THE NOVEL MAKES THE EPIC[1]

O ROMANCE FAZ O ÉPICO

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ABSTRACT: The epic cannot be considered a literary genre in and of itself. Like all genres it is, rather, a theoretical object whose construction depends on the epistemological strategies of scholars. A quick overview of contemporary approaches reveals that the epic acquires its full meaning in its comparison with the novel : the identity of each of these genres is "relational". My comparative energetics strategy suggests taking this relationship seriously and describing the function of each of the generic apparatus through their mutual relationship, thus deducing their generic "endeavor". Based on analyses of texts representative of both genres, my work determines both the rhetorical and noetic functions of the narratives as well as the pragmatic effects of their ideological content. By linking this functional semiology with the pragmatic hermeneutics it is possible to find in their convergence their endeavor — what the genre is trying to convey to the reader. In such a case, the novel can be characterized by its ethical endeavor at the individual's emancipation, and the epic by its political endeavor at redefining common values.
Keywords: epic poetry, epic novel; epistemological strategies.

RESUMO: O épico não pode ser considerado um gênero literário por si só. Como todos os gêneros, é, antes, um objeto teórico cuja construção depende das estratégias epistemológicas dos estudiosos. Uma rápida visão geral das abordagens contemporâneas revela que o épico adquire todo seu significado em sua comparação com o romance: a identidade de cada um desses gêneros é "relacional". Minha estratégia comparativa sugere levar a sério essa relação e descrever a função de cada um dos aparelhos genéricos através de seu relacionamento mútuo, deduzindo assim seu "esforço" genérico. Com base em análises de textos representativos de ambos os gêneros, meu trabalho determina as funções retóricas e noéticas das narrativas, bem como os efeitos pragmáticos do seu conteúdo ideológico. Ao vincular esta semiologia funcional com a hermenêutica pragmática, é possível encontrar em sua convergência seu esforço — o que o gênero está tentando transmitir ao leitor. Nesse caso, o romance pode ser caracterizado pelo seu

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[1] Original in French : « Le roman fait l'épopée » : http://ouvroir-litt-arts.univ-grenoble-alpes.fr/revues/projet-epopee/166-le-roman-fait-l-epopee.

esforço ético na emancipação do indivíduo e o épico pelo seu esforço político na redefinição de valores comuns.
Palavras-chave: poema épico; romance épico; estratégias epistemológicas.

Introduction: Escaping from the "modern paradigm"?

Is the epic over? In a recent book, Cédric Chauvin defined what he calls the "modern paradigm" of epic studies[2]. It consists in the Hegelian disposition to conceive of epic as a vestige of magnificent vanished times, as well as both an outdated source and an unattainable model for the novel. Chauvin argues that epic is at the same time a document and a monument, but that having disappeared as a literary genre, it can only survive as an occasional literary register, for instance in "epic poetry" or in an "epic novel." And what about this paradigm—are we still its prisoners? If not, can we now break free? If indeed we are in a paradigm—and Chauvin refers explicitly to Foucault in invoking the term—the possibility of escape seems doubtful. Because for Foucault, a principled system of understanding (what he calls an "episteme") coerces our way of thinking, as we always see things through an historic system of categories. In a Foucaultian way, the fact that we believe that something like "epic" exists (and locate it in texts as different as the *Iliad*, the *Ramayana* and the *Heike Monogatari*) says more about the thought-structures that organize our language than about the things themselves.

Yet one can explain the consistency of the different ways that modern theorists define epic without drawing on the heavy metaphysics of Michel Foucault. I will argue in this paper that post-Hegelian theorists have always defined epics in the framework of an implicit comparison with the novel—seen as the quintessential modern literary genre. Thus, the features they like to see as the core of epic are quite stable, not due to a so-called paradigm, but due to the epistemological strategy these theorists share (i.e. seeing epic through the eyes of a reader of novels). But being a mere strategy, this can be perpetuated or dismantled.

What epistemological strategy?

After Hegel, we love to see in the epic the ancestor of the novel. Thus, in *The Theory of the Novel*, the Hegelian theorist Lukács treats epics as archaic ancestors only worth reading or studying as evidence of the originality of the novel. Underlying this position is the assumption that every era, every part of the world, and indeed every stage of human development, has its

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[2] CHAUVIN, Cédric. **Référence épique et modernité**. Paris : Champion, 2012.

own characteristic literary genre: the epic would thus be the genre of archaic societies, and the novel the genre of modern societies. But in this theory, there is no place for ancient novels or modern epics, and no way to understand why the Japanese novel *Genji Monogatari* was written before the Japanese epic *Heike Monogatari* ("monogatari" just means "story"). We thus need to try a different strategy, or to redefine our object.

