

## ADVICE ON THEORETICAL POETICS

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### 1. Personal preliminaries

"Everyone knows how much more pleasant it is to give advice than to take it. Everyone knows how little heed is taken of all the good advice he has to offer. Nevertheless, this knowledge seldom restrains anyone, least of all the present author. He has been noting the confusions, misdirections of emphasis, and duplications of effort ...." Having assumed the task of writing down some experiences from twelve years of doing literary theory and from eight years of editing this journal, I remembered the title of a paper, 'Advice on modal logic', written ten years ago by the logician Dana Scott, of which I just quoted the beginning. At the time I read that paper (a time I was interested in modern logic in order to be able to account for semantic aspects of discourse) I thought such a title to be arrogant, if not preposterous. But, Dana Scott had to defend new developments in logic, *viz.* the construction of modal logics, against more classically oriented logicians, a situation in which a piece of advice could have its particular effectiveness.

In this paper, with which I have reserved for myself the right to take the last word as editor of *Poetics*, I will take the risk of arousing similar reactions, among at least some of my readers, by issuing some advice on theoretical poetics. This advice will be personal, and hence written in terms of the personal pronoun I. because it will be based on my personal experiences, views, evaluations of and contributions to the domain of modern literary theory. Besides prompting my evaluation of traditional and more actual approaches to literature, these experiences at the same time appeared to be sufficient reason to shift the emphasis of my scholarly attention, at least for some time, to the more general field of the interdisciplinary study of discourse and language use.

An advice is a particular kind of speech act. Speech acts, as studied in pragmatics, are characterized in terms of appropriateness conditions. And these conditions at the same time determine whether a piece of advice will actually be acceptable or not to the addressee of the advice. The major condition is that the speaker thinks that a recommended object, action or attitude benefits the hearer. This means that I will have to assume that what I have to say is useful for at least some people working in the domain of literary studies. Of course, I should hope that the faithful reader of *Poetics* does *not* belong to this group. He/she will in that case find most

of my remarks obvious or even trivial, and hence my advice superfluous. Of course I would be glad if one would agree with my statements, but I believe that some of them will not be familiar even to the average reader of *Poetics* or to those who follow a similar policy in their research on literary theory. In that case too, then, I hope that some of the points I make will give rise to the necessary reflection and debate about the aims and methods of literary studies.

Another condition for appropriate advice is that the speaker should at least have some modest authority on some subject matter, or assume that he knows more about it than his hearer: we should not give advice about which wine to take with what kind of food if we know nothing about wines or if we know less than our hearer. Prevailing social and scholarly rules of modesty, together with knowledge about the competence of my colleagues, tell me that this condition is not satisfied, so that on these grounds as well the advice might be misguided. Yet, I will assume that some of my experiences, evaluations and opinions are shared by others, and making myself their *porte parole*, the advice thereby acquires a collective nature, apart from coming close to the speech act of 'giving one's opinion'.

In order to provide some more insight into the points I have to make, some further personal indications seem necessary, *viz.* about the backgrounds of my work in theoretical poetics. My first acquaintance with literary studies took place in the department of French language and literature of some Dutch university. At that time, more than fifteen years ago, studying literature predominantly meant doing literary history: reading many literary texts from different periods, and reading some 'critical books about authors, works of art or literary periods. Systematic analysis of literary texts, based on a theoretical framework, hardly occurred, at least not within the usual program of study. Literature was discussed within a long cultural and academic tradition, focusing on the so-called *explication de texte* and its background of literary history, *e.g.* as exemplified in the well-known textbook of Lagarde and Michard. The same, in fact, appeared to hold in other departments of language and literature studies. Yet, occasionally, some teacher, and some students, were also interested in more general and theoretical problems of the study of literature. So, in addition, they read the famous books by Wellek and Warren, Kayser, Ingarden, as well as other books in these traditions of American 'new criticism', German *immanente Werkinterpretation* or phenomenological approaches to literature. Reading such books, whatever their limitations may be when seen from our actual point of view, sparked the beginning of a more critical stance towards traditional literary history and *explication de texte*, at least in some of us — fervents of both *avant-garde* literature and *avant-garde* thinking about literature. As students in a French department we soon had the advantage of becoming aware, often on our own initiative, of new developments in France in the domain of literary studies: we read Lévi-Strauss, Barthes, Greimas, and — somewhat later — Todorov, Kristeva, Bremond, and many others who had just published their first papers or books. In this way, we for the first time read about semiotics, structural analysis of narrative, and then went on to the various sources for these

developments: Peirce and Morris, Propp, Jakobson and the (other) Russian Formalists made known and translated by Todorov. Of course this way of doing literary study was not really compatible with what we had been doing, from medieval Perceval to twentieth century Proust, Sartre and Camus (where the text-books stopped). So, soon our own seminar papers, MA-theses and other work started to take a road which deviated rather strongly from the prevailing academic program and its titles (X about Racine, Y about Romanticism, or Z about Modern Drama in France). Once graduated, and preparing our first scholarly papers or conceiving plans for our Ph.D. theses, this emancipation from the 'tradition' was of course easier: we were simply fascinated to discover and to do something 'new'. This, then, all happened around 1965. And I use the pronoun we here, because one at least knew one friend who liad the same ideas and passed through a similar development. Later, when meeting colleagues of my own age during international congresses and colloquia, it became clear that this kind of experience was far from unique: many had had to discover, read, understand and develop new methods and theories all on their own, guided only by 'the' papers and few books, greedily xeroxed or bought from modest student scholarships, which began to appear on this 'semiotic', or 'structural' ways of studying literature.

Once generated, this (self-)critical mind, it was of course impossible to stop at the boundaries of a French program: German, English, American and (translated) Russian studies soon appeared to fill the gaps and we began to formulate more explicitly or systematically or to propose new or additional ways of constructing theory. The link to these competing approaches was obvious: we had discovered semiotics and aboye all its methodological example: linguistics. Whereas structural linguistics, and aboye all semantics, already provided us with some means of studying meanings of poetry or structures of narrative, generative-transformational grammar soon began its pervasive influence in poetics as well. We learned about grammars and their formal bases, about formation and transformation rules, derivations and their constraints . of course, describing a kind of language use like that of literature could not escape such an influence. In fact, in the meantime some American theorists had already shown some applications of the Chomskyan paradigm, e.g. in the influential *Style in language* book edited by Sebeok, already published in 1960, followed, some years later, in 1965, by *Mathematik und Dichtung*, edited by Gunzenhäuser and Kreuzer, having besides the generative approaches also information-theoretical and statistical methods shown to us. What struck us was the fact that the various directions of research in the respective countries knew so little of each other; no attempts were made to integrate the insights of each approach, except perhaps by the Germans who quickly assimilated the current methods and results in order to found their considerable methodological and theoretical efforts leading to the perhaps most extensive production in the domain of modern literary theory. Only some years later, the Americans discovered and translated the French, and *vice versa*, although a real integration of methods hardly took place: not only structuralist and generative grammars in both countries were too far apart, but also

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the very 'style' of inquiry and writing (*écriture*). There was also a difference in theoretical 'content': whereas the French focused on structural analysis, mostly of stories, often based on their version of structural semantics, the Americans applied generative grammars in the grammatical characterization of literary texts, often of so-called 'deviations', *e.g.* in modern poetry.

The third phase in this development, after the 'French' and 'American' phases, could be called the 'German' phase, and involved the development of so-called text grammars and their application in the theory of literary texts. The motivation for this step in our development was obvious: in order to describe, more or less explicitly, as we had learned from TG-grammar, the structures of literary texts, the very grammar taken as a basis for such descriptions should be extended, or perhaps even changed in a more fundamental way. Together with German literary theorists and linguists like Petófi, Ihwe, Rieser, Schmidt, Kummer, Ballmer, and others, various problems and fragments of such a grammar (or 'grammar') of texts were studied. Much of this earlier work remained in the programmatic and methodological stage. Moreover we stayed uncomfortably close to the current TG-fashion of that moment (around 1970), *viz.* generative semantics. We wanted to generate texts from a semantic basis, and hence above all studied the specific semantic properties of such bases, *e.g.* problems of co-reference, meaning relations and coherence phenomena in general. With these very partial models in hand we then got back to literature in order to see how literary texts could be described in similar terms, *e.g.* in the study of coherence breaks, metaphor, thematic structures and of course all sorts of surface structural 'deviations' or specificities. All kinds of 'other', *i.e.* non-grammatical, structures such as rhetorical operations or narrative structures were studied in relation to these text-grammatical models, *e.g.* as specific constraints on the semantic or surface structures.

At this point, however, many of us, including myself, found the proper linguistic problems and aims at least as interesting as the original literary motivation: text grammars were developed as a more adequate model of linguistic competence in general. After all, verbal utterances mostly involve textual structures, which should be studied, apart from the usual sentence structures, in their own right, solving — if possible — at the same time a number of difficult issues of sentence grammar: PRO-forms, connectives, topic and comment, relative clauses, anides, and semantic coherence in general. Interestingly, sentence grammars themselves at that time showed tendencies towards necessary extensions, towards discourse and conversation, context, speech acts, and so on.

It was soon discovered, however, that the current grammatical models (*e.g.* generative semantics) in linguistics were inappropriate to formulate, let alone solve, important problems of discourse structures. Following a new trend, then, some of us turned to philosophy and logic. First of all to get the semantics more explicit, and secondly in order to find ways of characterizing the various elusive properties of textual coherence. Important in this development was that semantics no longer exclusively dealt with 'meaning' (intensions), but also with 'reference' (extensions).

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And indeed, many crucial conditions of textual coherence appeared to be of a referential nature (as we should have known from the co-reference discussion in grammar) for which however current grammatical theory had no models.

The last period in this 'German' development again combined with American/British insights, *viz.* in the domain of *pragmatics*. John Searle's *Speech acts* became known and soon linguistic theory, especially in Germany, developed more or less independently in the direction of a theory of linguistic (inter-)action of which the classical grammar would only be a component. Text grammar also integrated a pragmatic component, especially because it had earlier favored a more embracing structural account of verbal utterances: these would now at the same time be taken as (speech) acts, and hence texts as sequences of speech acts, systematically to be related to the sequences of sentences of the discourse. For literary theory this meant that the application of text grammar drew a new aspect into the picture: literary communication and especially literary 'speech acts' and their status. Besides an essentially 'textual' component, literary theory thereby got an additional 'contextual' component, a development very early noted, though not explicitly developed yet, by Schmidt at the end of the sixties. In my dissertation, *Some aspects of text grammars* (1972), this pragmatic component of text grammar, as well as some remarks about literary applications, was only given attention in a programmatic final chapter. More attention to pragmatic problems in literature followed only in 1975, after earlier work by Ohmann on the speech act properties of literature. Only in the last few years, however, such a pragmatic approach, and hence a relativization and extension of the earlier grammatical models of literary texts, seems to have become more acceptable.

The interest for speech acts, especially in Germany, was accompanied by a more general attention for abstract structures of action and interaction, for instance in order to be able to have a formal foundation for pragmatic theory. For literary theory this meant a much more thorough basis for narrative theory. That is, narratives as a form of action description can be much better understood if we know the structure and description of action sequences. And indeed, in some papers I was able to explain a number of narrative categories and constraints in terms of such an action theory. This enabled renewed attachment to the French structural analysis of narrative, which we had earlier tried to integrate into a text grammar.

We see that the whole picture, although becoming more and more complex, at the same time becomes more integrated and adequate: (text-)grammatical description of texts, (text-)pragmatical description of the speech acts performed by the utterance of such texts in some context, and a foundation of both pragmatics and the theory of narrative on a theory of action. Clearly, we only had the outlines of this picture, with just occasional details filled in. Important, though, was the fact that in the meantime the pervasiveness of TG-grammar and of linguistics in general had somewhat faded: in order to describe discourse, we focused on proper discourse structures, and our theoretical models were developed or sought in all kinds of directions: philosophy and logic, action theory, speech act theory, and —

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somewhat later — in psychology and artificial intelligence.

