“That something better ought to come”

Structure and canon formation in British literary history

by

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᠎# Samandrag

I engelsk språkdrakt er litterær historiografi, mellom andre ting, læra om korleis litteraturhistorie vert skriven. Med utgangspunkt i historikaren Hayden White sin påstand om at historie er fiksjon vel så mykje som fakta, og at historieskriving har meir til felles med skjønnlitteratur enn med vitskapleg diskursformer, tek eg føre meg struktur og kanonformasjon i tre britiske litteraturhistorier, *A Manual of English Literature* av Thomas Arnold (1862), *A Short History of English Literature* av George Saintsbury (1898) og *A Short History of English Literature* av B. Ifor Evans (1940).

Desse litteraturhistoriene er skrivne i ein periode då det var stor tiltru både til positivistisk historisme, vitskaplege metodar og den litterære kanon sin funksjon. Det er stilt spørsmål ved alle desse områda dei seinare år, og eit studie av litteraturhistorier frå denne tida vil gje innblikk i eit område i omvelting frå eit meir stabilt tidspunkt. Likevel kan desse gje verdifull innsikt i litteraturhistorieskriving i dag, med dei utfordringar sjangeren møter i høve post-moderne skeptisisme og sterk kritikk av den litterære kanon.

Eg har i denne oppgåva vist korleis ein kan lesa litteraturhistorie både som historie og litteratur, og som eit uttrykk for tida den er skriven i. Eg har vore meir interessert i å visa *korleis* denne sjangeren gir uttrykk for tidstypiske ideologiar enn *kva for nokre*, om nokon, ideologiske implikasjonar dei ulike historiene presenterer. Eg har særleg sett på struktur og kanonformasjon, då eg meinar at den grunnleggande strukturen i historiene vil leggja føringar for kva verk dei meinar fortener ein plass i den litterære kanon. Dei strukturelle, og strukturerande, trekka eg har sett på er i hovudsak periodisering, plot og metaforar. Alle desse er sentrale område for historieskriving, og like sentrale i produksjon av fiksjon. Eg har gjennom studiet av desse illustrert at litteraturhistorie ikkje representerer objektiv kunnskap, men er eit uttrykk for historikaren si tilnærming til både litteratur og historie.

Studiet av litteraturhistorie som sjanger er lite utbreidd i Storbritannia i høve andre deler av verda. Litteraturhistorier av ulike typar vert enno skrivne, og eg meinar studiar av litteraturhistorie både som uttrykk for ideologiar og som litterær sjanger er verdifulle både for å lettare kunne ha ein kritisk tilnærming til det som vert presentert, for å lettare skriva gode, nyttige litteraturhistorier, og for å komma fram til kanonar som høver i eit skiftande samfunn.

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Preface

Throughout years of literary studies I have been provided with literary histories to answer my questions about literature – its context, its reception, its changes and strategies for understanding it. Literary history has always interested me, much because it gave me insights into works I had never heard of just as often as it gave me information about what I had already read. Literary histories seemed to present the principal works of a nation's or a language's history.

While studying Nordic Language and Literature at the University of Bergen, I was given an assignment focusing on literary history's portrayal of an area within Norwegian literature. For the first time I studied a history not as a source of objective knowledge, but as a representation of the historian's – the writer's – ideas and ideals. Although challenging, the scope of the term paper was not nearly large enough to provide me with answers to my questions: I did not wonder so much *what* these ideas and ideals – which may be referred to collectively as ideology – are, but rather *how* they are expressed in the literary histories. This is what this thesis will focus on: how underlying ideas, ideals and assumptions influence literary history not only on the surface, but also in the deep structures of it. How these structures may be seen in as various, but also similar, areas as scientific classification and fanciful metaphors, and how these combined reveal the strategies and ideologies behind each historian's literary canon.

Table of Contents

Samandrag i
Acknowledgements iii
Preface v
Chapter 1: First words. Why literary history? 1
Chapter 2: “One and indivisible”? The question of literary periodization 19
Chapter 3: “In statu pupillari”. Plots and structuring metaphors in literary history 43
Chapter 4: “The best and principal things”
Canon formation and inclusion in literary history 65
Chapter 5: Final words. An apology for literary historiography 93
Bibliography 99

“A poet, especially a poet like Shakespeare, is not a vegetable”

George Saintsbury

Chapter 1: First words.
Why literary history?

> [In] general there has been a reluctance to consider historical narratives as what they most manifestly are: verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much *invented* as *found* and the forms of which have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have with those in science.
> (White "Tropics" 82)

Hayden White's claim from 1978 did not represent new insight, but did still create lasting waves in at least two scientific disciplines. White reacted against history always seeking its models in science, and claimed that the literary dimension to history writing is more than fanciful language and decoration; that the historian uses narratives to make sense of historical data. Already the ancient Greeks understood history and fiction as closely connected, and historians throughout the centuries have explored and used this connection. But literary critics as well as historians interpreted White's view to mean that history is in essence fiction, not fact. The historians found it reductive to limit history to formal literary structures and understood White as devaluing the scientific nature of history. Literary theorists and critics also found White's theory reductive, as he strictly limited the number of possible narrative structures and disregarded the importance of cultural contexts (Leitch et. al. 1711). He distinguishes four categories of arguments, of plot structures, of ideologies ("Metahistory" x) and of literary tropes or figures ("Metahistory" 34-37), claiming that historical narratives are created and explained in the intersection of these.

Despite the criticism, White's claim offers valuable perspectives. History cannot be considered merely a simple source to truth or reality, but is in addition an expression of the historian's point of view. The student of history must look more closely at it, be more critical and ask questions as to the historian's material, what events are included in the history, and the historian's account of them. "The bases for historical knowledge are not empirical facts but written texts, even if those texts masquerade in the guise of revolutions," Paul de Man argues (in Abbas 179). In a literary history this perspective is even more striking. Here the ties between history and literature are closer. Despite this literary history is nonetheless a history in its own respect, representing a genre within history writing, literary studies, or

both. In this thesis I will explore the relation it has to literature and history, and treat it as both.

The term 'literary history' may be understood in at least three different ways. Instances of it may be the historical novel or other uses of socio-political history in fiction, history presented in the form of fiction (Brooks 133), and the history of literature, which is how I will use the term. But also this, somewhat circular, definition is incomplete. Michel de Certeau defines history as both a discipline and a discourse, connected by production (Dvergsdal 12). 'Literary history' thus includes the study of previous literature, the written literary histories and the act of writing them. The popular understanding of history is generally that of events in the past, and also this can be transferred to the field of literary studies. By now the term has grown unmanageable, and needs distinctions.

In this thesis I will use the following terms to refer to the various actors in the area: 'history' will be used to refer to a study of the past, as well as the written discourse presenting this study. When discussing specific works on the study of past literature, I will use the term 'literary history' or 'histories'. The literature of the past will simply be referred to as 'literature'. The writer of a history, literary or other, will be referred to as a '(literary) historian', while a theorist and researcher of the subject will be called a 'historiographer' and the result of his work 'historiography'. The act of writing history will also be called 'historiography.'

The term 'historiography' may likewise have several meanings. It comes from the Greek 'istoria' ('study, knowledge, narrative') and 'graphia' ('writing'). It has, as we can see, to do with writing history and written history in every sense, and may refer to as different things as the study of history and a collection of historical works. To make the distinction between historian and historiographer may cause some of the focus on the historian as a creator of text to be lost, and I will therefore stress this aspect already here. A historian is not merely studying the past, but is producing texts on the subject matter. The distinction is also criticised by Hayden White, who uses the terms 'historian' and 'historicist' instead of 'historiographer', although he claims that most historians also include historicism in their works ("Tropics" 102), as the structure and material of a history will reflect the writer's view on the subject area. For practical purposes I will still keep the distinction.

Mads Rosendahl Thomsen and Svend Erik Larsen use the term 'literary historiography' in reference to the theory of writing literary history (7). They point to three dimensions of literary historiography: it is a basis for theoretical, methodological and historical reflection (10-11). In this thesis I will include all three aspects, although to a

varying degree. The theoretical aspect is especially concerned with the historical character of literature. This will surface in various places, but, as I see it, the historicity and changeability of both literature and history is a necessary preliminary of literary history and will not be discussed to any great extent. Instead manifestations of this view will surface throughout the discussion of method. This embraces choices as to audience, material and structure. The last reflection is one of history, taking into account the aspect of the field's own past, and earlier manifestations of literary history.

These aspects will be combined as most of the thesis will focus on the structure of literary histories and the material discussed in them. In order to do this, I will use examples from and analyses of different literary histories, mainly *A Manual of English Literature* by Thomas Arnold from 1862, *A Short History of English Literature* by George Saintsbury from 1898 (in the 1903 edition) and B. Ifor Evans' *A Short History of English Literature* from 1940. I will refer to these by the authors' surnames; that is Arnold, Saintsbury and Evans, respectively.

Tied to the methodological aspect is the connection between history and narrative. One understanding of 'istoria' is 'narrative' or 'story.' We can see the same connection between the concepts in various other European languages: Norwegian 'historie', French 'histoire', German 'Geschichte' and English 'history' and 'story'. The choice of how to represent past events in written form, to tell the (hi)story of literature, is one of the many choices the literary historian must make.

In early English both 'history' and 'story' were used about accounts of imaginary as well as supposedly true events. The split between the two happened around the fifteenth century, when history came to be used for real events, and story about imagined, or at least questionable, events and in informal settings. History as meaning an "organized knowledge of the past" originated in the late fifteenth century, and the understanding that it also indicated a process which included the past, present and future is an eighteenth century addition (Williams 119-120). This is strongly reflected in later literary histories, I will claim.

It is important to understand the term 'literature' as well. In the fifteenth century it meant an "Acquaintance with 'letters' or books; polite or humane learning; literary culture" (*OED*[1]), and was something a person possessed or not: "the term in the late medieval and Early Modern context […] referred less to a skill than to the status signified by that skill"

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[1] This and the following references are from the *Oxford English Dictionary*: "Literature." *Oxford English Dictionary.* 2011. 28 Apr. 2011. <http://www.oed.com>.

(Greenblatt 466). By the late eighteenth century the meaning of the word had changed to mean "literary work or production" (*OED*).

Raymond Williams defines the term as follows:

> **literature** and **literary**, in these new senses, still referred to the whole body of books and writing; or if the distinction was made it was in terms of falling below the level of polite learning rather than of particular kinds of writing. (152)

The specification that literature may be only "writing which has claim to consideration on the ground of beauty of form or emotional effect" (*OED*) is a very recent one, and the *Oxford English Dictionary* does not have any examples of this use. Stephen Greenblatt claims that it is this use which is "the conventional sense" of literature today (467), although I will claim that this limits the field considerably. What the literary historian considers literature will necessarily influence both what material he discusses, and how he values this material. This will be explored further in chapter 4.

The term 'literary history' may be found on almost every literature undergraduate's syllabus. It has an important position in literary study and education, and although this perspective will not be highlighted much throughout the thesis it is important to bear in mind. Literary history is considered a good and simple way of getting an overview of the field, and help the student to place the other works on the syllabus in a cultural and historical context. The student seldom questions the literary history found on the syllabus and the educational institution seldom offers alternatives. That the literary history is written from a specific point of view is seldom highlighted. "The understanding of works that literary history achieves is a disciplinary one and has at least a formal claim to being an objective understanding," claims David Perkins ("Literary History" 177).

Few literary historiographers and literary critics discuss the uses of literary history. They seem self-evident, as the aforementioned use in literary studies to provide frames and contexts for literary works. The most important task for literary history is the didactic, claims Walter Benjamin ("Litteraturhistorie" 79), and places the discipline in the educational realm. This is the same position that Perkins holds. He claims that we "write literary history because we want to explain, understand, and enjoy literary works" ("Literary History" 178). This aim is quite wide and vague, but is reflected in literary histories through time: George Saintsbury argues the necessity of reading early English literature, because there is nothing "the study of which is repaid by greater increase of understanding, and even of enjoyment, in regard to the

rest" (109) in 1898, while to "consolidate and enhance the reader's understanding of the period and its literature," is Paul Poplawski's aim in 2008 (xvi). Providing historical knowledge is probably the main aim of many literary histories, and is also how many students of literature understand the use of histories. Another important task of literature is to offer critical views of literature: "The historian of a literature tries to do justice to the great things in its tradition," claims literary historian Michael Alexander (2). Literary history's aim "is not merely to reconstruct and understand the past, for it has a further end, which is to illuminate literary works," states Perkins ("Literary History" 177). The educational aspect of literary history will be of importance in this thesis, but even more striking in relation to the histories I study is René Wellek and Austin Warren's claim that the main task of the literary historian is to describe change in literature through time (255).

As mentioned, the historical character of literature is a preliminary for having literary history. A historical understanding of history in itself is also necessary. Edward Hallett Carr claims that "history properly so called can be written only by those who find and accept a sense of direction in history itself" (126). The ancient Greeks saw reality as unchanging and determined, and their histories were therefore not concerned with development or human initiated change, but presented rather past events as examples of a created, stable world. The modern understanding of reality is that it is historical and changeable by human interaction (Thomsen and Larsen 13-14). This understanding of reality may be transferred to literature: in order to have a literary history one must understand literature as a historical phenomenon, influencing and being influenced by a changing history. These theoretical reflections are the basis for all historical enterprise today, and a prerequisite for literary history. But there is not complete consensus around the question whether literature is historical, or can have a history. Benedetto Croce argues that works of art are immediate and individual and that there is no essential continuity between them, T. S. Eliot denies the 'pastness' of a work of art, Arthur Schopenhauer claims that a work of art has always reached its goal, and can therefore never improve beyond the point which it is at, and W. P. Ker "contends that a work of art is not a chain in a series, that it cannot be explained causally, and that it is above the world of movement" (Wellek "Discriminations" 159-160; Wellek and Warren 254; Wellek "The Attack" 66). For a literary critic or a student of comparative literature, these views may be useful, but for the literary historian literature must be historical and subject to change, or there will be no history to tell.

The first literary histories were not histories at all, but something in between educational works, biographies and publisher's lists (Wellek "The Rise" 4-6; Benjamin

"Litteraturhistorie" 74). The first use of the title 'literary history' on an English book was in 1688, but then in Latin: *Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Historia Literaria* by William Cave (Wellek "The Rise" 19). René Wellek claims that literary history became possible only when two main concepts began to be elaborated: individualism and development. The individuality in question is not necessarily tied to an author, but as much to the uniqueness of a work of art, to national literature and to the "spirit of the age," i.e. each epoch's distinctiveness (Wellek "The Rise" 25-26).

Thomas Warton's *The History of English Poetry* (1774-1781) is probably the first true literary history in England. It was much read in the first part of the nineteenth century, and his idea of literary evolution coloured many of the histories that were to follow. There are two main stages to literary history in the nineteenth century, Wellek claims, the romantic and the Victorian ages. Both, though, are characterized by a belief in literary development or change, either linear or cyclical. Moreover, the view that literature is connected to the society from which it sprang developed in the nineteenth century: "Besides these new methods in the study of the evolution of literature, new concepts deriving from a social view of literature became more and more important for the writing of literary history" (Wellek "Discriminations" 143-150).

The "new methods" mentioned by Wellek are the increased focus on scientific methods and discourse within most academic fields in the nineteenth century. "Significant books, like Lyell's *Principles of Geology* (1833) and Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859), stimulated a shift of thinking which had impressive effects in fundamental thinking and in altering educational concepts in schools and colleges newly founded," relates William S. Knickerbocker (110). It was not only in educational circles there was a large focus on the methods of especially natural science; this also influenced much of the society in general. Neither did it originate in Britain: "The scientific method of studying history developed and flourished in Germany in the first half of the nineteenth century" (Brooks 134).

Peter Allan Dale claims that "the nineteenth century was dominated as no period before or since has been by the 'historical sense'" (2). Richard A. E. Brooks states that

> it can rightly be said that the Romantic movement gave a strong impetus to interest in history in England and on the continent in the first half of the century and that the most important figure in this respect is Sir Walter Scott. (133)

Brooks here highlights the close connection between literature and history. Scott wrote historical novels and helped shape the interest for history in the early nineteenth century. Édouard Glissant also links history and literature at this time; the emergence of an increased focus on both objectivity of history and realism in literature occurs in the same period, and is probably founded in the same attitude to reality (175).

However, the study and production of history became more specialized and more closely tied to the universities as the focus on history grew and historical methods became common: "The public came to think that the field was indisputable the scientific historian's" (Brooks 137). Despite the increased focus on scientific methods, the "indisputable achievement of greater objectivity did not, however, free the professional historians from bias," Brooks acknowledges (135), and points to an important aspect of the study of literary history, that of subjectivity in historiography.

The large growth in number of universities in England in the latter half of the nineteenth century, especially as many urban universities opened in the new industrial centres (Knickerbocker 110), is also an important aspect in the history of literary history. These universities focused more on technology and science than the traditional universities:

> New educational institutions tended to abandon the humanistic tradition which had been preserved in England since the revival of the classics, to reject traditional literary bases of education, and to substitute the study of science and of technological machines and processes. (Knickerbocker 97)

At the older universities Oxford and Cambridge classical education had been predominant, and especially at Oxford it continued to be so. Criticism of this resulted in scholars arguing their belief in literature as a formative element in education (Knickerbocker 97-98). But changes happened also in these universities. Knickerbocker writes that "a noteworthy minor change of the 1854 act permitted the professor of poetry to lecture in English" at Oxford (122), which greatly strengthened the education in the vernacular and in English literature in Britain. But "English did not become a pass subject at Oxford until 1873 and an honors one until 1893," relates Brooks (142). Other colleges and universities implemented these changes earlier.

Reasons for the increasing focus on English language and literature is closely tied to the increase in literacy in England during the nineteenth century. The lower and middle classes also gained access to both lower and higher education. These students had no

knowledge of Greek or Latin, and the study of English Literature began as a substitute for classical education. ”English became an important subject in the curriculum of nonconformist academies in the eighteenth century, and after 1858 was increasingly important in the growing secondary schools,” Brooks states (142).

“Related to the increase of literacy and literary history is the teaching of English, which became more and more historical in approach,” Brooks asserts (141). He points to similarities in the development of general historiography and literary historiography: “there is a development, parallel with that in historiography, from the romantic to the scientific” (140). This duality resulted in two opposites which distinguished literary history in the Victorian age:

> first, the age-old disagreement between those who think of literature as a series of isolated works and those who find at the very center of literary history the problem of its continuity and development; and second, the conflict, specifically characteristic of the Victorian age, between those who want to assimilate literary history to the methods and results of the natural sciences and those who use inherited concepts of the idealistic philosophical tradition. (Wellek “Discriminations” 153)

These oppositions are recognizable in literary histories from the time, and the standpoint of the literary historian in these questions is reflected in the basic assumptions of the literary history. Dale distinguishes between three historiographical approaches to literary criticism, which were all prominent in Victorian literary historiography. One is that literature is influenced by society; the second is that literature is influencing society. The last is that of aesthetic value. This presents challenges, claims Dale, namely that the value of literature can then only be relative or historical (10-11). This, I must assume, is in opposition to Matthew Arnold’s “real estimate,” which I will return to in chapter 3.

Due to this large focus on society and science in various forms, Wellek is critical of the Victorian literary histories:

> We must therefore conclude that none of the many Victorian histories of English literature can satisfy the ideal of purely *literary* history. They are either histories of civilizations as mirrored in literature, or collections of critical essays in chronological order. The first type is not a history of *art,* the other not a *history* of art. (“Discriminations” 163)

Wellek also claims that to write a "satisfactory history of English literature […] is still a problem and a task for the future" ("Discriminations" 163), both for Victorian historians and for historians in the late twentieth century, when the aim of literary history again was doubted: "Croce and Ker are right. There is no progress, no development, no history of art except a history of writers, institutions, and techniques. This is, at least for me, the end of an illusion, the fall of literary history" (Wellek "The Attack" 77).

"For approximately the first seventy-five years of the nineteenth century, literary history enjoyed popularity and unquestioned prestige. As a synthesis of history and criticism, it seemed more powerful, in some ways, than either discipline separately," Perkins claims ("Theoretical Issues" 1). The final years of the twentieth century saw a fear of the 'great narrative,' and of narratives in general, at the same time as there was widespread scepticism towards the objectivity of history, following historiographers like White; or the objectivity of anything, according to deconstructionists and other post-modern theorists. This resulted in scepticism towards history in general, including literary history. In addition, the large canon debate, which I will return to in the fourth chapter, questioned literary histories' material and selection, and as a result doubted the possibility of general national literary histories. This critical environment is one of the reasons why I find it important to study literary history not only as history, but also as a literary genre.

Commenting on the status of literary history, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht wrote in 2008 that he does not have

> a master plan or a program for the future of literary history. As I said at the very beginning: I am not even sure whether such a future will ever come. We will have to think, to experiment, and to wait—if we have an interest in continuing to write histories of literature. ("Shall We Continue").

Despite the many questions around literary history in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, new literary histories are published. Large publishers like Cassell and the Oxford

and Cambridge University Presses have published extensive new histories in the last few years (COPAC[2]). Wellek predicted in 1982 that the

> new literary history promises only a return to the old one: the history of tradition, genres, reputations, etc. less atomistically conceived as in older times, with greater awareness of the difficulties of such concepts as influence and periods but still the old one. (“The Attack” 77)

Looking at recent literary histories, it is evident that Wellek had a point. Despite a larger awareness of the troublesome concepts of history, literature, periodization and canon, literary histories still try to address the historical aspect of literature, while students and general readers use literary histories in order to navigate through the immense field which is English literature. “Literary history is a discipline necessary for the revelation of the power of imaginative writing to serve as a means of human understanding, past, present, and future,” claims Bate in the general introduction to *The Oxford English Literary History* (viii), published in thirteen volumes from 2001 to 2006. Claims like this place literary history at the front of literary studies.

While literary history in the sense of literature of the past is a study included in most studies of literature on some point or another, the study of literary history as a historical or literary artefact is not as common. It has been studied and discussed in the US and on the continent for the better part of the last half century, but inquiries into the area between and above history and literature are seldom seen in British literary studies. The focus in the US has mainly been on two aspects, represented by White’s claim that history is literature and the canon debate of the 1980s and 1990s. In Europe there has been a larger focus on the historians’ ideology, for instance in connection with nationalism (see for instance Thomsen and Larsen; Kittang et.al; Gumbrecht). Due to the lack of recent studies and theories in the field, I have sought were appropriate in order to find relevant approaches, in historiography as well as literary theory. Theorists and historiographers included in this thesis are therefore of various origins, American and European as well as British.

The Danish literary historiographer Thomsen states that he

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[2] “History of English Literature” and “English Literary History.” *COPAC National, Academic, and Specialist Library Catalogue.* 2011. 29 Apr. 2011. <http.//www.copac.ac.uk>. COPAC is a library catalogue offering access to the catalogues of many major research and specialist libraries in Britain.

> understands *literary historiography* as a contemplation over the relationship between specific contributions to a historical approach to literature on the one hand, and the imaginary, but active, literary history on the other hand. Literary historiography does thus not only concern the conditions for writing literary history, but also the understanding of the collection of texts which already exists. (11-12, my translation[3])

This is my departure point as well. I will engage with the subject not so much by looking at contemporary conditions of literary history, but by studying existing instances within the genre, instances which may offer valuable insights into the production and use of literary history now as well as then.

I focused much on the nineteenth century in my treatment of the history of literary history. This is because my main material is published in the second half of the nineteenth and first half of twentieth century. The three literary histories which will form the basis of my discussion are all much-used and much-published monographic narrative literary histories. They are published within a time range of approximately eighty years, and represent a change in both literary view and readership. The long publication history and the fact that they are all narratives written by one author instead of being edited collections are in themselves reasons enough for them to be of interest, and they are well suited for the general claims I will make about literary history.

