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## APRESENTAÇÃO

A Literatura Comparada desenvolveu-se, ao final do século XIX e nos começos do século XX, em resposta ao avanço da História da Literatura. A expansão das histórias nacionais da literatura fragmentou, no século XIX, o campo literário, separando por países e/ou línguas a produção artística de autores originários de diferentes geografias. A Literatura Comparada procurou unir as partes, relacionando as semelhanças e articulando as desigualdades.

Porém, a época era dominada pelo cientificismo positivista, que disseminou as teses de H. Taine relativas às influências do meio, raça e momento histórico. A Sociologia da Literatura foi um desses frutos; outro, foi a noção de que literaturas mais tradicionais e consolidadas atuavam sobre as mais novas ou mais fracas, numa reprodução das teses darwinistas, de que os mais fortes, os superiores, sobrepujam-se sobre os inferiores, determinando suas características e modos de atuação.

Questionadas as bases teóricas, assumiu a Literatura Comparada novos rumos, que a fortaleceram o suficiente, para reivindicar seu lugar, legítimo, no campo da Teoria da Literatura. Suas dimensões são várias: discute as relações entre textos provenientes de autores de nações diversas, mas pertencentes à mesma época; analisa obras de períodos literários diferentes, verificando a trajetória de temas e o percurso de processos; examina as aproximações entre a Teoria da Literatura e/ou a Estética Literária e outras áreas do conhecimento.

É nesse sentido que esse volume de *Letras de Hoje* tem muito a oferecer à Literatura Comparada, não em termos de metodologia, mas na forma de resultados. Hans-Ulrich Gumbrecht, o renomado professor formado originalmente na Universidade de Constança, na Alemanha, e hoje atuando em Stanford, nos Estados Unidos, oferece sugestões para se pensarem as relações entre filosofia e literatura. Kathryn H. Rosenfield igualmente reflete sobre ética e estética, aproximando a literatura das preocupações da filosofia. Gilberto Mendonça Teles, crítico e poeta, propõe idéias inovadoras sobre a contribuição da religião à literatura brasileira, examinando, depois, obras de importantes escritores nacionais filiados ao

pensamento católico. Num processo *sui-generis* dentro das possibilidades da Literatura Comparada, mais adiante Elizabeth Marinho analisa poemas de Mendonça Teles, facultando a nosso leitor estabelecer os nexos entre o Gilberto crítico e o Gilberto criador.

As hipóteses de comparar produções de épocas diferentes emergem dos estudos de Pedro Fonseca, dedicado aos *Lusíadas*, de Camões, e de Sissa Jacoby, sobre o igualmente épico *Mensagem*, de Fernando Pessoa. Christopher Dunn discute as proximidades entre Longfellow e Alencar, a partir dos caracteres de Pocahontas e Iracema, figuras ficcionais femininas emblemáticas da preocupação romântica de representar as identidades nacionais. O ensaio de Alice Moreira, enfim, volta-se à observação monográfica de um texto, obra-prima da literatura francesa descortinada desde o prisma do pesquisador brasileiro.

Oferecendo ao leitor e estudioso da Teoria da Literatura esse conjunto de textos, *Letras de Hoje* contribui para o avanço das pesquisas em Literatura Comparada e mantém seu compromisso com o aperfeiçoamento dos estudos literários no Brasil.

Regina Zilberman

## Gegen / Darstellung<sup>1</sup>

HANS ULRICH GUMBRECHT

STANFORD University

(1)

"A moment arrives when one can no longer feel anything but anger, an absolute anger, against so many discourses, so many texts that have no other care than to make a little more sense, to redo or perfect delicate works of signification. That is why, if I speak here of birth, I will not try to make it into one more accretion of sense. I will rather leave it, if this is possible, as the lack of 'sense' that 'is'. I will leave it exposed, abandoned" (Jean-Luc Nancy: *The Birth to Presence*. Stanford, 1993, p. 5). In the very strong, in the etymological sense of the word, I have long felt a sympathy for this quote from Jean-Luc Nancy's book *The Birth to Presence*. The anger that Nancy and I seem to share is something that, on my side, precedes any argument; it is definitely not the outcome of a mature reflection. The same goes for my (if possible: even fuzzier) feeling that, instead of interpreting (i.e. instead of identifying meaning), I would hope to be the catalyst for things to emerge, for forms to happen. Now, I realize that my language threatens to become embarrassing here. So I will try to cast the

