

# THEORETICAL ASPECTS IN THE MODERN ENGLISH NOVEL

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## Abstract

The modern age can be considered as the age when the novel flourished. This represents the most important and probably the most popular medium of writing in modern times. We can say that English fiction is the only literary medium that can compete with film and radio. Modernism can be extensively characterized as the global social development that grabbed hold in the late nineteenth century and arrived at its top just before World War I. In the mid-twentieth century, authors, for example, Henry James and Virginia Woolf, tried different things with shifts in schedule and story perspectives. Social change requested likewise changes in verbal plans and in essential styles of articulation, and that's just the beginning. The advanced novel trials with everything—and it does as such interminably, out of a feeling that structures should maintain changing in control to match innovation, to keep individuals newly and effectively mindful of it, and to find each additional opportunity advancement may make. To match innovation, notwithstanding, was just as important for the point, for the cutting-edge writer likewise needed to oppose it—or even reclaim it. The quintessentially modern novel tends to embody a redemptive hope, reflecting a desire to restore meaning, wholeness, or beauty to the contemporary world. This is probably the most important aspect of literary works; they try to bring forward the issues that people were facing during the time those works were written, and at the same time, they try to criticize those social and historical developments, especially when the human being is downgraded morally. All these aspects form the foundation of our thesis, which we aim to explain and clarify with sufficient argumentation so that readers from any background can understand and appreciate the significance of the modern English novel.

**Keywords:** modernism, novel, English literature, history, society, etc.

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## INTRODUCTION

The complex, shady relationships between literature and history seem today to find new perspectives in the claimed desire of historians to use a beautiful language, to authorize new models of storytelling, or to assume a subjective position. This, for them, seems to remove another barrier, especially since historians are now interested in the way authors have expressed their viewpoints regarding culture and historical moments during their lifetime. But we should value the works as testimonial texts because they would be one of the "literature of non-writers" or insist on the moral dangerousness of texts, like *The Benevolent* by Jonathan Littell, which tells the story from the perspective of the executioners. Isn't it basically to take up the old quarrel to the very point where it has fueled since history was constituted as a discipline against literature? Is not the fear

of "aesthetization" of historical processes the great crime of the trial in demoralization that history makes of literature? Far from challenging this "demoralization," authors go back to the "century of history" to try to measure its value and function; in other words, they try to understand what literature does to history.

Our idea of literature, that of a corpus of texts responding to an aesthetic aim, dates from Romanticism. Texts belonging to historical moments when the very term "aesthetic" did not exist, such as Antiquity or the Middle Ages, were placed in the category of "literary" a posteriori in the first half of the XVII century again; having literature, or having letters, simply meant being cultivated. The "Beautiful Letters" were all works of the mind and covered all current disciplines, including science. In the moral convenience proper to the "Great Century," they became "Humanities" because, carrying light, their frequentation humanized the modern meaning of the term "literature," which became widespread at the start of the XIX century. In 1800, when Germaine de Staël wrote "Literature," the term still encompassed morals, philology, scholarly studies, and history.

We know how the humanities will develop during the century, against literature, by appropriating an object, a lexicon, and methods of validating evidence borrowed from science. History is the first of them; the process is long and the arguments always the same: for the historian to be a scientist, he must distinguish himself from "literators." Thus, Gabriel Monod wrote in 1876, in volume 1 of the Historical Review:

French historians, on the other hand, are usually, even the most learned, literary before being scholars. The proof is that we do not see them take back or revise their works to make them aware of the progress of science. They reissue them twenty years apart without changing anything (see Michelet, Guizot, and Augustin Thierry). What matters to them in their writings is less the facts themselves than the form they have given them.

The aesthetic aim of literature is systematically opposite to the scientific aim of history—the sign of this irreducible opposition residing in the form adopted by false historians, which matters more to them than the content of their books since they do not include them, probably considering, like "literators," that their work is a work of art; as such, its originality outweighs the reported facts. Scholarly divorce is declared. As Ivan Jablonka writes:

Adieu to literature has enabled history to conquer its intellectual and institutional autonomy. And as the historians abandon the letters, the commitment of the self, the challenges of the investigation, the uncertainties of knowledge, and the potential of form and emotion.

The regret that is reflected in these sentences concerns, as we can see, what has been "abandoned" by the historian to literature in the name of science, that is to say, formalism and the use of subjective methods of expression. Neither the aesthetic aim of

literature nor its humanist purpose, or, as Chateaubriand said, its competence to deal with "the problem of man" precisely from what it is, seems to interest the historian. If the literary temptation seems to be limited to the exploitation of his emotions and his hesitations, and mastering the virtualities of the beautiful language, is that stay at the bottom always relevant major opposition? What the historian is aiming for (unlike the literator) is the truth, which legitimizes their approach as researchers. Its function is to write the real with the greatest accuracy and thus to transmit it by altering it as little as possible. Why would he deprive himself, to achieve this noble ambition, of the resources of literature? In the end, the novelist coming to do his shopping in the history books, is it not a fair return of things that the historian takes from him the recipe for his success, beautiful language, and recourse to fiction and emotion? He will therefore continue to tell the truth while using the intrigue capabilities of literature? Literature, on the other hand, may continue to do what it does; the historian rarely questions what literature does or could do to history. When questioned, Gabriel Monod would no doubt have concluded that literature would demoralize history; Patrick Boucheron expresses another fear: "So we should be able to say this: the literary temptation of the historian is an admission of weakness; Hugo and Flaubert would have said quite differently.

