite forms, none more inherently valuable or authoritative than another. In place of the epic hero, the novel offers the lonely ironist: an “epic individual” who is estranged from the external world and whose irony is mandated by the double chasm he or she cannot disregard.<sup>6</sup> The first lies between one’s own consciousness and the external world and the second within interiority itself, which compels one to make oneself the object of knowledge (66). Lukács elaborates: “In the novel the subject, as observer and creator, is compelled by irony to apply its recognition of the world to itself and to treat itself, like its own creatures, as a free object of free irony: it must transform itself into a purely receptive subject, as is normatively required for great epic literature” (75).

These imperatives are fundamentally ethical ones, entailing a vision of freedom that mandates a kind of novelistic Golden Rule in which the author treats “itself” as it treats “its own creatures”: here authorial agency is reconceptualized as pure receptivity.<sup>7</sup> This is the “negative mysticism” of irony, for which “the ultimate, true substance” is “the present, non-existent God” (90). Although Lukács does not refer explicitly to the democratic nature of the novel, he conceives of the genre as fundamentally alienated from transcendent authority.

In contrast to Lukács’s assessment of the novel’s declension from the epic of antiquity and to the novelistic practice that subsequently came into being with the

<sup>5</sup> I take the poet/pilgrim distinction from John Freccero.

<sup>6</sup> Just as the novelistic protagonist is the “epic individual,” Lukács characterizes the novel as “the epic of an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem, yet which still thinks in terms of totality” (56).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Bakhtin’s account, in his 1934 “Discourse in the Novel,” in which he presents his idea of the “character zone” (*Dialogic* 316).

erasure of authority, Bakhtin sees these developments as intrinsically comic. The demise of the epic and the historical formation of the novel, “shaped by the current of decentralizing, centrifugal forces,” initiate the carnivalesque from which the novel derives its impetus through the subgenre known as Menippean satire (*Dialectic* 273). Released from the hallowed forms of the epic and its attendant meanings, the novel runs amok. Against the finished quality of the epic, the novel is eternally open-ended, attuned to a present whose future cannot be known and therefore committed not to being but to becoming, searching out, revealing, discovering, undressing authority to disclose its secrets, deconstructing the pieties through laughter. The novel—in its infinite capaciousness, its ability to comprehend all other literary forms—is the categorically protean, always contemporary genre. In the novel, everything is in flux, nothing is reified, there are no enduring truths, and yet a great truth receives in the novel its most direct and unmediated representation.

This is a truth about voice as the basis of the novel. Bakhtin’s point is not so much the equal value of individual voices as it is their permeability: the novel’s meaning can only be intersubjective, cocreated—and then uncreated to be re-created—by the three partners in the novelistic event: author, character, and reader. The interiority of all three partners is made up of language, but since language cannot be owned or externally regulated, it cannot be private, unique to individuals. Instead, one’s interiority, the place from which one speaks, is already populated: as Walt Whitman, America’s self-proclaimed poet of democracy, wrote, “I contain multitudes.” Containment, for Whitman, did not signify ownership but its opposite: paradoxically, containment is the opening through which emerges an aggregate of singular voices, “the sign of democracy” (50). Containment, in this sense, is analogous to Bakhtin’s metaphor of the church to describe Dostoevsky’s polyphony: the church/novel stages “a communion of unmerged souls” (*Problems* 26–27).<sup>8</sup>

If the early novel’s “developing but unplanned aggregate of individuals” presages the containment of multitudes, it also presages what Henry Adams, in *The Education of Henry Adams*, described as the “unsure acceleration” of American culture toward an uncertain destiny, fueled by industrialization and the ascendancy of science and technology (1095).<sup>9</sup> The novel’s formal realism as described by Watt remained the dominant novelistic principle, but the rapid transfiguration of American reality had begun to exceed the conventions of formal representation in the novel. The novelist’s role was itself transfigured by the expansion of an increasingly heterogeneous aggregate of individuals whose trajectory was impossible to predict. As the metamorphosis of American reality quickened, the novel began its experimental journey, beginning with Melville, an author particularly attuned to the contrast between American democratic ideals and their dystopic

<sup>8</sup> In this passage, Bakhtin links Dostoevsky’s novels with Dante’s poem, insofar as both create worlds in which “multi-leveledness is extended into eternity, where there are the penitent and the unrepentant, the damned and the saved.” Bakhtin’s remarks here anticipate Auerbach’s conclusions regarding Dante’s accomplishment, as discussed above.

