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## **THE LITERARY AND THE SOCIAL**

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### **Introduction**

If there is one thing that those who have taken a retrospective look at the relationships between the literary and the social agree on, it is the difficulty of their task: everyone insists on instability, fragmentation, the impossible synthesis. No appellation has succeeded in becoming the authority. While the expression most commonly used is “the sociology of literature,” over the last half-century it finds itself competing with a number of other terms, some of which are specific to one or two authors, and others adopted by research groups and university program courses: sociology of the text, literary sociology, sociocriticism, sociopoetics. In Germany, *literatursoziologie* collides with the *soziologie der Literatur*. In Italian, one speaks of *sociologie letteraria* or of *letterature sociologica*. Beyond the terminology, there is unity neither among groups of specialists (literary scholars, historians, sociologists, communications researchers), nor in the objects themselves (fiction, texts, discourses, practices, actors, social conditions of production and reception, mediations) nor in the methods (textual analysis, historical narrative, quantitative study, theoretical development). There have been many who, in order to augment the latter, have juxtaposed a sociology of facts and of literary practices with a “textual social hermeneutic” (Popovic, 2011). There are just as many who consider this opposition to be artificial and excessive, preferring to study mediations between texts and contexts. Hence, the panoramic nature of syntheses on the sociology of literature. To mention only two of the most recent: in French, Gisèle Sapiro (2014) organises her book along communication axes (from the production of works up to their reception) while Paul Aron and Alain Viala (2006) structure their “Que sais-je?” according to major orientations (sociology of content, forms and practices).<sup>1</sup>

These works, all of excellent quality (in addition to those cited above: Dirkx, 2000; Dörner and Vogt, 2016; Rondini, 2012; Sayre, 2011; Zima, 1985) have each put forward a history of sociological ideas about literature. Our intention here is not the same, and we prefer to send the reader to those works, to the [Socius Lexicon](#) where eighty theoretical concepts useful to sociological approaches to literature are presented as well as a general bibliography entitled *Le littéraire et la social* (Glinoyer, 2015). In the perspective of a history of intellectual life (Charle and Jeanpierre, 2016) and of a history of human and social sciences (Heilbron, Lenoir and Sapiro, 2004), we propose instead to organise these approaches by groups, networks, *clusters* (Clark, 1973), schools and collective labels.

It is important to immediately stress the productive but limited, sometimes artificial, character of history by schools of thought and collective terms (Topalov, 2004; Hirschorn, 2018). Certain schools correspond to the sphere of influence of a researcher, others to an actual collective function. Some have put into place an institutional infra-structure (journal,

research centre) while others have only assumed the collective designation a posteriori. Moreover, if these schools are often designated according to the name of the city in which they were developed, (Bordeaux, Liège, Metz), the networks maintained by the researchers extend beyond the local, the discipline and the national framework. This type of historic perspective leads to a neglect of the contribution of thinkers who were relatively isolated during their era (Erich Auerbach, Antonio Candido, Bernard Groethuysen, Jean-Marie Guyau, Levin Schücking and others), but whose influence was, nonetheless, significant. Furthermore, it is important to emphasize the very nature of that which follows: that the individuals and groups are predominantly masculine, Francophone and Occidental is undeniable. As for the texts of the anthology, in relation to which the institutional history that we will read is contrapuntal, they experience the same limitations, to which the necessity of choosing open access texts and the publisher's own subjectivity must be added. I conclude these explanations and methodological precautions by emphasising that I have not focused on the most important authors from an historical point of view, but on researchers who interest me because they have had the greatest impact on the "discipline," understood as the history of a collection of interconnected approaches embodied by individuals and groups.

## **Ancient History**

The pre-sociological or proto-sociological debates concerning literary works date as far back as those questioning verbal art. The theory of *mimesis* as representation and imitation of reality originated with Plato's *Republic*. Aristotle's *Poetics* attributes a central role to *mimesis*: literary art must resemble reality because it has a political and moral objective (provide citizens with a glimpse of the truth by enabling them to experience emotions.) Aristotle founded a theory based on literature's social effects (the refinement of citizens) and inversely, on the aesthetic effects of this refinement. The Aristotelian theory (followed by Horace's *Ars Poetica*) has been of enormous and extraordinarily enduring significance. During the classical era in France, it continued to serve as a veritable aesthetic catechism. Boileau, in his *Art poétique* (1674), argues in turn that literature is an edifying and civilising imitation of reality and that it therefore serves a social purpose. Missing, however, from those considerations are, on the one hand, the autonomisation of concepts of literature and of society, and on the other hand, a taking into account historical determinations weighing on artistic creation. That would occur at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century with the French Revolution and the structuring of scientific disciplines.

The *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture* by the abbé Dubos (1719) had already added political and moral issues to climatic and geographical causes in order to justify historical determinism. Herder would recall them in his *Idées pour la philosophie de l'histoire de l'humanité* (1784-1791). Everyone agrees that the book by Germaine de Staël, *De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales* (1800), should be granted a seminal role, even if she understands "literature" as "everything that concerns the exercising of thought in written texts," that is to say, both literature of the imagination and of political philosophy. Like Louis de Bonald, originator in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century of the formulation "Literature is the expression of society," Staël considers literature to be dependent on the state of society. That perspective provides her with the opportunity to state that it was since the Revolution that a literature of fraternity became possible, and for the counter-revolutionary Bonald to think that revolutionised society would have, on the contrary, only bad literature.

Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, an abundance of treatises were produced dealing with the conditions for literary creation, the social functions of literature and, something new, the author's persona. To mention only a few examples, the major romantic prefaces (Victor Hugo, Alfred de Vigny), and later Zola's *Experimental Novel*, make the author's condition one of their main themes. In 1926, Harold Needham explored the variety of expressions over the preceding century in France as well as England referring to that which he called "esthetic sociology," and he shows in particular that social thinkers like Enfantin, Fourier and Proudhon in France, Ruskin and William Morris in England, all have a notion, more or less developed, concerning the relationships between art and society. Moreover, a large number of texts claiming to be literature have cast a sociological eye on the social world, for example, the *physiologies*, those critical ethnographies that aimed to establish sociological types each equipped with its characteristics, and traditional realist novels tied to the description of various social milieus. And finally, the major French literary critics of the second half of the century have paid special attention to the historicity of literary phenomena, whether it be Sainte-Beuve on the genesis of Chateaubriand's "literary group", Taine and his reflections on climatic, geographic, political and social determinations, or Brunetière's Darwin inspired study, *L'évolution des genres dans l'histoire de la littérature* (1892).

## **A founding act gone unnoticed**

This story began in 1904 in France, when literary and sociological studies, from then on made up of academic disciplines, officially encountered one another during a conference paper given by Gustave Lanson in the presence of Émile Durkheim and his colleagues [See [Gustave Lanson's lecture](#)]. The major classical thinkers in sociology, Weber, Simmel, Pareto, Durkheim, Tarde, devoted numerous works to the sociology of religions, of education, political parties, public opinion, etc., but little or none to a sociology of literature, even if they drew extensively from literary sources. It is important to grasp the significance of the moment when Lanson and Durkheim, proponents of an increased scientific presence in relation to the humanist education that had prevailed up until then, encountered major leaders of disciplines in the process of developing complete autonomy (the *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France* was founded in 1894, *L'Année sociologique* in 1898) during a seminar at the École des hautes études sociales (Aron, 2017). Lanson argued then that in addition to the existing disciplines (philology, textual studies, biography), it would be advisable to found a

“literary sociology” attentive to the conditions surrounding the production of works and that would take into account not only authors, but also the society of their time and the initial reception of their works. The proposal was strong; however, the coup did not pay off. There was no published response from Durkheim, and the literary history of Lanson and his followers gave up on any sociology as the sole explanation of major works of literature. Things would remain that way until the end of WWII.

### **Critics and Marxist Institutions**

Meanwhile, it was far from the university setting that the rapprochement would occur. Throughout the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and even beyond that (see the anthologies published by Fréville in 1936 and by Eagleton and Milne in 1996), one might say that the sociology of literature became synonymous with Marxist analysis of literature. Even if Marx and Engels themselves left behind only a few lines about literature, in which they expressed their admiration for Balzac, Marxist literary theory would be developed and deepened by several social thinkers in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Franz Mehring in *Die Lessing-Legende* in 1906, Clara Zetkin in *Kunst und Proletariat* in 1911). Lenin himself left a number of texts about art and literature, among them a famous series of articles on Tolstoy (1908-1911) [See [Lenin's article](#)] in which he relates the work of the latter to Russia's historical situation around 1905. Subsequent to the 1917 Revolution, intellectuals would seize upon the literary question in order to establish a revolutionary literature. There, there was not only a battle of ideas (for or against a proletarian literature, for or against socialist realism) but also competition among institutions. In Soviet Russia, the Proletkult which, led by Bogdanov, attempted to found a “proletarian culture,” clashed with proletarian authors' associations (the VAPP or Pan-Russian Association, the RAPP or Russian Association, established in 1925) whose doctrine was set out in the journals *Na postu* (*On Guard*, 1923-1925) and *Na literaturnom postu* (*On Literary Guard*, 1926-1932). The debate went international very quickly: in all countries where the Communist International (Comintern) spread, a reflection on the roles of literature in the revolutionary combat took hold, or developed. In the same period, the Moscow Circle, then the Prague Circle, both sites of linguistic, aesthetic and literary theory discussions, came together, even though their works would not be known in the Western world until the end of the 1960s (thanks to Tzvetan Todorov, for the Russian Formalists, and to Julia Kristeva, for Mikhail Bakhtin's texts). Several theoretical discourses appeared in non-university and often ephemeral publication settings, whether they be in Germany, France, Russia or the United States, by means of congresses, meetings, petitions, and debates. Among “fellow travellers,” as among communist intellectuals, intense reflections on the socio-political role of art and of literature took place, notably within international associations or in literary life organs (Viala, 1990) such as *Octubre*, reproduced by les Ediciones Octubre in Espagne, *Tanemakuhito* (*The Sower*, from 1921 to 1923) then *Bungeisensen* (*Literary Battlefront*, from 1924 to 1930) in Japan, *Nouvel Âge* and the *Bulletin des écrivains prolétariens* in France, or the international journal *Literature of the World Revolution* which appeared simultaneously in Russian, English, German and French. These international networks evolved outside of the universities due to the prestige enjoyed at the time by intellectuals and to newspaper and publishing outlets.

