Literature and Sociology:

A Siamese Twins' Journey from Entwined to Estranged

Edebiyat ve Sosyoloji

Siyam ikizlerinin Sarmaş Dolaşlıktan Yabancılaşmaya Uzanan Yolculuğu

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Abstract

This paper traces the history of the concept of literature while highlighting the key moments that shaped its meaning and epistemic relationship with systematic social study in Western thought. Grounded in conceptual history, following a chronological order from antiquity to the modern era, it adopts both semasiological and onomasiological approaches. This comprehensive scope enables the analysis of different milestones in religion, philosophy, science and social thought. As Enlightenment rationality ascended, the mystical insights of poetry were derided as irrational fancies. Accordingly, pioneer sociologists – in their endeavor to achieve academic legitimacy and authority – distanced themselves from the suspect influence of belletristic styles. Before long, sociology disavowed literature entirely, denying its own foundation in literary commentary and critique. However, the emergence of new paradigms destabilized this institutional estrangement. The study reveals that literature has been intertwined with social studies in general and the genesis and development of sociology in particular. It argues that both remain inextricably linked in their endeavors to illuminate the human condition. This research ultimately postulates that the interplay between these disciplines encourages a holistic understanding of society, fostering creativity, empathy, scientific inquiry and critical thinking.

Keywords: Literature, Sociology, Conceptual history, Paradigm shifts, Interdisciplinarity, Knowledge categorization

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Öz

Bu makale, edebiyat ve sistematik sosyal çalışmalar arasındaki epistemik ilişkinin ve edebi sanatların algılarını şekillendiren Batı düşüncesindeki anahtar anları izlemektedir. Antik çağlardan modern çağlara kadar kronolojik bir sıra izleyerek, kavramsal tarih yaklaşımını benimsemektedir. Bu kapsamlı perspektif, din, felsefe, bilim ve sosyal düşüncedeki dönüm noktalarının analizine olanak sağlamaktadır. Aydınlanma döneminin akılcılığı (rasyonelliği) yükseldikçe, şiir mistik içgörüleri akıldışı (irrasyonel) fanteziler olarak alaya alındı. Buna göre, akademik meşruiyet ve yetki arayışında olan öncü sosyologlar, edebi üslupların şüpheli etkisinden uzak durmaya çaba göstermişlerdir. Çok geçmeden, sosyolojinin kendi temelinin edebi yorum ve eleştiride yattığını inkar edilerek, edebiyattan tamamen yalıtılmıştır. Fakat yeni düşünce akımlarının (paradigmaların) ortaya çıkması (yapısökümcülük, post-yapısalcılık, postmodernizm, vb.) sosyolojinin edebiyattan kopuşunu sorgulamaya başlamış ve bu kurumsal ayrımı sarsmıştır. Sonuç olarak, bu çalışma, edebiyatın genelde sosyal bilgilerle, özelde ise sosyolojinin doğuşu ve gelişimiyle sıkıca ilişkili olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Her ikisinin de insanın doğasını anlama ve aydınlatma gayretlerinde birbirlerini tamamlayıcı ve ayrılmaz bir ilişki içinde bulunduklarını savunmaktadır. Makale nihayetinde, bu disiplinler arasındaki akışkanlığın bütünsel bir toplum anlayışını teşvik ettiğini, yaratıcılığı, empatiyi, bilimsel araştırmayı ve eleştirel düşünmeyi desteklediğini öne sürmektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Edebiyat, Sosyoloji, Kavramsal tarih, Paradigma kaymaları, Disiplinlerarası, Bilgi tasnifi

Genişletilmiş Öz

Bu makale, edebiyat kavramının tarihini izleyerek, anlamını şekillendiren ve Batı düşüncesindeki sistematik sosyal çalışmalarla olan epistemik ilişkisini vurgulayan önemli anları ortaya koymaktadır. Kavramsal tarih temel alınarak antik çağlardan modern döneme kadar kronolojik bir sıra izlenirken, hem semasiyolojik hem de onomasiyolojik yaklaşımları benimsemektedir. Bu kapsamlı çerçeve, din, felsefe, bilim ve sosyal düşünce alanındaki çeşitli dönemeçlerin analizine olanak tanımaktadır.

Aydınlanma döneminde akıl süreci yükseldikçe, şiirin mistik içgörüleri irrasyonel hayaller olarak küçümsendi. Bu nedenle, öncü sosyologlar - akademik meşruiyet ve otorite elde etme çabalarında - şairane tarzların şüpheli etkisinden uzak durmaya çalıştılar. Kısa süre içinde, sosyoloji, kendi temelini tamamen reddederek, edebi yorum ve eleştiriden izole edildi.

Ancak, yeni paradigmaların ortaya çıkması bu kurumsal uzaklaşmayı sarsmıştır. Çalışma, edebiyatın genelde sosyal çalışmalarla, özelde ise sosyolojinin doğuşu ve gelişimiyle iç içe geçmiş olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. İki disiplinin de insan koşullarını aydınlatma çabalarında birbirinden ayrılamaz bir şekilde bağlı olduğunu savunmaktadır.

Sonuç olarak, bu araştırma, edebiyat ile sosyal çalışmalar arasındaki etkileşimin toplumun bütünlüklü bir anlayışını teşvik ettiğini, yaratıcılığı, empatiyi, bilimsel sorgulamayı ve eleştirel düşünmeyi desteklediğini ileri sürmektedir.

1. Introduction

> Come let us mock at the great
>
> That had such burdens on the mind
>
> And toiled so hard and late
>
> To leave some monuments behind,
>
> Nor thought of the leveling wind.
>
> [...]
>
> Mock mockers after that
>
> That would not lift a hand maybe
>
> To help good, wise or great
>
> To bar that foul storm out,
>
> For we traffic in mockery.
>
> W.B. Yeats[1] (1865-1939)

Yeats composed these verses during the fragile peace of the Great War, the "armistice" (Morelock, 2013) that preceded WWII, the greatest intellectual, political, social and moral earthquake the world witnessed since the French Revolution of 1789. It was a time of crisis[2] and an "age of mockery"; mockery of the legacy of the Age of Reason. That crisis brought renewed attention to an aspect that had long characterized the human and social sciences since their inception: the blurring of "the sacredly upheld dividing line between theory and method" (Jacobson & Poder, 2008: 19), rekindling the challenge of finding the right approach between two polar extremes – science and the "frigid, dry, insipid, and hard writings [which] must be read and devoured in the same manner as Saturn is fabled to have devoured the stones" (Montesquieu, 1752: 631) on the one hand, and imagination and the flowery emptiness of magniloquence, on the other. This blurring culminated in the rise of a number of sociologists

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[1] These verses are from the fifth of the six sections of the *Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen* poem, which Yeats first published in 1921 under the title: *Thoughts upon the Present State of the World* (Wood, 2008).

[2] From the Greek word *krisis*, which was originally used in a medical context to mean "turning point in a disease, that change which indicates recovery or death," from the Greek verb *krinein* "to separate, decide, judge, [...] sieve, or distinguish." A German term for "mid-life crisis" is *Torschlusspanik*, literally "shut-door-panic", fear of being on the wrong side of a closing door (Harper, 2022). These shadows of meaning are all implied in the use of the word "crisis" here.

(e.g., Zygmunt Bauman[3]) who merged the "prosaic sociological interpretation with more poetically inspired insights", creating a "hybridity between the magical and the real" (Jacobson & Poder, 2008:20).

At first glance, the steely social scientist analyzing data and the eccentric novelist lost in creative reveries may seem an unlikely match, but winding back the clock reveals that sociology and literature share more history than their modern divergence might suggest. They evolved not in silos but through complex exchanges, their early trajectories intertwining. In antiquity, poetry and storytelling interlaced with nascent philosophy and cosmology, seeking to systematically understand human affairs. Fiction expanded experience by universalizing singular currents. Then allegory ferried veiled social critiques past established shores.

