

NOTES AND DISCUSSION

Jean Starobinski

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE PRESENT

STATE OF LITERARY CRITICISM

Let us begin by taking a look at the semantic background: the word *criticism* designated an action implying judgment and discrimination based on standardized poetics or on preferred taste. By virtue of implicit or explicit *criteria*, the principal task of criticism—of things either beautiful or otherwise—was to make a distinction,¹ to disapprove or to praise. If one refers to French dictionaries (from the 17th century onwards), one can see that the first and stable meaning of the noun *criticism* is:

“*The art of judging a work of the mind*” (Academy, 1694). To this first acceptance of the meaning of the word was added, in 1740, the idea of *enlightenment* and *explanation*. It has now

Translated by Valérie Brasseur.

¹ For a history of criticism in France see Roger Fayolle, *La Critique*, (Paris, 1964).

The etymological source of *criticism* comes from the Greek *krites*, judge, and, in French, from the act to “cribler” (“sift”), also originating in *krinein*. Georges Blin recalled this in an opportune manner in his *La cribleuse de blé*, Paris, 1968. On the question of judgment, see Gaëtan Picon, *L'écrivain et son ombre*, Paris, 1953.

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come to designate “literary science,” independently of any judgment of value. This new acceptance, although confirmed by use, did not appear sufficiently clear to the compilers of the 8th *Dictionary of the Academy* (1932). The definition proposed at this date hardly differs from that of 1694:

Criticism (noun): *The art of judging works of the mind, literary production, a work of art. etc.*

Critical (adjective): *Pertaining to the distinction in a work of the mind, a literary production, a work of art, etc., that which does not correspond to the accepted ideas of beauty, or what one considers to be the truth.*

The notion of explanation has disappeared. Such a restriction placed on the meaning, at such a recent date, may surprise us and appear archaic and conservative: but it does at least have the great merit of recalling to mind a function threatened with neglect or being relegated to the implication of analysis and interpretation: for a work to appear to us to be worth while studying, its value, importance and significance must have been previously discerned. Critical knowledge presupposes—if only provisionally and after due classification—an earlier verdict by critical judgment. Those same people who today refute the standards of beauty or the authority of truth do not hesitate to describe as old-fashioned the attitudes which they refuse to accept, thus substituting (sometimes unwittingly) a historical *criterion* for the criteria on which former criticism depended. By refusing even the possibility of judgment is to pass a shameful judgment.

It would not appear that the considerable scope of specialized methodologies has yet found any repercussion at the level of activities of choice applied to current production or to manuscripts submitted to reading committees. A criticism of acceptance or refusal can always be considered as a *spontaneous criticism*—according to the expression Albert Thibaudet employed in 1930.²

New research orientations all belong to the category that this author defines as *professional criticism*: criticism whose aim is to point up an “intelligible order” in the works themselves as well as in the succession of works and generations. Professional

² Albert Thibaudet, *Physiologie de la critique*, Paris, 1930.

criticism, or in other words criticism made by professors! It would be vain to conceal the sociological links between the new directions of critical study and the changing structures of universities. There are problems of teaching: certain practices such as *close reading* (stylistic explanation of the text), are to a large extent the result of pedagogic considerations. There are problems concerning the choice and promotion of teachers: in most countries a university's reputation is based on the number, quality and originality of its publications; hence production is increasing rapidly, as are the numbers of periodicals, meetings, etc. Quantitative expansion of "professional criticism" does not necessarily imply qualitative development. It goes without saying, however, that emulation gives rise to new ideas, and to useful—or simply ingenious—experiments. Other outside influences affect the chosen orientations: the increasing number of listeners at lectures, or the cultural unpreparedness of participants in a symposium, encourage teachers to credit themselves with a certainty of scientific appearance. The impersonal character of positive methods, their dogmatic systematization, satisfy both the teacher's need for authority and the student's desire to acquire as soon as possible a technical mastery which can be put to use without delay. Doubt is literally no longer allowed and becomes a sign of weakness. It does happen that the conjectural nature and—to be frank—the low degree of "scientificness" of these new "sciences" give rise to an increase of assurance and intransigence as a form of compensation. The pedagogic factors indicated here are only occasional causes—the development of strict intention methods also replies to an inherent necessity, and there is no need to call upon the vicissitudes of university life to justify the connection made (or simply desired) between literary criticism and the various disciplines in the field of the humanities.

The critical operation then attempts to become a scientific dissertation on the particular subject of literature. Criticism can continue to be qualified as *literary* only because the subject it is dealing with is literature. If the criticism itself had any literary pretensions, this would be due more to some form of accident, a lack of vigilance, a lapse in the strictness of the mind, as if it had been unfortunately contaminated by the object of its attention, which should have been held at a greater distance. Well before our generation, literary history, in its positivist and do-

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cumentary form—accumulating and verifying biographical data, compiling irreproachable inventories, seeking after probable sources—set itself this severe ideal. This “criticism as a science of literature” has made it a point of honour to keep away from “essayism,” i.e. “criticism as literature,” or rather a reflexion of literature on itself.

More ancient, more infinitely variable, more deeply rooted in humanist tradition, “criticism as literature” was, in its freer appearance, an excellent target for any undertaking which wanted to make the most of a spirit of novelty and of methodological precision. However, hardly distinguishable from the principal trend of literary creation, ready to be absorbed into it, an integral part of the personal experience of writers, “criticism as literature” remains capable of transforming and rejuvenating itself, to the same degree as literature takes on a new look. The “literary dissertation on literature” may be considered as selfish research by critical writers (I am thinking of Henry James, Marcel Proust, Maurice Blanchot) anxious to put to the test the internal values of their own creation in their examination of books past or present; or, yet again, it may seem to us to be a no less *selfish* questioning by the critical essayist (I am thinking of Jacques Rivière or Charles Du Bos) for whom the search for self goes through a succession of enlightening readings. It is the domain of the “critic by masters”³—a criticism wherein the writer seeks for respondents. In France, the precursors are Baudelaire and Hugo, whereas psychological and sociological criticism come down in a fairly direct line from Taine.

This opposition is a schematic one, I agree, and should not encourage a division into two camps, one of critics who like to be considered men of science and the other of critics who are pursuing a writer’s experience. The risk and discomfort of critical undertakings consists in not being able to be totally absorbed either in a science which is advancing methodically in search of verifiable laws, any more than with an activity wholly given over to creative invention. Criticism would sometimes like to make the most of the impersonal and universal severity of knowledge, and sometimes of the seduction of a free adventure: in one form or the other, authority is overcome.

³ Again according to Albert Thibaudet’s classification.

I. THE NEED FOR HISTORY

We speak of *history* to characterize the "positive" methods of approach and to define the disciplines which are the fundamental bases for interpretation. But if the term *history* is appropriate to designate the preliminaries and objective conditions for interpretation, is it not also appropriate to designate the *general synthesis* to which the various interpretative steps will lead?

