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LITERATURE AND
LITERARY STUDIES:
SEARCH FOR A DEFINITION

I am, by profession, a “literary scholar”, in contrast to “scientists”. More precisely, I am a specialist in ancient Greek literature. Yet, in an age such as ours in which so often there is discussion of the standing of the various academic disciplines, of the differences implied by their methods and their needs, and of the means for making them work together, it seems to me more and more that very serious confusion is tending to becloud some essential definitions: that of the study of literature in general, but even prior to that, the very definition of literature itself. It is very important to reach some understanding if we hope to avoid losing the richness of research and the very vitality of culture in the broadest sense of the term.

It is evident that the notion of “literature” itself is not as clear as we might think, and it is tending to become less and less clear.

Translated by R. Scott Walker

Broadly speaking it would seem that the necessary condition for “literature” to exist is that there be writing, a use of letters. However, even such a fundamental starting point as this is debatable. For there is much discussion of the fact that the origins of our culture and that of other still living cultures are to be found in oral poetry. Is it possible to distinguish absolutely between the recited epic and the epic which is written down, often centuries later? However, this is but a minor imprecision. It is much more delicate and even dangerous to set the limits between written material which is literature and that which is not.

If we look at current usage, we see two groups of writings which are distinct from literature and which are quite different from one another.

The first concerns the area of specialized writings. And it is not always easy to draw the dividing line. Everyone would agree that an algebra treatise or a scholarly medical article is not literature. But if the exact sciences can be so easily distinguished, it is much more difficult when it comes to specialized writings in the area of the humanities. A history book is not literature; but Tacitus, Retz or Michelet are, nevertheless, part of literature. Likewise a technical and erudite philosophical treatise is not literature; but Plato, Montaigne and Rousseau most certainly are. Naturally this can vary with the works. Sartre wrote philosophical works and also works of literature. But Montaigne cannot be broken down. This, it would seem, is a very vague sort of limit. To be literature, a written work must be accessible, but to whom? And it must offer enjoyment, but of what kind? Ultimately, by separating itself more and more from specialized writings, literature tends to be restricted to the imaginary (novels or poetry) and to lay claim to purely formal qualities, capable of providing such clarity and such enjoyment.

At the other extreme, there is an entirely different type of writings which are also not literature. These are simply communicative, hastily composed and with no pretensions, such as the example provided by the media. But there too, what imprecision! Evidently the brief newspaper article is not literature. But an editorial by a great journalist might be, additionally, an essay in literary criticism or even a political discourse. Here too certain formal qualities are necessary, based on strength and firmness.

These boundaries have always been imprecise. But they are becoming more and more so, partly because of scientific and technological progress and partly because of the growth in audience and development of the media. Where can the limits be drawn, then? And what is happening to literature caught between these two growing masses?

Dictionaries reflect fully the existence both of this feeling of ill-ease and the gradual shrinking of meaning.

Many of them prefer not to draw a line at all and even avoid making any definition. A vicious circle is formed, referring the reader from “literature” to “literary” or to some vague concept such as *belles-lettres*, which in turn refers back to literature, meaning that the reader is hardly more enlightened. This is the case, for example, with the French *Petit Larousse* and the 1908 Oxford *New English Dictionary*.

Others, hardier, attempt a definition, which has evolved from year to year. Both in French and in English the word begins by designating the culture of the learned. This is the meaning given in the Seventeenth century Furetière dictionary and again by the *Encyclopédie* at the end of the Eighteenth century, which lists no other meaning. This is also the only meaning given by English dictionaries at the beginning of the Nineteenth century. But in 1908 the Oxford Dictionary declared this meaning “rare and obsolescent”. Conversely, the modern meaning, which has established itself, has taken on an increasingly formal character. For the 1924 *Pocket Oxford Dictionary* this character had not yet displaced all other criteria, but it does seem essential (“books or written composition, especially of the kind valued for form and style”). In the 1970 Littré, “*belles-lettres*” (which, in the *Encyclopédie* encompassed “grammar, poetry, eloquence, history, criticism, in a word all parts of literature”) is now made up of but “grammar, poetry, eloquence”. And the large Larousse dictionary-encyclopedia in 1984 furnished this limited definition of literature: *ensemble des œuvres écrites auxquelles on reconnaît une finalité esthétique* (“all written works to which can be ascribed an aesthetic purpose”)!

