

## Translators' Note

To grasp the full import of this book, one need only begin at the beginning, with Gisèle Sapiro's dedication: *À mes étudiants* (To my students). This is a book for students of research, whether they be found in doctoral programs or in faculty positions with decades of tenure behind them. Sapiro, like her mentor Pierre Bourdieu, takes very seriously the task of combining multiple roles that, for many, are nonjoinable: the pedagogue, scholar, and public intellectual. Her stature in France as an authority and frequent commentator on cultural politics has not kept her from the classroom. If Sapiro's byline is often encountered in the pages of *Le Monde*, *L'Humanité*, *Libération*, and *AOC (Analyse Opinion Critique)*, she herself is usually found among her students, each of whom is working to deepen the discipline she has so fiercely championed for more than two decades. We see this book as belonging in the classroom as well; it is just as much a document for pedagogy as it is a tool and resource for research.

In France, where the sociology of literature took root, the present text is a crystallization of methods, histories, and approaches that, to one degree or another, will be familiar to so-

ciologists and literary critics alike; it offers a program for further understanding and pursuing a discipline whose merits have long been proven in that country. For readers from the English-speaking world, we hope that *The Sociology of Literature* will open up broad new avenues for research and intellectual experimentation. That *La Sociologie de la littérature* (2014) was originally published in the “Repères” series at La Découverte speaks to the esteem in which this branch of sociology is held in France. The aim of the “Repères” collection is to offer rigorous, clear, and accessible introductions to the most important disciplines and subdisciplines in the sciences, each volume being no longer than 128 pages, costing no more than 11 euros, and taking the form of a pocket book. That everything one needs to know about the sociology of literature might be found in one’s coat pocket alongside, say, everything one needs to know about economics is evidence of the discipline’s hard-won institutionalization in France.

In the United States, the story is rather different. The sociology of literature has thus far made its deepest inroads in literary studies. Following the publication of Bourdieu’s *The Rules of Art* (1996) in English, American literary critics, long accustomed to borrowing methods from other disciplines for productive use in their own, found a new wealth of possibilities in what has since become a landmark text in the humanities. There is an incongruity here that can only be attributed to the peculiar transformations that attend what Bourdieu called “the international circulation of ideas”: in France, the sociology of literature is resolutely a branch of sociology, not literary studies—and Sapiro herself is undeniably seen more as a sociologist than as a literary scholar. The same went for Bourdieu. This is not, however, to scold American readers for mistaking the contents of this book and others like it as being fit for “the wrong” discipline. Quite the contrary: in their idiosyncratic American reception, the sociologists of literature have discovered new freedoms and possibilities

of their own, realizing that here, perhaps more than in France, they have an opportunity to rub shoulders with literary criticism and engage in interdisciplinary dialogue with its practitioners.

It was therefore our aim, in translating this book, to offer American literary critics and sociologists alike a foundational text—a handbook—upon which to base their future research and collaborations. *The Sociology of Literature*, then, is presented here not so much as an intervention as a rallying point, where scholars from varying fields can take stock of and rearticulate the work they have already been doing, and can borrow the tools and principles that might help them push ahead.

*The Sociology of Literature* is also offered as a kind of reset to what has, until now, often been a contentious (if sometimes ill-informed) debate around the sociology of literature in the American academic context. Most commonly, the sociological approach to literary study has been criticized by literary scholars for reducing texts to their social environments, and by sociologists for privileging an elite and unuseful object of study. As will be clear to the reader of this book, neither of these critiques is an accurate assessment of the sociology of literature. As with any interdisciplinary effort, the challenges of bringing the sociological perspective to bear upon literary study—or the literary perspective to bear upon sociology—should not be taken lightly. But thanks to Sapiro's work, we now know what tools to wield and what paths to explore.

The challenges of translating this volume have been both interesting and numerous. Most important to us was to effect a certain continuity with the better known books on the sociology of literature already published in English. Thus, whereas Bourdieu's term *l'espace des possibles* entered the English lexicon almost three decades ago as "the space of possibles," we have retained this translation—even as we might, in another reception context, have gone with "space of possibilities." Certain

terms that might jar or startle as somewhat foreign-sounding (e.g., the use of “consecration” in the context of awarding a literary prize) have been retained for that very reason: Sapiro, who worked closely with us on this translation, wanted readers to pause over the words and phrases that convey the most important concepts in the sociology of culture. Other decisions were exacting for reasons unrelated to the business of finding *le mot juste*. Although some have called into question the appropriateness of the term “field,” given its connotative associations with the historical practice of slavery, we have preserved it precisely because, in borrowing the term as a metaphor for his own sociological theory, Bourdieu had in mind another sort of field entirely: the magnetic field, rife with charges, currents, and vectors—a perfect image of the dynamic social arrangement he set out to describe.

Above all, we have tried to preserve the clarity and grace of the original text for you, the reader, a student much like ourselves.

*Madeline Bedecarré*

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