Literary Studies Facing the "Three Cultures Model"

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I F A real crisis of literary studies is underway, then it certainly has systemic implications. Therefore, an analysis of their general status requires the investigation of the symptomatology of the field of knowledge in its entirety. In these conditions, the directions of redefining literary studies are achieved by questioning the theories and the intersection between disciplines, where disciplinary constellations such as Digital Humanities, literature and cognitivism, literature and health, literature and law have emerged in the past years.

A first symptom of a crisis of literary studies, which I consider essential at the system level, is to be identified in the need of the humanities to build a defining scientific community in relation to other disciplines which are also in a stage of redefining. Once we assume that the *Two Cultures Model* paradigm, built on the dichotomous oppositions between real sciences and human sciences,[1] can no longer illustrate the reality in the field of knowledge, a repositioning of literary studies within the knowledge system is required.

Starting from a definition of culture that equally involves the two relational elements of cognitive habits (individual behavior and group behavior), it becomes necessary to map the discourses that defend the field of literary sciences building on the idea of scientific community. In this respect, it is worth taking a closer look at the general framework of Jerome Kagan's theory,[2] which considers the former two cultures model obsolete and insists instead on a three cultures models: natural sciences, social sciences and humanities.

Hence, the historical "two cultures model"—real sciences vs. human sciences--was replaced by the "three cultures model" in the early 2000s, not without admitting that if the dichotomous organization proved to be flawed, the triad of knowledge domains cannot be anything but conventional either. Thus, every attempt to delimit specific categories risks to oversimplify the complexity of recent disciplines, with their fragmentation into dozens of specialized micro-disciplines. While a traditional culture based on the two cultures model can no longer function—even though it has led to stereotypes that are difficult to overcome—, we are also aware of the fact that this tripartition is also a laboratory construct.

According to Kagan's definitions and functional delimitations, the specialists in humanities "are interested in understanding human reactions to events and the meanings humans impose on experience as a function of culture, historical era and life history," those of natural sciences in "prediction and explanation of natural phenomena," and those who are working in the field of social sciences are interested in "prediction and explanation of human behaviors and psychological states."[3] Moreover, while the members of the natural and social sciences community intend to predict and explain natural phenomena or human behavior, the humanities specialist is attributed the role of the "benevolent" judge who knows how to place human behavior on the axis of history. According to Kagan, this ability of historical positioning provides the specialist in humanities with the ability to "understand" the world. However, what this "understanding" really means is never clarified. The main objection that can be raised against Kagan's thesis is that the knowledge of specialists in humanities is generally limited to deciphering of past. As opposed to this view, theories like the one put forward by Lionel Ruffel,[4] which emphasize the strong interconnection between contemporaneity and horizontality (understood both geographically and in terms of the fusion of values), make plenty of room for approaches like Digital Humanities, quantitative analyses or geographical turns in literary studies.

A project like the one employed by Kagan in order to validate social sciences is useful. In philosophy and literary disciplines, social sciences create moral portraits with measurable rather than impressionistic methods, while neurosciences have confiscated the concept of emotion by analyzing scientifically the reaction of the brain to various aesthetic stimuli. At a conventional level (let's not forget that Kagan is himself a psychologist), the theory operates within a strict delimitation of knowledge in order to legitimize social sciences. In other words, only a three-category model could offer Kagan the possibility of legitimizing social sciences as an autonomous category, while also giving him the opportunity to account for some new features of social disciplines borrowed from strong sciences. My paper points out that while other disciplines have proven a constant adaptability to the pressures of contemporary society, the field of humanities did not lag behind, but made quite important steps in overcoming the rigid delimitation of the two cultures model, while also promising to defy the very conventional nature of the triad of knowledge. What we are witnessing is the repositioning of the entire epistemic system in which the field of humanities, rather than being a passive actor—in charge of the archiving of culture—, becomes an agent responsible for the emergence of pioneering disciplines.

Digital Humanities: A Specific Methodology, Theoretical Eclecticism

IN FACT, one of the most interesting symptoms of the crisis of literary studies has become visible in recent years due to the fact that they have begun to legitimize themselves more and more from "strong sciences." After the Darwinist temptations

of the 19th century, in the 20th century literary studies generally limited themselves to the connection with disciplines from the field of social sciences (economics, politics, sociology, anthropology, etc.), while systematically avoiding the scientific approaches of literature. In recent years, the language of mathematics, statistics and especially that of computer science have penetrated the field through a series of new paradigms generally placed under the name of Digital Humanities.

