

Original citation:

Ahearne, J. and Speller, J. (2012). Introduction : Bourdieu and the literary field. Paragraph, 35(1), pp. 1-9.

Permanent WRAP url:

<http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/48867>

Copyright and reuse:

The Warwick Research Archive Portal (WRAP) makes the work of researchers of the University of Warwick available open access under the following conditions. Copyright © and all moral rights to the version of the paper presented here belong to the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. To the extent reasonable and practicable the material made available in WRAP has been checked for eligibility before being made available.

Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge. Provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

Publisher's statement:

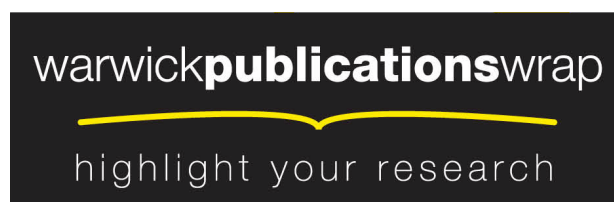
© Edinburgh University Press

<http://dx.doi.org/10.3366/para.2012.0038>

A note on versions:

The version presented in WRAP is the published version or, version of record, and may be cited as it appears here.

For more information, please contact the WRAP Team at: wrap@warwick.ac.uk



<http://go.warwick.ac.uk/lib-publications>

Introduction: Bourdieu and the Literary Field

JEREMY AHEARNE AND JOHN SPELLER

Pierre Bourdieu's range as a thinker was extremely wide, and it would be misleading to present him primarily as a literary theorist. Trained as a philosopher, he became the leading French sociologist of his generation, and brought under the spotlight of his 'critical sociology' a whole series of institutional and discursive universes (education, art, linguistics, public administration, politics, philosophy, journalism, economics and others).¹ Far from representing an intellectual dispersal, these manifold objects of enquiry allowed him to develop and refine a comprehensive theory of social process and power-relations based on distinctive concepts such as 'field', 'habitus', variously conceived notions of 'capital', and '*illusio*' (all these concepts and others will be explicated and assessed in this issue). Yet Bourdieu's analyses were scarcely ever received as neutral descriptions within the fields which he analysed. Bourdieu's abiding agenda was to show how the discursive presuppositions and institutional logics at work in such fields carried but also masked certain social logics that a 'critical sociology' could disclose. Coupled with the inveterately combative drive seldom absent from Bourdieu's objectifying analyses—and even setting aside the misprisions to which an external analyst is inevitably subject—this helps explain the resistance which his work recurrently provoked.² In this respect, Bourdieu's forays into the world of literary studies and his reception therein can be seen as part of a wider pattern.

When it appeared in 1992, *The Rules of Art* was perceived by many to represent, at worst, an all-out attack on approaches to literature in the academy, or, at best, a comprehensive endeavour to annex literary study under an all-embracing sociology.³ To some degree, this resistance simply reactivated an older hostility among literary scholars to the 'reductionism' of sociology. This was unfortunate,

2 Paragraph

insofar as Bourdieu's theory of literary autonomy takes shape precisely in reaction to such traditional sociological reductionism. The concern about annexation does respond to a certain scientific imperialism that often emanates from Bourdieu's writing, and this will be addressed by a number of contributors to the present special issue. At the same time, however, the refusal to engage with Bourdieu's work on these grounds is also unfortunate. As several contributors also show, the coordinated analysis of literary worlds—including the worlds of literary form—as relationally constructed social 'fields', with their diverse forms of 'habitus', 'capital' and '*illusio*', can generate significant insight into those worlds. Finally, there are also, paradoxically perhaps, dangers in reducing Bourdieu's own thinking on (and with) literature to his explicit 'theory' of literature, as expressed most systematically in *The Rules of Art*. Literature is sometimes his object; but, as some of the articles included in this issue will show, he is also at times, to a degree unusual among sociologists, its subject.