We here touch the final stage of the development, this time only occasionally applied to literature because the general problem of discourse and language use appeared to be more important — also for possible 'relevant' applications (see below). That is, I decided to see, around 1974, in which respect text grammatical ideas had a 'real', *e.g.* cognitive, basis. Especially the notion of 'macrostructure', which had haunted me since the end of the sixties, kept cropping up in all kinds of accounts of coherence. And since some of the earlier motivations for such a notion were of a cognitive nature (language users need higher order, global semantic structures in order to understand, memorize and summarize long texts), contact with psychology was sought. Surprisingly enough, psychologists and those working in artificial intelligence, nearly at the same time moved from the semantic study of sentences to discourse materials in their experiments and computer simulations. Collaboration with Walter Kintsch, a cognitive psychologist who had just finished (in 1974) a book with several papers on discourse comprehension, appeared as a natural consequence. The results were a number of common papers in which a model of discourse production and comprehension was developed and experimentally tested. Macrostructures and other fragments of text grammars played an important role in these models. At the same time, contact with this field showed that many other concepts and components were also necessary in an adequate theory of discourse structure and processing. Knowledge of the world appeared to be of fundamental theoretical and empirical interest in the account of textual coherence and comprehension. Similarly, the earlier findings in the theory of action now appeared relevant again in the action-based and goal-oriented computer models of story comprehension. This last phase (predominantly American again) is mentioned also because occasional side-stepping to literature seemed inevitable: a theory of literature should not be about textual structures alone, but also about how these are understood, memorized, evaluated, *etc.* In other words, the theory should also have a cognitive component.

It may have become clear from this professional-biographical sketch that the very nature of the problems encountered somehow forced me to displace the center of gravity from literature to the more general interdisciplinary domain of language, discourse and communication. Below I will indicate why I think such an interdisciplinary view also has its positive feedback in the study of literature itself.

Of course there is a lot missing in my account of personal experiences in the province of poetics. Most striking, however, is the lack of further 'background': I have indicated how this development was linked with or even integrated in similar developments in France, the USA, Germany, and so on, but this description dissimulates the real situation and developments of literary studies. A naive reader of my story would believe that both research and academic study of literature roughly followed this pathway. Nothing is less true, however. In the meantime, the majority of literary scholars, both in my own country and elsewhere, continued to do all

kinds of philological, historical or *ad hoc* descriptive work on literature, of which of course some work was good in its genre and also necessary with respect to certain literary aims. Large parts of the literary programs in most universities of most countries (note my quantifiers!) still range within this tradition: many 'works of art' of many authors from various periods are 'read' or 'interpreted' or 'discussed'. Sometimes, slight renewal can be traced here under the influence of the various developments which I have mentioned: occasionally, words like 'semantic' or rather 'semiotic' appear in this kind of literary talk, and a bit of methodological self-consciousness begins to show itself. Often however, the die-hards fully seclude themselves from the 'others', mostly the linguists in the same department, and take their domain as something absolutely different. Strangely enough, the same also takes place with the linguists themselves, being involved either in traditional grammar, language learning, or in structural or generative paradigms: the study of literature and discourse does not belong to their province. As a consequence these extremes indeed often touch each other: they do not have professional conflict because their methods, problems and domains never overlap (in their eyes). Both, however, may have to take issue with those 'in between', those literary scholars who use linguistic models or require certain properties of linguistic models, or those linguists who are not only interested in words, phrases, sentences and their formal grammars, but also in language use, discourse and their socio-cultural contexts.

Besides this majority of literary scholars, universities and programs, which faithfully continue the old traditions, there is a minority of those who occasionally will renew their views, problems, issues, domains, methods, theories, observations, *etc.*, either under the impact of theoretical developments within poetics itself, or under the influence of ideas in other disciplines. Characteristic of this minority group, however, is the typical 'lag' between the time some new ideas are worked out and the time they are accepted and used. At this moment this is noticeable especially for all kinds of structuralist ideas which came up or which were rediscovered in the sixties. Many scholars (quantitatively still a minority though, as far as I can judge intuitively from direct or indirect evidence from many universities in many countries) now (re-)discover the (re-)discoveries in the work of people like Barthes, Todorov, Lotman, Genette, Schmidt, or the great precursors, such as Propp, Peirce and Morris. That is, some semiotics and structuralism now begins to be acceptable, or even — *e.g.* in French departments in the USA — fashionable. This is in many cases more than ten years 'alter the fact'. Of course, this is understandable, especially for university programs, having a natural conservatism which at least protects them against the whims of a superficial fashion which would hardly benefit the students. However, in the theoretical work itself it is too little realized that each theory, each phase in such a theory, each problem, needs to be renewed continuously. In other words, given the developments in several disciplines of the humanities, it is no longer the case that we can unconditionally accept all results of, for instance, this structural tradition as it was practiced in the late sixties. Of course,

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we need not change a serious paradigm every two or three years, because that is about the time for a new paradigm to get started: the real, substantial research may only come five or ten years after the first programmatic statements or exemplary works. Thus, both Chomsky and Propp appeared (in English) for the first time in 1958, but work in these paradigms, the generative-transformational one in linguistics and the structuralist one in poetics, got some serious dimensions only ten years later, being accepted academically another ten years later — when theoretically the original ideas have already been corrected or even fully changed or abandoned by the small community of Theory Makers of a given paradigm or field of research.

So we see that the situation is more complex than a simple succession of 'new' developments. Whereas I myself went via linguistics, textlinguistics, philosophy and logic, to psychology and the social sciences, others also went wandering but came to and stayed in other domains, e.g. philosophy, sociolinguistics, child psychology, computer science on the one hand, and history, esthetics, psycho-analysis, marxism, *etc.* on the other (as you see I already seem to make a distinction between two kinds of renewal: a 'hard' and a 'soft' one, the first rather with new methods, new technologies, new theoretical tools, new domains, *etc.*, the second with existing classical theories from other domains, but implying new ways of analyzing or even 'living' in the literary domain, being part of another philosophy of life; it has been one of my frustrations that it has been so difficult to combine the good points of both types of renewal). In fact it was possible to meet an original friend of profession' speaking a descriptive and theoretical language which was nearly obscure for me (and, I am afraid, for many others). I have had this experience especially for the developments in France after the original structuralist movement, e.g. as we find in work by Lacan, Derrida and their less brilliant followers. Of course, my education had made me familiar with a particular kind of metaphorical writing which French theorists often use, on the one hand because only the metaphor can illustrate (though hardly explain) new insights and on the other hand because each theorist and scholar should at the same time be a creative writer, a stylist, an artist. In certain domains of the humanities we have a similar, but much more moderate, ideal also in British or American studies, but in general we typically find it in France, and Latin countries. In any case, the mysterious *clarté française* has not, as far as I can judge, been pervasive in the style of writing and argumentation of these different new traditions which also came to poetics.

So, some went in completely different directions and even adopted a distinctly opposed way of thinking and writing. Others had found their specific piece of cake and continued to eat it: the same structural analyses of narratives or the same transformational grammars — perhaps sometimes with slight theoretical differences.

The history of modern poetics is, however, still more confusing: there are several branches of structuralism, and there are several styles of writing. At the same time, the large substratum of 'classical' literary studies not only subsisted, but also renewed itself, often rather independently of structuralist developments. I am



thinking for instance of what may simply be called *hermeneutics*, a notion which is as broad and vague as that of structuralism. This direction of literary research is very much tied to Germany and those literary scholars elsewhere who are influenced by this German tradition (*e.g.* in my own country). At the moment, few scholars would still espouse the original views of Dilthey, and have at least integrated ideas of Gadamer, Heidegger and, more recently, of Jauss. In fact one should distinguish between two kinds of phenomenology in this hermeneutic tradition, the one originally represented by Dilthey, and later carried forward by Gadamer, on the one hand, and the one originating in the work of Husserl, which had a much more nature. Via the seminal work of Schütz, an interesting branch of phenomenology had its influence in sociology, resulting in the ethnomethodological approaches to 'everyday interaction', *e.g. as it* is practiced in the analysis of conversation. At that point the actual work is very close to structural analysis of discourse as it has been sketched above.

In fact, several concepts of phenomenological hermeneutics are crucial for a sound theory of literature, *e.g.* the concept of 'interpretation'. Only, the methods and theoretical elaboration were defective on many points. The approach remained non-systematic, not very explicit and necessarily *ad hoc*. Little was learned from the obvious advancements in the theoretical explication of notions such as interpretation in philosophy, logic and linguistics. Similarly, the emphasis on socio-historical contexts of literature, while valuable in itself, did not result in a serious application of methods and theories of the social sciences.

Against this background of my personal development and of the developments in post-war literary studies and neighboring disciplines in the humanities and the social sciences, I would like to formulate a number of more specific critical statements which at the same time may function as pieces of advice and suggestions for further developments in the study of literature.

## 2. Literary ideologies

One source of many problems in the development of a serious discipline of poetics is a deeply entrenched system of what we may call literary ideologies'. To be sure, in a broad sense of the term 'ideology' each approach to cultural and social phenomena, whether naive or rigorously 'scientific' is ideological. In a narrower sense, though, I here reserve the term 'ideology' in order to denote a system of conceptions about literature of which the origins, aims, problems, presuppositions, functions, *etc.* have not been explicitly discussed and formulated. This is first of the conception of literature as it appears most frequently in everyday talk about literature, in textbooks at school, in literary criticism in newspapers and literary magazines and naive literary studies in our universities. I will briefly enumerate some elements from this kind of literary ideology. It will appear in that enumeration that the conceptions do not only hold for literature but for 'art' in general.

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The first set of ideological propositions concerns the *specific* or *exclusive* nature of literature: a literary work of art is fundamentally different from other kinds of discourse, other kinds of language use and communication; literary language is uniquely creative, literary 'reality' is a world on its own, *etc.* The methodological consequence of this ideological proposition, or any stronger or weaker form of it, is that literature cannot be studied, or at least not exhaustively, with any method or theory developed for other phenomena, such as language or communication. Closely associated to this exclusive idea of literature as a cultural phenomenon are a number of *metaphysical*, *mythical* or even *religious* conceptions of literature, literary authors and literary experiences: the literary artist has supernatural insights, creative abilities and sensibilities, the literary work of art is a mysterious, divine, transcendental phenomenon, whereas reading, understanding and interpreting literature is an experience which requires inimitable empathy. The methodological consequence of this complex of ideological propositions is that literature, and literary production and reception, cannot fully be understood, analyzed, described; a theory of literature, if possible at all, will *a priori* be partial; only an irrational way of 'understanding' could fully grasp the uniqueness of a literary work of art.

Here appears also the third set of propositions: each literary text is a *unique* work of art, which methodologically implies that any kind of generalization about literature, and hence theories, would be impossible or at most reductionistic.

Fourthly, literature is eminently tied up with *values* and *evaluation* so, it is believed, a description of literature should itself be evaluative and the aim of literary studies should be an explanation of why a particular work of art *is* beautiful.

Related to the first, exclusivistic conception of literature, is the fifth ideological complex: literature is more or less *independent* from historical, social, and economical phenomena; a literary work of art is essentially universal, its value is not determined by socio-cultural constraints, its production and reception are so to speak transcendental with respect to any kind of environment. One of the well-known theoretical consequences of this conception is the exclusive or dominant interest for the literary work of art itself, neglecting the set of communicational, historical, social or cultural properties of a literary system.