First of all, we may give up the way we classify phenotypic features of texts (such as verse or prose, war or peace, realism or not, etc.) in the aim of deducing from them the ideological content of the society in which they were produced. One epistemological strategy to be jettisoned is what one may call "expressivist poetics," as such poetics argue that a literary genre expresses a *zeitgeist*. In line with this fresh perspective, Florence Goyet introduced, in a 2009 paper, three new ways of studying epics: "by the margins," "by the context," and "by the core.[3]" In all of these approaches, the key to epics is found not in the way a society may produce them, but in the way people may *receive* them. Much more than poetics, these strategies thus may be called aesthetics. But they are different, and each of them may be described as a specific epistemological strategy, leading to the building of a specific concept of the epic. We may call the first one a "dialectical poetics," the second one an "ethnographical rhetorics," and the third one an "inductive pragmatism."

1. By the margins: a dialectical poetics

The first one, by means of a dialectical somersault, switches the theme and the horizon. In such an approach, the so-called "archaic" epic should not be read only to cast a favorable light on the so-called "modern" novel. On the contrary, this strategy generously lets modern texts decide their own genre affiliation when they claim to be epics, as these texts express at least a modern *"désir d'epopée[4]"* (that is to say, an aspirational claim to belong to the genre). This strategy is "by the margins" because it does not define the concept by the core features of epic texts, but by other texts, allowing it to assimilate these epic features. However it remains a poetics, focused on the production and the causes of the literary forms, even though it is a dialectical one, as it focuses on texts (such as heroic or postcolonial poems, popular or historical novels) owing their very form to the previous reception of old epics.

Nevertheless, this strategy systematically stresses likeness (though sometimes very thin) and systematically holds back differences (though often very obvious) between modern texts

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[3] GOYET, Florence. Epopée. In : Bibliothèque en Ligne de la Société Française de Littérature Générale et Comparée, **Vox Poetica**, June 2009.

[4] NEIVA, Saulo (dir.). **Désirs et débris d'épopée au xxe siècle**. Bern: Peter Lang, 2009.

expressing the *"désir d'epopée"* and true ancient epics. That is why it runs the risk of a rhetorical trap. Actually, though it may be a good thing to trust the immanent intelligence of the texts, and thus call "epic" every text that claims to be "epic," should we not grant the creative mind its right to the art of dissimulation? For a claim to an explicit generic affiliation is often a rhetorical strategy, by means of which a text manages to fulfill another endeavor—by endeavor I do not refer to any intention of the writer, but to the very effort of the text, i.e., the optimal effects that its rhetorical, semiotic and ideological organization may provoke. Racine's romantic plays pretend for instance to be true tragedies, but they rather may be related to the Jansenism of the time (which encouraged Racine to pretend to be more "serious" than his love plots truly are) than to the organization of ancient tragedies (whose plots sacrifice suspense to religious and political ideas). And the *Franciade* of Ronsard imitates the *Iliad*, but this imitation fulfills a very different endeavor from Homer's. Far from "thinking without concepts," in which the *Iliad* succeeded, the claim of being an epic could just be for Ronsard an efficient way of praising a prince and getting from him a comfortable status at court.

Through this "by the margins" approach, the epic appears to embody a very relevant question posed to modern literature, even able to relativize the post-Hegelian notion of the obsolescence of this genre. Yet we are now facing an unsatisfying choice: either we define "modern epics" as true epics (but must rely on quite superficial features, all the more so as we run the risk of the rhetorical trap), or we just wisely speak about the *"désir d'epopée"* of some texts (though this means abandoning the struggle to build a relevant concept of the epic itself). Both of the choices are disappointing. Why? Because from this point of view the epic is seen as a modern question or desire, but ultimately this desire is still a desire for an old thing. We may thus have to depart even more radically from the Hegelian cliché.

2. By the context: an ethnographical rhetorics

The second perspective is called "by the context" by Florence Goyet. It leans less on the dialectical relationships of ancient and modern by which modern texts may express a paradoxical yearning for archaism, and more on the very tangible investigation of material conditions of production and reception of texts. In this frame of analysis, features of epic texts (like verse, formulas or patterns) are neither interpreted as an expression of the nature of genres nor as a desire for them. They are seen as rhetorical features, serving the semiotic work of the text. Tradition and modernity are thus not chronologically opposed, but defined as different modes of receiving meaning. Traditional epics are not necessarily ancient, and J. M. Foley and his disciples have dazzlingly studied contemporary Turkish and Asian oral traditions. But in any

event, regardless of chronology, these epics may find themselves defined as "the big other" of modern Western literature, as below:

> In the modern literary work of art we place the highest priority on a writer's personal manipulation of original or inherited materials, rewarding the work that strikes out boldly in a new direction by providing a perspective uniquely its own, memorable because it is new, fresh, or, best of all, inimitable. In such a case the work is praised for the finesse with which an author (not a tradition) *confers* meaning on his on her creation [...][5].

