They could not reproduce their artworks, so these had to be lasting.
Hence: eternal art
Just as the art of the Greeks was geared toward lasting, so the art of the present is geared toward becoming worn out
This may happen in two different ways: through consignment of the artwork to fashion or through the work's refunctioning in politics[4]
Reproducibility—distraction—politicization
Educational value and consumer value converge, thus making possible a new kind of learning
Art comes into contact with the commodity; the commodity comes into contact with art

Fragment written most likely in 1935–1936; unpublished in Benjamin's lifetime. *Gesammelte Schriften,* VII, 678–679. Translated by Howard Eiland.

Notes

This fragment is associated with the composition of "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility" (second version).

1. See Section XVIII of "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility" (second version), in this volume. See also Section XV of the third version of the essay (1939), in *Gesammelte Schriften, I,* 503–505; to appear in English in *Selected Writings, Volume 4: 1938–1940* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, forthcoming). Benjamin's term for "distraction" is generally *Zerstreuung,* which in this context can also mean "entertainment." In a related fragment (*Gesammelte Schriften,* VII, 678), Benjamin writes: "The work of art undertakes to produce entertainment in a responsible manner."
2. See "The Author as Producer" in Volume 2 of this edition, pp. 768–782 (trans. Edmund Jephcott).
3. "Absorption" here translates *Einverleibung,* meaning more specifically "ingestion." Compare Benjamin's comments on reading as *Einverleibung* in his radio talk "Children's Literature," in Volume 2 of this edition, pp. 255–256 (trans. Rodney Livingstone).
4. "Refunctioning" translates *Umfunktionierung,* a term taken from Brecht. See "The Author as Producer," pp. 773–774.

The Storyteller

Observations on the Works of Nikolai Leskov

Familiar though his name may be to us, the storyteller in his living efficacy is by no means a force today. He has already become something remote from us and is moving ever further away. To present someone like Leskov as a storyteller does not mean bringing him closer to us but, rather, means increasing our distance from him.[1] Viewed from a certain distance, the great, simple outlines which define the storyteller stand out in him—or rather, they become visible in him, just as a human head or an animal's body may appear in a rock when it is viewed by an observer from the proper distance and angle. This distance and this angle of vision are prescribed for us by an experience which we may have almost every day. It teaches us that the art of storytelling is coming to an end. One meets with fewer and fewer people who know how to tell a tale properly. More and more often, there is embarrassment all around when the wish to hear a story is expressed. It is as if a capability that seemed inalienable to us, the securest among our possessions, has been taken from us: the ability to share experiences.

One reason for this phenomenon is obvious: experience has fallen in value. And it looks as if it may fall into bottomlessness. Every glance at a newspaper shows that it has reached a new low—that our image not only of the external world but also of the moral world has undergone changes overnight, changes which were previously thought impossible. Beginning with the First World War, a process became apparent which continues to this day. Wasn't it noticeable at the end of the war that men who returned from

the battlefield had grown silent—not richer but poorer in communicable experience? What poured out in the flood of war books ten years later was anything but experience that can be shared orally. And there was nothing remarkable about that. For never has experience been more thoroughly belied than strategic experience was belied by tactical warfare, economic experience by inflation, bodily experience by mechanical warfare, moral experience by those in power. A generation that had gone to school on horse-drawn streetcars now stood under the open sky in a landscape where nothing remained unchanged but the clouds and, beneath those clouds, in a force field of destructive torrents and explosions, the tiny, fragile human body.

II

Experience which is passed on from mouth to mouth is the source from which all storytellers have drawn. And among the writers who have set down the tales, the great ones are those whose written version differs least from the speech of the many nameless storytellers. Incidentally, among the latter are two groups which, to be sure, overlap in many ways. And the figure of the storyteller takes on its full corporeality only for one who can picture them both. "When someone makes a journey, he has a story to tell," goes the German saying, and people imagine the storyteller as someone who has come from afar. But they enjoy no less listening to the man who has stayed at home, making an honest living, and who knows the local tales and traditions. If we wish to picture these two groups through their archaic representatives, we find one embodied in the settled tiller of the soil, and the other in the trading seaman. Indeed, both spheres of life have, as it were, produced their own tribe of storytellers. Each of these tribes preserves some of its characteristics centuries later. Thus, among nineteenth-century German storytellers, writers like Hebel and Gotthelf stem from the first tribe, writers like Sealsfield and Gerstäcker, from the second.[2] With these tribes, however, as stated above, it is only a matter of basic types. The actual extent of the realm of storytelling—its full historical breadth—is inconceivable without the closest interpenetration of these two archaic types. Such an interpenetration was achieved particularly in the Middle Ages, through the medieval trade structure. The resident master craftsman and the itinerant journeymen worked together in the same rooms; and every master had been an itinerant journeyman before he settled down in his hometown or somewhere else. If peasants and seamen were past masters of storytelling, the artisan class was its university. There the lore of faraway places, such as a much-traveled man brings home, was combined with the lore of the past, such as is manifested most clearly to the native inhabitants of a place.

III

Leskov was at home in distant places as well as in distant times. He was a member of the Greek Orthodox Church, a man with genuine religious interests. But he was a no less sincere opponent of ecclesiastic bureaucracy. Since he was unable to get along any better with secular officialdom, the official positions he held did not last. Of all his posts, the one he long occupied as Russian representative of a big English firm was presumably the most useful for his writing. He traveled throughout Russia on behalf of the firm, and these trips deepened his worldly wisdom as much as they furthered his knowledge of conditions in Russia. In this way he had an opportunity to become acquainted with the organization of the sects in the country. This left its mark on his works of fiction. In Russia's legends, Leskov saw allies in his fight against Orthodox bureaucracy. A number of his tales based on legends focus on a righteous man—seldom an ascetic, usually a simple, active man—who becomes a saint apparently in the most natural way in the world. Mystical exaltation is not Leskov's forte. Though he occasionally likes to indulge in the miraculous, he prefers, even in piousness, to stick with a sturdy nature. He sees his prototype in the man who finds his way around the world without getting too deeply involved with it. He displayed a corresponding attitude in worldly matters. In keeping with this is the fact that he began to write late, at the age of twenty-nine. That was after his commercial travels. His first printed work was entitled "Why Are Books Expensive in Kiev?" A number of other writings—on topics such as the working class, alcoholism, police doctors, and unemployed salesmen—are precursors of his works of fiction.

IV

An orientation toward practical matters is characteristic of many born storytellers. There are others who display this trait more markedly than Leskov—for example, Gotthelf, who gave his peasants agricultural advice; Claudius, who concerned himself with the perils of gaslight; and Hebel, who slipped bits of scientific instruction for his readers into his *Schatzkästlein*.[3] All this points to one of the essential features of every real story: it contains, openly or covertly, something useful. In one case, the usefulness may lie in a moral; in another, in some practical advice; in a third, in a proverb or maxim. In every case the storyteller is a man who has counsel for his readers. But if today "having counsel" is beginning to have an old-fashioned ring, this is because the communicability of experience is decreasing. In consequence, we have no counsel either for ourselves or for others. After all, counsel is less an answer to a question than a proposal concerning the con-

tinuation of a story which is in the process of unfolding. To seek this coun-
sel, one would first have to be able to tell the story. (Quite apart from th
fact that a man is receptive to counsel only to the extent that he allows h
situation to speak.) Counsel woven into the fabric of real life [*gelebte*
Lebens] is wisdom. The art of storytelling is nearing its end because the epi
side of truth—wisdom—is dying out. This, however, is a process that h
been going on for a long time. And nothing would be more fatuous than t
wish to see it as merely a "symptom of decay," let alone a "modern symp
tom." It is, rather, only a concomitant of the secular productive forces o
history—a symptom that has quite gradually removed narrative from th
realm of living speech and at the same time is making it possible to find a
new beauty in what is vanishing.