I do not know if the same developments can be found in all countries, but the two-fold example of French and English merit reflection, even by those languages which have not been affected by this development.

It goes without saying that these definitions, which for all practical purposes are purely formal, justify the pejorative meanings given to the word literature in common parlance. In French, one says, with a disdainful air, "Oh, all that is nothing but literature!" Or an author attempts to defend himself against charges of being a "*littérateur*" or a "paper waster with no human sensitivities" (I am quoting from the blurb for a book by Michel Leiris). Even a poet such as Verlaine, arguing for music and spontaneity in poetry, declared, "And all the rest is literature" (these are the last words of his *Art Poétique*).

But this represents a serious misunderstanding. For literature has always been much more than an activity with a purely aesthetic dimension.

After all, the experience of the Greeks is there to remind us that in the beginning there was no division: the *logos* was thought as well as word. The desire to "speak well" was no different from the desire to speak the truth. Homer, who had written fully concrete and simple poems, whose episodes follow one another as his imagination dictated, was for centuries considered a master thinker, in whose works could be learned morality, psychology, strategy and the love for certain virtues. Moreover, the philosophers, who were concerned solely with metaphysical truth, could write in verse, as did Parmenides and Empedocles. Even Plato, who wrote in prose, wrote dialogues, frequently lively and full of spirit or extremely poetical. Although he did not create that sense of majesty which is proper to the revelations of his two predecessors whom I mentioned, he at least had a desire to convince his reader and to lead the uninitiated gradually to reflection and to truth. And he was concerned with justice, with the city, with courage, with the soul: all problems which intrigued the people of his time. Similarly, history began to distinguish itself from the epic. It was now written in prose and it now aimed for truth. But it used discourses just like Homer, and it was written to be read aloud, without notes or appendices or documents. At every moment in the Fifth century Greece, out of which arose all western literature, a sort of dialogue was established between authors writing in different genres. There was the same discussion of democracy, of courage, of education, which was continued in the tragedies of Euripides and the comedies of Aristophanes (works of the imagination and hence "liter-

ary”), but also in the history of Thucydides and the dialogues of Plato. Up until the Fourth century B.C., without a shadow of doubt, everything written in Greece was literature.

Then the splitting off began. Specialization developed. Literature ceased being an ordinary search in common and became a scholarly activity. But then it still occupied a unique and indisputable place.

And even today, even after such divisions, pitfalls and setbacks, would anyone deny that there is a “*littérature engagée*”, for example? Or more simply, that every author attempts to communicate something—an idea, an impression, a certain feeling about human life, about society, about passing time, about love?

It is quite clear that the formal qualities which distinguish literature externally from the two groups of writings mentioned above are what give it the capacity to affect the reader and which endow it with its human dimension. And this is the difference. We must admit the existence of a double standard. Alongside pure philosophy as such, we can speak of the philosophy of an author who is effectively literary. The word then is synonymous with a vision of the world. Similarly alongside specialized history, every novel is set in a precise period of time and describes certain factors, pressures and expectation. Every novel is thus a sort of view of history and can help provide an understanding of what it signifies. Even more, the difficulty which sometimes exists in distinguishing the perishable article from the literary essay dealing with the same subject depends on the destiny and the originality of the analysis. In other words, “*engagée*” or not, rational or irrational, literature can be recognized from this dimension. The only role of the formal qualities is to give it—to impose on it—its meaning and presence.

This is why limiting oneself to the means (and *a fortiori* describing these as ends) seems to me to be serious.

Serious for whom? Not I think, for literature itself. Everyone knows that the great modern authors write as the Greeks I mentioned earlier did. They do so for a large audience, no doubt, but still always expressing, in a relatively resolute fashion, a philosophy, an experience, an idea. Claudel and Mauriac never wrote a philosophical treatise, but they expressed a philosophy. And contemporary authors continue to do the same. Moreover, every author is capable of creating new genres in order to win over new

territories and to stamp them with his seal. The essay fills in the gap between literature and philosophy. Certain historical novels do the same for the distance apparently separating history and literature, without mentioning the fact that established historians have recently begun writing works which can be of interest to a large enlightened audience. Even neurologists and astrophysicists can, on occasion, combine literature and science, not to mention physicians, who occupy a very special place in this respect.

