The Sociology of Literature: Bridging the Humanities and the Social Sciences

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Located between the “two cultures”, the sciences and the humanities, the social sciences are torn between contradictory injunctions, as Max Weber would say, which have translated into tensions between explanation and interpretation (or hermeneutics), and between quantitative and qualitative methods: modelization, algorithms or descriptive statistics, on one hand, ethnography, interviews or close reading on the other. Because of its object at the intersection of literary studies and of sociology, the sociology of literature offers a paradigmatic site to question these traditional divisions and to show that such contradictions can be transcended and turned into heuristic complementariness. Furthermore, while it enriches close reading by locating the text in a space of possibilities, thus helping to better understand its singularity (or alternatively its more common properties, as “distant reading” shows), the sociology of literature challenges and helps renew traditional domains of sociology such as the sociology of professions, the sociology of the media, economic sociology, or the study of social relations (class, gender and ethnicity). It opens up to new domains such as the sociology of translation, of publishing, of intermediaries and mediators, and of transcultural exchanges, helping resituate a phenomenon such as globalization in the *longue durée*.