

"New styles, new ways of representing reality, though always linked to old forms and styles, never arise from any immanent dialectic within artistic forms. Every new style is socially and historically determined and is the product of a social development. But to recognize the determining factors in the formation of artistic styles is not to assign equal artistic value or rank to these styles. Necessity can also be necessity for the artistically false, distorted and corrupt. The alternatives, experiencing and observing, correspond to what was socially determined for writers of two different periods of capitalism. Narration and description represent the principal modes of fiction appropriate to these periods.

To distinguish the two modes effectively, we can counter-pose statements by Goethe and Zola regarding the relationship of observation to creation. "I have never," said Goethe, "contemplated nature with poetic purpose in mind. But my early landscape sketching and later investigations in natural science trained me to a constant, precise observation of nature. Little by little I became so well acquainted with nature in its smallest details that when I need something as a poet, I find it at hand and do not easily err against truth." Zola also expressed himself clearly about his method of approaching a subject: "A naturalistic novelist wants to write a novel about the world of the theatre. He starts out with this general idea without possessing a single fact or character. His first task will be to take notes on what he can learn about the world he wants to describe. He has known this actor, attended that performance Then he will speak with the people who are best informed about this material, he will collect opinions, anecdotes, character portraits. That is not all. He will then read documents. Finally he will visit the locale itself and spend some days in a theatre to become familiar with the minutest details; he will spend his evenings in the dressing room of an actress and will absorb the atmosphere as much as possible. And once this documentation is complete, the novel will write itself. The novelist must only arrange the facts logically *Interest is no longer concentrated on originality of plot; on the contrary, the more banal and general it is, the more typical it becomes.*"

These are two basically divergent styles. Two basically divergent approaches to reality."

Georg Lukács, "Narrate or Describe? A Preliminary Discussion of Naturalism and Formalism" (1937)

"The elaboration of an intellectual physiognomy presupposes exceptional breadth, profundity and universality in characterization. Although the level of intellection is far above the average encountered in daily life, the result is not a weakening but an intensification of individuality in characterization. This intensification arises out of the continuous dynamic relationship between a character's personal experiences and his intellectual generalization about them; thoughts are depicted as a process of living and not as a result. Such an intensification can be achieved only when an author considers the capacity for abstract ideation an essential aspect of characterization.

Thus the elaboration of the intellectual physiognomy depends on a profound conception of the typical. The more acutely a writer grasps his epoch and its major issues, the less he will create on the level of the commonplace. In day-by-day existence, major contradictions are obscured in a whirl of petty, disparate accidental events; they are exposed only when purified and intensified to such an extreme that their potential consequences are exposed and are readily perceived. The success of great writers in creating typical characters and typical situations requires far more than accurate observation of everyday reality. Profound understanding of life is never restricted to the observation of everyday existence. The writer first defines the basic issues and movements of his time and then invents characters and situations not to be found in ordinary life, possessing capacities and propensities which when intensified illuminate the complex dialectic of the major contradictions, motive forces and tendencies of an era."

George Lukács, "The Intellectual Physiognomy in Characterization" (1936)