The literary ideology, of which we have briefly mentioned only some dominant propositions, has its historical roots in Romanticism. It cannot be my aim here to sketch the precise line of historical development connecting it with the actual views of literature. I can only observe that much of our naive thinking of literature shows one or more of the propositions mentioned above, not only in textbooks at school or newspaper criticism, but also in several academic literary traditions. The sometimes fierce opposition against linguistics, logic, or any 'formal' approach, the reluctance to adopt structural methods, or the neglect of psychological, sociological or anthropological approaches to literary phenomena, are all a result of these ideological conceptions. For those who share these widespread conceptions such approaches will be *a priori* inadequate, missing the essential of literature, if not be downright sacrilegious. Of course, the more extreme forms of the ideology are no

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longer widely accepted in our universities, but the more subtle forms still influence most discussions about the aims and methods of modern poetics. The controversies between structuralists on the one hand, and hermeneutics on the other hand, will often involve some of the points we have raised above.

There is another strongly ideological aspect related to the study of literature, both at school and in the university, *viz.* the role of literature as part of a broader *cultural education*. One of the chief aims of reading literature at various educational levels is that the student has literary *knowledge* and that he/she can *talk* about literature in an appropriate way. Thus, any 'respectable' arts curriculum, *e.g.* in the USA, will require a reading list with the major works of art of so-called 'world literature'. Similarly, a language and literature curriculum will more specifically require that a student has read the most important texts or authors from the literary history of a particular culture. Of course, as such, there is nothing wrong with this kind of transmission of literary culture, especially if the student really likes reading these texts, or if the reading is integrated into a more encompassing aim of understanding, learning, or developing abilities and attitudes which can eminently be achieved by studying such texts.

However, this is not always the case. To be sure, especially in university programs of literature, certain texts will be 'analyzed' (though in a more or less *ad hoc* way, as we saw above) in a more exemplary fashion. Most texts, however, will only be 'read', *e.g.* because they belong to the specific canon of a particular culture, as it is defined in textbooks and literary histories. Since such lists may sometimes be quite long, it is virtually impossible for the student to really learn or understand something about the more specific style, organizational structures, historical backgrounds, *etc.* of each individual text. Below, we will see in more detail that memorization of complex texts, *e.g.* novels, is necessarily reduced to the global plot. It follows that after some time, *e.g.* after having finished his studies, a student will seldom remember more than the name of the author and the title of the text, possibly with some vague remembrance of the plot. In other words, the specific cultural aim boils down, at least for the majority of the students, and in those cases where the student did not have a particular liking for the text (which is only exceptionally the case, especially for literature from earlier periods), to an ability to *mention names and titles* and perhaps fragments of a plot or a theme. The *function* of this aim is obvious: it does not serve insight or understanding for the student, but above all his possible *cultural talk* in conversation. Given this ability and superficial knowledge, a person is said to 'have culture' or a 'good education', which is a well-known criterion of bourgeois respect in middle and higher social classes. I should emphasize that this is the average picture, a picture which could easily be assessed by serious sociological investigation. Only a more specific *study* of particular works or a very 'engaged' reading of a particular text would perhaps contribute in a more substantial way to the 'culture' of a social member, but such an interaction with literature is rather exceptional, and not at all limited to formal education. In fact, it

is more likely that this kind of more intensive contact with literature will take place, at least for a small social group, in later life.

I realize that what I claim *here* is nothing less than iconoclastic. Literature and culture, as we saw above, are holy cows in certain social classes, and of course especially so in language and literature departments. Yet, until my claims are refuted by empirical research I hold them to be correct. Below we will see that these social observations are in part corroborated by extant psychological work on text processing.

My conclusion, and advice, then, is that if we formulate personally and socially useful aims for a literary curriculum, both at school and in the university, we should make explicit what kinds of pleasure, knowledge and insights, beliefs, attitudes, abilities, *etc.* are part of these aims, and how they can be attained. At the moment, such aims are seldom made explicit, let alone didactic methods worked out which will contribute to the realization of these aims. The simple task of 'reading' is sometimes assumed to provide, by itself, the kind of literary culture which a student is supposed to have. The kind of program developed on this ideological basis, therefore, necessarily has an encyclopedic nature: a lot of names and titles, associated with standard evaluations or classifications, are thought to be sufficient to bring about the cultural aims. Thus, it used to be a tradition in some comparative literature departments in my country to have read a list of at least 30 titles from 'world literature' — besides the works which had to be read for the particular language study (of four years) after which the comparative literature program could be taken. Of course, such a requirement would make sense if it was a serious phase of 'empirical observation' in a larger scholarly program. But this is hardly the case: one should simply 'have read' the major works from, say, Ovid, via Dante, Descartes, Shakespeare, Goethe, Baudelaire, to Joyce and Sartre. This list is pre-programmed, only slight options are possible, and the students will seldom be allowed to take *any* medieval story or 19th century novel they like but which is written by a practically unknown author (according to the textbook). Of course, such freedom is possible in the later stages of a curriculum, for instance in graduate studies, and as soon as the student is allowed to specialize on a particular period, genre or author. My main point is only that the majority of the traditional literary history' or 'world literature' requirements in formal education do have only occasionally useful aims, whereas the real objective is socially respectable literary

Insight and possible 'application' of this insight in our feeling, thinking and behavior derived from literary education is possible only if our programs have an *exemplary* nature. They should consist of selected texts (where the selection may be determined by the students themselves) which are read, analyzed systematically, evaluated explicitly, studied in both literary and socio-historical context, and if possible within the framework of a specific *problem* or theme. Of course, this holds for the university level, not for the (lower) levels of secondary schools, where simple reading, understanding and some elementary observations about the language and style, themes, stereotypes, *etc.* of literary texts can at most be achieved,

preferably in relation to the study of other types of discourse and communication.

My conclusion from this section, as I said, is severe: the *average* literary education in schools and universities will seldom contribute to didactically, scholarly and socially important aims, but merely exhibit the usual properties of superficial cultural behavior of a social elite.

### 3. The academic context

Another kind of background for the actual state of literary studies is of an institutional nature, *viz.* the *organization* of these studies in our universities.

The study of literature usually takes place in departments of 'language and literature', or more specifically in departments of French, English, German, Spanish, Slavic languages and literatures, *etc.* Such departments will often be organized in a faculty of philosophy and/or letters, of modern languages and linguistics, or a 'school' with a similar name. That is, literature is studied in close connection with the study of the mother tongue or a foreign language. **In** fact, literary texts are often read as part of the acquisition program of such a foreign language. Yet, such departments will often show a clear separation between literature and language or linguistics sections. Thus, the theoretical insights or developments in the linguistic section will seldom directly bear upon developments in the literary section, which is understandable against the background of our first set of ideological propositions.

This isolation of literary studies also appears in the fact that there is even less interpenetration between the 'arts' on the one hand, and the social sciences on the other hand: they belong to different schools or faculties. The result is that literature is seldom studied for its cognitive, social, historical, cultural, mass communicational, economical or political aspects, whatever their importance in the forms and functions of literary texts and the ways we read, understand and use them. And from the point of view of the social scientist, literature will at most be viewed as a document for socio-historical data, as an expression of emotional or pathological properties of authors, or as an economical factor in the so-called 'cultural industry'. Of course, such analyses, taken as such, are valid, but they neglect the multiple interactions between literary text structures, their cognitive processing, social functions, broader cultural framework and their socio-economic foundations. In fact, this also held for the study of language, until the rapid rise of psycho- and sociolinguistics, at least in the departments of general linguistics (less so in the more specific foreign language departments, which focus on second language learning and contrastive grammar).

There is another characteristic of 'language and literature' departments which also seriously hampers the development of a broader study of literature, *viz.* the *exclusive* nature of each domain. On the one hand, literary studies will predominantly pay attention to higher literature, *belles lettres*, and neglect all other kinds of literature: *Trivialliteratur*, children's literature, comic strips, everyday story-

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telling, popular songs, verbal creative practices such as verbal duelling or advertising, myths, riddles, proverbs, and in general other forms or uses of language involving 'creative' properties. On the other hand, the study of language, and linguistics in particular, has similar restrictions: normative or contrastive grammar, the language system, isolated sentences, or idealized linguistic competence are the major focus of these studies. Forms of language use, including the 'creative' ones mentioned above, or everyday conversation, and a wide variety of discourse types and their specific socio-cultural contexts have been paid attention to only in recent research but seldom in the institutional programs. If so, this happens, *e.g.* in the USA, in separate departments of speech, rhetorics or communication, departments which do not even have regular counterparts in European universities. Thus, the stylistic, rhetorical, communicative aspects of language will have only a modest place in our linguistic curricula, which in turn emphasizes the distinction with respect to the study of literature and other discursive uses of language.

As we observed above, the literary departments or sections will often be reluctant to adopt ideas, a theoretical background or methods which come from the linguists, and still less those which come from the social scientist. The ideological grounds for this hesitation, if not plain rejection or professional hate, have been sketched before: especially the argument of 'reduction' plays an important role. Describing the language of a poem or a novel, even if allowed, will never come to grips with the 'essence' of the text, let alone with the 'values' involved. And of course, when a psychological study is made of processes of understanding and evaluation, the argument is repeated. To be sure, such interdisciplinary approaches will often pay attention to phenomena or problems which are barely those of the traditional literary scholar. But in fact this is precisely one of the problems: the traditional literary scholar often only wants to talk about individual texts or authors, not about more general phenomena or problems, let alone about systematic and testable theories about these. In other words, 'reduction' will often involve a situation in which the literary scholar does not even recognize the problem at issue, whatever its relevance to literature. I remember that one of my colleagues, interested in the problem of literary 'reception', was flabbergasted about the fact that such a problem could, in part, be formulated and experimentally studied in terms of a model of cognitive discourse processing. The same would probably hold for the sociopsychological and sociological components of a theory of literary reception.

The upshot of these remarks may be clear: as long as the literary scholar does not recognize that a great number of the phenomena, problems or fields involved in the study of literature have been or are fruitfully studied in neighboring domains, the discipline of poetics will necessarily keep lagging. It simply should no longer be the case that papers and books about, say, meaning or interpretation of literary texts fully ignore the advances which have been made in philosophical, linguistic, or cognitive semantics, as I have so often experienced with papers submitted to this journal; papers which, for that reason, I had to reject (unless providing a completely

new and independent approach to meaning; an unlikely case, which indeed never occurred).

The self-isolation of literary studies from advances in other fields, at least in the average literature program, has a much more aggressive form as soon as one or two colleagues from the same discipline try to introduce such 'foreign currency'. The menace is then real, because in this case these are not simply the 'others of the other field', but people who claim to say something about literature, and, which is worse, explicitly or implicitly claim to do so in a more adequate way. The results in such a situation are predictable with a textbook of social psychology (chapter: innovations) at hand: they will attack, ignore, personalize, reduce, *etc.* the arguments or proposals of the opponent, comment upon his English when the arguments cannot be refuted, or use other neutralizing strategies in order to keep their 'cognitive balance'. And I do not think that my experiences here are unique. Many of us had more contacts in another university or with other countries than with colleagues in the same department or university. *Poetics*, in fact, was often precisely the forum where many of such rather isolated theorists had to send their papers before getting the (international) professional contacts. And, typically, I myself have given many more talks in linguistics and psychology departments than in literary departments (and the latter were seldom in my own country). As I said, this is nothing special, and a normal phenomenon of scholarly innovation. The amusing aspect of it is, for instance, that if one came, ten years ago, with structure analyses of narrative or generative grammatical analyses of 'deviant' sentences in modern poetry, such work was mostly ignored or attacked for some reason. Only to discover ten years later that the same kind of work is fiercely defended against new developments of research (*e.g.* pragmatics, or psychology).

Of course, what is suggested here is not a plea for the *a priori* value of anything new. Only for the fact that developments, also in other disciplines, are a basis for learning about new ways of thinking, new problems, new aspects, which in turn will often need to be critically evaluated and integrated in more adequate approaches.