However, as empirical science rose, the mystical insights of the poetical and the literary were increasingly pruned away and relegated to isolated limbs. Periods of compatibility gave way to deliberate distancing as rationalism and positivism took hold. Seeking legitimacy, pioneering sociologists suppressed their discipline's literary heritage in favor of "scientific" rigor. By the 20th century, literature and sociology's fracturing was complete. Yet clues to their compatibility persisted in shared social observation and worldly commentary missions.

This research traces the history of "literature" both as a word and a concept, as a field of knowledge and a way of coding knowledge, highlighting its semantic shifts over time and investigating the key moments that bifurcated the once-entangled pathways of what we call today "literature" and the systematic study of society. It focuses primarily on developments in Western thought, illuminating how broader paradigm shifts shaped the changing perceptions of literature and its relationship with knowledge production. The examination of these developments brings into focus the negotiated construction of modern disciplinary boundaries, critically challenging entrenched assumptions about the divisions between literature, the humanities and the social sciences.

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[3] Zygmunt Bauman (1925-2017) was a prominent Polish sociologist, known for his significant contributions to sociology, particularly in the areas of modernity, globalization, consumerism, and the concept of "liquid modernity." He was recognized for his profound and critical analysis of contemporary society. Bauman's work is infused with literary references, elegant prose, narratives, and metaphors, which reveal his uncommon and constant commitment to humanity. He consciously and consistently blurs the line between theory and method by way of literary means and poetically inspired techniques. Bauman's sociological imagination is simultaneously a poetic imagination, resulting in a unique and humanistic hybrid sociological voice (Bauman & Mazzeo, 2016).

2. Literature Review

The exploration of literature as a field of human knowledge has been a rich and multifaceted pursuit, engaging scholars across diverse disciplines. The inquiry into the definition of literature has sparked varied perspectives (Lerner, 1964; Sartre, 1964; Wellek & Warren, 1973; Ellis, 1974; Peer, 1991; Meyer, 1997), including, for instance (Culler, 2007), Todorov's views on the functional and structural definitions, which highlight how literature works in similar ways to other forms of text or Hagberg's use of the Wittgensteinian notion of family resemblance to emphasize literature as a relational aesthetic experience that helps establish an individual's selfhood.

Concurrently, the historical study of literature, whether generally (Heosel-Uhlig, 2004) or within specific cultures (Mishr, 1982), languages (Buetin, 1993), epochs (Pattee, 1915; Sibbald, 2007), or genres (Evans, 1965; Carey, 2020) is also rich and variegated, including works that focus on the importance of writing histories of literature (Gumbrecht, 2009).

In addition, the entwined relationship between literature and sociology has emerged as a significant area of inquiry. For example, Forster & Kenneford (1973) highlight the importance of considering literature beyond the works commonly regarded as great by literary critics and encourage the integration of the study of literature into the development of sociological theory. Hatcher et al. (1995) argue that the history of literature can be useful to sociology if it provides verified facts and precise reports that help sociologists in their research. However, literary history needs to be accomplished first, using the methods of history to study literary works in their historical context. Likewise, Noble (1976) contends that literature has demonstrated greater insight into the nature of reality and knowledge than sociology, postulating that a compelling sociology of literature must focus narrowly on the social dynamics of communication between literary authors, texts and the public.

Conversely, Raymond Williams (1977) criticizes the usage of the word "literature", arguing that it poses a challenge in its comprehension as a concept. He posits that, in everyday usage, it initially seems like a specific description of particular works which are so highly esteemed that their specific values seamlessly transfer to the concept of "literature". This process occurs without much notice, reinforcing the belief that "literature" is tangible and practical, contrasting sharply with other related concepts, like "society", "politics", "sociology," or "ideology", which are often seen as hardened outer shells, as mere abstract summaries or averages of human

existence, compared to the literature, which tends to be defined as the embodiment of "full, central, and immediate human experiences", emphasizing "minute particulars".

He argues that this notion of literature as equivalent to direct lived experience is an extraordinary ideological abstraction that theory can counter by recognizing that literature is fundamentally a "result of formal composition within the social and formal properties of a language." He suggests that comprehending the significance and complexities partially revealed and obscured by this concept requires looking into its historical trajectory.

As for the study of sociology's historical evolution, it has offered insights into the changing landscapes of human thought and societal structures. In his article *Reflections on the History of Sociology*, Jerzy Szacki (1980) posits that "the sociologists have fairly often been nonchalant about the heritage of the past," explaining that "there have also been such who, as Randall Collins, did not hesitate to state that "[...] in relation to major figures like Marx and Weber (and others) we are like the scholars of the Renaissance rediscovering the Greeks." He even argues that the average sociologist (during the time he wrote his article) likely had quite superficial knowledge of disciplinary history, unlike a philosopher who sees studying the history of philosophy as intellectually crucial. Among the factors explaining this neglect of the past, he includes breaks/discontinuities in the development of sociology in some countries after WWII, as well as a push towards seeing sociology as a strictly quantitative, scientific enterprise, causing dislike of earlier, less rigorously scientific works. There was a view that only the newest research mattered, as in the natural sciences. He eventually contends that sociology without historical awareness risks being unscientific – "utterly convinced" by each generation's beliefs, lacking context on its achievements.

By the same token, he adds that an essential query faced by historians of sociological ideas pertains to their approach: whether to perceive the progression of ideas "homophonically" or "polyphonically". The homophonic view portrays the history of thought as a singular stream working towards an ultimate system, where each predecessor merely paves the way for the next. In contrast, the polyphonic perspective envisages an ongoing, unresolved dialogue, with no definitive system holding the ultimate answer. Each contributes to new interpretations. This choice of historical lens significantly impacts students' perception of prior sociological ideas – whether they view them as sequential steps towards the present or diverse perspectives within an ongoing, unsettled debate. It crucially determines whether the past is left behind or remains vitally relevant in contemporary discourse.

In his article *History of and in Sociology*, Charles Tilly (2007) discusses a shift in historical sociology represented by what he calls the "third wave." This wave, emerging in the 1990s and onwards, notably diverged from the preceding waves' Marxist approaches. Instead of focusing on economic relations as the primary force shaping society, this wave emphasized culture, consciousness and interpretation. In this perspective, both individual actors and their relationships are seen as deeply shaped by cultural context and historical circumstances. This relationship of sociology with history is noted by the British sociologist Richard Kilminster (2014), who argues that the disciplinary boundaries between history and sociology are considerably blurry. The French historian Fernand Braudel (1980: 69) states even more directly that the two fields form "one single intellectual adventure." Actually, sociology itself is a product of the historical development of the social phenomena and processes it seeks to explain.

Building on this scholarly background, this study offers new insights by exploring the history of literature as a word and a concept, following its semantic shifts over time, shedding light on some of its family resemblances, with a particular parallel focus on the development of the systematic study of society, culminating in the emergence of sociology.

3. Method

Grounded in conceptual history, this study employs both semasiological and onomasiological[4] approaches to explore the semantic shifts in "literature" both as a word and a cultural concept while tracing the evolving relationship between literature and the social sciences during major paradigm shifts in Western thought. The article is organized chronologically, encompassing an expansive scope from antiquity to modernity. This broad temporal lens facilitates the identification of pivotal ruptures and realignments concerning literature's role in "social knowledge making" (Camic, Gross, & Lamont, 2011). The analysis synthesizes insights from both primary and secondary sources, focusing on intellectual history, philosophy and the literary arts within the Western tradition, including academic studies contextualizing seminal thinkers within their historical milieu and examinations of literary movements related to proto-social science. By reconstructing key ruptures and continuities in the perceptions of literature,

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[4] The semasiological approach focuses on the study of the meanings and changes in meanings of a particular word or concept over time. On the other hand, the onomasiological approach centers on investigating the various terms or expressions that can be used to convey a specific meaning or concept.

this method illuminates the interplay between epistemic values, intellectual currents and institutional pressures that shaped modern disciplinary categories.

