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Determinants of Literariness Set in a Pragmatic Perspective.

Hanna Konicka

Przeł. Anna Warso

Hanna KONICKA

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It has almost become a norm in critical writing on literature to begin with introductory remarks on the title, even when it is most concise, and the commentaries often become rather elaborate. This state of things results from the proliferation and increasing autonomy of methodologies used in contemporary humanities, particularly in the field of literary studies, a process discussed by Janusz Sławiński.¹ Sławiński argues that the increasing pace of revisions and renovations the tools of literary studies have been subjected to slowly gave birth to an entirely new set of problems that pushed away their actual object of research from the area of investigation, or at least removed indefinitely the moment of testing the efficacy of concepts created to explain it in the first place, abandoning those concepts before they could be tried and tested in a chase after new ones. By now, Sławiński's diagnosis, proposed exactly three decades ago, has found several positive verifications, including the recent paroxysm: an attempt at self-destruction by means of negating the possibility of a meaningful utterance on the meaning of anything.

Let us not forget that before we got to this place, all building blocks of literature have been declared methodological anathema: before the final killing attempt, the author became a figurehead as an object of "intentional fallacy"; the world depicted by the narrative was deemed a "referential illusion" and replaced with references to other works; instead of the analysis of style, labeled a "pre-theoretical" category, we were presented with inventories of grammatical forms found in the work.

The main, although partly hidden, goal of these operations was to neutralize the traces of the subject's presence in the literary text upon which disembodied critics,

¹ Sławiński, J. "Zwłoki metodologiczne." *Teksty*. 1978 Vol. 5. Reprinted in: *Teksty i teksty*. PEN, Warszawa: 1991. 38-44.

dispassionate in their conviction, were to prove the highly scientific (meaning: perfect) objectivity of their own observations. One should add as well that the attempts to ignore the subject were accompanied by the attempts to ignore the dimensions of its existence, that is space and time, specific and variable, reduced to abstract aspects of grammatical *deixis* at most.

The Ingardenian notion of the act of reading as actualization and concretization of meanings serving as a necessary condition for the existence of literary work has not been entirely forgotten in the process, but the atopy towards the subject as a nidus of acts of consciousness remained strong, encompassing not only the “affective fallacy” of the receiver, but also their entire capacity for understanding. Hence the following proposition: “meanings are the property neither of fixed and stable texts nor of free and independent readers but of interpretative communities that are responsible both for the shape of readers' activities and for the text that those activities produce.”²

The evolution of postulates in literary studies briefly outlined above is presented critically not because it lacked in important discovery, but because of its logical consequences for the interpretative practice which in itself forms the basis for all knowledge of literature. The propensity for the radicalization of assumptions found in the subsequent ideas (both one's own and the rejected ones), the exclusion of all middle ground, as well as the passionate inclination for binary opposition placed a familiar alternative before literary hermeneutics: that of complete indeterminacy of meaning in literary work versus the utopia of its complete definiteness.

The premise for the approach above could be traced back to a distinction seemingly innocent (as it aimed to order the field of research) between intrinsic and extrinsic issues in literary studies.³ It allowed to move unnoticeably from the principle of autotelic character of literary work (debatable in itself) to the principle of separateness of knowledge of literature as the art of the word. While it did not rule out borrowing concepts from other knowledge domains, having accepted without question separateness of its object, poetics generally did not attempt to test the borders and conditions for this separateness in areas shared by literature with other forms of human verbal activity.

Such attempts were present in the critical reflection on literature already in the 30s (let us also add that they are supported by commonsensical observation) but they could develop only after structuralism has reached its theoretical limit in generative grammar and the slowly accepted holistic model of cognition brought together disciplines that earlier found their *raison d'être* in separateness. Only after they were connected through a web of interdependencies, scientific status was granted to the belief that knowledge as well as its expression is always subjective, that *mimesis* relies on the same representations of external world that the mind cre-

² Fish, S. *Is there a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretative Communities*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass.: 1980. <http://www.jstor.org/pl>

³ Expressed in the already classical *Theory of Literature* by René Wellek and Austin Warren (1942). Polish translation by M. Żurowski. *Teoria literatury*. PWN, Warszawa: 1970.

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ates in the process of perception, and that communication relies on constant and mutual inferring of intentions.

It seems that for literary studies the most important methodological consequence of this epistemological reorientation is the blurring of boundaries between semantics and pragmatics, and the resulting increased interest in the category of discourse. It should be noted, too, that this time also autonomy of linguistics and language as its subject are at stake. Thus, while almost all linguists agree that the interpretation of utterance cannot be restricted to the non-contextual lexical information, they debate whether one should distinguish between contextual and non-contextual sense, and if yes, where the border between those is to be set.⁴ As a consequence, context as a category became the center of attention.

Pragmatics views context as an extremely broad set of conditions (as broad as practically endless) where utterance (written or spoken) takes place. These include: the physical and social surrounding of the utterance, as well as the interlocutor's perception of the surrounding; the question of who the interlocutors are, and what opinion they have of each other, and especially what each of them believes the partner to believe about them; finally, events preceding the utterance as well as past interactions, the verbal ones in particular, between the participants of the act of communication. Thus defined, context is found not only in the external world but also, largely, "in the minds of language users."⁵ The pragmatic approach investigates the procedures by which elements of discourse determine the sense and status of utterances, from their emergence to functioning and circulation.