This dynamic approach, offering us an ergonomic interpretation of texts' features, and leading us to a theory of traditional and modern ways of making meaning receivable, is deeply inspiring. Because these features are neither perceived as ornamental nor as marks of a mysterious production, it is no sterile taxonomy of literary genres. Nevertheless, this strategy further avoids theorizing the specificity of the epic. Actually the theory of Foley is equally relevant for all traditional rhetorics, and makes no distinction between epics and folk tales, *chantefables* or whatever popular and oral recitations.

3. From the core: an inductive pragmatics

The third epistemological strategy is Florence Goyet's own strategy. It consists in treating the problem at the core, building by induction a concept of the epic. First, she reads some epics, stresses common points of their organization, and then deduces what is the nature of the genre. The results of this direct approach are amazing and lead to a complete redefinition of what epic may mean: for from being the expression of a frozen world or values, the epic *thinks without concepts*, in the aim of getting out of a civilizational crisis and leading a society to renew its political imagination[6]. In 1971, J.-M. Paquette already wrote that "the peculiarity of the epic consists in thinking by means of action (Hegelian's *Handlung*), and not by means of concepts[7]." Of course, in a sense, the epic is at the beginning of a society, as "the specific vocation of epic is to tell the first word,[8]" but this beginning need not consist of the fixed harmony of ancient times. It is rather the launch of a new society.

Taking seriously these intuitions, Florence Goyet establishes a radically new perspective. She not only substitutes aesthetics for poetics (focusing on reception rather than on production), but also focuses on the very act of the text. Epic theory thus becomes a matter of pragmatics. But of course, as her background is in the method of induction, she cannot escape

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[5] FOLEY, John M. **Immanent Art** (Bloomington, 1991), p. 8.
[6] GOYET, Florence. **Penser sans concepts. Fonction de l'épopée guerrière**. Paris : Honoré Champion, 2006.
[7] PAQUETTE, Jean-Marcel Paquette. Épopée et roman : continuité ou discontinuité ?. In : **Études littéraires**, vol. 4, n° 1, 1971, p. 9-38, p. 27.
[8] *Ibid.*, p. 36.

Meno's paradox: "A man cannot search either for what he knows or for what he does not know. He cannot search for what he knows—since he knows it, there is no need to search—nor for what he does not know, for he does not know what to look for.[9]"

In the same way, either I know from what corpus I may induce my concept (meaning that I already know among all the texts which are epics, thus what epic means), or I don't know which texts are epics (meaning I don't know what to read in order to build my concept). How do we know that Homer's texts are more suitable than Stendhal's to build a concept of epics? It is not because *we call* "epic" the former and not the latter? The induction relies on common sense's intuitive taxonomy. Its task is to substitute a rational concept for the raw intuition, and it is legitimate. So when Florence Goyet reads *The Iliad* or *The Song of Roland* or the Japanese *Monogatari* to answer to the question "What is epic?," she cannot ask *at the same time* whether these texts are epics or not, because she has to take for granted that they are. And only then can she bring out by induction the functional features of the genre: popular, polyphonic and political. And relying on the very hypothesis that those texts *are* epics, she can define the genre as the texts, thanks to which a society may renew its political imagination and resolve a crisis.

But why would common sense be a legitimate path towards the identification of a genre? Why should one describe the Japanese *Heiji Monogatari* as epic? Why read this very text when you want to build a concept of the epic? In fact, for Japanese scholars, *monogatari* does not specifically mean "epic," but means in general "narrative." For them, *Genji Monogatari* and *Heiji Monogatari* belong to the same category. But for us, *Heiji* is an epic and *Genji* a novel. What about the French *Song of Roland*, when you know that it was written many centuries before the invention of the French word "*épopée*"[10]? You rely on the common sense's taxonomy when you choose your corpus, but this common sense is not natural: it is much more of an historical, cultural, and social construction. This common sense is no objective gaze, but an expression of a temporary point of view, from which *The Iliad*, *The Song of Roland* and the *Heiji Monogatari* (objectively sharing few phenotypic features, and coming from different areas and eras with no mutual influences) seem to acquire common features. It is only by the exclusion of an "everything else" that anything can share commonalities with something else. This place, from where we gaze at these faraway texts, is modern written literature. Where the novel reigns supreme. It is thus no coincidence that Paquette's seminal 1971 paper first concerns a comparison between the epic and the novel.

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[9] PLATO. **Meno**. 80e, translation by Grube.
[10] MÉNIEL, Bruno. **Renaissance de l'épopée : la poésie épique en France de 1572 à 1623**. Genève : Droz, 2004, p. 11.

The novel and the epic as relational concepts

The three epistemological strategies thus share the prejudice that the epic is the "big other" of the novel. It is no coincidence: the concept of the epic is a relational concept. It describes things less than it describes our relationship to certain things.