A serious problem in this kind of discussion about innovations in paradigms or disciplines is the well-known lag between relatively 'rich' insights which however are methodologically 'weak', and the new approach which, at least initially, is substantially 'poor', but methodologically 'strong'. Examples abound. Structural analysis of narrative, for example, was most certainly an important methodological advance, but of course it was hardly fit to provide detailed insights into subtle properties of complex novels. But what it *did* provide was a first serious definition of the very notion of 'narrative', which remained implicit in the well-known 'theory of the novel' tradition — besides the fact that structures were now accounted for in terms of more or less explicit rules, categories and levels of analysis. Similar lags existed in linguistics between TG-grammar and traditional grammars, or, more recently, between TG-grammar and the 'real thing' in formal grammars: Montague grammars. Thus, sometimes the advance will be more of a substantial nature (*e.g.*

the introduction of pragmatics in linguistics), and sometimes it will be rather formal or methodological, and sometimes, but very seldom, both.

From the first part of this section we now may conclude that, firstly, the gap between the literary and linguistic studies is too large and should at least be filled from both sides by the study of other kinds of discourse and language use; secondly, that the same thing holds for the gap with the social sciences and their problems and methods; and thirdly, that theoretical innovations within literary studies are often strongly resisted, especially when they derive from ideas borrowed from other disciplines. All this is particularly true for the institutional programs which of course lag still further behind the individual scholars, *e.g.* because they require consensus of all teachers about the validity of the new paradigm. Of course, another, more serious reason is that each theoretical development cannot, or should not, automatically be translated into a didactic form, at least not at school or undergraduate introductory courses, which require some 'critical distance' with respect to the momentaneous proposals for renewal in research. Quite another point, however, is the fact that often in rather advanced graduate stages the students are still (only) confronted with ideas and theories of 20 years ago.

In other words, we observe that the basic tenets of the literary ideologies tended to keep literary studies in a more or less conservative scholarly rhythm, isolating them from other disciplines and resisting new developments in their own field.

Unfortunately I have little advice to offer to those who are in the position, characterized above, in which they want to introduce new ideas in their academic environment. Abstaining from criticizing the 'old ideas' certainly helps, that is: simply do the 'new thing'. Better still is to take the 'old problems' seriously and to show how more and unexpected things can be said about them in another framework. Personal strategies are left as a task for the reader.

#### 4. Teaching literature and its theory

In the previous sections I have indicated some of the scientific flaws in the study of literature, an issue we will come back to below. I have observed that these shortcomings in the discipline of poetics are typical for the academic context of the study of literature and the more general ideologies on which these academic activities are based. Closely related to these scientific characteristics are the *didactic* ones. Teaching literature, both at school and especially also in our universities, in my view has a very inadequate didactic basis. Although this is certainly true for other subjects or disciplines as well, the particular ideology I have been describing above has its specific effect on the didactic dimension. Only in the last few years have there been developments towards a more systematic account of the didactic principles of literary studies, especially in secondary education, where literature is usually part of the mother tongue curriculum. I will however mainly focus my attention on the teaching of literature in higher education, which of course also involves teaching the theory of literature.



The initial teaching of literature in primary and secondary education usually stresses the direct 'use' of literature, *viz.* reading stories, telling stories, making poems and songs, *etc.* in the first stage, and in a later stage (in the Dutch system around the age of 15) reading 'real' literature, predominantly (Dutch) literature from various centuries. The primary goal of this use of literature is, if made explicit at all, the 'pleasure' the pupil is supposed to have in the reading of literature. Whereas this criterion will often hold for simple stories, singing songs or performing drama, the acquaintance with 'higher' literature most certainly does not automatically imply the 'pleasure' or related emotional and cognitive states usually aimed at. It is well-known from the experience of school teachers and from empirical research that only very few pupils, mostly those with parents with a higher education and literary interests, are spontaneously interested in reading 'serious' literature. These few will be interested in rather straightforward stories or love poetry, starting to read these between the age of 14 and 18. Most others, though, will read comic strips, simple adventure stories (crime stories, science fiction, love stories, *etc.*) and will predominantly get their 'fiction' from TV-movies, and their 'poetry' from pop songs. Although these elementary social facts are now becoming more and more accepted, such that the programs will sometimes even explicitly pay attention to these kinds of the literature' the pupils are interested in, the majority of the curricula, the text books, the assignments, the classes, *etc.* will emphasize the 'higher' forms of literature, especially in the higher stages of secondary schools. There will be standard authors, standard texts to read, and these will be the joint product of the literary history textbook and the preferences of the teacher.

The aims of this kind of teaching are not only the 'pleasure' of the pupil — which would be fine, though not sufficient — but especially the *knowledge* about authors, works, periods of literature, and some elementary properties of literary texts (style, story structure, prosody, *etc.*). Besides this knowledge the pupil should have some elementary analytic abilities: texts should be read, understood and 'explained'.

Much of this also holds in the academic context. The big difference here, however, is that at least in several European countries, the student chooses one or two major subjects (disciplines) in which literature plays a central role. That is, the aims are now much more professionalized: knowledge and analysis of literature are essential components in the conditions for obtaining a degree. And of course, after the kind of selection taking place before the student may enter the university curriculum, the interest and motivation for literature will be much higher. These are typically the people who will be the principal transmitters of the literary culture, including the ideologies mentioned above, via newspaper criticism and teaching at school. Although the whole complex of literary knowledge and ideology is of course already taught at school, we have here the key for the cultural continuity of literature in the institution.

We have seen that the basis of literary education, also in the university, is the *acquaintance* with works and their authors: reading, understanding, explaining,

paraphrasing, and discussing. It will be required that from each period the major texts and authors are read, plus some studies about these, or about some broader topic, such as a period of literature, a genre, *etc.*

Getting to the problematic aspects of this kind of literary education (besides those signalled above), we should first of all ask ourselves what this *knowledge* of (many) works and authors could amount to. Depending on the degree of education on the various structures of literary texts, the student will within a range of some months or a few years, at most be able to remember (a) the plot of a story; (b) some general features of style; and (c) some salient details of a story or poem. After longer delays only some fragments of a plot will be actively memorized and/or an occasional detail. This is a very firm result, for simple stories, from recent cognitive psychology of discourse processing. Although processing of literary discourse proceeds under somewhat different conditions, it is perfectly plausible to assume that the basic conclusions also hold for literary texts. In other words, after the university education the student will at most have a rather superficial knowledge of narres of works and authors, some period properties, and fragments of plots. That is to say, this is true for normal reading practice, which is necessarily typical for the kind of reading we do when we have to comply with the requirements of **OF** works to be read. Thus, although I myself was among those with a strong interest in literature, especially in poetry, and therefore read much more than the hundreds of literary works of art which were obligatory, and perhaps read at least some of them with special attention, only scattered fragments of themes, some narres, titles and some stylistic remembrances still subsist. From this personal experience, from the experiences of many of my colleagues and students, and from hard facts' from experimental psychology, I take this situation to be the general rule. In fact, it is a very clear claim, open to empirical investigation. The exception to my hypothesis, then, are those people with specific memory capacities.

Of course what has been stated in the previous paragraph only holds for what I called 'normal' reading practices. As soon as a particular text is systematically *studied*, the picture is different. First of all, the structures discovered at several levels will, according to the cognitive model we have been referring to, better organize the information of the text in memory. Secondly, these structures (stylistic, semantic/thematic, *etc.*) will be better tied with other knowledge and memories about literature. Thirdly, all kinds of associations, evaluations, opinions, *etc.* about the text or the referents (persons, objects, states, events, actions, situations, *etc.*) will be a further structural frame for the representation of the text in memory. And finally, particular properties of the text will be understood and stored as instances of more general organizational principles of literature of this particular type or period. This means that we are able to recall much of a text because knowing the general principles we also will be able to infer the probable particulars of a particular text. In other words, if reading of literature should also have long-term educational and cultural functions (beyond short-term functions such as interest, pleasure, suspense, *etc.*, taking place during reading, which one may call the

'primary' functions of literature) then only the exemplary study of some few texts is useful. If the pupils or students are really interested, they will read enough on their own anyway. Take music. Few of our schools have an extensive music program: music is for 'special' schools and university programs. Yet, most kids will listen more to and know more about music (and not only pop) than they could ever learn in an institutionalized program. In fact, the very special position of literature with respect to the other arts is another ideological issue which would merit further investigation: the percentage of literature classes at school I once calculated in a book I wrote about teaching literature at school (and which was meant to be a very critical assessment of what was wrong with it), is more than *fifty* percent of all mother tongue lessons in the higher grades, and is vastly higher than all other arts (music, drama, drawing/painting, *etc.*) together. At this point there may be some variation across countries but I doubt that the picture will be very different elsewhere (that is, for the kind of secondary schools which prepare for the university).

So, if we want to bring about some knowledge, insight and understanding, grounded opinions, and analytic and attitudinal abilities with respect to literature in our pupils or students, only this kind of exemplary study makes sense. By selecting texts from various periods, types, styles, schools, *etc.* the student will thus get a much better insight than on the basis of simply reading through the 'history of literature'. Both at school and in the university this insight very slowly begins to dawn upon the program makers, so that superficial literary history at least partly makes place for 'interpretation'. But *that*, as such, is not sufficient. A more careful, so-called 'close reading', proponed some 30 to 40 years ago by the American New Critics and their British colleagues (Leavis, *etc.*) will certainly be a necessary *condition* for a *systematic analysis*, but no substitute for it. A closer reading will at most yield a better memory representation of *that particular text*. Which again is nice for social talk about it — or at best later teaching about it at school or in a university class. What it does *not* yield, however, is *insight*, that is, *generalized* knowledge, explanatory opinions and evaluations, changed attitudes and better capabilities to use our reading, comprehending and analyzing of literary texts. This is possible only, as we suggested above, if the text is analyzed in more general terms, if its structures are linked to more general socio-cultural and historical facts and principles, and finally if its effects on our interests, opinions and emotions are *also* subjected to analysis.

What I have been saying here is of course short for a full-fledged, professional analysis of the didactic aspects of literature teaching. Some of these aspects have been studied in recent German work on literary didactics, and some first school text books have implicitly recognized these conditions for serious functions of literature teaching. What is necessary then, is a very precise formulation, if only for the sake of self-training for teachers, of the principles, starting points, aims and the intermediary stages of a literary curriculum — as part of a larger language, discourse, communication and/or art program. If we are unable to specify what our students should know and be able to, and by what *methods* this can be done, we should do

better and leave literature out of the institution, that is leave it to the really free interests and pleasure of the students. And I am sure that there would be no less reading in our culture. What is read by institutional compulsion, will be 'compensated' by what later will never be read again exactly due to this compulsion. In a little experiment I have been able to observe that after rather intensive literature classes between the age of 15 and 18, there was no significant positive change in the interest and reading practice for literature. Before having literature classes most of the kids read fairly regularly. This interest was directed towards certain 'simple' kinds of literature (stories, mostly) due to institutional obligations. But at the same time, their primary interest remained for the TV-movies, comic strips, crime stories, *etc.*, soon being accompanied by slightly 'higher' standards of liking. Just before leaving school, the students did not read more literature, but rather books of general interest, *e.g.* about science and technology, animals, philosophy, *etc.* To be sure, these are tendencies: we also have the occasional pupil who will from the age of 15 on, or even earlier, have literature as his only reading interest. This is fine, but the more general pedagogical problem is that these people will often end up in positions where they will dictate their interest to be the necessary interest of all pupils. In the name of the Holy Culture. And strangely enough, I have also observed repeatedly, in least in my own country, that these people, that is the Literary Elite, will be most opposed to a serious *study* of literature, and a responsible *didactics* of literature. They will be the defendants of the ideologies spelled out earlier, or perhaps some more refined versions of the propositions I gave. They loathe theory, systematic analysis, insight, critical evaluation, general principles, and they live in the illusion that the unique, the particular, the hunch, the private association, *etc.* are exempt from general principles and a broader basis; only, for them they remain implicit, and hence ideological. Which I think is disastrous for a good didactic system, where a combination of having 'real fun' in literature with having 'real insight' is very well possible. In this respect literature should not be different from both the passions and the science about nature, our body, economy or politics. Too long literature at school and even at the university, has been the means for forced leisure': often boring for many, and as far as general knowledge, culture, attitudes, *etc.* are concerned, practically useless for all.