But what seems much more serious, and also more recent, is that in the organization of studies, literary specialists have allowed themselves little by little to be enclosed in a narrow definition of their field. People from the outside have wanted it so, and they themselves have gradually accepted it. This can be seen in literary history books. Scholastic handbooks too often betray a marked disinterest with regard to literature. Conversely the most elaborately developed studies of literature, even of ancient literature which has no competition from the media, are increasingly becoming histories of the art of writing and not histories of thought, even when excellent works in themselves, written by very literate authors. The *History of Greek Literature* by A. Lesky, published in Vienna in 1957, still reserved a great deal of place for the history of ideas. The new *Cambridge History of Greek Literature*, published this year, is much more centered on style and methods of expression. In these works, characterized by such a new tone, there is discussion, for example, of "Plato, the literary author" and of his art of dialogue, with no further consideration for his theory of ideas nor of the dualism governing the relationship between body and soul, nor even of the definition of the just man in the city. For the "contents" it is necessary to refer to the works themselves and to specialized commentaries. In other words, the questioning about man which inspires an author to write, which preoccupies him and which seems essential to him, is relegated to other areas. Textual commentaries written by our young specialists follow along these same lines. Being a specialist in literature tends to denote being a specialist in form.

From this it is evident that what originally seemed to be simply a minor shift in the meaning of a word can open up a serious crisis in the organization of studies and can have an effect on the very structure of literary research in general.

Literary studies in fact are in decline. And perhaps they owe this situation in part to a misunderstanding about their nature, not unrelated to the imprecision already noted with regard to literature, and in fact more serious. For this time its repercussions reach even into the institutions.

University practices illustrate this imprecision, just as they illustrate the decline in literary studies.

The example of France in this respect is quite striking. Not so long ago as that, a distinction was still made in France between the Faculties of Science, Medicine, Law and "Letters". In the latter faculty were taught classes in history, philosophy and languages, all integral components of letters, as distinguished from the sciences. This was in keeping with a rather general practice. For even though the name sometimes varied from one country to another, it frequently occurred that all these disciplines were grouped together under the same title, indicative of their origins. In Germany these are frequently called "Philosophy" faculties; in England, the person who has studied in these fields becomes a "Master of Arts". Other countries frequently have "Humanities" faculties. The variety of names is an indication of the lack of precision in the concept, but the use of a single term confirms the close relationship which these disciplines had originally as a group distinct from the sciences.

The fact that in short time, in France at least, these Faculties were to be called "Faculties (or Universities) of Letters and Humanities", more generally shortened to "Humanities" (and even in certain cases tending to be replaced by the expression, "social sciences") is a certain indicator of the invasion of new methods and new interests, closer to those of the sciences. And the original unclarity is proof that from that time on, the effort was no longer made to find in "letters" a rallying point for the disciplines which had formerly been associated under this name. Independently of this change in events, and of what is thereby taken away from literature, we can imagine how, in an age which prides itself in being pluridisciplinary, vocabulary shows that these combinations, often arbitrary, are accompanied by a serious setback to conceptual unity.

But the clearest victim of this shift is, quite evidently, the study of “letters” in the narrow sense of the term, that is, the study of literature.

For if there used to exist in France Faculties of Letters which included all these disciplines I mentioned, there existed also a more specialized use of the word. It was applied to the history of literature, and in particular to the history of French literature. At times such studies were even designated by the term “pure letters”, an expression which should have been enhancing but which ran the risk of leading to further impoverishment. For it was not used to connote the richness of an unmixed wine but to suggest the meager substance of an element existing separately without participating in surrounding developments.

And the fact is that within literary studies extended to the broadest sense, the study of literature has not ceased losing ground. This is not simply a matter of a definition. If we look at what positions have been eliminated or created within a given university over the last ten years, no matter what political party is in power, we are astonished. Or if we note that in the entrance examination for the *École Normale Supérieure de Lettres* (in the broad sense), the Latin examination has become optional and can be replaced, for example, by economics, we are equally astonished. Pure letters have been rejected, repudiated and eliminated by every political regime and by every assembly of professors. And although I am citing examples from situations close to me, I know only too well that the same is true in many countries, whether European or not.

There are many different explanations for this, but they all return ultimately to the misunderstanding which we are attempting to describe here and which concerns the meaning to be given to these “pure letters”.