1. The epic as a relational concept

The epic is always "the other" genre. The kind of text we aim to rediscover, because it comes either from an ancient world (before the end of traditions), or from another world (where they are still living). But this concept seems coherent only from the overwhelming perspective of our modernity. I don't mean here to look down on these three strategies. On the contrary, I only aim to claim *explicitly* the relational nature of this concept.

Thanks to Jean-Marie Schaeffer, we know now that literary genres are not pure ideas or entities existing in an ethereal absolute[11]. By no means would it thus be relevant to look for their essential nature. They are mental artifacts, whose construction is based on a multiplicity of variable logics. My point is that concerning the epic, the logic underlying the construction of the concept could be described as "relational." In other words, it is from the factual existence of the novel that can emerge, by difference, the unified figure of another storytelling device we call "the epic." But the common points of epic texts only exist by difference with the novel: it is only, say, a "negative homogeneity." There is no epic *per se* (what could it mean?), but we might say that seen from the era of the novel, some texts *seem* to share features. Suddenly, they *appear* as a genre.

In other words, beginning in the 17ᵗʰ century, *The Iliad* starts to resemble the *Heiji Monogatari*.

2. Reciprocity of the relationship

But in putting it this way, one might conclude that we have here the evidence that the Hegelian theory is indeed an *episteme* in the sense of Foucault, since the three strategies which it was first believed had freed us from Hegel's theory led us right back to it, as it were

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[11] SCHAEFFER, Jean-Marie. **Qu'est-ce qu'un genre littéraire ?** Paris : Le Seuil, 1989.

subterraneously. But that is not the case. Why? Because the Hegelian theory makes two mistakes. First, it takes genres as essences, and then essentializes the relationship itself. Second, it ignores the reciprocity of the relationship.

Actually, not only is the epic "the other one"—the novel is also the epic's "other." And this for at least two reasons. First of all, for a logical reason: if the epic exists only from the point of view of the novel, it means that these two concepts are relational like "father" and "son" or "East" and "West." Then, for historical reasons: as Camille Esmein-Sarrazin has shown, the novel genre has historically been built around and against the epic as a reference[12]. The concept of the epic was used as a point of support for a rejection which constituted, at its very beginnings, the novel itself. The East/West division is first of all purely arbitrary, since everything in itself can be the east or the west of the other (as the Earth is round), and thus represents the purely historical institution of these categories. Secondly, an historical institution of these categories has gradually imbued them with specific content (the West would be the Christian peoples, for example, and the East, the Buddhist peoples). Better, once this content is fixed, the members of each of these categories (the Westerners and the Orientals) begin to see themselves, according to a mechanism theorized by Sartre (who wrote: "it is the Antisemites who creates the Jew"), Franz Fanon and within postcolonial studies, as "the other of the other." In that very sense, the reciprocity of a purely relational difference may lead to the constitution of substantial identities. Our concepts work in a similar way: when a text-producer believes he is a novelist and not an epic bard—or reciprocally, an epic bard rather than as a novelist, in the context of works of the *"désir d'epopée"*—it is at first just a fantasy. Actually, he desires such an identification because he believes that a novelist is an original genius, whereas a bard would only reproduce a tradition (or something like that). But once these roles are anchored in reality, they produce works that objectively no longer resemble each other, because the novelist does his best to write as if he were a genius. Just as Westerners construct a concept of the East that does violence to the objective diversity of the Eastern peoples, and just as the latter, in turn, construct a concept of the West defined by violence (and in doing so do violence to the objective diversity of the Western peoples, which include very peaceful individuals!), to have an idea of myself is enough to achieve a double homogeneity (the West is the West, the East is the East, the East is not the West) from a double inconsistency (neither East or West can mean anything substantial in a circular world). In the same way, as soon as some writers realized that they were doing

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[12] ESMEIN-SARRAZIN, Camille. Le rôle de l'épopée dans la théorie du roman. In : _____ et BOUTET, D. (éds.), **Palimpsestes épiques. Récritures et interférences génériques**, actes du colloque "Remaniements et réécritures de l'épique, de l'antiquité au XXème siècle" (Université Paris IV-Sorbonne, 11-12 juin 2004). Paris : Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2006, p. 237-256.

something other than Virgil or Homer, they stressed that these authors shared something in common. At the same time, they defined this commonality as the epic, and made it an alterity (a different identity, and therefore an identity), against which, like an imaginary point of support, they can unite themselves as producers of novels. One may protest: Virgil consciously imitated Homer, and the *Aeneid* objectively resembles the *Iliad*. It is true, but it is only by chance. The *Heike Monogatari* is also characterized as epic whereas objectively it shares no features with these epics. Although from the point of view of someone used to novels, it is true, it does indeed bear some resemblance to them.