<sup>1</sup> Meaning something like "counter-declaration", this word has a specific use in contemporary German journalism: it refers to those "diverging opinions" which, more and more frequently, periodicals are obliged to publish on the basis of legal decisions. In this sense, I would like to see the status of a legally licensed "counter-declaration" conveyed to my ruminations against interpretation. "Darstellung" with emphasis on the prefix "dar-", however, also alludes to a gesture in dealing with texts that I hope will prevail, in the long run, over interpretation (pointing to something, without determining the relationship that people may develop with that something). Finally, "Darstellung" in the sense of an emergence implying a self-deictic component, could be an appropriate description of what interests me most in aesthetic experience, in events, and, as I will try to argue, in some contemporary philosophical discourses.

double-sided feeling (the anger and the hope) into an argument (an argument, however, which I am not sure I will be able to really sustain).

(2)

"Interpretation" is one of those words on behalf of which, whenever you ask people what they mean by using them, one person at least will emphasize that, above all, she means something very different from what you had presupposed. Joseph T. Shipley's *Dictionary of World Literature* (by far my favorite book of its kind) quite beautifully exemplifies this point: "INTERPRETATION. This term has two main uses." The one use according to Shipley, as we expect, is "to declare the meaning of a sign" (I call it the "identification of meaning"). "Declaring the meaning of a sign" has two modalities, namely, first, "stating its message or ideology" (which Shipley seems to consider a somehow low-key operation), and, second, "explaining" which can either focus on securing a plurality of "primary" and "secondary" meanings or on "ambiguities", i.e. on passages in the text where the obligation to make a decision is imposed upon the reader. The other principal meaning of "interpretation", according to Shipley, is "developing a work along lines suggested by the original". What Shipley refers to here is either "interpretation" in the sense of playing a symphony or reciting a poem. But it can also be the "interpretation involved in transforming a work from one form into another, as in the adaptation of a novel for the stage". The point I want to make (nothing specific indeed) is that, with this triple bifurcation ("Interpretation" has two different meanings with two sub-meanings each), Shipley has established one of those fields where *you* can always "escape" to a "different meaning" if I put pressure on a specific concept (in our case on a specific meaning of "interpretation"). So please don't do this to me, dear reader, please play along defending the concept of interpretation that I hate. Fortunately for the sake of the game I propose, Gero von Wilpert's *Sachwoerterbuch der Literatur*, the most successful (although not the qualitatively best) equivalent of Shipley on the German market, does concentrate on the one meaning of interpretation that I want to pinpoint on the following pages (and that, I think, corresponds to a generalized disciplinary practice within Literary Studies, a practice, for that matter, which makes me "absolutely angry." It is because I want to refer to this "generalized disciplinary practice" that I start with "dictionaries", rather than with the more sophisticated positions within the contemporary debates on interpretation). Here, then, is Gero von Wilpert's definition of interpretation

– which indeed provides much more than the minimum for me to get angry: "Interpretation [...] erklärende Auslegung und Deutung von Schriftwerken nach sprachlichen, inhaltlichen und formalen Gesichtspunkten (Aufbau, Stil, Metrik); bes. e. Methode der modernen \*Dichtungswissenschaft, die durch moeglichst eindringliche, tiefe Erfassung e. dichterischen Textes in seiner Ganzheit als untrennbare Einheit von \*Gehalt und \*Form rein aus sich heraus – ohne Seitenblicke auf biographisches oder literaturgeschichtliches Wissen – zu e. vertieften Verstaendnis und voller Einfuehlung in die eigenstaendigen, weltschoepferischen Kraefte des Sprachkunstwerks fuehren, die Dichtung als Dichtung erschliessen will." I know that the style of this definition is unusually appalling. Nevertheless, it contains four elements that I find (and resent) even in much more sophisticated definitions: the topology of depth (1), the (more implicit than open) assumptions that "complex meanings" is what "literary artworks" are all about (2) and that these are a stable meanings that can be identified (3), finally the absorption, through the concept of "Gehalt", of more form-oriented textual aspects under the dimension of meaning.

