

**LECTURES ON THE SCIENCE OF  
LITERATURE, PARTLY DELIVERED  
IN EDINBURGH (SUMMER  
MEETING, 1898) FIRST SERIES:  
COMPARATIVE LITERATURE**

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Lectures on the science of literature, partly delivered in Edinburgh (summer meeting, 1898)  
First series: Comparative literature by Hendrik Clemens Muller

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**HENDRIK CLEMENS MULLER**

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Present exemplaar  
for recensie

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ON  
**THE SCIENCE OF LITERATURE**

PARTLY DELIVERED  
IN EDINBURGH (SUMMER MEETING, 1898)

BY

**HENDRIK CLEMENS MULLER**

Philos. Theor. et Lit. Hum. Doct. (Leiden), Jur. Cand. (Utrecht), etc.

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FIRST SERIES:  
COMPARATIVE LITERATURE.



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VINCENT LOOSJES  
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## P R E F A C E.

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This „first series” of lectures on the science of literature was, for the greater part, written at Oxford, 1897—1898, and some of them were read at the University Extension Meeting in Edinburgh, in the summer of 1898. It is only a first series, for since then, having collected vast material from nearly all the existing sciences, and having already begun to work this out, I intend to publish a „second series” of these lectures later on.

But the continuation of my work will bear a somewhat different character from the volume published here. This volume contains chiefly a sketch of the literature of mankind, divided according to languages and races, but it is far from perfect. An exhaustive study especially of the problem of race has taught me that our knowledge in this direction is very crude, and that anthropology and ethnology as sciences are only in their infancy, sciences rightly termed by thinkers mere collections of facts. As far as regards the race-problem, I wish the reader to bear in mind that my work has to be regarded more as a collection of useful material, than as the definitive and undeviating opinion of the author.

I have often made it my aim to suggest the problem rather than to solve it, and I shall be grateful for any observations and additions from competent readers, in order, by continuous study, to prove whether the hypotheses found in my work may be fully applied to literature, considered as a science.

For this reason I beg the reader to regard this volume only as a forerunner, and not to adopt all my conclusions as fixed theories — to cite one example: the names „Aryan” „Indo-european” and „Semitic”, especially „Semitic”, are insufficient, and better names ought to be introduced — and I wish to add that the second volume of these lectures will be an attempt to combine the study of literature with all the other branches of learning, also with physical and medical science, and to raise that study to the level of a positive science; as until now literature has not been studied in a truly scientific way.

Literature has always been considered part of so-called mental (or „psychological”) science, but the dualism of „body” and „soul”, the doctrine of two opposite principles, which cannot bear the light of modern scientific knowledge, ought to come to an end, and the so-called mental sciences — especially the study of literature — ought to be introduced as a necessary part of the physical and medical ones, or rather: ought to be reduced to true philosophy, as a system embracing all the existing sciences. Scientific literature must fix the laws of thought, the mental laws which govern the evolution of mankind, and as long as it has not accomplished this, it does not deserve the name of *science*. What I tried to do some time ago, viz. to fix a positive and truly scientific basis for the study of law, I also intend to do for the study of literature.

The determination of those mental laws, as applied to education and instruction, is one of the highest and noblest aims of science and knowledge; and I shall be glad, if I can in any way contribute towards the attainment of that end, as far as lies in my modest powers.

*Utrecht*, 1904.

H. C. MULLER.



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FIRST LECTURE.

Comparative Literature.

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INTRODUCTION.

There exists a very good book on Comparative Literature, written by Hutcheson Macaulay Posnett, M. A., Barrister-at-law, and formerly professor of classics and English literature in University College, Auckland, New-Zealand, author of "The historical method", etc. It has been published in London by Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1896. "Should the present application of historical science to literature meet with general approval — he says in his preface — the establishment of chairs in comparative literature at the leading universities of Great Britain, America, and the Australian colonies would do much to secure the steady progress of this vast study, which must depend on the cooperation of many scholars. The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers, as yet, are few."