I fully realize that my evaluation is harsh, and for rhetorical reasons I overstate my case a bit. But only a bit. If I had the time, the money and the assistants I would add to the already existent proofs in this area.

I will not here formulate the general principles and aims of literature teaching at school and universities. This would require an article or book of its own. Some of the general ideas may have transpired above. Globally speaking, I do not believe in literature teaching which is isolated from the teaching of language, discourse, communication, and arts, *and* their socio-historical backgrounds. In other words, the programs should be integrated. Only then can we compare a poem with an advertisement (and see similarities and differences), a novel with a natural everyday story in the newspaper about a similar event, a poem with a pop song, a drama and

historical documents about the same event, and so on. Only then is the study of language use in literature serious, and only then can the production and reception conditions of various kinds of literature be understood, more or less intuitively at first, more explicitly and theoretically in later stages.

Secondly, I think that most teaching, also of literature, should be part of a specific, real or simulated, *interest* or *problem Frame*, e.g. that of a particular project. There are various psychological reasons why interest and learning will be higher in such contexts: the students will find out themselves what kind of data, what principles, coherence, aims, motivations, *etc.* determine their knowledge formation and the acquisition of abilities on a certain topic or in a particular discipline. It is well known that a dry class on, say, Romanticism will seldom yield much knowledge, insight and interest, but organizing an exhibition with many additional activities (lectures, documents, *etc.*) — for instance — will get the students to find out for themselves, in a functional way, and thereby really learn how and why literature is written, how and why it is read and in what contexts.

Curiously, these kinds of activities are much more frequent in lower stages of our institutional education system: they are predominant in kindergarten, frequent in primary schools, likely in secondary schools, but very seldom in universities. Teaching is having a curriculum/classes about several disciplines, topics, *etc.*, and only in later stages is a more independent kind of work (in papers, theses) admitted. But even then the work will often be carried out *in vacuo*, that is at most in a scholarly context, not in the context of a personally interesting or a socially compelling *problem*. We will return to this lack of our universities, and above all of our literature teaching, below.

Thirdly, I think the teaching of literature should not only be *integrated, problem oriented* but also be part of a *generalizing* learning context. We have observed that texts are usually read and 'explained' in isolation, both from other literary texts (or only superficially so in a literary historical perspective), other types of discourse, other communicative contexts, *etc.* Hence the pupil and the student cannot understand how things work in general, nor *why* a text is so 'unique'. And finally, besides our interest for literature and its theory we should have more interest in *why* we teach these.

## 5. The social context

In the previous pages we have repeatedly observed that both the conception of literature, *viz.* a number of ideological propositions, as well as its teaching have a more or less 'exclusive' nature: literature is taken in isolation from language, communication, socio-cultural phenomena, and its teaching is geared too much to a traditional *Bildungsideal* where much reading and superficial cultural talk is the criterion, instead of a sound didactic situation with explicitly reflected and critically reassessed claims regarding knowledge, insight, opinions, feelings and abilities.

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Most conspicuous perhaps in both cases is the isolation from the *social context*. We have seen that one ideological proposition, *viz.*, the one regarding the 'universal' nature of literature and literary evaluation, already tended to neglect the fundamental role of the social context in literary communication. The functions of literary talk in social situations of certain kinds, literary education at school, literary criticism, the contents of textbooks, *etc.* on the one hand, and the production conditions, the book business, distribution, advertising and other conditions of selection, reading and evaluation of certain texts as literary' on the other hand, have been systematically underestimated. Literary sociology is one of the most underdeveloped domains of the discipline of poetics. And what has been done is both empirically and theoretically inadequate or simplistic. And this holds both for traditional, 'positivistic' sociological studies of the reading public, and for the more principled marxist analysis of the socio-economic context of literature or the representation of society in literary texts. This will all require our serious attention in the near future if we want to establish an empirically warranted understanding of literature and its functions. We will briefly return to this issue below when we indicate the specific actual shortcomings and the future directions of theoretical poetics.

What I would like to stress in this section is another issue, regarding our teaching and learning of literature in the academic context, rather than literature itself, or our theory formation about it, although both aspects are intimately related. What I am referring to is the more general fact that our work in the university is practically isolated from all kinds of serious *problems* in society. Of course, reading and studying literature may have valid aims of their own, and under some of the conditions specified above, such aims may be culturally relevant. For instance, we thus hope to educate good teachers of language, discourse, literature and arts. So far so good. But we remain within the same system, within a cultural circle which will benefit ourselves and some happy 'few' partaking in the same socio-cultural values, ideals and aims. But, I am convinced that in the long run we will no longer be able to continue this kind of cultural tradition without getting involved in the real socio-cultural and political problems of the world. More and more our university will be drawn towards a duty regarding the formulation, the analysis and the solution of part of these problems. This has been natural for the physical, medical, technical and, more recently, the social sciences. It will also be true for the linguistic, communicational, literary sciences and the arts, although perhaps in a more indirect way for literature and the arts. For a social and/or critical application of linguistics there are many problems in nearly every area: phonetics and phonology in the help of problems of articulation, aphasic conditions and language teaching to deaf children; the same goes for other areas of grammar, *e.g.* in developing foreign language programs, not only for schools but also for immigrant workers and their families; semantics and pragmatics in the analysis of persuasive, manipulative and discriminatory use of language; and the same for stylistics and rhetorics. In brief, from the classroom we should more often, both in teaching and research, go to the

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courtroom, to offices, business firms, hospitals and other 'total' institutions. Not to mention the well-known so-called linguistic 'deficits', or rather, social differences in language use which determine so many problems in our educational institutions, problems mostly located with the language or even intelligence of the socially deprived instead of with our own attitudes and schooling programs.

Clearly, a socially relevant way of teaching literature will have more modest applications. Yet, such programs are possible. Let me make some suggestions, which need of course further elaboration.

The first task in this area is of course the adequate formation of language and literature teachers themselves. If only they are taught to be able to make explicit the important ideologies with which literature is used and talked about, if they are able to show how literature can be understood and analyzed by any pupil, and not only interpreted by the 'gifted' ones, if they are able to show how a creative use of language, narrative representations, play, *etc.*, can be directly linked to the interests, emotions, dreams, *etc.* of the young readers, and if, finally, they can show how literature works in the social context, literature could perhaps play the role it should have in the cultural context. And then, integrated in a more embracing program of a language and communication curriculum, it would allow the teacher and his pupils to also critically analyze and evaluate the advertisements in the newspaper or on TV, the manipulative nature of propaganda or the so-called 'objective' news show. Because the typical stylistic and rhetorical 'tricks' will so often be similar, whether used in the 'esthetic' or in the persuasive context.

Secondly, a relevant poetics would be the necessary basis for the formation of literary critics, who would be aware not only of the mechanisms underlying new kinds of literature, but also of the socio-cultural conditions of their own evaluation and the use of literature in society.

Thirdly, a socially relevant poetics would urge towards a broadening of the usual boundaries of our literary province. It would show that our textbooks, both at school and in our universities, should not only contain 'western' literatures, but also examples of texts with a similar form and/or function in other countries and cultures, not in the least of the countries of the third world which are also culturally colonized by our books and TV. The same holds for the literatures of our sub-cultures and minorities, as we can see — a bit late — in the black, indian, women or homosexual literature courses in (a few) universities, *e.g.* in the USA. Whatever the so-called 'liberal' views of so many of my colleagues may be, it still occurs that they are scornful about and reluctant to introduce and integrate such courses or at least the systematically suppressed texts into their courses or textbooks. It shows that their knowledge of literature is superficial, because they ignore the profound relationships between literary structures, literary acceptance and cultural power.

Closely related would be a re-evaluation of the relevance of (also our own) popular cultures — and not only of the myths and rituals or narratives of the well-known 'primitive' cultures which have been the object of research for the anthropologist and the structural analyst. One should realize that from the point of view

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of scholarly analysis and understanding there is no difference between a poem and pop song as an object for our attention: if these are different, textually, this should be *shown*, and if they are different, contextually, it should be made explicit how and why. Studying 'high literature' alone is like doing sociology of the higher middle class alone. If we do not realize permanently that what most people read for fun is most certainly *not* what we consider to be literature, our theoretical poetics would be very poor indeed. And if *norms* are involved, about 'good' and 'bad' literature, these should not simply be imposed by authority, but first of all analyzed themselves. And if serious personal and social aims could be achieved by a systematic reading of such so-called 'good' literature, we had better devise a didactics which brings about such attitudes. At least if these attitudes are not the western, white, middle class, male . attitudes about 'good' literature.

Finally, we should realize what the particular socio-political role of literature itself could or even should be. Typically, literature is taught passively, at least in many countries: few countries have 'creative writing' programs in the framework of higher education. The ideology involved here is that literature is art, and therefore the work of the artist, and to be an artist is to be 'gifted', to be inimitable, and so on. Thus, literature is passively admired, not actively produced. One of the social consequences is that literature is very seldom used in order to represent or criticize socio-political problems, except again by an occasional author. But also here sanctions play a role. It is well-known, and my analysis of Dutch literature text books confirms this, that for instance socially critical, let alone socialist or communist, literary texts are evaluated much lower or even fully ignored, whatever their structural properties. The alleged criterion: such literature is only temporarily or locally relevant, and hence not eternal and hence not so much literary. Except for the numerous counterexamples, such a position implies that the *values* of literature are only based on esthetic grounds, and not also on ethical or more strictly socio-political grounds. A clear example is the actual difference between Dutch and German literature: most Dutch literature is politically and socially harmless, whereas the greatest German writers, Heinrich Böll first of all, are actively participating, also with novels, plays and poems, in the fierce debate around the decline of democratic and liberal principles in Western-Germany in the last ten years. In fact, much of the best literature of our time draws its power precisely from a clear social and political stance: see the literatures of Latin America. And such literatures at the same time show that a serious critical approach need not only take the simple form of 'socialist realism'. I strongly believe that the student and the teacher of literature, and literature itself, will continue to have a serious function in society only if they will be able to satisfy some of the criteria which have been sketched above.

At this point I am at the end of my, admittedly superficial, analysis of the discipline and the teaching of literature in our schools and universities. For most of the major topics a monograph would be justified to deal with the intricacies of the analysis.



Until now the survey of my experiences and evaluations of the discipline of poetics has been focusing on the various properties of the academic context of the study of literature and the deep-rooted, often ideological, preconceptions about literature and its theory. This means that in my opinion we should not only have a debate between different theoretical orientations in the study of literature, but also an analysis of the very foundations of such a study. I hereby do *not* refer to the methodological or meta-theoretical foundations but to the academic, didactic and social foundations. To elaborate a more adequate theory is fine, but if it is built on the same narrow-minded or ideological basis we will hardly be able to establish a more fundamental renewal of our discipline.

## 6. The theoretical framework

After the important preliminaries about the 'context' of the study of literature, we may now try to draw some consequences for the development of theoretical frameworks in the discipline of poetics. At several points in the previous pages I have already suggested where I think traditional literary scholarship is inadequate or where more recent theories are also misguided or incomplete. Of course, one single paper cannot possibly provide a full, well-founded, critical analysis of the various directions of research. So, my further remarks will also necessarily remain rather global. Moreover, I will not proceed to a critical investigation of extant 'schools', but will rather take the systematics of poetics as my starting point, indicating what in my opinion *should* be done, as may be expected in the speech act of advice.

