

LITERATURE, THEATRE, CINEMA:  
“COMPARISONS ARE ODIIOUS”

It is a truism that the relationships between literature and visual entertainment are multiple, complex and variable, especially if we consider literature in the broad sense and keep in mind the enormous variety in the forms of spectacle. Actually, several dangers lie in wait for the one who, on the comparative level, deals with the problem of the relationships between a literary work and a work intended to be viewed as visual entertainment.

On the one hand, there is the impact of “impressionist,” subjective criticism, whose representatives, often illustrious, are able to maintain no matter what and its contrary. A second danger is to trust to one method only, be it the most honorable and tried or the most promising in its novelty. A certain eclecticism, not to say methodological ecumenism, seems desirable, indeed necessary, for the analysis of such rich and heterogeneous phenomena.

However, there is another source of confusion and possible misunderstanding in the comparative study of literary, theatrical and cinematographic production, namely, to view them as such without taking into account the period of their existence or in

Translated by Jeanne Ferguson

confusing their different stages. Now, if we admit that existence implies a continuity in time, that it is a process, it is obvious that the existence of any artistic expression consists of several phases, from production to consumption. In order to avoid ambiguity and to submit to comparison only that which is comparable, we will accentuate, in our study, the successive stages of the life of a literary text, a theatrical presentation and a film. Terms such as creation (or production), notation, execution, emission (or transmission), perception (or reception) and, finally, interpretation (or decoding) will reappear throughout the course of these developments.

As far as literature is concerned, it is characterized by a double phenomenon: on one hand, the uniqueness of its substance and on the other, the duality of its existence. Let us explain. The substance<sup>1</sup> of all literary work is the word. Not all words are literature, but literature, by definition, cannot do without words. However, they appear in two different forms: oral and/or written. This is true of all the stages in the existence of a literary product.

Let us begin with creation. It is necessarily oral in a civilization without a written language or when the creator—poet, rhapsode or griot—either does not know how or does not wish to use a written form. It sometimes happens that literary creation is oral for certain material reasons; for instance, Alexandre Dumas, dictating his novels to secretaries with a view to intensive production, or Tomasi di Lampedusa, very ill and unable to hold a pencil, recording his last stories on a tape recorder. It may also happen that oral creation is a carefully cultivated form of expression: I am thinking of poetic improvisation, dear to certain romantic poets, to mention only Pushkin and Mickiewicz. I am also thinking of poetic or oratorical contests.

However, in most cases the process of literary production occurs through the intermediary of writing. It abandons oral expression. Without going into the psychology of this process,

<sup>1</sup> We consider “substance” in the acceptance given by André Lalande: “whatever there is of permanence in things that change, inasmuch as this permanent is considered as a subject that is modified by change while remaining ‘the same,’ and in serving as common support to its successive qualities,” *Vocabulaire technique et critique de la philosophie*, 8th edition, Paris, PUF, 1960, p. 1048.

which does not concern us here, without going into what happens in the mind of a writer during the gestation of a work, we must admit that for the great majority of authors the act of creation is accomplished through writing. Obviously, there may be mixed cases, where the writer formulates his thought aloud while putting it down on paper, the oral expression at times preceding, at times following, the graphic signs.

This leads us to a phenomenon that should be distinguished from that of creation, that is, notation. To survive the ephemeral moment of creation, to be transmitted to the consumer, to be diffused in space, to endure in time, the word has always looked for ways to be fixed, conserved and materialized—hence, notation. Only oral literature in the strictest sense evades this rule, by confiding the diffusion of its products to the mnemonic faculties of the poet himself, to his immediate circle and to his direct listeners.

The most universal means of notation is of course writing. Throughout epochs and civilizations, it resorts to systems of graphic signs and to extremely varied material supports. However, for a century we have had at our disposal the means to preserve and diffuse an oral text, thus a literary work, without recourse to notation. There are techniques that permit the recording, reproduction and diffusion of the voice, from the invention of the phonograph to the radio and the tape recorder.