When it comes to more recent literary histories, Wellek claims that "we can hardly help agreeing that something has happened to literary historiography which can be described as decline and even as fall ("The Attack" 65). Reasons for this decline are many; he mentions a change in the belief in scientific methods, critique of the focus on facts, a lack of focus on literature alone, and the mentioned disagreement of whether literature is really historical (Wellek "The Attack" 65). In addition, there has in recent years been a larger focus on political and ideological aspects of literary histories. Literary histories focusing on female writers, ethnic minorities or other groups are not uncommon today, and also general literary histories have taken this aspect into account. The view of literature in general has also shifted. In the three literary histories we can see a part of this change, from the almost all-

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[3] Original: "Jeg opfatter *litteraturhistoriografi* som en refleksion over forholdet mellem disse konkrete bidrag til et historisk forhold til litteratur på den ene side og den imaginære, men særdeles virksomme, litteraturhistorie på den anden side. Litteraturhistoriografi vedrører sålede ikke kun betingelserne for at skrive litteraturhistorie, men også opfattelsen af det arkiv af tekster som i forvejen findes."

inclusive literary category in Arnold to the restricted sense of poetry, drama and the novel as the major instances of literature. Almost as an afterthought, Evans includes other prose in the two last chapters: “an attempt is made, not to record the work of all the other important writers who have employed prose, but only of such as have added to the possibilities of English prose as a medium of expression,” he states (183). After Evans, the view has again shifted to a more open understanding of literature. Modern literary theory gives a broader definition; the whole culture may be considered to be text, although most people think literature is poetry, drama and fiction (Stevenson 7-8). There has also been a larger focus on popular culture, connected to the growing criticism of the traditional literary canon as opposed to the everyday literature which did and does exist outside this.

A mixture of changing literary views, ideological outlooks and theoretical and methodological reflections on literature as well as history, gives recent literary histories a different character than those of my selection. They have a tendency of including explicit metahistorical reflections, at least if they are more than simple introductory texts. There has been a larger focus on method within all areas of historical research. But this focus has used a longer time to make an impact within literary historiography than in other fields of historiography, where the historicism of the nineteenth century met an epistemological criticism from late in that century. “Particularly in the interval between the two world wars widespread dissatisfaction with literary history was voiced in almost every country,” Wellek writes (“The Attack” 65). Interestingly enough this is when Evans wrote his literary history, for a wide and extensive readership.

The first two, but also to some degree the last, of the literary histories I look at were written in a period when there was a great belief in the enterprise of writing history, and a confidence in literary history. But although these early literary historians do not question the whole endeavour of literary history as later historiographers and historians have done, they are not without reflection upon their own projects. The act of writing literary history includes a comment on earlier literary history, and thus a self-reflection. This is done both as the historian includes and excludes works of literature or authors, when he follows or diverts from earlier, even traditional, classification, and expressively in comments on earlier historians’ work. But contrary to a very open definition of what constitutes literature, few literary histories include the genre of literary history in their treatment, and the self-reflection this might have led to is thus non-existent in that sense. However, I consider for instance this evaluation of the history genre in Saintsbury to reflect also his view of literary history:

> According to the severest and most exacting conception of what history should be, it should satisfy three conditions. In the first place, the authors should have thoroughly studied and intelligently comprehended all the accessible and important documents on the subject. In the second, he should have so digested and ordered his information that not merely a congeries of details, but a regular structure of history, informed and governed throughout by a philosophical idea, should be the result. In the third, the result should, from the literary as well as the historical side, be an organic whole composed in orderly fashion and manifesting a distinct and meritorious style. (626)

Whether he lives up to these ideals of historiography may be discussed, though.

The trust in method and tradition, the lack of explicit self-reflection and criticism in combination with the narrative form is to a large degree what makes early literary histories so interesting, and such grateful subjects for study. They express in the extreme what modern literary history attempts to conceal, that literary history, like all history, is biased and to some degree fictional.

Thomas (Tom) Arnold the Younger's (1823-1900) *A Manual of English Literature, Historical and Critical* was published in 1862, and came in new editions until the 7th in 1897 (COPAC[4]). From its first appearance it functioned as a standard textbook for students of literature, for instance at the University College in Dublin where Arnold taught until his death in 1900 (Price 9). It is written mainly with students as the target group, but also to a reading public in Britain and abroad (Arnold v). That it is intended for an educated audience may be seen for instance in the use of Latin, which is left untranslated or unexplained, but is comprehensible for an audience with a classical education. Arnold explains his structuring of the history as reflecting his lectures on literature, dividing it into a historical and a critical section. In addition, he has an appendix "On English Metres," supporting the textbook function of the literary history. He is also careful to give his sources when it comes to themes not strictly literary. This strengthens the scientific style of the history, the preferred standard in the Victorian period.

A Short History of English Literature by George Saintsbury (1845-1933) is also Victorian, although later. It was first published in 1898. In 1908 it had already appeared in six

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[4] "A Manual of English Literature, Historical and Critical." *COPAC National, Academic, and Specialist Library Catalogue.* 2010. 4 Dec. 2010. <http://www.copac.ac.uk>.

editions, while the eighth, and last, edition was published in 1966 (COPAC[5]), revealing its status as a popular and lasting literary history. In addition to several works on both English and European literary history and authors, Saintsbury published in 1906 to 1910 *A History of English Prosody from the 12th Century to the Present Day* in three volumes (COPAC[6]).

Saintsbury is often used as an example of a narrative literary history from a period when there was a strong belief in the project (Wellek "The Attack" 64, Ray). Despite this, Wellek and Warren place him among the historians more interested in criticism than true history as expressed through a focus on evolution in literature (253). I find their view hard to adhere to, as will become evident throughout the discussion of Saintsbury.

The edition of Saintsbury I study is the third, published in 1903. This edition has, like the second, been revised for errors and misprints. While in the second edition Saintsbury was careful not to "alter critical judgments," he states that in the third edition "additions have also been made, with especial reference to texts which have appeared, or which have come under the writer's closer notice, since the first writing of the book" (vi). These are often included in footnotes throughout the history, setting these additions apart from the rest of the narrative.

The intended readership of this literary history is not overtly expressed, but it is reasonable to think it is intended for a broad, but well-read, audience. Some hints towards a use in the school system exist:

> Those who – and this is the main purpose of the volume – use it to supply the necessary minutiæ of useful information in guiding themselves or others through the history of which it is a mere epitome, may often find the opinions here expressed differing from other things that have been written about the books. (796-797)

There are also numerable references to "the student of literature" as opposed to the "literary consumer" throughout the history (109, 205), and it is for the first group Saintsbury has his concern. The 'student' is here not necessarily a student in the sense we understand the word today, enrolled at a university, but is used about an interested reader. Contrary to Arnold, Saintsbury stresses that no "part of the book has been delivered as lectures" (v). Although he

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[5] "A Short History of English Literature." *COPAC National, Academic, and Specialist Library Catalogue.* 2010. 4 Dec. 2010. <http://www.copac.ac.uk>.

[6] "George Saintsbury." *COPAC National, Academic, and Specialist Library Catalogue.* 2011. 30 Apr. 2011. <http://www.copac.ac.uk>.

was Professor of English literature at the University of Edinburgh, the audience in focus is broader than that of a student body. Writing almost 40 years after Arnold, the traits of classical education have all but disappeared in the text, and a larger focus on national literature is evident. The focus is also shifted from an educational angle to one of *Bildung*; Saintsbury wants to "provoke and facilitate reading of the books themselves on the part of his readers" (vi).

B. Ifor Evans' (1899-1982) *A Short History of English Literature* is indeed a short history. Compared to Saintsbury's almost 800 pages, it is, in the original edition, almost 600 pages shorter. It was first published as a Pelican Book by Penguin Books in 1940, and came in new and expanded editions until the 1970s. It was last published in 1990 (COPAC[7]). In the fourth edition from 1976, a final chapter about "Recent English Literature" by Bernard Bergonzi, Arnold's biographer, is added. The first edition has no preface or introduction to state the author's intention, but the dust jacket claims that he

> has compressed into a bare 200 pages the whole story of English literature from *Beowulf* to *Finnegan's Wake.* He does not attempt to prove a thesis, and he has no violent prejudices to air. His aim is to set down the essential facts, and to get ten centuries of well-known achievement into their proper perspective.

The focus here is on objectivity and "facts," and an interesting word to notice in this respect is then the use of "story" instead of 'history.' Again we see the connection between narrative history and story, even in the promotional text for the literary history.

This *Short History* is comprised of barely 200 pages, and the literary history is thus without much details and with a more limited selection of works and authors than the two others. Evans perceived the limitation of page numbers as a problem: "Its effect on the value of the volume was always realized and commented on frequently," he states in the preface to the fourth edition (Evans 4th ed. 12). Page number was important when Evans wrote his literary history. The Pelican books are Penguin Books' non-fiction series, intended to educate the audience. To follow Penguin's basic idea, it had to be cheap and available (Penguin

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[7] "A Short History of English Literature." *COPAC National, Academic, and Specialist Library Catalogue.* 2011. 12 Apr. 2011. <http://www.copac.ac.uk>.

Books[8]), and it was read by a broader audience than any of the two earlier literary histories. This may for instance be seen by the many allusions to which works are popular today or may offer "the modern reader" enjoyment (e.g. 34, 38). More than the earlier literary histories its focus is to educate a growing literary audience without the same classical education as was the foundation for the reading public in the late nineteenth century.

The three histories will not be discussed separately in this thesis; instead I will use them to illuminate some key issues to literary history: periodization, plots, metaphors and canon formation. These issues are to some degree prominent and specially striking in these histories, but they are also issues which touch upon fundamental aspects in the genre of literary history. The key concepts have numerous intersections, but for the sake of close analysis I will treat them in separate chapters. In the following I will briefly clarify how I understand each term, and explain how I understand the connection between them and their importance for the study of literary history.

Central to the two first concepts, periodization and metaphor, is 'structure.' Wellek states that "structures involve values" ("The Attack" 74). The *OED* defines 'structure' as a "[manner] of building or construction; the way in which an edifice, machine, implement, etc. is made or put together" or "[with] reference to a literary composition, a verse or sentence, a language, etc."[9] The structure of a literary history is not self-evident, and the choices the historian makes as to structure are influenced by what story is told. White claims that historical narratives are both invented and found. In the same manner structure in the same works is also invented by the historian, just as much as it is found in the genre conventions, in tradition or, as some may claim, in literature itself. In my discussion of the structuring of literary history, the primary focuses will be on periodization and structuring metaphors.

Periods are one of the first things noticed when one opens a literary history. They are reflected in the table of contents, and represent an easy and revealing way into central questions concerning the historian's literary view and understanding. "Periodization is necessary for rhetorical and narrative purposes," Perkins claims ("Literary History" 106). The periodization presented in my literary histories and the literary tropes or images, mainly

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[8] Penguin Books. *About Penguin: Company History.* 2010. 17 Nov. 2010. <http://www.penguin.co.uk/static/cs/uk/0/aboutus/aboutpenguin_companyhistory.html>. It is interesting to notice that also a publishing company finds it necessary to inform its costumers of its history, claiming authority and reliability on the basis of a historical narrative.

[9] "Structure." *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2011. 30 Apr. 2011. <http://www.oed.com>.

represented by metaphors, the historian employs both expose an understanding of literature as changing and developing.

There are many other aspects of structure which may be discussed. I will touch briefly upon the formal structuring of the histories, including aspects tied to sections, chapters and titles. This betrays much about how the historians, and their publishers, see the literary histories used, and by whom. Formal structure is also a source to information about canon formation, as highly canonized authors and works may be emphasised through the arrangement of literary history.

Another approach, which has been explored more by others, is to look more closely at Hayden White's tropes, and discuss the histories in connection with these. White is still a major figure within historiography, but I find this approach somewhat limiting. White has nevertheless inspired me to explore the narrative and fictional aspects of history, and will also form some of the basis for the discussion of plot structures and metaphors. The emplotment of a story is part of what is 'fictional' in literary history, just as much as the plot is part of the structure of it. Through creating a plot, the historian chooses the heroes and villains, the winners and losers of literature, and thus also what will be considered good or important literature. Studying the metaphors the historians employ is one way of discovering and discussing plot. Metaphors also highlight the fictional aspect of history. Especially striking in the histories I study is the combination of science and fictionality represented through both periodization and the structuring metaphors. The scientific focus is both a use of metaphors from the realm of natural sciences, and a related focus on history as science in the historians' approach to their subject.

I will not offer a style analysis or an interpretation of all metaphors. I will, however, identify the major metaphors concerning structure and the historians' understanding of literature and its changing nature, which is a preliminary for literary history. These metaphors are not all instantly recognizable as literary tropes, but it is necessary to be aware of them being so in order to explore and explain the historians' fundamental literary view. The historians' choice of words and metaphors is never arbitrary, although one may suspect them of being sometimes carried away with an imaginative language. The historians I study all reveal an idea of literature as developing, either through their formal structure, periodization or metaphors.

The idea of literature in constant change, or even progress, is interesting when considering the literary histories' selection of authors and works to discuss, the material I will refer to as the histories' canons. Value judgement is fundamental to canon formation, but

what this value really is varies from critic to critic, from historian to historian. Just like Wellek, I believe there is a link between how and on what principles a literary history is structured, and which works are included in the history's canon. As mentioned, canon formation has been much discussed in the recent years, resulting in alternative canons for example for women writers or minority groups. This discussion had not emerged when my literary histories were written, which is one reason why the canons in these histories are both confident and assumed. Canon formation is implicit in the two other concepts, and by looking at these one can arrive at an understanding of how the historian selects and presents his material. As mentioned, periods and metaphors alike in the histories point towards a focus on change and development, and this is part of the basis for the histories' literary canons.

White's claim that history is fictional is still relevant for the student of literary history, and to explore and question the underlying assumptions and ideas of the histories is necessary in order to ask the important questions of whose canon we are reading, for what purpose the literary history is written, and what it can contribute to our literary studies, understanding and enjoyment.

Chapter 2: "One and indivisible"?
The question of literary periodization

> "A story has no beginning or end: arbitrarily one chooses that moment of experience from which to look back or from which to look ahead."
> (Greene 1)

The term 'period' is central in any work of history or any discussion thereof. The slicing of time, or in our case literature, into more manageable pieces is an important structuring tool for historians, but it is not without controversy. "The concept of a literary period has a curious status in critical writings: there is wide agreement about what periods do, general discontent at these activities, and no consensus about alternatives to them," writes Mark Parker (227). Although there are similarities in periods from one literary history to another, there are also great differences which illustrate that periods are not self-evident or inherent either in literature or time. Even apparent consensus in period labels may hide differences in the general characteristic of the period, the understanding of literature's position at the time or which authors may best represent the period.

"Like all literary phenomena, literary periods are not factual givens, but continuously changing historical constructions," claims Thomas Vogler (in Parker 227). In creating periods, the historian will necessarily adhere to or leave earlier periodizations, thus making implicit, or in some cases explicit, comments on both the genre of literary history and the act of periodizing. The basis for literary periods also varies to a great extent. Erich Auerbach claims for instance that as there is a link between culture and literary work, there is also reason in periodization (in Gallagher and Greenblatt 155). This is a view shared by many with a historicist approach to literature. Other literary theoreticians and historians focus more on intrinsically literary criteria for periodization, whether these are tracing changes between literary works over time, the authors' own understanding of their works or similarities between works and authors within a range of years. The creation of periods is thus a highly ideological action, with implications as to the historians' understanding of literature and the past.

Before I go into more detail, I must pause at the term 'period' itself. When discussing periods and periodization, it would be tempting to try to find a neutral term expressing a stretch of time, in order to differentiate from the historians and their use of the term. But

period is so implemented in both thought and language that it is difficult to dismiss the term. Just the fact that I have the need to discuss smaller or larger stretches of time in isolation shows that when discussing history we need this term to structure our discussion or, in the case of the historians here considered, narrative. It is, nevertheless, important to be aware of implications the term brings with it, such as the implicit belief that time can be divided, and that each slice of time has its own unique character.

It is difficult to imagine literary history without periodization. Even theorists who oppose strict adherence to periods acknowledge the wide application:

> Even though one may be made extremely uneasy by the difficulty or perhaps even impossibility of verifying whether or not there are periods, much less what causes them, the assumption is that all the works of a given time can be unified under some single rubric seems more or less indispensable as a means of organizing scholarship and teaching in literature and the other humanities. Even if believing in periodization, like belief in genealogical sequence in history, is belief in a series of linguistic fictions, based on figures of speech, it seems we cannot do without this belief. (Hillis Miller 199)

Wellek and Warren refer to two understandings of what a period is: that it is an entity with an inherent nature or that it is an arbitrary linguistic label used for mere practical reasons. They do not agree with either idea; instead they consider periods as instances in a long chain of developments in literature (262). I will return to this shortly.

Perkins claims that early literary historians wrote of ‘schools,’ rather than periods, corresponding to the use in discussions of other art forms (“Literary Theory” 92). The idea of ‘period’ arose with the larger focus on history in academia in the nineteenth century. There are examples of this in Arnold, who uses ‘school’ as his classificatory category for literary directions. Despite this, periods are still an important structuring tool. As discussed earlier, the historians I discuss have chosen different strategies for their formal structure. Arnold and Saintsbury use chronology as the main structuring principle of their histories. But Evans, who has used genre to structure his history, also has time, and thus periods, as a secondary structuring method. Chronology or the placing of events in time is fundamental in narratives, which these histories represent. The Marxist literary critic Fredric Jameson claims there is a link between the concept of periods and a linear view of history: “individual period formulations always secretly imply or project narratives or ‘stories’ – narrative

representations – of the historical sequence in which such individual periods take their place and from which they derive their significance” (in Besserman 4).

Though periodization is material in furthering the narrative, it also invents breaks where there may be none and makes perceived radical changes the focal point of history, instead of continuity. The historiographer Wilhelm Dilthey claims that periods are portions of time divided so by a unifying ideology or the like, thus making periods a natural division of time (in Perkins “Literary Theory” 66). I think that this is to have too great respect for periodization. Although the division into periods is not arbitrary, the large variation in both the scope and the content of a period shows that an understanding of periods as natural entities is difficult to support. Despite the belief in natural periods, Dilthey also worries that periods may be perceived as stable while life, or in our case literature, changes. Periods are “giving fixity in thought to that which in itself is process or movement in a direction” (Dilthey in Perkins “Literary Theory” 66).

Wellek fears the same dividing of literature if heterogeneity within a single period is not stressed: “If the unity of any one period were absolute, the periods would lie next to each other like blocks of stone. There would be no continuity of development” (“Periods” 91). Wellek and Warren therefore point to the necessity of literary history to trace developments and changes in literature, and not necessarily just breaks between one period and the other. A period must include parts of two life cycles: “decay of one convention and the rise of a new one” (265-266). If describing only one life cycle, i.e. the birth, growth, decay and death of one convention, the periods will stand out as separate components without any connection between them. The life cycle metaphor is one I will return to later; for now I will simply state that even though the historians I discuss in this thesis employ this metaphor, they often fall into Wellek and Warren’s trap and let their subject die before a new one rises in a new period. Ending his discussion of Caroline literature, Saintsbury states that “the mark, if not of decadence – that is a dangerous word – yet of completion of phase, is very distinct” in the preceding chapters (467).

At the same time as periods highlight breaks and shifts in literature, periods must necessarily follow each other in a literary history; despite it not necessarily being so in literature: “With due observation of the caution (which may seem tediously repeated, but is still necessary) as to the overlapping of periods in this brief, crowded, and intensely active years of the drama called Elizabethan,” Saintsbury begins one of his chapters (432). Parker claims that periods thus support the view of history as continuous, and literature being part of

this continuity (229). I see this movement as more sequential, where the periods, although overlapping, not necessarily are in a direct relationship to each other.

"It seems clear to me that the historicist overrates the significance of the somewhat spectacular differences between various historical periods," Karl Popper states in his criticism of historicism, *The Poverty of History* (100). Historicism he defines thus:

> an approach to the social sciences which assumes that *historical prediction* is their principal aim, and which assumes that this aim is attainable by discovering the 'rhythms' or the 'patterns,' the 'laws' or the 'trends' that underlie the evolution of history. (3)

'Evolution' is one of the major explanatory strategies of literary change, and as such an important metaphor, as shall be noted in the next chapter. Popper does not recognize evolution as a universal law, and does therefore not support the many social scientists, including literary historians, who explain change through what he calls the "evolutionary hypothesis" (107). Popper does not reject the idea of periods entirely, but does not consider them valuable in science. As seen in the above discussion of Wellek and Warren, their view is the opposite. They do not discuss to a great extent the idea of development in literature, but see it as quite self-evident. Periods must also be understood in this sense: "A period is comprehensible only as a section inside the process of development" (Wellek "Periods" 91).

Adhering to this view, literary periods must have their origin in literature itself, Wellek claims.

> One cannot escape the conclusion that the sequence of English literary period names is a motley collection of political, literary, and artistic labels picked up here and there without much rhyme or reason. Theorists of literary history have therefore argued for the adoption of a consistent scheme derived purely from literary history, from an observation of the decisive changes in literature. ("Periodization" 484)

This seems quite self-evident and unquestionable for the general reader, and the general literary historian. But to decide what "purely from literary histories" means is harder. Different literary historians will see the connection between literature and the world outside it differently. Wellek argues for autonomous literary development ("Periods" 80; 92), but there are different understandings of what this autonomy implies, of which instances are important

for generating change in literature, and whether these are best explained with reference to the calendar, socio-political factors or authors' and critics' self-understanding or reading of the literature in itself.

The reasons for starting or ending a period at exactly this or that year may vary much, and be hard to discover. Often there is a break between classificatory aspects of some kind, such as group, school or movement, thus making it more or less natural to start or end a period at this point in literature. Just as often a period is adopted from events in socio-political history. These moments or breaks may vary from historian to historian, as can the inventory of a period. The historians I discuss do to a very little degree directly characterize the periods they employ, but even then are period characteristics implied. Even Evans, who does not use regular literary periods as such as a structuring principle, includes these in his discussion. An example is his use of "the Elizabethan age," which is mentioned as a period term, but without any further characterization (29). Here the name of a monarch is used as the period label, but, although Evans leaves it unmentioned, the term implies more than a mere calendric age. Wellek and Warren write: "Obviously we should not expect too much from mere period labels: one word cannot carry a dozen connotations" (267). I will claim that one word, and especially words which are used and changed so much as period terms, may well "carry a dozen connotations," including views on literature, history, literary change and literary quality. As mentioned, Wellek claims that period names are "a motley collection of political, literary, and artistic labels picked up here and there without much rhyme or reason" ("Periodization" 484). J. Hillis Miller points to these being linguistic tropes: "all are in one way or another tropes. In this, period names are like proper names. They label the individual, the unique, with a word brought in from some other realm" (197-198). Thus will a literary period imply more than does the name alone.

To return to the example of the Elizabethan age, Hillis Miller claims this is an instance of the trope metonymy (198); the period in question is called by the name of a monarch. The use of metaphors to perform acts as fundamental to historiography as periodization highlights the fictional aspect of historiography. Hillis Miller argues that

> the fact that a period can only be named in a figure does not mean that a period does not exist, but it does mean the period has that peculiar sort of existence that can only be named in figure, more strictly speaking by catachresis. (198)

He does not deny the existence of periods, but suggests that the metaphors used to name them may be misapplied or acquired from areas far from literature.