By providing the most radical solution to the crisis of literary studies, Digital Humanities has already created controversy. It represents the most productive branch of literary research in recent years, with centers and laboratories established in the most important universities in the world. Its radicalism consists of the fact that literary studies no longer try to legitimize themselves intrinsically or by appealing to related fields in the area of sociological sciences, but aim directly at a close collaboration with the "strong sciences." Never before were graphs, tables, trees, algorithms, data, processors, etc. considered constitutive to the study of humanities. On the other hand, a great amount of the information that researchers feed their computers with is based on fairly specialized theoretical and conceptual assumptions. The assimilation of formalism, new historicism and other theories remains essential even if only for the formulation of dilemmas of literary history that need solving through computational methods. In addition to the new type of research management built on post-industrial teamwork norms, the success of Digital Humanities is based on a certain theoretical eclecticism. Probably for the first time in the history of humanities (if Digital Humanities can still be considered a simple branch of humanities), the supporters of this new field of research are no longer pursuing a specific theory or aesthetics (Marxist, phenomenological, poststructuralist etc.) or even a certain discipline, but a specific methodology. Not even the theory of distant reading as defined by Franco Moretti can exhaust the practices of computer analysis, since recent researchers demonstrate that close reading is also compatible with programs capable of processing information. In this respect, Martin Paul Eve claims:

> *The processes of iteration, repetition, and quantitative analysis that are made possible by computational methods have an analogy not just in the telescope but also in another optical instrument: the microscope.*[5]

Thus, the area of ideological movement of those who practice computational reading is wide, mobile and does not imply the adherence to a particular set of ideas. The cohesion of the field is given by the methodological practice and by a specific ethos of collaborative research:

> *At its core, then, digital humanities is more akin to a common methodological outlook than an investment in any one specific set of texts or even technologies; . . . Yet digital humanities is also a social undertaking. It harbors networks of people who have been working together, sharing research, arguing, competing, and collaborating for many years.*[6]

In the wake of these opinions, it becomes plausible to state that the drive toward methodology at the expense of ideology may confirm Andrew Kopec's thesis that Digital

Humanities illustrate a post-industrial and post-ideological stage in literary research. However, it must be emphasized that computational methods are not incompatible to well-circumscribed ideologies, but often reflect the researchers' cultural or political affinities. When Matthew L. Jockers discusses Charles Fanning's volume on Irish literature in America[7] pointing out that the author did not take into account female or rural imaginary production, the author of *Macroanalysis*[8] inevitably adopts leftist ideology. Until now, Digital Humanities has proven an extraordinary ability to adapt to diverse contexts and to accommodate the most diverse ideologies.

Interdisciplinarity As a Lack of Specific Methodologies

O N THE other hand, when it comes to the traditional disciplinary intersections between literary studies and social disciplines, it becomes difficult to identify a specific methodology. The relationship between humanities and social sciences is certainly a long-lasting one, based on bilateral loans. In France, Christian Delacroix[9] observes a symbolic return to the 1960s, which were considered the peak of French social sciences. In this context, Delacroix wonders why Michel de Certeau has become a major reference for recent studies. Michel de Certeau had pleaded in *La Culture au pluriel*—in the aftermath of 1968, within a general dismissal of cultural uniformity—for the practice of interdisciplinarity understood in terms of displacements ("déplacements"), discrepancies ("écarts"), mutual changes ("altérations réciproques") or ambivalence ("entre-deux d'une ambivalence").[10]

What should be highlighted here is that the direction de Certeau points at (his lines are frequently quoted in the current debates on the *partition* of disciplines, as Delacroix correctly observes) concerns "the epistemological constellations in the process of offering each other a new cutting-up of their objects of study, respectively a new status of their proceedings."[11] In the case of disciplinary intersections between the literary and social sciences, the mechanism is best described by what I would refer to as "mutual contamination." If in the case of the collaboration between strong sciences and humanities quantitative studies provide the example of a brand-new methodology (even if slightly related to the old statistics), in the relationship between social sciences and humanities the traditional intersections (history and sociology of literature, psychoanalysis as a method of interpretation) remain the only valid examples of methodologies as such. Approaches often quoted in current debates have proven to be merely discourses that defend literary disciplines, lacking the capacity to give rise to autonomous research protocols. The intersections between literary and social studies were often invoked in the process of highlighting new functionalities of the humanities in the most utilitarian sense. If literature is used to cultivate empathy and to shape the citizen of the 21st century, then a new method of teaching or investigating this discipline is required. If, on the other hand, culture is used in the field of mental health (through therapy, "reading for life"[12] and other similar procedures), then the literary text represents the merely material basis for the significant encounter between an individual (as a reader), a narrator and some characters, while the methodology employed is that of general cognitivist psychology.