3.1. The Study: The Tangled Tale of an Intellectual Kinship

A distinction should be made between the word "literature" and the concept of literature. The history of the latter is much older than the former. The earliest ancestor of "literature" as a dictionary word is the Latin noun *litteratura*, which was possibly coined as a translation of the Greek word *grammatikē* (the [art] of writing) by the ancient Rome's scholar Marcus Terentius Varro (116–27 B.C.), who also coined the word litteratio (instruction in reading and writing). Cicero and Tacitus used the word *litteratura* to refer to the art of "writing," while Seneca and Apuleius used *prima litteratura* to refer to "primary education" (Bower, 1961).

From Latin, *litteratura* made its way to many European languages. It was first attested in French as *littérature* in the 12th century with the meaning of "what is written". By around 1495, with Vincent de Beauvais's book *Mirroir Historial*, the word took on the meaning of erudition or knowledge (acquired by the study of books). Centuries later (mid-18th century), *littérature* would designate "the totality of literary productions" and then "the body of what has been written on a given subject". However, by 1884, the French word took on a pejorative connotation in certain contexts. An example is a quotation from Paul Verlaine's work *Jadis et naguère*, published in 1884: "… *Et tout le reste est littérature* [And all the rest is literature]," where he uses the word *littérature* to refer dismissively to anything that is not genuinely worthwhile or meaningful ("Littérature," 2012). Through French, the word "literature" entered English in the 15th century, and it was not till a century later that the word Literatur (spelled *Litteratur* till the 19th century) became a German word (Pfeifer, 1995).

Through time, the concept of "literature" underwent, as Raymond Williams (1977) notes, three major complicating semantic shifts:

1.*Shift from Learning to Taste/Sensibility:* The benchmark defining literary quality moved from erudition to subjective taste or refined sensibility. This transition paralleled a change from literature indicating a scholarly profession to reflecting an elite class status. "Taste" and "sensibility" became flexible concepts applied across spheres, representing internalized markers of social position.

2.*Specialisation to Creative/Imaginative Works*: Literature progressively narrowed to creative or imaginative works. This specialization marked a departure from earlier wide-ranging

definitions of literature as knowledge and letters and the body of writings from a particular field or period.

3.*Rise of National Literary Traditions*: The notion of literary "traditions" defined within national boundaries became more prominent, crystallizing the concept of distinct "national literatures." This trend gained momentum in the 18th and 19th centuries, shaping enduring twentieth-century assumptions.

Unlike the word "literature", which did not come to life till the Late Middle Ages, the concept itself existed long centuries even before its Latin ancestor, litteratura, was coined. It existed in different forms and under different names. Also, the complex relationship between what we call today literature and sociology has gnarled roots in the history of written human knowledge. That relationship can be traced to the ancient philosophical dichotomy of "the visible and the invisible", epitomized by Plato's differentiation between the sensory world, governed by doxa or opinion, and the world of ideas, illuminated by episteme or "true" knowledge. This duality persisted in Descartes's exploration, where he questioned the reliability of sensory knowledge while asserting the certainty of the mind (Tymieniecka, 2002: 1). This philosophical tension has underpinned the intertwined nature of literature and sociology, where the tangible and intangible facets of human experience coalesce, defying clear-cut distinctions and inviting a deeper exploration of their shared intellectual terrain.

3.2. Literature's Sacred Voice: Poetry's Roots in Ancient Religion

As the oldest form of "literature", **poetry** emerged in antiquity as a vessel not only for artistic expression but also for spiritual enlightenment, marking a pivotal phase in the evolution of the roles of literature and the study of society. Poetry helped bridge "the gap between human and divine nature" (Euron, 2019: 11). It held a unique status as a source of superior, esoteric, "sympathetic" knowledge accessible only to the initiated. At the heart of this mystique was Orpheus, the mythical poet and musician renowned as the founder of mystery religions. Orpheus, who supposedly predates Homer[5], "did not have a new and entirely distinct species of religion to offer, but a particular presentation [...] of religion" (Guthrie, 1993: 9). His teachings found embodiment in the Orphic Hymns, codified and arranged as we have them today between the second and fourth centuries A.D. These hymns formed the core of the Orphic Religion, Orphism. Within this spiritual discipline, which sought to harness the wild essence of

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[5] Reported to have lived in circa the 8th century (if such a person ever existed).

the Dionysian mysteries[6] and introduced poetry, ascetic practices and vegetarianism as essential rites, poetry was "a way to bring a kind of rational and intellectual harmony to the chaos of existence. [... It was] a kind of knowledge" (Euron, 2019: 10). The Orphic Hymns blurred any demarcation between artistic expression and spiritual wisdom. In fact, "there are no *a priori* grounds for believing that a clearly marked division between literature and cult ever existed" (Guthrie,1993: 16).

3.3. Literature Degraded: Plato Casts Poetry as Madness

By the 4th century B.C., at the time when the sophists "were claiming that they could persuade people of the truth of two opposite arguments" (Flamm et al., 2021: 2), Plato[7] tried to make the distinction between what John of Salisbury[8] (1971) called the "things that are true and [the] things that only seem to be true" and separated the "science of wise thinking from that of elegant speaking", "from which sprang the undoubtedly absurd and unprofitable and reprehensible severance between the tongue and the brain," to use Cicero's[9] words (1942: 49). Believing that the physical world is "'ordered' by the Demiurge who imitates eternal forms" (Euron, 2019: 7), Plato had an ontological and, consequently, a moral opposition to art[10], tragic poetry in particular, which he perceived as an imitation "thrice removed from the king and from the

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[6] Nietzsche proposed that Greek tragedy emerged from ancient rituals celebrating Dionysus, the Greek god of wine and pleasure (known as Bacchus in Roman mythology) These ceremonies, called Bacchus mysteries, were characterised by heavy drinking which created an "ecstatic and orgiastic experience, erasing the principle of individuation", and ultimately exposing "the tragic truth", the "non-rational truth" of life as chaos. Nietzsche argued this dissolution of the boundaries of individual identity and rationality exposed the disorder of existence, the painful truths concealed by Apollonian rationality. Thus, for Nietzsche, the roots of artistic tragedy lay in intuiting truths about the human condition through primal, chaotic Dionysian rituals rather than structured rational thought (Euron, 2019: 10–11).

[7] (429?–347 BC)

[8] (AD 1115?–1180)

[99] (106–43 BC)

[10] The meaning of "art" here stems from the Latin root *ars*, referring to craft or technical skill, emphasising imitation as the core of art. This perception shifted in the 18th century with the rise of the Academies of Art, recognising artists as thinkers. The German word for art, *Kunst*, from the verb *kennen* meaning "to know", reflects this perception. *Kunst* originally meant "knowledge" and embodies a profound understanding beyond craftsmanship and technical skill. Unlike the English concept of art tied to craft, *Kunst* does not imply trickery or illusion (the connotations still present in English in the adjectives "artful" and "artless"). It signifies true knowledge, reaching beyond mimesis (n.d., Art's Etymology, 2022).

truth[11] " (Plato, 2013: 342), "a shadow of a shadow" (Eskin, 2014: 13), a faded copy of the "earthly namesake" of Beauty, which is "a way of achieving knowledge" and is the object of philosophy, not art (Euron, 2019: 6).