By the time Evans uses the period term ‘Elizabethan’ the time span of the period does not strictly follow the dates of the queen’s reign. The term has also acquired qualities beyond merely dating a literary work. Already in Queen Elizabeth’s own time the period was constructed as a high point in English history, and the tie between the lasting literature of the period and the monarch is shown in Evans:

> But the songs and lyrics, in which the age delighted, have ever been the delight of posterity. Shakespeare, in *Twelfth Night*, shows how in the house of the Duke Orsino the song was a ready and acceptable entertainment. So it was in the great houses of the Elizabethans, and in the Court of the Queen herself. (29)

Evans here demonstrates a connection between socio-political aspects, literature and literary history to support the periodization. This connection is seldom expressed explicitly. Saintsbury is aware of the problems tied to the limits of the Elizabethan period, but defends his periodization:

> Attention has often been drawn to the ambiguity of the title Elizabethan Literature, as commonly used. ‘Is it not,’ they say, ‘absurd to include under such a head the work of men who, like Milton and Browne, were not born till after the Queen’s death, and did not die till the last quarter of the seventeenth century had arrived or was at the door?’ ‘Is it not even the fact that most of the masterpieces of this literature were not produced at all till the reign of James?’ It is desirable to remember these facts; but it is still more desirable to remember the others, first that all the seed of the whole period called Elizabethan was sown, and that not a little of it had come up, before the Queen’s death; and secondly, that the quality of the period 1580-1660 is essentially one and indivisible. There are differences between Milton and Spenser, but they are differences rather of degree than of kind. The difference between Milton and Dryden are differences at least of species, almost of genus. (307)

Saintsbury uses the same distinctions when he describes the change from eighteenth century literature to that of the Romantic era (724). He shows awareness of the act of periodization, and argues on the basis of internal similarities between works and authors he considers

belonging to the same period. The argument is thus founded in intrinsically literary considerations. It is also interesting to notice that the language he employs is a combination of fictional conversation and scientific terms like "species" and "genus," illustrating the history's middle position between, and including both, fact and fiction. Scientific terms like these from the realm of biology were widespread in late nineteenth century historiography. This I will return to in the next chapter.

As mentioned Wellek and Warren point to two understandings of what a period is; either an entity with an inherent nature or an arbitrary label used for mere practical reasons (262). Perkins leans more towards the second idea. This may be seen for instance in his sketch of how a period in literary history is created: name the period, characterize it and provide it with a canon ("Literary Theory" 87). On the other hand, Perkins also seems to think that periods have some natural or logical counterpart in literature. Perkins sees periodization as an argument for believing in the objectivity of literary history. He recognizes that classificatory labels such as epochs, periods and schools are results of generalizations and, as they are kept throughout decades of literary histories, tradition; but at the same time he claims that as a well-read reader can recognize a literary work as a product of a specific time, there must be some objective quality in the style or theme of a period, epoch or group (Perkins "Literary Theory" 18, 111). Saintsbury supports this view to some degree, for instance when he writes of Francis Bacon that his sentence "would show itself to any person of experience as almost certainly written between 1580 and 1660" (372). This is to some degree a valid point by Saintsbury, as well as Perkins, but only for Saintsbury's intended readership, that of educated readers who are aware of movement and changes in literature. Period terms are often used interchangeably about time and style, and it is this distinction Perkins has problems of keeping clear.

I therefore think Perkins' is a conclusion drawn too quickly. I claim that if one did not have periods and the knowledge of what these are expected to hold as a departure point, it would be hard for a reader to place a work in a specific period on the basis of style or theme alone. I will not discard the idea entirely, as style is helpful in determining the time when a work is written, but it is important to keep in mind for instance the many post-modern stylistic breaks or plays on stylistic convention. The novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman* by John Fowles (1969) is a good example in this respect, with clear stylistic traces from the Victorian novel, and the refuting of the same conventions, written well after the Victorian age. Vocabulary and orthography would probably be of more help, but these are areas that are often kept out of traditional literary histories. In addition, it is very common to read older

literature in edited versions, with modern orthography instead of the original language. Thus the literature is further removed from the period when it was written.

An example of this is the treatment of Chaucer in Saintsbury as compared to Arnold. Arnold quotes Chaucer in the original orthography:

> I wil you telle a tale, which that I
> Lerned at Padowe of a worthy clerk,
> As proved by his wordes and his werk;
> He is now dead, and nayled in his chest,
> Now God give his soule wel good rest. (48)

Saintsbury, on the other hand, uses a modernized edition. Although he does not cite a source edition, the difference from the orthography in Arnold is quite striking:

> The life is so short, the craft so long to learn,
> The essay so hard, so sharp the conquering,
> The dreadful joys always that flit so yerne [eagerly],
> All this mean I by love – (123)

I believe that without much knowledge of Chaucer's authorship, it will be harder to place Saintsbury's extract at this time than to correctly identify Arnold's as belonging to the Middle English period. Close as his version is to modern spelling, Saintsbury sees the need to explain a word that may be unfamiliar for his readers. "We feel at once the grip, the thrill, the sense of mastery and mystery which are so rare in earlier poetry" he writes about the extract (123). He highlights the emotional aspect of literature, but at the same time as he encourages the reader to experience the extract as a literary masterwork. He presumes that understanding of one word, though it is necessary for this experience. It is tempting to claim that interruptions of this sort may hinder rather than promote emotional response to poetry. In addition, he presumes that the literary historian has authority to interpret both the literal meaning of a word and the reader's experience. The choice of which edition to quote is also a contribution as to the historians' understanding of literature, revealing whether it is closely tied to its period or if it is more ahistorical.

As mentioned in the introduction, it is not self-evident that literature is to be considered historical, and although this is one of the preliminaries for writing literary history,

it is always to a varying degree. The same is true for periods. One understanding of periodization is that a period is “a timeless psychological type which can be taken out of its historical context and transferred anywhere else” (Wellek “Periodization” 484), thus giving us periods, or rather categories, such as ‘medieval classicism’ or ‘new realism.’ This is an instance of a historical view which emphasizes repetition or a cyclic history, even to a greater extent than the common trope of life cycles. I will not discuss this understanding any further though, as none of the literary histories I discuss employ period terms which emphasize periodicity, i.e. a cyclical history view, over the linear understanding of periodization (Besserman 10-11). Periodization in the three literary histories I discuss is rather traditional, but holds many clues as to the historians’ understanding of literature.

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I have now discussed some central problems when it comes to periods and periodization in literary history. In the following I will look more closely at periodization in the three literary histories. As a start, I will focus mainly on a period which is treated differently in the three literary histories, the eighteenth century. This is a period in British literature which has seldom been the object of period debate, unlike for instance Romanticism or the nineteenth century. It is also far enough in time from the historians to make it possible for them to make stronger claims about the period than about their closer past, at the same time as more recent literature may be considered to be reactions to that of the eighteenth century.

Saintsbury writes this about the early eighteenth century:

> In hardly any period of English literature (though the old caution as to the constant overlapping of tendencies, the constant or regular coincidence of the receding and flowing tides, has still to be repeated) are the general characteristics so distinct and so uniform as in that which has been surveyed in the Book just concluded. (564)

Despite this the borders of the eighteenth century are not clear-cut in the literary histories I discuss, neither are they stable in later studies of literary history. The literary period often stretches beyond the calendar and includes changes in society that may influence literature. The three literary historians have chosen different points of entering and leaving the eighteenth century, choices which hint towards their literary view.

Wellek and Warren state that “the term ‘eighteenth century’ is an old numerical term which has assumed some of the functions of literary terms such as ‘Augustan’ and ‘Neo-Classic’” (263). Both Arnold and Saintsbury use this term as a means of periodizing. Arnold’s Chapter V is simply called “Eighteenth Century: 1700-1800” and is a strictly calendric term, though with implications as to contents that may be beyond that of dates. Saintsbury does not draw a strict line at the turn of the century. Instead he has two books covering the century in question, the second half of Book VIII “The Augustan Ages” and Book IX “Middle and Later Eighteenth-Century Literature.” In the last we again see the numeric or calendric term employed.

Calendric period terms are not very common; in the three literary histories here studied Saintsbury’s “Fifteenth Century” is the only other example. Literary periods are adopted from a range of different areas, such as social and political history, ecclesiastical history, history of humanities or visual arts. “The Augustan Ages” in Saintsbury is an example of a period term from the field of literature itself, reflecting the authors’ imitation of classical works during this period. This is a term which was used early about the time from the Restoration in 1660 to the death of Queen Anne in 1714, and may thus be an instance of what has later been known as ‘the long’ or ‘new eighteenth century.’ I will return to this later. Wellek writes that it “claims comparison to the great age of Rome, flatters the reigning monarch and congratulates the English poets” (“Periodization” 483). Saintsbury’ explanation is somewhat similar, though with a variation: “it connects itself well with Johnson’s famous comparison of Dryden’s dealings with the English language and literature to those of Augustus with the city of Rome, which he ‘found of bricks and left of marble’” (471). Here he connects Dryden and the emergence of a new period, like in the above quotation, focusing on literary events. Saintsbury also links the new period to socio-political events, as will become apparent later. But we can also see one of the other structuring principles of Saintsbury’s literary history, the idea of development. This idea is central also to periodization, and is common to all my literary histories. I will expand on this in the next chapter.

The use of the plural “Ages” in Saintsbury shows that the term is not as unified as periodic terms often are. Saintsbury opens the possibility for there being more than one Augustan age, and more than one characteristic of the literature of the period. Wellek argues against this sort of plurality, as he finds it “mistaken on theoretical grounds.” He sees periods as sections of time, and argues that the complexity of them is expressed through the variety if works included in the period instead, thus making the plural superfluous (“Periods” 91).

Hillis Miller holds the opposite view: "The singleness of the label implies the singleness of what is labelled," he claims (197).

The term 'the age of' takes the place between 'school' and 'period,' writes Perkins ("Literary Theory" 97-98). It denotes a strong influence of the person mentioned, without the authors of the age being direct disciples of him or her. When it comes to the Augustan age, the term does not function in this way, but in the first chapters of the mentioned book, "Age of Dryden," this is the understanding:

> After Addison everybody tries to write like Addison: after Johnson almost everybody tries to write like Johnson. But after Dryden everybody does not yet try to write like Dryden; the common influence is upon them, but they express it in different ways. (513).

The time span is tied to Dryden's lifetime, discussing various authors and genres in this period. Although these are not explicitly compared to Dryden in the history, they are in the reader's experience, due to the title functioning as a period term.

This is one of the directions in which Evans' periodization leads the reader. As mentioned earlier, he has based the structure of his history on genres; chronology is secondary. But within the scaffolding of genres the treatment is still chronological, and the eighteenth century is therefore discussed in four different places. The result is a much smaller focus on period characteristics than in the two others, but as the mentioned example of "the Elizabethan age" (29) or the chapter on "The Romantic Poets" show, Evans is unable to free himself completely from the traditional literary periods.

Unlike Arnold and Saintsbury, Evans does not often use terms the reader intuitively recognize as periods; instead he uses names of authors as chapter headings, and thus their lifetimes as boundaries for blocks of time. The poetry of the eighteenth century is treated in "English Poetry from Milton to William Blake," the drama in the last couple of pages in "English Drama from Shakespeare to Sheridan," the novel in both "The English Novel to Defoe" and in "The Novel from Richardson to Scott," and the remaining prose mainly in "Modern English Prose." Here we can see that Evans is not entirely consistent in his use of "to," whether it means 'up to' or 'including.' He includes for instance Defoe in the chapter named after him, but hardly any of the eighteenth century prose in the chapter said to end with this, "English Prose to the Eighteenth Century." We see here that one of the few chapters not named after authors includes "the eighteenth century." Although these chapter

titles are not recognized as literary periods, the function is similar, especially when it comes to the unifying function of periodization. This is even clearer in Saintsbury, where authors are used to clarify the periodization: "The prose of the fifteenth and early sixteenth century – or, in other words, the prose from Fortescue to Fisher" (205).

An implication of the title is that authors placed together in the chapter title will be compared to a greater extent than authors who may be more natural to place together. In Chapter III, "English Poetry from Milton to William Blake," two quite different authors are used to outline this part of literature, and while the possible links between them are not made explicit, they may be in the reader's understanding. Thus Milton may be considered the direct forerunner of Blake, on the basis of the period designation. This is especially striking as the chapter does not end with Blake, but instead with treatment of Robert Burns, George Crabbe and Thomas Chatterton. Among these Blake is set out as the greatest poet, and the link between him and Milton may thus not be one of direct heritage, but rather a heritage of literary position.

The authors mentioned in the chapter title often get a larger focus from the reader than they are given by the historian by means of treatment and page numbers. Authors thus singled out become the focal point for the chapter, and the standard other authors are measured against, perhaps to a larger degree than what is called for by their general coverage or the historian's evaluation. In the histories I look at, though, there are hardly any occasions when the authors mentioned in the chapter titles do not represent a shift in the course of literature in some way or another. The use of authors' names as chapter titles, and in Evans thus also as period boundaries, not only raises the importance of these authors in the reader's mind, but also says something about how and where the historian sees changes in literature. Choosing these exact authors as the limit of a period implies that an era ends or begins with them; that they are responsible for major changes in literature:

> With all these earlier developments to the novel, it is left to the eighteenth century to consolidate fiction as a form of literature, and from that time onwards there has been no cessation in novel-writing. A beginning is made with an enthralling and mysterious figure, Daniel Defoe. (Evans 129)

This is an example from the history of the novel, where the chapter ends with Defoe. The pages on him function as an introduction to the true development of the novel in the following chapter: "Defoe had no contemporary, no immediate successor, and the next

development in the novel, and possibly the most important in its whole history in England, comes by accident" (Evans 132). I will return to structural metaphors of change and direction in the literary histories later. These are not very striking in Evans but, as the above quotation shows, he has also a sense of direction in literature.

In Saintsbury the authors used in the chapter titles are often the content of the chapter, although Saintsbury also sometimes goes against the reader's expectations. An example is Chapter IV in Book V, "Spenser and his Contemporaries." Here the reader will expect an initial presentation of Spenser and his works, before the historian enters into a discussion of other, and lesser, authors. Instead "The Leicester House circle," which Spenser was a part of, is presented first, followed by a discussion of Sidney, who was, and still is in Saintsbury, considered to be the centre of this group, although his "genius was indeed inferior to Spenser's by a long way" (260). The presentation of Spenser follows a few pages later (264), although this is what the reader will be looking for in the chapter. Again we can see that Saintsbury does not challenge the traditional presentations and classifications, although he seems to disagree with the reasons behind these, i.e. the large focus on the "gossip and personal side of literary history" (260) at the cost of a focus on literary quality. Saintsbury's ideal of literary quality is challenged by the consideration of tradition within literary history, a problem which is not much discussed, but reflected in utterances like this. Sometimes these considerations of quality and tradition coincide, though. About Chaucer, Saintsbury writes:

> Chaucer is not the earliest of these; he is not, as is sometimes still openly said, and perhaps much more frequently thought, the only one worthy of attention. But he is by so much the greatest figure, that he deserves to give, as he has always given, name to the period. (115)

Compared to Saintsbury and Arnold, it is more likely to find calendric terms in Evans. He employs centuries to a much larger degree than the others when placing works in time or discussing changes in literature. Using dates without tying them to events either in literature or in socio-political history is considered one of the more neutral manners of handling time (Besserman 12). In addition it does not require much previous knowledge from the reader on literary or socio-political history. On the other hand, calendric terms are not more natural as divisions than other strategies of periodization. In addition, also calendric period terms are laden with characteristics, Wellek claim that some centuries, like the eighteenth, "have

assumed an almost symbolic meaning" ("Periodization" 482). This meaning may be still less apparent than when the period term comes from the area of art or socio-political events.

As mentioned earlier, Arnold's eighteenth century is limited strictly to that century. He uses dates in his discussion to a much greater extent than the other two; in the table of contents all chapters have dates as subtitles. Many of them do not follow centuries or half-centuries, but rather events on the socio-political scene. Atle Kittang claims that if literature is seen as only one of many expressions of a nation's development, periodization tied to external factors like a sovereign's rule or a nation's wars is uncomplicated (60). I claim that it is not. Though events in the socio-political history may influence the literature of the time, changes in literature seldom happens overnight, and it is hard to tie them directly to socio-political events. Bate claims that there is a "false assumption that literature moves strictly in tandem with events" (x).

An exception is the closing of the theatres in 1642 and their re-opening in 1660, where literary and socio-political events are closely connected. Arnold ignores this obvious change. He does not mention drama in the period this happened, a period he has called the "Civil War Period," stretching from Charles I's ascent to the throne in 1625 to 1700, two years before Queen Anne's reign started. In Saintsbury, the Restoration is a turning point for drama (482), and it is also where he chooses to start his Book VIII, which will lead into the eighteenth century. Saintsbury argues explicitly for the socio-political basis for his periodization: "At the Restoration the country unquestionably turned to business [...] It wanted literary media that would suit these purposes [...] It had no objection to poetry as such, but insensibly its poetry took the same complexion" (564-565). Thomsen claims that periodization in literary history often "demonstrates a hope for a higher synthesis of history and literary history. A hope that it will be possible to describe connections between history, culture and literature" (136, my translation[1]).

The tendency to extend the period usually called the eighteenth century, or in Saintsbury's case other period terms denoting the same time span, has become more common throughout the twentieth century, and the terms 'the long eighteenth century' or 'the new eighteenth century' are used quite frequently. A quick look at various books discussing this period shows that the period is seldom strictly limited by exact dates, and the limits which

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[1] Original: "demonstrerer en forhåbning om en større syntese i historien og litteraturhistorien. En forhåbning om at kunne beskrive sammenhænge mellem historie, kultur og litteratur."

exist show a variation in the span of this period.[2] The most conventional limit is as described here: “the period in British history denominated ‘the long eighteenth century,’ [is] defined to stretch roughly from the Glorious Revolution of 1688 […] to the Reform Act crisis of 1830-32” (Abramson 419), but also the years 1680-1840, 1660-1830 and 1660-1815 are mentioned, as well as, in literary studies, “the novels of Daniel Defoe early in the century to those of Jane Austen at the end of what we call ‘the long eighteenth century’” (Scheuerman 155).

Historians discussing general history and literary historians alike base the new periodization in socio-political events. This is an “enduring conventionality,” claim Tom Mason and Philip Smallwood (203). They see educational use of literary history as a reason for an expansion into a ‘long eighteenth century,’ allowing eighteenth century studies to include literature of greater heterogeneity than earlier (192). This is a quite limited explanation of the period designation. Felicity Nussbaum and Laura Brown point to stagnation in eighteenth century studies as well as canon criticism as the reason for the change (14). I think there are a number of reasons for this expansion, not only pedagogical. Also, the idea of a period stretching out of the calendric eighteenth century is not new. Saintsbury may be said to present a ‘longer’ century, if not the ‘long’ discussed in the twentieth century, and he has not landed on the date 1660 depending on aspects linked to literature alone. It is his “Age of Dryden” which begins here, and he could just as well have chosen Dryden’s date of birth, 1631, or 1670, when the same man was made Poet Laureate, as the start of the period. The end of Saintsbury’s eighteenth century, though, is not linked to socio-political events, but to the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798, cutting the century short.

As mentioned earlier, the grounds for periodization are ideologically based, for instance in poetic and programmatic statements from authors and critics of the time. The border between the eighteenth century and Romanticism is a good example. Some historians, including Saintsbury, use Wordsworth and Coleridge’s programmatic declaration not only as the starting point of Romanticism, but also as the basic characterization of it (see for instance Alexander 219-220). But I do not believe it is as clear-cut as this. Those adhering to political or historical theories will probably find links between changes in society and literature, while historians with a more aesthetical oriented literary view will construct periods on the basis of

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[2] ”Long eighteenth century.” *COPAC*. 2011. 15 Feb. 2011; 11 Mar. 2011. <http://copac.ac.uk/search?&ti=%22long+eighteenth+century%22&sort-order=rank>.

literary internal aspects. “There is a distinction between that which is historical and past and that which is historical and still somehow present,” writes Wellek, placing the true literary historian among those with the second approach (“Periods” 93).

Perkins does not take into account the influence socio-political history has on literary historiography, and that many epoch breaks or shifts in period is set to a year not remarkable in literature, but prominent in a nation’s socio-political history. This is a missing distinction in his discussion. When there is little connection between the events forming the period and the literature of the time, and few to none questions this connection, periods become truths of the past, instead of structuring devices for the literary historian.

Choosing a socio-political period term over a literary term highlights different aspects of the period. While Arnold uses “Civil War Period” to describe most of the seventeenth century, Saintsbury uses the terms “Caroline Literature” and “The Age of Dryden” for the same time span. The first of these terms refers to Charles I’s reign, and is thus a socio-political term. The addition of “Literature” draws the reader’s attention to the literature instead of the political situation, but political implications are still present. The use of the monarch’s name may for instance suggest a focus on royalist literature in a politically unstable period. “The Age of Dryden” and the overarching “Augustan Ages” are, as already mentioned, terms with basis in literary life. Arnold’s “Civil War Period,” on the other hand, will necessarily attract the reader’s attention to the political situation at the time, rather than the state of literature. Arnold is throughout more concerned with socio-political history; he opens both this and other chapters with a “Historical Sketch” or an overview of the changes in society.

As mentioned, Evans seems to avoid the mixture of socio-political and literary events in his periodization, and keeps as a main rule to authors and centuries. This is probably done with his readers in mind. For a reader not familiar with literary history it is nearly impossible to determine what area the period terms come from, and what they imply. Although is often left unexplained by the historian, the characterization is still linked to the term, especially if it has been used as a period term for some time, and thus is a part of the tradition of literary history.

This is another reason why Kittang’s claim that periods decided by socio-political events are unproblematic should not stand unchallenged. Periodization and other tactics for structuring history may well become tradition in literary history. Perkins claims that when a classification, like a period, has reached the status of tradition, it is tested and modified over and over again. A literary historian must always interact and comment on tradition, either by

following it blindly or diverting from it (Perkins "Literary Theory" 113). But I believe that tradition is more often adhered to than abandoned. This is because a diversion from tradition must be supported by a new interpretation, a new classification. Saintsbury does not want to challenge the traditional periods: "the entire literary age which is still, and justly, called Elizabethan by those who are not studious for innovation for innovations sake," he argues when summing up this period (467), and thus criticize historians he deems to be unnecessarily critical to traditional periodization. Contrary to Perkin's claim that few literary histories reflect upon their own classification ("Literary History" 84), Saintsbury here shows that he is aware of the act of periodizing, and takes a stand in the debate concerning how to divide literature.

Wellek and Warren claim that older literary histories use calendric periods or the reigns of monarchs to a greater extent than more recent histories (263). Arnold is an example of this. Wellek and Warren also points out that even in more recent histories periodic terms like "Elizabethan" and "Victorian" are kept, like in Evans, although the years of the literary periods do not correspond to the years of the monarchs' reign. The terms "have assumed new meaning inside a scheme of intellectual history. We keep them because we feel that the two queens seem to symbolize the character of their times," Wellek writes ("Periods" 76-77).

Although it is a convention, the "Victorian period" in Saintsbury is noticeable, as the period is not yet over when the history is published. This is linked to the focus on history in the nineteenth century, on making history scientific and of categorizing also the present in this respect. The periodization also reflects earlier periods like the Elizabethan and Jacobean, which where heydays of drama and poetry, according to Saintsbury. He presents the Victorian period as a whole in his final book, but the poetry is treated in two separate chapters, which makes it less of a unity. There are both practical and literary considerations behind this division. "There can be little hesitation in dating a change in the attitude towards poetry from about the middle of the nineteenth century," Saintsbury states (774).