Let us go on to the following stage of the existence and functioning of a literary work, a stage which we may call transmission or emission. There are two ways to transmit a literary text to the consumer, oral and written. The first involves sound waves, or acoustics, and of necessity makes use of the voice. Depending on the technical means of transmission, we have the voice alone (direct recitation), voice plus cylinder or disk, voice plus radio-electric waves, voice plus magnetic tape, and so on. Written transmission uses a tridimensional space or surface representing graphic signs. We must also add a particular way of transmitting a text: the gestural system of deaf-mutes.

As for reception, in general we find the same duality that exists at the level of emission. Perception engages either the auditive (acoustic) channel or the visual (optical) channel, or both at the same time, for example, when a conscientious

listener listens to *Hamlet* on the radio while reading the text. Let us note that the literary work may be perceived by means of a third sensory channel, namely, touch; when a blind person reads a book in Braille, neither his eyes nor his ears are involved.

Here I would like to suggest another distinction that does not involve the oral/written, audio/visual dualities, a distinction that appears to me charged with consequence. In fact, there are two kinds of transmission and reception of a literary work: one, using means that do not need material support, that use sound or electro-magnetic waves. Let us take a text, a poem that we listen to recited live or on the radio; it is in the mouth of the reciter, it is in our ear, it is in the air, but it is not materialized, it does not occupy space. On the other hand, a book containing the same text, like a record or a tape on which this text is registered, is an object, perhaps cumbersome but having the merit of being easy to handle by the one holding it.

If I advance this commonplace distinction, it is not because of an excessive respect for physical laws. It is a fundamental fact from the point of view of the perception of a literary work. In the case of listening to the radio, where the broadcaster is completely independent of the consumer, the latter is obliged to accept the rhythm and time span imposed by the broadcast. The only thing he can do is turn the dial to interrupt the transmission. It is impossible to pause, to go backward, to listen to a passage again. On the contrary, all of that is possible when a literary work is received through the intermediary of a book or tape. The length of time and the ordering of the perception is regulated by the consumer.

The distinction that we have just brought up is not without consequences for the interpretation, meaning the deciphering or the decoding, the last stage analyzed here of the existence of a literary work. It is convenient to distinguish interpretation from perception for the good reason that one may perceive a text even in a language one does not know, while comprehension and interpretation of a perceived text is a complex process, extended in time and dependent on many intrinsic and extrinsic factors. One of these factors is precisely the possibility to accommodate ourselves to the text in question, to re-read it or to listen to it again, to dwell on its slightest details. It is thus obvious that

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only the "materialized" presentation of a literary work, a perception that may be regulated by the consumer, offers the conditions for more profound reflection and interpretation.

Up until now, fortunately, we have been in the literary domain: to consult a book is easy. Things become less simple when it is a question of visual entertainment.

We have just seen that the substance of any literary work (including dramatic) is the word and that its existence may take either an oral or a written form. From this point of view, what are the characteristics of the theatrical spectacle considered in its broad sense: drama, opera, ballet or pantomime? The substance of any theatrical work is the body or the actual object presented to the view. The existence of a theatrical representation is determined by the conjunction of space and time, that is, through movement.

Let us try to examine the different stages of the existence and functioning of a theatrical work.

The production of a spectacle is a more or less lengthy and heterogeneous process, almost always collective (with the exception of what is called a "one-man show" even outside the English-speaking world). What interests us here is to determine the moment of execution or emission of a product of theatrical art. May we admit that a spectacle is emitted from the moment of such or such a rehearsal? If so, which one? Is it up to the director to decide? However, he himself is often perplexed on this point. Is it the presence of an audience that determines the fact of an emission? However, even during rehearsals there are usually spectators, although in limited numbers. Is it the first public presentation that is determinant and sets the standard? But in some countries the press is invited not to the premiere but to the fifth or tenth performance. In the domain of the spectacle, the process of creation never stops. A theatrical work is never definitive, it is not fixed and unalterable; it may change from one evening to another. What is an objective fact and scientifically analyzable is one sole performance, one sole evening, that is, a single example, object of the theatrical production, an object that is remade, reproduced every evening or even twice in the same day.

