Which Disciplines for Literature?

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Abstract: *The author analyses the way in which—against the fluid background of globalisation—literary studies not only lose their edifying purpose, as a central component of what used to be called* Bildung, *but, more importantly, also risk losing their very object of study—literature, insofar as literature itself is no longer taken into account in its specificity and in its literary* difference.

Keywords: *literary studies, cultural studies, comparative literature, semiotics, structuralism, Deconstruction, Derrida, J.H. Miller,* Bildung, *the anticanonical reaction, literary-cultural, high literature, high theory, literariness*

Résumé : *L'auteur analyse la façon dans laquelle – sur le fond fluide de la globalisation – les études littéraires perdent non seulement leur but édificateur, en tant que composante centrale de ce qui était appelé auparavant* Bildung, *mais, plus gravement encore, elles risquent de perdre leur propre objet d'étude – la littérature, dans la mesure où la littérature elle-même n'est plus considérée dans sa spécificité, dans sa* différence *littéraire.*

Mots-clés : *études littéraires, études culturelles, littérature comparée, sémiotique, structuralisme, Déconstruction, Derrida, J.H. Miller,* Bildung, *la réaction anti-canonique, littéraire-culturel, haute littérature, haute théorie, littérarité*

There have presumably been ages more propitious for literature than the one we are living today… Among them, perhaps, even that which the romantic poet called "destitute." I do not share the opinion, more and more prevalent today, that there are no great contemporary writers any more: it is wiser to think that we may not know how to discover them. Such lamentation aside, we must still admit that the great literary events of recent years have been rather commemorative in nature. Let us bear in mind Márquez's almost festive demise and let us not forget that it occurred in an age when a mediocre but deft writer such as Coelho is enjoying cross-continental triumph.

Literature has not lost its vitality; there still exists an abundance of good writing; territories that up to several decades ago were silent from the literary point of view—such as continental China, for one—now turn out significant works. Nevertheless, literature has lost the importance and buoyancy of former times, has ceased to occupy a central position in the economy of culture. Until after the Second World War, to some extent until the '80s even, European culture was predominantly literary, and American culture no less so.

In Eastern Europe, in Romania at any rate, this *literaturocentrism* continued into the early 2000s; dramatic fractures and dispossessions occurred, and still do to this day. Let us consider only what the Writers' Union stood for in the '70s and the '80s and what it stands for today; to say nothing of the prestige literature and literary criticism enjoyed during the same communist past. Nevertheless, it would unquestionably be inappropriate to conclude that those past times were beneficial for literature.

Any lamentation is lamentable in itself, of course; yet I cannot refrain from posing the following rhetorical question: does literature still exert today the *edifying* role attributed to it by the founders of modern European culture and of the modern University from the early 19th to the early 20th century, from Wilhelm von Humboldt to Ortega y Gasset and Paul Valéry, or, going back even further in time, from Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* to Matthew Arnold's convincing plea to cultivate one's moral and civic virtues through readings of great writers? Should such expectations still exist today (and they still do, but in a waning public), the literary works that would meet them are sure to appear—in the eyes of the young and against the fluid background of globalisation—positively vestigial.

The ever accelerated rhythm of day-to-day life, the often sudden and unpredictable transformations, the technological advances demanding to be implemented straight away, the speed of long-distance communications, the capacity to produce simulacra of presence at any moment, all define an age of *directness, immediateness,* of *contingencies* appearing to be—and sometimes actually being—*contiguities*. Hence, probably, the impression (and expression) of the "*Disappearance of the Outside*".

In reality, what disappears—or, at any rate, diminishes—is the *Inside*. Starting from the more or less far-off effects of the new communication technologies and of digital culture, Derrida, in *La carte postale* […], foresaw the disappearance of the inside-outside dichotomy in favour of the exterior, together with that of literature itself (beside philosophy, psychoanalysis and… love letters). An author such as Derrida cannot be suspected of intellectual conformity or nostalgia, although he was also the one who said about literature that it was "the most interesting thing in the world." In any event, his apocalyptic vision with respect to the future of literature cannot be overlooked. Norbert Elias also remarked the contemporary human's growing inclination for the outside, compared to the humans of immediately preceding epochs. Anthony Giddens also points to a dilution of reflexivity, which the age's vast information offer and extraordinary communicational diversity only fuel and promote.

As for myself, I have spoken on a different occasion about the "decay of the symbolic" in postmodern society. In the era of generalised communication there is hardly any room left for symbolic communication.