Another interesting term is Evans' "Georgian poets." By inference drawn from earlier period names, one could think this is a periodic term like 'Elizabethan,' 'Victorian' or 'Jacobean.' But the term is one more of classifying than periodizing, it does not denote all poets publishing during the reign of George V, but only "a group of lyrical poets of the twentieth century," who "have been very sharply, perhaps unjustly, attacked" (Evans 71). This was a term used by the poets in question themselves, expressing a new direction in literature. Evans' readers are aware of this, but in the fourth edition he makes explicit that they are called Georgian "because their verse was presented in Sir Edward Marsh's *Georgian*

Anthologies" (117). This period is not presented further in Evans, but by singling out a particular group of authors, the unity of a period is questioned. This also happens when the work of an author does not correspond with the characteristic traits of a period.

When using a periodic term, both the reader and the historian have an understanding of all literature of the time as part of this period. But not all literature corresponds to the general characteristics of the period, and it may be difficult for the historian to decide where and how to treat authors who oppose these. An example is the three histories' treatment of the aforementioned William Blake (1757-1827) and George Crabbe (1754-1832). Their lifetimes cover the end of the eighteenth century and the transition to a new period: the Romantic (Evans 46, Saintsbury 653) or Modern (Arnold 211).

While Arnold does not mention Blake at all, Saintsbury and Evans devote both space and a quite exulted language to the poet: "William Blake's work stands alone in our literature," claims Evans (42), while Saintsbury writes that "in both vocations, and perhaps especially in that of the poet, he gives flashes, and sometimes more than flashes, of genius, which excel anything to be found in the work of his time" (592). Both descriptions of Blake are similar to how Romantic poets most often are depicted; Saintsbury even writes that "Blake was an extreme, indeed extravagant, Romantic" (592). Still he is treated on the pages before Romanticism in both histories, and set apart as a special author rather than included in the period where his work would correspond better with the period characteristics. This suggests that the Romantic period is the dominant or emerging literary period, with forerunners in the preceding years. There are also hints as to canon formation; Blake is considered special in a period when poetry was not in a transitional state, but might not be considered great or important in the Romantic period proper. The distinction between great and important is one I will return to in Chapter 4.

Crabbe is treated in the same period as Blake in Evans and Saintsbury, but he is not set out as an innovator: "The forms of poetry were changing at the close of the eighteenth century, but this did not deter George Crabbe from returning to the couplet as Pope and Johnson had used it" (Evans 44), a claim which may be questioned by the literary scholar. In Saintsbury he is, together with Blake, one of the "greater four" poets of the late eighteenth century (588), but not one to enjoy such praise, and criticism, as Blake: "During his last years Crabbe was treated which much honour and no jealousy by the younger and greater poets of the Romantic schools, always had a considerable public, and enjoyed his reputation to the full" (590). In Arnold, Crabbe gets only a few lines, in a group of poets which are mentioned "in the order of their deaths" (223). Thus Crabbe turns up, quite unexpectedly, in Arnold's

"Modern Times," more due to the publication date of his "most finished and powerful work" (Arnold 226) than the period he would belong to based on period characteristics instead of calendric considerations.

While the three historians in connection with Blake and Crabbe treat them where they are chronologically in literature, this is not always the case. Saintsbury chooses for instance to treat John Selden (1584-1654) on basis of his work rather than his lifetime: "John Selden outlived the reign of James; but his characteristics are rather Jacobean than Caroline" (380). Wellek's early definition of a literary period was "a time when a system of norms, discoverable from literature itself, is 'dominant,' and in which 'every individual work of art can be understood as an approximation to one of these systems'" (in Parker 234). This is a simplistic definition, as Wellek himself acknowledged. There may well be authors writing at a specific time who does not fit into the period characteristic. If left out of the literary history, it is difficult to know whether the reason is that they do not fit the period they should belong to, or if there are other motivations for them being ignored. I think there is a connection between which authors are included in the canon, and their correlation with the dominating or emerging literary period. Wellek states that the

> decision about the dominance of specific norms at a specific time will be an act of criticism, as only critical judgment can single out the important works of art and their leading traits.
>
> The critic will have to decide which works present a break with tradition, are genuinely innovating, and which revive older stages of the literary development, present throwbacks, and which simply continue the accepted tradition. Distinctions between epigones, dominant figures, and path-breaking avant-gardists will have to be made. ("Periodization" 485)

Authors and literary works will be treated differently according to their position as traditional or innovative. I will claim that in the histories I discuss, though most obviously in Saintsbury, it is authors who represent the last group who are most often distinguished as especially worthy of notice. Also those which represent a specific period, and thus a developmental stage, especially well will be emphasized. This is an aspect of literary history I will return to in Chapter 4.

Another aspect of periodization is how the historian treats his own time. Saintsbury places himself in the Victorian time, as mentioned, though with a certain distance consistent

with a scientific ideal. Neither does he comment on authors still living: “Many of the novelists born in the second quarter of the century […] are still alive and therefore not to be mentioned here” (756). He only allows himself to include an author who has “passed away and abides our censure” (756), thus including, and necessarily emphasizing, the works of for instance R.L. Stevenson and Lewis Carroll. Arnold does the same, and for these two historians this censorship on basis of whether the object of discussion is alive or not seems quite natural. Evans, on the other hand, includes living authors: “some of the authors who began then are still alive and their work uncompleted” (172), although he sees this as somewhat problematic: “It is always difficult to judge the poetry of one’s own age, for it arouses enthusiasm or antipathy more easily than the poetry of the past” (70).

Saintsbury, in his refusal to include living authors, avoids to some degree the question of whether his own as an important or great period in literary history. The focus on deceased authors is also an indication towards the idea of a closed history. Evans on the other hand leaves the future of literature quite open, both in his inclusion of living authors, and in comments on these: “One has to take leave of the English novel in a work which is incomprehensible, and it may be that in the future some writers will come back to simpler methods” (182). Saintsbury refuses to cast a forward glance as he reaches his own time: “we need attempt no Pisgah-sight[3] forward” (796).

In a more recent literary history, one can see some of the same tendencies. The *Oxford English Literary History* is in thirteen volumes, each discussing a dated period, although some of the volumes overlap to some extent. Randall Stevenson has written about the last forty years of the twentieth century. He describes the problem of writing about period close to one’s own time: “Still unsifted by the amnesia of centuries, authors and their works compete for attention in unusual numbers” (9). Stevenson’s volume, and the literary history, ends in 2000, and authors are discussed regardless of whether they are alive or not. But unlike the earlier literary histories, Stevenson does not discuss individual authors to a great extent. In addition, the description of recent literature is done with a certain distance; especially the use of the past tense is quite striking: “Perhaps some of the most interesting

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[3] Mount Pisgah is in the Bible the mountain from which Moses sees the Holy Land (see Deuteronomy 34:1). The use of the term implies as divers, but significant, aspects as divine insight, distance in space and time, and a position at the end of life or from a physical height (Landow). This may of course be understood metaphorically as the end of literary history, at the height of literature itself.

years, for writing around these parts, were still to come" (522). He has thus the forward glance of Evans, but writes as if the period he treats is closed.

Michel de Certeau claims that creating periods represents the closure of the past (in Dvergsdal, 13). This is quite interesting, as many historiographers, including de Certeau, criticize historians for trying too hard to make the past relevant for the present (in Dvergsdal, 13). The author David Lodge points to the same result of periodization: "*Period* implies an end," he writes (547). Evans uses the same words when discussing the previous century: "As the nineteenth century closed, so romanticism closed with it" (70). Saintsbury's final period ends at the same time, but the Victorian age is not closed, as the monarch is still alive when the history is published. Still the periodization in itself implies an end or a closing of history. It also illustrates the conscious relationship with the past so extant in the Victorian period, and the dialogue between past and present which came as a result of the increased focus on history.

As previously mentioned, period labels will necessarily give the reader expectations to the literature of the period, emphasizing similarities between works of the same period and differences to those of preceding and following. To some extent this may be convenient shorthand for the historians, as they do not need to describe the characteristics of a period in any detail. Saintsbury very seldom characterizes the periods he discusses, and then only in terms as this: "[Learning] has been already sufficiently shown to be *the* Jacobean characteristic" (378). A work which describes periods quite differently is *The Norton Anthology of English Literature.* This is not a narrative literary history, but as it is built up chronologically and divided into periods, it may be argued that it is a history of literature. Each group of texts is introduced by a quite thorough description of the period. Even the revisions in new editions are done "period-by-period" (Abrams, Greenblatt et. al. xxxvii), rather than by genre, topic or any other division. More than in the more typical literary histories, the reader of the anthology will have the period characteristics provided by the editors clear in mind when they study the texts themselves, both as the periods are so clearly characterized and because the texts succeed this characterization directly. Hillis Miller claims that there is an asymmetry between periodization and reading, not only in the *Norton Anthology*. The expectations will necessarily overshadow the reading experience. "And reading, in literary study, is where the action is," he adds (212).

Wellek and Warren claim that the ideal periodization is based in literature itself, considering literary developments: "The history of a period will consist in the tracing of the changes from one system of norms to another" (265). In this, Wellek suggests, authors' self-

understanding may be helpful, but that these are merely methods for studying periods which "may give us suggestions and hints" but should not dictate the periodization. The historian has an advantage, Wellek claims, which the contemporary author or critic lack, "the benefit of seeing the past in the light of the future" ("Periods" 78). This is what historiographer Herbert Butterfield means when he warns of 'whig' history: "it studies the past with reference to the present" (11). I will revisit Butterfield in the following chapter.

Saintsbury is also aware of the problem of self-understanding or -proclamation as a period boundary. As already mentioned, he ends his eighteenth century in 1798, the year *Lyrical Ballads* by Wordsworth and Coleridge was published. The authors were explicit as to their poems being experiments (Wordsworth i) bringing something new to poetry. By using this work as the turning point in literature, Saintsbury takes his cue directly from literature. Still, Saintsbury is the first to admit that ending the eighteenth century here is not without controversy:

> Some slight protest has lately been made against the fixing of the year 1798, and the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads* of Wordsworth and Coleridge, as the definite turning-point of English literature for its last great stage as yet. It is perfectly true that no immediate general effect was produced by the book till *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, seven years later, showed that any other great mind had been affected. But this is not in reality a damaging argument. In almost all revolutions, literary and other, the first onset is separated from the decisive charge by a greater or lesser interval. (653)

Arnold does not distinguish this year as the changing point, but agrees to there being a change in the air "from the opening of the nineteenth century": "In the main, the chief pervading movement of society may be described as one of reaction against the ideas of the eighteenth century" (211). Also Evans has a break between periods around the turn of the century in two of his four genre series, poetry and drama. This may be a hint as to there being something in the idea that periods are natural entities, or it can be explained simply by pointing to tradition in literary history. It must also be noticed that the general feeling that the end of a decade brings disruption and change is not only influential in literature, but may also be so in literary history. What is certain is that Saintsbury's 1798 and Arnold's 1800 both are valid and arguable limits to the eighteenth century, one explained on the basis of literary events, the other in numeric terms.

I claim that the limits set by the historians are acceptable limits. That is, if one adheres to the idea of periods as necessary in literary history. It is possible to imagine a history without periods, but this is not common. Like canons, periods offer overview as well as a limited material and thus insight into the ideals of the time, claims Thomsen (143). I will add: and of the historian. Periods are helpful as generalizations, and generalizations are necessary for narrative literary histories. It is exactly this sort of generalizations Popper fears when he rejects historicism as a science (98). As he does not support the view that literature goes through developmental stages corresponding to those of living organisms, he also refuses the importance of periods in history. He argues that “historicism claims that nothing is of greater moment than the emergence of a really new period” (10). Thus the period breaks become the most important points in literature, as sometimes may be seen in my histories. Whether this is positive or negative depends on the literary and historical view of the historian or historiographer. Popper discards the focus on development, and literary evolution, as a misleading or misapplied metaphor (113, 119), an area I will examine closer in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: "In statu pupillari"
Plots and structuring metaphors in literary history

> That something better ought to come and would come than the half-alliterative, half-rhymed, half-rhythmical, half-metrical jumble of Layamon was clear; that it would be something also different from, and much better than, the stiff rhymeless cadence of Ormin was clear likewise. But this was the necessary tack in one direction as that was in the other, and between them, with other minor veerings to help, they brought the ship through the troublesome middle passage of the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries safe into the open sea where Chaucer took command, and where she has sailed since, and may sail, we hope, for evermore.
> (Saintsbury 52-53)

The image of literature as a ship steered through the sea of time with more or less skilled authors at the helm is striking in many ways. Not only does Saintsbury focus on Chaucer a hundred years, and fifty pages, before he discusses Chaucer's own time, but he also sees literature as having a direction. In this period, something better lay ahead. It may also seem that literature, or at least prosody, which is the main subject in this passage, reached its high point with Chaucer and remained there.

As mentioned in the introduction, a historical understanding of literature is a preliminary for literary history; that is, the historian must perceive changes in literature, initiated either by intrinsic or extrinsic factors. To trace these changes is often the main subject of literary history. As discussed in the previous chapter, period boundaries often mark the change from one tendency in literature to another. As also discussed, periodization emphasises both the unity of a period and the breaks between them. The idea of change is thus represented through the varying period labels. But images like the one above or other linguistic tropes can offer just as valuable insights into how literary historians understand the relationship between literature and history. In this part of the thesis I will look at how metaphors are central in structuring the literary histories, and what these structuring metaphors say about the historian's view of literature and literary change. But before I enter into this aspect, I will pause at another form of structuring, namely the formal structures of literary history.

The formal and technical aspects of a literary history may, like periodization and metaphors, offer clues towards the basic structuring principles behind the literary histories. These may be revealing as to the historians' view of literature, aim and intended readership and principles behind the canon formation. They are conventions to break up the text and help the reading, and are part of the conventions distinguishing non-fictional from fictional works.

Arnold's division of his history into to parts is reflected in its subtitle: *Historical and Critical*. "The arrangement of the subject-matter according to two distinct principles – that of the order of time and that of the order of thought – is a novel one," states Arnold in his "Preface" (vi). The first part is the "Historical section," following mainly a chronological structure from the year 449 to 1850. The "Critical section" is based on genre, with one chapter on poetry and one on prose writing. Arnold writes that "English literature is now to be considered under that which is its natural and legitimate arrangement; that arrangement, namely, of which the principle is, not sequence in time, but affinity in subject" (239). One can in Arnold's rejection of chronology as a natural arrangement of literature see a devaluation of the historical part. The arrangement according to genre is more "natural and legitimate," Arnold claims, and it is also through comparing works within the same genre that one can measure the quality of a literary work. This puts emphasis on the autonomy of literature in canon formation, versus the larger focus on literature tied to historical changes in the two other literary histories.

In this section, Arnold uses examples from various periods of the literature to illustrate his division of literature into genres, based mainly on formal traits. Despite the title "Critical section" this part of the literary history functions rather as a textbook in genre and metre than a review of literature. Arnold is aware of this: "With the critical process, for which the proposed classification is to serve as the foundation, we shall, in the present work, be able to make but scanty progress" (239). The examination of the different genres is organized hierarchically, from the rough division into prose and poetry to the individual classes of narrative poetry, which are listed by number and described accordingly (Arnold 267). The genre classifications are not discussed, but merely stated.

The table of contents in Arnold lists what will be discussed in each chapter, but these subjects are only to a certain degree set off in the text itself. We find a similar table of contents in Saintsbury. His literary history is divided into eleven books, each one again divided into chapters. The subjects discussed are presented in the table of contents, and appear again in the running text as italics indented in the outer margins of each page. For

instance we find these subheadings, which we I will call them for the lack of a more precise term, in the first chapter on Victorian literature, “Tennyson and Browning”:

> Tennyson: his early work and its character – The volumes of 1842 – His later life and works – *The Princess* – *In Memoriam* – *Maud* – The *Idylls of the King*, etc. – Robert Browning – Periods of his work – His favourite method – His real poetical appeal – Edward FitzGerald – Elizabeth Barrett Browning (Saintsbury xviii).

The subheadings are only comprehensible in the context of the surrounding text, and the text is unbroken and undisturbed by them. They function more as aids for navigating for the reader than as a disposition for the writer, and do not follow other formal conventions such as the paragraph or the like; as an example we can see that a single paragraph from the discussion of Tennyson contains the two subheadings “His later life and works” and “*The Princess*”, not marking the one subordinate to the other. Together with the final index the subheadings give the sense of a referential work, while the text itself invites to an uninterrupted reading differing widely from the typical reading of a reference work. These different impulses towards reading strategy reflect the varying intended readership.

Like in Arnold, the presentation of individual authors and works in the table of contents will necessarily give emphasis to some authors and works over others. It is interesting to compare which authors are mentioned in chapter titles or the table of contents in the three literary histories in connection to which authors and works are to be considered part of the canon the histories present. The chapters presenting Anglo-Saxon literature in the three literatures may serve as examples. For instance is Cynewulf mentioned in one of Saintsbury’s chapter headings, he is included in Evans’ treatment of religious poetry (13), while not mentioned at all in Arnold. I will return to the implications this aspect of the formal structure may have on the canon formation in Chapter 4.

Returning to the table of contents, we see that every book in Saintsbury, except the last, ends with an “Interchapter.” Saintsbury states that the

> substitution of bird’s-eye views and sweeping generalizations has been very sedulously avoided; but it is hoped that the system of Interchapters will provide a sufficient chain of historical summary as to general points, such as, for instance, the nature and progress of English prosody and the periods of prose style. (v)

The interchapters may well form a literary history of itself, providing the general and, to use Saintsbury's own words, "bird's-eye view" of literature. As they are employed in this literary history, the interchapters both break up and explain the narrative. They are both complementary and repetitive, sometimes adding new information, other places repeating what has already been stated. There are also forward glances in these chapters, as elsewhere in the history, illustrating that the historian looks at literature from a place in the future. But Saintsbury does not limit his treatment of "the nature and progress" of literature to the interchapters, one can find own chapters on the subject, such as Chapter I in Book II, "The Transition."

The focus on "progress" already in the Preface is striking, and an aspect I will return to later in this chapter. But there are discrepancies in Saintsbury's structure. His final book does not end with an interchapter, easily explained by the linguistic fact that it cannot be "inter-" as it is not between anything. Instead the history ends with a "Conclusion," bringing the history of literature to a close, or at least to a decision as to the status of literature at the time of writing. However, Saintsbury undertakes this task with caution: "it would be a proof rather of rashness than of prescience to undertake to say how the firm perspective of the past will represent it to the future" (795). Despite this, there is a feeling of conclusion or having reached a peak, and perhaps started the descent, in his description of the state of poetry and prose at the end of the nineteenth century:

> New singers are more and more echoes – sometimes direct, sometimes blended. We have our Crashaw and our Akenside; we have even resurrections of voices so recent, and themselves so little perfected, as those of the Spasmodics. But there is no sign yet of a Tennyson or a Browning, even of a Morris or a Rossetti. (795)

Evans' literary history does not have any of the previous mentioned formal structural conventions. Following the standard of the Pelican books, Evans is quite simple in its structure. It is divided into 13 chapters in the first edition. In the 4th edition two extra chapters are inserted, one on Shakespeare alone, and the mentioned final chapter on "Recent English Literature" written by Bernard Bergonzi. There are no subchapters or -headings, and also no index, contrary to Arnold and Saintsbury. The lack thereof invites, like the text in Saintsbury, to a continuous reading rather than using the history as a reference work.

While Saintsbury and the first part of Arnold are highly chronological, Evans is structured partly on basis of chronology and partly on genre classification, as discussed in the

previous chapter. The first chapter explores literature "Before the Conquest," including all genres. The four next chapters discuss poetry to the present, before we find three chapters on drama, and three on the novel, all starting with the earliest and ending just short of Evans' own time. The last two chapters are devoted to other prose than the novel and prose drama, "to record the work […] of such as have added to the possibilities of English prose as a medium of expression" (Evans 183). Even in a statement as simple as this, we can see some of the basic preconceptions structuring the narrative in the history on the level of plot and metaphors, and intimations towards strategies for canon formation.

Murray Knowles and Rosamund Moon define metaphor as "the use of language to refer to something other than what is originally applied to, or what it 'literally' means, in order to suggest some resemblance or make a connection between the two things" (3). Other theorists talk of 'structural metaphors.' George Lakoff and Mark Johnson see these as instances in human understanding where one concept is understood in terms of another (14). This resembles the simple definition of metaphor above, but for Lakoff and Johnson a metaphor is more than a linguistic trope: "metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature" (3). This definition of structural or structuring metaphor differs somewhat from how I will use the term. I will use the term 'structuring metaphors' to distinguish some of the tropes I find to be of importance in structuring the literary history from other tropes which function as mere illustrations of a point. While illustrative metaphors are short term and function within a limited area of the text, structuring metaphors are long term and apply to the texts as a whole.

Although my definition is somewhat more restricted than Lakoff and Johnson's, the two are linked. The metaphor in the beginning of this part may be both an illustrating metaphor and a structuring one. Literature is compared to a ship and authors to captains of it, images I will call illustrative. But the implied directionality in the same metaphoric image is an indication of both a historical understanding of literature, and the structure of the literary history which is to follow it.

Just as when discussing periods, I experience the difficulty of finding neutral terms to discuss change in literature. The historians use words such as 'development' and 'progress,' which are quite laden terms. Even the word 'change' denotes a basic belief in an unstable literature, a belief which is primary in literary history, but should be questioned by theorists and historiographers, at least as an experiment of alternative ideas. Change is also often unconsciously tied to the other terms, as change will more often than not denote an

alternation into something better. As I cannot find any truly neutral terms in this respect, I will use the same terms as the historians do, and try to stay aware of the implications these may hold, and the metaphorical concepts they represent.

Returning to the quotation above, we can see that it expresses a variety of interesting aspects of structuring metaphors in literary history. As already mentioned, the basic image is that of literature being a ship steered by authors, while the sea is representing time. What is especially striking in connection with the time aspect is the prepositional phrase "through the troublesome middle passage of the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries" (Saintsbury 52-53). These 150 years are seen merely as a transport stage, where nothing essential happens. As discussed in the previous chapter, periods are often defined through metaphorical titles, and they move from one to another in a metaphor of movement or conflict, as shall be noticed in the following. The word "middle" in the quotation is significant. There is a "middle passage" between two types of literature, two languages, and two phases in literary history.

The chapter the quotation is taken from is called "First Middle English Period," referring to the history of language. Although the history of language is not the main concern of literary history, many literary histories are at least greatly informed by it. One of the reasons for this is the troublesome answer to the basic question of what constitutes English literature. Bate points to there being two broad definitions of English literature: either literature in the English language excepting the Anglo-Saxon, or literature which bears upon England in some sense or other (ix). These are more recent definitions; neither of the historians I discuss has such broad definitions of English literature. But it is interesting to see that the understanding that Anglo-Saxon language is at the edge of English is represented both in these early literary histories and one as recently as in *The Oxford English Literary History*. In Arnold literature before 1350, i.e. before Chaucer, is presented before Chapter I, in a "Preliminary Chapter" including the Anglo-Saxon and Norman periods. The literature from this time is not considered English literature as such, but is necessary to discuss:

> Yet, since the English tongue is in its essential elements derived from the Anglo-Saxon, and since the existence of an Anglo-Saxon literature probably stimulated our earliest English writers to persist in the use of the vernacular, when interest, fashion, and the torrent of literary example would have led them to adopt the Norman French, it seems desirable to commence with a brief sketch of that literature. (Arnold 1-2)

Arnold includes a quite lengthy discussion of both Anglo-Saxon and French language and literature in this "preliminary chapter." Saintsbury's first book is also called "The Preliminaries of English Literature." He includes Anglo-Saxon literature and focuses on Anglo-Saxon language. The next book is "The Making of English Literature," where the change from Anglo-Saxon language and literature to that of English is prominent. These titles suggest that literature is created from something already existing, but which is perhaps not literature, and certainly not English. Evans on the other hand includes Anglo-Saxon literature in that of English: "English literature is often described as beginning with Chaucer. This would give England six centuries of literature. Actually there were more than six centuries of literature before Chaucer was born" (Evans 9). Although Evans does not see an opposition between Anglo-Saxon and English literature, he discusses most pre-Chaucerian literature in a separate chapter.