3. Autonomy of the concept

Hence, the fact that the concepts here are the fruit of a relational difference does not mean that they did not acquire their own meaning. Though "the East" may first just mean "the West's other," it still has its own characteristics (as soon as we compare it to the West). Of course, such a concept will always be suspect, and the West will be criticized, rightly, for its "Orientalism." But such a suspicion, legitimate because it points to an essentialization, does not prevent differences. Thus, for example, the West is more Christian, the Orient more Buddhist; such a characterization is no longer relevant, however, as soon as we stop comparing, and it makes no sense to say that the West in itself is Christian—we might rather say that there are Catholic and Methodist people in it, and find a few new relational concepts.

The same holds true for the relationship between the concepts of novel and epic. One must actually assert the following paradoxical affirmations: 1. their value is relational, and yet 2. each has its own content, even though 3. this content does not imply any essence. We may imagine a concept-construction process like this: among the plurality of narrative texts that are not novels, some of them share remarkable properties that require us to bring them closer together. We will for instance make a distinction between those that are clearly political and those that are not, like fairytales, myths, etc. Hence, there may be no "epic," just like there is no such a thing as the "East" (and Japanese *monogatari* shares with the Indian Mahabharata very few phenotypic features, as Japanese people share few with Indians). But as "the Eastern" makes sense from a Western point of view (e.g. neither the Japanese nor the Indians are Christian), "the Epic" makes sense from a novel-based point of view. And then, such a relational difference may grant a relative space of autonomy to the concept (among all the non-novel political productions, one can always highlight positive features, just like Japanese Buddhism originates...in India).

Even though they are relational concepts, each of them thus gets its own relevancy, enough at least to make one believe that one is allowed to use each of them in an essentialist way, without referring to the other one. *Essentialism* is not by the way the worst mistake. Actually, if you forget that the concept of the epic only takes on its meaning in relation to the novel, it may also lead you to nonsense. If you say for instance (laying aside that "epic" first was especially built for Homer and Virgil, and that "novel" was first built as a reaction against Homer and Virgil), that "*The Odyssey* is much more a novel than an epic" (which is an actual statement expressed by some scholars[13]), it is as absurd as if you say that "Confucius was Western" due to his common points with Socrates and differences with, say, Jackie Chan. In short, you must keep in mind that the novel and the epic are relational concepts and at the same time that you can independently study each of them, as soon as you never forget that *in the end*, the concept takes on its meaning in relation to the other. I consider this obvious double-bind as a challenge. In the following, I will claim that solving it requires the constitution of a fifth epistemological strategy (after the Hegelian one, and after the three modern approaches) that I suggest calling "comparative energetics."

The strategy of comparative energetics

I call "comparative energetics" a strategy whose objects are relational (it investigates the novel by balancing it against the epic as its counterpart) and whose method is synthetic (it takes for granted the three modern strategies and claims to articulate their results).

1. A relational and synthetic perspective

"Comparative" may thus produce two meanings. On the one hand, "comparative" means that you have to *compare the two genres* and theorize them one in light of the other (due to the logical genealogy I briefly summarized). On the other hand, "comparative" also means that once you put the other genre in your sights, you will thematize your concept of each of the genres by induction, and then you have to *compare some of the texts* we think can be representative, because common sense calls them "novel" or "epic." This strategy is then comparative, in both its intra- and extra-generic aspects. Then why is it an "energetics"? Because

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[13] As shown by STEAD, Evanghelia. **Odyssée d'Homère**. Paris: Gallimard, Foliothèque, 2007, p. 127. That is also the point of view of CITATI, Pietro Citati. **La Pensée chatoyante, Ulysse et l'Odyssée** [2002]. Trad. B. Pérol. Paris: Gallimard, Folio, 2004. See also DINGREMONT, François. L'*Odyssée* est-elle moins épique que l'*Iliade* ?, In : **Recueil Ouvert**. URL : http://ouvroir-litt-arts.u-grenoble3.fr/revues/projet-epopee//revues/projet-epopee/197-l-odyssee-est-elle-moins-epique-que-l-iliade

you will not define a literary genre as a class or category whose texts illustrate some replicable features (verse, invocation, *nekya*, etc.). You will rather define it as a class whose texts share the same endeavor. You will then focus on an *energeia* (the act, the endeavor) produced by the functional features of the text, and not on an *ergon* (the literary work as an accomplished object) with its list of features.

