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## Literature, Knowledge, and Worldview<sup>1</sup>

Gisèle Sapiro

In his introduction to *Literary Theory*, Marxist British scholar Terry Eagleton rightly claims that the concept of literature cannot be reduced to imaginative writing, i.e. to fiction. Literature includes for instance autobiographies, or John Donne's sermons.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the border between fact and fiction is permeable and unstable: novels may refer to historical events or to real persons (like the novel by Mathieu Lindon *Le Procès de Jean-Marie Le Pen*, 1998), whereas lampoons may introduce fictional scenes (as in Céline's *Bagatelles pour un massacre*, 1937). Even in works of pure imagination, including science fiction and fantasy, the question of the relationship to the real world cannot be dismissed, because our ability to grasp the functioning of these possible worlds is based on our own knowledge and modes of understanding. This is why the history and sociology of literature are intricately entangled with the history and sociology of ideas, although they cannot be reduced to them.

Literary theory is split around this issue between two main currents: on the one hand, those who, following the Russian formalists, focus on what is most specific to literary writings, i.e. their form and language, and thus concentrate on the internal analysis of the text (which was especially the case for structuralist criticism), and on the other, those who, especially in the Marxist tradition, examine the relationship of the literary texts to the society in which they are produced and received, using the concepts of "ideology" and "worldview." Following Foucault, these notions were replaced by (or sometimes combined with) the concepts of "discourse" and "representations," which were adopted by intellectual historians and sociologists of literature, starting in the 1980s, to study the literary texts in their socio-historical context of production and reception. This split reinforced the cleavage between internal vs. external approaches of literature, between form and content, between idealistic and materialistic approaches to literature, even though these oppositions cannot be entirely superimposed, and despite attempts to transcend them. Although these two currents have questioned the very category of literature and noted its instability in time and space, none have really attempted to historicize its advent as a relatively autonomous activity, having its own rules and issues at stake, referring to its own history, what Pierre Bourdieu calls a "field."<sup>3</sup> The literary field gained autonomy first from the State, then from the market.<sup>4</sup> It also differentiated itself from other intellectual activities. Field theory thus enables us to question the relationships between the literary field and the broader intellectual field in which it is embedded.

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Juliane Vogel for her comments on this chapter.

<sup>2</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory. An introduction*. New Ed. (London: Verso, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. Randal Johnson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993); Id., *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 1-46.

<sup>4</sup> Gisèle Sapiro, "The Literary Field Between the State and the Market", *Poetics*, 31, no. 5-6 (2003), p. 441-461.

The following section outlines a socio-historical perspective on the differentiation of the literary field within the intellectual field. This undertaking also requires a transnational approach, as literary works, genres and forms circulated across languages, and were appropriated by hybridization with local repertoires and materials. I will then turn to notions that help us bridge literary analysis with the history and sociology of ideas, first that of worldview, and then those of discourse and representations, before discussing the question of the relationship between literature and truth and situating literature between *doxa* and *episteme*. I will propose the notion of axiological operator in order to grasp the moral performativity of the systems of opposition that structure the underlying worldview in texts, and that transcend the boundaries of fields, thus connecting the literary field to the broader intellectual field and vice-versa. The last section focuses on the interpretation these texts are given in the reception process. Examples are deliberately taken from different periods and cultures, in order to show the heuristic potential of this methodological framework. Although they are based on in-depth scholarship, they are mentioned here only indicatively, to illustrate the more general questions and approach.

### Literature and knowledge: an entangled history

Only at the end of the eighteenth-century did literature come to be a relatively autonomous field within the intellectual field. This seems to have happened first in the German-speaking area around the *Sturm und Drang* movement. In French, the very word "*Littérature*" included philosophy and scientific vulgarization up until the beginning of the nineteenth-century.

Johan Heilbron has studied the long-lasting entanglement between social thought and literature since the seventeenth-century.<sup>5</sup> In the eighteenth-century, the "people of letters" (*gens de lettres*), especially those called "*philosophes*," embodied the first figure of what was not yet called the public intellectual.<sup>6</sup> Voltaire for instance famously denounced religious intolerance in the Jean Calas Affair, which concerned a Protestant who was accused of murdering his son (who had converted to Catholicism) and condemned to death. The *philosophes*, who were obliged to publish some of their theoretical and fictional writings clandestinely, were believed by both the revolutionaries and the counter-revolutionaries, to be responsible for the French Revolution.<sup>7</sup> The *roman à clefs* had been a highly politicized genre since the seventeenth-century. Theater was also a political arena. The female playwright Olympe de Gouges, who had become a political activist against slavery, wrote the *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of the Female Citizen* in 1791 in response to the 1789. For this text as for her Girondist positions, she was prosecuted and guillotined in 1793.

According to the sociologist of literature Alain Viala, the first stages of emergence of a literary field as a relatively autonomous activity in France harks back to the seventeenth-century, under the absolute monarchy, although the authors' right to get an income out of their work was not granted until a 1777 royal decree and the

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<sup>5</sup> Johan Heilbron, *The Rise of Social Theory* (London: Polity Press, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> Didier Masseau, *L'Invention de l'intellectuel dans l'Europe du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: PUF, 1994).

<sup>7</sup> Robert Darnton, *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982); Roger Chartier, *The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution*, trans. Lydia Crochane (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991). See also chapter 14 in this volume.

1791 and 1793 revolutionary laws on literary property.<sup>8</sup> Such a right had already been recognized in Great Britain in 1710, when the British Parliament adopted the Copyright Act or "Statute of Anne," which contributed to the professionalization of writers, parallel to the formation of a new middle-class readership.<sup>9</sup> Following Foucault's analysis of the "author function,"<sup>10</sup> the cultural and social meaning of these laws regarding the writers' status in society and the construction of authorship have become a fertile field of studies.<sup>11</sup> According to Carla Hesse, the Lakanal law of 1793 confirmed, through a compromise struck between the idea of property as a natural right and that of the "public domain" to which ideas belonged, the principle of literary property by dissociating it from what had linked it to private interests and privileges, so as to transform it into a reward for services rendered by the author to the nation.<sup>12</sup>

In the second half of the eighteenth-century, however, the autonomization of the literary field was also in part a negative process which resulted from the professionalization of science and the autonomy achieved by the field of philosophy. Kant and his disciples developed a model of writing the history of philosophy which excluded non-Western philosophy as well as the eighteenth-century French *philosophes*.<sup>13</sup> In France, when philosophy became part of the newly-born Napoleonic university, the subversive eighteenth-century "*philosophes*" including Rousseau and Voltaire were excluded from the canon and relegated to "literature."<sup>14</sup> In the second half of the eighteenth-century, "literature" had started, especially in Germany, to redefine itself as an "art;" it joined painting and sculpture and music and was subsumed to a new philosophical domain, which had emerged in Germany and in France: "aesthetics."<sup>15</sup>

Nevertheless, throughout the nineteenth-century, writers never gave up the claim to disseminate ideas and produce knowledge about the world: literature could not be reduced to telling entertaining stories or writing beautiful poetry. In France, they appropriated the critical function that had been exerted by the eighteenth-century *philosophes*. Under the Bourbon Restoration, fiction became, for the liberal authors, an ideological weapon: allegory, displacement in time and space, and metaphors, were devices used to overturn or sidestep censorship.<sup>16</sup> Under the July Monarchy, the novel established itself as a serious genre by presenting itself as a sociological study.<sup>17</sup> In

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<sup>8</sup> Alain Viala, *Naissance de l'écrivain. Sociologie de la littérature à l'âge classique* (Paris: Minuit, 1985).