All of that would come to an end in the mid-1930s with the elimination of organisations and when a yoke of rigid thought was imposed on Communist authors and thinkers (including

Christopher Caudwell in Great Britain, Paul Nizan in France, Upton Sinclair in the United States) with socialist realism as the sole horizon. By far the most influential among them for our subject was the Hungarian Georg Lukács whose conceptual framework was the most advanced. For him, the so-called Realist work (that he contrasted with Naturalism and Modernism) presents typical characters who carry within themselves contradictions forming the dialectic of the transposed real world, which makes this type of oeuvre the only one capable of expressing a coherent and non-decomposable historic totality. Thus he subscribes to the Marxist axiom according to which the real is positively knowable: sufficient study of socio-historical determinations allows an understanding of the rationality not only of what was produced in the past but also of future evolutions.

In contrast to this rigidity and to the obsession with monosemy, thinkers and practitioners chose instead to question the role of negativity disclosed by major literary works. This was particularly the case at the heart of the Frankfurt School, the name given as of the 1950s to members of the Institut für Sozialforschung, created in February 1923 on the University of Frankfurt campus before fanning out (and fleeing in face of mounting Nazism) to its satellite institutes in Geneva, Paris, London and New York. The Institute would represent an anchor in common for Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin or Herbert Marcuse with no one leader being declared. These researchers would not focus on literature as such but produce key works on art during the era of cultural industries [See [Theodor Adorno's text](#)]. Another institution *sauvage* (Devevey, 2016), the College of Sociology was founded by the authors Georges Bataille, Roger Caillois and Michel Leiris from 1937 to 1939. In between the vanguard group and the scholarly institution, the College held weekly conferences and was a site for interdisciplinary research (sociology, anthropology, biology, art, psychoanalysis) where sociological discourse and literary discourse interacted with one another.

## Admission to University

After WWII, apart from a few outstanding contributions dated immediately after the war (Jean-Paul Sartre's *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* Paul Bénichou's *Morales du grand siècle*, and *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* by Erich Auerbach), the sociology of literature, in its various incarnations, returned to the university fold, never to leave again. The years 1956-1958 were particularly fruitful with the publications of *The Rise of the Novel* by Ian Watt (on the genesis of the novel during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries), *Ideal und Wirklichkeit in der höfischen Epik* by Erich Köhler (on the courtly novel as compensatory development of a mythology glorifying the chivalric gentry at a time when its power was diminishing to the benefit of a centralised royal power), *Le dieu caché* (*The Hidden God*, translated in 1964) by Lucien Goldmann (on the equivalence of the historical situation of the Nobles of the Gown, the Jansenists and the works of Racine and Pascal) and *Sociologie de la littérature* (*Sociology of Literature*, translated in 1971) by Robert Escarpit in the "Que sais-je ?" collection.

In France, it was time for alliance among disciplines and for research in areas where they intersected (social psychology, economic history, sociology of politics) even if philosophy still remained the crowning discipline. It is of little surprise, therefore, that the first two instances of the institutionalisation of the "sociology of literature" took place at this time, at the instigation of Goldmann and of Escarpit. Goldmann (See [Lucien Goldmann's text](#)), of Romanian origin, gave a seminar as early as 1959-60 entitled "Sociology of Literature and of

Philosophy" at the École pratique des hautes études de Paris. Without leaving the EPHE, where he directed a Sociology of literature group that would be carried on by Jacques Leenhardt (Dumont, 2018), he founded the Centre de sociologie de la littérature in 1961 at the Institut de Sociologie at the Université libre de Bruxelles and became its director three years later. The registration of these two institutions placed Goldman's philosophical and sociological ideas at the centre of debates concerning the relationships between the social and the literary throughout the 1960s. Goldmann organised, in particular, *Rencontres de sociologie de la littérature* at Royaumont and edited issues of the *Revue de l'Institut de sociologie*, anthologies such as *Problèmes d'une sociologie du roman* (1963) and *Littérature et société, Problèmes de méthodologie en sociologie de la littérature* (1967). After his death in 1970, the Centre de sociologie de la littérature was directed by Ralph Heyndels until he left for the United States, (Heyndels, 1988), and then by the lawyer and novelist Pierre Mertens.