V

The earliest indication of a process whose end is the decline of storytelling is
the rise of the novel at the beginning of modern times. What distinguishes
the novel from the story (and from the epic in the narrower sense) is its es
sential dependence on the book. The dissemination of the novel became
possible only with the invention of printing. What can be handed on oral
the wealth of the epic, is different in kind from what constitutes the stock in
trade of the novel. What distinguishes the novel from all other forms of
prose literature—the fairy tale, the legend, even the novella—is that it ne
ther comes from oral tradition nor enters into it. This distinguishes it from
storytelling in particular. The storyteller takes what he tells from experi
ence—his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the expe
rience of those who are listening to his tale. The novelist has secluded him
self. The birthplace of the novel is the individual in his isolation, the
individual who can no longer speak of his concerns in exemplary fashion,
who himself lacks counsel and can give none. To write a novel is to take to
the extreme that which is incommensurable in the representation of human
existence. In the midst of life's fullness, and through the representation of
this fullness, the novel gives evidence of the profound perplexity of the liv
ing. Even the first great book of the genre, *Don Quixote,* teaches how the
spiritual greatness, the boldness, the helpfulness of one of the noblest of
men, Don Quixote, are completely devoid of counsel and contain not a
scintilla of wisdom. If now and then, in the course of the centuries, efforts
have been made—most effectively, perhaps, in *Wilhelm Meisters Wander-*
jahre—to implant instruction in the novel, these attempts have always
amounted to a modification of the novel form.[4] The *Bildungsroman,* on the
other hand, does not deviate in any way from the basic structure of the
novel. By integrating the social process with the development of a person

bestows the most brittle justification on the order determining that process.
The legitimizing of this order stands in direct opposition to its reality. The
unattainable is event—precisely in the *Bildungsroman.*[5]

VI

One must imagine the transformation of epic forms occurring in rhythms
comparable to those of the change that has come over the earth's surface in
the course of thousands of centuries. There is hardly any other form of hu-
man communication that has taken shape more slowly, been lost more
slowly. It took the novel, whose beginnings go back to antiquity, hundreds
of years before it encountered in the evolving middle class those elements
that were favorable to its flowering. With the appearance of these elements,
storytelling began to recede very gradually into the archaic. True, in many
ways it took hold of the new material but was not really determined by it.
On the other hand, we can see that with the complete ascendancy of the
middle class—which in fully developed capitalism has the press as one of its
most important instruments—a form of communication emerges which, no
matter how ancient its origins, never before decisively influenced the epic
form. But now it does exert such an influence. And ultimately it confronts
storytelling as no less of a stranger than did the novel, but in a more menac-
ing way; furthermore, it brings about a crisis in the novel. This new form of
communication is information.

Villemessant, the founder of *Le Figaro,* characterized the nature of infor-
mation in a famous formulation.[6] "To my readers," he used to say, "an attic
fire in the Latin Quarter is more important than a revolution in Madrid."
This makes strikingly clear what gets the readiest hearing is no longer
intelligence coming from afar, but the information which supplies a handle
for what is nearest. Intelligence that came from afar—whether over spatial
distance (from foreign countries) or temporal (from tradition)—possessed
an authority which gave it validity, even when it was not subject to verifica-
tion. Information, however, lays claim to prompt verifiability. The prime re-
quirement is that it appear "understandable in itself." Often it is no more
exact than the intelligence of earlier centuries. But while the latter was in-
clined to borrow from the miraculous, information must absolutely sound
plausible. For this reason, it proves incompatible with the spirit of storytell-
ing. If the art of storytelling has become rare, the dissemination of informa-
tion has played a decisive role in this state of affairs.

Every morning brings us news from across the globe, yet we are poor in
noteworthy stories. This is because nowadays no event comes to us without
already being shot through with explanations. In other words, by now al-
most nothing that happens benefits storytelling; almost everything benefits

information. Actually, it is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation as one recounts it. Leskov is a master at this (compare pieces like "The Deception" and "The White Eagle"). The most extraordinary things, marvelous things, are related with the greatest accuracy, but the psychological connections among the events are not forced on the reader. It is left up to him to interpret things the way he understands them, and thus the narrative achieves an amplitude that information lacks.

VII

Leskov was grounded in the classics. The first storyteller of the Greeks was Herodotus.[7] In the fourteenth chapter of the third book of his *Histories* there is a story from which much can be learned. It deals with Psammenitus. After the Egyptian king Psammenitus had been vanquished and captured by the Persian king Cambyses, Cambyses was bent on humbling his prisoner. He ordered that Psammenitus be placed on the road that the Persian triumphal procession was to take. And he further arranged that the prisoner should see his daughter pass by as a maid going to the well with her pitcher. While all the Egyptians were lamenting and bewailing this spectacle, Psammenitus stood alone, mute and motionless, his eyes fixed on the ground, and when presently he saw his son, who was being taken along in the procession to be executed, he likewise remained unmoved. But when he subsequently recognized one of his servants, an old, impoverished man, in the ranks of the prisoners, he beat his fists against his head and gave all the signs of deepest mourning.

This tale shows what true storytelling is. The value of information does not survive the moment in which it was new. It lives only at that moment; it has to surrender to it completely and explain itself to it without losing any time. A story is different. It does not expend itself. It preserves and concentrates its energy and is capable of releasing it even after a long time. Accordingly, Montaigne referred to this Egyptian king and asked himself why he mourned only when he caught sight of his servant. Montaigne answered: "Since he was already over-full of grief, it took only the smallest increase for it to burst through its dams."[8] Thus Montaigne. But one could also say: The king is not moved by the fate of those of royal blood, for it is his own fate. Or: We are moved by much on the stage that does not move us in real life; to the king, this servant is only an actor. Or: Great grief is pent up and breaks forth only with relaxation; seeing this servant was the relaxation. Herodotus offers no explanations. His report is utterly dry. That is why, after thousands of years, this story from ancient Egypt is still capable of provoking astonishment and reflection. It is like those seeds of grain that have lain for centuries in the airtight chambers of the pyramids and have retained their germinative power to this day.

VIII

There is nothing that commends a story to memory more effectively than that chaste compactness which precludes psychological analysis. And the more natural the process by which the storyteller forgoes psychological shading, the greater becomes the story's claim to a place in the memory of the listener; the more completely the story is integrated into the latter's own experience, the greater will be his inclination to repeat it to someone else someday, sooner or later. This process of assimilation, which takes place in the depths, requires a state of relaxation which is becoming rarer and rarer. If sleep is the apogee of physical relaxation, boredom is the apogee of mental relaxation. Boredom is the dream bird that hatches the egg of experience. A rustling in the leaves drives him away. His nesting places—the activities that are intimately associated with boredom—are already extinct in the cities and are declining in the country as well. With this, the gift for listening is lost and the community of listeners disappears. For storytelling is always the art of repeating stories, and this art is lost when the stories are no longer retained. It is lost because there is no more weaving and spinning to go on while they are being listened to. The more self-forgetful the listener is, the more deeply what he listens to is impressed upon his memory. When the rhythm of work has seized him, he listens to the tales in such a way that the gift of retelling them comes to him all by itself. This, then, is the nature of the web in which the gift of storytelling is cradled. This is how today it is unraveling on every side after being woven thousands of years ago in the ambience of the oldest forms of craftsmanship.