Nothing justifies the neglect or omission of the exact rules of literary history. In fact, the establishment of texts, their dating, their attribution, the careful examination of their variations, the comparison between the printed and manuscript texts, etc., remain indispensable. The history of language and lexicography both have their place in literary studies; for on what bases would sociological, psychological and thematic interpretations be founded if the text was not first of all understood in its literality, and if the "positive" research had not collected all material of all sorts? One should therefore only be grateful at seeing the availability of so many new instruments. Team research, and recourse to machines, speed up or simplify the work involved in inventory and classification. Henceforth it is possible to obtain a *concordance* of vocabulary vast enough and exact enough on which to base objectively differentiated studies on ideas, style, etc. Statistics on the use of terms or grammatical forms offer precise data to the appreciation of critics. Analyses may now include not only the work of one single author, but an ensemble of contemporary productions, or the whole series of a periodical's output.

The possibility of increasing the extent and exactness of *preliminary* materials forces comprehensive reflexion to face unexpected problems. Thus we can see the establishment of a reciprocal incitement uniting apparently neutral instrumental processes with the most general and philosophical ambitions of the critic. If the classified facts open new horizons to the interpreter, we should also note in return that descriptive processes are not exempt from presuppositions and consequences which transgress the laws of prudent objectivity: they are destined to be put to work, they are "solicited" according to the selfish prejudices of the investigator. From the start, their neutrality was perhaps nothing but an illusion. One seeks to establish only the order of facts to which one attributes some importance... What is more,

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should one not recognize, behind all the impersonal processes, a choice of the impersonal, and a free determination in favour of an "objective" which is held to be important? There is *data* only for a movement going to meet it. All objectivity presupposes an aim: the realization of this does not lead to a slighting of the truth nor to declaring as negligible any attempt soberly to recognize the *facts*, but enables us to see more clearly the share which falls to us in this research.

The field and the extent of the preliminary study will be regulated according to whether one intends subsequently to give most importance to a close examination of the text, to biographical and psychological research, or yet again to the relationship between the work itself and its socio-historical surroundings. Thematic studies, particularly, are characterized both by the relative restriction of the specific object of their attention, and by the breadth of the space in which this object is to be observed: by choosing a *theme*, they restrict themselves to precise limits, but at the same time open up a wide field for study. They remain enclosed in the work of an author, broaden themselves synchronistically to a whole epoch or—finally—follow up in its historical dimension the evolution and metamorphoses of the selected theme: in this case they will cover intellectual or poetic tradition. In this sense, a thematic criticism may be defined as the *diachronic* history of ideas, images, symbols. It is the *Stoffgeschichte* and *Problemgeschichte* of the Germans, and is one of the aspects of the *History of Ideas* of the Anglo-Saxons. It is easy to appreciate that there is nothing new in this form of thematics.⁴ By following the evolution of a legendary figure or a problem (for several centuries or for a shorter duration of time) one can see an indication of the changes in the mind, society or civilisation. By no means void of interest if considered separately, variations on the theme will also have a revealing function: with them one is enabled to understand a global movement, a collective transformation, if the fluctuations of an "associated variable" are carefully noted. In this respect, thematic criticism is literary history with a guide-line, history which has specialized itself and is more profound. Let us see the results of this choice: if you

⁴ For example, studies on primitivism, undertaken by A. O. Lovejoy and Georges Boas.

want to follow in detail the expansion of a theme or an idea, nothing obliges you to place more importance on the great authors and successful works; the *minores* and less important also have the right to our attention—the idea, the theme, the image and their diffusion and transformations must count more than the authors who represent them... Too much can lead to confusion.⁵

As we know, *literary history*, according to Gustave Lanson, made no pretences at excluding judgments and tact: it was a science as long as it was documented, but ceased to be a science when the word gave place to a taste and sensibility which tried to express an opinion based on a knowledge of the facts. The appreciation of a work was therefore not an act of science, but a personal verdict influenced by science.

In the very name of “advanced” scientific demands, one might think that, laborious and scrupulous though it was, traditional historical study deviated from its course, came to a stop mid-way, and was too inclined to consider as a matter of taste certain problems which have been better judged by a finer or more specialized approach. One might wonder if literary science must necessarily be restricted to the research for documents and their classification: however broad the field explored, this seemed to be a short-sighted science consisting of files and information assembled according to biographical chronology or some vague causality, wherein the terms *source* or *influence* simply designated the passage of certain information, the transmission of procedures, doctrines, sentiments. What was wanted was that this science of recordings be increased by the contributions of “nomothetic” sciences: that to the simple collection of facts should be added their formalized description and their inter-relation in the form of laws. Briefly, it seemed that history, in its documentary and narrative form, did not keep up to all the promises of science, while the style, psychological mechanisms and social attributes could be explored in a more systematic fashion by disciplines which gave the appearance of being better able to ensure the universal validity of their results. Although people

⁵ It was one of Spitzer’s grievances with regard to the history of ideas: see “History of Ideas versus Reading of Poetry,” *Southern Review*, VI (1941), p. 584-609.

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have liked accusing *literary history* of “scientism,” often enough recourse has been made to a stand-in for science to fight against it or surpass it. And even if, like Lanson, it is admitted that facts and laws established by objective knowledge may subsequently be amended in accordance with free judgment and personal interpretation, it seems desirable to remove the borders and widen the field of exploration of techniques which are reputedly rigorous.

These considerations led to a call for a closer alliance—even an allegiance—between criticism and the human sciences: linguistics, philology, sociology and psychology. A palace revolution in the citadel of science; a revolution led by science’s ultra-ists and extremists who wanted the work and the author’s personality and milieu to be submitted to a more thorough examination more in conformity with the demands already formulated (though only summarily so) by Taine and the “positivist generation.” Nothing that the historical methods had brought to light seemed negligible (no exact information should ever be ignored); these innovators demanded further investigation in the field of facts and, where the historian stood back and relied on the arbitrary intuition of personal taste, they saw a possibility of carrying on the positive work through the utilisation of new instruments or hitherto unused systems of reference.

Sociology, the science of the structures of social life; psychology, science of the personality; linguistics, the science of language—each of these could include literary work in the field of their investigations. The difficulty was that critics had to go back to school and study linguistics, sociology and psychology. On the other hand, it was easier for already *trained* linguists, sociologists and psychologists to turn to literature, thus following the expansionist movement of their new respective sciences. It should be remarked here that any significant change in method implies not only a new perception but also a modification of the subject. In appearance, sociology and psychoanalysis are simply other techniques of research applied to the same books and characters that had previously been submitted to the attention of historical criticism. In fact, both of these recent methods call into question the status of literature, by putting once again a question that literary history thought had been already settled: “What is literature?”

II. INDICATION AND CAUSALITY

Treated by psychologists as a symptom, as a social product, or at the least as a sign indicative of the global structure of a society, the work of art is "relativized," deprived of its magic isolation. Unsuspected connections are brought to light, and meanings appear which act as a link between the work and its milieu, between the work and the author's subconscious. It is therefore no longer the work itself which will hold our attention, nor the handful of friends or mistresses gathered around a great author: the new object which appears in the sight of sociology or psychology is an ensemble of meanings and forces where the work and the writer no longer have their traditional place. If these methods encourage an understanding of the works, it is by demonstrating that the works necessarily bear reference to something other than themselves—to an extra-literary reality of which they are sometimes the involuntary indication. Once this displacement has taken place, one can return to the work and better understand what gives it such a superabundance of meanings; but by carrying the analysis even further, one can also forget all about the work: literature would thus be reabsorbed—as an institution or as a function—into the wider network of communication and exchange of signs by which individuals and societies exist.⁶

It is important to underline the diversity of orientations that a critical work can take on when it comes to dealing with literary works as indications and symptomatic revealers. First of all a connection will be made between the work and the psychic particularities of the author and the conflicts of the surrounding society. But, in its turn, the extrinsic knowledge concerned with the emotional life of the author or the social milieu will be so many indications pointing back to the work, which henceforth will be seen through its originator: this is causal and genetic vision. Or again, if one is loath to invoke a causal mechanism, the work will be considered within the network of its "circumstances." If literary psychology or sociology do not wish to impose

⁶ The way in which some people these days are inclined to put the words *work*, *author*, *creation* in inverted commas is a sure sign that in their eyes these terms are invested with the qualities of *former*, or *so called*.