*Sociologie de la littérature* (1958) announced the advent of the "Bordeaux School" and sought, in a way, to become, its manifesto [See Robert Escarpit's book]. Robert Escarpit had obtained a Chair in Comparative Literature at the University of Bordeaux in 1952. Encouraged by the success of his "Que sais-je?" (frequently translated and republished well into the 1990s), in 1960, he founded the Centre de sociologie des faits littéraires (later renamed as the Institut de Littérature et de Techniques Artistiques de Masse) and launched major research projects on the readings of conscripts, on adaptations, or on libraries of businesses (Van Nuijs, 2008). His name would remain attached to a branch of sociological studies of literature: the empirical sociology of the book and of reading, with the publication, among others, of *La Révolution du livre* (1965; *The Book Revolution*, 1966) and of *Le Littéraire et le social. Eléments pour une sociologie de la littérature* (1970), a collective work devoted largely to research conducted by Escarpit and his team.

It is also important to add that the group gathered around Louis Althusser at the École normale supérieure de Paris gave rise, in the midst of the explosion of structuralist thought, to an attempt to apply Althusser's philosophical thinking to literature. *Pour une théorie de la production littéraire*, by Pierre Macherey (1966; *A Theory of Literary Production*, 1978), theorises and puts into practice that which *Lire le Capital* (1965; *Reading Capital*, 1970), co-authored by Macherey together with Althusser, Balibar, Establiet and Rancière, calls a "symptomatic reading" intended to bring out the language of ideology beneath the surface of the text. This work [See Pierre Macherey's book] has had a major impact on the English-speaking world where it is still considered an unavoidable milestone.

The effervescent years, 1955-1970, (until Goldman's death) thus endowed the sociology of literature with two research centres and two high calibre leaders. Competition between the two centres was muted and brought about a division of tasks and analytic perspectives: in the case of Goldman, the major works (Malraux, Racine, Robbe-Grillet), the philosophical processes inspired by Lukács, the dialectical relationship of texts and contexts of production by way of the social group to which the author belongs; in the case of Escarpit, literature of the masses, the gathering of empirical data relating to literary products, the integration of audiences into the literary communication equation. They also had much in common: their proximity to Marxist thought, which both claimed in several respects, and a holistic approach aimed at understanding the process of creation (Goldmann) and transmission (Escarpit) of the literary in its entirety.

Sociological studies of literature also flourished outside of France. In West Germany, in



addition to the projects at the Frankfurt School, Erich Köhler exercised a major influence up until his death in 1981 [See [Erich Köhler's article](#)]. A positivist sociology also developed there, led by Hans Norbert Fügen and Alphons Silbermann before both turned to other research during the 1970s. In Great Britain, Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* (1957) and Raymond Williams' *Culture and Society* (1958) launched what would come to be called the Birmingham School. The institutionalisation of *Cultural Studies* occurred in Birmingham in 1964 with the creation of the The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies that saw as its object of study "the forms, practices and cultural institutions and their relationships with society and with social change." It was a very active research and discussion centre where practically unknown terrain such as popular culture, media, sexual and ethnic identities was explored through interrogations of power relationships, of forms of resistance, and of the ability to produce different representations and to go beyond the mechanical aspect of Marxist analysis of ideology [See [Raymond Williams's article](#)].

### **From the 1970s to the 1980s**

The years 1970 to 1980 were marked by a deepening of the divide between studies considered "external," practised by historians, philosophers, and sociologists, and studies known as "internal," those produced by literary scholars. The entry of sociocriticism into the debate (in the first issue of *Littérature* in 1971) and of Pierre Bourdieu's sociology of the literary field (with the ground-breaking article "Le marché des biens symboliques" the same year) would shift this long-standing tension without resolving it, a tension that, when all is said and done, gave shape to social approaches to literature.

During this time, amongst English speakers, the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies became dominant and separated from the sociological studies practised in the French-speaking world, although there was a mingling of some authors of French Theory such as Michel Foucault (Cusset, 2003). Moreover, two authors took on considerable importance both as theoreticians and as interpreters of Marxist theories: Fredric Jameson in the United States (*Marxism and Form: Twentieth Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* in 1971, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* in 1981) and Terry Eagleton in England (*Criticism & Ideology* in 1976, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* in 1983). There was also the Essex Sociology of Literature Project, a collective project that was developed at the University of Essex from 1976-2001 (even if the term "sociology" was dropped about ten years after its creation): it produced conference proceedings entitled *Literature, Society and the Sociology of Literature (1977) and collected works dedicated to significant dates: 1642, 1789, 1848, 1936*.

These two decades are also those in which disciplines which once were mixed in with the sociology of literature gained their independence, although the primary focus is on theories of the text. That is the case in particular of the History of the Book and of the History of Publishing, led by Roger Chartier, Robert Darnton and Jean-Yves Mollier, as well as the Sociology of art for which Raymonde Moulin created a research centre at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in 1984. Also a professor at the EHESS before joining the Collège de France, Pierre Bourdieu was interested almost from the start in questions around culture and artistic creation. In 1966, he published his first article on the subject, "Champ intellectuel et projet créateur" in *Les Temps Modernes*. His 1971 article, "Le marché des biens symboliques," was the beginning of more intense research on his part into cultural fields. Although *Les règles de l'art. Genèse et structure du champ littéraire*, his major book on literature, was published in

1992 (*The Rules of Art*, 1996), as was the article "Le champ littéraire" [See Pierre Bourdieu's article], Bourdieu had already devoted an issue of his journal *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* to "L'économie des biens symboliques" in 1977 and had given another article the title "Sur l'art et la littérature," the following year. His influence was also practised by researchers who were under his direction (Pascale Casanova, Rémy Ponton, Gisèle Sapiro), prefaced (Jérôme Meizoz), published in collections that he founded at the publishing houses Éditions de Minuit and Éditions du Seuil (Alain Viala, Pascal Durand) or collected at the Centre de sociologie européenne, that he directed. In the field of literary studies, as in others, the work of Pierre Bourdieu has had a remarkable influence even in the resistances and rejections that it has engendered, notably because it applies the same mechanisms and concepts (*habitus*, *illusio*, autonomy) to the literary field as those at work in other social fields.