IX

The storytelling that thrives for a long time in the milieu of work—rural, maritime, and then urban—is itself an artisanal form of communication, as it were. It does not aim to convey the pure "in itself" or gist of a thing, like information or a report. It submerges the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again. Thus, traces of the storyteller cling to a story the way the handprints of the potter cling to a clay vessel. Storytellers tend to begin their story with a presentation of the circumstances in which they themselves have learned what is to follow, unless they simply pass it off as their own experience. Leskov begins his tale "Deception" with the description of a train trip on which he supposedly heard from a fellow passenger the events which he then goes on to relate; in "A Propos of the Kreutzer Sonata," he thinks of Dostoevsky's funeral and makes it the setting in which he becomes acquainted with the heroine of the story; and in "Interesting Men," he evokes a meeting of the members of a reading circle in which we are told the events that he renders for us. Thus,

his tracks are frequently evident in his narratives—if not as the tracks of the one who experienced it, then as those of the one who reports it.

This craftsmanly art, storytelling, was moreover regarded as a craft by Leskov himself. "Writing," he says in one of his letters, "is to me no liberal art, but a craft." It cannot come as a surprise that he felt bonds with craftsmanship, but faced industrial technology as a stranger. Tolstoy, who must have understood this, occasionally touches this nerve of Leskov's storytelling talent when he calls him the first man "who pointed out the inadequacy of economic progress. . . . It is strange that Dostoevsky is so widely read. . . . But I simply cannot comprehend why Leskov is not read. He is a truthful writer."[9] In his artful and high-spirited story "The Steel Flea," which falls midway between legend and farce, Leskov glorifies native craftsmanship through the silversmiths of Tula. Their masterpiece, the steel flea, is seen by Peter the Great and convinces him that the Russians need not be ashamed before the English.

The intellectual picture of the craftsmanly atmosphere from which the storyteller comes has perhaps never been sketched in such a significant way as by Paul Valéry. "He speaks of the perfect things in nature—flawless pearls, full-bodied mature wines, truly developed creatures—and calls them the precious product of a long chain of causes that are all similar to one another." The accumulation of such causes reaches its temporal limit only at perfection. "This patient process of Nature," Valéry continues, "was once imitated by men. Miniatures, ivory carvings elaborated to the point of greatest perfection, stones that are perfect in polish and engraving, lacquer work or paintings in which a series of thin, transparent layers are placed one on top of the other—all these products of sustained, sacrificing effort are vanishing, and the time is past in which time did not matter. Modern man no longer works at what cannot be abbreviated."[10] In point of fact, he has succeeded in abbreviating even storytelling. We have witnessed the evolution of the "short story," which has removed itself from oral tradition and no longer permits that slow piling up, one on top of the other, of thin, transparent layers which constitutes the most appropriate image of the way in which the perfect narrative is revealed through the layers of various retellings.

X

Valéry concludes his observations with this sentence: "It is almost as if the decline of the idea of eternity coincided with the increasing aversion to sustained labor." The idea of eternity has always had its strongest source in death. If this idea declines, so we reason, the face of death must have changed. It turns out that this change is identical with another—the one

that has diminished the communicability of experience to the same extent as the art of storytelling has declined.

It has been evident for a number of centuries how, in the general consciousness, the thought of death has become less omnipresent and less vivid. In its last stages this process is accelerated. And in the course of the nineteenth century, bourgeois society—by means of medical and social, private and public institutions—realized a secondary effect, which may have been its subconscious main purpose: to enable people to avoid the sight of the dying. Dying was once a public process in the life of the individual, and a most exemplary one; think of the medieval pictures in which the deathbed has turned into a throne that people come toward through the wide-open doors of the dying person's house. In the course of modern times, dying has been pushed further and further out of the perceptual world of the living. It used to be that there was not a single house, hardly a single room, in which someone had not once died. (The Middle Ages also experienced *spatially* what makes the inscription *Ultima multis*—which adorns a sundial on Ibiza—significant as an expression of the times.)[11] Today people live in rooms that have never been touched by death—dry dwellers of eternity; and when their end approaches, they are stowed away in sanatoria or hospitals by their heirs. Yet, characteristically, it is not only a man's knowledge or wisdom, but above all his real life—and this is the stuff that stories are made of—which first assumes transmissible form at the moment of his death. Just as a sequence of images is set in motion inside a man as his life comes to an end—unfolding the views of himself in which he has encountered himself without being aware of it—suddenly in his expressions and looks the unforgettable emerges, and imparts to everything that concerned him that authority which even the poorest wretch in the act of dying possesses for the living around him. This authority lies at the very origin of the story.

XI

Death is the sanction for everything that the storyteller can tell. He has borrowed his authority from death. In other words, his stories refer back to natural history. This is expressed in exemplary form in one of the most beautiful stories we have by the incomparable Johann Peter Hebel. It is found in the *Schatzkästlein des rheinischen Hausfreundes* [Treasure Chest of the Rhenish Home Companion], is entitled "Unverhofftes Wiedersehen" [Unexpected Reunion], and begins with the betrothal of a young lad who works in the mines of Falun. On the eve of his wedding, he dies a miner's death at the bottom of his mineshaft. His bride keeps faith with him after his death, and lives long enough to become a wizened old woman. One day

a body is brought up from the abandoned tunnel; saturated with iron vitriol, it has escaped decay, and she recognizes her betrothed. After this reunion, she too is called away by death. When Hebel, in the course of this story, was confronted with the need to make this long period of years graphic, he did so in the following sentences:

> In the meantime the city of Lisbon was destroyed by an earthquake, and the Seven Years War came and went, and Emperor Francis I died, and the Jesuit Order was abolished, and Poland was partitioned, and Empress Maria Theresa died, and Struensee was executed. America became independent, and the united French and Spanish forces were unable to capture Gibraltar. The Turks locked up General Stein in the Veteraner Cave in Hungary, and Emperor Joseph died. King Gustavus of Sweden conquered Russian Finland, and the French Revolution and the long war began, and Emperor Leopold II went to his grave. Napoleon captured Prussia, and the English bombarded Copenhagen, and the peasants sowed and harvested. The millers ground, the smiths hammered, and the miners dug for veins of ore in their underground workshops. But when in 1809 the miners at Falun . . ."[12]

Never has a storyteller embedded his report deeper in natural history than Hebel manages to do in this chronology. Read it carefully. Death appears in it with the same regularity as that of the Reaper in the processions that pass round the cathedral clock at noon.

XII

Any examination of a given epic form is concerned with the relationship of this form to historiography. In fact, one may go even further and raise the question of whether historiography might not constitute the common ground for all forms of the epic. Then written history would bear the same relationship to the epic forms as white light bears to the colors of the spectrum. However this may be, among all forms of the epic there is not one whose incidence in the pure, colorless light of written history is more certain than the chronicle. And in the broad spectrum of the chronicle, the ways in which a story can be told are graduated like shadings of one and the same color. The chronicler is the history-teller. If we think back to the passage from Hebel, which has the tone of a chronicle throughout, it will take no effort to gauge the difference between one who writes history (the historian) and one who narrates it (the chronicler). The historian's task is to *explain* in one way or another the happenings with which he deals; under no circumstances can he content himself with simply displaying them as models of the course of the world. But this is precisely what the chronicler does, especially in his classical avatars, the chroniclers of the Middle Ages, the precursors of today's historians. By basing their historical tales on a divine—and inscrutable—plan of salvation, at the very outset they have lifted

the burden of demonstrable explanation from their own shoulders. Its place is taken by interpretation, which is concerned not with an accurate concatenation of definite events, but with the way these are embedded in the great inscrutable course of the world.