That is why I can say that this "comparative energetics" is fed by the "ethnographical rhetorics" approach: I will argue like John M. Foley that one needs a functionalist approach to the features of the text. Rather than amassing them in meaningless taxonomies, you have to see them as sockets, so that the receiver can be plugged into the flow of meaning. One may also feel that my "comparative energetics" is also fed by the "dialectical poetics" strategy. By focusing on the way each class of texts relationally tries to define itself, it take seriously the rhetorics of the "desire" of each genre and correlates it with the efficiency of the generic endeavor. Last but not least, this strategy is fed by the "core" strategy, as my concept of "generic endeavor" is an interpretation of Florence Goyet's concept of "epic work." Here is the difference: she means here the very actual work of the texts, and its actual consequences on real societies. On the contrary I think one has to be more speculative, that is, more prudent: if you read *The Mysteries of Paris*, you will realize that an objectively conservative literary endeavor may also produce, if received in some politically hot context, revolutionary effects. Generally speaking, all technical objects (and literary mechanisms surely belong to this class) have both an ideal and an actual use, which of course are often identical but may sometimes be different. I simply mean here that one can also use a broom as if it were a truncheon. Hence, what I call the "endeavor" of the text is not an actual effect. It is the *ideal action* of a literary mechanism, as one may reasonably guess by investigating the rhetorical, semiotic and ideological functioning of the text. My pragmatics may thus be called only "transcendental pragmatics," as it does not describe what actually happens, but just what may happen, all else being equal.

The "endeavor" of the text is not an actual effect. It is rather the ideal effect of the text that you can reconstruct with a patient investigation of its functional features. It means that rather than just classifying the "phenotypic" features of a text, you may take them as roles in the general "genotypic" endeavor, that is, the hidden program these features may figure in (as I will argue later, the epic endeavor is to define new political values). And superficial features (those appearing to the common reader) may sometimes be seen as organs, and sometimes just as symptoms. The distinction is here relevant, since different features can figure in the same endeavor, and since the same features (if placed in different systems) may figure in different endeavors. Think of the various chariots in a parade: even though the plane-chariot resembles the plane, it accomplishes the same endeavor as the boat-chariot. That is the reason why you

can find both verse and prose epics, and why some of them include a *nekya* and some others not, etc. That is also the reason why one may not conclude from the multiplicity of appearances a novel may have that there is no such genre—all the more so as such a multiplicity is one of the notable rhetorical features of the novel. That is, it is a symptom of the novel to try to be original, and is part of that genre's endeavor to achieve emancipation (as I will argue later). Taxonomy is here meaningless, because the multiplicity of appearances is by itself a rhetorical tool of the genre itself.

A genre's endeavor is thus first of all rhetorical. This means that the text tries first to orientate the receiver's reception, that is, it includes an implicit "user's guide." But this endeavor is also noetical. It means that it is a semiotic system that has to produce some precise content. Last but not least, it is praxeonomical (that is, ethical or political). It means that this very content *says* something about the relationship between individuals and the society, and also *adds* something to this relation (I call it "praxeonomical" and not "ideological" due to this pragmatic aspect). In the aim of reconstructing this three-dimensional functioning of both of the genres, my book *De l'épopée et du roman. Essai d'énergétique comparée* [On Epic and Novel. An Essay in Comparative Energetics[14]] especially focused on *The Red and the Black* and *The Odyssey*. Of course, these are specific texts and one cannot build a generic theory from them alone. That is why, in addition to using these two texts as my main corpus, I also investigated forty texts of a secondary corpus, including classic novels (*The Princess of Cleves*, *Julie or the New Heloise*), as much as modern ones (*Madam Bovary*, *Journey to the End of the Night*), from not only the French but the English tradition (*Robinson Crusoe*, *Pride and Prejudice*). Of course, I also included epics, from various traditions: Greek (*The Iliad*), Roman (*The Aeneid*), Japanese (*Heike Monogatari*), and Indian (*Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*). Finally, I also focused on some generically hybrid texts (*The Mysteries of Paris*, *Les Misérables*) and more modern texts that explicitly claim to belong to the epic genre (*Jerusalem Delivered*, *The Franciad*, *Paradise Lost* or *The Legend of the Centuries*).

How to do things with epics, or novels?

As I have once argued, "energetics" has three dimensions: rhetorical, semiotic and ideological (or, as I will argue, "praxeonomical"). The analysis may start with the rhetorics.

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[14] VINCLAIR, Pierre. **De l'épopée et du roman. Essai d'énergétique comparée**. Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2015.

1. Rhetorics

Every text needs rhetorics. In order to fulfill its endeavor, it first has to be received in a certain way. And then it has to develop in the receiver the proper attitude. There are three levels in such rhetorics: what I call "rhetorical economy," "strategy," and "function."