### **What Does Literature Do to History?**

When the French Revolution inscribed the reality of the West as still a new fracture, both in the hopes it aroused and, in the upheavals, (including massacres and wars) that it provoked, it told the truth of the story, that is to say, it reconnected with the vector of the perfectibility of man, which was the requirement of literature.

However, the literary origins of the mechanisms for interpreting history (first, but not only, mimesis and diegesis) deserve to be historicized and analyzed. As Jacques Rancière has shown, the procedures "by which a speech evades literature and gives itself a status of science and means" are literary procedures. Historians' practices do not depend solely on the narrative models that are contemporary with them; they depend on other legacies and other constraints. In this perspective, literary and poetic history would undoubtedly allow us to better understand them.

The first of these devices is the one that fixed romantic self-government (no distinction yet between history and literature): how to combine the specificity of one, the writer (the historian?), with the multiple character of the community and the virtuality of "they become"? As Patrick Boucheron writes, "He is not from yesterday, yet literature intends to reveal with the same gesture the intensity of the self and the vastness of the world—because it is precisely this social belief that constitutes it in literature."

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

From a literature perspective, the link between "the intensity of the self" and "the vastness of the world" has developed throughout the 19th century in the different approaches of "genius," representative in the strong sense, in the political sense, of the nation, of the people, of the present. This link is at the origin of our modern conception of the writer, based on a certain competence of subjectivity. The modern historian, in his beginnings as a "literator," according to the word of Gabriel Monod, did not neglect him. In this perspective, moreover, there is a remarkable continuity between the questions of the romantic historian and those of the "crisis of history."

### *Literature: What is it?*

It is difficult to give a precise definition of literature, since it has long been considered as something that goes without saying, which applies by itself because of its aesthetic character. It is precisely thanks to this condition of pure aesthetic that this artistic event is considered something that makes no sense and that seeks to say nothing. Indeed, literature as such has never been defined; there is no consensus on what it can do and is. Several authors may build a relevant definition, but they have only managed to outline some of its characteristics by thus widening this particularity of indefinable. Even if these attempts were not very precise, they helped a lot to clarify this concept, which is, moreover, very common but very difficult to explain.

The poet Paul Valéry, using the opposition between literary text and authentic text, tried to approach the term "literature." For him, the literary speech was designed to amuse; it does not in itself intend to communicate or inform. Its creation obeys, rather, an aesthetic concern that gives it its *raison d'être*. To better clear the term "poetry," it links it to understanding that never destroys itself. This is irreducible to the expression of a thought. When his poems were called incomprehensible, he said, "... If one is worried about what I meant in such a poem, I answer that I did not mean, but wanted to do ..." Prose, which could be associated with authentic text, is associated with practice, with everyday life, and with an instrumental function. Its purpose, then, is not to please but to inform.

For its part, Sartre links the concept of literature to art. In the same vein, Barthes establishes a difference between "writer" and "writing." For him, the writing is the one who writes to say something, while for the writer, writing is an uncompromising verb; that is, he does not intend to speak to anyone. It also establishes an opposition between literary language and daily language. Literary language would be that of poets, while the popular register would be the one that everyone uses and that would approach everyday language.

Considered one of the first artistic manifestations that humans of all time and in all countries have used to express their feelings, literature is a projection of man, an

awareness of one's own life that questions itself, allowing him to go down inside and show readers the big problems that have always worried him and find an answer.

For a long time, various ancestral civilizations have used this means to register their culture and thus transmit it to others. It is through Genesis, for example, that one can know the vast cultural heritage of the Hebrew people, just as Greek mythology evokes Antiquity by showing the way in which these people conceived the world. The Mayans in Central America have also collected their customs, beliefs, and history in their sacred book. The literary text is an integrative and identity element of other cultures as well as a means to grasp the cultural dimension of a language. It is from this perspective that G. Mounin underlines the anthropological value of literature. Literature often remains considered the only one, and always the best, ethnography of the culture of a given country, in the pro-prosy sense of the word "ethnography": almost all the most tenacious and concrete images and ideas we have on the English, Russians, or Greeks (...) came (...) from literary works....

The literary text is, then, indicative of the social and cultural imagination. It offers different ways of discovering a foreign culture thanks to the diversity it brings about. Its pages open doors to other ways of life and thought, images of yourself and of the other, which are offered to the reader through imaginary characters belonging to stories from which the author is inspired to create them in the social and cultural context where they are immersed. The writer plays a very important role as a creator. His intervention facilitates reconciliation between the universal and the singular. Hegel described the writer as follows: "This is the embodiment of universality through a concrete, lively, deadly person who, through his unique testimony, his singular writing, contains and translates at the same time everything, the whole." Through his reading, the learner can wonder about the representations of otherness while exploring linguistic and cultural identities.