Whether this course is determined by salvation history or by natural history makes no difference. In the storyteller the chronicler is preserved in changed form—secularized, as it were. Leskov is among those whose work displays this with particular clarity. Both the chronicler, with his orientation toward salvation, and the storyteller, with his profane outlook, are so represented in his works that in a number of his stories one can hardly determine whether the web in which they appear is the golden fabric of a religious view of the course of things, or the multicolored fabric of a worldly view. Consider the story "The Alexandrite," which transports the reader into

> that old time when the stones in the womb of the earth and the planets at celestial heights were still concerned with the fate of men—unlike today, when both in the heavens and beneath the earth everything has grown indifferent to the fates of the sons of men, and no voice speaks to them from anywhere, let alone does their bidding. None of the undiscovered planets play any part in horoscopes any more, and there are a lot of new stones, all measured and weighed and examined for their specific weight and their density, but they no longer proclaim anything to us, nor do they bring us any benefit. Their time for speaking with men is past.

As is evident, one can hardly come up with an unambiguous characterization of the course of the world that is illustrated in this story of Leskov's. Is this course determined by the history of salvation or that of nature? The only thing certain is that, precisely *as* the course of the world [*Weltlauf*], it is outside all properly historical categories. Leskov tells us that the era in which man could believe himself to be in harmony with nature has come to an end. Schiller called this era in the history of the world the period of naïve poetry.[13] The storyteller keeps faith with it, and his eyes do not stray from that clockface and its revolving procession of creatures—a procession in which, depending on circumstances, Death is either the leader or the last wretched straggler.

XIII

It has seldom been realized that the listener's naïve relationship to the storyteller is controlled by his interest in retaining what he is told. The cardinal point for the willing listener is to assure himself of the possibility of reproducing the story. Memory is the epic faculty par excellence. Only by virtue of a comprehensive memory can epic writing absorb the course of events on

the one hand and, on the other hand, make its peace with the passing of these, with the power of death. We are not surprised that in the view of a simple man of the people such as Leskov once invented, it is the czar, the head of the world in which his stories take place, who has the most encyclopedic memory at his command. "Our emperor and his entire family," says the man, "have indeed a most astonishing memory."

Mnemosyne, the rememberer, was the muse of the epic art among the Greeks. This name takes the observer back to a world-historical parting of the ways. For if the record kept by memory—the writing of history—constitutes the creative matrix of the various epic forms (just as great prose is the creative matrix of the various metrical forms), its oldest form, the epic, by virtue of being a kind of common denominator, includes the story and the novel. When in the course of centuries the novel began to emerge from the womb of the epic, it turned out that in the novel the element of the epic mind that is derived from the muse—that is, memory—manifests itself in a form quite different from the way it manifests itself in the story.

Memory creates the chain of tradition which transmits an event from generation to generation. It is the muse-derived element of the epic art in a broader sense, and encompasses its varieties. Foremost among these is the one practiced by the storyteller. It starts the web which all stories together form in the end. One connects up with the next, as the great storytellers, particularly the oriental ones, have always readily shown. In each of them, there is a Scheherazade who thinks of a fresh story whenever her tale comes to a stop.[14] This is epic *remembrance* and the muse-inspired element of the narrative. But this should be set against another principle, also a muse-derived element in a narrower sense, which as an element of the novel in its earliest form (that is, in the epic) lies concealed, still undifferentiated from the similarly derived element of the story. It can, at any rate, occasionally be divined in the epics, particularly at moments of solemnity in the Homeric epics, as in the invocations to the muse in their opening lines. What announces itself in these passages is the perpetuating remembrance of the novelist as contrasted with the short-lived reminiscences of the storyteller. The first is dedicated to *one* hero, *one* odyssey, or *one* battle; the second, to *many* diffuse occurrences. In other words, it is *remembrance* [*Eingedenken*], the muse-derived element of the novel, which is added to recollection [*Gedächtnis*], the muse-derived element of the story, the unity of their origin in memory [*Erinnerung*] having disappeared with the decline of the epic.

XIV

"No one," Pascal once said, "dies so poor that he does not leave something behind."[15] Surely it is the same with memories too—although these do not always find an heir. The novelist takes charge of this bequest, seldom without profound melancholy. For what Arnold Bennett says about a dead woman in one of his novels—that she had had almost nothing in the way of real life—is usually true of the sum total of the estate which the novelist administers.[16] We owe the most important elucidation of this point to Georg Lukács, who sees the novel as "the form of transcendental homelessness."[17] According to Lukács, the novel is at the same time the only art form which includes time among its constitutive principles.

As he says in his *Theorie des Romans* [Theory of the Novel],

> Time can become constitutive only when connection with the transcendental home has been lost. . . . Only in the novel are meaning and life, and thus the essential and the temporal, separated; one can almost say that the whole inner action of a novel is nothing else but a struggle against the power of time. . . . And from this . . . arise the genuinely epic experiences of time: hope and memory. . . . Only in the novel . . . is there a creative memory which transfixes the object and transforms it. . . . The duality of inwardness and outside world can here be overcome for the subject "only" when he sees the . . . unity of his entire life . . . emerge from the past life-stream which is compressed in memory. . . . The insight which grasps this unity . . . becomes the divinatory-intuitive grasping of the unattained and therefore inexpressible meaning of life.

The "meaning of life" is really the center around which the novel moves. But the quest for it is no more than the initial expression of perplexity with which its reader sees himself living this written life. "Meaning of life" versus "moral of the story": with these slogans novel and story confront each other, and from them the totally different historical coordinates of these art forms can be discerned.—If *Don Quixote* is the earliest perfect specimen of the novel, its latest exemplar is perhaps *L'Education sentimentale*.[18] In the final words of the latter novel, the meaning that the bourgeois age found in its own behavior at the beginning of its decline has settled like sediment in the cup of life. Frédéric and Deslauriers, boyhood friends, think back to the days of their youth when the following incident occurred. One day they showed up at the bordello in their hometown, stealthily and timidly, to do nothing more in the end than present the *patronne* with a bouquet of flowers which they had picked in their own gardens. "This story was still discussed three years later. And now they told it to each other in detail, each supplementing the recollection of the other. 'That may have been,' said Frédéric when they had finished, 'the finest thing in our lives.' 'Yes, you may be right,' said Deslauriers, 'that was perhaps the finest thing in our lives.'" With such an insight the work reaches an end which is more proper to the novel, in a stricter sense, than to any story. Actually, there is no story for which the question "How does it continue?" would not be legitimate. The novelist, on the other hand, cannot hope to take the smallest step beyond the limit at which he writes "Finis," and in so doing invites the reader to a divinatory realization of the meaning of life.

XV

A man listening to a story is in the company of the storyteller; even a man reading one shares this companionship. The reader of a novel, however, is isolated, more so than any other reader. (For even the reader of a poem is ready to utter the words aloud for the benefit of a listener.) In this solitude of his, the reader of a novel seizes upon his material more jealously than anyone else. He is ready to make it completely his own—to devour it, as it were. Indeed, he destroys, swallows up the material as a fire devours logs in the fireplace. The suspense which permeates the novel is very much like the draft of air which fans the flame in the fireplace and enlivens its play.

