

Michel Foucault - Literature as self-transformations

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This book mainly focuses on Michel Foucault's literary theories. Foucault actively published his literary theories primarily in the 1960s. He publicly mentioned his disappointment toward literature in the 1970s and after, and it appears that he started avoiding referring to literature ever since. This book explores Foucault's withdrawal from literature and demonstrates that, even then, he did not lose complete interest in literature until his later years. He reattempted new approaches to literature, such as "power" and "self-transformation," in the 70s and later, which were different perspectives from those of 60s.

Part 1 of the book covers Foucault's texts from the 60s. In Chapter 1, we particularly noted two privileged figures: "books" and "libraries" in Foucault's literary theories from the 60s and followed their eventual replacement by one figure, "archives." This elucidates the conflict between "spatiality" in literary language and "temporality" in archives, and follows the trajectory of Foucault's withdrawal from "literature" toward the late 60s.

In Chapter 2, as a concrete privileged example of this trajectory, we focused on the transformation of Stéphane Mallarmé's image in his literary theory of the 60s. For Foucault, Mallarmé was a literary figure who embodied the essence of "literature" and could be compared with Nietzsche in philosophy; however, Mallarmé, along with Foucault's withdrawal from "literature," was rarely spoken about. Tracking such a process revealed that Mallarmé was a "mirror"-like presence that reflected Foucault's interests in the 60s, when he was fascinated by "languages."

After the overview of Foucault's literary theories of the 60s in Chapters 1 and 2, we focused in Chapter 3 on his only writing, "Les mots qui saignent" (The words that bleed), wherein he explicitly discussed the main theme of "translation." This text is read together with "The prose of Actaeon," another writing discussing Klossowski, to perceive the continuity of the main themes of "invasion," "origin," "simulacre," and "death," which frequently appear in Foucault's literary theories.

In Chapter 4, we formally evaluated the "approach to écriture," developed by Foucault in his "Death and the Labyrinth: The World of Raymond Roussel." This work was "exceptional" in that it was written in "circle," the very format used by Roussel, and it was also "personal" because Foucault's "me" as the writer of this text was imprinted on it like a trace.

Part 2 of the book focuses on the relationship between "literature" and Foucault in the 70s and later. First, it is indicated that "nameless discourse" and "day-to-day parole," which deviated from "institutional écriture," appeared in the texts written by Foucault in the 70s and later, as if replacing Mallarmé and Klossowski, despite his statements about withdrawal from "literature."

Based on these assumptions, Chapter 5 covered “Discipline and Punish” as a text demonstrating the changing relationship between “literature” and Foucault in the 70s and later, and reveals that, in this period, Foucault started discussing literature based on the problem structure, “power and life.” This is what prompted Foucault not to abandon “literature” altogether 70s onward.

In Chapter 6, as another sign indicating his changing relationship with “literature” in the 1970s and beyond, we focused on how the literature genre of “theater” gradually started gaining importance for Foucault. We pointed out that Foucault’s main theme, “theater,” occupied a unique position elucidating his interest in “literature” at that time.

In Chapter 7, we attempted to explore Foucault’s argument about “fiction” to discover further evidence that “literature” still remained with him through and beyond the 70s. Based on the above, Foucault’s remarks regarding “self-transformation” through *écriture* revealed that he had connected “fiction,” “*écriture*,” and “literature” with “life,” as a common denominator in his later years, unlike in the 60s, when he associated “literature” with “death.”

As we discuss in this book, Foucault did not completely abandon his mask as a “literary critic” in the 70s and beyond. He continued the process of constant self-transformation, and kept changing his definition of “literature,” which was the subject of his thought, and kept pondering “together” with literature. You may be able to discover Foucault as a “literary critic” and the essence of his literary theories through this book.