In the previous chapter, the problem of periodization in literary history was discussed. The aspect of period is evident also in the metaphors employed in the literary histories. The "middle passage" in the ship metaphor and the socio-political period named 'the Middle Ages' in European history are closely connected. The Middle or High Middle Ages in Britain are often described as lasting from the Norman Conquest to the fifteenth century (Nichols), so the periods overlap. The use of 'middle' in the period term also reflects what Saintsbury claims about this time span, that it is a period between great events in history, and in literature. The first use of 'Middle Ages' was in the fifteenth century, when the period term was used derogatorily to describe a period when antique learning was ignored between its origin and its return (*Encyclopædia Britannica*[1]). This is implied in Saintsbury's use as well; the period is a stage between Anglo-Saxon language and literature and the emergent English language and literature.

As discussed in connection with periodization, periods may be considered blocks of time where literature is seen as a unified whole. It can be considered a paradox that literary history, which traces changes, is so concerned with these implicitly stable blocks of time. Saintsbury's "middle passage," the literary historians' discussion of "Middle English" or the more general Middle Ages are different, as they designate not so much a period with a distinct type of literature, or even a stable language, as a period with hardly any distinctions. In socio-political history it is often pointed to this period being quite eventful and unstable in

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[1] "Middle Ages." *Encyclopædia Britannica.* 2011. 28 Mar. 2011. <http://www.britannica.com>.

Britain (*Encyclopædia Britannica*[2]), and in the history of language and literature there were also massive shifts (Crystal 30). There is thus a discord between socio-political, linguistic and literary facts and the period term denoting merely an intermediate time span. Saintsbury's use of the adjective "troublesome" is therefore quite striking in this context. It seems to indicate an understanding of the time discussed as something different than a mere stable period, as is also reflected in the more positive book title "The Making of English Literature." The period is a time of change rather than of stability, represented both by the period term and by the metaphor used to describe the literature of the time.

In the first part of his history, Saintsbury focuses to a great extent on the changes or developments in prosody, more than on other aspects of literature. The mentioned 'making of English literature' happens to a large degree in prosody and its various stages, and this is to some extent why Chaucer is so important in Saintsbury's view:

> If Chaucer had not appeared when he did, the language might have got into ways too slovenly for it to acquire a real *Ars poetica* at all, might have succumbed to the rigid syllabic prosody of French (there was some danger of this for a long time to come), or have gone off "rim-ram-ruffing" into the wilderness. (Saintsbury 154).

Saintsbury considers Chaucer to be one of "the four masters" (110, 401). What they are the masters of, is unclear, but it is likely that they are representatives, and advocates, for stages in development of prosody. The four masters are, in addition to Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton, and it is with Milton the discussion of prosody in Saintsbury concludes:

> The dramatic current mixing with that of general poetry produced two things which were practically new – the use of blank verse for non-dramatic purposes in original poetry, and the altered form of the couplet, which between them, gradually ousting in great part lyrics and stanza, were to dominate English verse for nearly a century and a half. (Saintsbury 391-392)

After Milton "English prosody up to the present has gone no further," Saintsbury claims (402).

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[2] "United Kingdom." *Encyclopædia Britannica.* 2011. 28 Mar. 2011. <http://www.britannica.com>.

Prosody is in this paragraph seen as active; one form is "ousting" other verse forms and "dominates" the writing of poetry. The underlying metaphor is that of war, while inanimate objects are brought to life. Personification of this sort may be hard to recognize, as it is such a common metaphor, and so integrated in the reader's comprehension: "human *thought processes* are largely metaphorical," claim Lakoff and Johnson (6). The metaphorical trope of personification is evident in literary history, where literary forms seem to meet, merge, grow and diminish like active participants in literary change. Hayden White claims that it is necessary for the historian to construct a plot with heroes and villains in order to follow the conventional form of history, and thus make it recognizable for the reader ("Tropics" 44). In the first of the two quotations above, it is the "rigid syllabic prosody of French" and the alliteration of earlier English literature which is seen as the threat to a development of English prosody, while in the second the blank verse and the new couplet are the victorious heroes of English poetry.

Perkins, basing his discussion on White and Paul Ricoeur, claims there are three phases to writing narrative history. First one must make a chronicle of past events, then choose a hero and the points in the past which will constitute the story. The third phase is to emplot the story, i.e. to base it in an archetypical structure the reader can recognize as a familiar plot, a familiar course of events (42). This is what White calls a 'deep structure,' highlighting the connection between plot and structure in a work of history. White bases his possible plot structures in Northrop Frye's archetypes ("Metahistory" x), while Perkins' inventory of possible plot structures is simpler. He distinguishes between three main plot structures: rise, decline and the combination rise and decline (39), which all denotes change. These are examples of "orientational metaphors" according to Lakoff and Johnson (14), which has an implied value dimension. A common inference of orientational metaphors is that "good is up" (Lakoff and Johnson 18). Other plot theories, like R. S. Crane's, are also preoccupied with change in the hero's situation (Crane 122).

Which type of plot the literary history has, is decided by the historian and his assigning of value to the events and actors he treats, White claims ("Tropics" 106).

> *How* a given historical situation is to be configured depends on the historian's subtlety in matching up a specific plot structure with the set of historical events that he wishes to endow with a meaning of a particular kind. This is essentially a literary, that is to say fiction-making, operation. (White "Tropics" 85)

Both in reality and in a chronicle where events of the past are simply listed in the order in which they occurred, all actors and events are value-neutral, White argues ("Tropics" 90). But the mere act of selecting which events and actors to include in the chronicle is also an act of criticism, I claim, and these are therefore not neutral as soon as they are placed within the scaffolding of a story, even one as simple and seemingly transparent as a chronicle.

What constitutes events and actors in literary history may not be as evident as in socio-political history, but an example is the one we have already looked at, where various instances of prosody are in conflict. Their relationship as heroes, villains, starting points or finales is not given by their nature, but by the act of emplotment: "By the very constitution of a set of events in such a way as to make a comprehensible story out of them, the historian charges those events with the symbolic significance of a comprehensible plot structure" (White "Tropics" 92).

Returning to Saintsbury, one can see in the treatment of prosody a plot of rise: "We have traced the gradual growth of prosody," Saintsbury states (391). In addition to other metaphors, which I will return to presently, the mentioned war metaphor is instrumental in this plot structure: "The actual instrument were two, Latin and French; and their working was directed to three different points of attack" (40). The metaphor is repeated throughout the history, for instance are images belonging to the source domain used in connection with a perceived rise in poetical quality: "*Into a bitter fashion of forsaking* is perhaps better than any single line in southern English since Chaucer; and when we meet with such single spies we know that they will come in battalions soon," Saintsbury writes about Thomas Wyatt (247). In a final discussion of the aim and scope of literary history, Saintsbury identifies the subjects of his treatment as "the written word that conquers Time" (797), making literature in itself the final victor of the narrative.

Butterfield, in his influential book *The Whig Interpretation of History,* first published in 1931, defines whig history thus: "It is part and parcel of the whig interpretation of history that it studies the past with reference to the present" (11), meaning that whig history is written with the present as the summit of where history is headed. He also claims that "there is a tendency for all history to veer into whig history" (6). Literary historians like Saintsbury cannot then escape this label, especially as there are obvious expressions of progress and development in his history. These are closely linked to emplotment, according to Butterfield:

> Through this system of immediate reference to the present day, historical personages can easily and irresistibly be classed into the men who furthered progress and the men

> who tried to hinder it; so that a handy rule of thumb exists by which the historian can select and reject, and make his points of emphasis […] Working upon the same system the whig historian can draw lines through certain events […]; and if he is not careful he begins to forget that this line is merely a mental trick of his; he comes to imagine that it represents something like a line of causation. (11-12)

Butterfield criticises whig history, claiming that instead of following possibly imaginary lines in history, the historian should be "making the past our present and attempting to see life with the eyes of another century than our own" (16). This would give a larger focus on details, and may be connected to the decreasing trust in history as a science in the early twentieth century, as well as a focus on close reading in other arts departments.

The following quotation from Saintsbury illustrates many of the aspects discussed above:

> It is true that the formative period of prosody had not yet ceased, and that the genius of the four masters, Chaucer himself, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton (to whom it is perhaps but just to add Surrey and Marlowe), had to be applied before all the resources of English in this respect was at the command of whosoever chose – and chooses – to use them. It is true that at the actual time a revolt, and a rather formidable one, was being made by alliterative rhythm against metre. This went some way, and if Langland had had variety, flexibility, range, equal to his intensity – especially if he had had anything like Chaucer's command of phrase – it might have gone farther. But the truth is that alliteration, with its tyrannous restriction to the word which must be, not the word which ought to be, chosen, is the deadly foe of phrase itself, and consequently of style, and could not have triumphed. (110)

We see here an opposition between the personified alliteration and metre, where metre is the victorious part. Langland may be considered a helper of the loosing party, or a hindrance for progress, to return to Butterfield's terms. Saintsbury, writing from the perspective of his present, interprets the varying prosody as an ongoing line, casting forward glances to a time not yet this discussed at this point in the literary history.

Not all metaphors in Saintsbury are unambiguously of movement in a single direction. In a footnote debating whether Chaucer wrote all the works which have traditionally been ascribed to him, Saintsbury writes that

> *The Flower and the Leaf* is put by the Separatists about 1440, in the dead waste and middle of the night of English poetry; the *Court of Love* at about 1500, when that night saw only the broken dreams of Hawes and the cockcrow of Skelton, or about 1530, still before dawn. (120)

The metaphor of night and dawn may be considered representing rise, but is circular in its extended form. It does not match for instance Perkins' plot types, and shows that such a limiting of possible plot structures is reductive and simplistic. It is a plot structure and a metaphor which hints towards a literary view different from the traditional one of continuing growth or development, and it may therefore be questioned whether Saintsbury and other literary historians are so closely tied to whig historicism as usually argued. On the other hand, Saintsbury returns in several places to an ebb and flow metaphor, where the emphasis is on some of the same shifts in literature as in the night and dawn image. But here he stresses the focus on the new or emerging literature:

> What we have to look to is the character of the plays of younger men, the theories advanced by younger critics, the mounting, in short, not the retreating, tide. It is because in literature ebb and flood always in this way overlap, instead of keeping apart with a clear interval between, that so many mistakes are made. (483)

At the same time as this specification points to one of the major problems of periodization, i.e. the problem of overlapping and the lack of clear breaks between periods, it returns the focus of the literary history to that of the major lines of change: ”Flux rules all, and we can only note with any precision the greater turns of the tide” (Saintsbury 295). It also points to a single line of movement, disallowing variety within the period, as discussed in the previous chapter.

If we return to Saintsbury's ship metaphor, the concept of literary change is explained through the concept of journey. Journey metaphors are quite common, and are often used in the conceptual metaphor “life is a journey” (Knowles and Moon 42). The journey metaphor thus leads into an understanding of literature as having a life, an understanding supported by the historians' use of various metaphors where the source domain is biological life and biological development. In this respect there are especially two major metaphors which are recurring: life cycle and evolution.

Although the term 'evolution' is not used much in any of the literary histories, it is this concept that in some way or another lies behind many of the other images and terms used. "Development means something more than change or even regular and predictable change. It seems obvious that it should be used in the sense elaborated by biology," Wellek and Warren write, and mean two different ideas of evolution: "first, the process exemplified by the growth of an egg to a bird, and second, the evolution exemplified by the change from the brain of a fish to that of a man" (255). These correspond to my distinction of life cycle as one metaphor and a more general or abstract form of development, or what I will call, for lack of a better term, evolution. I will look more closely at the life cycle metaphor first.

Karl Popper states that this understanding of history

> goes back to an idea of great antiquity – the idea that the life-cycle of birth, childhood, youth, maturity, old age, and death applies not only to individual animals and plants, but also to societies, races and perhaps even to 'the whole world.' (110)

The underlying assumption, which he questions, is that history repeats itself (110). Saintsbury shares this general idea: "It is scarcely too much to say that the fifteenth century […] plays the same part in regard to English prose that the thirteenth century […] plays in regard to English verse" (218). As both a metaphor and a concept the idea of life cycle is closely linked to Perkins' rise-and-decline plot structure, although many life cycle images end mid-life, with maturity. This is for instance the case with English prosody, which the ship metaphor is an instance of. An example of a life cycle coming to an end, is Arnold's description of Norman poetry in his preliminary chapter: "the newly kindled flame of romantic sentiment and idealizing passion passed into the south of France, and gave birth to the poetry of the Troubadours," he writes, and sums up: "that of the Troubadours sprang the soonest into full maturity, as it was also the first to decline and pass away" (33).

Saintsbury mainly keeps to the British Isles in his discussion, and where Arnold devotes quite a few pages to Norman literature, Saintsbury is preoccupied, as mentioned, with Anglo-Saxon. Anglo-Saxon literature is "the literature of a childhood, the lispings of a people," Saintsbury reminds his reader (9), and has thus the link between literature and language not only as a subject, but also combines them in the metaphor he employs. Anglo-Saxon is considered "immature" as a literary language (Saintsbury 27), but towards the end of the period Saintsbury writes of its "inherent old age" (30), and that it is "if not slowly

dying, at any rate slowly passing into some other form" (29). Here it is the language which goes through stages in life, but without reaching maturity.

Education is tied to the idea of childhood and maturing. Saintsbury employs quite a few metaphors from the area of education and craftsmanship, which is closely connected to the stages of development in prosody and genres. About the Anglo-Saxons, he writes: "But their poetry, indeed their whole literature, is a rudimentary literature, a literature *in statu pupillari,* and one which has not passed any but the lower stages even of pupilship" (37). The adjective "rudimentary" is quite interesting, as it is often used in natural sciences to describe that which is undeveloped, immature or imperfect (*OED*[3]). Thus it underlines the scientific approach to and focus in the literary history. The metaphor of education is at least twofold. At the same time as it is connected to biological development of a personified literature, it expresses the view that literature is a craft: "We are still in the workshop, and hardly any master workman has yet appeared, but *opus fervet* and the master himself is at hand" (Saintsbury 114). This quotation also expresses an idea of progress towards something better. Literature has not yet reached its full potential at this stage, but will in the future.

Until now, we have seen life cycles not coming to a full circle, but rather stopping at their height. English prosody is not discussed beyond Milton, and English poetry reached its peak with Shakespeare: "he carried poetry […] to a pitch which it had never previously reached in English, and which it has never outstepped since" (Saintsbury 319). But from the Elizabethan period, there is a change in Saintsbury's narrative. The period is divided into three books, and this division is rooted in literary changes, Saintsbury argues:

> the separation into three, besides avoiding cumbrousness and confusion of arrangement in other ways, enables us to bring out the three divisions of rise, of culmination, and if not exactly of decadence, yet of a long and gorgeous sunset, in a very satisfactory fashion. (387)

It is especially the drama which saw its decline with the closing of the theatres at the end of this period: "Even in these three greater men [Massinger, Ford and Shirley] – certainly in Shirley – signs, if not of decadence, of at any rate of impending change, are manifest" (436). It is quite striking that Saintsbury is so careful not to use "decadence" when it comes to

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[3] "Rudimentary." *Oxford English Dictionary.* 2011. 31 Mar. 2011. <http://www.oed.com >

changes in literature, but still employs the word to such degree. The drama is seldom mentioned in the rest of the literary history. Except for the chapter on “Eighteenth century drama” with its treatment of just two remarkable dramatists, the genre is left out in the remainder of the history. “If the suddenness of the rise of the English drama, though sometimes exaggerated, is still one of the most striking facts of literary history, the suddenness, and the enduring nature, of its collapse are hardly less curious,” Saintsbury states, and explains it only to some degree with the “rise of the novel” (636).

I have now looked at examples where the metaphors are taken from the source domain of biological life in the sense of a maturing process. In biology, a preliminary for existence is parents. In literary history one can also find one thing being the origin or cause of another. White claims that historical narratives are incomplete without their plots being filled by an argument revealing the causal relationship between the actors (“Metahistory” 11), but it is outside the scope of this thesis to go into causal examinations to any extent. I will instead point to a few instances where the metaphor of parentage is employed.

Arnold calls Chaucer “the father of our poetry” both in his historical part (69), and in the critical section (290). Saintsbury on the other hand is not positive to the use of such terms:

> The title of ‘Father of English Prose,’ which used to be given to Mandeville, is indeed rather silly, as are all such titles, if only in that they provoke the chronological and other squabbles from which literary study has suffered so much. (150)

Despite this view, Saintsbury uses images of parenthood later in his history: “the Scottish Muse was about to fall almost barren for centuries, while the English was in some fifty years time to become the fruitful mother of the best poetry in the world” (178). This is clearly a literary trope, including the muse as a personification of national literatures. It is more striking when he employs the metaphor in connection with individual authors; about Austen he writes that “[she] is the mother of the English nineteenth-century novel, as Scott is the father of it” (683). But these are again the children of John Mandeville, who “was the spiritual father of Malory and Berners, of Lyly and Sidney, of Defoe and Fielding, of Miss Austen and Scott,” Saintsbury writes (155), negating himself by using the same trope he earlier deems “silly.” He also indicates prominent prose writers of coming stages in the literary development he perceives.

As mentioned earlier, ‘evolution’ as a term is not much used in the literary histories. Within the area of change and development, there are words which are much more frequent, and which point toward the same concept. A quick search in an edition of Saintsbury found online[4] gives an idea of the use of a set of words in his history. “Development” is used 40 times, “progress” 39 (some of these are in connection with Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*), “advance” is used 35 times (some of these are about the passing of time) and “improvement” may be found in 13 different places. Arnold shows some of the same numbers, although his history is somewhat shorter: “development” is used seven times, “progress” 29 times and “improvement” four times.[5] These terms are all linked to how the historian views changes in literature. As we shall see later in the discussion of ‘evolution,’ the understanding and use of the word term ‘progress’ has changed. It means ‘going forward,’ and the early uses of it were literal, denoting a physical march, journey or procession. Later it came to mean a “developing series of events,” and eventually acquired a connotation of movement from worse to better (Williams 205-206). It is in this respect interesting to notice the title of Ford Madox Ford’s final work, *The March of Literature* from 1938. It is a history of world literature (though never identified as such), from Egyptian literature (28) to Dostoyevsky (775), including only books Ford has “found attractive” (6). The aim of this history is to “induce a larger and always larger number of my fellows to taste the pleasure that come from always more and more reading” (6), and to “trace for that reader the evolution from the past of the literature of our own day and our own climes” (7). One sees here a clear connection between ‘march,’ i.e. ‘progress’, and evolution which is also reflected in other literary histories.

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[4] Saintsbury, George. *A Short History of English Literature.* Volume 1. 2005. 12 Feb. 2011. <http://books.google.no/books?id=oXcqWJ6u4qUC&printsec=frontcover&dq=george+saintsbury+%22Short+history+of+English+literature%22&source=bl&ots=YzCmo_QoWR&sig=eC9eQLZup8T1KYS_j4ENr33R-hY&hl=nn&ei=6-eRTfawO4aBOuLP8JMB&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CBYQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false>

Saintsbury, George. *A Short History of English Literature.* Volume 2. 2005. 12 Feb. 2011. <http://books.google.no/books?id=MOPx9LcHm-oC&printsec=frontcover&dq=george+saintsbury+%22Short+history+of+English+literature%22+vol.2&source=bl&ots=Y9htFnVtPU&sig=dC2QP8HRfaIl5Ad1kWQXcrEhpVc&hl=nn&ei=AemRTaNlhOk5kbLIbA&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CBYQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false>

[5] Arnold, Thomas. *A Manual of English Literature.* 1862. 10 Feb. 2011. <http://books.google.no/books?id=gM4BAAAAQAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=A+Manual+of+English+literature+thomas+arnold&source=bl&ots=mw3hCRxDjl&sig=uHZD6Vy3lxHg5on_UHY3jqtR5sE&hl=nn&ei=veeRTcbOKM_pObziwU0&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CBYQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false>

Thomas A. Goudge claims that evolution has often been “mistakenly identified with progress” (179). I disagree with this, or perhaps I make the same mistake myself. I understand evolution to be the underlying, or overarching, concept for the use of all the terms mentioned above; I believe this is how they are used in the literary histories. The varied use of terms and images is no hindrance for this understanding: “In general, metaphorical concepts are defined not in terms of concrete images […], but in terms of more general categories” (Lakoff and Johnson 45).

Goudge defines evolutionism thus:

> Evolutionism is a family of ideas which affirm that the universe and some or all of its parts have undergone irreversible, cumulative changes such that the number, variety, and complexity of the parts have increased. Evolutionism is thus opposed to the belief that the universe and its parts are eternally the same; or that they have been the same since they were created; or that they are now the same as they have been periodically in the past; or that they are emanations from a higher and perfect source (174).

As one can see here, there is a close link between this understanding of evolutionism and the historical view of literature as discussed in the introduction. But as Goudge and others make quite clear, ‘evolution’ is not necessarily the same as what is understood by the term in natural sciences, though this often is the basis for the disapproval of the metaphorical use. Very few discussions of metaphors in historiography, and even less so literary historiography, include other metaphors than that of evolution. Metaphors like those I have discussed in the previous part, and some which I will return to later, are hardly ever mentioned, though I believe they can offer valuable insight into aspects concerning both literary and historical view, and eventually canon formation. In the following, though, I will look closer at metaphors of evolution in the literary histories, deeming them to be some of the most prominent and striking examples of links between literary elements, a scientific approach and the histories’ aim.

Franco Moretti, with various others who study the history of evolutionism (see Goudge; Williams), points to cultural evolution being a Lamarckian[6] idea rather than a Darwinian. While evolution in the Darwinian sense is random variation, Lamarckian

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[6] Jean-Baptiste Lamarck (1744-1829), French naturalist, “viewed evolution as a process of increasing complexity and ’perfection,’ not driven by chance” (Berkley).

evolution has direction, and is the basis for development (Moretti 103-104). It may thus be more fruitful to look at evolution in literary history as merely another term for development or change rather than a strictly biological term.

The word 'evolution' comes from Latin, meaning 'to roll out' or 'unroll'. In its earliest use in English, it meant the unrolling of something which already exists, but is not yet revealed. During the eighteenth century 'evolution' shifted to a more restricted use in biology, denoting "the development from rudimentary to mature organs" (Williams 103). 'Evolution' became synonymous with 'development,' and it was generalized to mean a transition from lower to higher life forms and lower to higher organization. With Charles Darwin's works came the added understanding of evolution as the combination of development and discard, through the theory of natural selection. "These Darwinian ideas spread rapidly into the whole intellectual domain," Goudge writes (181). Evolution, as used in biology and other natural sciences, lost the sense of an inherent design, which was an important connotation in the earlier use of the term. But in social evolution, the sense of unrolling what was inherent in the nature of things was still existent. Williams defines 'evolution' as "(i) inherent development, (ii) unplanned natural history and (iii) slow and conditional change" (104-105).