The burning interest of the reader feeds on dry material.—What does this mean? "A man who dies at the age of thirty-five," Moritz Heimann once said, "is at every point in his life a man who dies at the age of thirty-five."[19] Nothing is more dubious than this sentence—but for the sole reason that the tense is wrong. A man—so says the truth that was meant here—who died at thirty-five will appear to *remembrance* at every point in his life as a man who dies at the age of thirty-five. In other words, the statement that makes no sense for real life becomes indisputable for remembered life. The nature of characters in a novel cannot be presented any better than it is in this statement, which says that the "meaning" of their life is revealed only in their death. But the reader of a novel in fact looks for human beings, from whom he derives the "meaning of life." Thus, he has to realize in advance, no matter what, that he will share their experience of death: if need be, their figurative death (the end of the novel), but preferably their actual one. How do the characters make him understand that death is already waiting for them—a very definite death, at a very definite place? This is the question which feeds the reader's consuming interest in the events of the novel.

The novel is significant, therefore, not because it presents someone else's fate to us, perhaps didactically, but because this stranger's fate, by virtue of the flame which consumes it, yields to us the warmth which we never draw from our own fate. What draws the reader to a novel is the hope of warming his shivering life with a death he reads about.

XVI

"Leskov," writes Gorky, "is the writer most deeply rooted in the people and is completely untouched by any foreign influences."[20] A great storyteller will always be rooted in the people, primarily in a milieu of craftsmen. But just as this includes the rural, maritime, and urban elements in the many stages of their economic and technological development, there are many

gradations in the concepts through which their store of experience comes down to us. (To say nothing of the far from insignificant share which traders had in the art of storytelling; their task was less to increase its didactic content than to refine the tricks with which the attention of the listener was captured. They have left deep traces in the narrative cycle of *The Thousand and One Nights.*) In short, despite the primary role which storytelling plays in the household of humanity, the concepts through which the yield of the stories may be garnered are manifold. What may most readily be put in religious terms in Leskov seems almost automatically to fall into place according to the Enlightenment's pedagogical perspectives in Hebel, appears as hermetic tradition in Poe, finds a last refuge in the life of British seamen and colonial soldiers in Kipling.[21] All great storytellers have in common the freedom with which they move up and down the rungs of their experience, as if on a ladder. A ladder extending downward to the interior of the earth and disappearing into the clouds: this is the image for a collective experience to which even the deepest shock in every individual experience—death—constitutes no impediment or barrier.

"And they lived happily ever after," says the fairy tale. The fairy tale, which to this day is the first tutor of children because it was once the first tutor of mankind, secretly lives on in the story. The first true storyteller is, and will continue to be, the teller of fairy tales. Whenever good counsel was at a premium, the fairy tale had it, and where the need was greatest, its aid was nearest. This need was the need created by myth. The fairy tale tells us of the earliest arrangements that mankind made to shake off the nightmare which myth had placed upon its chest. In the figure of the fool it shows us how mankind "acts dumb" toward myth; in the figure of the youngest brother, it shows us how one's chances increase as the mythical primordial time is left behind; in the figure of the youth who sets out to learn what fear is, it shows us that the things we are afraid of can be seen through; in the figure of the wiseacre, it shows us that the questions posed by myth are simple-minded, like the riddle of the Sphinx; in the shape of the animals which come to the aid of the child in the fairy tale, it shows that nature not only is subservient to myth, but much prefers to be aligned with man. The wisest thing—so the fairy tale taught mankind in olden times, and teaches children to this day—is to meet the forces of the mythical world with cunning and with high spirits. (This is how the fairy tale polarizes *Mut* [courage], dividing it dialectically into *Untermut*—that is, cunning—and *Übermut* [high spirits].) The liberating magic which the fairy tale has at its disposal does not bring nature into play in a mythical way, but points to its complicity with liberated man. A mature man feels this complicity only occasionally—that is, when he is happy; but the child first meets it in fairy tales, and it makes him happy.

XVII

Few storytellers have displayed so profound a kinship with the spirit of the fairy tale as did Leskov. This involves tendencies that were promoted by the dogmas of the Greek Orthodox Church. As is well known, Origen's speculation about *apokatastasis* (the entry of all souls into Paradise), which was rejected by the Roman Catholic Church, plays a significant part in these dogmas.[22] Leskov was very much influenced by Origen and planned to translate his work *On First Principles*. In keeping with Russian folk belief, he interpreted the Resurrection less as a transfiguration than as a disenchantment, in a sense akin to that found in fairy tales. Such an interpretation of Origen lies at the heart of "The Enchanted Pilgrim." Like many other tales by Leskov, this one is a hybrid between fairy tale and legend—a hybrid not unlike that which Ernst Bloch mentions, in a context where he uses our distinction between myth and fairy tale in his own fashion:

> A hybrid between fairy tale and legend makes for inauthentically mythical elements within the latter—mythical elements whose effect is certainly captivating and static, and yet not outside man. In legend there are Taoist figures, especially very old ones, which are "mythical" in this sense. For instance, the couple Philemon and Baucis—magically escaped, though in natural repose. And surely there is a similar relationship between fairy tale and legend in the Taoist climate of Gotthelf, which, to be sure, is on a much lower level. At certain points it divorces legend from the locality of the spell, rescues the flame of life, the specifically human flame of life, calmly burning, within as without.[23]

"Magically escaped" are the beings that lead the procession of Leskov's creations: the righteous ones. Pavlin, Figura, the toupee artiste, the bear keeper, the helpful sentry—all of them, as embodiments of whatever wisdom, kindness, and comfort there is in the world, crowd about the storyteller. They are unmistakably suffused with the *imago* of his mother. This is how Leskov describes her: "She was so thoroughly good that she was incapable of harming any man, or even an animal. She ate neither meat nor fish because she had such pity for living creatures. Sometimes my father used to reproach her with this. But she answered: 'I have raised the little animals myself; they are like my children to me. I can't eat my own children, can I?' She would not eat meat at a neighbor's house either. 'I have seen them alive,' she would say; 'they are my acquaintances. I can't eat my acquaintances, can I?'"

The righteous man is the advocate for all creatures, and at the same time he is their highest embodiment. In Leskov he has a maternal touch which is occasionally intensified into the mythical (and thus, to be sure, endangers the purity of the fairy tale). Typical of this is the protagonist of his story "Kotin the Provider and Platonida." This figure, a peasant named Pisonski,

is a hermaphrodite. For twelve years his mother raises him as a girl. His male and female organs mature simultaneously, and his bisexuality "becomes the symbol of God incarnate."[24]

In Leskov's view, the pinnacle of creation has been attained here, and at the same time he presumably sees the character as a bridge established between this world and the other. For these earthily powerful, maternal male figures which again and again claim Leskov's skill as a storyteller have been removed from obedience to the sexual drive in the bloom of their strength. They do not, however, really embody an ascetic ideal; rather, the abstinence of these righteous men has so little privative character that it becomes the elemental counterpoise to uncontrolled lust which the storyteller has personified in "Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District." If the range between a Pavlin and this wife of a merchant encompasses the entire world of created beings, then the hierarchy of Leskov's creatures has revealed its depth.