This is why I do not speak of the prestige of the sciences. Their incredible progress is evident and undeniable. But this is no reason for letters to disappear, if we conceive clearly the fact that they have a special role all their own in intellectual development. What is misleading is that letters are often wrongly identified with purely formal research, with no relation to ideas and consequently without a future for renewal. Likewise the question of job openings is a false problem. It is clear that if by literary studies we mean purely formal studies, they can be of interest to but a small number of

specialists. However, if we admit conversely that they are something other, that they aim at defining a history of ideas, and that a study of what was written in the past can help develop an analysis of teachings, arguments and myths, serving in this way as an apprenticeship to lucid thinking, then for specialists there can be seen immediately to open up all the professional possibilities represented by government administration, journalism, politics, the various forms of culture, art and theatre, not to mention management of companies. With proper application and good results, young people with a good literary education will find these professions open to them. Students with solid training in this area and with good results can even distinguish themselves, for their own good and for the good of all. Literary openings, at present, do not exist simply because such studies are arranged around an incorrect idea of literary education. And every day in the sectors which I just cited can be seen the damage caused by this misunderstanding and the lack of knowledge which it entrains.

Nevertheless, it must be admitted that “literary” people themselves have largely contributed to encouraging this misunderstanding by a very serious sort of philosophical imprecision.

This imprecision has been brought on partly by progress, not only in the sciences but in the humanities, which have in a sense changed the very direction of purely literary disciplines. All sorts of methods have been discovered to explain texts, based on new viewpoints, to read into them a meaning which had escaped even the author himself. In this way psychoanalysis has helped to develop, alongside the older methods, research tending to surprise the author’s very subconscious. And this was a fertile and fascinating method, but one which in the final analysis dealt with literature as a sort of huge *lapsus* whose secrets were finally to be revealed to us. Likewise anthropology taught us to read in these texts certain manifestations of the mental structures of a society different from our own, whose works bear witness to this fact despite themselves. In this way they become documents which open up, involuntarily, onto new knowledge of the development of societies. Likewise structuralism or semiology, or even semiotics, have developed an art of finding in these texts signs, involuntary and unknown to the author, which betray the secret system which controlled, without his knowing it, his manner of writing and his relationship to

society. Literature itself then becomes a sort of secret code whose key even the author does not know, but which nevertheless defines him and reveals him.

I am exaggerating, perhaps. I am distorting certainly. But the fact remains that in principle all these methods, applied to literary texts, have as a common factor to set aside avowed intentions and intentional trends and use them as testimony and as documents in a search for another order. In other words they deride an author's lucidity. They neglect his "philosophy" and even the philosophy of his age.

The danger is apparent. For although these new methods are interesting, they can in no case replace nor eliminate direct study of a text and the effort required to understand its contents and its implications. It is a fact that a text may betray unconscious limitations, due to language, to complexes or to social pressures. But it is no less true that it expresses an idea, which the same language, the same pressures of all too human complexes and of a changing society cannot prevent from being different in each author, original and intelligently acquired. This was known, obviously, and it has always been known. No one, perhaps, would even deny it. But in practice, the very newness of the research I mentioned tends to cause this to be forgotten.

But this is serious and also harmful to literary studies. First the new methods do not avoid generating a certain skepticism with regard to their very principle. Because a text is nothing more than a document which does not itself know what it is saying, texts as such are no longer considered for their original contents and they lose as a consequence a certain degree of their prestige; secret pressures, which are real, result in the fact that the author is treated a little like a patient and his work as a reflex. Moreover, the free variety of so many differing interpretations diminishes the confidence of the public in the study of these texts, a public which has become accustomed to the objective certitude provided by the sciences. Literary studies, whether understood in the broad or the narrow sense, are in this way diminished. They are oriented *en masse* in this way toward ends which are perfectly foreign to them. And a general feeling of disappointment settles in at every level.

This imprecision is understandable. Not only do the various disciplines subsume together the pre-eminence given today to so-

ciety over individuals. These disciplines have all so dazzled us by the very luster given them all over the world by their newness. This has led to the facile idea that nothing much could be expected from the traditional study of letters, as if such studies had no other purpose than to rest indefinitely in admiration before works of art known well for a long time. From this it was not difficult to conclude—another misunderstanding—that these studies could be renewed only by abdicating their responsibilities into the hands of more fertile research. The injustice of such a perspective is equalled only by the vogue which it currently enjoys, unfortunately, among the uninitiated.

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The study of letters is not a purely formal study nor one in which even the slightest stagnation can be detected.