Evolution was recognized and expressed in literary history from the middle of the eighteenth century, writes Wellek ("Evolution" 170). However, there are hardly any instances of the word 'evolution' in the literary histories, as mentioned earlier. Arnold uses it quite obviously in the literal sense of 'unrolling' or 'unfolding':

> As the unity of the epic poem is derived from its being the evolution of one great, complex action, so the unity of the heroic poem proceeds from its being the record of all or some of the great actions of an individual hero. (264)

This is clearly connected to the theological idea of a 'grand design' which was prominent in the nineteenth century. Saintsbury, on the other hand, uses "evolution" to express development and change: "The history of the English drama during the particular stage of evolution which preceded its fullest development is, except in one well-defined and interestingly-peopled section, not so much difficult as impossible to trace" (280). Evolution is here very closely tied to development within a genre, and towards a goal, that is, "its fullest development." Also here one may see traces of the same adherence to the idea of a final goal, a planned creation.

The idea of evolution is evident in Saintsbury. In the chapter on periodization, we saw that he wrote that the “difference between Milton and Dryden are differences at least of species, almost of genus” (307), utilizing terms from natural science in the discussion of the authors. I believe the use of this particular jargon may have different sources. Until now I have claimed that it functions as a metaphor expressing a developmental view of literature. I also think that the use is closely tied to the large focus on positivistic science in the late nineteenth century; the terms reflect the large focus on scientific methods in historiography. They may also be considered trend words, without any further implications than being evidences of the time the history was written. I think, though, that they mean more to Saintsbury than being just surface images. He uses the same terms when discussing the development of prose:

> But it is no accident, it is of the essence of the literary history and development of the time, that the resources, the practice, the duties, the opportunities of prose continue during the whole course of the period steadily to expand, to subdivide themselves, to acquire diversity, adequacy, accomplishment. That this is done for the most part through the medium of translation and compilation does no harm, but on the contrary does a great deal of good; that a certain amount of the practice is in the nature of not always successful experiment is nothing to be ashamed of, or to be annoyed at, but, on the contrary, a fair reason for satisfaction and pride. (217)

Here we see that he includes elements of evolution which are closely related to Darwinian ideas: that there is randomness in the variation and quite a few unsuccessful experiments (Moretti 105, 112). These are most often lost in literary history, and Saintsbury does not comment on authors or works which are completely without merit. The connection between evolution and evaluation is one I will return to in the following chapter, but I will point to one instance of this here. In his discussion of Richard Rolle of Hampole Saintsbury writes that “his treatises contain nothing very remarkable as literature, though they may, with care, be taken as further stages in the chain which leads from the *Ancren Riwle* to Chaucer’s *Parson’s Tale*” (75). As instances of literature, the work of Hampole is not significant, but as evidence of a phase in literary development it is treated and commented upon by the literary historian, and is thus included in Saintsbury’s extended canon.

Evolutional metaphors express gradual change, but there are also expressions in Saintsbury which break with this idea. An example is his treatment of the Romantic period.

As discussed in connection with the borders for the eighteenth century, Saintsbury identifies the year 1798 as the period boundary. Saintsbury describes the period shift thus: "this is the last definite turn – the last of the innumerable revolutions and eddies which constitute the history of English literature" (724). This contrasts with the seafaring metaphor in the opening of this chapter. Eddies are natural movements of water, contrary to the human made ship. Additionally, they are countermovements or opposites of the expected course of water, or, like here, literature.

Another interesting word in the above quotation is "revolution." 'Revolution' is generally considered the opposite of 'evolution' (Williams 103). Seen in connection with for instance "the suddenness of the rise of English drama" (Saintsbury 636), it is possible to question whether evolution is the main metaphor in Saintsbury. He is quite explicit in the discussion of Milton that evolution alone does not explain literary change: "Milton is one of those examples which come, fortunately, from time to time, to prove the folly of any strict 'evolution' theory in letters, and the superiority of a theory of revolution tempered by permanence" (467). Although Saintsbury here questions the whole concept of literary evolution, I do not think, though, that it is possible to discard the concept entirely. We have seen many examples of Wellek and Warren's "egg to bird"-type of evolution (255-256). There are also quite a few other metaphors of growth, which are linked both to biology and evolution.

Revolutions, caused by sudden innovations or "individual study or genius" (55), are for instance refused in the initial discussion of prosodic changes with the help of an organic metaphor: "generally the procession is as regular as the growth of a tree," Saintsbury writes (56). Also inorganic metaphors tell of growth, the mentioned image of literature as a city which Dryden "found of brick and left of marble" (471) is striking in this respect. During the Age of Dryden "the English novel, as opposed to the Romance, was founded," Saintsbury writes (515), continuing the metaphor of building. These are minor metaphors with only a few appearances throughout the history, and may be considered illustrative rather than structuring. Despite this, they reflect the same idea of literary development as the structuring metaphors do.

Karl Popper criticises the use of evolution as a concept in social sciences, including literary history. His main rebuttal is that evolution is not a universal law that can be the basis for historical prediction (107, 111). For him evolution used in social studies is therefore a "misapplied metaphor" (Popper 119). When it comes to movement generally in anything but natural sciences, he states that "we ought to be clear that we are simply using a metaphor, and

a rather misleading one at that" (113). Popper thus links historicism and evolutionism, rejecting the second as he rejects the first. Correspondingly, Wellek and Warren refuse the combination of the term evolution and the image of a life cycle as "little more than a fanciful metaphor" (256). They accept, though, and even encourage, an understanding of literary change as evolution like a "hen from an egg" (Wellek "Periods" 86). Popper and Wellek and Warren alike reject metaphors as something which does not have a place in scientific discourses. Lakoff and Johnson explain this discarding of metaphor:

> The fear of metaphor and rhetoric in the empiricist tradition is a fear of subjectivism – a fear of emotion and the imagination. Words are viewed as having 'proper senses' in terms of which truth can be expressed. To use words metaphorically is to use them in an improper sense, to stir the imagination and thus to lead us away from the truth and toward illusion. (Lakoff and Johnson 191)

This reaction is tied, I think, to the reactions against White's claim that history is fictional.

One may claim there is a contradiction between the scientific focus in the nineteenth century and the language Saintsbury uses. As we have seen, in addition to more "fanciful metaphors" he uses scientific jargon. He is also aware of the metaphorical language he employs: "the fall began at once, and though not as rapid, almost as uninterrupted as the familiar simile suggests," he writes about Byron (668). Saintsbury is also aware of the conflict between a scientific work and a literary language, but argues for his imaginative language with basis in the literary works he discusses:

> If this language seem more highflown than is generally used in this book or than is appropriate to it, the excuse must be that every reader of Donne is either an adept or an outsider born, and that it is impossible for the former to speak in words understanded of the latter. (368)

The audience of the literary histories is also important to take into consideration when discussing the style of a work. Saintsbury does not write primarily for academia, but for an educated readership comfortable with literary tropes.

Butterfield claims that "our assumptions do not matter if we are conscious that they are assumptions" (24). This may be transferred to metaphors, and the metaphors the literary historians employ may be made harmless by a large focus, from the historian's and the

reader's side, on their being just literary tropes. But I do not think the metaphors in the literary histories may be dismissed so easily. The above discussion has illustrated that development and evolution may have other meanings than the Darwinian. If this argument is followed further, one may even find that the terms are not adopted from a foreign scientific field, and may thus not be considered metaphors at all. As natural science and its use of these terms were so prominent in the time the histories were written, I will not claim this, though. Moreover, the literary historians I study seem to believe in literary development to some extent or other, and let this form the basis for their literary histories, both structurally and in the case of canon formation. I cannot see any alternatives to developmental or evolutional structuring metaphors, partly because the historical understanding of literature is so similar to Goudge's definition of evolutionism. The variation will manifest itself, I think, more in the surface images and how literary change is explained; either with a basis in literary intrinsic aspects or in socio-political influences, as discussed in the previous chapter.

The selection of a specific metaphor directs the argument. An example is the 'ebb and flood'-metaphor previously mentioned (Saintsbury 483), where the focus is on continuous change. Lakoff and Johnson claims that the "metaphor is not merely in the words we use – it is in the very concept" of what we discuss (5). "Metaphors as linguistic expressions are possible precisely because there are metaphors in a person's conceptual system" (6). The use of developmental metaphors thus reveals the viewpoint from which the literary historians write. This is again influenced by the ideas and ideals of the historians' own time, and the period's preferences and criteria of value are thus influencing and influenced by the plots and tropes employed by the historian.

Chapter 4: “The best and principal things”
Canon formation and inclusion in literary history

> Pay no attention to the criticism of men who have never themselves written a notable work.
> (Pound 131)

The above quotation is from Ezra Pound’s “A Few Don’ts By An Imagiste.” Here some rules for writing poetry are outlined, along with advice on how to recognize poetry of lesser quality: “The first three simple proscriptions will throw out nine-tenths of all the bad poetry now accepted as standard and classic,” Pound claims (134). What “bad poetry” is, and how this was “accepted as standard and classic” to begin with, is something Pound does not enter into, but it is these aspects and functions of literary history I will discuss in this chapter.

Central in this discussion is ‘canon.’ The first uses of the term were to describe ecclesial law;[1] later the use was extended to include the accepted books in the Bible and, in the expansion of this, other sacred works. Especially interesting from my point of view is the use of the term as a standard of judgment or a test of quality, as in this use from 1601: “Moreouer, he made that which workmen call Canon, that is to say, one absolute piece of worke, from whence artificers do fetch their draughts, simetries, and proportions” (*OED*). Both in connection to laws and rules and literature, the use of the term changed from a purely ecclesial to a secular during the following centuries:

> A body of literary works traditionally regarded as the most important, significant, and worthy of study; those works of esp. Western literature considered to be established as being of the highest quality and most enduring value; the classics (now freq. in *the canon*). Also (usu. with qualifying word): such a body of literature in a particular language, or from a particular culture, period, genre, etc. (*OED*)

Harold Bloom states that “the secular canon, with the word meaning a catalog of approved authors, does not begin until the middle of the eighteenth century” (244). Although neither

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[1] This and further discussion of the term is based on the *Oxford English Dictionary*: ”Canon.” *Oxford English Dictionary.* 2011. 8 Apr. 2011. <http://www.oed.com>.

Bloom nor the *OED* have examples of this use as early as this (the first example in the *OED* is from 1929), the idea of there being some works which were more lasting, important or better than others was present from this time, and is reflected in literary criticism and literary history.

There is an interesting connection between the sacred texts of the church and the canonized works of a literary culture. This connection is highlighted when one considers that not only separate works or texts may be admitted into the canon, but that also persons may be canonized. The term ‘canonization’ is mainly used when a holy person becomes a saint, but may be used metaphorically about other person, such as in Ralph Waldo Emerson’s discussion of the status of authors from 1906: “'Tis curious what new interest an old author acquires by official canonization in Tiraboschi or Dr. Johnson” (*OED*[2]). The procedures for Catholic canonization states that the person in question must have died more than five years ago in order “to allow greater balance and objectivity in evaluating the case and to let the emotions of the moment dissipate” (Catholic Pages). This echoes the reservations the literary historians have for discussing and judging contemporary authors. Two documented miracles are required for the canonization of a saint, in addition to “heroic virtues” (Catholic Pages). How many miracles are required for the canonization of an author is harder to define, what is certain is that it is seldom the whole body of works which is considered when an author is admitted into the literary canon. There is also a certain romantic tenor to the idea of literary canonization, a sense that there is a sacred or blessed quality to the canonical work, that there is a divine inspiration behind the literary canon. There are also parallels with religious canonization concerning canonical works’ moral significance. The idea that canonical works had some sort of moral influence and would improve the reader in this respect was prominent especially in Victorian education (Knickerbocker 97-98).

The literary historians I study do not use the term ‘canon’ when referring to their selection, which is understandable on the basis of the changing uses of the term. It is notable, though, that Saintsbury uses the term “Apocrypha” about works which are attributed to an author, but are of dubious or contested origin (117, 163, 167). This is a clear theological allusion, although the term is also used about secular works.[3]

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[2]”Canonization.” *Oxford English Dictionary.* 2011. 15 Apr. 2011. <http://www.oed.com>.

[3] ”Apocrypha.” *Oxford English Dictionary.* 2011. 12 May 2011. <http://www.oed.com>.

There have throughout history been many discussions of canon and canon formation in literature. Literary historiographers like Benedetto Croce or Georg Gervinus claim that criticism and aesthetic or value judgements have no place in literary history (Perkins "Literary History" 178). This, they claim, is the undertaking of critics, not historians. The basic action of choosing, and choosing away, material to include, organising this and in the relative depth and amount of treatment this material receives, a critical or value aspect is always implicit in literary history: "The mere selection of texts out of hundreds and thousands surviving is an act of judgement" (Wellek "The Attack" 74). This is tied to the special position of literature between historical artefact and aesthetic object.

The three literary histories I study were written at a time when there was as strong belief in the canon as in literary history itself. There are suggestions that canonical works are of a different quality than other works of literature. This is an unspoken ideology never expressed explicitly in the literary histories but reflected throughout. The major objections towards the canon did not materialize until the late twentieth century, and then mainly in the United States, although it spread and influenced also the rest of Western literary studies, changing many countries' understanding of their national literature. The argument of the debate is mainly that a traditional canon excludes a variety of voices which are valuable and important to include in modern canons. While aspects that this debate expressed, and still expresses, were not noticeable in the period my literary histories were written, it is all the while an interesting frame in which to consider the need for or uses of canon. I will therefore return to aspects of the recent debate later in this chapter.

"Every literary history has to select; in so doing, it reconfigures the 'canon,'" Bate states in *The Oxford English Literary History* (viii), which was published in the aftermaths of the canon debate in the late twentieth century. Literary history does not only select a stable canon, but is in a position to change it every time a literary history is written. This is perhaps somewhat contradictory to the definition of canon presented above, as the canon here may be understood as a constant entity. Thomsen and Larsen claim that it is in the nature of norms to change (25), and this is also true for the literary canon.

The reasons for change are as numerous as the grounds for canonization. "Canons are only the instruments of entrenched interests" is the stance Robert von Hallberg ascribes to many of the theorists included in his collection, *Canons* (2). One of these is Charles Altieri. From Frank Kermode Altieri acquires the idea that "canons are essentially strategic constructs by which societies maintain their own interests, since the canon allows control over the texts a culture takes seriously and the methods of interpretation that establish the

meaning of 'serious'" (43). If canons are this powerful, and I believe they are, there is no wonder that minority groups are creating their own canons, and that canon formation is one of the major questions in the study of literary history. It is possible to distinguish between ideologically based canons and canons based on literary quality, but I will claim that canons are always ideologically based even though this ideology may be aesthetic or historical.

Von Hallberg claims there are three perspectives to consider when discussing canon formation. One is "how artists determine canons by selecting certain styles and masters to emulate" (1-2). This is an aspect we may call intrinsic to literature. The canon is based within the system of literature itself, without much reference to outside factors. The two next are moving from the internal to the external, first by exploring how critics' ideologies influence their construction of a canon, and finally how institutions and their canons regulate how and what literature is taught and studied (2). The first perspective is one I will not enter into to any extent, except where canon formation of this sort is reflected or referred in the literary histories. As I have argued in the first part of this chapter, literary historians are to some extent also literary critics, and the second perspective is thus an obvious part of my study. I will therefore focus on how the literary historians construct the canon, and which basis they have for their selection of works and authors to include and discuss. The historians I study do not reflect much over literary history's ability to create a canon. There are, however, clues as to the historians' bases for canon formation, expressed both explicitly and through the structuring of the literary histories. I will also consider the third perspective, especially in relation to modern canon criticism and the responses to this.

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As pointed out earlier, the basic act of choosing which works to include in a literary history is an act of criticism, and to some extent an act of canon formation. One can argue the history presents a canon through the works included, but, as will become apparent in this chapter, there are some difference between canonization and inclusion in literary history. This is, however, a difficult distinction to make, for as I have already argued the act of selecting is also a value judgment. Based on the histories' didactic purposes, it is possible to argue that literary histories create their own canons to be used either within the scope of that history, or also to be understood as contributions to a common canon.

Canon formation was not debated explicitly until the mid- or late twentieth century, although earlier contributions to the subject are, as we shall see, not rare. These express,

though, an underlying assumption that works included in the canon are, and should be, of a different quality than those excluded. This view is also implicit in the literary histories, and differs from the historians' arguments for inclusion. This is one of the reasons why canon formation in literary history is difficult to discuss and define. Saintsbury uses terms like "intrinsic literary merit" (84), "intrinsic quality" (686) and "intrinsic value" (155). He never explains what he understands by these terms, but it is apparent that they are used discriminatory in order to distinguish certain literary works with a specific status, namely those which are considered 'good.' The other distinction he uses is one of 'importance.' These are authors and works which are not necessarily 'good,' but which achieve inclusion in the literary history due to their influence on literature. About the Elizabethan poets Churchyard, Whetstone, Tusser, Turberville, Googe and Gascoigne, he writes:

> It is almost enough to say, on the one hand, that to no single one of the six is ascribed even the smallest piece of verse which has made its way into the memory of the general. On the other hand, all have importance to the historian. (252)

George Gascoigne is in a singular position in this company; Saintsbury describes him both as "the typical man of letters of the first half of the great Queen's reign" and "the most eminent, of the whole" (252). Here Saintsbury emphasizes both his position as 'important' in illustrating stages in literature, and as a 'good' poet: "Except Sackville, he is the best poet of the group" (256).

In the contemporary environment of specialized canons, one could argue that this history presents a canon of literary change, but as the distinction between 'good' and 'important' is quite apparent in Saintsbury, one must understand inclusion as something different than canonization. In the following I will discuss both aspects.

There are many motives for creating a canon, resulting in various strategies for doing this. Among these is for instance a focus on literary craft, where the canonical texts function as examples for writers. This was the original use of the canon, Thomsen and Larsen claim (27). Another reason is the creation of a national identity and culture which became prominent in Europe during the late eighteenth and nineteenth century, and has re-emerged with the creation of new national states after colonization and the dissolving of the Soviet Union. Canons with this aim will focus on what is typical for the national literature, national traits and major events in a nation's political and literary history. This is not prominent in earlier British literary history or literary criticism, but has become increasingly so in other

English speaking nations and cultures. The discussion of what constitutes English literature is also emerging in Britain.

Throughout the nineteenth century there was also a larger focus on the canon as representing something morally good, making the reader a better person. It arguably has its roots in for instance Philip Sidney's *Apology for Poetry* or *Defence of Poesy* (1595), where poetry has the quality of encouraging virtue in its readers. The moral aspect is not prominent in the literary histories I study. It is, though, closely related to the idea of self-improvement through literature, which Evans and to some degree Saintsbury are results of, in addition to the popular *Literary Taste* (1909) by Arnold Bennett and some recent canons, which I will return to later. Arnold is as mentioned written largely for the student reader, and canon formation for educational purposes became common in the late nineteenth century. Throughout the twentieth century more and more of the canon formation is based in the educational institutions, and the discussion centres on which works and authors are to be taught in higher as well as lower education. The canon formation is here tied to literary history, to so-called 'Great Books' and to the curricula and course descriptions.

"The canon is an imaginary notion, but it names a real relation to the long time of Western writing: the desire to preserve specimens of that writing from oblivion," John Guillory writes ("Period" 1973). This is probably the main claim for the use of canon. Canons may be useful in limiting the complexity of literary history (Thomsen 27); the canon is the "core of literary history's memory" (Thomsen 144, my translation[4]). Kermode expands on this view:

> It is a highly selective instrument, and one reason why we need to use it is that we haven't enough memory to process everything. The only other option is not a universal reception of the past and its literature but a Dadaist deconstruction of it. It must therefore be protected by those who have it and coveted by those who don't. (148)

It is this "coveting by those who don't" which resulted in the extensive canon debate in the late twentieth century.

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[4] Original: "kerne i litteraturhistoriens hukommelse" (Thomsen 144).

In literary periods when the craftsmanship of literature has been highlighted, the canon includes works which can function as models for this craft. An example is the large focus on classical texts in the eighteenth century, but also later. Matthew Arnold states the importance of an exemplary canon thus: “For in poetry the distinction between excellent and inferior, sound and unsound or only half-sound, true and untrue or only half-true, is of paramount importance” (281). The same understanding of canon as exemplary works effective in educating writers may also be found in later criticism:

> If you want the gist of the matter go to Sappho, Catullus, Villon, Heine when he is in the vein, Gautier when he is not too frigid; or, if you have not the tongues, seek out the leisurely Chaucer. Good prose will do you no harm, and there is good discipline to be had by trying to write it. (Pound 133)

In 1880 Matthew Arnold, Thomas Arnold’s older brother, published what is now known as the essay “The Study of Poetry” as a foreword to a poetry collection. Here he presented a strategy for singling out good literature:

> Indeed there can be no more useful help for discovering what poetry belongs to the class of the truly excellent, and can therefore do us most good, than to have always in one’s mind lines and expressions of the great masters, and to apply them as a touchstone to other poetry. Of course we are not to require this other poetry to resemble them; it may be very dissimilar. But if we have any tact we shall find them, when we have lodged them well in our minds, infallible touchstone for detecting the presence or absence of high poetic quality, and also the degree of this quality, in all other poetry which we may place beside them. (287)

Matthew Arnold’s list of touchstones, or authors who may be considered classics, is quite limited. *OED*’s first recorded use of the word ‘classic’ meaning a “work of literature, music, or art of acknowledged quality and enduring significance or popularity” is from 1763.[5] It may be discussed whether it is in this sense Arnold uses the term when defining his ‘touchstones,’ as he mainly refers to classical literature. On the other hand he quite clearly distinguishes

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[5] ”Classic.” *Oxford English Dictionary.* 2011.16 Apr. 2011. <http://www.oed.com>.

some poets as 'classics.' He says for instance that "Dryden and Pope are not classics of our poetry, they are classics of our prose" (300). There is an aesthetic dimension to the designation as well; classics are works which belong to "the class of the very best (for this is the true and right meaning of the word *classic, classical*)" (M. Arnold 283).

Thomsen claims that a classic is an undisputed work, even more canonized than a mere canonical work. When having this definition in mind, it is interesting to notice that publishers compile lists, and publishes works, under the heading of 'modern classics.'[6] This may seem a paradox, as the work is not given the distance of time to be established as a classic. There are of course sale strategies involved in presenting a novel as a classic, but at the same time these companies are influential in the reading society, and will influence the public's understanding of the literary canon. This is an aspect of canon formation I will return to later.

Lee Morrissey interprets Arnold's touchstones as classics: "Arnold refers to 'touchstones,' which represent and measure the best that is known and thought in the world. Eventually, what Arnold calls touchstones come to be known as the Great Books" (4). This statement illustrates some of the confusion which may arise in connection with canon formation, and the difficulty of creating canons also where a seemingly clear precursor exists. Arnold does not necessarily refer to complete works when he presents the literary touchstones, a distinction Morrissey seems to have overlooked as he equates Arnold's classic lines with 'the Great Books.' These are works which also form a basis for educational programmes which were popular in the mid-twentieth century, especially in American universities. Educational canons, represented by academic literary histories and course curricula, are important instances of the public canon today.

Chaucer is one of the authors who do not meet Arnold's standards, although is discussed in the same terms Thomas Arnold and Saintsbury employ: Chaucer "is the father of our splendid English poetry" (293). Despite this, he is excluded from the exclusive list of 'touchstones,' due to the lack of something as elusive as "accent." "It may be said that it was necessarily out of reach of any poet in the England of that stage of growth," Matthew Arnold claims (295). This resembles Saintsbury's position, that both English language and prosody was not entirely completed with Chaucer, but Arnold does not want to use this as an

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[6] See for instance Peguin Books. "Penguin Classics." 2011. 4 Apr. 2011. <http://www.penguinclassics.co.uk>.

explanation for the missing quality: “but we are to adopt a real, not a historic, estimate of poetry” (295).