XVIII

The hierarchy of the creaturely world, which has its apex in the righteous man, reaches down into the abyss of the inanimate through many gradations. In this connection, one particular circumstance must be noted. This whole creaturely world speaks not so much with the human voice as with what could be called "the voice of Nature," after the title of one of Leskov's most significant stories. This story deals with the petty official Philip Philipovich, who leaves no stone unturned in the effort to have as his house guest a field marshal passing through his little town. He manages to do so. The guest, who is at first surprised at the clerk's urgent invitation, gradually comes to believe that he is someone he must have met previously. But who? He cannot remember. The strange thing is that the host, for his part, is unwilling to reveal his identity. Instead, he puts off the high personage from day to day, saying that the "voice of Nature" will not fail to speak distinctly to him one day. This goes on until finally the guest, shortly before continuing on his journey, must grant the host's public request to let the "voice of Nature" resound. Thereupon the host's wife withdraws.

> [She] returned with a big, brightly polished copper hunting horn, which she gave to her husband. He took the horn, put it to his lips, and was at the same instant as though transformed. Hardly had he inflated his cheeks and produced a tone as powerful as the rolling of thunder, when the field marshal cried: "Stop! I've got it now, brother! This makes me recognize you at once! You are the bugler from the regiment of jaegers, and because you were so honest I sent you to keep an eye on a crooked supplies supervisor."—"That's it, Your Excellency!" answered the host. "I didn't want to remind you of this myself, but wanted to let the voice of Nature speak."

The way the profundity of this story is hidden beneath its silliness conveys an idea of Leskov's magnificent humor.

This humor is confirmed in the same story in an even more cryptic manner. We have heard that because of his honesty the official was assigned to watch a crooked supplies supervisor. This is what we are told at the end, in the recognition scene. At the very beginning of the story, however, we learn the following about the host: "All the inhabitants of the town were acquainted with the man, and they knew that he did not hold a high office, for he was neither a state official nor a military man, but a little supervisor at the tiny supply depot, where along with the rats he chewed on the state rusks and boot soles, and in the course of time had chewed himself together a nice little frame house." It is evident that this story reflects the traditional sympathy which storytellers have for rascals and crooks. All the literature of farce bears witness to it. Nor is it denied in the higher realms of art; of all Hebel's characters, the Brassenheim Miller, Tinder Frieder, and Red Dieter have been his most faithful companions. Yet for Hebel, too, the righteous man has the main role in the *theatrum mundi.* But because no one is actually up to this role, it keeps shifting from figure to figure. Now it is the tramp, now the haggling Jewish peddler, now the man of limited intelligence who steps in to play this part. In every single case it is a guest performance, a moral improvisation. Hebel is a casuist. Nothing will induce him to take a stand on any principle, but he does not reject it either, for any principle can at some time become the instrument of the righteous man. Compare this with Leskov's attitude. "I realize," he writes in his story "A Propos of the Kreutzer Sonata," "that my thinking is based much more on a practical view of life than on abstract philosophy or lofty morality; but I am nevertheless used to thinking the way I do." To be sure, the moral catastrophes that appear in Leskov's world are to the moral incidents in Hebel's world as the great, silent flowing of the Volga is to the babbling, rushing little millstream. Among Leskov's historical tales, there are several in which passions are at work as destructively as the wrath of Achilles or the hatred of Hagen.[25] It is astonishing how fearfully the world can darken for this author, and with what majesty evil can raise its scepter. Leskov has evidently known moods—and this is probably one of the few characteristics he shares with Dostoevsky—in which he was close to antinomian ethics. The elemental natures in his *Tales from Olden Times* go to the limit in their ruthless passion. But it is precisely the mystics who have been inclined to see this limit as the point at which utter depravity turns into saintliness.

XIX

The lower Leskov descends on the scale of created things, the more obviously his way of viewing things approaches the mystical. Actually, as will be

shown, there is much evidence that here, too, a characteristic which is inherent in the nature of the storyteller is revealed. To be sure, only a few have ventured into the depths of inanimate nature, and in modern narrative literature there is little in which the voice of the anonymous storyteller, who antedated all literature, resounds as clearly as it does in Leskov's story "The Alexandrite." This tale deals with a semiprecious stone, the chrysoberyl. The mineral is the lowest stratum of created things. For the storyteller, however, it is directly linked to the highest. He is granted the ability to see in this chrysoberyl a natural prophecy of petrified, lifeless nature—a prophecy that applies to the historical world in which he himself lives. This world is the world of Alexander II.[26] The storyteller—or rather, the man to whom he attributes his own knowledge—is a gem engraver named Wenzel who has achieved the greatest conceivable skill in his art. One could compare him with the silversmiths of Tula and say that—in the spirit of Leskov—the perfect artisan has access to the innermost chamber of the creaturely realm. He is an incarnation of the devout. Concerning this gem cutter, we are told:

> He suddenly squeezed my hand that bore the ring with the alexandrite, which is known to sparkle red in artificial light, and cried: "Look, here it is, the prophetic Russian stone! Oh, crafty Siberian! It was always as green as hope, and only toward evening was it suffused with blood. It was that way from the beginning of the world, but it concealed itself for a long time, lay hidden in the earth, and permitted itself to be found only on the day when Czar Alexander was declared of age, when a great sorcerer had come to Siberia to find the stone, a magician. . . ." "What nonsense you are talking!" I interrupted him. "This stone wasn't found by a magician at all—it was discovered by a scholar named Nordenskjöld!" "A magician! I tell you, a magician!" screamed Wenzel in a loud voice. "Just look—what a stone! A green morning is in it, and a bloody evening! . . . This is fate, the fate of noble Czar Alexander!" With these words old Wenzel turned to the wall, propped his head on his elbows, and . . . began to sob.

One can hardly come any closer to the meaning of this significant story than by citing some words which Paul Valéry wrote in a very remote context.

"Artistic observation," he says in reflections on an artist, "can attain an almost mystical depth. The objects on which it falls lose their names. Light and shade form very particular systems, present very individual questions which depend upon no knowledge and are derived from no practice, but derive their existence and value exclusively from a certain accord of the soul, eye, and hand of someone who was born to perceive them and evoke them in his own inner self."[27]

With these words, a connection is established between soul, eye, and hand. Interacting with one another, they determine a practice. We are no longer familiar with this practice. The role of the hand in production has

become more modest, and the place it filled in storytelling lies waste. (After all, storytelling, in its sensory aspect, is by no means a job for the voice alone. Rather, in genuine storytelling what is expressed gains support in a hundred ways from the work-seasoned gestures of the hand.) That old coordination among the soul, eye, and hand which emerges in Valéry's words is that of the artisan which we encounter wherever the art of storytelling is at home. In fact, one might go on and ask oneself whether the relationship of the storyteller to his material, human life, is not in itself a craftsman's relationship—whether it is not his very task to fashion the raw material of experience, his own and that of others, in a solid, useful, and unique way. It is a kind of procedure which may perhaps most adequately be exemplified by the proverb, if one thinks of this as an ideogram of a story. A proverb, one might say, is a ruin which stands on the site of an old story and in which a moral twines about a gesture like ivy around a wall.

Seen in this way, the storyteller joins the ranks of the teachers and sages. He has counsel—not for a few situations, as the proverb does, but for many, like the sage. For he is granted the ability to reach back through a whole lifetime (a life, incidentally, that comprises not only his own experience but much of the experience of others; what the storyteller knows from hearsay is added to what is most his own). His gift is the ability to relate his life; his distinction, to be able to relate his *entire* life. The storyteller: he is the man who could let the wick of his life be consumed completely by the gentle flame of his story. This is the basis of the incomparable aura that surrounds the storyteller, in Leskov as in Hauff, in Poe as in Stevenson.[28] The storyteller is the figure in which the righteous man encounters himself.