In this case, the role of literature is restricted to a "cognitive workout," "bibliotherapy," "theory of mind," "culture of care," or "personal development."[13]

However, neurosciences, established as a huge epistemic paradigm of the 21st century, are placed at the border between social and "hard sciences." Their aim to provide empirical explanations for any human thought/behavior/creation are not without echoes in literary studies. In terms of neuroscience, the cognitive process of creation (through imagination and symbolization) is perceived as a map of points in the individual's brain, just as the attentional process redirects the reception of the literary work from sensibility to the reason on the abovementioned map. Practically, both the creator and the receiver take part in a cognitive equation and the contact with the literary work is reduced (hence the arguments of the detractors of the method[14]) to a mental activity like all the others.

Interdisciplinarity has given rise to research disciplines such as cognitive poetics, cognitive aesthetics and neuro-aesthetics, doubling with empirical databases what was provided traditionally by the intuition of the literary critic. This turn is not unusual in the broader context of the development of studies on human brain, where literary reception mechanisms have always stirred great interest. At least in the area of poetic language, cognitivist approaches have managed to fill some important gaps. In this respect, it is worth mentioning John R. Searle's famous intuitions regarding the three-step reception of a message containing metaphors. The ability to identify this type of discourse through the map of receptors in the human brain represents a significant evolution in research. Beyond the reception mechanisms, in the field of cognitive poetics the investigation of the literary text becomes an analysis of textual structures as mental patterns. Literary forms (genres/species) are merely cognitive structures and the text itself reads like a mental scheme. Literary studies can invoke the experience of formalism and structuralism in this regard, and at first glance the approach does not seem so original when compared to former contributions. In an introduction to cognitivist poetics, Peter Stockwell describes the new approach (even with the subliminal intention of selling it to philologists[15]) precisely through the conceptual parallels between what we would traditionally call literary studies and cognitivist poetics. Defined as "the study of literary reading,"[16] cognitive poetics is established on the five pillars of literary studies: composition, discourse, ideology, emotion and imagination. Even if Stockwell's focus is primarily on emotion ("The concept of emotion is an obvious point where literature and cognition meet"[17]) and imagination ("a talismanic word especially for the Romantics"[18]), the discursive and the ideological component allow cognitivist poetics to promote reading on a large scale:

> *Many voices within cognitive poetics are passionate about the emergence of the field because it offers an opportunity of reuniting the academic with the everyday. Though literature itself is obviously an artifice, literary readings are natural phenomena, and it is this that cognitive poetics sets out to investigate.*[19]

On the other hand, for Terence Cave, who tries to map the conceptual territory of cognitivist criticism[20] as opposed to cognitivist poetics, literature is "the most revealing *product* and *symptom* of human cognition"[21] because it "offers a virtually limitless archive of the ways in which human beings think, how they imagine themselves and

their world"[22]—which is closer to the intersection between literature and anthropology. Cave's perspective starts from the premise that the two directions (cognitive criticism and literary studies) are complementary and invites to "stop thinking in terms of frontiers, dividing lines, oppositions":[23] "the aim would be to connect the intuitive and the counter-intuitive modes, as they are connected in our own cognitive processes, rather than to separate them antagonistically."[24] Therefore, if traditionally literary criticism reaches what is "self-evident from an unexpected angle,"[25] the aim of cognitivist criticism would be to test intuitions in various contexts in order to extract patterns:

> *a properly constituted cognitive approach to literature should insist on its histories, from the history of our own times via the longer history of written language to prehistory and the vast, fragmentary narrative of evolution.*[26]

Nonetheless, if cognitivist poetics detaches itself from literary studies, filling with particular meanings even traditional literary concepts (in order to use instrument literature merely as a material among others), what cognitivist criticism seems to promote is a form of interdisciplinarity that promises to preserve the autonomy of the literary material. The manifesto that concludes Terence Cave's book emphasizes the "commitment to preserving the special character of literature and literary study while being ready to move out into dialogue with other discipline and with the public at large." However, the fulfillment of this goal is so problematic (and subliminally acknowledged by Cave), that legal involvement seems to be needed:

> *that thinking with literature is a resource which has strong social and ethical implications and which therefore requires from those who promote its cause a willingness to engage in both academic and public debate.*[27]

In fact, in its intersection with social sciences, literature is used merely as a material basis in order to investigate problems specific to the research interests of those disciplines. In a subdiscipline such as Law and Medicine, the moral nature of the characters is analyzed in order to establish the ethical profile of the physician, while in emerging domains such as Law and Literature literary characters are used to extract and test the general level of jurisprudence of an era.[28] In fact, Richard Weisberg's analysis of this "cross-disciplinary" provides insightful remarks on the unidimensional system of exchanges between disciplines involved even in the most promising interdisciplinary processes:

> *She [Julie Stone Peters] found instead "each discipline's splitting and transfer of disciplinary desire: to project the humanist real onto literature [as the law professors were doing] was implicitly to accept the law as a system of utilitarian calculus; to project the political real onto law [as she claims literary folks were doing] was implicitly to acknowledge the inconsequence of the aesthetic.]" Thus, she argued, each partner's desire for the "real" within the other only reinforced, by confessing, its side's traditional unidisciplinary essence: The law was powerful but formalistically blind, while literature was beautiful but powerless.*[29]