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their results as the terms of adequate conditions leading to the work, if they have the modesty to pretend only to be the demonstration of some of the necessary conditions, then there is no reason to challenge their propositions.

It can be seen that the pattern established in most of the psychological and sociological explanations is one which makes the subject to be explained the product of a causal system located without itself. Nobody can pretend, indeed, that a literary work is born *ex nihilo*; it always has an *antecedent*; even if it is not pre-formed, it is at least pre-figured in the author's mind and in the historical moment. But the passage from this pre-figuration to accomplishment is not an automatic one. "Existential" decision determines the recourse to literature and to the work—a decision whose point of departure is to be found in a reality experienced among men and institutions, but with the idea of going beyond it. For a critic, the whole question is to know whether his main interest lies in the conditions of realization preceding the work, or in the work itself as the result, or again in the connection between the finished work and the conditions of which it is the result. The mistake to avoid, and which is not always avoided, is to make the work identical, coextensive, homologous with the conditions brought to light: in this case it would be a simple redundancy, a pure reflexion, the manifest formulation—to a closer degree of evidence or symbolization—of an already pre-existing reality. If the work is not born *ex nihilo*, its own order was nonetheless founded *before* everything which gave it impetus; it is still carried on this impetus, but modified and exploited to produce an original achievement. A more specific study, as can be seen, would consist not in classifying in the work the residue of the preceding impetus, but in perceiving the original character of the final intention, such as it is recorded in the active form of the text. In any event, critical examination should be discriminating—careful to note any deviations, oppositions and distances that are to be seen in the work in comparison with its original conditions: it originates from them in order to differ from them and expresses them through betrayal. Infinitesimal though the effect may be, it does affect history and can no longer be reduced to the relationship of forces of the preceding moment.

III. PROBLEMS OF LITERARY SOCIOLOGY

“Popular sociology” no longer has many defenders; few people persist in seeing in the products of culture a simple reflexion of the milieu and the moment. With respect to literary work, society is in many ways much more overpowering than the simple theory of “superstructure” would have us suppose. Society is present not only at the origins of the work, but also at the level of those for whom it is destined; it has been said, correctly, that the work carries within itself, and even goes so far as to create, the image of its own readers, of its actual or virtual public. So that society—the system of human relations at any given moment—lies not only at the origin of the work, but the latter also makes its own contribution to society. Often a new image of society can be seen through the work and is diffusely foretold in it; conversely, the work is much less exterior to the network of real social exchanges than is implied in the notion of “superstructure.” Literature is not an optional outgrowth of social reality: it is a specific practice, with the same status if not the same style and the same import as other practices (economic exchanges, techniques, sciences), and is complementary to these in the constitution of the complex totality of the historical moment.

It may be asked if the methods of scientific sociology allow us to go beyond the comparison of average statistical data: can one do more, or better, than to confront the general structures of society with literary climates and trends which are sufficiently widely diffused to take the rank of events? Most studies hardly venture to characterize the social function of literature more specifically than by an ensemble of general features which all belong to the same “style of the epoch.” Literary sociology, often enough, only designates a common denominator. In its view, the writer’s subjectivity, and particularly the literary “product,” is only one of the relay-stations through which the objective language of a society may pass.

“Epoch” is usually too broad a reference: under closer examination the cohesion and unity which were first attributed to it soon disappear. For societies are rarely harmonious organisms where everything goes to make up a “general spirit.” The relationships of forces which they contain are not restricted to bal-

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anced tensions: little by little, conflicts break out into the open. In their ties with society, works written by living men cannot avoid showing up its divisions and contradictions; it would be tempting for the historian to do research within literary work for lines of cleavage and the oppositions which separate human groups or are the representations of the world to which they stand witness. This presupposes that the reading and survey of social conflicts have already been done, and that the result has been carried over into the literary field. One can see where the risk lies: this process extends the *interpretative image* of a society to an interpretation of the works which originated therein. Then it is a question of an interpretation done by the "square inch," where the errors and simplifications of a first interpretative reading of a society will be multiplied in their application on the reading of the texts. It is the most indirect of methods, where "unfalsifiable" affirmations will abound, which can be neither refuted nor strictly proven. In many ways, this method is not unlike that which, at the beginning of this century, established a privileged relationship between the works and the genius of a "race" (nation or province): this is to give a special character to an associated variable or to one of the multiple "material causes" of the work and to raise them to the rank of final cause. While it is true that a text cannot avoid including *something* of the society in which it originates, one should not conclude from this that this element always plays the principal rôle and determines the meaning of the text in question; on the other hand, if it is true that society surrounds and pervades the work, it would be wrong to state that the work does not deviate from it to some degree. To the relationship of inherence is added a relationship of exclusion. In our eyes, the social meaning of literature, or more generally of culture, is not restricted to the sole possibility of *referring* to connected structures (relationships of production, the economico-social apparatus); the very fact that the work is complementary to the existing data may also mean that it was called for by the latter and that it *overlaps* them. This is true of any act, of any transforming initiative. In this way we can size up *inventive marginality*: it is the ground proper to a living culture; the variable tolerance shown to its consideration by the various historical communities and the various politico-social structures should hold the attention of literary

sociology. (Very few studies have been made in this direction).

To be sure, sociology (Marxism on many occasions) has not assumed as sole task that of assigning to literary works a place of origin, an indication of social background of an ideological aim in the service of "class" interests. Its ambition is to place them among the complex interactions whose interplay forms the social whole. The problem which it cannot avoid facing is that of the validity of the relationships of meaning or symbolisation that sociology establishes. Marxist criticism—in which it is close to psychoanalysis—often develops as the reading of a latent or implicit meaning which, without being directly expressed in the literary work, nonetheless contributes to its aesthetic value and determines its historical importance. But, like psychoanalysis, sociological criticism has provided itself with the means of being right in all circumstances. Once the *relationships* which are held to be genuine have been established, everything which corresponds to them and everything which is homologous with them will appear as a faithful translation of historic reality; but the notion of *mystification* will allow of an appreciation of non-concordance, without initial assumptions having to be sacrificed. By giving himself the right on some occasions to attribute a deceptive function to literary works, the interpreter is certain, on his part, never to be in the wrong. He becomes the master of the true and the false. (Works of the past protest only if gross material errors are committed in their respect: otherwise they let things stand). So a literary work may sometimes be treated as a cunning screen elaborated by a bad conscience, and sometimes as the expression of a great awareness of the historical moment; so as not to upset explicative diagrams, the happy solution is adopted of considering "congruent" works as those which faithfully show the "genuine relationships," while incongruent works are put down to some power of illusion. It may happen that the work is considered under both angles simultaneously: as a revealing dissimulation, or as a disguised revelation, a symbolic indication of the conflicts which are not mentioned or are transposed in fiction. The dogmatic temptation here consists in trying to outline the global figure of a society and, in interpreting the work on these premises, deducing particular facts in order to confirm a concise general formula which is immediately held to be adequate. While many sociologists of literature admit in all good

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faith that they do not know what they are going to find in a particular work, all too often they claim that they do know the laws of history and of the conflict of ideologies in relation to which the work will be appraised. The system of measurement is accepted in advance: our only surprise will be when we learn the extent of the sum of connections that a work has with the surrounding social reality. We have hardly progressed at all. Thus, according to Sartre's severe judgment, "this lazy Marxism" will have "made of genuine men the symbols of its myths;"⁷ a surmised assertion will be passed off as an authentic scientific discovery.