### *The scope of poetics*

It has long been self-evident that poetics (*Literaturwissenschaft*) has literature' or literary texts' as its object of teaching and research. This tacit assumption underlies both traditional and structural poetics. I think, however, that this assumption is not self-evident at all, and that it is either too vague or wrong. So, let me try to ask some relevant questions and propose some more precise answers.

First of all, it should be well-known by now that the set of literary texts is fuzzy. The first reason for this fuzziness is that there are no decisive textual properties which, alone, make a text literary (see below). Secondly, we should distinguish between an *ex post factum* analysis of the structural properties of literary texts which have already been *accepted* as literary, and the more general analysis of relations between textual properties and the various contextual characteristics, *e.g.* the processes which precisely determine under what conditions a given text will be acceptable as 'literary' in a given culture. Thirdly, it is well-known that certain texts which were not at all intended to 'be' or to 'function' as literature by their author or by the contemporary reading public, are later admitted to the literary canon (*cf.*

for instance some texts of 18th century French philosophers). Fourthly, we have seen in previous sections that there is little *a priori* reason not to include also those kinds of texts which according to their intended pragmatic functions and some textual properties also have a literary' nature, such as *Trivialliteratur*, children's stories, songs, popular tales, *etc.* In other words, there is little theoretical reason to only study those texts which, for various reasons, have been accepted as 'real' literature by critics, textbook writers and professors. What should be decisive are on the one hand the textual properties and on the other hand the typical functions (*e.g.* esthetic, but also others) of the texts. Resuming some of the other objections against this classical conception about the object and scope of the study of literature, it should be stressed in the fifth place that the phenomenon of literature' does not only include an open set of texts, but also all kinds of communicational aspects: conditions of production, processes of reading, understanding, memorizing, and various socio-cultural conditions of use, evaluation, *etc.*

Resuming these objections, then, we may say that the object of poetics is a set of cultural practices, in which texts are produced and used, under a certain number of textual and contextual conditions. A subset of these texts will be those usually called literary', whereas another subset are those which have similar social functions. Thus, the very process by which a text is produced, read and above all accepted as a literary text is also a legitimate, and in fact very important, object for research in poetics. We will see below what kind of contextual conditions, *e.g.* pragmatic ones, determine the inclusion of a subset of texts — and their communicative contexts — which are not called literary but which function in a similar way in different (sub-)cultures or social classes. If we would take the culturally and historically variable criterion of literary acceptance as our main, but implicit, criterion for the delimitation of the object of poetics, we inevitably run into trouble: would a novel or poem (say written by a well-known literary' author) not 'be' literature, or object for poetics, until it has been read and accepted by the various cultural institutions determining its acceptance? There are other reasons not to adopt that strategy.

In linguistics we have had a similar 'normative' or 'ideal' approach: grammars should enumerate the set of 'grammatical' sentences of the language — even although 'grammatical' and 'acceptable' may be far from identical. The criterion, now, is no longer (only) what people judge to be grammatical or not, but rather how they actually speak. This empirically more warranted criterion should, I think, also hold for the study of literature: the acceptance of a text as literature' is one criterion — and itself object and problem for analysis — but what people actually read, how texts function in the social context, *etc.* is a better criterion.

Hence the scope is first of all the total communication process, including both text and context, and second also those texts which have similar structures and functions. Of course, we might leave this latter subset to a more general discipline of discourse studies or semiotics, but we have seen that there is no decisive criterion for literariness' which will allow us to make a clear distinction between the two

sets. So, let us also study everyday stories, tales, jokes, songs, children's stories, *Trivialliteratur, comics, etc.* I am sure that the mechanisms of 'real' literary practices will become much clearer to us.

### *The aims of poetics*

Having established the very scope of a rather 'broad' discipline of poetics, being part of a larger (inter-)discipline of discourse studies (*Textwissenschaft*), we should more in particular specify some of its aims.

One of the aims of traditional literary scholarship was the 'interpretation' of individual literary texts, an aim which has certain philological implications. Associated to this aim was the usual criterion that such texts should also be assigned an evaluation. In other words, literary scholarship should explain why one text is 'better', from an esthetic point of view, than another text.

Although we have signalled before that such aims are still alive in much actual work on literature, it has been superseded by different aims in more recent theoretical approaches. Thus, structural poetics, for instance, has emphasized the description of literariness', that is the account of the conditions which make a text literary, as compared to other kinds of discourse. A variant of this aim is the 'generative' aim of enumerating and structurally describing the set of actual and possible literary texts (of a given culture). These aims are certainly advances, but they are not fully adequate as yet. Let me enumerate a few of the legitimate aspects of these aims first.

Important, first of all, is the emphasis on more *general* properties of (sub-)sets of (literary) texts. Our understanding of literature is simply not the sum of our 'Interpretations' of individual texts. What we need is insight into general principles, rules, phenomena or problems, *e.g.* holding for the modern novel or renaissance drama. Secondly, such a general understanding should be based on *structural* descriptions. Characteristic of a structural description is for instance a distinction between levels or dimensions of a text, the distinction between different categories, units, rules of 'composition' (syntax), rules of interpretation (semantics) and rules of use (pragmatics). Some of these aims have been pursued in formalist and structuralist poetics of the last fifty, and especially the last fifteen, years. Structural analyses have been given of simple narratives (*e.g.* folktales) and sometimes, less systematically, of poetry. This work, however, is far from complete. The structural analyses are limited to only a few kinds of (literary or semi-literary) discourse types, the analyses are far from explicit, the levels of analysis are still not explicitly distinguished (*e.g.* Propp's functions are both syntactic and semantic, and the distinction between semantic and narrative structures is still rather vague), rules and constraints have been formulated but also in a theoretically inadequate way, and so on. In short, our general insight deriving from structural analysis is still both fragmentary and methodologically unsatisfactory, although the advances with respect to traditional literary scholarship are obvious.

There are however many properties of literary discourse which have been discussed in traditional literary scholarship which need further structural analysis. An example is the systematic analysis of perspective (point of view) in narrative discourse, which constituted a central topic in the classical theory of the novel and which has been taken up again in more recent discussions, *e.g.* in France. More in general however such a structural analysis of further interesting properties of (literary) discourse should be framed within a more inclusive theory of discourse, in which for instance the notion of event and action description, levels and completeness of descriptions, local and global coherence, *etc.* play a role. More specifically it should be made explicit how such properties can or cannot be accounted for in terms of the categories, rules and levels of linguistic theories (grammars) of discourse. Thus, it should be specified in which respect the phenomenon of 'perspective' is semantic and/or pragmatic.

From this brief discussion about the advances made by structural poetics some more general conclusions may be drawn about the aims of poetics. Our first aim, then is a *description* of actual or possible literary texts, including the kind of texts which are not usually called literature but have similar functions. This description should have a more or less *general* nature, *i.e.* hold for sets of texts of a particular type, period or culture. The description should be *explicit* and *systematic*, that is, be formulated in inter-subjective terms, structural categories, units, rules and other descriptive principles, and should pertain to all relevant phenomena and structures of literary texts, and not, *ad hoc*, to only a few selected aspects of such texts. For instance, in the traditional theory of the novel, the 'theory' was limited to some few properties of narrative such as 'time', 'space', 'perspective', 'characters', *etc.* without explicit definitions, a theoretical framework, about the respective textual units or levels in terms of which such phenomena could be formulated. In quite another sense we have observed above that also the structural analysis of narrative has been neglecting important properties of narrative, limiting itself to so-called 'simple' narratives. We should however distinguish between intentional descriptive limitations and inherent limitations. It is a sound strategy in any discipline to begin with an account of 'simpler' structures and to see how the theory can be extended to the more complex, 'interesting' phenomena. The general nature of a structural analysis of narrative in principle also allows extension to more complex stories, whereas traditional theories of the novel, although they make interesting observations, are inherently limited because they have not and cannot in principle define the very notion of narrative.

Systematic descriptions of literary texts should be based on a *theory*. The categories, rules, units, *etc.* need to be defined in a more general way, and may not be invented *ad hoc* for one or only a few texts. Hence, if we want to achieve descriptive adequacy in poetics, we should also develop theories. Such theories should satisfy the usual methodological criteria, *e.g.* of coherence, explicitness, systematicity, *etc.* Since they are about literature, and hence about an empirical (cultural) phenomenon, the theories should be empirically founded, *viz.* allow

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adequate descriptions on any text of the type the theory is about, testing of hypotheses, and be sensible to refuting data and observations. One should add that the theory should also be empirically relevant, in the sense that it should not (only) be about marginal or trivial properties of the objects studied, but about those properties which implicitly or explicitly are found important and problematic.

At the moment we have fragments of theories, *e.g.* theories of metrics, narrative, language use, or details of these, even if these fragments do not yet satisfy all the criteria of adequate theories. Besides the systematic extension of current theories towards interesting problems, phenomena or domains of literature, it must therefore also be our aim in the future to devise theories which really satisfy the usual criteria. Although I think this aim is important I would also like to express a certain reserve: if we have the choice between formalization of a theory fragment about relatively marginal aspects of literary texts, on the one hand, and extension of a more or less informal, but systematic, 'theory' with a substantially new component, I would at the moment prefer the latter approach, mainly because of the poor actual state of a 'young' discipline as (structural) poetics, and because of the necessary descriptive adequacy. This latter argument is important because with such a descriptive power we can convince literary scholars that our approach makes sense, instead of only being a 'formal exercise'.

As we have seen in the previous sections, both description and theories should not be about literary texts alone, but also about *litera?*, *communication*. The same remarks hold, therefore, for the account of various literary contexts, to which we will more specifically turn below.

Besides developing theories, and systematically describing (sets of) texts, I think there is a third main aim of poetics, *viz.* its *applications*. Describing literature, and making theories, should not only lead to the satisfaction of the interests and curiosity of scholars but should also, I think, be useful in a broader framework. I have discussed this framework at length in the first part of this paper: poetics should in education provide insights, knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, norms and abilities, *etc.* to students and others, which they can use in their personal and social contexts, *viz.* in reading and teaching literature. The same holds for applications in literary criticism, work in the media and with publishers, and the cultural situation in general. At the moment I think that especially the didactic/pedagogical applications need our attention: we should develop curricula and write textbooks which make sense for the pupils and students in our schools and universities. We have observed that there is a great lack in this respect in our cultural education. The many properties of such a 'relevant' teaching of literature have been discussed above and need not be repeated here.

The three major aims of poetics sketched here, *viz.* the theoretical, descriptive and applied, are very much interrelated. Without theory formation, no description (and *vice versa*), and without empirical knowledge, which is theoretically formulated, about the structures and functions of literature, no serious applications, *e.g.* in education, are possible.

*Theories of literary texts*

Since this paper, and this journal, are biased towards 'theory' I will focus on the theoretical aims of the discipline, while emphasizing the whole academic, educational and social context of theoretical poetics as it has been described earlier in this paper.

Roughly speaking, then, theories of literature will have two main components, which should be interrelated, *viz.* theories of literary *texts* and theories of literary *contexts*, together forming integrated theories of literary *communication*. Let me say something about theories of literary texts first.

Although each discipline of course has a certain degree of autonomy, the phenomena which constitute the object of the theoretical and descriptive activities in such a discipline will very often also be the object of other disciplines, or have properties which are accounted for (also) by other disciplines. The same holds of course for poetics. Literature is a cultural and social phenomenon, and hence also should be studied by anthropologists, sociologists, art historians, *etc.* Similarly, literature is defined in terms of discourse, language use and communication, and hence will, at least partly, be the object for linguistics, discourse studies, psychology, social psychology and mass communication research. In fact, there is very little about literature which would constitute the exclusive field of exploration of the literary scholar. So-called 'specific structures' of literary texts have for a long time been the centre of such a field, especially since the other disciplines have only marginally or superficially been paying attention to literature. This is certainly true for linguistics, so the claim for this field seems valid. Yet, we now witness that both old and new (sub-)disciplines are at least disputing a share of this domain: rhetorics, stylistics, discourse studies and semiotics in general have also been paying attention to all kinds of discourse types and their 'specific' or 'characteristic' structures. In fact, as we know, new developments in the description of literary texts may even come from such neighboring disciplines, to wit: the structural analysis of narrative being borrowed from anthropology and shaped and developed further after the methodological example of structural linguistics.