At a given moment, at a certain place, a theatrical work is

performed, an emission takes place. The spectacle is seen by a public. It must be emphasized that the emission and the perception are always simultaneous in the case of a theatrical performance. This is what distinguishes visual entertainment from literature; it is what constitutes one of its essential traits.

After considering the “producer” side, let us consider the “consumer” side. The perception of a theatrical work is necessarily visual. It is at the same time auditory, but the acoustical channel is facultative. In the case of a pantomime or of a deaf spectator perception is limited to the optical channel.

What is very important in the consumption of a product of theatrical art and what differentiates it from the reading of a literary text is that the rhythm, the tempo, of the perception is imposed by the performer. We do not as a rule interrupt a performance to say to the actor. “Do that over again. I did not really grasp it,” “Repeat that gesture, I was looking at your partner.” By obliging the spectators to follow the rhythm of the performance, the theatre mobilizes their attention and sharpens their sensory perceptions. And yet we are not capable—except in the hypothesis of a very sober and bare spectacle—to perceive all the signs emitted by this “cybernetic machine” that is a theatrical performance. Given the expanded visual field, the often large number of performers, the wealth and mobility of the scenographic elements, the spectator is constantly asked to make a choice, to follow one or the other perceptive itinerary. Perception is necessarily selective, its result differs from one spectator to another and, for the same spectator, from one evening to another, if he decides to see the same play more than once.

The fact of a perceptual selectivity that is not imposed to such a degree in any other artistic domain—neither in literature, nor in painting nor in music—has an influence on the process of interpretation (or of decoding) that we have been careful to differentiate from the process of perception. Even when it is a matter of a literary work in written form, interpretation proves to be a laborious task whose definitive result (on the other hand, is it ever definitive?) depends on many factors. This process is infinitely more complicated in the theatre, first because of the plurality of the sensory stimuli involved, the multiplicity of significant levels and their interrelations, but also because of the

fact that the spectator is forced to perceive a theatrical work within strict and predetermined time limits.

Thus, in the theatre, a certain perceptive liberty in space is associated with a perceptive constraint in time. This is the dialectic of the theatrical phenomenon, a dilemma that deserves a more thorough study also on the part of people in the theatre world.

A final problem concerning the products of theatrical art is notation. Is it possible to overcome the fleeting nature of a spectacle by means of notation, a means that has succeeded so well in the domain of the word that in most cases writing has taken over from the oral form?

Attempts to notate scenic activity (vocal expression and body movement) with the aid of graphic signs have multiplied, beginning with the 16th century, so as to arrive in our day at interesting results, especially in dance (to mention only the kinetography of Rudolf von Laban).<sup>2</sup> Their objective is not only to record, to "immortalize" certain aspects of a spectacle but also to facilitate its reconstruction for those who have never seen it, in the way a piece of music is performed from a score.

There is another way of eternalizing a theatrical work, namely, by camera or video-tape recorder. In this case, it is not a question of notation, since no system of signs is involved in the process, but of a photographic or electronic reproduction, possibly with sound, fixed on film or on magnetic tape. Let us recognize, however, that recordings that comply with strictly documentary criteria are rare: an immobile camera placed at a fixed point, an overall view taking in the totality of the spectacle and corresponding to the perceptive conditions of an individual spectator. In most cases, the author of the recording of a theatrical performance sees himself as a cocreator: he changes levels, points of view; he uses several cameras; he edits. The result is an artistic work that is more or less autonomous with regard to the original.

Another problem arises here, a problem of principle: the substance as well as the existence of a filmed work are different from those of a theatrical work. This leads us to the third section

<sup>2</sup> Tadeusz Kowzan, "Jeu scénique comme système de signes codifiés et codés (XVI-XX siècle)," to appear in *Actes du 2<sup>e</sup> Congrès de l'Association Internationale de Sémiotique*, Vienna, July 2-6, 1979.

of our considerations, the cinema.