Literary sociology (to the extent that it remains attached to a certain humanism) therefore has the problem of showing up the social conditions, while at the same time doing justice to the individual qualities of the works. Some people would like to safeguard both the notion of a "master-piece" and the possibility of a sociological reduction; and the tempting solution, paradoxical though it may appear to be, is to make the master-piece the ideal opportunity for sociological reduction, i.e. an analysis of the functioning of the work and its close ties with collective reality. Lucien Goldman's original proposal (following in the steps of Georg Lukacs) consists in seeing in the work of genius not an exception but an authorized spokesman; it has a supereminent representative value because it develops in a figurative but complete fashion the "possible conscious" of a social group.⁸ Without describing the entire process, without attempting to show up the intermediary links, the critic sees in the homology of great works and social facts the accomplishment of a phenomenon of mutual expression. It is striking to see here the reappearance—under the name of dialectical method—of Schleiermacher's hermeneutical circle, applied both to the work and to its social background: the process follows a pendulum movement which, taking historical works and documents as a starting-point, seeks to identify the conflicts of an epoch. Then, basing itself on a knowledge (provisional as a rule and, like any science, subject to revision), of the social totality, we come back

⁷ "Questions de méthode," in *Critique de la raison dialectique*, Paris, 1960, p. 43.

⁸ See *Le Dieu caché*, Paris, 1955, Chap. I, "Le tout et les parties."

to the works to explain them genetically. Goldman—and therein lies his merit—in no way tries to disguise the work of construction taken on by the interpreter; the latter extrapolates, from texts which have been studied, a *conceptual scheme* to be applied to the social group concerned; if the image one has of the group is thus given increased coherence, one may admit that the conceptual scheme constitutes the “world vision” of this class and, beyond the individual author, the latter is taken as the collective author of the master-piece being analysed. Mediation between the individual work and the social class is thus ensured, as can be seen, by an avowed intellectual construction, a hypothetical point of convergence where the interpreter sees a connection (or makes a connection) between the always incompletely expressed thoughts of the social group and the final meaning of the work. Here the critic’s intervention takes place in the open, as does the distinction he makes between essential and inessential works; to be sure, he will be reproached with *constructing* his demonstrations and of making wide use of the Procrustean bed. Such reproaches are almost well founded, since we are dealing with a process for which the user both assumes responsibility and claims justification. But too many operations are done without any left-overs, for the establishment of homologies not to appear as an artifice of demonstration—reality conforms too obligingly to the pattern which has been set for it.

One may nevertheless think that the gap between the economic-social domain and the plane of the particularity of the literary act should not be too wide a one, that it should not be filled simply by virtue of a conceptual scheme elaborated by the critic: should not the task of the human sciences—led by philosophy—be to divulge the intermediary stages?

This is what Jean-Paul Sartre meant in his major essay on *Questions de Méthode*. The essential task of the micro-sociological study (involving restricted groups and small collectivities) and particularly the psychoanalytical study (with its interest centred on the family background and the fundamental choices made in childhood) is then to link to the historico-social framework a specific and nuanced analysis of the works, without impairing their individuality, i.e. the unique character of the freedom which gave them birth. In Sartre’s view, psychology (in the form of existentialist psychoanalysis) must necessarily

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intervene both to ensure the understanding of the social implanation of the work (*regressive* explanation) and to clarify the irreducible character of the "choice of situation" which gives the work its particular physiognomy (*progressive* understanding). Psychology's function is therefore a double one, since on the one hand it must go back to the social relations which normally prevail in the writer's formative period, and on the other hand it must ensure the understanding of *this* poem, of *this* book, considered as original acts, particular desires and free behaviour. Psychology thus becomes the discipline which observes the genesis of the individual, taking collective surroundings as a starting point: it must therefore indicate, against the background of a limited determinism, the moments when the creative individual frees himself from his dependence in order to become the producer of his own style, and his more or less complete "commitment." If men make history by fighting against material conditions, literary work is no exception to this; it is a reply to this conditioning and can only be understood as a reactive production. The difficulty in such a method is that it tries to go back to the very early stages when a child's mind is trying to make decisions with regard to the world. It does happen that the critic claims to be too well informed on these hidden choices—for he has reconstructed them by a series of extrapolations and conjectures where the share of romantic fiction plays a predominant rôle. He speaks of them "as though he were there," giving as evidence of established fact what is in effect nothing but a tissue of imaginative inferences.

IV. PROBLEMS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS: FROM SUBJECTIVITY TO OBJECTIVITY

Sociology tries to find concrete contents through "ideological" formulations; psychoanalysis seeks to discover the latent psychic meanings lying below manifest behaviour. In both cases, the observer claims to be able to decipher unconscious desires, unconsidered meanings; he tries to bring out into the open an "unthought," an intention which is unknown or which can only be apprehended through symbols or myths; he denounces a mystified conscious which can only recognize its own drama by analogy or behind a protective mask. The critic thus becomes

the reader of the palimpsest, the one who removes the mask, or the demystifier. But it should be noted that psychoanalysis⁹ has set limits for its ambition with which Marxist sociology would have no patience; it would refer to them as being the mystifiers, being too narrow and too unconcerned with the "totality."

For psychoanalysis, it is a question indeed of discovering the ties which link the work with the subconscious of the author, without prejudice to the rôle played more or less freely by the conscious will, the social *ego*. Psychoanalysis claims to contribute only complementary information to classical criticism, though this complement is certainly of capital importance since we are obliged to alter our image of the writer; but it does not claim to do more than clarify the reciprocal implications of the work and the desire. It will have deciphered only the base score of the counterpoint, and made an obscure composition understandable and perceptible, isolating it in a totality which cannot be completely circumscribed.

In the case of psychological analysis, problems are centred around the notion of expression. Should one retrace the psychobiography of an author? Literary texts will take on the status of documents—of material—to the same degree as extra-literary indications (letters, notes, acts and gestures): they will be interpreted as revealing tendencies, conflicts and complexes to which they attest the probable existence. They lend themselves to a conjectural induction which will necessarily have to be combined with as many outside testimonies as possible. The *person* who is reconstructed in this way can, as a general rule, have only a lacunary resemblance. Conferring the status of expressive testimony to each act and to each piece of writing, we project his probable motivations towards an imaginary centre: we build up the image of a psychic structure compatible with the life and work as we know them.