<sup>9</sup> Adams’s *Education* was first circulated in a private edition in 1907 and posthumously published in 1918.

permutations. Before the *Education* was written, Adams himself attempted a fictional critique of American politics in *Democracy: An American Novel* (1880). In *Education*, Adams, the scion of revolutionary-republican idealists who would go on to codify the principles of democratic liberalism, reflects on the obsolescence of his patrician education. He invokes La Fontaine's fable "La Besace," in which Jupiter asks a group of animals to compare themselves critically with one another, beginning with the monkey. Departing from La Fontaine's tale, Adams allegorizes the fabulist's monkey as the personification of contemporary America: the monkey concedes that its figure is "not necessarily ideal or decorative"; beyond that, and more to Adams's point, it could not guess "what form it might take even in one generation." If it is impossible to anticipate the metamorphosis of form in one generation, Adams confesses that he, privileged witness to the dynamic transformation of American democratic culture, "never ventured to dream of three" (1095). Why does Adams identify the American as a monkey? The monkey—and the novel that must if not contain then at least record its antics—is a chimp, a changeling, a jester, an affront to conventional forms. It is a short Bakhtinian step to seeing the novel as analogous to the monkey, both creatures of boundless appetite liberated from scruple in relation to form.

I will end my introduction to this special issue of *Novel* by briefly examining three images of emptiness central to the French democratic theorist Claude Lefort's analysis of the structure of modern democracy. Each image figures a paradoxically productive emptiness situated at the center of democratic politics and, according to Lukács and Bakhtin, of the modern novel as well. Lefort's first image, and the most familiar, is that of the empty space of power situated at the heart of democratic politics, a space that before the Revolution was inhabited by the king as absolute sovereign (Lefort is thinking of the French Revolution, but his observation holds for the American Revolution as well). In contrast, the empty space of democracy is inhabited only provisionally; an elected president, for example, holds office for a limited time. The democratic empty space thus generates "a diffuse, invisible power, which is both internal and external to individuals; which is produced by individuals and which subjugates individuals; [and] which is as imaginary as it is real" (174). In the self-splitting required by the empty space, we find a political-historical analogue of Lukács's existential concept of irony as it is fictionally embodied by the protagonist of the modern novel.

Lefort's second image of absence derives from the social and psychological effects of the "disincorporation of power" signified by the empty space, a consequence of the revolutionary eviction of the sovereign. For the individual, the disincorporation of sovereign power means independence, but that necessarily entails "the dissolution of the ultimate markers of certainty": experience, law, and knowledge (179). According to Lukács and Bakhtin, as we have seen, these markers are firmly established in the epic world. To the degree that they encompass the totality of meanings, they delimit the nature of "adventure" for the epic hero whose identity is derived organically from that world. In modernity, however, the dissolution of certainty inaugurates an "adventure" that produces a permanent crisis of identity. Lukács maintained that the protagonist of "the adventure of interiority" is "the soul that goes to find itself, that seeks adventures in order to be proved and

tested by them, and by proving itself, to find its own essence" (89). But for Lukács, the discovery of essence will always be undermined by irony; for Bakhtin, the protean nature of the novel precludes the very idea of essence and the closure it promises.

The ambiguity of Lukács's allusion to essence resembles the ambiguity of Lefort's allusion to a "new mode of existence . . . within the horizon of democracy" (180). As there is no essence in literary modernity, there is no horizon in modern democracy; as Lukács begs the question of identifying essence, Lefort begs the question of locating democracy's limits. Can one be said to exist *within* the ever-disappearing horizon of democracy? Or to put this question in Bakhtinian terms, can the novel be said to have a horizon, given that it is always in process, always becoming? The novelistic and the democratic have no essence because their horizons, if they can be said to exist, can only be provisional, a fiction of containability or closure. Lefort's observation that the advent of modern democracy—the fall of the autocratic regime—blurs the "inner-outer distinction," producing in turn the disappearance of the markers of certainty, militates against the discovery of essence. The "inner" of essence requires a stable "outer," a fixed horizon in relation to which one knows oneself. If the individual finds his or her freedom in the absence of such certainty, he or she does so at the cost "of his assurance as to his identity" (180). For Lefort, as for Lukács and Bakhtin, dissolution, dispossession, and radical uncertainty are prerequisite to political as well as personal formation (*bildung*) and ultimately to freedom.

Lefort's third image of emptiness is a productive, if fraught, "openness" central to our existential condition: "[H]uman society can only open on to itself by being held in an opening it did not create" (222). What can be said of society can be said of the individual. Here, philosophy and religion concur: "[H]umanity" must accept that it "cannot be self-contained, that it cannot set its own limits, and that it cannot absorb its origins and ends into those limits" (*ibid.*). (This premise applies to Lefort's other images of emptiness, the empty space of power and the absence of essence.) But religion possesses a categorical advantage over philosophy in the resources of imagination. The imagination enables the believer to participate in the staging of redemption, the sacred "ordeal" in which "being held" and "self-opening" are simultaneous states of being (*ibid.*).<sup>10</sup> That is, the staging made possible by imagination allows us to understand the simultaneity of individual free will and the absolute authority of a divine sovereign. The narratives offered by religion, Lefort writes, portray, perform, and dramatize the unthinkable relation of mortality and transcendence. In so doing, every believer participates in the same imaginative enterprise: they "populate the invisible with the things they see, naively invent a time that exists before time, organize a space that exists behind their space." The "plot" of such a narrative is based "on the most general conditions of their lives" (223). The religious and novelistic endeavor is in this sense the same.