Nor is it a field where rigor plays less a role than in the sciences, particularly the “human sciences”, the humanities. A text can only be understood as part of its age and only if each word is given the meaning and the nuance which it had at that time, in comparison with other authors, or rather together with certain other authors, measuring what is not mentioned or what is amplified or modified, in favor of whom and against whom. Similarly a text can only be understood as part of a long vertical—or diachronic if one prefers—series, when, through the history of genres, themes, words, images, it is possible to determine with the proper relief what were its sources, or what suggested a protest perhaps or a rectification. In this way in the customs of the times and the habits of the author there appears what it was that gave his reaction the form it took. However, in these various areas of research, the requirements and the possibilities for rigor have continued to grow at the same time as the methods have been renewed.

I shall give two examples, drawn apparently from the most unfavorable cases.

The first is that of my own discipline as I have exercised it. The history of Greek literature would seem *a priori* to be one of the most firmly set possible since it has been studied for so many centuries. And my manner of dealing with it seems *a priori* to be one of the most traditional since I am specialized in the classical

period (the best known) and in the major authors (also the best known). However, it is easy to demonstrate that in this field everything has changed. I am absolutely amazed each time I take stock of progress recorded since my younger days. The history of Greek literature by the Croiset brothers was certainly an admirable work in its time, which was the very beginning of the century. But today it is practically useless, not only because the writing style is characterized by that slightly laudatory and reproving turn-of-the-century style, but because everything—from the factual data, to the research tools, to the areas of curiosity themselves—has changed.

Without even mentioning the contribution made to language studies and institutions by the decoding of an unknown script which pushes the use of Greek back several centuries further in the past, the number of papyrus texts discovered in our century has been amazing. In the recent history of Greek literature which I mentioned earlier, these new resources have been widely used, and we are seeing with numerous quotations, authors appear, who were barely even mentioned previously (the case for many lyric poets). Dates for the same period have sometimes been completely changed by papyrus and epigraphic discoveries (an Aeschylus play which had been considered early, for example, and which is, instead, recent). Also, what do we not have available now on the authors? Critical editions and indexes now exist for almost every author. And etymological dictionaries also are available furnishing a brief history of words. Based on this it is possible to create series and then to undertake refined comparisons which have the additional advantage of becoming unquestionable. It is possible to choose between series which are or are not continuous, which are limited or broad. Everything can be arranged. This is the reason for the great number of research works, theses and articles devoted to tracing the history of a word or a group of words, to seeing how their value or their frequency depends on historical conditions; but also devoted to how each important author has given them a new acceptance, or new relief, or, on the other hand, how he sets them apart based on an idea, whose details, external but certain, help to perceive his articulations and originality better. From statistics and etymologies we then move to the analysis of a text in its words and for its innovation. This cannot be done without having the proper tools. And it is being done a little better each day, taking advantage

of all the previous efforts. There too the harvest has just begun. And the questions being asked are rejoining contemporary experience. Anyone who keeps up with the bibliography of the historian Thucydides is aware of the updating which takes place year after year, suggesting new means of approach. Even more than these events, the interests of the present period have stirred up new interpretations inspired by current intellectual trends or by closer contact with other lore. Anthropology, among others, has modified the questions to a great extent, and since the appearance of this discipline, no research can avoid being impregnated and reorientated by it. The study of literature is still a dialogue between two ages, one past and the other present, and repetition is excluded in advance.

This supposes that literary studies are not satisfied with an explanation of form or stylistic methods or even with defining individual feelings. They deal with history as much as with philosophy inasmuch as each is reflected in literary works. The study of literature can no more ignore history and philosophy than these fields can ignore the writings of the authors who, without being technicians, are part of their development and who have given it a certain orientation.

I should add a parenthesis here which is a bit of house promotion. A taste for a study of societies and the overwhelming interest in social matters means that frequently there is surprise at seeing me pursue a history of ideas which is constructed through a study of individuals and of major thinkers instead of the impersonal themes in current usage. I would like to answer this criticism because it touches on the status of literature, which is at the heart of the present discussion. I am fortunate in that for Greece we are rich in authors and rather poor in everyday documents. (Apart from inscriptions which are often rather standard, the documents are generally all texts). I am also fortunate that for Greece progress in ideas continued in a continuous dialogue in which almost every author participated. And this dialogue could go on only thanks to them. I believe that this last remark would be valid for all literature, which may be the fruit of a given society but which is alone capable of giving a new impulse to that society. I firmly believe this. Nevertheless, I will not insist on this idea which, it is evident, is strongly opposed to current trends and is, moreover, unprovable.