In addition, Plato saw the "gift of speaking excellently" not as an art but as a divine inspiration, a possession by the Muses, a madness. "There is a divinity moving [the poets], like that contained in the stone which Euripides calls a magnet, but which is commonly known as the stone of Heraclea [...], like Bacchic maidens who draw milk and honey from the rivers when they are under the influence of Dionysus" (Plato, 2008). "The function of poetry is to connect the divine and the human. [...] The poets are only the interpreters of the Gods" (Euron, 2019: 8). Unlike Aristotle after him, Plato was also a poet, "and just there lay his tragedy. [...] The quarrel in him [was] internecine" (Colerisge & Wordsworth, 2015: xxix). From the threads of this quarrel was woven the Western image of poetry as the contrary of philosophy and rationality, a "stigma" that would accompany poetry (and later on other literary forms) in Western cultures for long centuries.

3.4. Literature Redeemed: Aristotle Recasts Poetry as Philosophy

In contrast to Plato, Aristotle[12] (2008: 6) did not believe in the ideal order of reality; for him, there are no original forms and lowly copies, no shadows. The human being is the "most imitative of living creatures, and through imitation learns his earliest lessons." Poetry is a special imitation of nature in that – unlike history – it is concerned with "universal facts", not "singular ones". While the historian describes what has been (the real), the poet imitates what may be (the possible). Poetry is thus more philosophical (Aristotle, 2013). It does not present a portion of reality as do most of the fields of human knowledge. It presents reality as a consistent, structured whole. It both instructs and delights. As Paolo Euron (2019: 13–16) suggests, to grasp the complexities of a concept like "crazy love", one would find more insight in a literary work such as Flaubert's novel *Madame Bovary* than in a paragraph on "psychosis" in a medical handbook like the *Diagnostic Statistical Manual*.

3.5. Literature Ascendant: The Emergence of the Man of Letters

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[11] In the literal translation of Allan Bloom: "[...] the maker of tragedy, if he is an imitator; he is naturally third from a king and the truth, as are all the other imitators" (Plato, 1991:280).
[12] 384–322 BC

After the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC and the melding of Hellenic and Eastern cultures, a vibrant Hellenistic culture emerged during the second and third centuries B.C., marking a milestone in the classification of human knowledge and the development of what we now call literature. No longer a "madness", poetry became an art that required technical knowledge to acquire, as depicted in Horace's *Ars Poetica*. Simultaneously, a new class of scholars, the prototype of the literary theorist, gained prominence: the **man of letters**, the *grammatikos* (in Greek), the *grammaticus* or the **litteratus**[13] (in Latin).

The Greek word *grammatikos,* which denotes "pertaining to or versed in letters or learning", comes from the word *gramma,* meaning "letter of the alphabet", from which came the expression *grammatikē tekhnē*, "the art of letters". In Classical Greek, a grammarian was thus one versed in letters or learning, hence a "man of letters". In the Hellenistic period, the meaning of the word expanded to encompass linguistic and literary studies, a meaning akin to the modern sense of "philology". The *grammatikos* represented a professional philologist involved in textual criticism and interpreting Classical works. However, in Late Antiquity, grammar narrowed to primarily refer to phonology and morphology (Wilson, 2013).

Latin borrowed these words with their Greek meanings. The role of the Latin *grammaticus* in teaching "grammar" also extended beyond mere language structure. Alongside grammar, the *grammaticus* also instructed in *enarratio poetarum* (literally, explanations of the poets), which involved the interpretation and analysis of "canonical" poetic works. This broader educational aspect stemmed from the understanding that the art of writing, as implied by the literal meaning of the Greek term *grammatikē technē*, was acquired through the study of epic poets like Homer and other revered writers (Leonhardt, 2013: 97).

Starting from the late 15th century, in addition to the meaning of erudition, the English word "grammar" would also convey the meaning of "knowledge peculiar to the learned classes,"

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[13] Some argue that the Latin word *litteratus* was initially the equivalent of the Greek *grammatikos* (in the sense of a teacher of literature), but it was later replaced in usage by the Latin loan word *grammaticus* before coming back into common parlance by the time of the late Roman writer Martianus Capella (c.390–c.428 CE), postulating that "the Romans would then have had the quartet *litterator, litteratio, litteralis, litteratura,* to correspond to the Greek γραμματιστής [*grammatistḗs*], γραμματιστική [*grammatistikḗ*], γραμματικός [*grammatikós*], γραμματική [*grammatikḗ*]" (Bower, 1961: 476). However, in a study he conducted, E. W. Bower (1961: 464–477) disagrees with this view and contends that "*litteratus* was never a mere synonym of *grammaticus*, but that their true relationship was always that of genus and species [… :] the general term *litteratus* for a cultured, educated man naturally included the *grammaticus* among others."

particularly "magic" and "astrology", and hence "occult knowledge". A century later, it assumed its contemporary meaning of the "systematic account of the rules and usages of language"(Harper, 2022).

The Latin equivalent of the Greek word *gamma* is *littera,* which initially denoted an "alphabetic letter" and then extended to signify "a writing or a document" and, in plural *litteræ,* "a letter, epistle or missive", encapsulating the essence of recorded communication. From this elemental concept emerged *litteratus*, denoting an individual who is learned and educated, possessing proficiency in reading and writing.

3.6. Literature as Divine Insight: Poetry in Medieval Theology

With the advent of Christianity, the man of letters, specifically the poet as an artist, became the imitator of the Greatest/Divine Artist, and poetry became "as it were, God's grandchild" (Alighieri, 2008: 74). As Rome collapsed by the end of the fourth century, a sort of a concoction of Greek, Roman, Germanic and Christian cultures informed the European cultures of what would be known as the Middle Ages. Plato and Aristotle were "Christianised", while theology, mainly in the form of scholasticism, became a central field of study. Beauty was considered (especially by the Platonic school) "as a characteristic of being itself and, consequently, as an opportunity for knowledge and divine experience" (Euron, 2019: 29), which indirectly led to poetry and drama occupying a more moral and educational role in society.

Building on the claim that direct language is unable to represent eternal truth, allegory[14] became the means to reveal "the presence of God in the world and his secret messages" (Euron, 2019: 30). The medieval allegorical morality plays, mystery plays, and miracle plays are a striking example. In a broader sense, symbols became the means to reveal the complex and manifold social reality. Francis Bacon would, centuries later, go as far as to say that Greek mythologies, as a form of allegorical writing, were written "to conceal from the vulgar and reveal to the elect profound philosophical truths" (Broad, 1926).

During this period, the meaning of literature came to include acquiring in-depth knowledge of the Latin language. It also referred to a body of knowledge, or the possession of particular

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[14] "In *The New World of English Words* (4th ed., London, 1678): 'Allegory [basically denotes] inversion or changing. In Rhetorick, it is a mysterious saying, wherein there is couched something that is different from the literal sense.' Sometimes, the term *inversio* may be taken in its original sense of translation, while *translatio* is but the Latin equivalent of the Greek metaphor" (Fletcher, 1970: 2).

knowledge, similar to a part of what the word "culture" encompasses today ("Littérature," 2023). We still have traces of that meaning in words like "unlettered", which typically refers to someone lacking literacy or formal education but often suggests a lack of knowledge or refinement in a way similar to "uncultured", which implies a lack of sophistication, refinement or knowledge in cultural matters, including the arts, humanities, etiquette, or broader cultural awareness.