Rhetorical economy. What is economy? It is the way one organizes a production system, in order to derive the best value from one's raw materials. We may thus distinguish the actual economy (which is the way a literary project actually produces its meaning from cultural resources), and the rhetorical economy (which is the fantasy of its own economy that this system has to provide to its audience in order to fulfill its endeavor). A capitalistic company, for instance, needs to hide exploitation and to highlight well-being, even though its actual production is obtained by means of violence. An oil company, in this sense, *needs* sometimes to highlight its love for the environment. Not because it is true or because the company particularly likes to hide its actual economy, but simply because it has to say such things to fulfill its very endeavor, which is to make the most money it can, by polluting the environment. In the same way, a literary text hides or highlights its originality, hides or highlight its debt to traditional resources. The difference is here obvious because the epic loudly claims that it is traditional, whereas the novel pretends to be absolutely new (it doesn't borrow characters from previous novels by other writers, for instance). But the theorist has not only to deconstruct the text's discourse about itself (which can be staged by means of a novelist-character or a bard-character), he also has to show how some functional features manage to create a tradition-like effect, or on the contrary an originality effect. For instance, an epic bard may highlight the theme of fate, in order to suggest that he makes no innovations in the well-known traditional narratives of the same story, at the very moment that he needs to share new elements and wants to hide that fact. In the same way, when he needs to use a very well-known story-pattern, a novelist will highlight the fresh effect of the plot by means of an obviously superficial suspense device which suggests, since nobody knows what will happen, that no previous novel had ever told the same story.

Such rhetorical economy serves a *strategy*, which is the second aspect of the generic rhetorics. "Strategy" means here that the text tries to develop in the receiver the very kind of reception it needs. The epic, for instance, especially highlights its traditional-esque effect because it has to give legitimacy to some yet unknown political content. The novel, meanwhile, pretends to be totally original just because it has to disrupt certain socially legitimate moral values (one may call such a strategy "anti-idealist" or "realist").

Last but not least, texts have a rhetorical *function*. As for the epic, the valorization of the traditional aspect (rhetorical economy) and the legitimacy it gives to new contents (strategy)

serve a cognitive function, since some audiences have come to consider age as the criterion of truth. As for the novel, the originality effect and the realist strategy have a theoretical function: they encourage the reader to entertain doubts about socially generated moral discourses, that is, to think for himself. In the case of the epic, these *functions* are accomplished by formal tools: lists or comparisons are no mere ornaments. They are cognitive schemes. And in the case of the novel, irony or metalepsis try, on their side, to keep the reader awake.

2. Noetics

Noetics focuses on the functioning of the text as a semiotic system. Novels or epics are actually not ordinary things, since they are able to think, though without concepts. These are the very convincing results of Florence Goyet's work on the epic and of Philippe Dufour's on the novel. The question is, what are the different modes by which each of them thinks? My book *On Epic and Novel* pays attention to the two synchronic and diachronic schemes that make characters interact in a fictional work. The diachronic scheme (that is, the plot) articulates a succession of various facts in a single narrative, whereas the synchronic scheme (that is, the fictional world) articulates a plurality of material things in a single milieu. These schemes are not totally strangers to each other, as the characters (with their body, embedded in the milieu, and their tasks, embedded in the plot) are the very tools that make the connection. As such, characters are the actual engines of storytelling.

Yet one must recognize that a list of phenotypic features will not be enough. One has to add functional hermeneutics to positivist structural narratology. In this sense, I argue that the discrepancies between discourse time and narrative time (Genette) are no useless ornaments. They serve to create an illusion of actuality and then make the reading an *experience*. The polyphonic explosion of the world in various narrative voices seeks the same impact, and both of these features suggest that the mode by which the novel thinks is the experience mode (that is, the sensitive relation to the world by which a mind may produce sense). On the contrary, the epic is set in a shared world, and its polyphony is no polyphony of consciousness, but of political discourses. In the same way, there is no plot in epics, but a confrontation of political positions. The epic mode of thinking is the *ordeal*. It is significant that the ways (novelistic experience or epic ordeal) by which the respective forms produce thought express themselves by the rhetorical functioning of the works in order to determine a generic mode of thought. Thus the epic, which proposes to a traditional audience a new content determined by an ordeal, is political; whereas the novel, which proposes to an individual reader an experience that makes him reflexive, is ethical. Choice of common values on the one hand and education for freedom

on the other hand: the difference in their noetic structure itself is invested with a praxeonomic dimension which constitutes the third dimension of the endeavor of literary works.

3. Praxeonomics

The epic and the novel are rhetorical and semiotic machines, and each of them may be characterized as a specific mode of thought. They thus produce new contents but by different ways. As these new contents concern the practice or *praxis* (in other words, the relations between society and the individuals, say, ethics and politics), I call the third aspect of the endeavor of the genre "praxeonomy." Furthermore, "praxeonomy" means less the (political and ethical) ideology of the texts, than the actual *act* they perform on their readers, individuals or societies. It refers to the text not only as a discourse on *praxis*, but as *praxis* by itself.

