

Between Text and Context: The Theory of the Literary Field and Cultural Materialism as Models of Mediation

Josef Šebek, Mgr.

Abstract

In his dissertation *Between Text and Context: The Theory of the Literary Field and Cultural Materialism as Models of Mediation* the author deals with the problem of mediation between literary text and its social context. He focuses on two important contemporary context-oriented approaches to literature: the theory of literary field, developed by Pierre Bourdieu, and cultural materialism, first formulated by Raymond Williams and further elaborated by Alan Sinfield and Jonathan Dollimore. He interprets these two theories as basic, mutually complementary models of mediation: the theory of literary field presupposes the existence of a (semi-)autonomous literary micro-world, whereas cultural materialism stresses the full integration of the literary text into the social context, the “social material process” (Williams). After an introduction outlining the problem, the author concentrates on Bourdieu’s theory of the literary field, his “new science of works,” and on contemporary post-Bourdieuian approaches (those of Alain Viala, Anna Boschetti, Jacques Dubois, Gisèle Sapiro, Pascale Casanova, Bernard Lahire, Jérôme Meizoz, Geoffroy de Lagasnerie) which employ, develop, and modify the field theory, and he uses them to shape his critique of this theory as a model of mediation. He then focuses on cultural materialism, first sketching the fundamental notions of Williams’s theory of culture and literature, before moving on to Williams’s most important continuator, Alan Sinfield. With Sinfield the problem of mediation is re-oriented towards sexual dissidence and social difference, and the result is a remarkable variant of queer literary studies with the concepts of subculture and dissident reading at its centre. The author concludes by re-examining and comparing both theories, with special emphasis on problems of historicity, text as an event, singularity, production and reception, the question of form, and self-reflexivity of research, thus illuminating the question of the mediation between the text and the context.

Keywords

Pierre Bourdieu, Raymond Williams, Alan Sinfield, Ladislav Fuks, sociology of literature, literary field, *habitus*, cultural capital, literary game, posture, cultural materialism, ideology, hegemony, dissidence, reading, queer studies