The critic, provided with the tools of psychology, is thus the creator of a figure whose incompleteness is almost the rule; most of the time the critic recognizes the uncertainties which affect the image he believes likely; nonetheless, he often tries, less

⁹ Paul Ricoeur correctly points out the voluntarily fragmentary nature of Freud's studies on works of art or literary works. See "L'art et la systématique freudienne," in *Le conflit des interprétations*, Paris, 1969, p. 197.

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prudently, to confer on it a status of indubitable reality. This is certainly a legitimate undertaking (psychobiography is a *genre* which has found its place), but its legitimacy ceases when a return is made to the work with the intention of explaining it totally on a basis of the psychic structure thus inferred, in the absence of any experimental control: for there is an obvious fallacy in trying to seek in an uncertain (though apparently global) structure the explanation of a certain (though partial) fact. The text is not a possibility, it is a reality; the act of reading makes of it an objective presence whose evidence is greater than anything I can try and conjecture behind it. If, *in law*, the text is preceded by these conditions, I cannot, in their regard, designate *in fact* anything which is more than a probable factor among others, mingled with others, the sum and composition of which could never be defined exactly. Only a haughty decree could claim to define, without appeal, an exhaustive causal system. To stipulate that the work must be understood as the expression of its author is to give it the status of a representation, of the reflexion of "empirical" subjectivity: but this empirical personality having been constructed by derivation and projection—largely based on the work itself—we then see the work becoming the offspring of its own shadow. Is not the empirical *ego* improperly named in this instance? For if it is presumed to have been the subject of an experience anterior to the work, it is not, *for us*, the object of a direct experience: it is conjectured through mediate channels. To consider the work as an aspect of the psychological reality which it expresses is to approach it in a doubly mediate fashion: it is to make of it the emanation of a psychic world which the critic has built up, using it as the foundation. Thus is developed a circular exegesis which, having left the text, comes back to it again in order to make it dependent on a phantom-like ulterior text... Should we conclude from this that there is nothing to be gained from psychological criticism? There are at least two ways of avoiding the dangers we have just pointed out. The first is to forego establishing too close a bond between the man and his work, it is to recognize the hypothetical character of the mental structures and the alleged emotional history, and it is to invoke them only as the probable background against which the work has taken shape: the causal relationship then eases and takes on an optional value; it no

longer disguises its presumptive character. The second (and by far the most productive) recourse which allows psychological interpretation to be made deliberately is to base it on the text itself, on the obvious data: in this way we forego constructing an *ego* which is distinctive from the text. Henceforth, the analysis no longer explores a subjectivity anterior to the work, but a subjectivity which is inherent to it: the text, and the meanings it puts across, are the equivalent of a complete psychic world. In this connection we should remember Charles Mauron's¹⁰ procedure: determined to work according to Freudian methods, the latter was forced to seek a substitutive source to replace the material which the free association of the living patient provided for the therapist. He superimposed the most varied texts by the same author in order to discover the obsessional images and to make a faithful tracing of their network. It concerns both a figurative world (for it is based on a system of symbols) and an objective presence offered to the reader's perception and comprehension. Hence the act of reading becomes an essential moment of psychological deciphering: the critic must discern the meanings which are to be found in the text itself, he must recognize its manifest organization, the implicit conflicts, the dominant themes and all its connotations. To be sure, at this point Mauron believed that he was in possession of all the elements allowing him to discover the author's emotional life. He allowed himself to leave the text, but came back to it later. He nonetheless had the merit of demonstrating everything that could be discovered without leaving the textual plane, before making any conjectures on the writer's subconscious. For his part, Gaston Bachelard, having had recourse to a method which was fairly closely allied to psychoanalysis, preferred in the end to undertake a *phenomenology* of the literary image, which according to him was more capable of expressing what we feel on direct contact with the works.¹¹ Bachelard is convinced that nothing is lost by not forming a judgment on the psychic causes which preceded the

¹⁰ An account of this procedure is given in the first pages of the work *Des métaphores obsédantes au mythe personnel*, Paris, 1963. To the bitter objections of Serge Doubrovsky (*Pourquoi la nouvelle critique*, Paris, 1966, p. 104-126), Charles Mauron replied in *Le dernier Baudelaire*, Paris, 1966, p. 177-186.

¹¹ On the theory of material imagination, see the foreword to *La terre et les rêveries de la volonté*, Paris, 1948.

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literary works, since the poetic fact establishes its own order at a level of liberty which has nothing in common with libidinal conflicts of interest to psychoanalysis. The text, as it is read, induces a ceremony of desire, a freeing of images, and thoughts and dreams are put to work. On this occasion, critical reflexion will act not on a hypothetical "author," but on the ensemble of phenomena of which the reader, on reading the text, will have himself become the theatre. There is no doubt that one can never be sure that this reading or reception of the text will be perfectly pure and not mingled with projected elements resulting from the subjectivity of the reader: the latter can perceive the values of the text only by giving his own attention and his own emotional energy. This participation is the rule proper to any genuine reading. Is the same not true for the performer of a musical score? Reading—and even "sight-reading"—can be considered as an interpretation in itself. But in music we have faithful interpretations, where the literality of the text appears safeguarded and where the personality of the performer is not clumsily interposed. It is no chimera, therefore, to believe that there also exists, for literary work, a reading which is very close to the ideal of an integral actualisation, which can serve as a sure basis for later commentary. In this way, a particular being takes shape, developed by its own "relational" substance: not a person, any more than an impersonal thing. The psychic values which are manifested here must be taken as representations: they are detached figures, independent of the author, supported by the system of the connotations of language, and capable of provoking, on the reader's side, a feeling of complicity, of profundity, of "truth."

In this textual element, the critic-reader discovers the living substratum, the subjectivity of the mind which can be submitted to a "psychological" interpretation—but a psychology free of all biographical anxieties. He will have to choose between several approaches: nothing is more striking, in recent criticism, than the diversity of styles of investigation of the subjective dimensions of the literary work. For as soon as the interrogation no longer has to do with the person and the particular history of an author, the critic has even wider freedom. For a certain number of investigators, the psychoanalytical pattern will continue to prevail, but at a strictly intra-textual level; in the works them-

selves they will discover the adventures of desire, a libidinal imbroglio, a conflict of impulses: the scene reconstructed by the critic does not have the "intimate" life of the author for theatre, but the characters of fiction, the feeling attributed to "paper heroes" endowed on this occasion with a status approaching realism. Going even further, Gaston Bachelard explores the many channels of material imagination, he does not place more importance on the emotional relationships between one person and another: the theatre of desire leaves the order of human relationships to enter the register of relations (experienced or dreamed) of the conscious with the elements, to a degree of universality which is no longer that of individual destiny. The very configuration of the texts no longer counts, frontiers fade away and the whole of literature becomes a vast repertory of images. Among these, some will be distinguished by their persuasive nature: the critic sees in them the paradigms according to which our presence in the world is fundamentally organized. The poetic image comes to assume the rôle of an irreducible semantic unity in a figurative dissertation which must be deciphered by a new anthropology.