Not only because of my present orientation, but rather for systematic reasons which in fact brought me to that field, I therefore would suggest that a theory of literary texts should be based on a more general *theory of discourse*, as it is developed within the new interdiscipline of *discourse studies*. There are several

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pointless if a literary theorist would develop theories for properties of discourse which hold for language use and discourse in general, and thereby sometimes re-invent the wheel years after its frequent use in neighboring fields. Thus, the major levels, categories, units of analysis, holding for each discourse should be left to a general theory of discourse. The definition of 'coherence', for instance, at the semantic level, and all kinds of textual operations at the rhetorical and stylistic dimensions, do not specifically belong to literary theory. All too often literary

scholars, due to their isolation from other disciplines and phenomena, have postulated typically literary' properties which are just properties of discourse in general or properties of discourse types which are not only functioning in literary contexts. There are two conspicuous examples. The theories of narrative have often ignored that stories are a normal discourse type within everyday conversation, and many aspects of narrative categories, action description, style, point of view, *etc.* also are relevant for these 'natural' stories. The second example is so-called 'poetic language', a notion very familiar in the formalist-structuralist tradition, and being made explicit in terms of modern grammars, as I myself have tried to do for years. Of course, it has been realized that at least some of the properties of this 'poetic language' also characterize other discourse types, but this was often not much more than lip service. We should have devised a more general theory of certain types of language use, verbal operations, *etc.* and give specific examples from various types of discourse. Given such a theory, an additional theory of context would then be able to specify what the particular functions and effects of such types of language use are, *e.g.* in the literary or in the advertisement kind of communication. We should realize that, at least at the moment, there are very few linguistic forms which are exclusively used in what we usually call literature. Empirically speaking we are therefore at most able to claim that such forms are statistically more frequent, or differently distributed, *etc.* in literary texts than in other kinds of discourse. But this at the same time implies that, structurally speaking, such forms are neither a sufficient nor a necessary criterion for a text to be (taken as) literature.

In other words, one should conclude that a large part of the job of the literary theorist can be taken over by the theorist of discourse (or by the linguist), or at least that a certain domain is shared. What is more specifically left over is not easy to delimitate: even such fields as prosody and metrics could also be more general because they involve non-literary discourses, at least in other cultures and in other periods of our own culture. Nevertheless we would fall into another extreme if we would fully deny any typical or specific structures of literary discourse. At least if we take the scope of poetics to be wide enough, as we have been doing earlier in this paper, there will be no quarrel between 'high' and 'low' literature as soon as we want to describe the typical structures of literary texts. Secondly, 'specific' structures do not come alone. Even if, as such, some linguistic forms may also occur in other types of texts, they need not be part of the same over-all textual structure. If we add certain types of language use with certain narrative structures, then the over-all structure may well be more typically 'literary': we have certain forms of everyday stories, but language use and narrative complexity of a novel will distinguish clearly between such types of narratives. Then, we should bear in mind that particular structures may function differently in different pragmatic, cognitive, social and cultural contexts, as we will see below. It is in that sense that so-called literary structures' have often been assessed, not as literary *sui generis*, but rather as the actually observed properties of texts which, maybe for other, contextual, reasons are considered to be and functioning as literature.

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It cannot be my aim in this paper to even summarize the possible 'specific' structures of literary texts; here I am only concerned with the general aims and principles of literary study, occasionally giving some examples of phenomena or problems involved in such a study. The upshot of what was said above is that as literary theorists we should be more modest in claiming that certain properties of discourse are literary, and start collaborating with the linguist and the theorist of discourse in order to develop more general theories. In that perspective it may turn out that certain textual phenomena are typical (albeit not exclusive) for literature, especially when taken into combination within the textual structure as a whole.

We have seen above that literary theories and descriptions should be systematic. For a theory of literary texts this means, among other things, that the various structures we assume to be characteristic for certain types of literary texts, should be described 'at' the respective *levels* or *dimensions* of discourse and language use as we know these from linguistics and discourse studies. In this way, a serious theory of prosody or metrics should be explicitly formulated in relation to phonetic, phono- (or grapho-)logical, morphological and syntactic structures of language. What we further need, though, is an additional theory describing the abstract metrical structures as they are mapped on the structures of these levels. That is, linguistically speaking, at least according to a 'general' grammar for a language, certain phonological regularities (of syllable length, stress or pitch, pauses, *etc.*) are 'arbitrary': they are not interpreted semantically, but 'free variations'. Metrically, however, they are the manifestations of structures which have their own categories, units and rules. This very example also shows that certain phenomena which may occur in certain literary discourse types of certain periods may affect several levels at the same time: prosodical/metrical structures are showing in sound, lay-out, word forms and sentence forms, and may sometimes even be related to certain semantic constraints.

The same holds for narrative structures and other linguistic levels. In principle, narrative structures should be accounted for in an independent sub-theory, with its own categories, units and rules. But such abstract narrative structures may be exhibited both in natural language and in other semiotic systems. For narrative discourse, then, we must show how the narrative structure is manifested in textual structures, *e.g.* of syntax, semantics and perhaps even pragmatics.

The third example are all kinds of so-called 'rhetorical' operations, *i.e.* 'figures' mapped onto structures of several textual levels: repetitive operations (phonological, syntactic and semantic ones) or contrastive operations, to name only these. Also here we find certain kind of 'additional' structures, which may be characterized in a grammar-independent way, but which should then be mapped onto (text-)grammatical structures.

The details of these three examples do not matter here, only the theoretical upshot: a structural description of texts takes place at several levels; but not all relevant structures are accounted for in terms of the usual linguistic subtheories (syntax, semantics, *etc.*) but may require additional discourse theories (*e.g.* theories



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of meter, narrative, rhetorical operations) of which the structures should be systematically related to the linguistic structures of the text; these mappings may affect various levels at the same time.

Although we have been doing structural analysis for many years now, and although the same may be said about linguistics, textlinguistics and the more general theory of discourse, I am still astonished at the limited amount of knowledge we have about the more subtle properties of discourse, both literary and other types. The same holds for the very framework of description: above we have made some rough suggestions about how to combine textlinguistic grammars with other theories for structural description, but the precise formal interrelationships between such (sub-)theories are far from clear.

At this point some more should be said about the well-known 'poetic language' controversy. As might have become clear from earlier remarks in this paper, and from a growing awareness in poetics for contextual factors, there is no serious way in which the notion of 'poetic language' could be defined: no language forms are exclusively used in literature, or *not* used in literature, or even in poetry. Similarly, all kinds of 'deviations' from grammatical rules are neither sufficient nor necessary in literary/poetic texts. Thus, it has become more appropriate to speak about *variations* of language use, which not only allow variable applications of the rules for different functional reasons, to be accounted for in stylistics, but also (intentional) use to different rules, yielding the so-called 'deviant structures'. Since hardly anybody in structural poetics would still defend the extreme forms of the 'poetic language' hypothesis, the controversy may be considered as solved. I suggested above though that we should not fall into the other extreme and think that certain discourse types, including literary ones, cannot in principle be characterized *also* in terms of typical forms of language use, of course together with an account of their cognitive and social functions. Here it should be noticed that (proto-)typical does not mean that certain properties are necessary or sufficient, but only that they may regularly be expected, *i. e.* that they are conventional. Thus, both the textual and the contextual properties will determine the conditions under which a reader will assume that a text is meant to be taken as a literary text. Although the notion of 'non-poetic' language is even more nonsensical, as such, than the notion of 'poetic language', we should bear in mind that language use and the use of different kinds of discourse induces schematic, strategic or even rule-governed expectancies in language users. In this way, the naive reader will 'recognize' the modern poem also for its funny syntax and semi-nonsensical meanings, referential particularities and pragmatic specificity. The reader will on the one hand make a differentiation between different types of discourse, according to their structures and functions, and on the other hand will operate global classifications of discourses. In that case he might use such terms as 'normal' and 'abnormal' ('funny', *etc.*). An empirically based theory of literature, then, should also account for these kinds of intuitions in language use and language evaluation. It seems relevant therefore to specify for each (literary) discourse type whether prototypical uses of language (at some level of

description) are associated with it. At this level we may arrive at interesting generalizations, not at the level of literature (of all times and cultures) in general, at least as far as the textual properties are concerned, but rather for particular types of literary discourse being used in certain periods and certain cultures.

#### *Theories of literary contexts*

It has been emphasized that the object of poetics is not individual works of art, a set of literary texts, or textual literariness, but a complex *socio-cultural system*, involving participants with certain roles and functions (writers, readers, critics, professors, *etc.*), activities of these participants (reading, talk, commenting upon, explaining, writing, *etc.*), and objective results of such activities (discourses), and finally a number of rules, conventions, strategies, *etc.* determining these activities and, indirectly, the discourses resulting from them. In other words: no literary theory can be adequate without a number of theories about the literary context. Besides further work on the textual, linguistic, analysis of discourse types used in literary communication, then, we should expect in the near future that more and more attention will be paid to the *use* of literature. That is, we need to specify the pragmatic, cognitive, emotional, social, historical, cultural conditions for the functioning of literature. The lesson we should have learned from our mistakes in the application of structural linguistics should again be drawn here: there are no sufficient or necessary properties of literature' in any of these contexts. That is, the theory of literature will have to assume that only when taking into account all levels of structural analysis and all contexts of use, a more or less empirically warranted account of what people (in some context) call literature' may be given. Let me finally make some remarks about some of these (future) theories, that is specify some aims and problems.

#### *The pragmatics of literary discourse*

Context first of all plays a role in a pragmatic component of a literary theory. Note though that 'context' here is merely an abstraction of the 'real' cognitive or social contexts. Pragmatic contexts consist only of a number of abstract features which are used in the formulation of the appropriateness conditions of the speech act(s) which are performed by the utterance of a text in a given context. In other words, pragmatics, just like syntax and semantics, is about the discourse, but now not taken as a verbal object but as a linguistic *action*. Instead of well-formedness, or meaningfulness (or truth value), pragmatics specifies the appropriateness of such discourse-actions. Whereas semantic interpretations are given with respect to an abstract 'model structure' (possible worlds, individuals and their properties, *etc.*), pragmatic interpretations, *i.e.* the assignment of a particular speech act or illocutionary force to a sentence or text, are given with respect to an abstract context. Yet, although pragmatics is an abstract component of a 'grammar' ? (in the wide

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cense) of discourse, it at the same time establishes the link with various empirical contexts: it takes the text as an action, of a speaker/writer for a listener/hearer, and already specifies some properties of these language users in order to account for the set of specific social actions we call 'speech acts' (asserting, promising, threatening, *etc.*). The abstract nature of pragmatics may be compared to that of semantics: semantics is about meaning and interpretation, and hence about 'conceptual' structures, but is an abstraction of the real cognitive processes and representations taking place in production and comprehension; in the same way, pragmatics is about linguistic acts, but does not account for all kinds of cognitive and social details of talk or writing/reading in the actual socio-cultural context.