(3)

But where does my (so heroic sounding) "anger" on behalf of interpretation come from? I fear that the main reasons behind that anger (as if anger needed reasons at all!) show traces of my 1970s-style academic socialization in the environment of "reception theory". As I still more or less believe that what "literary reading" (rather a reading under specific circumstances than the reading of a specific type of texts) – as I still believe that the most important thing literary reading has to offer is an incomparable degree of freedom, for those who read, in the production of a meaning and in the shaping of an emotional and intellectual reaction to this meaning, I fear that attaching the little authority we have to our own "professional" interpretations will generate the wrong message. It will convince the few readers that we reach (in the American case: it will convince, above all, the beginning undergraduates in the large literature-and culture-courses) that, instead of using and exercising their own subjective judgment and taste, that instead of each of them indulging in the belief that they are the author's one and only "beloved reader", readers of literature have to be concerned with guessing and coming close to professional interpretations (even if readers have the laudable habit of rejecting any kind of authority, they can still feel committed to finding the "correct" interpretation). There is another, loosely related aspect that I want to mention here (although I think that we have long

overdone the very praise of any kind of self-reflexivity as it comes with this aspect). What I want to mention is the idea that, due to its independence from most institutional constraints, literary reading has the potential of showing to the reader some of the strategies that she uses in producing meaning. Such self-reflexive insight, too, should contribute to building a habit of resisting the imposition of "correct interpretations". (I realize that, at this point, my readers will begin to feel that I am making up a horror story around "interpretation", a horror story that does not correspond to any contemporary practice. My counter-argument lies in the claim that no interpretation-oriented practice within literary studies can fully avoid the effects that I am describing here).

(4) What makes me even more nervous than the violation of the wonderfully democratic principles of literary reading (see [3], and let me quickly confess that I decreasingly care about them) are the topologies that come with interpretation. There is, first of all and repeatedly, the more or less horizontal topology of a (purely spiritual) subject who, being eccentric to the world, confronts the world as a world of objects: this applies to the subject of the interpreter in relation to the text of an author other than himself (the text is then part of the world of objects), and to the author-subject in relation to her own text which, despite being his own, cannot help appearing alienated from her because it has the status of an object. What I dread even more than the subject/object-paradigm is a vertical topology which, referring exclusively to the world of objects (including texts), distinguishes between a purely material surface and a purely spiritual depth. I assume that the spirit has to always reside in the "depth" because this topology stages the spirit as that which matters, and whatever matters is also that which can only be reached after a long and difficult itinerary. The itinerary that I mean here is of course interpretation which begins by penetrating (deciphering) the purely material surface of the textual signifiers in order to identify, secure, and arrive at the deep "meaning of the text". But does one really need a specialist (i.e. a literary critic) in order to secure such deep meanings? This is where the component of alienation in the relationship between author and text comes in. It is supposed to be impossible for the author to "fully express", on the material surface of a text, the complex spiritual content that is lying in the depth of her soul (or of his guts). This assumption explains, I think, the connotations of "pain" in the original, metaphorical use of the word "expression" (see below [5]). But it is also on this level of the argument that I am

becoming prejudiced against interpretation. I don't like the devaluation of materiality (and, with it, of sensuality) that goes with the paradigms of interpretation and expression. And I like even less the stickiness of the implicit subject-theory, especially the thought that there is something terribly important, something that imperatively requires redemption, lying at the bottom of every individual's soul.

