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Kapital, Feld, Habitus und sozialer Raum: Pierre Bourdieu für Anglisten

Abstract: Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) is one of the most influential sociologists of our time. But although his notion of ‘cultural capital’ has become a household word, many literary scholars still shy away from the sheer bulk of his writings. This essay offers a short introduction to his work, focusing on two crucial studies, Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste and The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field. In the first part, four key terms – capital, field, habitus and social space – are explained with reference to Bourdieu’s empirical research in France and Algeria. The second part applies Bourdieu’s theory to (1) the interpretation of literary texts, (2) problems of literary history, and (3) aspects of literary theory. It is the aim of this essay to suggest the wealth of Bourdieu’s sociological insights – and to show that Bourdieu has an important role to play in literary and cultural studies.