Literature was in fact of long-standing interest to Pierre Bourdieu, personally, theoretically and politically. As a boy, he imagined being another Balzac.⁴ He published intermittently on literature throughout his academic career, from his 1966 article 'Champ intellectuel et projet créateur' ('Intellectual Field and Creative Project') to what was, as it happens, his last piece of major empirical research, 'Une révolution conservatrice dans l'édition' ('A Conservative Revolution in Publishing') (1999).⁵ References to literature appear recurrently across an oeuvre that comprises several hundred articles and some thirty books. His major work on literature was his 1992 book *The Rules of Art*, but this was a synthesis of ideas and articles written and developed over the previous decades. Bourdieu spent much of his time not simply 'attacking' literature, as a common misrepresentation sometimes suggests, but vigorously defending both it and the cultural ecosystem on which it depends. Towards the end of his career, when he took a more stridently political turn, the sociologist warned with what can seem like striking prescience of the threats to intellectual autonomy posed by the withdrawal of State support for the arts, the submission of education to the needs of the economy and the erosion of what he called the 'social conditions of existence' of humanistic culture, including publishing houses, journals and bookshops. Moreover, Bourdieu's ongoing engagement with literature was not limited simply to the insight it can or cannot provide into social reality. In 1995, in an article translated for the first time in the present issue, we see him

turning to a poem by Guillaume Apollinaire (as he would turn in 1998 to Blaise Pascal) to meditate on illness, death and his autumn years.⁶

The interest of a special issue on Pierre Bourdieu and the literary field is at least twofold. On the one hand, it will shed light on an important but often under-examined component in Bourdieu's intellectual project, with significant ramifications for our understanding of his entire oeuvre. On the other hand, Bourdieu's work offers literary researchers a comprehensively articulated theory and method, together with a corpus of empirical case studies on which to build. The collected contributions to the issue variously combine these two interrelated centres of interest, moving from more programmatic overviews of Bourdieu's theoretical apparatus and its applications to detailed studies of what Bourdieu effectively 'does' with selected literary writers. Articles by Gisèle Sapiro and Anna Boschetti set out the broad theoretical framework Bourdieu applies to literature, and demonstrate how it has been collectively taken up by other researchers, focusing respectively on the themes of mediation and autonomy and on fields and world literary space. Michel Hockx shows how this theoretical framework can be and has been applied to the particular case of literary writing in China (this was not a possibility that Bourdieu had imagined). Articles by Jeremy Lane, John Speller and Jeremy Ahearne then examine different aspects of Bourdieu's own work on literature 'in practice', and find important points both of continuity and divergence with regard to his theoretical prescriptions and wider work. Their articles focus on Bourdieu's work on Flaubert in relation to notions of repression and anamnesis; on an overlooked article on Faulkner that illuminates his theories of reading and reflexivity; and on his attitude towards and use of literature through an exploration of his transepochal 'collaboration' with Blaise Pascal. Jérôme David seeks, finally, to elucidate the singularity of an enigmatic text, mentioned already, by Bourdieu on Apollinaire, in which his reflections on the poem, death and dying challenge us to modify our understanding of Bourdieu's own affective disposition (his 'habitus'), and of literature's place within it. The editors are grateful to Bourdieu's estate and to *Cahiers d'Histoire des littératures romanes/Romanistische Zeitschrift für Literaturgeschichte* for permission to translate and publish, as an appendix to this issue, the Bourdieu article in question, 'Apollinaire, Automne malade', for the first time in English.

In the first article in this collection, Anna Boschetti provides a general overview of Bourdieu's method, setting out the principles of Bourdieu's overall sociological/anthropological theory (as developed

4 Paragraph

in *The Craft of Sociology* (1968) and beyond), while helpfully relating this theory in broad terms to its anglophone foil (individualism and interactionism). The author probes certain perceived weak spots of Bourdieu's extant studies of literature (the naturalization of the concept of the 'field'; the privileging of already canonized literary figures; their restriction to the national level), insofar as these impede the full development of his theories' potential. Boschetti also explores the ways in which aspects of his theories have been unfolded and adapted by researchers working on literature, in particular how field theory can be used in the relational study of literatures across national and transnational spaces. Indeed, one of the most important points Boschetti makes is that the analysis of specific cases, which are by definition limited and circumscribed, can be reconciled with a worldwide perspective, by producing comparable studies making use of common principles and standards. Boschetti draws on a broad range of secondary sources to present Bourdieu's theory of literature as it is caught up today in an elaborate and sophisticated collective work of adaptation and refinement. Rather than a closed system of concepts, Boschetti argues that Bourdieu's theory is a continual work in progress, which continues to be developed through collective effort involving its use in different empirical contexts and the comparison of results.