Criticisms by Georges Poulet develop not only in the order of sensitive qualities, but in the less deeply rooted order of temporo-spatial experiences. This method (which has only recently acquired a complete theoretical language)¹² expresses a desire for identification with the subjectivity of a writer, but it is based on the work and on the work alone. The critic explores the mind of an empirical man (anterior to his work, regarded in the conflicts of "daily life") but which unfolds in the temporo-spatial dimension expressed by the work. Georges Poulet is constantly in search of the initial *cogito* of a thought and studies only those authors whose work is developed on the basis of a *cogito*. So we are not dealing with a criticism of the work as such: it is the description of an adventure of the mind, understood after a first act of self-involvement. How does the mind perceive itself? The question is immediately changed into: how does it live in space, time, the moment? Here, as we can see,

¹² A fairly full account of this may be found in "Phénoménologie de la conscience critique," published in *Quatre conférences sur la "Nouvelle Critique,"* suppl. to No. 34 of *Studi Francesi*, Turin, 1968. See also "Conscience de soi et conscience d'autrui chez le critique," which will be found in *Stiftung F.V.S. zu Hamburg, Montaigne Preis* 1970.

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the subjectivity is filtered, stripped of its emotional determinations, dissociated from the aesthetic form in which it is manifest. Criticism by Georges Poulet cannot therefore be defined as thematic criticism: it does not isolate a theme, an objective motive, in order to examine its function in a work or an ensemble of works. Its ambition is to reconstitute, through an "interior" sympathy, the development of an experience in a fundamental register of human existence.¹³ So here we should rather understand a *criticism of pure subjectivity* or a *categorical* criticism. A criticism which is abstract and idealist: all works are thoughts, independently of the form they assume. A dramatic and "existential" criticism: all works are unique destinies, peerless adventures. The result of this is that the logical sequence of the circuit, described by Georges Poulet in each of his monograph studies, corresponds neither to the unfolding of the dissertation under study, nor—more often—to the external chronology of biographical experience. Indeed, in this perspective, the work and the life are only the accidental and purely contingent witnesses of what is determined at the level of the conscious: subjective progress, according to Georges Poulet, does not have to cover the successive moments of experienced history; it could even be considered as nearly instantaneous, played out in advance, and with no relation to the passing of "measurable time."

Georges Poulet's analyses place the universal at the level of the category (space, time), and the particular at the level of the

¹³ Criticism by Jean-Pierre Richard develops, for its part, in a register of sensitive qualities: it is a sensorial experiment, particularly attentive to the meaning of images (of which Georges Poulet, in his asceticism, makes but little mention); but the realities thus described tend, as is the case with Georges Poulet, to be bound up with a specific dissertation, ordered by intrinsic necessity rather than according to the order of the calendar or that of the pages of the book concerned. Jean-Pierre Richard tries in this way, by vigilant reading, to bring out of hiding the "glimmer beneath the surface," the world of images and essential myths concealed below the work and which constitute its fundamental texture. It is a succession of themes, unstable, fluent and productive, which are brought to life only to be supplanted by others. If this is a form of thematism, it is at any rate a polythematism where everything is brought back to a perceiving subject in which the material essence of the world is brought out... One may ask if the possibly extreme acuity of "categorical" analysis does not have as counterpart a reduction of the field explored. Yet in each of the major categories chosen by Georges Poulet and Jean-Pierre Richard, strong beats are recorded, where the note struck is surrounded by harmonics and makes a living totality perceptible. Everything which appeared excluded from the field of study is then arranged around a sensitive presence.

content (individual expression, personal course). Others try to discover universal structures or figures at the very level of the content itself.

In more than one case, a mythical or symbolic reading appears to be necessary, to the extent that the tale, the characters and the images take on in our eyes a universal aspect, developing a resemblance with older legendary themes of which they appear to offer a new version. The Jungian theory of psychoanalysis (with the notion of a collective subconscious and the archetypal subconscious) could find a field of application here. With no point of attachment with the Jungian theory, and having recourse to another sort of archetype, the method proposed by Northrop Frye has no hesitation in treating the universals of the imagination as objects, in classifying and grouping them, etc., so that the whole of literature, like a sort of second nature, is composed like a huge order of works, governed by its own laws, and divided into distinct reigns and *genres*.¹⁴ At this point, the psychic elements, liberated from any ties with the empirical person of the author, appear as unique entities. They are no longer really subjective (except through their anonymous aptitude for manifesting themselves as the stable elements of a universal and intemporal language which is spoken in the human mind). Originating in the depths of inner nature, they come to the surface as objects, and their relationships and complex trajectories can be seen as complete evidence, henceforth easily visible. A certain hesitation can be seen to intervene among critics between an allegorical reading and the more sober practice of literal reading. In any case, no further reference is made to the supposed intentions of the writer. The act of criticism will not try and find, in the work or behind it, a preliminary desire or will, of which the internal values of the text are supposed to be the indication and achievement; criticism is no longer confined to trying to discover in the pages under analysis the exact aims of the author. The reconstitution of intentions is an intentional fallacy, says a whole trend of American critics—not only because it is not possible to find them, but even more because there is probably no work totally commensurable with the idea which engendered it.

¹⁴ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*. The first edition of this work dates from 1957. Many new editions have appeared since. It has been translated into French by Guy Durand, Paris, Gallimard, 1969.

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Thence it appears permissible to treat the text as a verbal figure (verbal icon) to be formally analysed as carefully as possible.¹⁵

V. FORMAL STUDY

Whereas sociological criticism (at least in its systematic form), even before tackling literary facts, is in no doubt about the laws which govern the course of history; and whereas psychoanalytical criticism, accepting and dealing in advance with a certain number of operational concepts (that of the subconscious in the first place), respects the causal system wherein the contents of the work must necessarily be placed; stylistic criticism, on the other hand, try though it may to get to grips with language, is nonetheless only neutral attention with no bias towards any particular theory of history or of man, and sometimes even attempts to supplant all philosophy of history or of human nature; its wealth in fact lies in this very poverty, for it has no reason for refusing any of the interpretations available, as long as they appear convincing, confirmed by counter-proofs or by concordant indications. Structuralist criticism, of which Roland Barthes is now the defender, challenges any recourse to a deterministic explanation. A work is not explicable by its *causes*, but by the infinite number of significant relationships of which it is the centre.¹⁶

To be sure, the study of style has frequently assumed objectives of a psychological nature: to find the "soul" of the author, or that of an epoch or a nation, etc. It has sometimes been allied, as with Auerbach, with sociological research. For a long time dominated by a certain conception of expression (in which Croce, Vossler and Spitzer's first works tried to apprehend the "lyrical intuition" of the poet), stylistics more and more tries to assert itself as an autonomous discipline, careful to exhaust, in its descriptions, every conceivable aspect of the texts studied. The great variety of methods used proves that in spite of the often

¹⁵ See Paul de Man, "New Criticism et nouvelle critique," *Preuves*, No. 188, October 1966, p. 29-37.

¹⁶ It goes without saying that the stylistic plane is only one of the aspects of "form." Composition, articulation between the various parts, choice of narrative perspectives, interweaving of motifs, etc., are among the constitutive elements of the text and must be taken into consideration. See Jean Rousset, "Pour une lectures des formes," in *Forme et signification* (Paris, 1963) and Gérard Genette, "Raisons de la critique pure," in *Figures II*, Paris, 1969.

expressed desire to raise knowledge to a scientific level, uniformity of views is still far from being attained. Descriptive stylistics has borrowed its language and tools from linguistics, but the latter, in spite of considerable progress, is still open to the conflict of rival doctrines as far as fundamentals are concerned. Thus the codes of descriptive language (metalanguage) are not identical from one school to another—though both claim to be equally “scientific.”