Symbolic mediations are felt, especially by young people, to be deviant, alienating, when not outright tedious. Still, literature and arts in general—even in some of their postmodern forms—are and remain products of *mediation*. Despite their concreteness, the images they lay before us are not direct; their representations are highly wrought, mediated; they are, in one word, "artificial," not "natural": despite their freshness and effectiveness. Any competent reader knows that the *authenticity* of everyday life is not

to be confused with authenticity in literature. Beyond any affective engagement, reading itself, far from being simple or literal, presupposes a certain "decoding," which is to say a painstaking mental and imaginative process.

Apocalyptic prophecies apart, one cannot ignore a certain incompatibility between our age and literature (or what we used to call literature). When I say "our age," I, of course, bank on the fragile ambiguity of synecdoche. Despite the growing homogenising effects of globalization, important differences remain between various cultural areas, which are due to their different starting points, namely their local traditions, their historic and political context, their economic circumstances, the rhythm of their development, etc. Yet the process through which literature is marginalised seems to be irreversible everywhere. It is not by chance that its social usefulness is more often claimed than positively acknowledged these days. Literature no longer plays anything except a minor role in defining the ethical principles and the patterns on the global arena, in the self-image of contemporary humans. The power, influence, and pertinence it used to enjoy in the last several centuries are waning dramatically, irrespective of the amount of grief such considerations might give us, the people whose lives are connected to it. The more and more evident passage from a book culture to a hypertext culture is a corollary of this process—a corollary that merely appears to be just technical.

Yet how about the study of literature, how about *literary studies*? They lost the important place they held in what used to be called *Bildung* some time ago. From an institutional point of view, literary studies undergo a serious crisis of representation today, a crisis that is but a fragment of the crisis of representation that the humanities undergo in the larger scheme of upper education and of society as a whole. Academic management is largely entrusted to economists, accountants or engineers, while the scientific research in every field is more and more insistently required to produce quantitatively measurable results and immediate applications.

Ever since the 1990s, universities in the Unites States have begun to turn towards profit and have consequently cut down the humanities study programmes, particularly those dedicated to literature. In Europe, a similar process is underway, with the "Bologna" system favouring such cuts. In Romania, the *per capita* financing of upper education seriously undermines the quality of education in general, whereas the policy of classifying fields of study according to their "productive intelligence"—productive from an economic point of view—puts not only literary studies, but history and philosophy as well, at a gross disadvantage.

Against the larger background of the humanities, literary and historical studies tend to be not only underfinanced, but downright marginalised, all the more so given their very definition is partly dependent on the concept of the *nation state.* The fashionable, even dominant, tendency of the last few decades in the USA, which also spread, after some time, into a sizeable segment of West-European elites is that of proclaiming the erosion of national states and their slow—or not so slow—disappearance. Over the past years, echoes of such tendencies have asserted themselves in Romania as well, and the attempt of certain pedagogic factions to eliminate Romanian literature from secondary education may be considered an effect of that. That attempt occurred under the pretence

of a necessary "modernisation," which posited that literature and communication were incompatible, as well as of an urgent „updating," in whose light the works of authors the likes of Sadoveanu, Coşbuc, or Creangă were allegedly incompatible with the present time.

Even more serious than that seems to me the fact that literature tends to vanish even from study programmes still carried on in its name. Researching and teaching literature in universities no longer carry the prominence and attraction that they used to elicit in former times. The phenomenon has been noted by the renowned American professor J. Hillis Miller, in *Black Holes: Literary Studies in the Transnational University* (Stanford UP, 1999). He noticed that young researchers in English literature departments in the States took more and more distance from literature as such. Professor Miller did not hesitate to view their attitude as proof of the present fall of literature.

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This process of abandoning literature going on even within the literary studies themselves has, however, started earlier, in forms that were less direct, less aware of their consequences. I am referring now to literary criticism, literary history, literary theory, comparative literature, as well as to the entire field of metaliterature in its multiplicity and diversity.

Ever since the 1960s—if not even in the interwar period in certain European cultural areas—*literary criticism* has been reforming and reformulating itself in a direction that meant, first of all, the gradual moving away from the literature of the moment, the emerging literature. The critic's column, the critical essay—equally analytic and value imparting—are replaced by reviews which are mainly summarisations rather than interpretations, ever more reliant on editorial policies and developing interested promotional strategies. In Western Europe, literary critics fell back on theoretical and/or generally cultural positions, in their collaborations with magazines and even more so in their academic research papers. Writers are written about occasionally (anniversaries, commemorations or awards) or in the train of fashionable themes—most often political in nature. Unfortunately, irrespective of the number of exceptions, to be found mostly in Eastern Europe, *this* is the overall picture of the matter.