(5) Nobody would deny that the generalized habit of "reading the world" emerged in early Modernity – and that whatever has had such a historical beginning must be capable of having a historical end (of course it is the possibility of claiming a historical end for interpretation that matters to me). Now, the expectation that humans can read the world and that, in reading the world, they produce knowledge, comes, together with the habit of interpretation, out of what I call the "hermeneutic field", i.e. out of the convergence of the subject/object-paradigm with the surface/depth-paradigm in early Modernity. This implies, as a further step of historization, that there was no such thing as "our" way of interpretation in the Middle ages. I indeed believe that medieval writing and reading, especially the reading of the Gospel, did not presuppose that distinction between the purely material surface and the spiritual depth that looks so natural to us. The graphematic and phonetic materiality of language certainly mattered, and, in addition, language was not held to be incapable of fully articulating a subject's thought (it was not even held to be incapable of articulating God's thought). The most important difference may indeed be that language was probably thought of as less immediately linked to any subject than today – and more directly related to the world of objects. A concept of "expression" close to ours did not appear prior to the 15th and, in some places, even to the 16th century (Martin Luther, for example, is the first author to use this notion in German). During the Middle ages, God's revelation was not thought of as a potential knowledge that humans had to constitute by interpreting God's word. One could infinitely point to, annotate, comment upon, and surround God's words with possible aspects of its application. But if it ever appeared to be obscure, humans could not hope to redeem this obscurity without God's self-revealing intervention.

(6)

Is it possible, under the modern premises of the hermeneutic field, to translate the knowledge and the experience conveyed by literature into the propositional language of philosophy? First of all, the question presupposes a homogeneity of the discursive field "literature", and this is an assumption which theory-oriented people within literary studies have become very skeptical about ever since the heroic (and ultimately unsuccessful) efforts of the Russian Formalists to define the extensions of our disciplinary field. But this is really not the main point – because one could of course find many different "formulas" for the translation of different sub-forms of literature into philosophy (for example: one could try to develop one specific formula for each genre). If I agree, once again, with Jean-Luc Nancy in that "philosophy will never reduce the difference of art except in the mode of a reduction that is 'only thought'" (*The Muses*, Stanford, 1996, p. 30), it is for the simple reason (and I am of course saying "simple" because I am using a scandalously simple way of explaining something infinitely complicated) – it is for the simple reason that art is not just a truth or a modality of truth different from the truths dealt with in philosophy. Art, in comparison to philosophy, is about altogether different dimensions of experiencing truth (if "truth" is still the right word here). This means that if one tries to "translate" the truths of art into philosophy one is left, disappointingly, with truths that are not new at all within philosophy – and, to make things worse, one loses those dimensions of experience inherent to art which philosophy in and by itself would not be able to offer. As for the specific dimension(s) of experience that we are dealing with in art and literature, I would opt (once again: I would opt if it were legitimate at all to go for a totalizing formula) for a solution close to Heidegger's description from *The Origin of the Work of Art*: "Art then is the becoming and happening of truth. Does truth, then, arise out of nothing? It does indeed if by nothing is meant the mere not of that which is, and if we here think of that which is as an object present in the ordinary way" (*Poetry, Language, Thought*, New York, 1975, p. 71). As I am being extremely irresponsible anyway, why not add that I would like to substitute, in this description, "truth" by "form" – and that the concept of "form" that I have in mind is definitely *not* detached from "substance" as its Aristotelian flip-side? The appearance and/or the vanishing of embodied forms (forms with substance) as a dimension of aesthetic (including literary) experience, I imagine,

could be something capable of "hitting", of "affecting" us, something that would thus always have the character of an event without needing to be innovative. Now, regardless of whether there is something to this approach or not, it is clear that philosophy (highly conceptual language) may try to describe what is going on in literary or in aesthetic experience (this is indeed what I have been trying in this paragraph). But it should not try to absorb aesthetic and literary experience into the philosophical discourse – as if philosophy implied the guarantee of preserving (or even of intensifying) everything that art and literature convey. Trying to describe what is going on in experiencing art and literature, however, is aesthetic theory – not interpretation.