3.7. Literature Reshaped: Theology Losing Its Grip

During the Renaissance, two of the seminal moments that reshaped the intellectual landscape were the rise of **philology**[15] and the establishment of The Florentine Academy in 1462. While medieval scholars were mainly focused on philosophical and theological interests, and while most of what we may describe today as social issues (e.g., family, morality and political authority) were tackled as an integral part of theology, humanist scholars embraced a new paradigm. Making optimum use of what came to be known as philology, the nascent "science" of language and literary[16] criticism, they "restored the original human message of the classical

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[15] Philology (from *philo-* "loving" + *logos* "word, speech", literally "the love of learning and literature" (Harper, 2023)) existed as a cultural concept much earlier than the word itself, which was first attested in English in the late 14th century. "Philology as the search for principles of reconstructing the original source was created where there were large quantities of inconsistent manuscripts. This occurred first of all in the Hellenistic world, where hundreds of thousands of manuscripts were collected and which represented an empirical world on their own" (Bod, 2013: 36). The philology of the Hellenistic era was an immensely interdisciplinary pursuit, blending expertise in grammar, rhetoric, history and poetics. There was minimal distinction between these disciplines. It was not until late Antiquity, with Dionysius Thrax's work *Technē grammatikē*, that grammar began focusing on language as a study separate from philology's aim of reconstructing sources. Medieval philology, unlike its ancient counterpart, revolved around copying, compiling and translating texts. European philologists engaged in text reconstruction activities and also produced encyclopedic works akin to late Roman philology, exemplified by St. Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae* (c.560–636). "Isidore's arrangement followed a classical pagan tradition, where God was introduced after an overview of the liberal arts" (Bod, 2013: 103). In the Early Middle Ages, a religious (Christian) revolution, emerging from Roman Africa, reshaped all fields of knowledge, and "Philology (as textual criticism) was too marginal to go through life as a discrete discipline. […] It would take a second, lengthier humanistic revolt to 'undo' the Christian revolution" (Bod, 2013: 139–141). With the rise of humanism during the Renaissance, philology became an extensive literary, artistic and historiographical reconstruction of Roman Antiquity, led by Petrarch, the founder of humanism, who tried to revive the ideals of Rome in a Christian community.

[16] The adjective literary is used anachronistically here as it did not enter the English language until the middle of the 17th century from the French littéraire which itself came from the Latin *litterarius* ("pertaining to alphabet letters"), while the meaning of "pertaining to literature" was not attested till the 18th century (Harper, 2023).

philosophers," making knowledge "independent from (but not against) Christian revelation" (Tanner, 2003: 2). "Rarely has a discipline brought about such major societal changes as philology did in Europe" (Bod, 2013: 143). The critical analysis of historical sources by philologists played a significant role in one of the most profound transformations of the early modern era—the shift towards a secular worldview (Bod, 2013: 161).

Concurrently, The Florentine Academy emerged as a unique research institution that was free from the powers of both the state (which usually controlled universities) and the church. It championed Neo-Platonism, embodying "a religious syncretism, an intellectual eclecticism and a broad interest in ancient traditions." During this period, the Orphic Hymns were translated, reviving the Orphic concept of "salvation (the divine madness of the Dionysian rituals) [...] through a poetic form (the order of poetry)" (Euron, 2019:36–47). These seminal moments not only defined the Renaissance but also laid the foundation for future intellectual pursuits.

It was during this period (particularly in the early 15th century) that the English word "literature" came to life, replacing the Old English word *boccræft*. It referred to "book learning", highlighting the acquisition of knowledge through reading and studying books. It also denoted "writing formed with letters", emphasizing the textual aspect of knowledge dissemination. The English word "literature" would carry the meaning of "book learning" till the end of the 18th century. This integration of language, letters and erudition laid the groundwork for our contemporary understanding of literature, grammar and the esteemed "man of letters".

3.8. Literature as Social Commentary: Early Critique of Power

In this Early Modern period in human history, the modern arts were born. This birth is said to have taken place the moment Miguel Cervantes (1547–1616) "sent Don Quixote journeying and tore through [... the] magic curtain, woven of legends, [which] hung before the world" (Bauman, 2014: 24). "The founder of the modern era is not only Descartes but also Cervantes" (Bauman & Mazzeo, 2016: 6). A little before Cervantes, the Catholic priest Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536), "the Prince of the Humanists", wrote his mennipean satire, *In Praise of Folly*, attacking the religious institution and paving the way for radical change in the religious arena.

In 1516, a year before the historic moment when Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the Castle Church door in Wittenberg, officially heralding the Protestant Reformation, the English social philosopher and Renaissance humanist Thomas More (1478–1535) penned his seminal

work Utopia.[17] The religious turmoil and fervor that ensued from the fracturing of the once-monolithic religious institution creating a large-scale wave of fanatism and absolutism, provided the backdrop for More's imaginative narrative, which tells the story of a perfect society of an imaginary island where legal, social and political justice reign supreme. Behind the utopian façade, More subtly critiqued English society, offering veiled commentary on its social and religious structures. His convictions would lead him to a dire fate as he was ultimately beheaded for high treason after denying King Henry VIII's supremacy over the church (Manning & Lodge, 1852: xiii). Nevertheless, his work earned him the admiration of 19th-century socialist/communist social theorists, including Marx, Engels and Kautsky, who hailed him as a communist hero for his "contribution to the liberation of humankind". In recognition of his enduring impact, a monument was erected near the Kremlin in his honor in 1918 (King, 2014: 157).

3.9. Literature Secularised: The Rise of the Humanities

Simultaneously with all these intellectual changes, the notion of the humanities as a distinct realm of education tracing back to classical antiquity began to solidify as a recognizable tradition during the Renaissance. In ancient Greece, the studies of grammar, rhetoric and logic constituted what became known in the Middle Ages as the *trivium*, while arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy formed the more advanced *quadrivium*. Though not referred to as the humanities per se, the *trivium* disciplines continued, during the Middle Ages, to be taught as foundational skills, valued for sharpening the intellect even as students went on to specialize in fields like theology, law or medicine.

It was not until the Renaissance that the concept of the **studia humanitatis** (studies of humanity) took on new prominence. As Renaissance scholars and educators reacted against medieval scholasticism and sought to revive classical learning, they emphasized human-centric subjects, including moral philosophy, eloquent writing, poetry, rhetoric and history. This humanistic curriculum starkly contrasted with the medieval educational focus on theology and divine studies, establishing a clear demarcation between human-related studies and the sacred

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[17] From the Greek words *ou* (meaning "not") and *topos* (denoting "place"), the word "utopia" was coined by More himself in 1516 and became a standard word in Modern Latin in 1551, literally meaning "nowhere". This denotation was extended by the 1610s to refer to "any perfect place" (Harper , 2022). The full title of More's work is *Libellus vere aureus, nec minus salutaris quam festivus, de optimo rei publicae statu deque nova insula Utopia* (A truly golden little book, not less beneficial than enjoyable, about how things should be in a state and about the new island Utopia).

realm. In addition to the distinction of the natural sciences, which had been drawn earlier in the Late Middle Ages, a line was now drawn between the *literae humaniores* (the human studies) and the *literae divinae* (divine studies). The **humanities**,[18] which designated then what we generally call today the **classics**, elevated poetry and rhetoric, which had been subordinate to the study of theology, to equal standing with it, granting literature and human expression newfound importance and recognition within the realm of intellectual inquiry. Nevertheless, despite these categorisations, the quintessential Renaissance Man was the epitome of the "decompartmentalisation" of the realms of knowledge. The boundaries between sacred and secular learning were still porous, even as humanism shifted emphasis toward the secular classics.

By the 17th century, the humanities encompassed an array of subjects pertaining to human culture, though boundaries remained largely permeable. The modern conception of the humanities as non-scientific, non-vocational arts subjects emerged in the late 18th century as Enlightenment values encouraged systematic intellectual specialization. With the establishment of contemporary universities in the 19th century, the humanities took shape as one of the three main divisions of learning alongside the natural sciences and the social sciences.