"To think" means "to think for oneself." So if epics actually think something, doesn't it imply that what is thought is proper to each epic? Of course it does. How will you build your praxeonomics? But if anything like a genre (and not only individual texts) actually exists, it means that there should be some link between all the particular contents of all the epics. As it has been shown, all the epics share a project, if not a structure. As this project determines semiotic structures, it creates a peculiar "mode" of thought. But of course, to share a mode of thought doesn't mean that you share the *content* of the thought. The epic's mode is political. First, because it tries to think about this problem: what is a good king? It thus sets a story involving some king, puts him through trying ordeals, and then asks the audience: was he a good king or not? It is a narrative way to determine what are the truly valuable political skills and virtues. In the *Odyssey*, for instance, we are forced to judge Odysseus' cunning, which leads him into hubris (for instance with Polyphemus), though it also allows him to triumph over the suitors. Thus it leads either to chaos or to justice. Thus we have a problem with the value of cunning, as the structure of the action between books V and XII may suggest: Odysseus here must persuade the Phaeacians to take him back home. But Poseidon (father of Polyphemus) had previously forbidden the Phaeacians to do that, as revenge against Odysseus. Odysseus thus has to persuade them that he is a good king, good enough anyway that it could worth braving Poseidon's threat. But at the same time, Odysseus also needs to explain why he needs their help, that is, how he is such a wretched king as all his fellows were killed during the journey. How will he show he is a good king, by explaining how wretched a king he was? In addition to this problem, Phaeacian society appears as a kind of utopia that makes the *Odyssey* theorize about what constitutes a good political association.

Furthermore, if you focus on the two core concepts of the anthropology of kinship (alliance and descent), you may realize that for an epic, alliance is a means for descent and descent is a kind of alliance. A lot of epics indeed tell stories about wives' fidelity (Sita in *The Ramayana*, Helen in the *Iliad*, and Penelope in *The Odyssey*) because marriage serves the institution of the dynasty. Alliance thus is a tool for political integration. At the same time, descent relations (such as father and son) are sublimated into political alliances, thanks to a ceremony of ritual recognition.

Alliance and descent work together like two knitting needles to build the canvas of society, and the recognition ceremony thus sits at the core of the politics of the epic. It means that the epic is not ideology. It is not just a picture of what a people may define as justice. The epic represents the real practice of politics. Thanks to the rhetorical mobilization of the audience, the epic indeed lets the audience *perform* the trial of the virtues. The epic *bring about* new forms of communities.

On the contrary, the novel performs no political function. It may of course *speak about* politics, that is, for instance, criticize contemporary politics. But it will never *perform* actual politics, that is, positively define the virtues of a good government. The novel is much more an ethical mode of thought, in which the task is to show the way to individual salvation, far from the social vanities of constituted communities (such as families, towns, etc.). Here alliance and descent are playing one *against* the other. On the one hand, marriage (alliance) is here a means of emancipation from the family (and not for constructing a dynasty), and on the other hand the relations between parents and children (filiation) are full of disillusionment and mistrust.

Disillusionment and mistrust play a pragmatic role in this case. The text *effects* them, or let the reader effect them. The function of an uncommon way of talking, that is, the literary style, is for instance to emancipate the reader (whose consciousness has direct access to the narrative flow and thus starts to "see uncommonly") from the "false consciousness" of common speech. I call "misunderstanding" this pragmatic attempt to emancipate the individual from the common, socially constituted point of view.

Between the epic and the novel, the contrast is thus total. Recognition on the one hand and misunderstanding on the other hand are two antagonist yet pragmatic ways of doing things. Here, the novel disconnects the reader from society and there the epic connects the audience in a political trial.

Conclusion: the pragmatic value of epistemological strategies

Comparative energetics thus not only lets us conceive the epic in its relation to the novel, but also articulates the three former epistemological strategies in a global theory. As its results, we got these definitions: an epic is a traditional-like text that makes a collective audience recognize new political values, whereas the novel is a would-be novel text that attempts to emancipate a reader from common values by producing superficial misunderstandings.

But to theorize the relationship and to synthesize the former strategies is not enough. As William James argued, efficiency should be the first criterion for the value of a theory. It means that escaping from the "modern paradigm" should not be just a theoretical exit, but also a practical one. What could be the meaning of the theory that the epic is not dead, if you have no idea how to write it again? A theory is nothing but a practical scheme. Thus you don't know what something is until you know how to make it happen, and the actual creation of a modern epic can be the only evidence that a theory of epic is true. From that perspective, not only is every "poetics" of its superficial features unwisely essentialist, but it is also deeply inefficient, as writers who have tried to apply it have always failed. Not only were their attempts unsuccessful, but also these texts are no epics at all.

— Well, one may throw up one's hands and say, the Moderns lack the epic mind!

But using these means, you will never correctly define the novel either…

— Well, one may reply hopefully, the novel is not a genre.

From a pragmatic point of view, these theories are obviously too poor, aren't they? According to them, among our two genres, the first one is impossible and the second one doesn't exist! Hardly a plan for action…But on the contrary, I think that a theory is like a map, and a map is good as soon as it leads you wherever you want to go. If there is such a thing as a "desire" for epics, the only correct theory would be the one that lets us reach this place, that is, a sunlit field of actual epic texts and practices.

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