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Notes

1. Nicolai Leskov was born in 1831 in the province of Orel, and died in 1895 in St. Petersburg. He had certain affinities with Tolstoy (by virtue of his sympathetic interest in the peasant class) and with Dostoevsky (by virtue of his religious orientation). But it is precisely those of his writings which seem most doctrinaire—the novels of his early period—that have stood the test of time least well. Leskov's importance rests on his stories, which belong to a later phase of his career. Since the end of the First World War, there have been several attempts to acquaint the German-speaking world with these stories. Along with the smaller volumes of selected stories published by Musarion and Georg Müller, the nine-volume edition published by C. H. Beck deserves special mention. [Benjamin's note. A contemporary of the great novelists Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910) and Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821–1881), Leskov worked as a junior clerk at a criminal court in Orel and Kiev, and later as a commercial traveler for an English firm operating in Russia, before becoming a journalist. He published his best-known story, "Ledi Makbet Mtsenskogo uezda" (Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District), in 1865. Another story, "Ocharovanny strannik" (Enchanted Wanderer; 1873), was written after a visit to the island monasteries on Lake Ladoga. His early novels *Nekuda* (Nowhere To Go; 1864) and *Na nozhakh* (At Daggers Drawn; 1870–1871), were attacked by Russian radicals for their perceived hostility toward the Russian revolutionary movement—an attitude Leskov later modified. Leskov's stories have been translated into English a number of times. The most recent versions are *Enchanted Wanderer: Selected Tales,* trans. David Magarshack (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1987), and *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk and Other Stories,* trans. David McDuff (New York: Viking, 1988).—*Trans.*]
2. Johann Peter Hebel (1760–1826), German pastor, pedagogue, and prose writer, edited *Der rheinländische Hausfreund* (The Rhineland Home Companion) from 1801 to 1811. He gained popularity as the author of realistic, often humorous and ethically pointed stories of provincial life. A compendium of his poetry and prose, *Schatzkästlein des rheinischen Hausfreunds,* appeared in 1811; this has been translated by John Hibberd as *The Treasure Chest: Unexpected Reunion and Other Stories* (London: Libris, 1994). See Benjamin's two essays on Hebel in Volume 1 of this edition. Jeremias Gotthelf (pseudonym of Albert Bitzius; 1797–1854) was a Swiss novelist noted for his depictions of village life in Switzerland. Charles Sealsfield (né Karl Anton Postl; 1793–1864) was a Moravian-born writer of adventure novels who became an American citizen and later resided in Switzerland. Friedrich Gerstäcker (1816–1872) was a German traveler and author of many novels and adventure stories, often set in North America.
3. Charles Nodier (1780–1844), a French writer identified with the Romantic movement, was the author of such tales as *Les Vampires* (1820) and *Trilby, ou le Lutin d'Argail* (Trilby, or the Goblin of Argail; 1822). On Gotthelf and Hebel, see note 2 above. For more on Hebel's *Schatzkästlein,* see section XI of "The Storyteller," below.
4. Benjamin refers to Miguel de Cervantes' novel *Don Quixote* (Part I, 1605; Part II, 1615) and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's novel *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* (1821–1829).
5. A reference to the final mystical chorus in Goethe's *Faust, Part II.*
6. Jean Hippolyte Cartier de Villemessant (1812–1879), French journalist of antirepublican sympathies, was the founder and director of *Le Figaro,* first (1854) as a weekly, and later (1866) as a daily newspaper.
7. Herodotus was a Greek historian of the fifth century B.C. whose great work is a history of the Greco-Persian wars from 500 to 479 B.C. His systematic treatment and masterly style have earned him the title "the father of history."
8. See Michel Eyquem de Montaigne, *Essais,* in *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris, 1962), p. 15. Montaigne (1533–1592) was a French essayist and courtier, famous for his classical learning as well as for his skepticism. The *Essais* (1571–1580; 1588), both in their style and in their thought, exerted an important influence on French and English literature. Benjamin elsewhere identifies the source of the three alternative explanations that follow Montaigne's. The first is by his friend and collab-

orator Franz Hessel (or by Hessel and Benjamin together); the second is by his Latvian love, Asja Lacis; the third is by Benjamin himself. See Benjamin's *Gesammelte Schriften,* vol. 4 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1972), p. 1011, and vol. 2 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1977), p. 1288.