<sup>9</sup> Mark Rose, *Authors and Owners: The Invention of Copyright* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001).

<sup>10</sup> Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?," in *Language, Counter-memory, Practice*, trans. and ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 113-138.

<sup>11</sup> See, for instance, Marta Woodmansee and Peter Jaszi eds., *The Construction of Authorship: Textual Appropriation in Law and Literature* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994). See also chapter 8 in this volume.

<sup>12</sup> Carla Hesse, "Enlightenment Epistemology and the Laws of Authorship in Revolutionary France, 1777-1793," *Representations* 30 (1990): 109-137; Roger Chartier, *Culture écrite et société* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1996), chap. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Peter K. J. Park, *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy: Racism in the Formation of the Philosophical Canon* (New York: SUNY Press, 2014).

<sup>14</sup> Dinah Ribard, "Philosophe ou écrivain ? Problème de délimitation entre histoire littéraire et histoire de la philosophie en France, 1650-1850," *Annales HSS*, 2 (2000): 355-388.

<sup>15</sup> Annie Becq, *Genèse de l'esthétique française moderne 1680-1914* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1994). On Germany, see Marta Woodmansee, *The Author, Art, and the Market: Rereading the History of Aesthetics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

<sup>16</sup> Gisèle Sapiro, *La Responsabilité de l'écrivain: Littérature, droit et morale en France, XIX<sup>e</sup>-XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 2011).

<sup>17</sup> Judith Lyon-Caen, *La Lecture et la vie. Les usages du roman au temps de Balzac* (Paris: Tallandier, 2006).

Great Britain, men of letters embodied the figure of the "public moralist."<sup>18</sup> In other places, the novel became, in keeping with the epic and sagas, a medium for writing national history.<sup>19</sup>

These claims were soon challenged again by the formation of scientific fields in the social sciences and the humanities, which, in the second half of the nineteenth-century, dispossessed literature of its expertise in fields of knowledge such as history, psychology and the study of mores and of crime in modern societies (sociology, criminology). These disciplines adopted the scientific paradigm in order to assert their expertise and claim jurisdiction in their field, a claim that was enforced when they became academic disciplines. Sociology, for instance, emerged in strong relation (and opposition) to literature in France, Germany and England.<sup>20</sup> Advocating for specialization in his preface to *De la division du travail social* (1893), the French sociologist Emile Durkheim distinguished this new discipline from the "dilettantism" of the past men of letters.<sup>21</sup> The import of German philology to France and the establishment of the history of literature with philological methods by Gustave Lanson at the Nouvelle Sorbonne after the 1896 reform aroused a fierce reaction from the elitist part of the literary field: Lanson was accused of transforming the literary scholar from a man of taste with a mastery of rhetorical devices of expression and achieving idealistic goals into a materialistic scientific worker.<sup>22</sup>

The rise of the scientific paradigm, which challenged the dominant position of literature in the intellectual field, also modified the literary landscape. While some authors expressed their rejection of science as materialistic and their quest for spirituality by turning to religion, for others, science became a source of inspiration. Romanticism, with Edgar Allan Poe, introduced scientific issues into the world of the novel. Flaubert's narrator adopted the objective and neutral distance of a physician. By using medical knowledge, Zola and the naturalist school, which would spread from France around the world, aimed at transforming literature into a science, as Zola expressed in his concept of the "experimental novel." Not only realism but also science fiction borrowed from scientific literature (as for instance J.H. Rosny aîné). And psychology served the "psychological novel." Later, in the 1920s, the surrealists were to draw the notion of the unconscious from psychoanalysis and use it in an experimental way. Sociological and anthropological concepts were introduced into the literary field by the *Collège de sociologie*.<sup>23</sup> And, closer to our time, Annie Ernaux and Edouard Louis drew from Bourdieu's sociology to analyze their own trajectory in their autobiographical writings. Conversely, ethnology borrowed writing models from literature, from Marcel Mauss to Alfred Métraux, Michel Leiris (a member of the Collège de sociologie), Marcel Griaule, and Claude Lévi-Strauss.<sup>24</sup> More recently, anthropologists have acknowledged the contribution of literature to ethnography and

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<sup>18</sup> Stefan Collini, *Public Moralists. Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain, 1850-1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>19</sup> Anne-Marie Thiesse, *La Fabrique de l'écrivain national. Entre littérature et politique* (Paris : Gallimard, 2020).

<sup>20</sup> Wolf Lepenies, *Between Literature and Science: The Rise of Sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

<sup>21</sup> Émile Durkheim, *The Division of Labour in Society*, trans. W. D. Halls, intro. Lewis A. Coser (New York: Free Press, 1997).

<sup>22</sup> Gisèle Sapiro, "Défense et illustration de 'l'honnête homme' : les hommes de lettres contre la sociologie," *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, no. 153 (2004): 11-27.

<sup>23</sup> Denis Hollier, *Le Collège de Sociologie, 1937-1939* (Paris: Gallimard, 1979). Alban Bensa et François Pouillon eds., *Terrain d'écrivains : Littérature et ethnographie* (Toulouse: Anacharsis, 2012).

<sup>24</sup> Vincent Debaene, *L'Adieu au voyage. L'ethnologie française entre science et littérature* (Paris: Gallimard, 2010).

interrogated the relationship between the inquiry (*enquête*) and the writing practice in literary works.<sup>25</sup>

From this historical sketch of the relationships between literature and knowledge, it becomes clear that intellectual history can hardly avoid dealing with literature, and literary history with intellectual history. Furthermore, even when they do not pretend to produce and distribute knowledge, literary works convey a "worldview," a "doxa" (i.e. common sense knowledge and beliefs), or, according to the Marxist critics (following Marx's reflection on German ideology), an "ideology".

### Worldview or ideology?

The idealistic concept of "worldview," or "*Weltanschauung*," was theorized by Wilhelm Dilthey in order to articulate the individual's worldview with the society s/he belongs to. It is not by chance that Dilthey explored this concept about literature: for Dilthey, the "worldview" designates the articulation between the "individual genius" and the "spirit of the people," conceived in a historical perspective. The concept of "worldview" was further developed in the interwar period by German scholars such as the philosopher Ernst Cassirer and the art historian Erwin Panofsky, who focused on images and forms (painting, architecture). Panofsky famously demonstrated that the scholastics and the gothic architecture shared common symbolic forms.<sup>26</sup>

It was the French historian Lucien Febvre, in his study on Rabelais and the problem of unbelief, who first attempted to approach literature as a case study in the "*histoire des mentalités*."<sup>27</sup> Conceived against the traditional "*histoire des idées*" (history of ideas), "*histoire des mentalités*" aimed at inserting systems of thought in their social and economic context, an approach that was in line with the historical project of the *Annales* school.<sup>28</sup> However, Lucien Febvre's program did not have real followers in French history. He himself initiated what would become book history, with his book *L'Apparition du livre* (1955). This program was taken up by Roger Chartier and Henri-Jean Martin, who established the history of publishing as a research domain, which also developed in the English-speaking and German-speaking world.<sup>29</sup>

Against idealistic approaches to ideas, Marx and Engels had elaborated a materialistic conception of ideas, beliefs, and art as being a superstructure reflecting the social relations of production. While it appeared reductionist from the outset, reflection theory did inspire in-depth consideration of the autonomy of artworks from social conditions and on the mediations between them.<sup>30</sup> Is literature merely a reflection of the social world, as realist literature claims to be, or the expression of an

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<sup>25</sup> Alban Bensa et François Pouillon eds., *Terrain d'écrivains : Littérature et ethnographie* (Toulouse: Anacharsis, 2012).