On the other hand I would quite willingly insist on the fact that such a history of ideas, if it is based in every respect on carefully observed formal particularities, has but very little to do with what is called the art of writing. Literary studies, in their apparently most traditional form, in fact proceed from discovery to discovery. Working from explanations of words and of texts, the study of literature develops into a history which is the history of thought.

And so that I will not be accused either of giving too much credit to ideas by endowing literature with their status of knowledge, or of remaining too tied to traditional studies by ceding too great a place to authors and their works, I will cite as my second example a field of studies whose name would seem to designate the most formal of activities but which is enjoying a renewed vogue of late: namely, the study of what today is called "rhetoric". "Rhetoric" is a very old word and it evokes very old studies, those which existed at a time when there were chairs in "Greek elocution" in universities. The rhetoric which has so greatly developed in the last decade or two on an international level has also changed meaning. And now, through a characteristic reaction, it also includes the content of works. Even better: it has expanded its frontiers. For it is defined broadly as the general system governing the aesthetics of an age, in a series of various countries influenced by the same theories, and in a series of various fields which encompass, along with literature, the graphic arts, architecture and music, and which ultimately are based on a common philosophy. Everyone can appreciate this opening and these various interchanges, which are quintessentially modern, as well as the role given to society which is no less modern. But it should be remembered also that this aesthetic is expressed in texts, often little known, which provide direct and conscious testimony of this aesthetic, the interpretation of which restores historic objectivity to the whole. And especially it can be seen that even the theme which is apparently the most formal and the one most exhausted in the eyes of the public is in fact a powerful reconquest of meaning through form. "Rhetoric" in Greece, at the time of its birth, taught not only how to speak well, but also how to formulate arguments, how to touch hearts, how to construct a work. The modern study of rhetoric deals with the history of this search and of its significance in literary creations. It thus explains the works in the second

degree, so to speak. This does not prevent the uninitiated from remaining skeptical, for the simple reason that literary terms are suspect. As always, misunderstanding is the fruit of simple ignorance.

It is clear that it is totally erroneous to relegate all the various forms of literary research into the realm of form and to doubt its power of renewal. These two brief examples suffice to prove it. Not only is such research an ongoing quest into the meaning and significance of these texts, which are its immediate concern; but in this quest, which is pursued anew each time it occurs, literary research focuses on even more essential problems. Why do men write? How does thought develop? What margin of freedom does the creator have with respect to his surroundings, to his past, to his passion? In short, behind each word whose meaning becomes clear can always be seen the same question taking shape: what is man? And the question arises here in the context of his most original and most characteristic accomplishment. For there are societies composed of bees or of chimpanzees, and there are various means of communicating. But literature does not exist apart from man.

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The gravity of the present tendency can be clearly imagined. This tendency is grave in the field of higher education which is intent on turning away from this major source of reflection on man. A strong reaction is called for, by the allocation of academic chairs and financing, but especially by a redefinition of goals and applications. The trend is no less grave in the area of young people's education, where direct contact with texts is more and more limited. Through a certain way of organizing examinations and the value given to them, by mixing newspaper articles and literary works within the same course, there is a dilution of knowledge in and the spread of these works which formerly still served as the means for inculcating not only the bases of thinking and the meaning of the great human symbols, but which also instructed moral values, civic virtue, a critical spirit and intellectual enthusiasm: in short everything that, when finally mature and fully understood, alone can assist in using scientific progress for the good of

mankind rather than for its destruction. In every country in every age, is this not what has been expected of works of literature?

But I shall not argue the point any further. It would be too facile and it risks taking me too far. I shall limit myself to what is rooted in the organization of research and, in a sense, methodology or epistemology. The review *Diogenes* likes to encourage multiple exchanges between countries and between disciplines. It enjoys cross views and encounters which are the source of renewal. I am in favor of these encounters, of these marriages. But I have tried to point out that the real crossroads where all paths begin is precisely the study of works of literature. And this is the point we must come back to. For it is true that authors are a means for understanding an age; but an age is of value above all for what it provides and says, and for what it leaves behind that lives on. If this condition is fulfilled, all marriages with other disciplines become good ones and fruitful ones. Yet to marry, it is necessary to have an identity, to have the proper documents. As a result of the misunderstanding which I have attempted to explicate here, the study of human works and of literature strongly risks losing its identity, simply through negligence, just as for any lost object.

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