In their applications to literary criticism, to poetry, to the analysis of a story, present structural methods are not only derived from linguistics of Saussurian origin, but also from the conjoint contribution of the *gestalt* theory of phenomenology, logical positivism and information theory. Inspiration has also been taken from methodologies used in the field of ethnography and cultural anthropology. It is not surprising that there is some confusion and misunderstanding.

That the functional totality is not constituted by the passive sum of its parts, that the meaning of the whole is immanent in each of its constitutive elements—this is structuralism’s first premise. “It is with the solidary whole that one must start in order to obtain, by analysis, the elements which comprise it” (Ferdinand de Saussure).¹⁷ The structural method aims at an adequate understanding of complex organism, in their original organicity and according to the internal relations (relations of contrast and opposition for the most part) which govern their coherence. The term organism, considered too vitalistic, is more often replaced by the more neutral one of system: the mechanical or mathematical pattern tends to prevail even when it is a question of analysing the sense of a communicated message (semiology, semantics).¹⁸

But structuralism is not, like Marxism, a “vision of the world,” nor, like psychoanalysis, a technique of interpretation based on a more or less invariable pattern of emotional processes. In its more general definition, structuralism is only a prejudice of

¹⁷ *Cours de linguistique générale* (1916), 4th edition, Paris, 1949. On this point, see Emile Benveniste, *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, Paris, Gallimard, 1966, ch. VIII: “‘Structure’ en linguistique,” p. 91-98.

¹⁸ An excellent statement on this will be found in the recent work by Cesare Segre, *I segni e la critica*, Turin, 1969. See also Umberto Eco, *La struttura assente*, Milan 1968.

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formalization, attentive to the complex play of constituents at the heart of a whole.¹⁹ Hence its universal validity, making it applicable to extremely varied disciplines; hence too the necessity for explaining precisely the approach to structural analysis by defining, in each domain—and perhaps for each particular subject—a specific descriptive vocabulary, a pertinent code of transcription, the results of which may later be used for fruitful interpretation.²⁰

Moreover, the structures being analysed must not be taken for inert or stable objects, contrary to the claims of those who would like to confer on a literary work a wholly material objectivity. Structures arise out of a relation established between the observer and the object, they awaken in response to a preliminary question, and it is only as a function of this question put to literary works that the order of precedence of their deciphered elements can be established. It is on contact with my interrogation that the structures are made manifest, become active and stable, at the heart of a text which has been printed on the pages of the book for a long time. Various types of reading choose and select “preferential” structures. Much as we may wish to adhere only to the linguistic characteristics of the text, we can only free ourselves of the interminable (and really senseless) task of total inventory by “slanting” our question, by giving it a definite direction, whether it be towards the aesthetic effect, the socio-historical meaning, or emotional relationships, etc., of which the

¹⁹ We should note that the desire to question structures, i.e. totalities which are coherent and meaningful, coexists in our epoch with the strongly held conviction which believes that the spirit of the present time is marked for its incoherence, absurdity, confusion of language, the loss or disappearance of traditional values of culture, etc. Structuralism, as an instrument for deciphering today, provides the possibility of discovering readable and comprehensible ensembles. As a result, it implies faith in the immanent presence of structuring reason, it demands world rationality, or at least readability. Even if it proposes to examine “systems” or sick “organisms” (which also have their own structure), it presupposes on the part of the observer a wager in favour of meaning, an option for intelligibility. Structuralism is a refutation of the facile dramaturgy of absurdity. To be sure, the juxtaposed existence of structures which are varied and shut in on their own organicity leaves the question of the rationality of the whole, at the centre of which heterogeneous systems are present simultaneously, an open question. A *general structure*, today, can hardly appear to us as the result of one reading: it is normally the result of an ideological construction. Cf. preceding chapter.

²⁰ In the French domain we must point out the extremely coherent effort by A. J. Greimas: *La sémantique structurale*, Paris, 1966.

text is the simultaneous focus. Each of these approaches determines a perspective: its effect will be to change in our eyes the configuration of the whole, to call for a new context, to cut across frontiers inside which another law of coherence will reign. It can soon be seen that one and the same text, according to the question posed, may bring out several equally acceptable structures, or again that the work may be defined as one part belonging to broader systems which surpass and engulf it. In this case it is not the structural thought which can take the decision; on the contrary, structural analysis can only be consecutive to a previous decision deciding the scale and interest of the research. No doubt a desire for cumulative knowledge will incite us to coordinate the results of these various readings, to treat them as the elements of a greater structure which would be the global and exhaustive meaning. Everything leads one to believe that this great structure—unless a premature synthesis intervenes—constitutes an end which can only be seen in an asymptotical way.

The network of structural correlations unfolds in simultaneity. Everything is contemporary—synchronous—in a constituted structure. I would not conclude from this that structuration neglects historical dimension and that it is reduced to interpreting the past as a series of stable states separated by inexplicable breaks. How could the critic venture to confer a false intemporality on structures which he knows very well to have been taken at a given moment x in a diachronic evolution of the course of history? In my view the risk of escapism into an *ahistorical* formalism can be avoided as soon as one questions the objective structures (the text in all its formal complexity) as the product of a structurizing conscious. A return to the idea of *intention* here becomes necessary, but it must be made clear that here it is only a question of intention immanent to the unfolding of the sentences and pages of the texts, and not of an anterior intention. The memory of a “naive” reading may, in this respect, remind the critic that texts of literary tradition were not written with the idea of being instantaneously the object of formal description. They were the generators of successive emotions, of varying degrees of amazement, of a slanted interest—briefly, of meaning. Their idea was to please, to instruct, to move, to convince, to rouse illusion: why try to conceal it? “Scientific” analysis must also intervene, but at the right moment, i.e. after

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the text has been allowed to develop all its power, produce all its effect. To study a text cut off from its effects would in itself be a truncated study. The objective structure of the work is the finished form in which an unfinishable relationship is established; the tension which gives rise to this form in its own dimension and its own time is a historical vector whose presence should never be neglected by the critic. It has been said that any genuine criticism is circular—taking a first meaning as a point of departure, it comes back to it again, but better understood, at the end of a temporal movement of interpretation.

It would be a bad description of the characteristic features of contemporary criticism if we were not to mention a whole fringe of reflexions and discussions which cannot be reduced to a methodological denomination. Many philosophers, writers and essayists have asked the question: why write? What can literature do? What is commentary's contribution? Doubtless it is necessary for these questions to be asked—sometime wildly—for critics not to enclose themselves in the mirror halls of pure methodology.

