

Re-committing French Literary Studies.

Aesthetics, politics, ideology

In the last three decades, the transformations undergone by literary studies, and especially that of French literary studies, have followed the major current socio-cultural transformations that have taken place in Western societies.

In the early 2000s, the discussions aroused by the return of the "narration", severely affected by the semiological revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, revolved around what is soon called *contemporary extreme literature*, a sub-domain that expands quite quickly in the French academic field, but also in the study of French literature in countries such as Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and in Eastern Europe, except in Anglo-Saxon space. We are talking about an "end" to literature and the beginning of a new one, and the term *postmodern*, though little used in French, have nevertheless appeared in these debates.

1980-2000 is a period that critics characterize generally deceptively, even if the signs of a return to realism, but a critical, subversive return, did exist. Over the same years, however, the critical Anglo-Saxon paradigm began to press more and more, both in terms of discursive circulation and epistemological recalibrations, and, in particular, of institutional configurations (thus, the majority of the 13 Parisian universities have not long since come together as *Sorbonne Université*, as a result of inter-university competition worldwide).

From this point on we can talk about a re-commitment of literary studies that had already been involved in a socio-political action of change of mentality and ethos in the 1960s, but which had retired either in a nostalgic assessment or in playfulness, in the 80s and 2000s. These studies are now evolving in inextricable connection with a discourse from humanities increasingly concerned with concrete issues, both at the political and material level: the relationship between literature and everyday experience, between writing and the body, between writer and public, but also the relationship of literature with all that means life in general reconfigures literary studies

and conjugates them with what is called , first in the Anglo-Saxon space, French studies, where literature and theory work together, support or compete at times.

Throughout these transformations, two aspects concern me more than others: on the one hand, a historical and rhetorical approach at the same time to the French literary language, which is no stranger to some of Roland Barthes' projects from the 1940s to 1950s, but related, to him, to a sociology of the French language, and on the other hand the increasing weight of a certain "ecological thinking" in human sciences fuels literary studies , starting from Michel Serres and, in particular, Bruno Latour. Other aspects remain essential, of course, but they have attracted me less - postcolonial studies and feminism – although they are also closely related to literary language and ecology.

Finally, it is important to assess the extent to which these new commitments of French literary studies can allow us to hope that literature can continue to aim to remain the expression of a universal, this time much more connected to everyday life than the universal idealistic – aesthetics, for example – around which the romantic myth of literature was formed.