Matthew Arnold distinguishes between three ways of looking at literature and deciding its worth: the historic, the personal and the real. The two first of these he considers fallacies, based on the author’s position in the development of literature or in the critic’s personal judgement. Literary histories are necessarily being criticised by Arnold due to their large focus on historical estimate:

> The course of development of a nation’s language, thought, and poetry, is profoundly interesting; and by regarding a poet’s work as a stage in this course of development we may easily bring ourselves to make it of more importance as poetry than in itself it really is, we may come to use a language of quite exaggerated praise in criticising it; in short, to overrate it. (M. Arnold 282)

One may say that especially Saintsbury and Evans write by this so-called fallacy. Thomas Arnold is more careful to avoid this in his historical section, and focuses more on texts as examples in his critical section, much like his brother recommends. How we can find the ‘real estimate’ if not in history or a personal understanding or appreciation Matthew Arnold does not discuss, except in pointing to the “touchstones” of literature. Again we notice a circular argument.

Before I enter into a more detailed discussion of the relationship between the ‘real estimate’ and Arnold’s perceived fallacies, I will pause to discuss another influential book of the early twentieth century, which focuses on self-improvement through literature. Arnold Bennett’s *Literary Taste: How To Form It* was published in at least ten editions for thirty years after its first appearance in 1909 (COPAC[7]). The concept of ‘literary taste’ is interesting. In its earliest uses, ‘taste’ was not good or bad, as one often perceives it today, one simply possessed it or not: “No, no, hang him, he has no tast,” Congreve wrote in 1694 (*OED*[8]). This echoes the first uses of ’literature’ as discussed in the introduction, which was also something a person did or did not hold, and which distinguished a person in society. Taste and literature are thus closely connected.

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[7] “Literary Taste.” *COPAC National, Academic, and Specialist Library Catalogue.* 2011. 11 Apr. 2011. <http://www.copac.ac.uk>.

[8] ”Taste.” *Oxford English Dictionary.* 2011. 16 Apr. 2011. <http://www.oed.com>.

The aim of *Literary Taste* was to educate the public not only in how to read, but how to enjoy reading: "It is well to remind ourselves that literature is first and last a means of life, and that the enterprise of forming one's literary taste is an enterprise of learning how best to use this means of life" (Bennett 13). In addition Bennett presents "detailed instructions for collecting a complete library of English literature," as his subtitle promises. This is very practical and includes information on editions, prices and assurances that "the volumes can be procured immediately at any bookseller's" (96). The "Grand Summary of Complete Library" is 226 authors and 335 volumes to the price of £28 (111). Bennett concludes:

> When you have read, wholly or in part, a majority of these three hundred and thirty-five volumes, *with enjoyment*, you may begin to whisper to yourself that your literary taste is formed; and you may pronounce judgment on modern works which come before the bar of your opinion in the calm assurance that, though to err is human, you do at any rate know what you are talking about. (112)

We here see an example of the belief in canonical works as the scale on which to measure other literary works, and literary quality is the criterion for inclusion. Bennett expressly excludes works

> whose sole importance is that they form a link in the chain of development. For example, nearly all the production of authors between Chaucer and the beginning of the Elizabethan period, such as Gower, Hoccleve, and Skelton, whose works, for sufficient reason, are read only by professors and students who mean to be professors. (90)

From my study of the various literary histories, I distinguish mainly three different reasons for a work's or an author's inclusion in literary history, and thus for the literary history's canon formation. The first is literary quality or merit, Matthew Arnold's "real estimate." Guillory claims that there is a "resilient tautology in literary history," namely that "works *ought* to be canonized because they *are* good" ("Ideology" 338). How to arrive at what is 'good' literature is as mentioned never explicitly explained in the literary histories, although some indications are offered in comments on individual works and their achievements. Qualitative terms are often used without any further explanation or argument (e.g. Saintsbury 13, 195, 438). Certain authors are set apart by the historians as "the greatest

prose-writer perhaps, when all things are taken together, in the whole range of English" (Saintsbury 449) or "the greatest fantastic novelist of England" (743). Evans describes Dickens as the "greatest novelist that England has yet produced" (150). The use of the superlative is striking in histories mainly concerned with tracing literary development. This aspect is tied to a 'historical estimate,' while literary quality as expressed in the above is tied to both a 'personal' and 'real' understanding of literature.

Thomas Arnold, despite his historic section and the referential qualities of the critical section, wants to compare works in order to present "a just estimate of their relative merits" (239). His method of comparison, though only within the genres he introduces, resembles the method his brother described in order to make a "real estimate," but Thomas Arnold does not have any "touchstones" to help his verdict.

The lack of discussion in connection with which authors or works are considered to be the masterpieces, great works or touchstones is evident in almost all descriptions of canon which are not openly critical. "But their obviousness is not a natural fact; it is constantly being produced and maintained by cultural activity," Jane Tompkins claims (26). In traditional canons there is often a self-evident tone as to which authors are included, this may be seen for instance in Matthew Arnold and Harold Bloom. This self-evidence is an illusion, there is for instance no agreement between Bloom's unconditional praise of Wordsworth (249) and Arnold's discussion of the same author: "But we enter on burning ground as we approach the poetry of times so near to us - poetry like that of Byron, Shelley, and Wordsworth - of which the estimates are so often not only personal, but personal with passion" (206). Arnold shows the same concern for personal judgment which the literary historians show when they refuse to discuss living authors (Saintsbury 756) or when they comment on the difficulty of being objective in this matter (Evans 70).

Saintsbury is not satisfied with this focus on literary quality alone:

> The incorrectness, or at least the insufficiency, of that view of literature and literary criticism which despises the historic estimate, and bids us look only to 'the best and principal things,' is perhaps nowhere illustrated in a more complete and damaging fashion than by the foregoing Book. (109)

The above quotation is from Book II, "The Making of English Literature," and illustrates that Saintsbury, although employing evaluating expressions and imply an underlying value judgment through his distinction between 'good' and 'important' literature, does not want to

limit literary history to focus merely on the first. It is thus apparent that there exist other reasons for inclusion.

The second reason I have distinguished is matter: the subject of the literary work expresses something of value to the reader or the reader's society. This may for instance be the author or work's origin, it subject, its moral standing or its educational aim. I claim that this is especially prominent in certain modern canons, which I will discuss later. In these canons evidence of the group's culture and self-understanding may be traced through the subjects discussed in literature. This is not common in the histories I study; one may almost claim the opposite in some cases. In his discussion of William Langland, Saintsbury is harsh in his criticism of Langland's political and religious position: "Intense, but narrow; pious, but a little Philistine – so we must pronounce him" (137). The treatment of Langland is extensive though, and may be explained by what follows the above: "Nevertheless he had a great literary talent, which perhaps amounted to genius" (Saintsbury 137). Evans on the other hand is more open to literary works representing society, instead of merely the historical stage it is at: "No one can well understand the twentieth century, in its hopes and its disillusionments, without studying Mr. Wells," he states (172).

While historical importance in society is a reason for inclusion in some canons, a third reason is historical importance in literature. Altieri argues that

> we must take as our representative cases not only those works that directly exhibit exemplary features of craft or wisdom but also the works that fundamentally illuminate the contrastive language we must use to describe these exemplary achievements. It matters that we read the *Aeneid* because there are strong reasons to continue valuing the tragic sense of duty the work exemplifies; it matters that we read Thomas Kyd because of the influence he exercised on Shakespeare and Eliot; it matters much less that we read George Gascoigne or Stephen Duck, the Water Poet, because they neither provided significant types exemplifying wisdom or craft nor influenced those whom we think did. (51-52)

Altieri here maintains that authors who have influenced major authors or helped in the development of literature should be part of the canon, as well as the so-called major authors. Saintsbury agrees, and points for instance to Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History* as an influence for Shakespeare and Milton:

> The debt which English literature owes to this curious book is not limited to the Arthurian part, for Geoffrey has given us the original story of *King Lear*, the most heartrending of English, or any, tragedies; the ending at least of *Comus*, the most exquisite of English, or any, masques; and other things. (43)

How to decide who the major authors worth reading for the sake of their work alone instead of for their influence on later authors are, is not discussed either in Altieri or in Saintsbury. The argument thus resembles that of Matthew Arnold, and is also an instance of circular argument: the canon of both major and minor authors will be based on who is already deemed major.

This basic understanding of literature as a changing and developing entity is instrumental in the histories' canon formation. To reflect a changing literature is one of the reasons for periodization, while explaining this change is one of the aims for metaphors employed in the literary histories. These aspects combined may offer valuable insight into the criteria for inclusion in the same histories. Jurij Tynjanov argues for an evolutionary understanding of literature, similar to that which we have seen traces of in the previous chapter. He claim that this focus makes it necessary and possible to "reject the theories of naïve evaluation" and that "evaluation in itself must be freed from its subjective coloring, and the 'value' of a given literary phenomenon must be considered as having an 'evolutionary significance and character'" (153). Canonical works must represent a stage in the literature's development. As seen in the previous chapter, Butterfield claims that the historian can "select and reject" on the basis of who promotes or hinders progress (11). These are the heroes or villains of literary history, the innovators or the great representatives for a literary change or a literary stage. There is thus a value judgment implied also in this strategy, which may indicate canonization. "A work of art will appear as positive value when it regroups the structure of the preceding period, it will appear as negative value if it takes over the structure without changing it," claims Czech literary theorist Jan Mukařovský (in Wellek "Evolution" 173). Tynjanov claims that "a work is correlated with a particular literary system depending on its derivation, its 'difference' as compared with the literary system with which it is confronted" (158). The historical value, and thus the value in a literary history, is decided by the work's divergence from the literary tradition. Moretti on the other hand points to some works being examples of too great a divergence, and that these works will be forgotten by the reading public before long (112).

Nevertheless, as representatives for a stage or jump in literary development they may be remembered by literary historians. This is Saintsbury and Evans' main criterion for inclusion. Evans tackles the history of the novel by tracing it "through the works which seem most clearly to show these aspects of its development" (125). Arnold argues to a greater extent than Saintsbury for the aesthetic value of the works he includes, while Evans makes few explicit comments on his selection. The focus will therefore mainly be on Saintsbury in the following.

A statement introducing Saintsbury's treatment of the fifteenth century may be considered a programme for his history: "Of these disdains literary history knows nothing; and nothing shall be passed over by her unless it is at once devoid of intrinsic attraction, and of no importance as supplying connections and origins" (157). He is trying to be all-inclusive at the same time as he needs to be discriminative. Though Saintsbury seldom opposes tradition, he claims to put the works first and make judgments based on these (v). Both the aspect of literary quality, or, as he carefully designates it, "intrinsic attraction," and that of literary importance are central in determining a work's position in literary history. This programme may be considered to break with Saintsbury's own preface, though:

> The object of this book […] is to give, from the literary point of view only, and from direct reading of the literature itself, as full, as well supplied, and as conveniently arranged a storehouse of facts as the writer could provide. (v)

What I believe is the case here, is that "literary point of view" may mean two different things in Saintsbury. One aspect is that of literary quality, while the other is wider. Saintsbury considers literary history not as a separate field, but as one direction, one alternative, within literary studies in general (513). The historical aspect is thus only one aspect of literature as a whole, and only one of the things which make a literary work valuable.

Saintsbury believes every literary period has its place in literary development, and that the literature which is the result of this period thus has value as witnesses of this stage. Evans also has some of the same focus. About *The London Merchant* or *The History of George Barnwell* by George Lillo, he claims that "[the] innovation is far more important than the play which introduces it" (111). Of the much-rebuked eighteenth century, Saintsbury states that "it is by no means necessary while granting this, to belittle, much less to abuse, the Augustan ages. They had their own work to do and they did it" (565). Throughout the literary history Saintsbury points to works which may be inferior as literature, but which offer

valuable insight into the development of literature. An interesting passage in this respect is Saintsbury's final words on the fifteenth century, "the seemingly dullest period of the actual literary course" (218):

> The airy generaliser may flap his wing disdainfully at the fifteenth century and hurry to pastures more succulent; the mere indolent person may decline the labour necessary to acquaint himself with it. But both will do what they do, and decline what they decline, at their own peril. […] Yet shall those who decline to take notice of Barclay and Bokenam run no small risk of not fully understanding even Spenser, even Shakespeare. (218)

Saintsbury here highlights the necessity not just of knowing earlier literature in order to fully understand and appreciate the later, but also not to omit any parts, though they may seem uninteresting.

> Anglo-Saxon succeeded in producing works both in prose and verse which has not only intrinsic merit and interest, which has not only the additional historic claim of being the ancestor of one of the greatest literatures of the world, but which has the further attraction, also historic, but surely not negligible, of being for its time unique. (32)

There is in the above a distinction between the "intrinsic merit and interest" and the "historic claim" of the literature. As illustrated in the previous chapter, Saintsbury sees the language and formal qualities of Anglo-Saxon and Middle English as yet in the early stages of development. The "chief attraction" of these periods for Saintsbury is the changes in prosody (69). He readily admits that the Anglo-Saxon and early Middle English periods do not offer much of literary quality. Despite this, he argues, it is necessary to have knowledge of the literature of the periods in order to appreciate what came after:

> And yet there is no portion of English literature the study of which can be wholly pretermitted with greater danger, none the study of which is repaid by greater increase of understanding, and even of enjoyment, in regard to the rest. (109)

Saintsbury distinguishes two types of readers for his literary history: the reader of literature and the student of literature. The last does, as stated in the introduction, not necessarily imply an academic use, but is rather a term denoting an educated and interested reader. These readers need insight into different sides of literature, Saintsbury claims. He caters mainly for the second group:

> The prose of the fifteenth and early sixteenth century – or, in other words, the prose from Fortescue to Fisher – supplies, with the almost sole exception of the work of Malory and Berners, which has been treated above, little or nothing that is delectable to the mere literary consumer. But to the student of literary history it is one of the most important periods of the whole subject. It is, in fact, the great exercising-ground – the great school-time – of English prose. (205)

We see here a distinction between which works are interesting for the "literary consumer" and to "the student of literary history." While the consumer, i.e. the regular reader, mainly looks for literary quality, the student will search for works which can give insight into the changes and development in literature: "To judge the progress of literature one must read most of these things" (431). The educational metaphor is recognizable from the discussion of structuring metaphors; the idea of literature as going through a life cycle is important also in deciding upon a literary canon. From this point of view it is important to include literature from all stages of development, and the canonized works are those which best represent either a stage or a leap in this development.

Saintsbury not only stresses works' positions as stages in literary development, but also the individual author's place in this change. About Fanny Burney's contribution to the novel he writes that

> the most important, though far from the most gifted, novelist of the latter years of the century was Frances Burney (1752-1840) […] Her importance, however, consists in the fact that, at any rate in youth, she had a singular knack of catching the tone and manners of ordinary and usual society, and that by transferring these to her first two books she showed a way which all novelists have followed since. (612)

It is noticeable here that Saintsbury stresses that there may not necessarily be a link between what is considered good literature, and what are important instalments in the development of

literature. Evans agrees with Saintsbury's judgment of Burney, but limits her importance in literature: "To compare Miss Burney with Richardson is to lose critical balance, for Richardson could create, while Miss Burney had only a tenuous store of invention to support her own observation and experience" (139). Also the metaphor of parenthood, which was discussed in the previous chapter, is tied to the individual's influence on literature.

As Saintsbury wishes to be all-inclusive and not leave anything worth mentioning out, he often has to resort to the act of just mentioning. By doing this, he ensures that critics cannot point to his forgetting anyone of importance. At the same time he can distinguish between major or important writers who need a broader discussion, and those which may just be mentioned in a work of this size. About dramatists before 1642, he writes that all "deserve respectable places in a separate history of drama, and all deserve mention here" (Saintsbury 438). This distinction is not always easily made: "It is hard to draw the line between those novelists who deserve independent mention and those who must be dealt with in batches" (687). This of course becomes increasingly difficult as the historian draws nearer his own time, when "the personal estimate of poets begins to be rife" (M. Arnold 300), and it becomes hard to judge who will be popular for the time to come, and who will influence the future course of literature.

As discussed earlier, Thomas Arnold and Saintsbury do not discuss authors who are still alive as they write their histories. This sometimes provides Saintsbury with a problem: "among dead verse-writers who published about or after 1850, there are not a few of interest, perhaps hardly any one can pretend to a substantive place here" (786). Despite the resolution referred to above, there are some examples of recent authors being mentioned. One reason for this is that the author has died before his or her contemporaries. R. L. Stevenson thus attains more treatment than any other of this time, and represents both the present and coming generations of authors (Saintsbury 756-757). Saintsbury also sometimes clearly violates his own principle. One example is in relation to the novel in the end of the nineteenth century, about which he writes: "Many of the novelists born in the second quarter of the century, including their acknowledged chief Mr. George Meredith, are still alive, and therefore not to be mentioned here" (756). By this Saintsbury has not only negated his claim as he makes it, he has also focused on a single author and given him the lead position in late Victorian fiction. It is also interesting to notice that all the while that Saintsbury stresses that the focus is on works and not lives of authors, it is the lifetime of authors which both structure at least parts of his periodization, and which limits his canon in the end.

The use of the verb “deserve” in the above quotation implies that there may be some authors who are not worthy of mention. Despite this, Saintsbury seldom excludes authors who are mentioned in other literary histories, although his judgement may be quite harsh:

> In serious poetry the standard names – names alas! standing rather as marks for scorn than as objects of veneration – are those of Erasmus Darwin (1731-1802) and William Haley (1745-1820) […] Below them, if indeed in these regions of poetry higher or lower are predicable terms, we come to degrees of dullness or absurdity, ending in the so-called ‘Della Cruscans,’ who were the object of Gifford’s scorn, a group of versifiers at the head of whom was Robert Merry (1755-98), a man of good education and some parts, whose exploits in poetastry show better perhaps than anything else the poetical degradation, or rather exhaustion, of the time. (597)

These authors are included in the literary history as illustrations of symptoms, if not reasons for, the decline of poetry in the late eighteenth century. But I cannot claim they belong to Saintsbury’s canon as such, as the works in every way are distinguished as ‘bad,’ and perhaps not even important, literature.

Like some critics after him, Saintsbury uses the term “lesser,” “greater” and “minor” about authors. He has “The Minor Poets of 1800-1830” in a separate chapter (715) and a subheading within this chapter called “A group of minors” (716). He explains this division by pointing to practical considerations of space, and that “some of them at least form a well-separated group of transition between the great school of the first quarter of the century and the Victorians proper” (Saintsbury 715). Ideas of progress and improvement are reflected in Saintsbury’s vocabulary, and again we can see traces of the idea that it is minor writers who generate literary change. The judgment here is one of historical, and not literary, value. The term “minor” suggests that these authors have not provided canonical works.

As mentioned in the chapter on periodization, there are many strategies for dividing literature into periods. One, which Evans uses much, is to define a period by the names of authors representing the start and end of it, thus giving greater prominence to these authors over others. Guillory claims that this is also true when creating a canon. In his discussion of Cleanth Brook’s *The Well-Wrought Urn,* Guillory comments on Brook’s use of Donne and Yeats to limit the English canon: “So far form merely attaching the names of Donne and Yeats to the beginning and end of canonical history, the curricular shape of English literature is henceforth determined as “From Donne *to* Yeats” (“Ideology” 358). This function is of

course not as striking in a literary history where there are many combinations of this sort, and where the name of an author is also closely tied to dates. As mentioned in a previous chapter, the reader expects there to be more focus on authors mentioned in the chapter heading, though. It is, though, as I mentioned in a previous chapter, and the reader will consider them more prominent.

The focus on Shakespeare is another example of how formal structuring shapes canon. Not only is his name used in two chapter headings in Evans, in the fourth edition the treatment of Shakespeare is expanded to a whole chapter. The mentioning of Shakespeare as both the end of one period and the start of the next is not a singular event; Sheridan is also used in two chapter headings. It is then interesting to notice that the treatment of Shakespeare covers seven pages, while Sheridan is discussed in one, the same amount that Dryden, giving his name to a whole age in Saintsbury, receives. The canon formation which is expressed through the chapter titles is only suggestive for the reader, and may not be intended as such by the historian.

"Popularity sometimes affects the judgments of critics in estimating the worth of a writer," states Evans (174). There is sometimes a discrepancy between which works have been, or still are popular, and the historians' evaluation of them: "It is the fashion today to despise Sir James Barrie," claims Evans, "but it is dangerous to despise a man who invented a mythology and added to the English stage a play that will be permanent" (118). Evans uses the same metaphors here as both the historians do in their discussion of literature in general: George Elliot's reputation "has suffered something of a collapse" (158), while that of George Meredith "has declined" (160).

Of *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley and similar works, Saintsbury writes that they "survive by reputation, and even to a certain degree by reading" (690). This may suggest a devaluation of the work on grounds of popularity, a common complaint against traditional canons He does not distinguish the novel either as of great quality or importance. Arnold, on the other hand, puts Shelley "among the principal performers" within the genre of "fictitious narratives, romances, serious" (341-342). As his strategy in order to "arrive […] at a just estimate" of literature is "by comparing together works of the same kind" (239), it is evident that his exemplary works serve some of the same function as Matthew Arnold's touchstones, and the assessment of Shelley's work is thus quite high.

Which authors and works are included in the literary histories depend not only on what 'estimate' the historians adhere to, but also on how they define literature In the introduction I discussed briefly the changing meaning of 'literature,' and how the historian

understands this is imperative for canon formation. Arnold includes more non-fictional prose than the two others, as the definition of literature was broader at the time he wrote his history.

Saintsbury and Evans include non-fictional works too, but to a smaller degree. In Evans these are confined to the two last chapters, of thirteen. He claims that when “life is the criterion and not art, the prose of a nation is far more important than its poetry” (183). In this lies an appreciation of matter or subject as reasons for inclusion in literary history and canon, though he emphasises that this sort of literature does not necessarily constitute works of art.

In Saintsbury the non-fictional genres are less separate from the rest of the literature, as the structure of the history does not allow a division to the same extent. Nevertheless he also distinguishes between ‘belles lettres’ and other types of literature, formally and, more importantly, in his attitude toward literature. He clearly expresses his preference for fictional literature as true literature (150), and argues that there must at least be literary qualities present for a work to be considered literature (238). Saintsbury seeks the authors and works which have influenced and changed literature as a whole in one way or another also when including non-fiction:

> On such views historical literary criticism has no opinions: it looks at their authors, from Heraclitus to Darwin, with an equal eye, knowing that they dawn, and charm, and irritate, and pall, and pass away, retaining little but historical interest in themselves, unless they happen to have sought and obtained the aid of literature itself in their expression. (793)

The above quotation is from Saintsbury’s evaluation of Darwin’s *Origin of Species* (1859), and illustrates not only the distinction between historical and literary interest or value, but also that the second is required in order for the work to be canonized.

While literary history, and especially the literary histories I discuss, includes authors and works on the basis of their literary importance and influence, this does not necessarily mean that the works are canonized. For these literary historians the canon wants more than mere inclusion; it wants greatness. Thomsen claims there may be several levels to literary canons, from the hidden to the undisputed (65). There may thus be several levels also to the individual canons presented in literary history, from works which have only illustrative powers to those which display ‘intrinsic merit.’ It is necessary, though, to distinguish between the dominating, yet unstated idea of a single canon in the nineteenth and early twentieth century to the self-conscious idea of several canons in the twentieth century.