Just as for any kind of specific theory of discourse, the theory of literary discourse needs a pragmatic component. In several papers I have made clear that a pragmatic account of literary discourse is by no means unproblematical. At least, current philosophical and linguistic models are certainly not fit to handle the subtleties of discourse pragmatics in general: what about the speech act(s) being performed by discourses as a whole? Besides a notion of sequences of speech acts, we therefore also had to introduce macrospeech acts (just like semantic macrostructures in texts). But although much of the prototypical nature of literature lies in its particular 'function', it did not seem wise to adopt a special literary 'speech act'. All appropriateness conditions one could formulate for such a (global) speech act — including the well-known Jakobsonian one (more attention for the message itself) — would at least also hold for all kinds of other discourse/action types, such as jokes, stories, *etc.* I therefore introduced the notion of *ritual* speech act, being a speech act defined in terms of conditions under which both literature and those other discourses are used. In other cultures and periods, in fact, the ritual speech act and the discourse types were not distinguished as we do now: 'high literature', as we know, is a rather recent cultural convention. The specific functions associated with this ritual speech act are well-known (hedonistic, esthetic, *etc.*): ritual speech acts are — pragmatically speaking — accomplished 'for their own sake', that is they do not primarily or directly have the aim to change knowledge or opinions, influence actions, *etc.* beyond the communication framework itself (but may do so indirectly). Remember: this is an abstract analysis of the pragmatic context of literary discourse types. These will vary across cultures, in history, and in different social and cognitive situations: actual intentions and interpretations are not dealt with here.

I do not think that a pragmatic component will be a 'decisive' component in an adequate literary theory. The appropriateness conditions, although not unproblematical from an empirical point of view, are well-known. At least, pragmatics has helped us to realize that literature, even in the fixed written form accompanying it in our culture, should also be seen in terms of action(s) of social participants in a communicative framework. Interesting for literary theory, I should think, are especially the consequences of such an observation for the description of the literary text itself. It has appeared, also for other types of discourse, that many proper-

ties at several levels require pragmatic interpretation: the attitude and intentions of the writer with respect to the reader will find its manifestations in the text, and the same will hold for the (indirect or secondary) illocutionary functions at the local and the global level which are to be assigned to the literary text. An application of the more general pragmatics of discourse is relevant in the description of represented discourses, *e.g.* dialogues, in literary texts. Instructive for instance is a comparison between 'real' conversations and conversations in novels. In general I would suggest not to stay too long within the rather abstract scope of pragmatics, but rather to try to work out theories about the actual cognitive, social and cultural conditions, conventions, functions, effects, *etc.* of literature.

#### *Literature and cognition*

I expect much of the renewal of poetics in the coming years to come from cognitive and social psychology. This renewal will be both substantial and methodological. The substantial insights will be about the ways we read, comprehend, memorize and (re-)produce literary texts, how they change our knowledge, opinions, attitudes, evaluations, *etc.* The methodological advance will on the one hand be the usual experimental orientation of current psychology, and on the other hand the simulative orientation of artificial intelligence. Recent work in cognitive psychology about the processes underlying discourse comprehension, research in which I have participated myself, has formulated a number of problems and has proposed certain models which I think will be very important for our understanding of the ways a literary text is read and understood. Instead of vague speculations about reading and interpretation of literature we will have detailed insights into the various phases, levels, memory representations, retrieval conditions and effects of a literary discourse processing. As is also the case for the structural analysis of literary texts, we should first of all assume that the general principles are the same as those for discourse in general. Readers of literature simply have the same memory limitations, the same basic strategies of interpretation, and the same fundamental processes for the representation and retrieval of information as for processing complex information in general. Interesting for a theory of literary discourse processing however are the more specific cognitive processes which depend on different textual structures and different social functions of literary communication.

We shall want to know how a reader is able to construct a semantic representation of highly complex narratives such as novels, how knowledge of the literary system, of other literary texts, and of the world, determines such representations, how interests, opinions and attitudes are involved, *etc.* Besides global thematic coherence (macrostructures), the specific ritual functions of literature will induce attention for and hence representation of typical language use or stylistically variable representations of actions and events. Short literary texts (*e.g.* poems) will

be shown to require different processing, involving more depth of processing at the local level. Semi-grammatical (syntactic and semantic) sentences and discourse will require specific strategies of interpretation and representation. And the differences in social functions of literature will determine both storage and retrieval because the 'use' of information from literature may be different from other kinds of discourse. Experiments should be carried out with different types of literary discourse, in different reading contexts with different kinds of readers. This means that the literary theorist should collaborate with the psychologist in order to develop processing models involving both a detailed structural analysis of these discourse types and the specific demands of the context and their consequent processes of comprehension and representation in memory.

Results of this theoretical and experimental research should be linked to results from work being done on the various *emotional/affective* aspects of literary discourse processing. Besides factors of the 'cognitive set' of readers, such as knowledge, beliefs, opinions and attitudes, reading and comprehension will involve personality variables and have effects on feelings, evaluative opinions, and their consequent activities. Explicit models of discourse processing at these levels do not yet exist, but there is much experimental evidence on which such models could be built.

The *social psychology* of literature should also be one of the central areas of research in empirical poetics in the near future. A first issue in that domain is acquisition and socialization, *viz.* of the literary system(s) and of readers of literature, respectively. It should be investigated how language users get acquainted with literary discourse, *e.g.* in educational contexts, how they learn to talk about it, in which situations they use it and how groups of literature users participate in literary communication (including communication about literature). The formation and change of literary conventions, the processes of acceptance (and resistance) are another object for research of such a social psychology of literature. And finally, closely linked to cognitive psychology, this branch of research will investigate how the reading public may be influenced by literary discourse. Knowledge, opinions and ideologies are also formed and changed due to the reading of literary texts, and attitudes are involved in processes of social evaluation of certain (types of) literary texts. Apart from occasional speculations and observations, this domain is still practically unexplored. Yet it seems to be the central domain for the empirical assessment of the so-called 'functions' of literature, because it is the meeting place of both the cognitive/emotive and the social functions of literary communication.

#### *Literature and society*

More work has been done on the social and cultural contexts of literature. More or less systematic theories on the relations between literary texts and social contexts, however, are still lacking. In fact, the area is too vast for an integrated theory, so we should do better and split it up into more manageable (sub-)theories.

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At the end of this paper it may have become obvious that I think that the socio-cultural theories of literature will be the bases for the other theoretical components we have been discussing. Here again, such theories should be developed within the broader framework of sociological theories of language use, discourse, communication and art. We have observed that literature' is not simply a set of texts, but a system of 'practices' around such texts, and this system is inherently social. Literature is written, published, bought, read, and talked about in various social situations, of which the typical participants (with their roles, duties and rights) accomplish a number of (communicative) actions under a number of social conventions. After a period of literary socialization, some members of a culture know these conventions. Besides the usual macro-sociological research about which kind of readers (social class, age, sex, education, *etc.*) read what kind of literature, we should more in particular investigate the social situations in which literature is used: how conversation about literature is structured, how roles and functions of participants determine opinions, talk and other behavior of other participants in such situations, how institutional rules and conventions determine what literature is read and how it is used and talked about (*e.g.* in schools and universities). The preliminary remarks made in the beginning of this paper provide ample examples of issues to be dealt with in such an investigation.

Parallel to sociolinguistics, we may finally, and without being exhaustive, mention the more particular socio-poetic research about the relations between literary text structures and the various properties of the social context of literature. Different social situations will not only determine when and how literature can be used in general, but also which types (genres) of literary texts can be used, and what their possible structures are. At this point we should get an explanatory answer to the macro-sociological problem why only certain social groups will read certain kinds of poetry or novels. Important also for a *cultural* and *historical* analysis of literature is a sociological explanation of the use of certain linguistic, stylistic or other textual structures. And conversely, it should be investigated how variations of language use are *represented* in literary discourse, according to the social situations and their participants referred to by a narrative. More in general it will be interesting to investigate how various socially functional styles of different discourse types can be investigated with regard to literary texts.

All the issues and problems briefly mentioned above will also require an analysis of their historical and cultural dimensions: variations across cultures, developments in different periods, both under the influence of the historical development of the literary system itself and of the relevant socio-cultural factors.

From these few final remarks, which need not be further specified here, it may again be concluded that structural poetics is by no means limited to the analysis of literary texts, but that it essentially also involves the study of the relationships between literary discourse structures and the respective contexts in which they function. Whereas, admittedly, the emphasis until now has been on the textual components of the theory, the near future will certainly stress the important con-

textual factors of literary communication.

Returning to the remarks made in the beginning of this paper about the social and academic context of the study of literature, we may expect that this investigation of the whole socio-cultural system of literature will also provide some insight into the didactic and social applications of the theory. We can only seriously teach literature if we know about the cognitive and social functions and effects of reading and talking about literature. And we can only integrate literature teaching in a more embracing curriculum of language use, discourse, communication and art, if we have more general insights into the various cognitive and social contexts of these phenomena, and into the relations between structures and functions of literary discourse and those of other types of discourse.

The advice I have been giving in this paper is necessarily very global. I could not enter into the details and particular problems of the domains and theories which I think should be developed in the coming years, but only sketch some rough directions which set the aims and scope of structural poetics. From the other contributions in this special issue it may have become clear that most of my suggestions are shared by other literary theorists, so that there is some hope that soon they will be more generally accepted and that actual research can be carried out in order to realize the aims of modern poetics.

#### Reference note

More or less complete references to the many books and papers which have implicitly been discussed in this paper would require a very lengthy list. For many of these references, the reader is requested to consult the bibliography given at the end of Fowler's contribution to this issue. Many of the remarks made are substantiated in my other work in poetics, linguistics and the theory of discourse, which the reader is requested to consult for details and further references. I will here give some references to the more important of these works.

For work in structural and generative poetics (including my own) and their links with the theory and grammar of discourse, see *Some aspects of text grammars* (The Hague: Mouton, 1972), where also my earlier papers in the field are mentioned. Some of these papers were published in German translation in *Beiträge zur generativen Poetik* (Munich: Bayerischer Schulbuch Verlag, 1972).

For the action theoretical foundation of narrative theory, see Philosophy of action and theory of narrative, *Poetics* 5 (1976) 287-338.

A discussion of the pragmatics of literature is given in Poetics and pragmatics', which appeared in *Pragmatics of language and literature* (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1976) which I edited, and in 'The pragmatics of literary communication' [1977] which will appear in a collection of my papers on pragmatics: *Studies in the pragmatics of discourse* (The Hague: Mouton, 1979).

A first (elementary) application of ideas from cognitive psychology in the study of literature is given in 'cognitive Processing of Literary Discourse', *Poetics Today* 1 (1979). Since the more general text-psychological background of this application in literature often involves narratives, we may also mention: 'Recalling and summarizing complex discourse' [1975] in: K. Hólker and W. Burghardt, eds., *Text processing* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1979), and 'Semantic macrostructures and knowledge frames in discourse comprehension', in M. Just and P. Carpenter, eds., *Cognitive processes in comprehension* (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1977), and especially my work written

together with Walter Kintsch: Cognitive psychology and discourse', in: W.U. Dressler, ed., *Current trends in textlinguistics* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1977), and 'Towards a model of discourse comprehension and production', *Psychological Review* 85 (1978) 364-395. See in particular the special issue of *Poetics*, in 1980 (volume 9), on *Story comprehension* of which I am the guest-editor.

For the general textlinguistic background of this more recent work, see e.g. *Text and context* (London: Longman, 1977). A more interdisciplinary approach is taken in my Dutch introduction *Tekstwetenschap* [Discourse-Studies] (Utrecht: Het Spectrum, 1978) of which a German translation will appear with Niemeyer in Tübingen and an English one with Indiana U.P.

Another example of an interdisciplinary discussion of central problems of discourse is given in: *Macrostructures. An interdisciplinary study of global structures in discourse, interaction and cognition* (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1980).

Finally, the remarks about the teaching of literature at school, about textbooks and the ideological background of literary education are based on: *Het Literatuuronderwijs op school. Een kritische analyse* [Teaching literature at school. A critical analysis] (Amsterdam: van Genneep, 1977).

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