This is why perhaps the most pioneering discipline of humanities that promises both to preserve its autonomy and to push forward its methodological limits is that of Digital Humanities: on the one hand, the field of inquiry is indebted—but not restricted—to classical dilemmas that remained under-investigated due to the lack of relevant data. A simple look at the questions that Matthew L. Jockers thinks the "macroanalysis" might answer in the following years is relevant for the widening of cultural horizons made possible by the new methodology: "literary production in terms of growth and decline over time, across periods, within regions, or within demographic groups," "literary patterns and lexicons employed over time, across periods, within regions," "the waxing and waning of literary themes," or "whether there are stylistic patterns inherent to particular genres"[30]—to cite just a few. Last but not least, the ethics of research that Digital Humanities requires—where literary proficiency merges with technical competencies and where the results of the research reside essentially on collaborative work—offers enough guarantees for the restructuring of knowledge as envisaged by Jerome Kagan.

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Notes

1. C. P. Snow, *Two Cultures and The Scientific Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959).
2. Jerome Kagan, *The Three Cultures: Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, and the Humanities in the 21ˢ Century* (Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
3. Kagan, 4.
4. See Lionel Ruffel, *Brouhaha: Worlds of Contemporary*, translated by Raymond N. Mackenzie (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2018).
5. Martin Paul Eve, *Close Reading with Computers: Textual Scholarship, Computational Formalism, and David Mitchell's Cloud Atlas* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019), 4.
6. Matthew G. Kirschenbaum, "What Is Digital Humanities and What's It Doing in English Departments?" *ADE Bulletin* 150 (2010): 56.
7. Charles Fanning, *The Irish Voice in America: 250 Years of Irish-American Fiction*, 2ⁿᵈ edition (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2000).
8. Matthew L. Jockers, *Macroanalysis: Digital Methods & Literary History* (Urbana–Chicago–Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2013).
9. Christian Delacroix, "À propos de Michel de Certeau," *Mouvements* 25, 1 (2003): 152–156.
10. Michel de Certeau, *La Culture au pluriel*, 3ⁿᵈ edition, rev. and presented by Luce Giard (Paris: Seuil, 1993).
11. Delacroix, 153.
12. See Josie Billington, *Is Literature Healthy? The Literary Agenda* (Oxford–New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).
13. See Lisa Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction: Theory of Mind and the Novel* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2006).

14. See Alain Ehrenberg, "Sciences sociales, pas cognitives," *Libération*, 23 September 2008: "Nous ne sommes pas appelés à devenir des neurosociologues, des neurophilosophes, des neuroanthropologues ou des neurohistoriens. . . . De même il nous paraît essentiel de valoriser et de reconnaître les 'théories de la complexité' comme un authentique partenaire scientifique dans les sciences humaines et sociales. C'est une condition évidente de la crédibilité scientifique internationale du futur institut. Mais pour cette raison même, nous refusons leur monopole."

15. Peter Stockwell, *Cognitive Poetics: An Introduction* (London–New York: Routledge, 2002).

16. Stockwell, 165.

17. Stockwell, 171.

18. Stockwell, 173.

19. Stockwell, 152.

20. Terence Cave, *Thinking with Literature: Towards a Cognitive Criticism* (Oxford–New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

21. Cave, 14.

22. Cave, 14.

23. Cave, 18.

24. Cave, 24.

25. Cave, 23.

26. Cave, 21.

27. Cave, 157.

28. Richard Weisberg, "What Remains 'Real' About the Law and Literature Movement? A Global Appraisal," *Journal of Legal Education* 66, 1 (2016): 37–43.

29. Weisberg, 40.

30. Jockers, 27–28.

Abstract
Literary Studies Facing the "Three Cultures Model"

While acknowledging the transition from the *two cultures model* to the *three cultures model* as theorized and described by Jerome Kagan, the article investigates the directions of redefining literary studies by its collaboration with the real sciences and the social sciences. Literary disciplines have historically legitimized themselves through differentiation and delimitation, while the specificity of this recent stage resides in the tendency to incorporate the instruments of other disciplines. On the one hand, literary studies seek methodologies within the hard sciences through new disciplines such as "distant reading" or quantitative studies. On the other hand, humanities' traditional intersections with social sciences are associated with the need to re-legitimize them in the public space, as a common good. Following disciplinary constellations such as Digital Humanities, literature and cognitivism, literature and law, the article questions the theories and practices of interdisciplinarity, while searching for emerging disciplines capable of developing a specific methodology that cannot be reduced to the former components of the interdisciplinary process.

Keywords