The method applied so far proposing that we first consider the utterance separately and then refer it to the supposedly external and independent context that precedes it violates the most fundamental pragmatic assumption that a non-contextualized utterance does not exist as discourse, does not have the importance of a conscious act and does not engage anyone's responsibility.

Since the meaning of some of the basic notions in pragmatics, such as "speaking," "utterance," or "discourse" is highly ambiguous, their logical relation may prove more instructive than an inventory of possible uses. If speaking is an act resulting in utterance, only considering the act and its result will allow us to see discourse as a form of subjective action inclusive of everything it consists in and everything that enables it.

Considering the sphere of verbal artifacts that is of interest to us here, the following question may prove to be of cognitive value: must an individual act of speech performed in the social area perceived as literature be accompanied by any particular condition, and if yes, than by what kind of condition?

Despite what one might expect, techniques commonly labeled as "discourse analysis" are not destined to answer this question. Regardless, or rather precisely for that reason, it will be worthwhile to pay them a closer look.

⁴ For an overview see: Moescheler, J. and Reboul, A. *Encyclopédie de Pragmatique*. Seuil, Paryż: 1994.

⁵ Tabakowska, E. "Komunikowanie i poznawanie w językoznawstwie." *Teksty Drugie* 2005 Vol. 1-2. 53.

The rapid and, so to say, largely uncontrolled methodological proliferation of those techniques is, by the way, doubly symptomatic. On the one hand, it reveals a huge gap emerged after structural linguistics, having discarded the achievement of philology and rhetoric, imposed itself as a model of text hermeneutics. On the other, the local character of the method of analysis and the choice of its object manifest the dependence of discourse (in this case, scholarly discourse) on the cultural context. Thus, English and American discourse analysis focuses on its spoken variety, with particular focus on everyday conversation, and aims to describe its practices using methods of psychological interaction or ethnologically oriented sociology. Meanwhile, the so-called French school of discourse analysis specializes in the written form of institutional and doctrinal discourse, striving at its formal explanations with the help of notions borrowed from structural linguistics, elements of Marxism, and psychoanalysis.⁶ Those “discourse analyses” investigate mainly verbal constructs created within institutional frames strictly delimiting both the field of discursive possibility and the space for potential dialogue. Thus, utterances in question are mostly part of the public game whose stakes are tied to the history, politics, law, and morality of the chosen society.

Consequently, what is consecrated today as “discourse analysis,” and sometimes as “critical analysis of discourse,” investigates rather what Michel Foucault labeled as “discursive formation”⁷ – entire blocks containing utterances that are a correlative of sociologically and historically determined ideological attitudes, and that can be expressed by perfectly exchangeable speaking subjects. Thus, it is an analytical practice uninterested in discourse understood as subjective action, neither a highly individualized one, nor one that differs little from the type or genre it belongs to. And even if (let us hypothesize) a literary work, great or lesser, should be subjected to the so called “discourse analysis,” it will be reduced to its elements that can be interpreted as an “argument,” or a “case in point” made by the “discursive formation” it has been categorized as.

As a result, the French school of discourse analysis, or to be more precise, its first generation, most active at the turn of 60s and 70s, was determined by the context (in this case by political context) to no lesser degree than the utterance corpus it investigated. No wonder then that both the following generations of adepts of discourse analysis,⁸ and first and foremost, the representatives of pragmatic linguistics interested in literary discourse attempt to distance themselves from the early French school.

⁶ Gadet, F. “L’Analyse de discours et l’Interprétation” (à propos de “Thérapeutique discours.”) *DRLAV* 1982 No 27. 107-133. Discussed in: Maingueneau, D. *Nouvelles tendances dans l’analyse du discours*. Hachette, Paris: 1987.

⁷ Foucault, M. *Archéologie du savoir*. Gallimard, Paris: 1969. 74.

⁸ Among them the representatives of “social criticism”: Claude Duchet, Ruth Amossy, A. Viala, who proposed a sociological reading of texts as one of the possibilities without reducing the global sense of literary utterance to it. Admittedly, “social criticism” relies at its source on the systemic approach inherited from structuralism as well as on Marxist approach that aims to reveal ideological sense. (*L’analyse du discours dans les études littéraires*. Presses Universitaire du Mirail, Toulouse: 2004. 63.)