For literary scholars, the beginning of the 1970s saw the emergence of sociocriticism. One should say sociocriticisms because both Claude Duchet and Edmond Cros devised a distinct theoretical arsenal at the same time under the same banner. The former, a teacher at Lille, and then at the Centre universitaire expérimental de Vincennes, which became the Université Paris 8, was giving seminars on the "sociology of the novel" (Duchet & Maurus, 2011) when he published the ground-breaking article "Pour une socio-critique" in 1971 [See Claude Duchet's article]. The significance of this article is as much due to its title as to where it was published: in the inaugural issue of the journal *Littérature*, founded in Vincennes as a sort of answer to Genette's and Todorov's journal *Poétique* dated 1970. In this first issue, apart from that of Duchet, the signatures of France Vernier, Jacques Dubois, Roger Fayolle, Pierre Barbéris and of Jacques Leenhardt can be found in a tribute to Lucien Goldmann. All were authors who called for sociological theories as much as they did for analyses of literary texts. More radically than his colleagues, Duchet claimed that it is in the work, and only in the work, that networks of signification operate. If one adheres to Saussure's theses, the sign is never the actual thing and the words of the text cannot speak of the world. Reality only appears in fiction in the form of an *analogon* and is therefore out of reach in fiction. Sociocriticism then developed in several directions, under several names and in several places. The French Hispanicist Edmond Cros, whose sociocriticism owes much to Freudism, made his career at the Université de Montpellier where he founded the Institut de sociocritique. Peter V. Zima, whose sociology of texts was inspired by Goldmann and Adorno, taught at the Universität Klagenfurt and published as much in German as in French. Pierre Barbéris, who arrived at the Université de Caen in 1976, created a Centre de recherche sur la Modernité and the journal *Elseneur*: he argued [See Pierre Barbéris's course] that history written down in literary texts is closer to History than the history practised by historiography. Evidently, literary scholars (of Marxist persuasion) in favour of sociocriticism were more active in the provinces, while the Sorbonne and the *grandes écoles* were more led by literary history and textualism.

At the same time, outside of France, it seems as though the opposition between internal and external analysis was not as extreme. In Belgium, in addition to the Centre de sociologie de la littérature inherited from Goldmann, Jacques Dubois began to teach the "sociology of literature" in 1968. At first influenced by Macherey, Dubois was also deeply affected by the discovery of Bourdieu's works (Dubois, 2018). With the sociologist Paul Minon and with Philippe Minguet, who participated in the Groupe with him, Minon created in Liège the "Arts et société" Commission that envisaged, in the wake of what was developing in France, a social reading of the production of artistic occurrences. In 1978, his courses gave birth to the *Institution de la littérature. Introduction à une sociologie* which, in addition to envisaging the



institutional processes at work in the literary world, proposed a method of reading texts. Later, Dubois would turn to a literary sociology of realist novels informed primarily by Bourdieu [See Jacques Dubois' article].

During this time, in the Dutch-speaking part of the country, more precisely among translation specialists at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, another theoretical group discovered fertile ground. Following the 1976 *Literature and Translation. New Perspectives in Literary Studies* conference at Leuven (Lambert, 2006), José Lambert founded a research group in which Lieven d'Hulst and later Reine Meylaert would distinguish themselves with regards to systems of translation. They adopted and furthered the polysystem theory championed by Itamar Even-Zohar, a Comparative Literature professor at the Université de Tel-Aviv and author of a doctoral dissertation in the 1970s on literary translation. He envisaged a system of relationships among elements (in particular between one language and another) [See Itamar Even-Zohar's book].

This polysystem, equipped with different centres and peripheries, has a directory of norms and models that prioritize relationships within each system. This approach by systems (that Niklas Luhmann would develop in his own way in 1995 in *Die Kunst der Gesellschaft*, translated in 2000 under the title *Art as a Social System*) has taken root without, however, creating much dialogue with French-speaking scholars interested in literature as a social object, all trends combined.

