

Distant Theory in Comparative Literary Studies

Corin Braga¹

In this paper I want to propose a hermeneutical approach that I call “distant theory”. I start from the premise that mythology, literature and art, especially antique, medieval and early modern, in order to be fully comprehended need a reconstruction of the respective visions of the world and of human nature in which they were created and read by their public. This is also true for modern and contemporary works, but while pre-modern metaphysical and anthropological systems have been acculturated and are no longer in use, current systems, belonging to the scientific “vulgate” of our days, are spontaneously endorsed and accepted by literary and art critics as valid and true. I call this unquestionable use by commentators of cosmological and psychological theories “close theory”. In contrast, in order to avoid anachronistic mismatching of works belonging to a certain historical cultural paradigm with methods deriving from other paradigms, I propose an approach in which all ontological and psychological systems, be they antique or present, should be considered mere intellectual artefacts, “master narratives”, dependent on their respective epochs. This relativistic attitude would allow a “distant approach” especially to nowadays theories, freeing the literary and art analysts of the task of having to certify themselves theories that belong to other domains. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Transformative Studies Institute. E-mail address: journal@transformativestudies.org Website: <http://www.transformativestudies.org> ©2022 by The Transformative Studies Institute. All rights reserved.]*

KEYWORDS: Worldview, Cosmological Theories, Anthropological Theories, Literary Studies, Close Theory, Distant Theory.

As a general rule, we, literary researchers, tend to invest common systems of explanation of the world as correct and reliable companions in approaching literature. We consider that accepted methods of investigation are capable of giving us the truth about things and beings. We rely on the latest theories from cosmology, physics, biology,

¹ See biography at end of manuscript.