<sup>26</sup> Erwin Panofsky, *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism* (Wimmer Lecture, 1948) (Latrobe, Pennsylvania: The Archabbey Press, 1951).

<sup>27</sup> Lucien Febvre, *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth-Century: The Religion of Rabelais*, trans. Beatrice Gottlieb (Cambridge MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1982).

<sup>28</sup> See chapter 3 in the present volume.

<sup>29</sup> See chapter 14 in the present volume.

<sup>30</sup> Lucien Goldmann, "Criticism and Dogmatism in Literature" in David Cooper (ed.), *The Dialectics of Liberation* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968); Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, trans. Geoffrey Wall (London: Routledge, 2006. 1<sup>st</sup> original ed. 1971); Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

ideology through a "worldview?" Karl Mannheim distinguished the key Marxian concept of "ideology" from the "worldview," that he defined as the total representation of ideology.<sup>31</sup> For Mannheim, the worldview of a social group refers to the structure of its consciousness (or style of thought), and it is divided into two categories: *ideology*, i.e. mental fictions which legitimize the established order and facilitate its reproduction by veiling the objective reality; and *utopia*, i.e. representations (dreams) with a subversive function, which inspire collective action for the transformation of societies.

Marxist literary scholars asked whether the "worldview" conveyed by literary and artistic worlds is a manifestation of the dominant class's collective consciousness or if it echoes the contradictions at work in social relations of production. As the expression of these contradictions, Georg Lukács contended, Balzac's work may for instance give us a critical outlook on society regardless of the author's political positions. Frankfurt School theoreticians also tackled the reflection problem.<sup>32</sup> Adorno argued that the most hermetic art can express a reaction against the devastation of language by commerce. However, as he emphasized the ambiguity and polysemy of literary texts, he also showed that they resist ideological reduction.<sup>33</sup>

Drawing on Lukács, who argued that the relations between literary forms and the social situations in which they emerged are mediated by collective consciousness, sociologist Lucien Goldmann considers that the real subject of the work is not the individual author, but the social group to which the author belongs (family, profession, nation, class). The group's worldview constitutes the mediation between the economic and social infrastructure and the works: "A world vision is [...] the whole complex of ideas, aspirations and feelings which links together the members of a social group (a group which, in most cases, assumes the existence of a social class), and which opposes them to members of other social groups."<sup>34</sup> The members of the group attain this consciousness "in a more or less coherent manner," "as a result of a particular social and economic situation."<sup>35</sup> Goldmann also uses Durkheim's concept of "collective consciousness" but prefers that of "group consciousness," which includes class consciousness, as well as familial, professional and national consciousness.

Thus in Goldmann, the worldview constitutes a mediation between the economic and social infrastructure and the literary works. He demonstrates that there is a structural homology between Racine's tragedies, or Pascal's *Pensées*, and the "tragic" Jansenist worldview, an expression of the collective consciousness of the nobility of robe (*noblesse de robe*).<sup>36</sup> For the first form of Jansenism emerged at the time of the shift from limited monarchy to absolute monarchy, among the officers (especially lawyers) who depended on the state and could therefore not commit to active opposition, although they did distance themselves. Their tragic vision is an ideology – or rather a

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<sup>31</sup> Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, trans. Louis Wirth and Edward Shils (London: Routledge, 1991).

<sup>32</sup> Georg Lukács (1999), *Balzac et le réalisme français*, trans. Paul Laveau (Paris : La Découverte, 1999).

<sup>33</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Notes to Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 2 vol.

<sup>34</sup> Lucien Goldmann, *The Hidden God: A Study of Tragic Vision in the Pensées of Pascal and the Tragedies of Racine*, trans. Philip Thody (London: Routledge, 2013), 17. I kept here the original translation of "vision du monde" by "world vision" rather than "worldview."

<sup>35</sup> Goldmann, *Hidden God*, 18.

<sup>36</sup> The nobility of the robe refers to aristocrats who held their nobility title from judicial or administrative functions, as opposed to the nobility of the sword, or the knightly class, whose titles were attached to feudal fiefdom, attributed in return for military service.

"total vision" encompassing ideology, affect and behaviour – asserting that it is "impossible to live a valid life in this world."<sup>37</sup>

Goldmann sees literature, like the arts, philosophy, and to a large extent religious practice, as "languages," means for men to communicate with other beings, whose specificity is that they are dedicated to the expression of specific contents, i.e. "visions of the world" – a world vision being "the conceptual extrapolation in the most coherent manner possible of the real, emotional, intellectual and even motory tendencies of the members of a group. It is a coherent pattern of problems and replies which is expressed, on the literary plane, by the creation through words of a concrete universe of beings and things."<sup>38</sup> This means that the "aesthetic fact" implies a double level of correspondence: "between the world vision as an experienced reality and the universe created by the writer;" and between "this universe and the specifically literary devices – style, images, syntax, etc. – used by the writer to express it."<sup>39</sup> In his view, the "coherence" of the extrapolation is what gives literary works value compared to other writings: "all valid literary works have an inner coherence and express a world vision."<sup>40</sup> This capacity of extrapolation, which is to him the basis of representativeness, is only found in a few singular individuals, such as Racine.

Raymond Williams, one of the founders of the Birmingham school of Cultural Studies, criticized the notion of worldview.<sup>41</sup> He preferred concepts that take greater account of the internalization of collective consciousness by individuals, such as "common sense," "structures of sentiment" or "feelings." For instance, in *Culture and Society*, Williams analyzed the way nineteenth-century British novels such as *Mary Barton* (1848) by Elizabeth Gaskell or *Hard Times* (1854) by Charles Dickens dealt with the social transformations triggered by the Industrial Revolution ("industrial novels").<sup>42</sup> They tried to reconstitute the daily experience and suffering of the working class and to rouse readers' affective reactions of empathy or repulsion. Thus Williams, like his colleague Richard Hoggart who, in *The Uses of Literacy* (1957), analyzed how the working class reads serial novels, introduced the issue of reception that had been overlooked by the studies on the worldview conveyed by art and literature (on reception, see below).

The notion of worldview was also criticized by Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser and his disciples Étienne Balibar, Roger Establet, Pierre Macherey, and Jacques Rancière. In *Lire le Capital* (1965), they rejected the notions of causality underlying Marxist analyses – on the one hand, the mechanic causality presupposed by reflection theory, and on the other, the expressive causality entailed by the concept of "worldview," which meant reading texts as allegorical models of society as a whole. They argued that, associated with expressive causality, the very concept of mediation is problematic in that it establishes relations between different levels (superstructure and infrastructure, text and society). They proposed replacing these two types of causality with the idea of a "structural causality," referring to the presence and immanence of the structure in its very effects (akin to the *Darstellung* concept in the Marxist theory of value). The concept of "ideological State apparatuses" introduced by Althusser (1970) was a means to theorize the idea of a relative autonomy of the

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<sup>37</sup> Goldmann, *Hidden God*, 105.

<sup>38</sup> Goldmann, *Hidden God*, 314-5.

<sup>39</sup> Goldmann, *Hidden God*, 315.

<sup>40</sup> Goldmann, *Hidden God*, 315.

<sup>41</sup> Raymond Williams. *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 132.

<sup>42</sup> Williams, *Culture and Society* (1958; reis. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 87-109.



superstructure from the infrastructure that determines it, and of the effect it may in turn have on the latter, namely "reproduction," which he illustrated by discussing the role of school.