It is also important to differentiate studies that deal with the reception and reading of literary works. The Bordeaux School had already focussed on empirical data on book distribution and on the social composition of reading audiences. Jean-Paul Sartre asked himself in 1948 "For whom do we write?" in *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* while in Italy, the Marxist Galvano della Volpe proposed *Storia del gusto* in 1960 and Umberto Eco published *Opera aperta* in 1962. In the final third of the century, Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser, primary representatives of what became known as the Constance School, from the name of the German city where both taught, proposed an approach centered around the relationship between text and reader, more precisely on the responses that various publics, specialised or not, manifest towards texts and their aesthetics. In *Ästhetische Erfahrung und literarische Hermeneutik* (1977, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, 1982), Jauss starts from the observation that each public is predisposed to a certain mode of reception of a work and he ponders over the reader's horizon of expectations. Iser favours an "aesthetic of effects" such as that which appears in the work itself. Other avenues are also explored: led by Roger Chartier, a history of readers and of the uses of literature (beach reading, reading during the Occupation, reading of detective novels), a sociology of reading devoted to reading practices in the contemporary era, a sociology of the reception by the press that is close to Bourdieu's sociology of fields (Joseph Jurt on the reception of Bernanos) or Boltanski's sociology of criticism (Pierre Verdrager on the reception of Nathalie Sarraute), Jean-Pierre Esquenazi's sociology of interpretation, etc. At the present time, with the advent of digital reading, works on reading and on literacy are still appealing, but lack a unified network.

## **The Years 1980-2000**

The years 1980-1990, compared to those that preceded them, were less marked by new theoretical propositions with sociological labels. No doubt, this was caused by cross-

pollinations among disciplines that had become autonomous and institutionalised and the subject of journals, associations and specialised comprehensive bibliographies: discourse analysis, history of the book, cultural history, the sociology of intellectuals, cultural studies, studies of media culture, sociology of visual arts. An added factor was the domination in France of the field theory and of sociocriticism, while the British at the Birmingham School were having a huge influence in the United States. Cultural sociology was well-established in Britain with scholars like Tony Bennett, Andrew Milner, Jim McGuigan, adding a sociological slant to British Cultural Studies, nourished by textbooks by John Hall (*Sociology of Literature* in 1979) and Raymond Williams (*Sociology of Culture* in 1981). Australia and English Canada (Jackson, 1983) were also hospitable territories for projects of this sort, while in the United States, the vast field of cultural studies, gender studies and postcolonial studies had constructed a theoretical corpus of its own (Spivak, Appadurai, Foucault among others).

French sociological approaches experienced their major institutional developments at a distance from the Parisian centre: in short, it is not surprising that the *Dictionnaire du littéraire*, published in 2002, was directed by a Belgian (Paul Aron), a Quebecer (Denis Saint-Jacques) and a Frenchman (Alain Viala). In Belgium, Paul Aron of the Université libre de Bruxelles combined literary history and sociology of literature, while at the Université de Liège Jacques Dubois was breaking ground (Jean-Pierre Bertrand, Pascal Durand) in the area of sociological knowledge of literary works and the study of mass cultures. In the 2000s, the Centre interuniversitaire d'Étude du Littéraire (CIEL) brought together researchers from Brussels and Liège for a large sociological inquiry into Belgian Francophone literature. In Québec, under the impetus of social discourse theorist Marc Angenot [See Marc Angenot's book] and the sociologist Régine Robin, le Centre interuniversitaire d'analyse du discours et de sociocritique des textes (CIADEST) reunited the major players in Canadian sociocriticism (Michel Biron, Benoît Melançon, Pierre Popovic), before the Collège de sociocritique took over from 2000 to 2007. In French-speaking Switzerland, the Centre de recherches sur les lettres romandes was the pool from which scholars like Daniel Maggetti and Jérôme Meizoz emerged. In French-speaking Africa, the sociocritic Claude Duchet has created considerable stir, as evidenced by the activities of Adama Samaké's Littérature et Société research group at the Université Félix Houphouët Boigny de Cocody in Côte d'Ivoire and Jean-Claude Mbarga's Cercle africain de sémiotique et de sociocritique in Cameroun. The sociology of African literary fields has, moreover, mobilised a number of researchers in recent years.

Some trends in intellectual production devoted to relationships between the literary and the social can be singled out. The first is unquestionably the Pierre Bourdieu's field theory, due to the internationalisation of its uses, the number of repercussions and disputes that it has incited, and to the durability of its theoretical contributions, all taken together. In francophone literary studies, it has completely eclipsed interactionist sociology, that of Howard Becker in particular, according to which art is the product of the collaboration among mediators who act in a chain between the producer (the author) and the receiver (the public). Gisèle Sapiro continued the work of Pierre Bourdieu at the EHESS. With others, primarily in France and in the United States, she has contributed to the development of the sociology of publishing, the sociology of intellectuals and the sociology of translation from a perspective that is both historic and comparatist, also punctuated by Michel Espagne's and Michael Werner's theory of cultural transfer. Moreover, Sapiro has encouraged the work of scholars (and has published the work of several of them in the collection entitled "Culture and Society" published by CNRS) who have, without being exclusive, adopted field theory in order

to apply it to areas of research that had been closed to it: gender, Judaism, avant-gardists, post-colonial literature.