3.10. Mapping Literature's Place: Bacon's Classification

Francis Bacon (1561–1626) was the first in the West to put forward a detailed delimination of the different compartments of human knowledge. For him, "the parts of human learning have reference to the three parts of man's understanding, which is the seat of learning: history to his memory, poesy to his imagination, and philosophy to his reason" (Bacon, 1605: 48). In history, he distinguished between two types: natural history and civil (social) history. The latter, he divided into ecclesiastical (religious) history, literary history, and civil history proper.

He also divided poesy into three types: narrative, representative (dramatic), and allusive (parabolic). For him (1605: 57), poesy "doth raise and erect the mind, by submitting the shows of things to the desires of the mind; whereas reason doth buckle and bow the mind into the nature of things." As for philosophy, he distinguished among three branches: natural theology

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[18] During the late Middle Ages, the term "humanity" (in the singular) was used to delineate classical studies from natural sciences on one side and sacred studies, such as divinity or theology, on the other side. Francis Bacon employed the term "humanity" in this specific manner in his work *The Advancement of Learning* (1605) (Turner, 2015: 204).. The plural form came into use at the beginning of the 18th century.

(the science of God), natural philosophy (the science of non-human nature), and the science of man, which he divided into the science of man proper and civil science.

Bacon's classification provided a framework that acknowledged the intricate connections between literature, human cognition and society. By placing poesy – representing imaginative and creative expression – as a fundamental part of human cognition, Bacon elevated literature to the realm of essential knowledge. His recognition of different forms of poesy highlighted the multifaceted nature of literary expression. In addition, his distinction of literary history emphasized the unique role of literature in capturing the socio-cultural fabric of different eras. Literary history, as a subset of civil (social) history, acknowledged the profound impact of literature on shaping societies and reflecting human social and cultural experiences across time.

Moreover, Bacon's classification also emphasized the cognitive and emotional significance of literature. By associating poesy with imagination and the desires of the mind, he acknowledged literature's power to evoke emotions, stimulate creativity and provide unique insights into the human psyche. This recognition reinforced the idea that literature is not just a form of entertainment or artistic expression but a fundamental aspect of human intellectual and emotional exploration.

3.11. Literature in the Crucible: Enlightenment Debates on Ways of Knowing

While the time of Galileo (1564–1642) marked a watershed moment in the history of the natural sciences and human thought in general, the advent of the Age of Enlightenment marked an intense debate over the superiority of rationality and science.[19] The feudal system was giving way, almost completely, to capitalism, and the pegs (namely the church and the monarchy) that kept the old intellectual, religious and social system in place were steadily and deeply eroding with the rapidly increasing rationalization and secularisation of the time. In this transformative period, the literary and scientific modes of inquiry began to diverge. Nonetheless, despite this division, many intellectuals still believed in the mutual complementarity of poetry and science.

The Enlightenment Italian philosopher and historian Giambattista Vico (1668–1744), for example, thought that the human world cannot be understood using only one method (rational arguments and abstract thoughts). He contended that fantasy and memory were essential for

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[19] Science at the time acquired the meaning of "non-arts studies" which was first attested from the 1670s, and the meaning of "body of regular or methodical observations or propositions concerning a particular subject or speculation" which was attested from 1725, and for which the word philosophy had been/was commonly used.

knowledge, emphasizing the role of poetic thought in early civilizations, arguing that the "early man had poetic thought and civilization derived from this vivid and pictorial representation of reality" (Euron, 2019: 55–57). During this period (from 1710), the ***belles lettres*** (fine letters) emerged as the literary equivalent of what would later (from 1821) be known as the beaux arts (fine arts).

The emergence of the *belles lettres* during the Enlightenment was significant in distinguishing literary endeavors from scientific study as it marked boundaries between creative expression and systematic empirical knowledge. Nevertheless, the *belles lettres* also retained interdisciplinary connections as they encompassed social commentary and critique, and their scope maintained links between literature, philosophy, arts and proto-social science before their later disciplinary divergence. Many *philosophes* wrote *belles lettres* that engaged with moral, political and social issues, influencing the development of modern social science. Overall, the *belles lettres* helped legitimize secular and humanistic literature while also pioneering new spaces for the social criticism and analysis that would shape emerging fields, like sociology.

During this period, a significant shift occurred in the meaning of the word literature (in English as in the other European languages, which use the same Latin root word[20]). "It gradually "lost [its] earliest sense of reading ability and reading experience, and became an apparently objective category of printed works of a certain quality" (Williams, 1977). By the 18th century, it came to refer to "the whole body of valued writing in society: philosophy, history, essays and letters as well as poems." A work's classification as literary depended not on any fiction/nonfiction distinction but on its stylistic polish and resonance with the "standards of polite letters", which were largely determined by the "values and tastes" of those who held the reins of power in society. For example, "the eighteenth century was in grave doubt about whether the new upstart form of the novel was literature at all" (Eagleton, 1996: 15). Actually, this resonance with the values of the elite applies not only to literature but also to scientific knowledge. "The boundary between Nature and Society is itself a social construction; [...] the knowledge-making practices of natural scientists are thoroughly configured by the social worlds that they inhabit" (Camic, Gross, & Lamont, 2011: 10).

3.12. Literature Re-Enchanted: Romanticism and Poetry as a New "Religion"

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[20] For instance, French *littérature*, Spanish *literatura*, Italian *letteratura* and German *Literatur*.

As the optimistic promises of the Enlightenment started to falter, the Romantic movement emerged in part as a response to the turmoil and upheaval taking hold of Europe after the French Revolution and the social misery brought about by the Industrial Revolution. Romanticism represented a "general sobering", a reality check following the lofty rationalism of the Enlightenment, which Victor Hugo (1887: 1121) encapsulated with a soupçon of irony in the duality between Voltaire (arithmetic reason) and Rousseau (utopic emotion), on which duality he blamed the ugliness of post-revolutionary France:

On est laid à Nanterre, (People are ugly at Nanterre,)

C'est la faute à Voltaire; ('Tis the fault of Voltaire;)

[...]

Misère est mon trousseau, (Misery is my trousseau,)

C'est la faute à Rousseau." ('Tis the fault of Rousseau.)

This period saw renewed efforts to reconcile the tensions between analytical and creative ways of knowing. It is noteworthy in this context that Kant (1724–1804) explored three different facets of human reason, which he critiqued in three different books:

1.*Critique of Pure Reason* (1781, 1787): It attempts to reconcile empiricist skepticism with rationalist metaphysics, focusing on **pure reason** and **metaphysics**. Kant aimed to determine the limits and scope of human knowledge. He explored how we perceive and understand the world through sensory experience and a *priori* concepts (ideas independent of experience). He introduced the idea of **transcendental idealism**, suggesting that while we can never directly know the "thing-in-itself" (*the noumena*), our minds actively structure and organize sensory input using innate concepts, like space and time. He discussed the role of **synthetic *a priori*** judgments, which are statements that expand our understanding beyond mere definitions and are necessary for knowledge but not derived from experience.

2.*Critique of Practical Reason* (1788): It explores ethics and morality. Kant examines here reason's use in guiding free moral action and seeking the highest good. Key issues involve freedom vs determinism, the categorical imperative as an unconditioned moral law, and the links between virtue and human rational agency. Overall, he explores a priori foundations for the ethics of autonomy.

3.*Critique of Judgment* (1790): This, in part, investigates taste and aesthetic judgment as an intermediary between theoretical and practical reason. It "has as its overall aim to show that the

two realms that were discussed in the First and Second Critiques – namely those of nature and of freedom (or morality) – can be bridged by means of the faculty of judgment" (Ward, 2007: 183). Kant's unique contribution to aesthetics lies in his attempt to reconcile seemingly conflicting positions between empiricism and rationalism regarding the judgment of taste.