Nevertheless, in *The Political Unconscious*, U.S. Marxist critic Fredric Jameson (1981) did show that in the literary domain, the two types of causality challenged by Althusser remain locally valid.<sup>43</sup> For instance, the replacement of the dominant model of the three-volume novel by the cheaper single-volume format following the late nineteenth-century crisis of publishing (an external cause) lead to altering the very form of the novelistic narrative. And expressive or allegorical causality works on some level because the great narratives and leading conceptions of history are often inscribed in the texts themselves. According to Jameson, these texts are actually our main pathways to access an otherwise inaccessible historicity, which functions as an absent cause (this is how Althusser interprets Spinoza's immanentism: effects are inherent in the structure – or in God). In that sense, they are sources to access our "political unconscious," which must be subject to the work of interpretation. According to Jameson, Althusser's main contribution resides in the relative autonomy he recognized in the different social spheres, against the expressive causality, that tends to reduce them to one another through the concepts of structural homology (for instance, in Goldmann's work, between class situation, worldview and artistic forms) or mediation (e.g. the institution of family as a mediation between the child's experience and the class structure, in Sartre's biography of Flaubert, *The Family Idiot*). However, as Jameson noted, the very concept of relative autonomy cannot be used without reflecting on the forms of mediation between different spheres. In *Archeologies of the Future*, Jameson studied the literary forms of utopia from Thomas More to contemporary science-fiction authors who challenge the belief that free-market capitalism is the inevitable future, proposing alternative social systems.<sup>44</sup>

Following Althusser's article on "ideological state apparatuses" ("*appareils idéologiques d'État*"), Marxist literary scholars in the 1970s focused on the relationship between literature and ideology. For Terry Eagleton, literature is ideology, i.e. the fashion in which perception, judgment and beliefs are related to structures and relations of power in society.<sup>45</sup> However, this very broad definition of ideology does not allow us to distinguish the literary works which express a political message, as the "ideological novels" ("*romans à thèse*") analyzed by Susan Suleiman,<sup>46</sup> or the socialist realism in the USSR studied by Régine Robin,<sup>47</sup> from other less self-conscious and more ambiguous texts, which nevertheless convey a "*doxa*" and "worldview," that may reproduce the dominant ideology or depart from it without offering a clear alternative ideology, if we circumscribe the meaning of ideology to a more or less coherent and self-conscious political system. Literary texts may convey schemes that have a political connotation and impact without being framed in a coherent ideology: for instance, while fascist writer Drieu La Rochelle's novel *Gilles* (1939), as analyzed by Suleiman, represents a typical example of the ideological novel (it ends with the protagonist's

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<sup>43</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1981).

<sup>44</sup> Jameson, *Archeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (New York: Verso, 2005).

<sup>45</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Ideology*, New Ed. (London: Verso, 2007).

<sup>46</sup> Susan Suleiman, *Authoritarian Fictions. The Ideological Novel as a Literary Genre* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

<sup>47</sup> Régine Robin, *Socialist Realism: An Impossible Aesthetic*, trans Catherine Porter (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992 [1986]).

engagement in the Spanish war, on the Francoist side), his former autobiographical novel, *Réveuse bourgeoisie*, cannot be defined as such, as there is no "thesis" despite the idea of national decline which underlies it, an idea that was common to the far-right thinkers, who opposed it to "progress."<sup>48</sup>

### Discourse and representation

Borrowed from linguistics, the notion of "discourse" provides an alternative concept for approaching the relationship between literature and other types of texts. Literature is regarded as a social discourse, that conveys discourses that are widely spread during their time. French Canadian sociocritic Marc Angenot dedicated for instance an interesting study to the social discourses published in the French press during the year 1889, placing literature in the intertextual frame of these other discourses.<sup>49</sup> This study participated in the development of studies on literature and journalism, which include the poetics of the journalistic genres.<sup>50</sup>

The relationship between law and literature has also become a fertile area for exploring the discursive social construction of the subject, in the line of Foucault. Joseph Slaughter parallels for instance the *Bildungsroman* with the Human Rights legal framework from the Enlightenment to international law in their mutual construction of the "human personality" not as an individual with no limits but as a self-conscious social creature, endowed with rights and responsibility, through a process of individuation which is "an incorporative process of socialization," i.e. of internalizing social norms.<sup>51</sup>

In historical scholarship, it was the notion of "representation" that gained momentum in the 1980s, in the wake of the reception of Foucault's work in the United States (and later that of Louis Marin<sup>52</sup>). The journal *Representations* was launched in order to promote such an approach. Within this approach, literary works became a source to study collective representations (without always acknowledging the origin of this notion in Durkheim's sociological theory). Realism was the literary trend that lent itself best to such an approach.

This approach was renewed by gender, postcolonial, subaltern and queer studies. Postcolonial and subaltern studies challenge the Western dominant national narratives from the margins, underscoring the experience of "in-between" spaces and of "hybridity", through migration and diasporic culture. Homi Bhabha reads such an experience in *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, who describes the condition of slave women through a story of infanticide, and in *My Son's Story* by Nadine Gordimer, who describes the turmoil in the houses of the South-African ghetto under Apartheid and the trouble of *Métis* identity. In her analysis of Mahasweta Devi Stanadayini's *The Breast-Giver*, Gayatri Spivak demonstrated how this work questions dominant feminist paradigms. Michael Lucey explored the articulation of affective relationships, social forms of

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<sup>48</sup> Gisèle Sapiro, *Les Écrivains et la politique en France, de l'affaire Dreyfus à la Guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: Seuil, 2018), 273-298.

<sup>49</sup> Marc Angenot, *1889, Un état du discours social* (Montréal: Le Préambule, 1989).

<sup>50</sup> Marie-Ève Thérénty, *La littérature au quotidien. Poétiques journalistiques au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 2007).

<sup>51</sup> Joseph Slaughter, *Human Rights, Inc.* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 19.

<sup>52</sup> Louis Marin, *On Representation*, trans. Catherine Porter (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002 [1994]).

sexuality and social order in a period of change in the family and property legal system in Balzac's work.<sup>53</sup> And Laure Murat studied how sexual binarism and the gendered hierarchy between masculine and feminine were challenged in nineteenth-century France by novels staging lesbians and emancipated women, both incarnating the "third sex," as in the paradigmatic examples of *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1835) by Théophile Gautier and *Gabriel* (1840) by George Sand, at a time when homosexuality and travesty were regarded as pathologies.<sup>54</sup>

Like the notion of worldview, the notion of representation emphasizes the constructed, active dimension of perception, as opposed to the empiricist, passive conception of perception. It thus allows us to account for the variations over time, or among social groups, for instance. Nonetheless, the concept of worldview is broader and includes not only representations but the relations between them, this relational or structural dimension being crucial to understand the meaning of each item in the structure. This is why, as argued by Cassirer, worldviews may be not commensurable, like Kuhn's paradigms or Foucault's episteme. They frame our perception, and though we can confront them, we cannot adopt both (literature often stages such confrontations between the diverging worldviews of classes or groups, like for instance in Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*).