That is, Lefort's use of literary language to describe the devices of religious narrative—portrayal, performance, dramatization, personification, invention,

<sup>10</sup> Religious novels like Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, for example, allow us to see how this simultaneity works in the life of a Christian slave.



epitome—suggests that the novel and religion drink from the same well. Their difference lies in the antithesis of religion’s fundamentalist belief in the Word made flesh and fiction’s suspension of disbelief. (As many theorists of readerly identification with the novel’s world and its immaterial population know, this suspension does not reliably hold.)<sup>11</sup> Novelistic narrative does what religious narrative does—it populates the invisible, invents a time, organizes a space—and in so doing, it stands with religion in opposition to philosophy, which invests in what is intelligible.<sup>12</sup> Every novelistic character, by virtue of the fact that it is a character, enters a world not of its creation. In this world, it discovers that its business is *bildung*, and that self-opening requires self-creation.

Lefort’s exploration of the productivity of emptiness—empty spaces of power, the dissolution of the markers of certainty as the grounds of freedom, and existential openness—permits his claim, despite the abstract quality of his analysis, that “democracy testifies to a highly specific shaping” (224). The project of shaping, however, cannot be completed. Novel theory similarly proposes that the novel is another such empty and therefore limitless space, a point of intersection for innumerable voices and a point of provisional habitation by transient beings. If both the novel and democracy testify to a highly specific shaping, both rely for their vitality on the state of “becoming”: neither survives finalization. Adams, upon seeing the great machine or “dynamo” on exhibit at the 1900 World’s Fair in Paris, pronounced it a “symbol of infinity” that would destroy all previous markers of certainty. Its advent would condemn the elite class, possessors of knowledge and power, to irrelevance, obsolescence (1067). The elite class would be replaced by the power of a rogue “pen,” which “works for itself, and acts like a hand, modeling the plastic material over and over again to the form that suits it best” (1075). The modeling or shaping is continual, but the form shifts according to the taste of the one who, for a limited time, holds the pen. Nevertheless, the shared principle of the modern novel and modern democracy seems to hold. Both encompass an aggregate of particular individuals—increasingly eccentric with the global reach of the novel into heretofore unrepresented peripheries—having particular experiences at particular times and in particular places. Both excel in making coherent the idiosyncratic fragments of modern life as it everywhere unfolds.

In this introduction, I have attempted to survey the intersection between novel theory and democratic theory as a backdrop to the distinctive way in which each contributor interprets the principal question of this special issue. These essays, in diverse ways, anchor the abstractions of theory and in so doing refine them through analyses of particular places, times, trajectories, characters, readers, authors, and modes of novel production and reception. They enrich our understanding of the literary history of the individual as well as of the history of forms of collectivity, including the literary enterprise itself. The achievement of these essays, then,

<sup>11</sup> This problem was at the heart of two conferences held at Stanford’s Center for the Study of the Novel: “Is the Novel Secular?,” convened in 2011, and “What Is the Nature of Literary Being?,” convened in 2013.

<sup>12</sup> One of Lefort’s aims in the essay is to show that philosophy, despite its “pretensions to Absolute Knowledge,” is “bound up with religion” (223, 224).

through the range of carefully wrought perspectives they bring to the principal question, is to leave the reader of this issue better equipped to make an educated guess as to whether the novel is or is not democratic.

### Works Cited

- Adams, Henry. *The Education of Henry Adams. Adams: Novels, Mont Saint Michel and Chartres, The Education of Henry Adams*. Ed. Ernest Samuels and Jayne N. Samuels. New York: Library of America, 1983. 715–1181.
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*. Rev. ed. New York: Verso, 2003.
- Auerbach, Erich. *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. 1953. Trans. Willard R. Trask. Intro. Edward W. Said. Fiftieth anniversary ed. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003.
- Bakhtin, M. M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: U of Texas P, 1981.
- . *The Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson. Intro. Wayne C. Booth. Vol. 8 of *Theory and History of Literature*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2003.
- Bellow, Saul. *Letters*. Ed. Benjamin Taylor. New York: Viking, 2010.
- Freccero, John. "Logology: Burke on St. Augustine." *Representing Kenneth Burke*. Ed. Hayden White and Margaret Brose. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1982. 52–67.
- Holquist, Michael. Introduction. Bakhtin, *Dialogic*, xv–xxxiv.
- Lefort, Claude. *Democracy and Political Theory*. Trans. David Macey. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1988.
- Lukács, Georg. *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*. Trans. Anna Bostock. Cambridge: MIT P, 1971.
- McKeon, Michael. *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600–1740*. Anniversary ed. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1987.
- Watt, Ian. *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding*. 1957. 2nd American ed. Berkeley: U of California P, 2001.
- Whitman, Walt. *Complete Poetry and Collected Prose: Leaves of Grass*. 1855. Ed. Justin Kaplan. New York: Library of America, 1982.