He agrees with the empiricists that a pure judgment of taste is determined by a subjective feeling of pleasure or displeasure, emphasizing that this judgment is not influenced by any definite rule applied to the object. Nevertheless, he also agrees with the rationalists in asserting that the judgment of taste claims **universal necessary validity**. Here lies the apparent paradox: if aesthetic judgment is based on a feeling rather than a definite concept of the object, how can it claim such universality and necessity?

Kant resolves this by proposing that although the basis of the judgment is a feeling, it possesses a subjective universality. This means that while grounded in individual subjective experiences, judgments of taste demonstrate a remarkable universality or agreement among different individuals. It is not a mere empirical generalization about how specific groups feel about certain objects; rather, it is a shared human faculty that allows for a sense of commonality in judgments of beauty.

Kant's endeavor to harmonize these "seemingly" conflicting positions is tied to his Copernican revolution in philosophy, where he shifts the focus from the object to the subject, emphasizing the active role of the mind in shaping our experiences. His major contribution to aesthetics lies in this attempt to unite the subjective nature of aesthetic judgment with its perceived universal validity, thereby laying the groundwork for understanding the interplay between subjective experiences and objective claims of beauty and taste (Ward, 2007: 184–187).

With this philosophical background, there grew, in the 19th century, a tendency[21] to see poetry as "a way of knowing absolute reality".[22] The idealist philosopher Hegel (1770–1831) argued

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[21] For example, the German philosophical movement known as the School of Jena in the late 18th century, represented – among others – by Hegel's friend Friedrich Schelling (1775–1854).
[22] While Kant argued that the human mind has intrinsic limits on what it can know, contending that we cannot acquire absolute, unconditioned truth, especially about entities like God, the universe as a whole, the thing-in-itself – that is, we can only know the world as it appears to us ("phenomena"), not as it is independently of our perceptions ("noumena"), which creates an unbridgeable gap between human knowledge and absolute truth –, Goethe (1749–1832), in response, put forward a relative, perspectival conception of truth. For him, each individual can have his/her own truth based on their understanding of their relation to themselves and the outside world. There is no single absolute truth, but many personal or cultural truths.

that both the general populace and erudite thinkers need a balance of "mythologized philosophy" and "philosophized mythology" – the rational approach of systematic thought integrated with art and literature's aesthetic sensibilities.

He argued that "men without an aesthetic sense are our *Buchstabenphilosophen* [literally, philosophers of the alphabet]." Poetry has always been, and will be, the "teacher of mankind"; it "alone will outlive all other sciences and arts." He advocated a "mythology of reason" and a "sensual religion", blending the "monotheism of reason and of the heart" with the "polytheism of imagination and of the art" (Schelling, Hegel, & Hölderlin, 2021: 23). This Hegelian view conceived literature (poetry in particular) as a vital way to grasp absolute truths about existence beyond empirical facts, reasserting literature's relevance after being sidelined during the Enlightenment fixation on scientific rationality.

During this revival of poetry in the 19th century, the word literature witnessed another semantic shift. A new meaning centered on aesthetics, creativity and fictive invention rather than scholarly or philosophical texts began to crystallize. With Romanticism, the category of literature was narrowed down to the "so-called 'creative' or 'imaginative' work". It was during this period that the adjective "prosaic" took on a negative connotation (commonplace and dull). As reverence for the "prosaic" realities of rationalism faded, the term "literary" became associated with poetic language and expressiveness rather than pragmatic prose, emphasizing imagination rather than factual content. Literature was thus linked to reveling in imaginary worlds, offering escape from the hardships of the industrial society.

3.13. The Third Culture and the Epistemological Divide

Building on Francis Bacon's classification, the French philosopher and art critic Denis Diderot (1713–1784) compiled the *Encyclopédie*.[23] This massive work aimed to systematically organize all areas of human knowledge and, in doing so, helped launch a rapid proliferation of discrete social science disciplines. Out of this new conceptualization of the fields of knowledge emerged

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In contrast to Kant's skepticism and Goethe's relativism, Hegel argued that philosophers should continue seeking absolute truth (which is speculative and philosophal) and aim to actually achieve knowledge of it.

[23] The full title in English is: *Encyclopaedia, or a Systematic Dictionary of the Sciences, Arts, and Crafts.*

what Wolf Lepenies[24] later termed the third culture[25] : sociology, feeding upon science and literature. From the middle of the 19th century onwards, literature and sociology would contest "the claim to offer the key orientation for modern civilization and to constitute the guide to living appropriate to industrial society" (Lepenies, 1992: 1).

At the end of the 18th century, a "sharp division" between the literary and the scientific modes of knowledge production was not yet possible. Even the main works, which anticipated sociological studies, like the writings of Voltaire, Rousseau and Monesquieu, "retain[ed] the largely literary and essayistic character of the salon culture" (Tanner, 2003:3). However, the example of the French naturalist, *encyclopédiste,* jurist, physicist, mathematician and botanist, Comte de Buffon (1707–1788), illustrates the way this division took place. This grand seigneur of science, the pupil of the Jesuits of Dijon who dreamed of speaking about the animal kingdom as Bourdaloue[26] had spoken about the kingdom of God (Lapaque, 2007), wrote his famous *Histoire naturelle[27]* with an elaborate literary style that brought him fame and admiration so much so that Flaubert described him as the one who "*mettait des manchette pour ecrire[28]*" (Lepenies, 1992: 2). He once said, "the style is the man." Style is the way a man expresses himself, and literature is the way society expresses itself (Bonald, 1819: 555).

Nevertheless, what was cause for admiration in the middle of the century became a source of attack by its end. Buffon "was the last scholar whose reputation was founded on his talent for presentation and the first to lose his reputation because he had devoted himself too much to authorship." It was the fall of *"Stilo primus, doctrina ultimus[29]* " and the rise of "*Doctrina primus, stilo ultimus*" (Lepenies, 1992:4). It was the alienation of the sciences from literature.

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[24] Wolf Lepenies (b. 1941) is a German sociologist and social scientist. He is known for his work in the field of sociology, cultural studies and intellectual history. He has made significant contributions to understanding the interplay between culture, society and politics.

[25] The original German title of his book which is commonly known in English as "Between Literature and Science: The Rise of Sociology" is actually *Die drei Kulturen. Soziologie zwischen Literatur und Wissenschaft* (The Three Cultures: Sociology between Literature and Science).

[26] French Jesuit orator Louis Bourdaloue (1632-1704)

[27] In 36 volumes published between 1749 and 1804.

[28] The French phrase "*Mettait des manchettes pour écrire*" translates literally to "wore cuffs to write". It implies Buffon took great care in his writing, presenting his ideas with elegance and flair, akin to someone dressing up in fine attire to make a polished impression.

[29] Approximately: Style first, doctrine/teaching last.

After Buffon, at the dawn of sociology, Honoré de Balzac (1799–1850) represented that feeling of superiority with which the men of letters regarded themselves vis-à-vis the natural scientists. He originally titled his well-known series of stories *Human Comedy* as *Études Sociales* (Social studies) and named himself *Docteur des sciences sociales* (Doctor of Social Sciences). "He saw his subject in the light of science [...], in the light of the bearing of all its parts on each other, and under the pressure of a passion for exactitude." This is what, in the opinion of Henry James, made Balzac special when compared to other notable novelists, like Fielding, Dickens or Thackeray (1914: 113). Engels described Balzac as "a far greater master of realism than all the Zolas *passés, présents et à venir* [past, present and future], [pointing out that] in *La Comédie humaine* [he] gives us a most wonderfully realistic history of French 'Society', especially of le *monde parisien* [the Parisian social world]" (Engels, 1953). Likewise, Marx stated that realist novelists "issued to the world more political and social truths than have been uttered by all the professional politicians, publicists and moralists put together" (Marx, 1976).