Various doubts arise, and we have not tried to disguise them in the course of this reflexion: is psychoanalysis not wrong to confine itself to subconscious mechanisms, and therefore to what is only part of the data? Is sociology, on the other hand, not also wrong in trying to be totalitarian and in claiming to exhaust the meaning of works by having them symbolize relationships of production and class warfare? The ambiguity and polyvalence of style teach us—and this in an important lesson—that a phrase or some verse may both refer us to the internal structures of a work of art, to the relationship (clear, obscure or chiaroscuro) of the work with its author, and to the configurations and contradictions of society. We may even wish for ambitious research to federalize and resume in a global circuit each of the methodical circuits examined by the specialized techniques. And there is one reproach which any good philosophy would address to "scientific" criticism: this science, so eager to relativize literature within the field of its causal references, neglects to call itself into question, to question itself on the meaning of its project to become a science. Deeper reflexion insists that the criticism itself should be relativized with regard to a questioning reason. A philosophical view of our problem forces us to go from techniques of explanation (believed to be well founded on the firm

ground of scientific laws) to a comprehensive reflexion which ponders the meaning of all explicative techniques, and which adds to the *what is literature* formulated by the sociologist and the psychologist, a *what is science* and a *what is criticism* which had not yet been clearly formulated. Radical reflexion, pondering on human reality, includes in its question the ambitious activity of scientific knowledge. Philosophy, faithful in this to Socratic tradition, would be more willing to defend *lack of knowledge*, an indispensable condition for any progress of knowledge, for any development of science and for increased rationality. Philosophy stands at a “dialectical” point where all scientific pretensions are both preserved and questioned as to their source and their meaning—where the mind is confronted with itself and with reality in a vigilant uncertainty which, without refusing anything, nonetheless does not submit to any system of authority, however objective it may claim to be... Philosophy is superior to the human sciences in that it knows better the risks and the defects of its undertaking. It does not demand that the results of its investigations be attributed the dignity of an objective fact, however desirous it may be to understand reality and to embrace a totality which the sum of partial disciplines can never attain. Briefly, while it may seek for meaning, it does not treat the meaning as an object of formalizable demonstration.

At this point, criticism may discover the extent of its own relations with literature. The difference between criticism and literature has been instituted by the critic only to the degree that he confers on works the status of things to be known, of a phenomenon to describe or explain. But this objectivizing attitude, this undertaking which claims to be precise and “scientific” can attain its goal only if it consents constantly to reinterpret, revise and readjust its instruments and processes. It is a science only if it includes the desire for self-revision and self-interrogation: submitted to experimental control, certainly, forced to respect formal coherence, careful to prove its statements, it can only progress if it perfects itself by calling its results into question. This presupposes an endless renewal of an act of interpretation, wherein each result—itself the product of interpretation—becomes in its turn the object to be interpreted. There is an implied freedom in this, of which it would be fair to say that it is of the same nature as the liberty which supports the generating

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effort of the literary work and of the one which, in the case of philosophy, reflexively affirms and questions itself.

As for the “creative” writer, while he makes inventive liberty predominate, he can at the same time be judged on an *interpretative* invention: the object he has to interpret is fundamentally a desire, i.e. deficiency, appeal, futility—which is primarily lacking in any stable identity. Literary creation, far from being the representation, the verbalized copy of a pre-existing desire, will be its invented phantasmal complement, the imagined identity. Words, added to desire, form a complex body whose unity comes from its double origin: appropriation of the social tool (vocabulary, syntax, fixed laws of style) by desire, and the interpretation of the desire by an act of speech or writing. But the *finished* work, in its very completeness and final determination, may in its turn appear to be the site of a deficiency and the point of departure for a possible interpretation which could be added to it. I would call “philosophical” interpretation the one whose dissertation would be the most broad, the most attentive to the universality of its purpose, the most capable of confronting the meaning of the work with the ensemble of judicious actions of which man is capable.

Philosophical reflexion hence appears to us as the point where the tendencies we first put in opposition could converge, be conciliated and surpass each other: scientific dissertations on literature, and literary awareness of literature. For no human activity can escape from the jurisdiction of an interrogation which, while refusing to encroach upon the field of specific techniques, means to situate them in respect of their ends; I see no radical difference between the reflexion which asks what man does with his science and the reflexion which asks what man aims to attain through the powers of language and imagination. I would therefore like to believe (but this may simply be an act of faith on my part) that there is a culminating point where knowledge, reflexion and creation coincide: in the form of a knowledge which questions itself and a creation which goes beyond itself in self-awareness.

This movement then belongs to an awareness which, without turning away from philosophy and its universalizable dissertation, is nonetheless fascinated by the work and by the risk inherent in the work. Any criticism applied to the texts themselves implies,

even at one of these moments, an ambiguous intimacy and an involvement which make us live in the work, be carried along by its power in blind submission to the injunctions of the text: by the re-creation involved in the act of reading, it participates in the clarifications and obscurities of the text. Through it, and in it, the text takes on a second life. To describe this experience faithfully is yet another reflexive act; and for this description to be organized, for the criticism to remain faithful to its resolutions without becoming a grafted lyricism, certain regulating principles are indispensable: we would like to find them in the work itself; in fact, we choose them freely, sometimes under the admitted influence of some philosophy, sometimes through indirect channels, through the multiple intermediaries through which we participate in a "vision of the world." We are not going to insist on an explicit profession of philosophical faith or that a declaration of method precede the critical undertaking. For we should not exclude the eventuality of a modest criticism with no avowed doctrinal pretensions, but whose qualities, developed "on the spot," would be those of an act of philosophical reflexion: there is no need to be a titular philosopher to have a good philosophy. The respect, attention and the vigilant watch which the work arouses in us are not only the preliminary conditions for any subsequent analysis, but already constitute a legitimate critical act. Indeed, if this criticism does not escape the inevitable condition of being a literary creation in itself, based on an antecedent creation, it is obliterated in the movement which makes works of art intelligible. It breathes at the same rhythm. Or, to use another metaphor, is diffused in the same way as light: it makes the forms it is lighting *become visible*, without being visible itself. Interpretative dissertation is added to literary works only to withdraw once finished, standing back and letting the works renew their appeal.

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As I have already said, any critical undertaking is based on a preliminary judgment—implicit, more often than not—which brings a work, a problem or a theme to our attention: it is obvious, or it should go without saying, that we study only what interests us, things the meaning and value of which have aroused

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our attention. Explicative techniques are at the basis of our increased understanding of the object at the completion (always provisional) of our study. The techniques of explanation we have mentioned are extremely varied: taken all in all, they are complementary rather than contradictory to each other: to situate, describe, analyse and interpret are so many acts which mutually reinforce one another. We are not pleading here for an accommodating and dull eclecticism. The solidary conjunction of methods (or principles) is only possible if, without losing sight of the indispensable requirements, each of the various explicative acts foregoes shutting itself up in its own functional perfection and consents to be simply a transition towards a comprehensive judgment, towards the apprehension of a whole through the incomplete sum of its aspects. This final judgment (which may be revoked at any time) will not always confirm the initial judgment from which the critical undertaking received its mandate. Nothing must be concluded, nothing must reach completion leaving no remainder, nothing must be confined: if literary works stopped eluding us, it would be the sign that the function of literature—and that of criticism—had henceforth come to an end.²¹

²¹ A few paragraphs of this article have been taken from a study on "Les directions nouvelles de la recherche critique," which appeared in the review *Preuves* in June 1965. We have also introduced here a few paragraphs from "Remarques sur le structuralisme" which appeared in *Strutturalismo e critica* (in the care of Cesare Segre), Casa editrice Il Saggiatore, Milan, 1965.