The substance of a cinematographic work is the two-dimensional image of bodies or objects, real or imaginary. Its existence is bound to a material support that can reconstitute or rather imitate movement.

Let us take a closer look at the stages of the existence of a film.

First, creation. It occurs in two principal steps: shooting the scenes and editing. What is important in cinema is that the process of creation necessarily ends in a fixed form, a material object that is a film or a magnetic tape. A cinematographic work of art cannot exist, it cannot be emitted without that object, contrary to a literary work. At this level, what distinguishes a film from a theatrical work is that in the theatre the body or real object is the support of the creation and is presented at emission, while in the cinema a real object is the *result* of production and material support of the emission.

Emission takes place, as in the theatre, in time and space, but it is a space of two and not three dimensions. The great difference with regard to a theatrical performance is that the consecutive emissions of a film are identical, except for technical reasons, such as the quality of the film.

Emission and perception are simultaneous, and cinema has still another characteristic in common with the theatre: the perception of a cinematographic work is visual and, probably, auditory. On the other hand, the rhythm of the emission and perception is less restrictive than it is at the theatre. It is possible to proceed with a film as with a book: stop it, go in reverse, re-view such or such a sequence. It is true that it is a process requiring special technical means, notably, a viewer. Up until recently reserved for professionals, this accessory is beginning to be available to amateurs with the introduction of video cassettes.

However, from the point of view of perception, there is a more subtle and artistically more profound difference between a theatrical spectacle and a filmed spectacle. Contrarily to a generally wide visual field that permits and requires a perceptive movement of the eyes in the theatre, the cinema has means to guide us, up to a point, in our vision (dissolves, changes in levels, travelling, flashbacks, editing, etc.). Let us use a very simple



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example. During a dialogue, in the theatre, it is up to the spectator to decide whether to concentrate his attention on one or the other speaker or to look at both at the same time. In the cinema, it is the director who decides if we see in the foreground the face of the one who is speaking or that of the one to whom the speaker addresses himself. Without abandoning the global view and even a certain exaggeration in this sense with the introduction of the wide screen and cinemascope, the cinema may impose on us a perceptive itinerary in a much more effective way than the theatre can.

This latter circumstance is not without implication for the interpretation of a cinematographic work. We can affirm that generally the semiologic decoding of a film is facilitated by the fact that the spectator finds himself better guided in his perception than he is while watching a theatrical performance and that it is possible to see a film several times in its objective and unchanged form. To a perceptive guidance in space, more accentuated in a film than in the theatre, is added the possibility of a perception that is less restrictive in time.

The problem of notation does not arise in cinema, as it does in literature and the theatre. A filmed work is necessarily materialized, thus fixed on a real object (film or tape) without which it does not exist. It is the object itself that assumes the notative function.

In our day, it is not possible to speak of the theatre and the cinema without considering the phenomenon of television. Let us then try to apply several ideas used so far with regard to the theatre and the cinema. We will limit ourselves to the televised spectacle as an artistic product, without taking into account broadcasts devoted to information, "journalistic" reporting, news of the day or commercials, although each of these sectors of the televised program deserves the attention of the theoretician and has already inspired several studies, to mention only a recent essay by Martin Esslin on television commercials as a special dramatic genre. Our remarks will be more limited.

We have speculated on the substance and existence of literary, theatrical and filmed works. From this point of view, how does a televised work appear? As far as its substance is concerned, we can use, literally, the formula proposed for the cinema: a two-

dimensional image of bodies or objects, real or imaginary. As far as the existence of a televised spectacle is concerned, the situation is more complex. First of all, different types of emissions must be distinguished, from the technical point of view. Three principal variants must be considered.

The first, a delayed telecast, in which television transmits previously recorded images and sounds. This process is near to that of the diffusion of movies over television, the latter being in fact only telecinema. Thus, a delayed telecast has materialized in the form of a real object—result of the production and support of the telecast—an object that allows a replay, as in cinema. Certainly, in an original televised work, at the level of creation there may be technological and artistic differences with regard to a filmed work (the reduced dimensions of the screen alone impose them, and electronic cameras permit them); there may be differences at the level of perception (length of the telecast), but the existential status of a delayed telecast, that is, one that has been previously recorded, is hardly distinguishable from that of a film.