In parallel with Balzac, the development of the attitude of the "official" father of sociology, August Comte (1798–1857), towards style is noteworthy. In his book *The Twilight of Idols Or To Philosophise by the Hammer*, Nietzsche (2016: 63) argued that Comte reduced French thought to a quasi-religious empiricism pretentiously presented as science. He described him – with a note of unmistakable contempt – as "that most intelligent of Jesuits [...] who wished to lead his compatriots back to Rome by the circuitous route of science."[30] At the beginning of his intellectual career, the founder of positivism used "no artifice" in his writing and set an arid collection of style rules (e.g., no sentence should be longer than two lines, [...] no paragraph should contain more than seven sentences, [...] the same word should not occur twice …" (Lepenies, 1992: 20)). The literary form had almost no place in his positivistic world.

Nonetheless, the "*coup de foudre*" Comte had for Clotilde de Vaux in April 1845 changed his position with regard to both literature and women. What was a scientific thesis became a religion, the Religion of Humanity[31] or a Positivist Religion. He proclaimed himself "the high priest of humanity" and maintained that "philosophy, poetry and politics ought to stand on an

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[30] "who wanted to lead the French to Rome by the detour of science" in the translation of Richard Polt (Nietzsche, 1997).

[31] The fundamental tenet of Comte's religion was worship of collective humanity over any theological deity. He argued that humanity should be the object of its own religion and developed a positivist catechism, complete with a secular priesthood and temple ceremonies devoted to significant benefactors of humanity, such as philosophers and scientists.

equal footing." This "fissure in Comte's biography" would cause a division within positivism, which would, in turn, have a lasting effect on the social sciences (Lepenies, 1992: 7).

However, as sociology became a distinct academic discipline in the late 19th century, its pioneer scholars made concerted efforts to distance themselves from the "early literary forms of their own discipline" (Lepenies, 1992: 7). This separation was driven by the influence of positivism and the sociologists' desire to model their new discipline after the natural sciences in pursuit of academic legitimacy. Early sociologists recognized the limitations of relying solely on intuitive personal observations and speculative interpretations ungrounded in robust evidence. They aimed to differentiate sociology from the literary traditions, the anecdotal commentaries and the ideologically-driven perspectives of the essayists and philosophers who preceded them. As positivism's growing influence further compelled systematic empirical study of social phenomena using scientific methods of data collection, hypothesis testing and logical analysis, sociologists prioritized producing objective, unbiased knowledge about society derived from facts verified through rigorous research.

However, as time went by, new approaches emerged in the social sciences (mainly deconstructionism, post-structuralism and post-modernism), putting into question the positivistic legacy. The cultural, social and intellectual changes that the world witnessed during and after WWII have shown that in the realm of human society, experimentation cannot replace the richness of experience, encompassing both its objective elements (what the Germans call *Erfahrung*, denoting what happened to us) and its subjective facets (what the Germans call *Erlebnis*, representing how we lived through those events) (Bauman & Mazzeo, 2016: 6). Attempting to comprehend social reality using solely "the fine little mill of The Statistical Ritual while worshipping 'The Scientific Method'" has proved inadequate (Jacobson & Poder, 2008: 8).

4. By Way of Conclusion

H The historical trajectory of literature, sociology and science reveals a captivating narrative of intellectual evolution and interdisciplinary synergy. From the ancient intersections of literature and religion to the modern complexities of deconstructionist thought, this journey illuminates the profound connections between human creativity, societal understanding and empirical inquiry. It also highlights the complex interplay between epistemic values, cultural forces and institutional pressures undergirding literature's fluctuating relationship with systematic social analysis.

It is evident that literature, as a cultural concept, played a fundamental role in the development of human knowledge and social understanding throughout history. In ancient times, poetry held a spiritual and religious significance as a means to access deeper truths about existence. It was intertwined with theology for many centuries, and during pivotal eras like the Renaissance, it emerged as an influential medium for social commentary and criticism. Works like *Utopia, Don Quixote*, and In *Praise of Folly* used allegory and satire to question established institutions and norms. Then, the rise of rational philosophy ushered in new perspectives that situated literature in opposition to reason and truth.

Despite the firm dividing line that was etched between the scientific and the literary by the late 18th century, this complex historical trajectory shows that literature has continually inspired and influenced "sociological" thought from its inception to the present day. Hybrid forms that unite poetic and analytical modes of inquiry also endure. Thinkers like Aristotle, Vico and the German Romantics advocated the complementary roles of both rationality and aesthetic senses in comprehending reality. The Romantic movement marked a resurgence of the view that poetry holds spiritual and intellectual significance beyond mere ornamentation.

As the contours of discrete academic disciplines began to crystallize, sociology emerged through the works of thinkers who synthesized philosophy, history and evolving social theories, and it was not long before it contested with literature to define modern civilization and guide social understandings in industrial societies. Emerging as a distinct discipline, sociology endeavored to establish its identity amidst the different modes of scholarly inquiry and expression, and the separation from early literary forms seemed to be the way to that identity. Empirical rigor became thus the hallmark, enabling sociologists to dissect societal structures and behaviors systematically. However, as new paradigms emerged, emphasizing the subjective and context-dependent nature of reality, sociology found itself at a crossroads. In this ever-changing landscape, the sciences, too, underwent profound shifts. Positivism, once a guiding light, was challenged by the complexities of human subjectivity. The attempt to quantify the human experience through statistical rituals faced resistance from the nuanced realms of experience and emotion.

Eventually, both literature and sociology are inseparable parts of culture. They share the same field of study, the same subject matters and topics and, generally, the same purpose. They both supplement and complement each other. They are both "sisters [...] not just ordinary sisters, but siamese twins – and such siamese twins as are, due to sharing their nourishing and digesting

organs." The study of society should not be confined to "the doubtful and presumptuous 'knowledge' of homunculi born and bred in test tubes" (Bauman & Mazzeo, 2016: 5–12), and neither literature nor sociology nor any other discipline can claim to be completely self-sufficient.

The significance of this historical exploration lies in its relevance to contemporary scholarship. Amid the complexities of a globalized, multicultural world, embracing interdisciplinary dialogue is not merely an academic pursuit but a necessity. In a world inundated with information, the ability to synthesize diverse forms of knowledge and engage in nuanced, context-specific inquiries that capture the richness of human experience becomes paramount. The interplay between disciplines encourages a holistic understanding, fostering creativity, empathy, scientific inquiry and critical thinking.

However, while this study's focus on Western intellectual history provides a nuanced understanding of the interplay between literature and the social sciences within the Western context, it nonetheless comes with limitations. Its scope remains confined within the boundaries of Western thought and does not encompass an analysis of non-Western perspectives. Future research integrating diverse cultural viewpoints could enrich the study further, providing a more global perspective on the subject. In particular, exploring non-Western integrative knowledge concepts could provide illuminating counterpoints to the bifurcation of creative and analytical pursuits. Concepts like the Islamic '*ilm* (Arabic), the Hindu *jnana* (Sanskrit), and the Confucian *zhi* (Chinese) present epistemological frameworks seamlessly integrating learning, speculative insight, ethical purpose and analytical rigor into integrative modes of understanding. Applying a conceptual history lens to these indigenous knowledge forms could illuminate alternative configurations beyond binary oppositions between objectivity and subjectivity, imagination and empiricism.

Ultimately, this historical perspective serves as a humbling reminder of the vast landscape of human understanding. The history of human knowledge abounds with examples of those who "saw themselves as giants standing on the shoulders of dwarfs", those "who asserted they had created entirely on their own account something novel that would stand the test of time" (Lepenies, 1992: 1). Yet time, without fail, turns the pages of Humanity one after the other, burying entire civilizations into oblivion, echoing William Blake (1757 – 1827),

Mock on, Mock on, Voltaire, Rousseau:

Mock on, Mock on; 'tis all in vain!

You throw the sand against the wind,

And the wind blows it back again.

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