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OF ANGELS, NOVELS AND HISTORICITY¹

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Abstract: Commonly regarded in the literature as the 'unhappy' result of the break-up of a primitive artistic unity, genres and generic differences have fared with other such 'splits' in the modernity boat on the river of time. 'Literature' itself is the historic(ised)/al effect of a *longue durée* whose head is hard to spot, whose tail no less so. Even our vision of literary history is undissociable from historicity, that phenomenon preceding history proper, as Heidegger reputedly asserts. 'Antiquity' and the 'Middle Ages', the 'Renaissance' and 'Neo-Classicism', and 'Romanticism' itself are as many badges attached via *negativa* to our Western point zero of reference left- and right-wards of which we have inherited 'our tradition' – a comforting and useful metanarrative. Recent critical stances (mainly Period Studies) have replaced these 'dated' period names with such ones as 'Early Modernity', 'Classic Modernity', 'High Modernity' and, indeed, 'Late or Post-Modernity' (as part of Modernity Studies).

In Klee's famous *Angelus Novus* drawing we read the haunting lesson of history pressed by historicity: the 'Angel of History' – a contradiction in terms – is pushed on into the unknown by a violent storm, while his head looks back, his eyes searching the support of the known. This secular(ised) angel kept in check by time is *novus* in no less significant measure than the modern genre par excellence, the novel. His, like its own agenda, is a *postlapsarean* one, an assessment put forth by names of reference in the field (Lukács 1920, Anderson 1983, McKeon 1987, Kelley 2002). 'Human, too human', the novel features as a prosthesis of our own fallen condition, sensitive to our and its own historicity.

This paper looks at the novel and/as historicity as illustration of the modernity agenda, pursuing various forms of 'modern narrative' as at once forms of vision and of expression at a time of hurried history.

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