In the second article, Gisèle Sapiro takes questions of 'mediation' as a practical focus in exploring the development of a Bourdieusian-based approach to analyses of literary works and fields. The 'mediation' in question revolves essentially around the relation between 'internal' and 'external' approaches to the analysis of literary production and reception, and the relations between 'autonomous' and 'heteronomous' principles underlying the creation and judgement of literary works. The notions of autonomy and mediation are important both for a fundamental understanding of Bourdieu's theory and for an appreciation of the normative cultural and political implications that he and other researchers draw out of it. Sapiro explores three broad levels at which the interplay between internal and external perspectives and between autonomous and heteronomous modes of determination can be studied. These treat, respectively, the external material and ideological conditions for the production of works, the space of position-takings and stylistic possibilities as they appear to differently situated agents within literary or artistic fields, and questions of reception (essentially in terms of critical reception). Sapiro does not simply oppose 'internal' and 'external' analysis, but shows instead how these two broad approaches can be interwoven. Likewise, she does

not pit principles of autonomy and heteronomy against each other in monolithic fashion, but rather shows how the writings of Bourdieu and other researchers allow us to draw out forms of complex and sometimes paradoxical dialectic at work.

Michel Hockx focuses on the interest scholars of Chinese literature, both anglophone and sinophone, have found in Pierre Bourdieu's sociological theory of literature. The underlying argument is that Bourdieu's mode of construing the relative autonomy of the literary field has provided analysts of Chinese literature with a means of moving beyond the flattening effects of one-dimensionally politicized approaches (even if these latter have taken the opposing forms of support for and hostility to a political regime, whether from commentators based inside or outside China). Certainly, the interest of Bourdieu's work heretofore has tended to be in its capacity to integrate various 'contexts' rather than its analysis of intrinsic form. Nonetheless, the article does show also how certain types of literary form (notably in the 1980s) can be seen as having played out in unexpected ways when effective contexts are suitably illuminated. The article thus introduces not only a rich vein of research into Chinese literature, but also demonstrates the potential of Bourdieu's theories to be applied to very different national traditions, also seen in the macro-context of World Literary Space. Overall, Hockx's article is particularly interesting insofar as it shows the uses of Bourdieu's paradigm, often rather glibly accused of being 'francocentric', when transposed, applied and tested in a very different context.

Jeremy Lane writes to some extent against a certain current of thought that relativizes the value of Bourdieu's work on literature by saying that it has little to say on literary form as such (thus in effect amalgamating Bourdieu's work with a certain 'externalizing' tendency in the sociology of literature). The author stresses by contrast Bourdieu's recurrent focus on the functions of form as such, particularly in relation to his work on Flaubert. The author goes on to draw out two broad functions of form that are developed by Bourdieu in largely compartmentalized manner. On the one hand, form can 'euphemize' or veil the reality it purports to represent. On the other hand, via various forms of aesthetic shock or defamiliarization, it can bring that reality into fuller consciousness (*anamnesis*). The author also discusses two modes of understanding the 'disclosing' that form can operate—on the one hand in analogy with dreamwork and its interpretation; on the other hand as the rendering explicit as such of socio-cognitive-affective structures that operate implicitly through

6 Paragraph

the habitus. Indeed Lane perceives basic conflicts both between the two accounts Bourdieu gives of the functions of Flaubert's literary form, and between the two models for understanding the disclosure of what the agent has 'repressed' or 'forgotten'. The author suggests that these vicissitudes and contradictions in Bourdieu's accounts of literary form might themselves be interpreted as a return of a repressed truth: that of sociology's inheritance from and debt to literature and literary writers such as Victor Hugo and Honoré de Balzac, who were the first to realize sociology's ambition to offer a comprehensive account of society and culture.