### **THE CONTRIBUTION OF SOCIAL SCIENCES TO THE LITERARY FIELD**

Anthropological, sociological, and socio-ethnological approaches to literary texts are still rarely practiced in the language class. These approaches offer, today, theoretical analysis that allows a reading of the world built and interpreted by the writer, who brings into play the representations of the other, of himself, of society, and of his different ways of expressing culture. There are four existing currents:

The first current has a close relationship with cultural anthropology. He is interested in the study of cultural representations of the other, which are implicitly or explicitly mentioned in the text. It is notably thanks to the contribution of Tzvetan Todorov that this approach has been structured in a critical form, which sometimes takes on a whistleblowing role.

This author took French literature as an object of study, specifically certain works by philosophers of the Age of Enlightenment as well as literary works by romantics. He looked there for traces of the existence of the Other (especially in his country of origin, Bulgaria) from the eyes of the writer-travelers. He describes these writers as false witnesses, incapable of seeing the Other, blind in some way to difference. This analysis by T. Todorov shows how these writers reproduce stereotypes and commonly used beliefs. With this attitude, these writers only talk more about themselves and their society:

But we are learning something about the very process of knowledge. Does our disappointment mean that we must disown the exotopy? Rather, it displaces the problem. In the sufficient and naive image of the native on his own culture, done exactly during the superficial and condescending picture painted from abroad.

Other theorists have developed anthropological and sociological readings of otherness and identity. Suzanne Chanzan and Nia Perivilaropoulou in *Literature and Social Sciences* and François Laplantine in *Story and Knowledge* have shown the conceptual collusion that is established between the literary field and the proper domain of the social sciences.

The second stream is similar to political anthropology, and it is represented by Edward W. Said in his work *Orientalism*, in which the West created the East and culture and imperialism. His view is based on the analysis of British works from colonialism as well as post-colonialism.

There also can be a method that requires focusing as much as possible on specific works that first need to be read as great products of creative or theoretical imagination, then showing how those participate in the relationship between culture and imperialism. We should not believe that the authors are automatically determined by ideology, class membership, or economic development. But they are deeply rooted in the history of their society; they shape this history and are shaped by it, as well as by their social experience, to varying degrees.

This approach brings an identification of binary oppositions, which finds the relationships between colonizers and colonized, between "we" and "them," but also an analysis of "identity thought," an essentially static concept maintained by the various actors of imperialism. The author intends to focus on literary texts as complex places of interpenetration because all cultures are heterogeneous and differentiated. On this fact, he says:

We live in a world that is not only made up of goods but also representations—their production, their history, and their interpretation are the primary material of culture. This problem is the great focus of the many recent theories, but they rarely return them

in their political context, which is first imperialism, [...]. This dichotomy distorts everything. It absolves the culture of any relationship with the power.

The third current, designated as the sociological approach, is initiated by Pierre Bourdieu in *The Rules of the Art*. This author explores the formation and structure of the literary field in terms of struggles for social positions. In this way, he demystifies a certain history of culture and literature that makes people sacred. It offers a science of works. Similarly, Paul Dirx exposes various approaches in the French-speaking space; he shows there that a sociological reading of works allows one to decode the balance of power within the literary Francophonie, which he designates as the Francophonie dominated by minority literatures.

This work of awareness also makes it possible to wrest literature as an object of scientific investigation from its social, non-scientific heritage status of a community. But here, too, research generally continues to participate in the nationalization or ethnicization implicit in literature by literary agents. It gives it through the spontaneous, natural insertion of texts in a collective heritage ("French literature," "German literature," "American literature," etc.). It is also the task of the sociology of literature, or more precisely of the sociology of literary productions, to be sensitive to it and to show that the scholarly discourse, there too, only borrows from the discourse of the field of study.

## **CONCLUSION**

With the cutting-edge soul in pieces, with the human person being referred to, with the brain a secret, and with power now unsure, fiction needed to change, and "the modern novel" alludes to fiction that does as such readily, fundamentally, and even with the expectation of having an effect. So we may start here with a basic, conditional definition: "the advanced book" signifies fiction that goes after a new thing, despite innovation, to reflect, to understand, or even to recover current life. Presently this definition may appear to be excessively basic or excessively unclear. Don't all books pursue a genuinely new thing? Hasn't innovation been inciting them to do as such from the beginning? What is "innovation," precisely? For what reason would it have such an effect—and how should fiction truly "reclaim" it? "Advancement is the universe of the present, loose from custom and destined for the future, damaged by struggle and wracked by questions; however, it is over every one of the universes of progress. It is, as the artist Charles Baudelaire put it, "the transient, the short-lived, the unexpected."

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