What happened in Romania from 1964 up to 1990—and continues today, although at a low intensity—is just one such exception, explainable in historical terms. Following the ideological terrorism of the 1950s, Romanian literary criticism rediscovered and reasserted its professionalism, tried to get in synchrony with the movements of ideas in the West, gradually gained prestige both in the writers' eyes and in those of the reading public at large and, in the 1980s, grew into a strong intellectual institution, which came to preoccupy, or indeed even alarm, at times, the political regime. Rarely in the history of Romanian culture—and, most likely, rarely enough across the globe—did the *literary review* get to play such an important role as a canon-forming authority. To be sure, this role was confined to granting support to authentic literary works and undermining as well as, at times, contesting the official canon, without targeting the totalitarian system in its essence; even so, through its most important representatives, literary criticism was a promoter of the freedom of conscience and speech.

After 1990, but especially over the last 10-15 years, the situation has changed visibly. Book reviewing is practised more and more rarely and by ever fewer established critics, while most young critics, who began and became known by writing reviews and columns, have headed for university careers and, subsequently, for monograph-oriented research and syntheses. With few exceptions, they become less and less interested in literary reviews and one cannot rule out—on the contrary, it is a highly predictable occurrence—that we might shortly realise, with a jolt, that they too have banished literature from the centre of their preoccupations, just like their American peers 20 years earlier. That time lag, for that matter, is tantamount to the lag between a trend manifesting itself in the United States and its adoption in Romania, in spite of an all too eager local mimeticism, for better or for worse—the problem deserves a separate discussion.

If we are to refer to the other modes in which metaliterature exists, the only way to do it is, of course, again in broad terms, by observing a similar, yet not identical, process: *literary theory* and *literary history* gradually relinquishing exclusiveness over their object of study—*literature* itself. The prevalence of literary theory for almost two decades (1970-1980) delayed and masked the ever stronger tendency to shift public interest from the *literary* to the *cultural.* After an age—the 1960s and '70s—when literary theory was understood and practised as a theory of *literariness,* and literary history concentrated on canonical works, literary theory as a theory of culture and literary history as cultural history represented the expected pendulum swing in the 1980s.

That movement, however, took place in a wider context, where humanistic studies were the arena of ideological-political pressures and disciplinary inclinations reaching a certain point of convergence. I am thinking of the epistemological impact of *poststructuralism*, as well as of the solidarity between the *anticanonical* reaction and the ascent of *cultural and post-colonial studies* in the United States. The repercussions in the practice and theory of literary studies were considerable. Literary studies themselves opened towards marginal literatures and minor or simply previously ignored authors, who, however, carried with them local specificity or sexual difference—gender difference, to be exact.

As far as the American canon, for instance, was concerned, major English writers began to be replaced with American minority writers: African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, etc. Evidently, a sizeable part of the "Great Tradition" of English and European literature was being thus replaced, important axiological landmarks were lost. Nevertheless, the validity of those writers was no longer acknowledged, while the objectivity claim of former valuations as well as the claim at universality of their conclusions were contested more and more vehemently. The mindset of traditional literary history, which placed great authors and their masterpieces at the centre, was gradually abandoned. School and university literature programmes bore the brunt. "The study of great literary works by great authors, has no useful part to play in a pedagogy committed to a politics of change," wrote Catherine Belsey ("Towards Cultural History—in Theory and Practice" in *Textual Practice* 3:2, pp. 159-172, 1989).

The politics of change consisted in the radical change of direction in the relation between inclusion and exclusion: masterpieces begin to lose the almost exclusive

importance previously granted them in favour of "new entries," considered relevant in view of other criteria, first of all that of *cultural difference*. The concept of *high literature* is abandoned while theory is also abandoned—literary theory proper, now called, limitatively, *high theory*. As the issue of value judgment has long slipped collective attention or has been reduced to contingencies, the interest for mass culture and, within it, mass literature emerges and manifests itself naturally, upheld, moreover, by an ideological connivance.

Mass literature is not concerned—or indeed able—to produce a difference of an aesthetic order, but that is no longer considered a shortcoming. *Literary* and *cultural* are no longer opposed, as they were in *high modernism*; literature, with its new extensions, "drains" into culture. The concept of culture itself is transformed into something else, gradually turns into something else, taking on—apart from forms of literature, arts, and sciences—various modes and fields of social practice. This enormous spread of culture (and literature) is highly symptomatic for our age—it is as if it were striving to win a major and urgent bet with *diversity*.