In 'Reading and Reflexivity: Bourdieu's Faulkner', John Speller examines a previously overlooked essay by Bourdieu on the author from Mississippi, tucked away in the final pages of *The Rules of Art*. After five hundred pages extolling contextualizing field analysis, we come to a purely internal reading of William Faulkner's short story 'A Rose for Emily'. Speller tries to unravel this puzzle left at the end of *The Rules*, a task that takes him into a discussion of Bourdieu's theories, elaborated elsewhere in his work, of reading and reflexivity. Yet in a piece devoted to these themes, and in particular to the challenging of unconsciously 'scholastic' intellectual projections, Speller finds Bourdieu prone to projections of his own. The sociologist sees the text as a kind of device that demonstrates his own theory of habitus, and in his enthusiasm, perhaps, to find in Faulkner a support for his own sociological theory, he flattens the literary complexity of Faulkner's short story (neglecting notably the techniques of foreshadowing, imagery, and diffuse Gothic convention on which the author plays). Thus, while Speller concludes that this apparently anomalous chapter at the end of *The Rules* can in fact be integrated into the overall economy of Bourdieu's theory of literature, he also challenges the clear-cut opposition between 'naïve' and 'scholastic' readings which structures it.

Jeremy Ahearne begins his article with Bourdieu's stark critique from the 1960s of the role of literary education in reproducing social structures—a critique that led, correctly in some respects, to the charge of social reductionism, and to Bourdieu's reputation as an inveterate 'enemy' of literary culture and pedagogy. This was arguably reinforced by the the 'hypercontextualizing' imperative that Ahearne notes in Bourdieu's theory of the literary field, which, to avoid the 'fetishistic' investment in works and the premature 'universalizing' of readings, demands not only that literary texts be situated in multiple 'fields' and 'spaces', but also that the reader

should submit him- or herself to an auto-analysis of his or her own ‘position’ and ‘trajectory’—a seemingly unending process of successive ‘double historicizations’. For all the undoubted advances in understanding thereby produced, these ‘hypercontextualizing’ injunctions nonetheless, Ahearne argues, risk stifling ordinary reading practices and the practical pedagogy of canon-formation. Moreover, Ahearne shows that Bourdieu’s actual attitude towards literature and his own real practice belie his more one-sided perspectives and pronouncements. Taking the example of Bourdieu’s long-term engagement with Blaise Pascal, Ahearne demonstrates how the sociologist inserts decontextualized fragments or ‘shards’ of literary text into his works. These enable him not only to express his ideas in a more arresting or even ‘brutal’ manner, but also to negotiate an experiential residue or excess encountered in his writing and that resists proper ‘scientific’ treatment. Literature, then, even or indeed sometimes especially when decontextualized, can be instructive. Moreover, Ahearne argues, Bourdieu’s appropriation of Pascal itself leaves behind a revealing residue, which brings into focus blind spots in Bourdieu’s thought (notably regarding his ‘investment’ in the world of science).

In ‘On an Enigmatic Text by Pierre Bourdieu’, Jérôme David begins by describing the feeling of perplexity that struck him upon first reading what is, to all intents and purposes, an *explication de texte* by Bourdieu of the Apollinaire poem ‘Automne malade’, dating from 1995 but written in the manner of a French professor or a particularly accomplished student from the 1950s. Even Bourdieu’s use of a common term in his lexicon, *amor fati*, does not take him, David argues, into the realm of sociological analysis. Bourdieu’s commentary appears to be an anachronism, not simply in terms of literary fashions, but also in the context of his wider work on literature, which had been strongly set against all forms of purely ‘internalist’, ‘scholastic’ reading. Yet rather than just a curiosity, David sees this commentary as revealing something about Bourdieu’s intellectual and affective system (his habitus), specifically the range of possible relations he held with literature simultaneously and at different moments. In ‘Apollinaire, Autumn III’, a remnant from Bourdieu’s scholastic unconscious re-emerges, and he enters into what David terms an ‘ethical’ relation to literature in which the reader is absorbed in a dialogue with the logic and internal dynamic of the work in itself. Bourdieu takes from the poem the same lesson the poet both draws from autumn and addresses to autumn: to accept and even love one’s fate, *amor amoris fati*, up to