9. Letter of 1898 from Tolstoy to Faresow; cited in part in Erich Müller, "Nicolai Semjonowitsch Leskov: Sein Leben und Wirken," in Leskov, *Gesammelte Werke* (Munich, 1924–1927), vol. 9, p. 240.
10. Paul Valéry, "Les broderies de Marie Monnier," in *Oeuvres,* vol. 2 (Paris, 1960), p. 1244 ("Pièces sur l'art," third piece); in English, "Embroideries by Marie Monnier," in Valéry, *Degas, Manet, Morisot,* trans. David Paul (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 173. Valéry (1871–1945), one of the great modern French men of letters, is the author of books of verse, such as *Charmes* (1922), and prose writings, such as *Soirée avec M. Teste* (1895) and *Analecta* (1927).
11. *Ultima multis:* "the last day for many."
12. Hebel outlines a period of some fifty-four years. The Lisbon earthquake occurred on November 1, 1755. The Seven Years War lasted from 1756 to 1763. The Holy Roman Emperor Francis I died in 1765. Pope Clement XIV issued a decree abolishing the Jesuit order in 1773. The partitioning of Poland was carried out in 1772, 1783, and 1795. Empress Maria Theresa of Austria, the wife of Francis I, died in 1780. Count Johann Friedrich von Struensee, a follower of the Encyclopedists and minister of state to Christian VII of Denmark, was forced out of office by a conspiracy of nobles, tortured, and beheaded in 1772. The United States of America won its independence from Great Britain in 1783. The unsuccessful siege of British Gibraltar by Spain and France took place in the years 1779–1783. The Holy Roman Emperor Joseph II died in 1790. King Gustavus III of Sweden won a brilliant victory over Russia on the Finnish front in 1790. The French Revolution lasted from 1789 to 1799. The Holy Roman Emperor Leopold II, third son of Francis I and Maria Theresa, died in 1792, just before the start of the French Revolution. Napoleon I defeated the Prussians at Jena in 1806, completely dominating Germany. Copenhagen was bombarded by the British in 1807.
13. The dramatist, poet, and literary theorist Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller (1759–1805) published "Über naïve und sentimentalische Dichtung" in 1795–1796. This celebrated essay on the two types of poetic creativity appeared in the periodical *Die Horen,* which he edited.
14. Scheherazade is the narrator of the stories that compose the *Thousand and One Nights.* After executing his unfaithful first wife, the sultan of the Indies resolves to take a new bride nightly and have her beheaded in the morning. Scheherazade marries him but keeps from being beheaded by telling her husband a series of tales, each of which she interrupts at its climax, so that he must postpone the execution in order to hear next day how the story ends. After a thousand and one nights, the sultan relents and abandons his resolve.
15. Blaise Pascal (1623–1662), French religious philosopher, mathematician, physicist, and writer, joined the Jansenist community of Port-Royal convent in 1654. There he wrote *Les Provinciales,* which is a defense of Jansenism against the Jesuits, and the *Pensées,* consisting of meditations published after his death and based on his manuscript notes. He spent his last years engaged in scientific research and good works.
16. Enoch Arnold Bennett (1867–1931), English novelist and dramatist, made his reputation as a master of naturalistic fiction with *The Old Wives' Tale* (1908) and a trilogy of novels: *Clayhanger* (1910), *Hilda Lessways* (1911), and *These Twain* (1916). The passage mentioned by Benjamin is in *The Old Wives' Tale* (1908; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), p. 585 ("End of Sophia").
17. Georg Lukács, *Die Theorie des Romans* (Berlin 1920), p. 127; in English, *The Theory of the Novel,* trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971), p. 121: "Only the novel, the literary form of the transcendental homelessness of the idea, includes real time—Bergson's *durée*—among its constitutive principles." See also p. 41: "The novel form is, like no other, an expression of this transcendental homelessness." For the passage from Lukács quoted below by Benjamin, see p. 122.
18. On *Don Quixote,* see note 4 above. *L'Education sentimentale* (1869), by Gustave Flaubert, presents a vast panorama of French daily life from 1840 through 1851. The novel's ending, which Benjamin discusses below, is set in 1868. See *Sentimental Education,* trans. Robert Baldick (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), pp. 418–419.
19. Cited in Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Buch der Freunde: Tagebuch-Aufzeichnungen* [Book of Friends: Journal and Notes] (Leipzig, 1929), p. 13. Moritz Heimann (1868–1925), chief reader for Fischer Verlag from 1895 to 1925, published essays and fiction in the most important literary journals of the Weimar Republic.
20. Maxim Gorky, cited in Leskov, "Ein absterbendes Geschlecht," *Gesammelte Werke,* vol. 5, p. 365 (publisher's afterword). The word "people," in this sentence and in the one that follows, translates *Volk.* Maxim Gorky (pseudonym of Aleksei Maksimovich Peshkov; 1868–1936) was a Russian writer who achieved great success in the years 1895–1900 with a series of realistic stories, and who later supported the Bolshevik revolution. He is the author also of novels, plays (*The Lower Depths,* 1903), criticism, and biographies.
21. On Hebel, see note 2 above. Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849), American story writer and poet, collected his stories under the title *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* in 1840. The "hermetic" element appears in such pieces as "The Colloquy of Monos and Una" and "Conversation of Eiros and Charmion." Among the best-known works of Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936) are *The Jungle Book* (1894), *Captains Courageous* (1897), *The Day's Work* (1898), and *Just So Stories* (1902). He was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1907.
22. See Origen, *De principiis* [*Peri Archon*], in *Opera. Patrologiae cursus,* vols. xi–xvii; on *apokatastasis,* see *De principiis,* vol. iii, I, p. 3. Origen, surnamed Adamantius (185?–?254 A.D.), was a Christian writer and teacher, active in Alexandria and Caesarea, and one of the Greek Fathers of the Church.
23. See Ernst Bloch, *Erbschaft dieser Zeit* (Zurich, 1935), p. 127; in English, *Heritage of Our Times,* trans. Neville Plaice and Stephen Plaice (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), p. 167. The philosopher Ernst Bloch (1885–1977), a friend of Benjamin's, taught at the University of Leipzig (1918–1933), where he drifted toward Marxist thought in the 1920s. After a period of exile in

Switzerland and the United States, he returned to Germany in 1948, teaching at Leipzig and Tübingen. He is the author of *Geist der Utopie* (The Spirit of Utopia; 1918), *Spuren* (Traces; 1930), and *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* (The Principle of Hope; 3 vols., 1952–1959). Philemon and Baucis are a faithful old couple in Greek legend who give shelter to Zeus and Hermes; in Goethe's *Faust, Part II,* Faust attempts to evict them as part of his land reclamation project, and Mephisto burns down their cottage. On Gotthelf, see note 2 above.

24. Erich Müller, "Nikolai Semjonowitsch Leskov: Sein Leben und Wirken," in Leskov, *Gesammelte Werke,* vol. 9, p. 271.
25. Homer invokes the wrath of Achilles, and its destructive consequences for the army of Agamemnon, at the beginning of the *Iliad.* Hagen is a warrior in the 13th-century German epic, the *Nibelungenlied;* he kills Siegfried and is himself killed by Kriemhild.
26. Alexander II (Aleksandr Nikolaevich; 1818–1881) was emperor of Russia from 1855 to 1881; he was responsible for freeing the serfs (1861), reorganizing the government administration and the army, establishing a regular system of courts, and founding schools. Certain repressive measures of his caused unrest (1879–1881), and he was killed by a bomb in St. Petersburg.
27. Valéry, "Autour de Corot," in *Oeuvres,* vol. 2, pp. 1318ff. ("Pièces sur l'art," eighteenth piece); see the English translation, "About Corot," in Valéry, *Degas, Manet, Morisot,* p. 147. On Valéry, see note 10 above.
28. In this sentence, the term "aura" translates *Stimmung,* which also means "atmosphere." In the French version of the essay, "Le Narrateur: Réflexions à propos de l'oeuvre de Nicolas Leskov," which Benjamin himself prepared sometime between 1936 and 1939, and which was first published in the *Mercure de France* in 1952 (and reprinted in Benjamin's *Gesammelte Schriften,* vol. 2, pp. 1290–1309), there is a sentence added after this penultimate sentence of section XIX: "If one keeps silent, it is not only to listen to [the storyteller] but also, in some measure, because this aura [*ce halo*] is there." Wilhelm Hauff (1802–1827) was a German poet and novelist with a gift for narrative and an inventive wit; he is best known for his fairy stories. Although he died before he was twenty-five, his collected works comprise thirty-six volumes. On Poe, see note 21 above. Robert Louis Stevenson (1850–1894) was a Scottish essayist, novelist, and poet. Among his best-known works are *Treasure Island* (1883), *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), *Kidnapped* (1886), and *The Master of Ballantrae* (1889).

German Men and Women

A Sequence of Letters
Selected and Introduced by Detlef Holz

Of honor without fame
Of greatness without glory
Of dignity without pay

Preface

The twenty-five letters making up this volume span a century. The first is dated 1783; the last, 1883. Although the sequence is chronological, the opening letter falls outside the sequence. Dating from the middle of the century covered here, it provides a glimpse into the time—Goethe's youth—marking the inauguration of the era in which the bourgeoisie seized its major positions. But the immediate occasion of the letter—Goethe's death—also marks the end of this era, when the bourgeoisie still held its positions but no longer retained the spirit in which it had conquered them. It was the age when the German bourgeoisie had to place its weightiest and most sharply etched words on the scales of history. And it had little to place there except those words—which is why it met its unlovely end in the boom years of the Gründerzeit.[1] Long before the following letter was written, Goethe, at the age of seventy-six, had glimpsed this end in a vision which he communicated to Zelter[2] in the following words: "Wealth and speed are what the world admires, and what all are bent on. Railways, express mail-coaches, steamboats, and every possible means of communication—that's what the civilized people of today strive for. So they grow overcivilized, but never get beyond mediocrity. . . . This is the century, in fact, for men of ability, of quick, practical understanding, whose skill gives them a feeling of superiority to the masses, even though they themselves have no gift for higher things. Let us keep as far as possible the views we had at the century's beginning. We may be the last representatives—with a few others perhaps—of an era that will not easily come again."[3]