We can address four interrelated critiques at the notions of worldview and representation. First, the notion of "representation" excludes other more formal aspects of the literary text that play a role in the framing of perception, such as style, metaphors, genre, and linguistic registers (for instance, Bakhtin's notion of "polyphony" and that of "carnivalization" to describe the effect produced by the use of popular culture in literature<sup>55</sup>). Second, reducing the literary text to a source for the study of social representations or of a worldview involves the risk of overlooking the specificity of literature and the mediation that the literary field as a space of possibilities exerts on these representations. In his reading of Flaubert's *Sentimental Education*, Bourdieu argues that the social space of the novel is structured from the standpoint of Frédéric Moreau, whose indetermination corresponds to Flaubert's own experience before he became a writer.<sup>56</sup> In Bourdieu's field theory, mediation means that the issues at stake in the broader social space are retranslated in a relational fashion and according to the specific principles of the field. Third, the notion of representation fails to account for the way literature can be a source of knowledge, which raises the question of the relationship between literature and truth. Fourth, in order to understand the negative or positive values associated with representations or the ethics that underlies the worldview, we need specific tools, *axiological operators*, which can help us connect the literary field to the intellectual field. I shall return to them after discussing the issue of literature and truth.

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<sup>53</sup> Michael Lucey, *The Misfit of the Family: Balzac and the Social Forms of Sexuality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

<sup>54</sup> Laure Murat, "The Invention of the Neuter." *Diogenes* 52, no. 4 (2005): 61-72; Id., *La Loi du genre. Une histoire culturelle du 'troisième sexe'* (Paris: Fayard, 2006).

<sup>55</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Boston: MIT Press, 1971).

<sup>56</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art. Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 1-46.

## Literature and truth

One should distinguish three modalities of the relationship between literature and truth: fictional verisimilitude, testimony, and sincerity in narratives about the self (memoirs, diaries), the two latter combining in political memoirs or in memoirs about intellectual life like those by Simone de Beauvoir.<sup>57</sup> While the relationship of testimony and writings about the self to truth seems more obvious, the testimonial attitude has been criticized by Norton Cru in his 1929 book *Témoins*, which discussed the literary production about the First World War.<sup>58</sup> And authors from Jean-Jacques Rousseau (*The Confessions*, 1782 and 1789) to André Gide (*Si le grain ne meurt*, 1924) have quite theatrically exposed the difficulty of a truly sincere account of their own lives. Moreover, hybrid forms such as autobiographical novels, autofiction or faction blur the border between fiction and reality. The testimonial posture has also become a fictional device in order to adopt a more or less "reliable" narrative (intradiegetic) perspective: in *The Kindly Ones*, Jonathan Littell adopted the point of view of a Nazi officer, Max Aue, a would-be plausible eye-witness of the Holocaust, so as to give an overall view and detailed descriptions based on historical documents, but this narrative strategy was harshly criticized by historians and literary scholars, triggering a controversy.<sup>59</sup>

Nonetheless, even in "pure" fiction, the relationship between literature and truth cannot be reduced to facticity. It may be situated at other levels, such as causality, probability, typicality, and exemplarity in the narration of human actions and of natural or historical events – whether they actually happened or not, whether their narration include fictional elements or not – in the description of social milieus, and in the analysis of individual psychology – whether the characters are real or imagined.

The relationship of fiction to reality has been conceived through the notion of "vraisemblance" (Aristotle), "verisimilitude," "mentir-vrai" (Aragon) or "effet de réel" (Barthes).<sup>60</sup> Aristotle's theory of *vraisemblance* points toward "possibilities" that the recipient will assess more through plausibility rather than through resemblance (mimesis): "These last [reversal or recognition] should arise from the internal structure of the plot, so that what follows should be the necessary or probable result of the preceding action."<sup>61</sup> This conception includes not only representations and values but also the narrative structure, which implies logics of causality, analogy, differentiation and exemplarity, that contribute to the production of meaning. *Vraisemblance* thus strongly depends upon probability, which in modal logics is formalized through the concept of possible worlds. *Vraisemblance* hinges on the readers' credulity, their adhesion, or, as expressed by Coleridge already in 1817, the "willing suspension of

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<sup>57</sup> Jean-Louis Jeannelle, *Écrire ses Mémoires au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle : déclin et renouveau d'une tradition* (Paris: Gallimard, 2008).

<sup>58</sup> Christophe Prochasson, "Les mots pour le dire : Jean-Norton Cru, du témoignage à l'histoire," *Revue d'histoire moderne & contemporaine* 48, no. 4 (2001) 160-189.

<sup>59</sup> Emmanuel Bouju, "Exercice des mémoires possibles et littérature 'à-présent'. La transcription de l'histoire dans le roman contemporain." *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 65, no. 2 (2010): 417-438; Susan Suleiman "Performing a Perpetrator as Witness: Jonathan Littell's *Les Bienveillantes*." In *After Testimony: The Aesthetics and Ethics of Holocaust Narrative for the Future*, eds. J. Lothe, S.R. Suleiman and J. Phelan (Athens, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 2012), 99-119.

<sup>60</sup> On the development of conceptions of verisimilitude which realism was to come to associate with "the effect of the real," see Andrée Mercier, "La vraisemblance: état de la question historique et théorique," *Temps Zéro*, no. 2, 2009.

<sup>61</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. S. H. Butcher (Project Gutenberg, 2008) 17.

disbelief:" the reader reads the fiction "as if" it were true.<sup>62</sup> For this reason, Bourdieu has proposed the notion of "belief effect" instead of Barthes' "reality effect."<sup>63</sup>

This "as if" nevertheless depends on genre conventions, on the internal plausibility of the narrative according to norms that are proper to a culture or a historical period, on its plausibility with regards to the known laws governing the real world, and on the plausibility of the narrator's enunciation position. These varying forms of plausibility may appear incompatible across time and place. Classical literature values internal coherence and norms of propriety, to the detriment of truth which, according to Boileau, "could sometimes not be likely [*vraisemblable*]." By contrast, eighteenth-century British realism embodied the philosophy of empiricism, as Ian Watt has argued.<sup>64</sup> And nineteenth-century realism moreover referred to empirical sciences and their relationship to the real world. Hence the relevance of Barthes' concept of "reality effect" in the particular case of realism. This effect is obtained by various devices: inserting proper nouns of places, public figures, and historical events, which invite the reader to situate the plot in space and time; offering detailed descriptions typical to realism and naturalism; portraying characters whose social properties and motivations are credible (social types); suggesting causal connections or connections referring to plausible probabilistic schemes. However, such probabilistic schemes are not specific to realism, and they can be also found in classical literature.<sup>65</sup>

While Aristotle emphasized the objective of *vraisemblance*, which is to convince, contemporary philosophers have focused on the cognitive functions of literature. French philosopher Jacques Bouveresse defined literature as "practical knowledge."<sup>66</sup> Another French philosopher, Pascal Engel discusses this thesis of "literary cognitivism." He distinguishes two options. One, weaker according to him, consists in saying that literature refers to beliefs and modes of inferences, which produce effects of empathy, recognition, or reenactment. The second, more robust, raises the question of whether this mode of practical knowledge has or not the properties of propositions. Engel argues in favor of the idea that literature as practical knowledge has a propositional dimension, without however underwriting the conception of literary cognitivism as a set of thematic statements implementing theses that are proposed to the reader's assessment. He suggests, instead, to consider this literary cognitivism in terms of modes of indirect representations of "know how," descriptions of practical knowledge and moral examples of personalities (*caractères*), types, mores, psychological laws (called "ethopea"). This is a propositional mode of knowledge in the sense that it

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<sup>62</sup> Philosopher John R. Searle defined it as "shared pretense" in "The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse," *New Literary History*, 6, no. 2 (Winter, 1975), 319-332. Jean-Marie Schaeffer added "playful, shared pretense" in *Why Fiction?* trans. Dorrit Cohn (Lincoln: The University of Nebraska Press, 2010 [1999]).