Second variant: direct transmission of a theatrical performance—variety show, circus, etc.—from the place in which it is given (theatre, open air, big top). In this case, the creation or the production responds to the criteria of what we have called theatrical spectacle. The transmission has a double status, that of a theatrical work and that of a cinematographic work. As for perception, it has the characteristics of any spectacle diffused through television, live or delayed. From the existential point of view, we are thus faced with a hybrid work that belongs to both the theatre and the cinema.

Third variant: direct transmission, most often from the television studio, of a spectacle created especially to be televised. What are the consecutive stages of the existence of a work of this type? The process of creation is located between a theatrical work and a cinematographic work. There is no editing as there is in the production of a film, but this process is replaced by the use of several cameras. The moment in which such a work is performed and transmitted is strictly determined, there is no ambiguity as is the case for the theatre. The specificity of this type of televised transmission resides in the fact that it is a

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unique example, even more accentuated than in the theatre, unless such a spectacle is recorded; but in the case of its retransmission through a recording, we find ourselves at the first variant of our classification, that is, a delayed transmission. As far as perception is concerned, it has a double character: for the audience attending the spectacle in the television studio (or elsewhere) it corresponds more or less to the perception of a theatrical work; for the spectator in front of his television set, perception has the characteristics of the reception of any other televised transmission.

In order to draw a conclusion from these remarks concerning a televised program, we may suggest that only the third variant of our classification presents a certain number of characteristics that may be considered as specific to television. However, it must be admitted that even this last variant—direct transmission from a studio of a spectacle created especially for television—does not change the fact that from the point of view of its substance, a televised work corresponds to a cinematographic work and that from the point of view of its existence, it has a mixed character, between the theatre and the cinema.

It is time to speculate upon what the consequences of our findings are for the choice of methods applicable to the comparative study of literature and visual entertainment; in what measure the distinction between the different stages in the existence of such or such a work determines methodological options; or, to go backwards, does the chosen method oblige us to hold to a particular stage of the existence and functioning of a literary or spectacular work?

Among the diversity of methods that are current today in human sciences, we have two orientations: historical and structural.

Let us begin with the second. Parenthetically, I prefer not to use the term "structuralism" (there are in fact as many structuralisms as there are structuralists, that is, theoreticians who make use of it) but rather to speak of a certain methodological tendency. Now, in the esthetic domain, structural methods deal especially with the substance and essence of a work, they attempt to analyze it in itself, to treat it such as it is, without taking account of its environment or its social and historic context.

They seek to disengage the essence of a work rather than follow the existential process from gestation and creation to the perception and social functioning of a literary or artistic production. However, since this process exists whether we like it or not, since it is an objective fact, any approach concerning a literary or artistic product is obliged to consider it at a certain stage of its existence; for the structuralist, this stage would be the interpretation, the decoding of the work.

Contrary to structural methods, the ones called historical are interested, by definition, in different if not all the phases of the life of a work (including its pre-existence): in its genesis, in the conditions of its birth as well as its survival over centuries and continents. We will not speak here of the best known disciplines: history of literature (or literary history, which is not the same thing), history of the theatre, history of the cinema and, of course, the comparative history of these fields. Another example will perhaps prove more instructive, that of sociology. The objects of this discipline are as multiple as its tools.

The sociology of the writer, like that of the actor, if it deals with the product of their labors, that is, the literary, theatrical or cinematographic work, considers it as much from the point of creation as from the point of transmission. However, it is especially involved with the social and historical context of the artistic production, with everything that surrounds the work: the literary life of the time, the collectivity of the actors (as troupe and as profession). As far as the sociologist who studies relationships between the actors and the spectators is concerned, he finds himself faced with a theatrical work at the moment of its transmission and its perception, which are simultaneous. There is sociological research that is directed toward the transmission and circulation of literary or artistic creations: diffusion of books, theatrical enterprise, cinematographic industry. The sociology of the public—literary, theatrical or cinematographic—is interested in the work from its perception and interpretation (one of the preferred means is opinion polls) until its survival in such or such a socio-cultural milieu. However, the exploration of the literary and spectacular using sociological methods does not stop there. We must add the study of relationships between the content of novels or plays and actual social cadres, as well

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as the study of the function of literature and the theatre in different kinds of social structures, which noticeably broadens the diachronic cadres of the sociological approach in the domain of literature and the spectacle.