Bourdieu generated an immense amount of critical literature in what we could begin to call Bourdieu Studies (see Martin, 2010, for more on this subject). Some of these works are of an explanatory nature, others take the form of a tribute, still others are resolutely committed to critiquing it. Even during Bourdieu's lifetime, Bernard Lahire directed a volume subtitled *Dettes et critiques* in which Alain Viala and Denis Saint-Jacques joined forces to question the historical and geographical extent of the "relatively autonomous" field concept (Lahire, 1999). Bernard Lahire carried out his own research on literature in *Franz Kafka. Éléments pour une théorie de la création littéraire* in 2010. There, he expressed the desire to base sociology at the level of the individual, to understand the "social in the embedded state" in the individual, "multi-socialised" and "multi-intentioned" by the field, by the social state, but also by family, school, friends, loves, and by political, religious and other affiliations. At the École normale supérieure de Lyon where he taught, Lahire brought together several young researchers who participated in his reflections on sociological biography (see the 2011 collective work entitled *Ce qu'ils vivent, ce qu'ils écrivent. Mises en scène littéraires du social et expériences socialisatrices des écrivains*).

Luc Boltanski, another heir to Bourdieu who distanced himself from him, created an a-critical constructivist sociology. Explanation of works, trajectories or positions by external criteria is replaced by explicitness, that is to say, by highlighting the internal consistency of representation systems. Boltanski himself rarely worked on literature (*Énigmes et complots. Une enquête à propos d'enquêtes* in 2012) but Nathalie Heinich seized upon some of the concepts that he laid out as an approach to art and literature (*Ce que l'art fait à la sociologie* in 1998). The journal *Opus*, an organ of French sociologists of art, demonstrates, moreover, a methodological openness to a variety of sociological approaches, notably to sociology of intermediation stemming from *Art Worlds* by Howard Becker [[See Delphine Naudier's article](#)].

Sociocriticism has also been productive over the recent decades. Claude Duchet, on the one hand, only belatedly gathered his theoretical proposals into a book, and he did so in the form of a collection of interviews reproduced with an anthology of his texts (Duchet & Maurus, 2011). On the other hand, several schools of thought, relayed by legitimating institutions (journal, research centre, book series) have continued to help sociocriticism to flourish. In Montreal, the Centre interuniversitaire d'analyse du discours et de sociocritique des textes (CIADEST), had already joined together two branches of socio-textual analysis. The Collège de sociocritique, again in Montreal, along with the journal and the "Discours social" series led by Marc Angenot, have broadened theoretical perspectives and the variety of subjects (alcohol, economic discourse, sex, sport). Under the impulsion of Pierre Popovic, the Collège de sociocritique was dismantled in 2006 to give rise to the Groupe de recherche sur les médiations littéraires et les institutions (Gremlin) on the one hand, and to the Centre de recherche interuniversitaire sur la sociocritique des textes (CRIST) on the other. Pierre Popovic breathed new life into textual sociocriticism [[See Pierre Popovic's article](#)]. He also brought certain predecessors (André Belleau, Gilles Marcotte, Jean-Charles Falardeau in addition to Angenot and Robin) and the CRIST team together in an École de Montréal. Edmond Cros, for his part, is the sole representative for sociocriticism to have had an impact on research conducted in Spanish. Conferences by the Institut international de sociocritique that have taken place in various cities since the 1980s, demonstrate the great vitality of concepts developed by Edmond Cros [[See article by Edmond Cros](#)] in Spain and in Central and South

America, as also indicated by the longevity of the journal *Sociocriticism* that has travelled from Pittsburgh to Granada (Pardo Fern ndez, 2006). In France, sociopoetics and ethnocriticism have their advocates. Already defined by Alain Viala [See [Alain Viala's article](#)] as the “study of literary transpositions of a social practice,” sociopoetics has become for Alain Montandon the study of the “manner in which representations and the social imaginary inform the text in the writing itself.” These representations have been the subject of works (dance, strolling, textiles) directed by Alain Montandon at Clermont-Ferrand and currently have their specialised journal: *Sociopoétiques*. Ethnocriticism, understood as the growing study of Duchet and Henri Mitterand’s sociocriticism, of Bakhtine’s semio-linguistics and of historical anthropology, was developed by Jean-Marie Privat at the École de Metz. Together with Marie Scarpa (and Véronique Cnockaert in a satellite branch in Montreal), Jean-Marie Privat has directed and inspired works devoted primarily to 19<sup>th</sup> century French novels [See [Marie Scarpa's article](#)]. These various declensions of sociocriticism (to which sociosemiotics and sociogenetics could be placed alongside) have not remained isolated and have undertaken fruitful dialogues with one another in recent years, as a volume such as *Horizons ethnocritiques* published by Privat and Scarpa in 2010 demonstrates, where Dominique Maingueneau (discourse analysis), Jacques Dubois (sociology of the novel) Peter Zima (psychoanalysis and sociocriticism) discuss their relationship with this theoretical approach.

Practising textual analysis, but informed by sociology, a trend has developed according to which a “sociological” way of seeing things comes to light in literature, notably realist literature. It is about drawing knowledge of the social world from literature, definitely empirical knowledge, but whose value is no less than knowledge offered by the social sciences. Literature reveals aspects of the social world but it does so in representative rather than explanatory fashion. Jacques Dubois, principle proponent of this study of the sociology of the novel, has also presented works on imaginaries like those that the Groupe de recherche sur les médiations littéraires et les institutions (Gremlin) has carried out on novelistic imaginaries of literary life.