<sup>63</sup> Roland Barthes, "The Reality Effect", in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 141-148; Bourdieu, *Rules of Art*, 334.

<sup>64</sup> Ian Watt, *Rise of the Novel*. See also Juliane Vogel, "Die Kürze des Faktums. Textökonomien des Wirklichen um 1800." In: *Auf die Wirklichkeit zeigen? Zum Problem der Evidenz in den Kulturwissenschaften. Ein Reader*, ed. Helmut Lethen, Ludwig Jäger and Albrecht Koschorke (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2015), 137-152.

<sup>65</sup> Karin Kukkonen, *Probability Designs. Literature and Predictive Processing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

<sup>66</sup> Jacques Bouveresse, *La Connaissance de l'écrivain. Sur la littérature, la vérité & la vie* (Paris: Agone, 2008), 63-64. For discussion of this notion, see Pascal Engel, "Literature and Practical Knowledge," *Argumenta* 2, no.1 (2016): 55-76.

confers practical knowledge indirectly, through "description using modes of practical presentation."<sup>67</sup>

This theory is convincing for realist and even allegoric literature, but less so for more experimental forms or for poetry, which deconstruct routine modes of representation and present things in a way that is not necessarily translatable in terms of "ethopea" or "know how." For instance, surrealists made use of dreams to redefine our notion of reality, using automatic writing, but also images (photography).<sup>68</sup> Nonetheless, this conception of literature as "practical knowledge," in particular in this robust version, opens new paths for investigating the relationship between literature and other forms of knowledge. The naturalist authors, for instance, borrowed from medicine not only representations but also a language and causality schemes which organize the narration (like, for instance, the effects of alcoholism in Zola's *L'Assommoir*). In his novel *Les Cloches de Bâle*, the Communist writer Aragon used dialectical materialism to account for the causes of the First World War.

One could examine the relationships of literary works with the *episteme* in Foucault's sense, that is to say the relationships unifying in a given period the discursive practices which produce epistemological figures, sciences and formalized systems, and how these moves towards epistemologisation are achieved within these discursive formations.<sup>69</sup> Although Zola conceived of literature as a mode of experimentation equivalent to science, the usages of medical knowledge by naturalist authors never questioned this knowledge. By contrast, realist novelists such as Balzac, Stendhal and Tolstoy did question the possibility to describe or control chance and contingency that had been explored by Carl von Clausewitz's theory of war based on mathematical and philosophical developments and that was implied in military models (maps, games, simulations).<sup>70</sup>

I have proposed considering literature as situated between *doxa* and *episteme*.<sup>71</sup> The degree of autonomy or dependency of the schemes of literary representation with regard to the existing frames of perception and analysis, be they mediatic, political or scientific, varies across literary works, and consequently in their capacity to renew the dominant worldview, as well as the dominant narratives of the past, present and future (see the discussion of Jameson above). For instance, Malraux's epistolary novel *La Tentation de l'Occident* (1926) challenged, both in its content and in the dialogic epistolary form, the idea of the superiority of western culture within a unique process of civilization, an idea which prevailed in his time in the *doxa* and in the *episteme* altogether, as the debate about the relationship between the "West" and the "East" in the French literary field reveal (although the anthropological notion of "culture" started being introduced in France).<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Pascal Engel, "Literature and Practical Knowledge," *Argumenta* 2, n°1 (2016), 55-76. On ethopea, see Barbara Carnevali, "Mimesis littéraire et connaissance morale. La tradition de l'ethopée," *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 65, no. 2 (2010) 291-322.

<sup>68</sup> Delia Ungureanu, *Time Regained. World Literature and Cinema* (London: Bloomsbury, 2022).

<sup>69</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 191. The meaning of the notion of *episteme* evolved between *Les Mots et les Choses* (1966) and *L'Archéologie du savoir* (1968): Foucault restricted its usage to sciences or fields of scientific knowledge. He also explicitly distinguishes it from that of worldview, by paying attention to practices and discursive regularities. On its relationship to ideology, see pp. 240-243.

<sup>70</sup> See Anders Engberg-Pederson, *Empire of Chance. The Napoleonic Wars and the Disorder of Things* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015).

<sup>71</sup> Sapiro, *Les Écrivains et la politique en France*, 211.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 324-344.

*Axiological operators: the literary field and the intellectual field*

The notion of worldview transcends that of knowledge, because it also involves axiological principles. According to Durkheim and Mauss, "all classification implies a hierarchical order."<sup>73</sup> Bourdieu contends that classification schemes are inseparable from evaluation schemes (positive/negative, high/low, noble/base, etc.).<sup>74</sup> I call *axiological operators* notions such as "disinterestedness," "civilization," "freedom," that give systems of cultural oppositions both their meaning and their position in a hierarchy of values, through spatial designators—in this case high and low—that have moral connotations of worthy and unworthy, and conferring or failing to confer dignity (*digne/indigne*).<sup>75</sup> Operating as practical schemes, according to fuzzy logics, these notions function as synecdoches of series of oppositions of which they are one term: civilization *vs* state of wilderness but also *vs* barbarity; freedom *vs* constraint, but also *vs* determination, determinism and servitude; disinterestedness *vs* interest, but also *vs* utility, social utility, and so on.<sup>76</sup> The social efficacy of such operators comes from their ability to symbolically unify systems of classification or heterogeneous types of hierarchies in the order of values and institutions. It is in this manner that they underlie and structure the worldview of a certain culture. They are regularly transposed from the intellectual field where they are produced to the field of ideological production and serve to legitimize political causes. Consequently, axiological operators play a major role in symbolic struggles, especially in periods of social transformation, but their own definitions and appropriation are also constantly struggled over.

Conversely, *axiological operators* are more difficult to identify in fiction, drama or poetry because they are often enacted in characters and plot, although they may for instance appear in dialogues. Nonetheless, one can reconstruct the system of oppositions which organizes the underlying worldview in literary works. The literary works can often be connected to essays written by their authors which may help reconstruct their worldview, as Jeffrey Mehlmann does with Paul Valéry's concept of civilization and of the superiority of the *Homo Europaëus*, developed in his famous 1919 essay "La Crise de l'Esprit" ("The crisis of the Mind"), and its poetic manifestation in *La Jeune Parque* and *Le Cimetière marin*, reminding us that Valéry had been a student of the racist anthropologist Vacher de Lapouge who introduced him to craniometry.<sup>77</sup> Such an approach should not be reserved to philosophers like Sartre or Beauvoir, whose novels and dramas enact their "theses," or to thinkers like Valéry. As Kenneth Burke put it, "the work of every writer contains a set of implicit equations. He uses 'associational clusters.'"<sup>78</sup>

*Axiological operators* can help us understand the connections between the intellectual field and the literary field, when the latter has gained a relative autonomy: which schemes circulate, how are they retranslated? For instance, did the notion of

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<sup>73</sup> Émile Durkheim et Marcel Mauss, 'De quelques formes de classification', art. cité.

<sup>74</sup> Bourdieu, *Le Sens pratique*.

<sup>75</sup> Gisèle Sapiro, "Défense et illustration de l'honnête homme."

<sup>76</sup> Gisèle Sapiro, "Against Self-interest: The Codification of "Disinterestedness" as an Axiological Operator in Religion, Aesthetics, and the Ethics of Intellectual Professions," in *Historicising Self-Interest*, ed. Christine Zabel (London: Routledge, 2021), 241-260.

<sup>77</sup> Jeffrey Mehlman, "Craniometry and Criticism: Notes on a Valeryan Criss-Cross." In *Genealogies of the Text Literature, Psychoanalysis, and Politics in Modern France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 11-32.