(7)

Recently, I have come to think (but this sounds too pretentious, let me rather ask) – let me ask: what if the side that I am characterizing as the aesthetic side in trying to describe the difference between a philosophical and an aesthetic dimension of experience, what if the aesthetic side had had an impact on philosophy? What if we could only now begin to see that the difference between the philosophical and the aesthetic dimension of experience is the difference between an earlier and a more contemporary chapter in the history of western philosophy? This is a feeling (nothing more!) close to (but not synonymous with) Lyotard's thesis (from *Analytique du Sublime*) that what Kant had described, in the *Third Critique*, as the specificity of the aesthetic judgment has by now become the general situation of any kind of judgment. What pushes me in this direction is, among other things, a recent (first!) reading of and a seminar discussion on Heidegger's *What is Called Thinking?* – in which reading I was struck to realize that the descriptions of thinking Heidegger ends up with are not much different from his descriptions of the specificity of aesthetic experience. In both cases, the dimension of emergence, of appearing and disappearing, seems to prevail over the dimension of "possessing" or of simply "having" something. It is not without some emblematic intention that I choose a passage from *Was heisst Denken?* that focuses on the modern world as a technical world: "Waltete nicht [...], Sein des Seienden, im Sinn des Anwesens und damit der Gegenstaendigkeit der gegenwaertigen Bestaende, dann wuerden die Flugzeugmotoren nicht nur nicht laufen, sie waeren ueberhaupt nicht. Waere das Sein des Seienden nicht als Anwesen des Anwesenden offenbar, dann haette niemals die elektrische



Atomenergie zum Vorschein kommen und auf ihre Weise den Menschen in die ueberall technisch bestimmte Arbeit einstellen koennen" (p. 142). What I am interested in is a state of presence that crosses the threshold between being a potential and a *zum Vorschein Kommen*, and, more specifically, I try to see, in the *zum Vorschein Kommen*, something that has a substance. Could Gadamer's philosophy, especially his elaboration of the Heideggerian motif of the "hermeneutic circle", on the one hand, and Derrida's practice of deconstruction, on the other hand, then be considered as two complementary symptoms that point in the same direction, i.e. in a direction where the appearance and vanishing of meanings (if that is still – or has ever been the right word) as embodied forms becomes more central than the situation of having and contemplating those meanings (in general, I detest such reconciliations of everything with anything – but what makes the idea of a complementarity between Derrida and Gadamer somehow appealing to me is the possibility to see, for the first time, more than just an "intellectually softening move" in the Gadamer's philosophy). Let me quote Gadamer from an interview: "Also, ich halte es in der Tat fuer eine menschliche Grundbestimmung, dass wir in einem absoluten Sinn die Wahrheit nie erfassen, sondern immer nur in Annaeherungen, wobei wir vielleicht nicht einmal im Fortschritt begriffen sind, sondern auch ebensosehr im Verfall" (*Sprache und Literatur in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 17 [1986], p. 93). Could we say, taking up Gadamer's intuition about "Fortschritt und Verfall", that deconstruction is a practice that lets truth and form appear – but under the specific condition that it always starts out with the undoing of some stable meaning? What would of course need an urgent "recasting" in this context (but who am I to even begin to try that?) are the concepts of "meaning" and of "truth". The appearance and the vanishing of embodied forms about which I am talking here is not comfortably covered by the notions of "truth" and "meaning". But the appearance and the vanishing of embodied forms has literally everything to do with that "birth to presence" which Jean-Luc Nancy holds against the principle of "a little more sense" in the quote I began with. After that passage, Nancy continues: "Joy, *jouissance*, to come, have the sense of birth: the sense of the inexhaustible imminence of sense. When it has not passed over into ornamentation or into the repetition of philosophy 'poetry' has never sought to create anything else. The coming and going of imminence."

(8)

We may of course say that interpretation is this letting come and go of imminence, and that, perhaps, philosophy today cannot be anything other than that (but my statement, I realize, looks way too dramatic!). This notwithstanding, I would still insist (but who cares?) that a similar letting-come-and-go of imminence was not what "interpretation" meant when I studied *Literaturwissenschaft* in Munich starting in 1967, or when I got my *Dr.phil.* in Konstanz, a couple of years later. Nor is it, even today, what most professional philosophers would want to associate with philosophy. Habermas, for example, gets so angry on behalf of "the leveling of the genre distinction between philosophy and literature" (*The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, p. 185-210) because, different from Heidegger and Gadamer (if I understand them correctly), he is eager to subsume "philosophical thinking" under "the duty of solving problems" (p. 210).