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An even more spectacular change took place in the field of *comparative literature*. Here too the transnational vocation of the discipline—strongly stimulated by an ever more accented political and ideological tendency to subvert the concepts of *nation* and *nation state*—has led to an expansion of interests towards local and regional productions, towards literary and cultural areas that previously received little attention.

Comparative literature is now experiencing the same thing that happened to literary history and literary theory: starting from the '80s, when looking at the practice of applied research we can recognise the same tendency to *oust literature*. Here, though, the very acceptance of the process and, what is more, its putative nature, is downright spectacular to observe. The famous *Bernheimer Report* delivered to the American Comparative Literature Association in 1993 propounds (nothing less than) the replacement of comparative literature, considered outdated and old-fashioned, with cultural studies, which are supposed to compare cultures by juxtaposing, instead of canonical literary works, "many kinds of artifacts and forms of behaviour—works verbal, visual, and aural," including various forms of advertising.

Here are the recommendations of the *Report* with respect to the compared terms: "The space of comparison today involves comparisons between artistic productions usually studied by different disciplines; between various cultural constructions of those disciplines; between Western cultural traditions, both high and popular, and those of non-Western cultures; between the pre- and postcontact cultural productions of colonised peoples; between gender constructions defined as feminine and those defined as masculine, or between sexual orientations defined as straight and those defined as gay; between racial and ethnic modes of signifying [...]. These ways of contextualizing literature in the expanding fields of discourse, culture, ideology, race, and gender are so different from the old models of literary study according to authors, nations, periods, and genres that the term 'literature' may no longer adequately describe our object of study"

("The Bernheimer Report, 1993: Comparative Literature at the Turn of the Century," in Bernheimer, *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism*, Johns Hopkins UP, pp. 41-2).

The difficulty of switching from one field to another, from one vocabulary to another is minimised with the argument that the transfer, just like translation, can occur "without significant loss." This claim of translatability without significant loss from one field into the other, from a literary text to a sociological or anthropological commentary, seems questionable to me. Also, the assertion that the new comparative literature might stop having literature as its object seems haunted by involuntary irony. Still, it announced a direction that was to be followed not only in the United States, but also in Europe, although somewhat timidly here.

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There can be no doubt that these structural changes in the content and orientation of literary studies must be seen in connection with the explosive development of *cultural studies* in America. One must not, however, forget the role played by an earlier, and important, field-wide phenomenon. I am referring to the emergence, establishment and intercontinental expansion of *semiotics* in the 1960s, which garnered more numerous and loyal followers then structuralism. (Although the two emerged at the same time, semiotics survived structuralism.) The perspective—multidisciplinary from the outset—of semiotics paved the way for the extension of the literary researchers' interests from literary texts to cultural artefacts, and to culture in its entirety. Considering culture itself as "a corpus of texts" (Clifford Geertz) no doubt encouraged the involvement of anthropologists, together with other humanistic researchers, in the study of literature, a field which, until the 1960s-1970s, was almost exclusively open to men of letters and linguists, or, more precisely, specialists in stylistic analysis.

Unfortunately, semioticians did not tackle literature in its specificity and difference from other modes of the spirit. They devoted their attention exclusively to the signifying and communicating function of literary works. As early as in *Semeyotike* (1969), Julia Kristeva declared that: "for semiotics, literature does not exist." I believe this is the place—and precise moment—we may consider as the origin of the *culturalist* approach to literature. That is because Julia Kristeva's affirmation should be taken in the following sense: for semiotics, literature does not exist *as* literature. From that moment onwards, any and all approaches to literature—be it sociological, anthropological, or historical—became possible. Through its multidisciplinary scope, semiotics legitimised approaches to literature from the outside—which, prior to that, were exercised only under the alibi of a political engagement and at the risk of appearing inadequate, an "external" viewpoint.

The researchers' political engagement—in the sense of adherence to a social-cultural policy, not necessarily involving party allegiance—is no longer seen as a problem in the theory and practice of *cultural studies*, nor is the external approach to literature; on the contrary, these positions are directly and explicitly embraced, without hesitation or methodological problematisation. Moreover, for quite a few decades in America, and

for a slightly shorter time in Europe, considering literature as a specific phenomenon is taxed as a way to isolate it, to segregate it in relation to other domains of consciousness and of social pursuits.