<sup>78</sup> Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Forms* (Louisiana: State University Press, 1941), 20.

"transparency" studied by Stefanos Geroulanos, which perfectly fulfills the function of an *axiological operator*, circulate in the literary field?<sup>79</sup> They can also help us connect writer's literary works with their political commitments. Indeed, while the "*histoire des intellectuels*," which developed since the 1980s, has focused on their political position takings without considering their literary works or literary positioning, a field-theory approach reveals homology between literary and political position takings, beyond the fact that they draw the symbolic capital in the name of which they intervene on political matters from their literary recognition.<sup>80</sup> Since writers engage as such, their engagement should be related to their conception of literature.

Moreover, their form of politicization is related to the position they occupy in the field. Four idealtypical modes of intervention can be distinguished: the moral attitude of the "*notables*," in their columns in newspapers, who also tend to stage their proximity to the ruling class in the genre of the portrait or interview of political leaders; the aesthetic approach of the "esthetes," who treat politics with an aesthetic distance (in fiction or in essays published in literary reviews); the subversive conception of art and literature of the "avant-garde," symbolized by the genre of the manifesto; and the overtly politicized positioning of the polemicists, whose favorite genre is the lampoon.<sup>81</sup> But some literary works are also politicized in the reception process, with axiological operators playing again a role in this politicization, and allowing to transcend the production/reception divide.

#### Reception, appropriations and usages

If we look in historical terms at the process whereby science and literature become autonomous from public morality and ideological frameworks – the principles of neutrality and objectivity, which were transposed into literature by Flaubert thanks to his impassive narrators and the theory of *l'art pour l'art* – it is obvious that this autonomy can never be complete because no representation of the world can be neutral. Every such representation is always inscribed in relational fashion within a broader space of representations and a *doxa* which transcends it and confers upon it its objective signification in a given configuration, notwithstanding the author's intentions. The interpretation of a book is never independent of the socio-historical configuration in which it is read and of the reading habits of the period.

Introduced by literary scholars, reception studies developed as a specific approach in and of itself in literary history, intellectual history and the sociology of ideas. The literary approach elaborated by the Konstanz school (represented by Hans-Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser) refers to an "ideal reader" that is implicit in the text, thus making it possible to think of the literary devices as producing effects on the reader in a way comparable to Roland Barthes' concept of "effect". The methodology remained however focused on text analysis and not on concrete reading practices that

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<sup>79</sup> Stefanos Geroulanos, *Transparency in Postwar France. A Critical History of the Present* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017).

<sup>80</sup> Christophe Charle, *Birth of the Intellectuals: 1880–1900*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015); Gisèle Sapiro, *The French Writers' War*, trans. Dorrit Cohn and Vanessa Doriott Anderson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); Tristan Leperlier, *Algérie, les écrivains dans la décennie noire* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2018).

<sup>81</sup> Gisèle Sapiro, "Forms of Politicization in the French Literary Field," *Theory and Society*, 32 (2003), 633-652.



were at the time studied by cultural historians.<sup>82</sup> Studies of the critical reception of literary works provided a more concrete description of the way texts were interpreted in the intellectual field, as for instance, Joseph Jurt's pioneer study of the reception of Georges Bernanos in the written press, which showed how the right/left cleavage affected literary criticism.<sup>83</sup>

Literary trials, which often echoed moralistic and politicized critics in the newspapers, also became a site of observation of the reception and interpretation of literary works. Despite Flaubert's insistence on adopting a neutral and objective point of view, *Madame Bovary* caused a scandal, one of the reasons being precisely, as Jauss underscored, the narrator's impassive posture (inasmuch as he did not condemn Emma's adultery) and the use of free indirect speech, which were both innovative literary devices.<sup>84</sup> According to Dominick LaCapra, the novel *read* the trial by challenging the social norm of marriage.<sup>85</sup> But this does not explain why Flaubert was not sanctioned in the end. Specialists made the hypothesis that it was thanks to his social capital, i.e. the connections his family had in the field of power.<sup>86</sup> However, one can also argue that the speech for his defense was confirming the norms in the name of which he was being prosecuted and read the trial in another way: his counsel Sénard argued that *Madame Bovary* was a moral novel which showed the noxious effects of reading novels on a woman from lower social classes to whom they instilled the ambition of upward mobility, an ambition which was at the time regarded as a social danger: as a result of this plea, Flaubert's intention was recognized by the court as "pure," and he was just blamed for his (mis)use of crude realistic devices.<sup>87</sup>

Writers can be also tried for ideological motives, such as offense to the king's person, to State representatives, to the army (like Lucien Descaves for his novel *Sous-Offs* in 1889), or for incitement to terrorism, or for anarchism. According to the regime, more or less emphasis is placed on certain values like religion, family, or national interest. The distinction between representation and apology, and between the fictional characters and the author, was acknowledged by French courts only starting in the 1970s. The potential reader was at the core of the moral and legal concerns regarding the effect of literary works. Metaphors of their noxious effects alternated between "poison" and "contagion." While the representation of these supposed noxious effects was restricted to youth with the post-68 liberalization of the public sphere,<sup>88</sup> the notion of "sensitive readers" emerged in the English-speaking world against racist, sexist and stigmatizing discourses, including in classical works. Some right-wing authors such as Michel Houellebecq use fiction in order to disseminate such stigmatizing discourses in the public sphere without taking the risk of a lawsuit. Others openly attack antiracism as a restriction to freedom of expression.

Against the notion of influence which prevailed in the traditional history of ideas, and which presupposes the passivity of the receiver, cultural historians and

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<sup>82</sup> Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi (London: Routledge, 1980); Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier (eds.), *A History of Reading in the West* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999), 284-312.

<sup>83</sup> Joseph Jurt, *La Réception de la littérature par la critique journalistique : lectures de Bernanos, 1926-1936* (Paris: J.-M. Place, 1980).

<sup>84</sup> Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 3-45.

<sup>85</sup> Dominick LaCapra, *Madame Bovary on Trial* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982). See also Elisabeth Ladenson, *Dirt for Art's Sake: Books on Trial from Madame Bovary to Lolita* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 2007).

<sup>86</sup> Yvan Leclerc, *Crimes écrits. La littérature en procès au 19<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Plon, 1991).

<sup>87</sup> Gisèle Sapiro, *La Responsabilité de l'écrivain*, 177-326.