This is not a peculiarity of sociology only, a discipline that we have used as an example. Any method that claims to be historic or that at least does not reject the fact of historicity in the study of a literary or theatrical work is subject to what we would call a double diachrony.

On one hand, there is the "small" diachrony: successive stages that punctuate the existence of a work—creation, transmission, perception, interpretation—stages on which we have already sufficiently dwelt. On the other hand, there is the "large" diachrony, that is, the life of a work through the centuries, a life that sometimes begins well before the moment of production (for example, when it is a matter of the exploitation of a mythological or biblical theme, a field of investigation so dear to many specialists in comparison), a life that continues in the receptivity and conscience of following generations. Let us note, however, that this second diachrony is not always so extended; it is almost non-existent in the case of a contemporary work, and as far as the comparative study of literature/theatre/cinema is concerned (for example, filmed adaptations of novels), it is necessarily limited to our century, that of the seventh art.

What are the place and role of semiology in the gamut of methods applicable to literary, theatrical and cinematographical phenomena? First of all, what is its situation when faced with the two methodological tendencies we have just considered, structural and, roughly, historical?

First of all, we must delimit semiology with regard to structuralism, for reasons of principle. Does not Jean Piaget find common "to all structuralisms ... the postulate that a structure is sufficient unto itself and does not require, to be understood, recourse to all sorts of elements that are foreign to its nature?"<sup>3</sup> Semiology, by definition, constantly turns to elements that are "foreign" to the nature of the object under study, the idea itself of sign being founded on the meaning/content/referent triad, the

<sup>3</sup> *Le structuralisme*, second edition, Paris, PUF 1968, p. 6.

latter element playing an essential role in semiology, whether Saussurian or Peircian. The fact of improperly associating structuralism to semiology has not served the latter and has helped to confuse the theoretical and notional situation of both.

In the dichotomous, thus inevitably schematic division—structural methods/historical methods—the place of semiology is rather with the latter. In any case, the semiological method is never anhistoric, since the content of a sign refers to a historically definable reality, and the semiotician tends precisely to define this reality, to reach the referent.

What we have just said about the historicism of the semiological method concerns, of course, the universe exterior to the work itself. It therefore concerns the “large” diachrony, if we turn to the concept of the double diachrony previously mentioned.

The “small” diachrony, that which has permitted us to distinguish clearly the principal stages of the existence of any artistic work (creation, transmission, perception, interpretation) is no less important, even though often neglected in semiology. It is never content to examine a work as such, to see only its essence. The semiological tool is necessarily applied to one of the phases of the existence of the work. In addition, it is there that I see the principle of the fundamental distinction—the consciousness of which is becoming more and more universal among semioticians—between the semiology of communication and the semiology of meaning. The first is particularly interested in creation and transmission, whereas the second—semiology of meaning—deals with perception and interpretation (decoding) of a work. Thus one is found from the point of view of the creator, that is, the transmitter of signs, the other takes the point of view of the public, the consumer, that is, the receiver of the transmitted signs.

This distinction between the semiology of communication and the semiology of meaning will perhaps clarify the problems—without solving them—concerning the relationships between literature and the spectacle. Comparative studies of these two areas are faced with several kinds of obstacles.