A preliminary observation seems, however, necessary: it will not do—not even in the case of last century's literary theory—to confuse literature's admitted *autonomy* with its "closure." Admitting to a special status for literature does not at all entail its impermeability to outside influences, or its emancipation from any social-historical determinism. The 20th century by no means understands the autonomy of literature as "purity"; although theorising and valorizing *literarity*, formalist schools, all the way back to the Russian school, never denied or ignored literature's social rapports.

Structuralism is a case apart—especially French Structuralism, for which literariness was the centre of preoccupation, with no concern for literature's social-historical contexts. The structuralist theory and practice brought a decisive contribution to the modernisation of literary studies and of the humanities as a whole, through its systematic analysis, on the one hand, and through impersonalisation and abstraction, on the other. Its major aspiration was that of *scientifically* restructuring the humanistic disciplines on the model of linguistics. This explains, among other things, its neglect of *history* and of the *subject*.

Nevertheless, an author such as Thomas Pavel, in his seminal book *The Feud of Language* (Blackwell, 1989), denounces precisely the insufficiently scientific character of structuralisms and qualifies this chief objective of theirs as illusory. Pavel identifies "speculative ambitions" in the protagonists of structuralism and their followers, as well as the lack of scrupulous attention to connections between facts and various levels of theoretical generalization. It remains interesting to note that the American scholar with Romanian origins does not accuse the structuralists of scientific ambitions—which may be excessive in fields such as literature and the arts—but of insufficient scientific rigour.

In fact, if we refer strictly to the structuralist manner of approaching literature, we cannot help but notice how literature is reduced to the text and the text is reduced to procedural schemata. Probably not in every case, but certainly in most of them, structural analysis missed the very *uniqueness* of literary works. Moreover, how can one discuss literature leaving out the issue of the creating or receiving subject? On the other hand, literature is essentially, definingly, *literariness*, but is not reduced entirely to it: apart from autonomous values, it also contains and transmits heteronomous ones. In his *Estetica*, as early as 1936, Tudor Vianu insisted on the double nature of the work of art.

The problem of value and especially of *valorisation* is bracketed away within the structuralist approach. The structures uncovered during the analysis of literary texts are given as values in themselves in the absence of a prior value judgment. Still, figures of speech, narrative devices, compositional schemes—irrespective of the amount of ability employed in discovering them—cannot *by themselves* account for either the uniqueness of a literary work or its aesthetic value. What matters is their adequacy to the work in its entirety and, of course, the significations and implications of its content. The paradox of the structuralist methodology consists in the fact that despite—or because of—its

sweeping formalism and its technicism, often blind to literary quality, it is precisely the *specificity* of literature that escapes it; once again, this specificity is not to be reduced to form or technical abilities.

What has been happening at the present time—more exactly for a couple of decades now—in the field of studies concerning literature is the opposite excess, the contrary error: the switch from an exclusive formalism to an exclusive contentism. Still, the result is the same, rendered more evident, even scandalous, today: *literary difference*, that which makes a particular text a literary work, is completely overlooked.

Whereas, without being necessarily formalistic, many studies and essays written during the last century kept sight of the way in which the transposition, transformation, *transfiguration* of the world into literature took place, the attention is now directed mainly to how the most diverse and unexpected aspects of the world are present in literature; to representation as such, and to a much lesser extent, or not at all, to the specific modes of these representations. What matters now is especially the *what* and the *why* and not so much the *how.*

Contentism and thematicism are flourishing... A long distance separates us from the time Roland Barthes stated that a writer was one who "absorb[ed] the *why* of the world into a *how to write.*"

The predominantly thematic approach has a long history behind it, which began even before the influence of Marxism but became more refined along the way, in the sense of a growing respect for literary and artistic quality. Even if from a stylistics of forms one ends up with a stylistics of themes, that very transition, however, occurred inside a framework regulated by the pre-eminence of the aesthetic criterion. It is precisely this criterion that has stopped functioning now.

To the extent in which they are concerned with literature, cultural studies are doing that from a radically changed perspective. Not only has literature lost its central place in this context, it has also lost its *distinctiveness*, its specificity; the way in which it is dealt with no longer accounts for the relations that literature maintains with a certain *language,* nor for the fact that this language is used by writers in a particular way, essentially different from common usage.

So here we are, reduced to making touchingly pedestrian dissociations over which, unfortunately, one glosses with bewildering nonchalance. We do not have to return to Mallarmé and his aestheticising contempt for "the words of the tribe," but that does not mean the present state of confusion is in any way acceptable.