In his first chapter Mr. Posnett answers the question: What is literature? His rough definition is that it consists of works which, whether in verse or prose, are the handi-craft of imagination rather than reflection, aim at the

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<sup>1</sup> Besides Mr. Posnett, we can mention Dr. Koch in Berlin, Mr. Rossel in Bern, the late Joseph Texte in France, L. P. Betz in Zürich, and some others. But the whole science is still "à faire", and Mr. Posnett's work, though very valuable, is only a beginning. I refer also to the Journal of Comparative Literature, which is published in New-York (by the department of comp. liter., Columbia College).

pleasure of the greatest possible number of the nation rather than instruction and practical effects, and appeal to general rather than specialised knowledge. He then shows, with many examples from various languages, the social and physical *relativity* of literature, that is to say, how it is connected with, and depends upon the age, the manners and customs, the climate and scenery, the social life of the different authors.<sup>1</sup>

The third chapter describes what Mr. Posnett calls "the principle of literary growth", viz. the progressive deepening and widening of personality in literature. In the movement of civilisation, a movement by no means regular, but often spasmodic, back and forward, forward and back, though on the whole forward — *personal character* comes to stand out more and more distinctly from the general crowd, and the highest evolution of character is, where every individual in the entire group stands out in clear-cut personality. This evolution of character includes the general movement and very evolution of literature.<sup>2</sup>

Now, what is the method Mr. Posnett follows in his general study of literature? He considers *the gradual expansion of social life*, from clan to city, from city to nation, from both of these to cosmopolitan humanity, as the proper order of all study in comparative literature. There are other standpoints — he adds — profoundly interesting, from which the art and criticism of literature may also be explained; that of physical nature, that of animal life. But from these alone we shall not see far into the secrets of literary workmanship.<sup>3</sup> So, his whole book is divided into: *clan literature* (the clan group; early choral

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<sup>1</sup> As a French proverb says: "On doit juger les écrits d'après leur date."

<sup>2</sup> P. 70—71. It would be very interesting to work out this theory. Take for instance Goethe's works, and Byron's. There is a great deal of character, that is to say personality, in both; and still, many passages and many ideas belong to their time, and to their time only.

<sup>3</sup> P. 86. Mr. Posnett's point of view is very interesting. In the latter part of our 19<sup>th</sup> century it is impossible to isolate the individual from his fellow-brethren, from the whole of society in which he lives. A social age, so to say, is approaching, in which individual study and the study of individuals will assume a new character.

song; personal clan poetry; the clan and nature), *the city commonwealth* (the city commonwealth group; clan survivals in the city commonwealth, poetry of the city commonwealth), and *world-literature* (the individual spirit in world-literature; the social spirit in world-literature; and world-literature in India and China). At the end of his book he deals with *national literature*, a subject of which there is now such an interesting revival in all parts of Europe. He asks: „what is national literature?“ And he devotes a special chapter both to „man“ and to „nature“ in national literature. Finally, he remarks in his splendid „conclusion“, that literature is a very serious thing, which can become morally indifferent only in ages of moral indifference. Whether men like it or not, their literary efforts at ideal beauty in prose or verse must involve ideals of human conduct.<sup>1</sup>

If I may venture to make a remark of my own, I should say that Mr. Posnett's treatment of comparative literature is perhaps sometimes too „social“ (if I may use that term). This can be shown very clearly p. 95, where the author refers to the well-known works of de Laveleye and Sir Henry Maine, on the common ownership of land. But the subject is so important and so immense that it is impossible to survey the field from all points of view. Comparative literature is a part of anthropology, as all anthropologists will admit; it is closely connected with art and with studies in art, not only with the art of poetry, but also with music, with the art of painting, with architecture, and so on; it can be considered from a merely aesthetic point of view, or from a historical and philosophical standpoint; it is the proper study of man, „homo sum, nihilque humani a me alienum puto“; in short, it is as important as its earlier sister, comparative philology, and perhaps more comprehensive. Why should phonetics be studied all over Europe, and especially in Germany, and comparative literature be neglected? Are the English dialects, and dialect study in general, more important than the dialects of the eternal human mind, as shown in the prose and poetry of centuries? The difficulty of the subject ought not to discourage us; it is quite

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<sup>1</sup> P. 391.