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As mentioned, the literary histories I study were written at a time when there was a great belief in literary history and canon alike. But towards the end of the twentieth century, dissatisfaction with the traditional canon arose, especially in American literary theory and criticism, tied to post-colonial or feminist currents. It was argued that the canon belonged to 'dead, white men' (Bloom 256-257; Thomsen 51-52). Von Hallberg claims that there are some periods in history which invites more to a questioning of canon than others, for instance when there is a large focus on nationality or in politically stable periods (3). I argue that the focus on voices not traditionally included in the canon did not come as a result of political stability; it came as a result of instability and an increased focus on marginalized groups, as a reaction against what was presented as stability by those in authority, both politically and in terms of aesthetics:

> After World War II, liberation movements swept the globe: postcolonial, feminist, and civil rights. Each of them brought not only a literature, but also a criticism. Together, this literature and criticism tackled directly the assumptions of universality implicit in the idea of the Great books that had come together over the preceding two centuries. (Morrissey 6)

Walter Benjamin claims that in "every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it" ("Theses" 247). He believes that "the ruling classes" may use both the tradition and the readers of the tradition for their own purposes, and that this is something which must be opposed. This opposition may take varying form. In the late twentieth century it resulted in the canon debate and attempts to both renew the canon, and to discard the canon completely.

The last has proven almost impossible. When trying to get rid of the 'dead, white men,' the canon is filled with alternative authors and works. Kermode states that "there can be no doubt that we have not found ways of ordering our thoughts about the history of literature and art without recourse to them" (150). Perkins argues that one aspect of the recent, more specified literary histories is that the historians see continuity, "not (in their opinion) because they are projecting their situation on the past, but because the same situation of suppression or marginalization continues from the past into the present" ("Theoretical

Issues" 4). I see traces of whig historicism in this view, perhaps turned upside down. Where the whig historian sees continuing progress in history, historians writing the history of minority literature will see a stable and unchanging station for the literature they represent. The continuity in history is the same. The same is true for canons in general, there is a continuity of selection, although the criteria on which it is based change.

In the process of including new works, some of the earlier important writers will disappear on grounds of limited space and, maybe more important, little focus in today's literary universe. This may be connected both to a larger focus on matter, and changing literary taste. What has traditionally been deemed major authors may be left out in specialized literary histories because they do not meet the criteria of inclusion.

Mason and Smallwood use the inclusion of Aphra Behn in *British Literature 1640-1789: An Anthology* (1996) as an example of the varying principles of inclusion and exclusion:

> The claims of Aphra Behn are probably in part rather different – having more to do, perhaps, with the sociology of writing than with her contemporary reception, or the intrinsic interest, accomplishment, or excellence of her writings – or, at least, of her verse. (205)

Saintsbury includes Behn in his discussion of Augustan poetry and drama. He singles her out with an individual subheading in the drama chapter, and describes her thus: "Afra, if not much worse than others, is quite bad enough, while, like Sedley, she requires no notice in respect of her serious or tragical work, though this sometimes gives occasion to her finest lyrics" (489). Her prose is barely mentioned, except in connection with other female authors, these in the eighteenth century: "Mrs. Manley and Mrs. Haywood, women of no very good reputation, followed in the footsteps of Afra Behn, and achieved a certain popularity" (599). The reputation mentioned here might be one of both moral and literary quality, neither of which Saintsbury is impressed by in these authors. It is obvious that Saintsbury does not include Behn based on what he perceives as literary quality, but rather on contemporary reception and continuing popularity. Behn's novel *Oroonoko* (1688) will have an obvious position in many recent canons as it both represents popular culture and addresses questions concerning slavery and the position of women. In Saintsbury, the only *Oroonoko* included is the play by Thomas Southerne (1696). That this is an adaptation of Behn's novel is not mentioned (505).

Guillory claims that while canon formation is ideological, it is not "an obvious production of ideology" ("Ideology" 338). Guillory here seems to argue that the creation of canon is ideologically influenced, but this creation, and in extension the works which constitute the canon, will not influence the ideology of the makers or readers of canon. I disagree, as I believe the canon will influence what is considered literature of quality or importance at a later stage. Kermode states:

> So canons are complicit with power; and canons are useful in that they enable us to handle otherwise unmanageable historical deposits. They do this by affirming that some works are more valuable than others, more worthy of minute attention. Whether their value is wholly dependant on their being singled out in this way is a contested issue. There is in any case a quite unmistakeable difference of status between canonical and uncanonical books, however they got into the canon. (149)

Kermode is uncertain whether the status of canonized works comes from the works themselves, or from the act of canonization. I believe that a canon will always influence future canon formations; either as they accept what is included in the canon or react against this. The canon is an important part of the cultural heritage, as it to some degree dictate what literature is worthy our notice and not. Tompkins claims that "our tastes, emphases, preferences, and priorities, literary and otherwise, do not exist in isolation, but emerge from within a dynamic system of values which determine what, at a given moment, will be considered best" (126). She does not explicitly include the canon as part of this changing system, but I do not think one can imagine a system of values without including what is considered to be the best or most important literature at a given time.

"We have ideas about canons because we learn to think about literature within cultural frameworks that are in part constituted by notions of the canonical," Altieri states (45). Altieri here argues some of the same for canon formation as I did for periodization, that canons and periods alike are results of expectations tied to canonicity or a period, respectively, and are thus subject to a circularity which may be correcting, but which also may be difficult to oppose.

Guillory claims that the canon will necessarily belong to an elite, namely the "literary culture" of society ("Ideology" 338). The necessary extension of this assertion is that if one does not own the canon, so to speak, one does not belong to this elite, similar to the idea of 'literature' in earlier centuries. To claim the canon is thus to claim a position among those

with ‘literature,’ the social elite. An interesting diversion here is to consider literary history’s position. One reason for literary histories’ canon formation may be to claim authority over the canon, and at the same time claim a position in the social and intellectual elite. The same is true for the readers of literary history. “Canons are simply ideological banners for social groups”, Altieri claims (43). I do not think the literary historians consider themselves as such, but this is not a conscious act. As this is said, one can well argue that the literary histories I study present a canon for one social group: that of the educated, white, British upper or middle class – or for those aspiring to be a part of this.

“The association of canon with authority is deeply ingrained in us,” writes Kermode (148). By this I understand at least two different things: that the canon is an authority in literary history, criticism and education, and that it is based in the authority of the culture which created it. In the case of the literary histories and the canon they represent, their authority is based in their status as experts, especially as they write from a society where the opinion of the expert is valued. Saintsbury also claims authority on the basis of literature itself, as we have seen (v; 797). Some of this authority may be transferred to the reader, as we saw in Bennett: “When you have read, wholly or in part, a majority of these three hundred and thirty-five volumes […] you may pronounce judgment on modern works which come before the bar of your opinion” (112).

Bloom states that “[in] our context and from our perspective, the Western canon is a kind of survivor’s list” (255). Here he claims some of what Thomsen and Kermode also emphasise, that the canon is a part of literary history’s memory. But what is especially interesting in this quotation, is the use of the personal pronoun. Whose context and whose perspective? It is quite clear that the critics of a classic or traditional canon will not consider themselves and the groups they represent as part of Bloom’s collective ‘we’.

An interesting insight into the results of the canon debate may be found in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* from 1985 as presented by Kermode:

> The dominant concern of literary studies during the rest of the nineteen-eighties will be literary theory. Especially important will be the use of theory informed by the work of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida to gain insights into the cultures of blacks and women.
>
> […]
>
> Among the promising areas for analysis is the examination of the concerns and metaphorical patterns that are common to past and present black women writers.

Such theoretical accounts of the cultural products of race and gender will help to undermine the half-truths that white males have established as constituting American culture as a whole. One aspect of that development will be the continued reshaping of the literary canon as forgotten, neglected or suppressed texts are re-discovered. (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, 4 Sept. 1985 in Kermode 147-148)

I have quoted this at length as it reveals interesting ideas about canon formation in the 1980s. It is striking that Afro-Americans and women are the only groups mentioned. They are also very much combined, both in the mentioning of authors (Hurston, Sander, Naylor and Morrison) and in the designation "black women writers." I think a focus like this limits literary education and thus also the canon, while the idea from the theorists and educators' side is probably to open, expand or even 'explode the canon.' But as Kermode also points out, the writer is not interested in dispensing with the canon entirely, he is simply replacing white men with black women (148).

As seen in the above quotation, the connection between canon formation and educational institutions is quite strong. This has not been emphasized in this thesis, as the main focus has been more on how the historians express various aspects than why and what. It is nevertheless important to notice the position of education in connection with literary canon, especially in the context of the debate of the late twentieth century. While the literary histories I study was written both for general readers and students, many literary histories today are written for literary students and scholars: "Readership: Scholars and students of twentieth-century English literature across all genres," writes the Oxford University Press about volume twelve of the new *Oxford English Literary History*.

Another important part of educational canons is curricula or syllabus. Douwe Fokkema and Elrud Ibsch distinguish between canons provided by critics and the school canons as represented by curricula (37). While they do not argue strongly for critical canons, they claim that "such selections cannot be avoided" in education (43), despite that "the idea of teaching a fixed selection, or canon, of literary works at schools or in universities has become increasingly unpopular" (27). This is closely tied to the canon debate. They continue to claim that in spite of this "the pedagogical, didactic need for it has not disappeared" (36). Although there have been attempts at discarding the shared canon in a nation's educational institutions (they point to examples in Germany and the United States), this has proven problematic. Without a common selection of works it is difficult to compare the knowledge gained by the students, and they will lack common frames of reference as they reach higher

education (43). "The only practicable way of intervening seems to be to propose additions to and deletions from the current selective frames of reference," Fokkema and Ibsch claim (43). But they admit that "changing a school canon is not a purely literary affair, but an exponent in a much wider cultural debate" (42).

Thomsen is sceptical to the idea of creating entirely new canons. He claims that it is unlikely to make rediscoveries of great works more than about fifty years after the work's publication. The only exception is that some works may be considered major in a minority or specialized canon (52). One example is the reception of Oscar Wilde, which has changed considerably. As he died after the publication of Arnold and Saintsbury, his production is not included here. Evans briefly mentions his comedies and poetry, though with hints toward Wilde's sexuality and imprisonment (70; 116). There are no traces of his prose. This has to some extent changed. If one looks at for instance *English Literature in Context* (2008) the focus is still mainly on the drama, but a discussion of Wilde's prose is included in the subchapter discussing "Gender roles and relations" in the Victorian age (Frawley 486-488). His novel *The Picture of Dorian Grey* (1891) is frequently studied in a gender perspective; often also in connection to Wilde's own sexuality. But the novel has also moved from these specialized approaches towards inclusion in a more general canon.

Morrissey claims that there are uses to the canon debate, despite his belief in the 'Great Books.' He requests "a reading of the canon that takes into account the critiques of it" (9). This may be just as reductive, as it does not open the canon for new works, but only invites to for instance feminist, postcolonial or gay readings of already established works, perhaps limiting these works' merit to only one perspective. Although one can claim, with Thomsen and Bloom, that new or alternative canons have limited success and extent, it is now quite common to teach 'women writers' or 'ethnic studies' in universities which earlier had none of these distinctions. It may be discussed whether this is real canonization, and not merely a dividing of the field. Depending on the aim of the canon, one may claim that inclusion in a more traditional or general canon might be more valuable for the appreciation of these voices.

Despite the widespread criticism against canons, there has in the recent years been a return to the canon. At the same time as theorists, critics and educational institutions fiercely debate the canon and cannot decide whether to kill it or revive it, the reading public requires easy access to the great works of literature. The relative success of works like Blooms' *The Western Canon*, Peter Boxall's *1001 Books You Must Read Before You Die* and the many examples of 'classics' series like Penguins' Modern Classics, Deluxe Classics and English

Library.[9] There are of course marketing interest involved in modern canon formation as well as a demand from the reading public, but the publication of these works illustrates that there a discrepancy between the critical community, which questions the use of canons, and the society at large.

[9] Penguin Books. “Penguin Classics.” 2011. 4 Apr. 2011. <http://www.penguinclassics.co.uk>.

Chapter 5: Final words.
An apology for literary historiography

Throughout this thesis I have tried illustrating two aspects of literary history. I have sought to read it, at least partly, as literature, highlighting areas where fictional elements are apparent and decisive in the construction of the history. Despite this, I hope I have shown that there is more to literary history than what is able to fit neatly into White's constricted categories of arguments, plot structures, ideologies and literary tropes. Just like other literary genres, different literary histories invite different readings. Arnold invites to a scientific and methodological approach to both this literary history and literature in general. Saintsbury's "distinct and meritious style" (626) offers a reading experience good as any fictional work, encouraging a closer study of literary tropes. Evans provides the reader with easily accessible information through his immediate style, and it becomes interesting to focus on the changing readership of literary history. There is a change in the reading public from Arnold's specialized literary student via Saintsbury's well-educated reader to Evans' wide and varied audience, illustrating social changes in Britain.

The other aspect I have focused on is showing how the structure of literary history is influenced by the historian's ideologies as to history and literature, and further how these structures decide which events in literature, i.e. which works and authors, are included in the literary history. Literary histories may be said not to provide a canon as such, but as there are discriminations as to material, there must necessarily also be evaluation involved in writing literary history. I have performed a close reading of literary techniques like emplotment and the use of metaphors to reveal some of the underlying, unstated assumptions behind this evaluation.

To point to the fictional elements of literary history and question the objectivity of the genre is not the same as discarding literary history completely. Perkins, in his influential book from 1992, asks *Is Literary History Possible?* His answer is paradoxical: "we cannot write literary history with intellectual conviction, but we must read it" ("Literary History" 17). He seems to think that objectivity is a prerequisite for historiography. He claims that "literary history cannot surrender the ideal of objective knowledge of the past," although "the ideal cannot be achieved" (185). The literary histories I have studied show a faith in positivistic knowledge, and are thus in pursuit of objectivity. This is especially noticeable in Arnold's systematic and comparative "Critical Section." Saintsbury and Evans too seek to

avoid the ‘personal estimate’ in their selection and criticism of works, although, as discussed in the previous chapter, they seldom support their evaluating claims of ‘good’ or ‘bad’ literature with sufficient evidence, and they are aware of the subjective nature of history (Saintsbury 15-16). Their inclusion of works on the basis of these works’ importance is more objective, one could claim, although there are both interpretations and ideologically based inferences behind this as well.

Despite the desire for objectivity in literary history, I hope I have in the preceding chapters shown that personally influenced histories may also be considered history. White does not reject the whole field of historiography on the basis of its fictional elements (“Tropics” 83). Notwithstanding the selection of events, the emplotment and the metaphorical presentation, literary histories are not in essence fictional. It is important, though, to be aware of the ideological implications of the methods they share with fiction. Thomsen claims that the best one can hope for literary history in the future are “better descriptions which can resist critical examination and still appear plausible” (239, my translation[1]).

It is generally agreed that the need for literary history is within literary studies. It is possible to imagine studying literature without focusing on contextual information, but this is not an approach much adhered to today. Gumbrecht claims that “literary critics know all too well that humankind would easily survive without literary criticism—and most likely even without the humanities at large” (519). He does not believe literary histories are necessary, like Perkins does, and requests a complete rethinking of the field: “we have to solve certain epistemological questions before we can tackle ‘smaller’ disciplinary and discursive problems” (529). He thinks the whole field of literary history, and history in general, is breaking up due to the post-modern scepticism towards claims about positive knowledge.

The continuing publishing of literary history illustrates that historians and their publishers do not agree with Gumbrecht. Wellek probably had a point when he claimed that the “new literary history promises only to return to the old one” (“Attack” 77). However, one may notice a shift from the great narratives of the period I have focused on towards a fragmentation in present histories. Perkins calls these literary histories encyclopaedic, as distinguished from the narrative literary histories (53), and highlights their discontinuity and lack of a unifying plot. Despite this, they have uniting elements, as they are written with a certain aim in view, and have a specific structuring strategy. This is not a new form; *The*

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[1] Original: ”Bedre beskrivelser som kan modstå kritisk gennemgang og stadig fremstå som plausible”.

Cambridge History of English and American Literature was first published 1907-1921, and is written by 171 different authors (Bartleby.com). It is also worth noting that the thirteen volumes of *The Oxford English Literary History*, which must be considered a narrative literary history, are written by different authors and not published chronologically, although they are named and numbered according to literary periods. Oxford University Press also published, the same year they finished the abovementioned history, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of British Literature*, which "covers the entire history of British literature from the seventh century to the present" (Oxford University Press).

Perkins rejects new ways of writing literary history. This is because straying too far from the traditional form of literary history is to break with genre conventions and expectations. "I would prefer more complicated plots for literary histories, but some plot there certainly must be," he states (32). Gumbrecht on the other hand thinks encyclopaedic or fragmented forms of literary history may be a step towards literary history for the post-modern reader:

> What a growing number of readers and scholars seem to be interested in today, more than in conceptions of collective identity, is, to say it one last time, the punctual feeling of being inscribed into the (not only) material world. As this is a punctual feeling, a feeling that has to be found and established in each specific case, I strongly associate it with a new type of literary history that is fragmented into hundreds of short 'entries.' For this extremely dense historical contextualization brings back to life and presence what we call 'literary events,' while these short 'entries' use literary texts to conjure up worlds of the past. ("Shall We Continue" 530)

He argues that the lack of an overarching narrative goal gives the reader more direct access to the literary events; gives them the opportunity "to immerse themselves into past worlds as material worlds" (529). I understand Gumbrecht's focus on fragmented histories as not so much a true embracing of encyclopaedic histories as a rejection of narrative ones. Nor do I think that encyclopaedic or fragmented histories necessarily are without ideological biases. Despite the lack of a continuous narrative, structuring strategies and principles for selection are nevertheless required, and these are based in the historians' or editors' aim and ideologies. I have shown in this thesis that structures are not neutral in historical narratives, and the same applies for encyclopaedic histories. White claims that the historian may choose

not to write in the narrative form, but he cannot choose not to narrate at all ("Value" 274-275).

In addition to fragmented histories, Gumbrecht sees a focus on canonized texts as a way "of experiencing the specific historicity of literature" (530), perhaps returning to a more traditional view of canon. However, he declares quite firmly that "we will not find any ready-made solutions to our problems in the works of our great predecessors" (531). I agree that "ready-made solutions" may be hard to find in the histories I have studied, but I will argue that they may provide the reader as well as the writer of literary history with valuable insights into some of the problematic areas of historiography, areas recent literary histories cannot escape. As stated in the first chapter, I chose these three histories on grounds of several criteria, but one was the great confidence in historiography at the time. They were written before White claimed that history is partly fictional, before the canon debate and before Perkins' negative answer to the possibility of literary history. They thus represent literary history at its height.

Kermode states that

> For the past quarter-century or so a rumour has circulated to the effect that it [i.e. literary history] can't any longer be written […] Yet, as Hans Robert Jauss remarks, it used to be thought that the crowning achievement of the philologist was to write the history of his national literature, to reveal its origins with pride, and to trace its stately and inevitable development (147).

The specialized literary histories we see now are the modernized conception of national literatures, as they are searching for the same tradition to base their common understanding on as the new national states of Europe did in the nineteenth century, or previous colonies did in the twentieth. The challenge is to create also general literary histories which may offer the same amount of relevance to minority groups as to the general reader or student of literature, presenting literature from divers groups and areas. Guillory claims that a common literary canon may be impossible in cultures which are socially and politically divers (in von Hallberg 2), but as discussed in the previous chapter there is still a desire for it in the reading public. In this respect literary history may be helpful in providing at least suggestions for canons, although I again must stress the necessity of being aware of the historian's principles for inclusion and canonization. My approach to canon formation is only one method; other possibilities in this respect are for instance to do diachronic analyses of the same or similar

literary histories, or to tie changing canons closer to both changing political and literary ideologies. Reasons for changing literary histories is also a field worthy of study:

> Literary history must – like all history – always be rewritten. The past changes. New scientific research gives new knowledge of what happened and this literary history must benefit from. But more importantly is it that the view point changes: New generations, new classes, new people are interested in the past in other ways than their predecessors, see it from other angles and with new eyes, seek other connections, ask different questions depending on the reality of their own time (Beyer 5; my translation[2]).

As stated in the first chapter, there has been little study of literary history as a genre or discipline in Britain. I believe British literary history would benefit from closer study. This thesis has shown that a study of literary history can be more than a foray into nationalistic questions or a criticism of the canon, although this is of course central to the study of literary historiography, and something British literary studies could benefit from. It is for instance interesting to note how the relationship between England and the rest of the British isles or Europe is expressed in older literary history, or how English literature is defined in more recent histories. "No third poet in English, and therefore none in any language, has anything that comes near them," Saintsbury writes about Shakespeare and Shelley (661), betraying a nationalistic belief in English literature's superiority.

In later years areas of non-fiction like life writing and travel writing have become recognized as literary genres. This illustrates an expanding literary view although in a somewhat different direction than as discussed in the first chapter. Here I claimed that the concept of literature is expanding to include several cultural expressions, whereas this extension has similarities to for instance Arnold's literary view. Mid-Victorian literary histories included a wider range of prose than many recent histories, canons and curricula do. The same recognition has not come for literary history. This is not recognized as a literary

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[2] Original: "Litteraturhistorien må – som all historie – alltid skrives på nytt. Fortiden forandrer seg. Nye forkningsresultater gir ny viten om det som skjedde og må komme oversiktsverkene til gode. Men viktigere er det at utsiktspunktet stadig skifter: Nye ættledd, nye samfunnslag, nye mennesker interesserer seg for fortiden på andre måter enn sine forgjengere, ser den under andre synsvinkler om med andre øyne, søker andre sammenhenger, søker andre spørsmål ut fra sin egen tids virkelighet."

genre in the literary histories I study either, while for instance biographies and histories are well represented.

At the same time as literary history is a form of literature it also represents a void of literature. It represents the necessity in literary studies to apply other theories and introduce other contexts to the text than the strictly literary. Literary history offers, along with biographies, histories, reviews and a variety of other approaches, a possibility to circumvent the literary texts themselves in literary studies, focusing on contextual aspects instead of textual. It also questions what the mentioned 'strictly literary' is, for instance through the inclusion or exclusion of various literary genres, or the varying focus on literary quality as compared to social or literary importance.

I have tried looking at the literary aspects of literary history, though necessarily with an eye for what the literary elements represent as to the historians' ideas and ideals of literature and history. Perkins claims that to "deny the involution of social conflicts and power relations in literary and critical texts would leave our profession politically irrelevant" (10). The same is true for the genre of literary history, but the exploration of political and social ideology can take many paths. Many critics of canon focus solely on facts and numbers, looking at who and what is mentioned to what extent. Looking for ideological implications, some have studied historians' backgrounds, explicit statements or dominating directions. Contrary to the interest in background and context which was prevalent in the nineteenth century, and still are in some areas today, I have tried placing the literary histories first, looking at deeply founded and founding structures to explore the same areas.

The post-modern rejection of literary history makes an assessment of it necessary. Perkins claimed in 1991 that "literary history is in a state of ferment and crisis, not for the first time" ("Theoretical Issues" 6). Various other theorists, including Wellek, Gumbrecht and Guillory claim the same, but I will also claim that literary history is still potent and has its place to fill in literary studies, although this is done with less confidence than a hundred years ago. Further studies of and debates around the techniques, uses and mandates of literary history are necessary for the genre to be able to again function as it was meant to, to provide the reader with an "increase of understanding, and even of enjoyment" of literature (Saintsbury 109).

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[1] I have not been able to find the publication date for this edition of Matthew Arnold’s *Essays in Criticism.* The Library of Congress (<http://www.loc.gov>, 13 May 2011) lists the book, but cannot provide a date.

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