The aesthetic criterion is abandoned and the question of passing any value judgment on literary texts is no longer raised. It is not a chance occurrence that cultural studies no longer concentrate on canonical literary works. Their interest shifts from artistic means and forms to themes, from aesthetic difference to social and historical reference; furthermore, from *literariness* to *literalness.*

The fact that historians of culture such as Roger Chartier or sociologists such as Pierre Bourdieu treat literature as a cultural and social phenomenon, emphasizing its cognitive contribution and its historical testimony, understood in a loose sense, is completely natural, all the more so as the latter took the precaution of also considering the "rules"

(in the full, internal, sense of the word) of art. What remains, however, is the question whether we can treat the knowledge delivered through literature in the same way as that provided by humanistic and social sciences. The difference lies in the transparency and univocity that are absolutely mandatory in the approach and discourse of the latter: what does not correspond to these minimal intellectual requirements is felt and judged as insufficient. This does not apply to the production, nor to the reception of literary texts. Here plurivocity, and even ambiguity at times, are not considered flaws, indeed, they may even pass as qualities, to be appreciated and enjoyed.

This specificity index does not annul or even reduce literature's cognitive relevance; it merely defines it more exactly. The same goes for its social relevance, for the same reasons. Literary studies cannot afford to ignore this difference, nor to fail to highlight it explicitly or, as is more often the case, implicitly. That is why I could never agree with relegating literary difference to a secondary plane, nor with abandoning the preoccupation for the hermeneutics of literary texts. These texts cannot be read *ad litteram*, nor used as testimonies, as documents, as arguments in a demonstration, except if passed through hermeneutic filters. As we know, literary discourse is centred on itself, not on the message.

There is no testimony that literature provides directly, no matter how often this claim may be put forward by some writers. Everything in a literary work is indirect, filtered, connoted, even what appears to us as purely denotative and transitive. There is no directness, nor full transitivity in literature, except as yet another effect produced by the literary art.

Deconstruction has shown us that the transparency of any text is problematic, that extracting a single meaning out of each text is a matter of utmost difficulty, if not downright impossible. Surprisingly, this demonstration has not been used towards consolidating literature's special status, but in the converse—and perverse—direction, that of unlimited openness and of unspecific ways of grappling it. Through an *a fortiori* logic, we cannot fail to reach the conclusion that, if no kind of text can be reduced to a stable, secure, incontrovertible meaning, the literary text—to say nothing of the poetic text—is all the more resistant to an instrumental approach. There are elements of transitivity in literature, even in poetry, but their identification and recognition still take place within a reflexivity understood as a defining feature of literature.

The literary work—be it a writer's journal or a historical novel—does not transcribe the events as such, *wie es eigentlich geschehen*—but condenses or dilates them, recounts them in a specific, at times even deviant, manner. The writer is preoccupied not so much with telling the truth as with telling it in an attractive, memorable, original way, at the risk of missing it sometimes, a risk which he/she assumes or subconsciously takes on. The problem of truth is not foreign, nor indifferent to literature: it is secondary. At any rate, the true/false dilemma is not posed, nor is it tackled in the terms of a general epistemology.

One can only salute the wide cultural opening Cultural Studies invite us to, and the emphasis they place on literature's social effects and on the metaliterary aspect of literariness is often fertile. The renewal thus brought about is considerable, especially from an anti-aestheticist perspective. One must, however, return to definitions, in other

words to specific differences; one must maintain certain distinctions, without which literature, in all its forms, and together with it the other arts—each taken individually—risk fusing with the disciplines studying them: literature with metaliterature, arts with art theory and aesthetics, and the latter with the other humanistic disciplines (that fall under sociology, anthropology, psychology, etc.), resulting in a composite entity that lacks all scientific rigour.

This way we risk returning to pre-critical approaches and pre-reflexive notions about literary works and even cultural artefacts, whose referentiality is oblique, not direct, and whose factuality is far from unproblematic. Whatever perspective we may adopt, *literary* (or artistic) *difference* remains, it must remain. We identify it in different ways, at different levels, in different aspects, we redefine it forever differently, but we cannot dispense with it, we cannot renounce it—nor can we renounce the disciplines that focus on it by virtue of tradition or vocation. Disciplines that bear a name. They still do…

I will conclude with a postmodern slogan (although that may appear as a contradiction in terms); in *The Postmodern Condition* (1979), with different intentions, Lyotard wrote an exhortation which seems that it can be appropriated here and now: let us "… activate the differences and save the honor of the name" (Minnesota UP, 1984, p. 81).

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