## **Future Perspectives**

Today, more than ever, borders that were once distinct between approaches to phenomena and to literary texts are giving way to cross-pollinations and interferences. Literary scholars seem always to be seeking a “science pilot” (in the sense of a pilot fish) and absorbing advancements made outside of their disciplines, while anthropologists, historians and other statisticians use literary material more and more overtly. Works that advocate a decompartmentalisation of discourses (literary, philosophical, historic, sociological, ethnographic) have multiplied over the last few years. Thus, more recently, for example, one can read books by Vincent Debaene (*L’Adieu au voyage, l’ethnologie française entre science et littérature*, 2010, translated into English in 2014) and by Jean Jamin (*Littérature et anthropologie*) which reflect on the interactions between literary and anthropological discourses (see also the collective directed by Alain-Michel Boyer, *Littérature et ethnographie*).

Historians have long been interrogating the connections between history and literature. That was already the case of Lucien Febvre, an adherent of the social history of literature. More recently, the Groupe de Recherches Interdisciplinaires sur l’Histoire du Littéraire (GRIHL), founded at the EHESS by Alain Viala and Christian Jouhaud, has produced several works

(individual or collective) on writing and historic logic as well as on texts by non-professional writers [See a recording of a lecture by Dinah Ribard and Gisèle Sapiro]. For his part, the historian Ivan Jablonka leans towards Paul Ricoeur and Paul Veyne in terms of the narratology appropriate to the social sciences in his book *L'histoire est une littérature contemporaine. Manifeste pour les sciences sociales*, published in 2014. The renewal of literary history in the 1980s (Vaillant, 2010), the emergence of objects of interest common to historians and literary scholars (institutions, sociabilities, the book and its materiality, the press), the development of cultural history (Dominique Kalifa, Pascal Ory, Philippe Poirrier) and the history of poetics (Marie-Ève Thérénty, Alain Vaillant) have all contributed to bringing these two perspectives closer together.

The eruption of digital humanities gave birth to distant reading defended by Franco Moretti in *Graphs, Maps, Trees* in 2005 and by the Literary Lab that he directs at Stanford University. The intersection between literary studies and computational methods has opened new avenues that touch, notably, literary history, sociology of literature and the history of the book.

Finally, although the list of interactions with social science disciplines has no end, discourse analysis, whether it be inherited from Michel Foucault (in the work of Jürgen Link), from Chaim Perelman (in the work of Marc Angenot) or from linguistics, has integrated a preoccupation with sociology. That is particularly the case with Dominique Maingueneau who has devised a series of concepts (discursive institution, *paratopie*, positioning, self-constituting discourse) to link sociological studies and discourse analysis [See Dominique Maingueneau's article], and with Ruth Amossy, the driving force behind a research network in Israel. The concepts of *ethos* and of literary *posture* have made particular in-roads into literary studies (thanks in large part to the book by Jérôme Meizoz, *Postures littéraires. Mises en scène modernes de l'auteur*, published in 2007), no doubt because they assume a non-discursive dimension (the set of non-verbal behaviours in the presentation of the self) and a discursive dimension, and allow a refinement of the interrelationships between the author's discourse and her or his position in the field [See a special issue edited by Denis Saint-Amand and David Vrydaghs].

## Conclusion

With the passing decades, literary sociology seems to have once again become a specialty of the French-speaking world (with branches in the Spanish-speaking world). James F. English (2010) thinks that it has almost disappeared from English literary studies while detailing five disciplines that it has fostered: book history, new media studies where the history of the book, communication theory, cultural studies, history and sociology, history of the formation of the canon and literary value, reflexive sociology of practices in the social sciences, sociology of reading and sociology of the word "literature" all encounter one another. This withdrawal could be explained by the decline of literary theory altogether, by the prestige of a French Theory more philosophical than sociological (Baudrillard, Deleuze, Derrida, Foucault) or by the loss of recognition of literature as a factor in understanding the social world. Or perhaps sociological approaches to literature are victims of their original interdisciplinary sin: always too sociological for literary scholars, always too literary for sociologists. Be that as it may, sociological approaches enjoy great institutional vigor, either in the form of niches endowed with relatively stable labels, or in the form of links between methods and objects. Certain

diffusion sites have disappeared (the journal *Opus*, the *Discours social* notebooks, the collection "Liber" published by Seuil) but others have flourished (the journal *Bien symboliques / Symbolic Goods*, the series "Culture et société" at CNRS Éditions, "Situations" from the Presses universitaires de Liège and "Socius" at the Presses de l'Université de Montréal). Sociological reflection on literature is still alive: as is evident from the success of the online journal *CONTEXTES*, the interdisciplinary seminar "Les armes de la critique" held at the École Normale Supérieure de Paris, or the Socius project [See [Socius website](#)] which, in a way, the present anthology has just completed.

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