(9)

And what should translation, I mean translation in the un-metaphorical sense of the word, be (or become) under these circumstances? I have so far emphasized that what makes the reading of literary texts specific is not a specific field of content or meaning but a dimension of experience that makes us see contents, meanings, forms as constantly appearing and vanishing. On this basis, one might tentatively argue that as long as a translation manages to yield this specific structure of experience and its effects, it needs not be very semantically precise. But is this an affordable concession? In its extreme form, it would mean that any text in translation capable of conveying the experience of the emergence and vanishing of (any?) form could be an acceptable equivalent of its original. Clearly, however, every individual case of aesthetic experience is not independent of what comes to appear and to vanish while it occurs. Heidegger's aircraft engine (see above [7]) may be perceived in a dimension of experience similar to that within which we perceive and appreciate a pass play in the game of American Football – but we couldn't say that the two cases "are" the same experience. This means that all the old, mostly vague, and often unsatisfying rules for translating (e.g. "so woertlich als moeglich, so frei als noetig") are still alive – and I do not even see at this point how we could be relieved from them.

(10)

Returning to the modality of aesthetic experience (which, if I am not grotesquely mistaken, may have come closer to the modality of philosophical experience in our present): what can a critic do – what can we do – to make this experience happen? Of course, we can (and probably should) analyze what happens when it happens. This, as I have already mentioned several times, is the discourse of philosophical aesthetics. But is there something that could replace the discourse of interpretation as (let us call it) a didactic discourse; a discourse that would motivate and help people to enter the dimension of aesthetic experience, a discourse also that enhances the happening of form? I will quote Jean-Luc Nancy one more (and final) time: “The presentation of presentation is not a representation” (*The Muses*, p. 34). In other words: if the thing is the appearance and vanishing of forms (i.e. events of presentation) and if all we can do to make the appearance and vanishing of forms happen is to let it happen and, perhaps, to point to it when it happens (i.e. an act of presentation), then of course the (act of) presentation of (the event of) presentation is not representation (in the sense of “mimesis”). We do not return to the semantic dimension. But what exactly can we do instead of interpreting? One answer to this question is already taking place, i.e. it has already taken up part of our professional space. I am referring to the renewed interest in the philological dimensions of text-editing (think of the Hoelderlin-debates during the past decades) and of text-commenting (think of all the different modes of commenting with which editors are experimenting in the volumes of *Deutsche Klassiker Bibliothek*). Both levels, editing and commenting, are concretizations of (acts of) presentations of (events of) presentation – but they are of course not representation. Is the concentration on the space of the museum among historians of art a similar movement? And is it true that, while these shifts are occurring in art history and in literary studies, musicology – so to speak in an “anti-cyclical” movement – is becoming increasingly fond of hermeneutics? At any rate, there is the discourse of philosophical aesthetics, and there is text-editing and text-commenting – but is there anything in our present and in the future that could more or less exactly occupy the place of interpretation? Frankly, I don’t see any such activity – and if this is so it would have considerable quantitative consequences (if one may talk about something as empirical as quantity in relation to an institution as ethereal as literary studies) because, among all those discursive activi-

ties only interpretation, despite its authoritarian gesture, claimed to be infinite (only interpretation would claim the right to endlessly come back to the same texts). So, perhaps, Literary Studies as an institution is doomed to shrink? Why not? Even if I could, I would certainly not try to stop such a development – which may be regarded as somehow cynical but, then, I have already spent so much time defending things that I do not even find entertaining (let alone “truly important”). And if (something like) interpretation shifts to the field of Philosophy, if, despite Juergen Habermas’ most tenacious resistance, the distance between the discourse of Philosophy, on the one side, and the discourses of Literary Studies and Literature, on the other, is disappearing, would that mean that Philosophy as an academic institution will grow in the future? Once again: why not?<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> At Stanford University, among professors of literature who do not enjoy the reputation of being politically virtuous, it is not unusual that courses with philosophical topics have a higher enrollment than literature courses. This quarter, for example, I am teaching fourteen students in a course on French and Spanish classical theater, and I have fifty-five students in a course on Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*.