and including one's demise and death. This was a surrender to nature, David argues, that Bourdieu's sociology would not have allowed him to deliver, but which, possibly with the prospect of his own death already on the horizon, he found the means to express in poetic language and literary analysis.

In a recently published collection in French entitled *Bourdieu et la littérature*, Jean-Pierre Martin recounts how he frequently asks amphitheatres full of literature students whether they have read any Bourdieu, and receives only a feeble showing of hands.⁷ One can imagine a similar situation outside France. Meanwhile, in the many general books and introductions on Bourdieu, his work on literature has likewise been given little attention. Yet interest does appear to have grown, as literary researchers around the world appreciate the possibilities Bourdieu's theory offers for situating works historically and within the fields of production and reception, including in a transnational perspective; and as sociologists realize that literature for Bourdieu was more than just a sideline — that it was a core interest, inspiration and influence in his œuvre. In this special issue, seven scholars from different academic traditions and disciplines, working with and on Bourdieu in a variety of contexts and for a variety of purposes, provide a range of perspectives on Bourdieu's approaches to literature and the literary field, in theory and in practice. The result is a collective reappraisal of this underexamined but central component in his work, and in the intellectual habitus that generated it. At the same time, this issue may serve as a starting point for further 'Bourdieuian' research, and for continuing adaptation and refinement of his general theory of fields, including his specific theory of the literary field.

NOTES

- 1 See, for example, Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* [1970], translated by Richard Nice (London: Sage, 1977); Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel, *The Love of Art: European Art Museums and their Public* [1966], translated by Caroline Beattie and Nick Merriman (Cambridge: Polity, 1990); Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, edited by John B. Thompson, translated by Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge: Polity, 1991); Bourdieu, *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power* [1989], translated by Laretta C. Clough (Cambridge: Polity, 1996); Bourdieu, *The Political Ontology of Martin Heidegger* [1988], translated by Peter Collier (Cambridge: Polity, 1991); Bourdieu, *On Television*

- and Journalism* [1996], translated by Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson (London: Pluto, 1998); Bourdieu, *The Social Structures of the Economy* [2000], translated by Chris Turner (Cambridge: Polity, 2005).
- 2 Bourdieu himself would come to see some of his more aggressive phrasing as counterproductive (see, for example, specifically in relation to literature, the comments on his earlier ‘needless excesses’ (‘outrances inutiles’), in Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* [1992], translated by Susan Emanuel (Cambridge: Polity, 1996), 185). Nonetheless, more generally, the very resistance to the terms of Bourdieu’s analyses within different fields was often integrated by Bourdieu into subsequent analyses as yielding significant insight into those fields.
 - 3 See Jean-Pierre Martin, ‘Avant-propos: Bourdieu le désenchanteur’ in *Bourdieu et la littérature*, edited by Jean-Pierre Martin (Nantes: Editions Cécile Defaut, 2010), 7–21.
 - 4 Pierre Bourdieu, *Esquisse pour une auto-analyse* (Paris: Raisons d’agir, 2004), 87.
 - 5 Pierre Bourdieu, ‘Champ intellectuel et projet créateur’, *Les Temps modernes* 246 (1966), 865–906; and Pierre Bourdieu, ‘Une révolution conservatrice dans l’édition’, *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales* 126–7 (1999), 3–28.
 - 6 Pierre Bourdieu, ‘Apollinaire, Automne malade’, *Cahiers d’Histoire des littératures romanes / Romanistische Zeitschrift für Literaturgeschichte* 3–4 (1995), 330–3, translated in this volume.
 - 7 Jean-Pierre Martin, ‘Avant-propos, Bourdieu le désenchanteur’, 7.