<sup>88</sup> On the concept of public sphere, see chapter 2 in this volume.

sociologists have insisted on the active dimension of reception by studying the ways in which texts are appropriated and used. This approach has allowed to recast the question of whether books make revolutions, a question that is deeply anchored in the belief that it was the writings of the *philosophes* that lead to the French Revolution.<sup>89</sup> In Bourdieu's terms, the strategies of appropriation of a text can be related to the issues at stake in the reception field.<sup>90</sup> While this approach has been mostly applied to non-fictional texts, it of course can be fruitfully applied to literary works. Literary works may be appropriated for ideological purposes, and for the cultural construction of "imagined communities": literature was ascribed a role in the construction of the national identities and plays a role in collective memory.<sup>91</sup> Literary works may thus serve educational purposes: the study of textbooks is revelatory of the social functions ascribed to them, of the values they are supposed to disseminate and of their cultural exemplarity. This applies of course to youth literature, which is submitted to educational control.<sup>92</sup> Authoritarian regimes have tried not only to control but also to instrumentalize art for propaganda purposes. While the Communist regime in the USSR promoted socialist realism as a method of creation,<sup>93</sup> the fascist regime in Italy was actively involved in the modernist aesthetic movement which served its goal of shaping the "new" individual.<sup>94</sup>

The cultural policies developed by national and international institutions such as UNESCO and their conception of reading have also become a fruitful field of research.<sup>95</sup> However, and this brings us back to the episteme, these political conceptions of culture and literature are often contested by the writers themselves, as Peter McDonald's study demonstrates about the way modernist writers such as T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, and Rabindranath Tagore, and contemporary ones, from Amit Chaudhuri, J. M. Coetzee, and Salman Rushdie to Antjie Krog, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra and Es'kia Mphahlele, have challenged the institutional definition of culture by state constitutions and international bodies (the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation of the League of the Nations in the interwar period and by UNESCO after the Second World War).<sup>96</sup> The relationship between literature and nation had been challenged since the end of the nineteenth-century by modernist conceptions of cosmopolitanism in the English world, as the intellectual debates studied by Stefano-Maria Evangelista show.<sup>97</sup> Writers often make use of past or foreign authors in order to subvert the dominant ideology of their time. For instance classical Greek references were used by British writers such as Oscar Wilde in order to challenge

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<sup>89</sup> Chartier, *Cultural Origins...*

<sup>90</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, "The Social Conditions of the International Circulation of Ideas." In *Bourdieu: A Critical Reader*, ed. Richard Shusterman (Oxford and Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 1999 [1989]), 220–228.

<sup>91</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Verso, 2006); Anne-Marie Thiesse, *The Creation of National Identities. Europe, 18<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 2021).

<sup>92</sup> See for instance Christa Kamenetsky, *Children's Literature in Hitler's Germany: The Cultural Policy of National Socialism* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2019).

<sup>93</sup> Robin, *Socialist Realism...*

<sup>94</sup> Francesca Billiani, *Fascist Modernism in Italy. Arts and Regimes* (London: Tauris, 2021).

<sup>95</sup> See for instance Sarah Brouillette, *UNESCO and the Fate of the Literary* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019).

<sup>96</sup> Peter D. McDonald, *Artefacts of Writing: Ideas of the State and Communities of Letters from Matthew Arnold to Xu Bing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

<sup>97</sup> Stefano Evangelista, *Literary Cosmopolitanism in the English Fin de Siècle: Citizens of Nowhere* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

the conservative Victorian conception of sexuality and legitimize homosexuality.<sup>98</sup> Finally, studying usages of literary texts as sources or illustration of theoretical assertions, from Freud to Bourdieu, can shed light on how literature has nourished the social and human sciences and marked their writing and style.<sup>99</sup>

## Conclusion

The existing and potential interactions between the socio-historical study of literary works and the history and sociology of ideas are manifold. Beyond the question of the relationships between literature and knowledge, and between fiction and truth, it raises that of the worldview conveyed by literary works.

The socio-historical study of literary works thus requires combining three perspectives.<sup>100</sup> First, the political, economic and social conditions of production – censorship, publishing constraints, the social conditions for access to the public sphere – and the literary institutions and networks to which the authors are connected, some of which are located at the intersection between the literary field and the intellectual field (like Sartre's journal *Les Temps modernes*<sup>101</sup>), the media field (newspapers), or the field of power (like the salons or the *Académie française*<sup>102</sup>). Although it remains relevant to understand the legal and socio-political conditions of production, the nationally focused approach of such intellectual networks has been renewed from a transnational and postcolonial perspective, as in Elleke Bohmer's study, based on archives and close reading, of the interconnections of the Indian intellectual migrants within British literary circles in *fin de siècle* Great Britain.<sup>103</sup> Working on such transnational networks between intellectuals and cultural intermediaries enables us to construct transnational intellectual fields, which may be formed by migration or political exile, but also by the global circulation of books in translation.<sup>104</sup>

Second, the worldview conveyed by the works can be related to the *doxa* and the *episteme*, in light of the authors' trajectories and also in light of the space of literary and intellectual possibilities of their time, using field theory.

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<sup>98</sup> Stefano-Maria Evangelista, *British Aestheticism and Ancient Greece: Hellenism, Reception, Gods in Exile* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

<sup>99</sup> See for instance the entries "Bernhard," "Flaubert," "Kafka," "Proust", or "Ponge" in *Dictionnaire international Bourdieu*, ed. Gisèle Sapiro (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2020).

<sup>100</sup> Gisèle Sapiro, *The Sociology of Literature*, trans. Madeline Bedecarré and Ben Libman (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2023).

<sup>101</sup> Anna Boschetti, *The Intellectual Enterprise: Sartre and les Temps Modernes* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1988).

<sup>102</sup> Antoine Lilti, *The World of the Salons: Sociability and Worldliness in Eighteenth-Century Paris*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); Sapiro, *French Writers' War*.

<sup>103</sup> Elleke Bohmer, *Indian Arrivals 1870-1915: Networks of British Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>104</sup> Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004) ; Gisèle Sapiro, "The Transnational Literary Field between (Inter)-nationalism and Cosmopolitanism." *Journal of World Literature*, 5, no. 4 (2020), 481-504; Gisèle Sapiro, Tristan Leperlier, and Mohamed Amine Brahimi, "Qu'est-ce qu'un champ intellectuel transnational?" *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 224, no. 4 (2018) : 4-11. For a case study on the channels of importation in France of literary works from Eastern Europe under the Communist regimes, see Ioana Popa. *Traduire sous contraintes. Littérature et communisme (1947-1989)* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2010).

Third, the reception and appropriations of literary works occur in a broader socio-intellectual history: one can ask how the conditions of reception determine the reading of a work and its ideological potential (for instance the subversiveness of *Madame Bovary*; or the debate on the relationship between West and East in the French intellectual field of the 1920s, when Malraux released his novel); or how the works are used for political or intellectual purposes, but also how literary theory may ground censors' judgment.<sup>105</sup>

The concept of field helps us understand the circulations between the literary field, the intellectual field, and the field of ideological production in a given social configuration, all the while taking into account the relative autonomy and specific issues of each, and the homologies and mediations through which the literary works are read and (re)interpreted. These circulations are facilitated by *axiological operators*, and by the politicization process which occurs in times of social and political crises, contributing to the synchronization and phase harmonization of fields, as Bourdieu argued for May 68.<sup>106</sup>

Lastly, it should be made clear that the interactions between literature and science, and the fact that it can be a source of knowledge does not mean, however, that one should subscribe to the blurring of the difference between literature and the social and human sciences, as some suggest, and however seductive the arguments might be.<sup>107</sup> Their epistemological regimes and modes of restitution should remain distinct, despite the tendency, encouraged by publishers and literary agents (with the hope of reaching a non-academic audience), to introduce narrative forms (which often have not much to do with literature) in the writing of the human and social sciences. Reaffirming this distinction should not prevent us from comparing the worldviews and *episteme* they both convey, nor from exploring the role of forms (taken in a broader sense than the traditional literary or art forms) in shaping the sociopolitical world.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Peter McDonald, *The Literature Police: Literary Censorship in Apartheid South Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>106</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988); Gisèle Sapiro, "Structural Crises vs. Situations of (Political) Crisis: A Bourdieuan Approach," *Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia*, LXIII: 2 (2022), 299-321.

<sup>107</sup> Ivan Jablonka, *History Is a Contemporary Literature. Manifesto for the Social Sciences* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018). Against this blurring, see Françoise Lavocat, *Fait et fiction. Pour une frontière* (Paris : Seuil, 2016).

<sup>108</sup> Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).