As we have seen, the substance of a literary work is not the same as the substance of a spectacle, whatever its genre. Among the numerous materials used, there is one that is common to the

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two, namely, the word, but if it constitutes the only material for the writer, it never appears alone in a spectacle. In addition, a spectacle—in theatre as in film—may very well do without it. In a literary work, we are thus in the presence of a sole meaningful level. While the principle itself of the spectacle is the multiplicity of meaningful levels that intertwine and are entangled with each other, and it is necessary to envisage their syntagmatic as well as their paradigmatic, their diachronic as well as their synchronic relationships. This is why the semiology of the spectacle, obliged to analyze the means of non-verbal expressions, seeks methodological inspiration outside the linguistic, while literary semiology remains a tributary to the methods elaborated by the science of language.

What is evident is that the semiology of communications is particularly interested in the products of the word, while the semiology of meaning is concerned with all extra-verbal domains. This state of things does not facilitate comparative studies of literature and the different forms of the spectacle. The symbiosis of the two semiological approaches—one putting the accent on the creator, the other on the consumer—can and must occur especially in the spectacle, because it is there that transmission and perception are simultaneous, thus interdependent.

Now let us reconsider the question of methodological choice in the comparative study of literature and the spectacle. We may observe that—except for structural methods that are especially directed toward the essence of a literary or theatrical work and are little concerned with the stages of its existence—all other methods are applicable to all existential stages. Consequently, each phase of the existence of a work is analyzable with the help of the tools proper to any methodological approach.

This freedom of choice brings with it a profusion of alternatives that constitute at the same time a wealth and a source of confusion. This obliges us, in fact, to be particularly vigilant so as not to mix up the different levels of the functioning of a literary or theatrical product. It is not enough to be conscious of the divergences between, for example, a dramatic work and a theatrical performance, or a spectacle of the theatre and a spectacle of the cinema. It is a matter of being sensitive to the different stages of the existence of such or such an artistic work. It is only

at the price of this vigilance that we may avoid the traps into which the theoreticians fall.

How many contradictions we find in the pen of the most competent authors, in the most famous creators.

While Emile Zola states "The theatre and the book have absolutely different conditions of existence," and Alain writes "Neither the same characters nor the same catastrophes apply to both the novel and the theatre," Henry de Montherlant asks himself "if there is not the same esthetic for the novel and the theatre, when they are of a certain quality." Marcel Pagnol is obviously confused when he observes, "There are three very different literary genre: poetry, which is sung; the theatre, which is spoken; and prose, which is written." If we meet with contradictions, not to say untruths, so flagrant, it is because the authors of these statements are situated, without saying so (and often without knowing it), at different levels of the functioning of a work, from its creation up until its interpretation by the consumer.

If Robert Bresson says, "The cinema is not a spectacle, it is a written work, one through which one tries to express oneself with horrible difficulty," while Jean Nitry affirms with insistence, "The cinema is not and cannot be a written work except in the measure in which it is first a spectacle," it is that one, being a director, places himself at the stage of creation while the other seems to see things at the level of communication.

While Marcel Pagnol notes, "The silent film was the art of printing, fixing and diffusing the pantomime; sound film is the art of printing, fixing and diffusing the theatre," Jean Cocteau remarked, "The theatre and the cinema turn their backs on each other," and René Clair states, "All that the cinema borrows from the theatre, all that the stage borrows from the film, risks to turn each one away from its own path." Others, like Alain, seek the essential difference between the theatre and the cinema in the presence or absence of direct relationships between the actors and the spectators. The latter theoreticians see one particular aspect (which is neither the only nor the most important) of transmission and perception.

We could multiply examples of this type, we could quote other statements that would only have the effect of engendering



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often sterile discussions and useless polemics. However, it is enough to keep well in mind that the theoretical situation of a literary or spectacular phenomenon changes from one stage to another in its existence in order not to risk inadequate comparisons, in order not to make parallels of things that are not comparable.

In conclusion, let us reconsider this truth dear to Etienne, "*Comparaison n'est pas raison.*" ("Comparisons are odious"). Valid for comparative studies in literature, the famous phrase becomes an even more serious warning when it is a matter of relationships between literature and the other domains of the artistic activity of man, especially the spectacle. And if we have presented some reflections and some suggestions on the matter, it is to contribute to the overturning of the terms of this locution; it is so that comparison may be governed by reason.

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