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And so, Dominique Maingueneau, expert in discourse studies who has long been applauding the evolution of discourse analysis and who has voiced strong criticism of its limitations, focuses in his latest work on the mostly ignored nature of relations in the creative act between the subjective involvement of the writer, the institutional dimension of the verbal act and the status of the text included in literary circulation. The institutional character of literature is rarely doubted, however, it is usually viewed as a result of the institutional character of language as a system to which literature “adds” its own system of types and genres of artistic expression (here meaning nothing more than expression “pretending to art.”) Maingueneau, however, emphasizes the institutional dimension of discourse as a form of verbal action that the subject expressing itself in the social sphere takes individual responsibility for. This means that the subject first needs to legitimize its utterance following the principle that each interference in the sphere of others’ consciousness requires such legitimization. Consequently, discourse appearing in the public sphere always references, explicitly or implicitly, a source of its legitimacy. The so called “self-constitutive discourses” are an exception as they pretend to the status of the source, and as such, decide their own legitimacy. They legitimize both the fact and the circumstance of their appearance by participating in one of the incarnations of the Absolute, such as Truth, Beauty, and Moral Ideal. It is a status granted to the mythical discourse, religious discourse, philosophical discourse, and scientific discourse.

According to Maingueneau, literature shares with them the special, the unique status of “self-constitutive discourse.” And only recognized as such in their company can it be released from the dichotomy of the literary and the non-literary. Only positioned against the background of elements of utterance circumstance shared with those discourses, can the fundamentally discursive specificity of literature be revealed.

Our civilization whose most important aspects stem from Ancient Greece is characterized by irreducible multiplicity and the inevitably competitive character of self-constitutive discourses. After a long period of rivalry between the religious and philosophical, the scientific discourse one has imposed itself as the leading one. It must, however, ceaselessly strengthen its position, pushing away competing aspirations of its rivals. In fact, each of the self-constitutive discourses determines its position in relation to others, but it is also permeated by them. They reference and exclude one another, continually negating one another’s place within given system of culture. And since one of the functions of self-constitutive discourses is to serve as a foundation for other, “ordinary” discourses, one could present histories of cultures, succeeding configurations of communicative space, as evolutions of the relations between self-constitutive discourses.

For example, the Romantic rebellion against the norms of the genre was a defense of the special status of literature as speech whose authority and power come from an order beyond the human. It is the status of a word that is a foundation for laws, including the law and place of utterance, the status of a word that gives meaning to the collective actions.

Maingueneau focuses in particular on the relation between the literary and philosophical discourse on the one hand, and the literary and religious discourse on the other. The juxtaposition of literature and cognitive doctrine reveals more than simply proportions of the speculative and the narrative elements of discourse: literary discourse not only absorbs reflection, covering it with the described world, but also achieves cognitive effect by building impression of reality. Meanwhile, philosophical discourse, on the other hand, that aims to isolate speculative reflection, minimizing the element of presentation, does not give up on the aesthetic dimension of the “structure of the work” in the image of “structure of the world.” The notorious instability of the border between the religious and the literary discourse that culminated in the 19th century found its expression in more than frequent preference for prophesy as a model of utterance. It was from the Romantic period onwards that a hermeneutic frame, asserting that given text should be viewed as unique since its message concerns the most crucial matters (such as human fate, power of the word, the mission of art), and consequently, that ordinary, common communicative intentions cannot reveal the gravitas of this message, became an indispensable element of the institution of literary discourse. The required exegesis weakens the enigma of the text and at the same time shows boundlessness of its meaning.

This does not exclude numerous relations between self-constitutive and “ordinary” discourses within the inter-discursive space. Conversations, press, administrative documents, and all common types of discourse, constantly interact with self-constitutive discourses. At the same time, however, self-constitutive discourses by their very nature deny this interaction or attempt to enforce upon it their own principles.

Among the characteristics of literary verbal acts, “paratopy” (*paratopie*) and the resulting necessity of staging come to the forefront. Both features result from the status of literature as a self-constitutive discourse. Although the material, legal, economic, and cultural aspects of production and circulation of texts are governed by the principles describable and described already by sociology of literature, the institutional character of literature as self-constitutive discourse by definition cannot fully depend on the social space, as it situates itself on the border dividing separate orders of phenomena. Self-constitutive discourse is a record that functions in social space, but it is also an act dependant on forces that by their nature are beyond human power. This is expressed, among others, through the fact that creative processes thrive on the impossibility of their subjects to belong to places, groups, or activities. Thus, a corporation of writers would be against nature while a corporation of hotel owners or engineers is something natural. As self-constitutive discourse, literature enters relations with the entire web of social spaces but it cannot be contained by any of its sectors. Ceaseless attempts at political or economical subjugation of writers allow to keep up the production but have no impact on the creation of masterpieces, unless it is through resistance that they provoke.

The positioning of the author and their work in the institutional space of literature does not entail a complete lack of locality, but rather its constant complexity,

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a constantly negotiable, and in the end, always incomplete state of belonging to anything. This fundamental “paratopy” (*paratopie*) extends to the existential dimension of the writer’s biography. It can manifest itself through isolation or involvement, but it will always position the author in the cracks and crevices of social ground. This impossibility of locality and the resulting tension is also variously thematized in the work: its protagonists, their attitude, social status, fates, but also in the topography or chronography of the world presented in the work, it also reveals itself, of course, in the relation between the work and the idiom the work is written in.

As I have stated, the fundamental character of paratopy (*paratopie*), the impossibility of an unambiguous positioning of the creative act and its result within the topography of human choices, has consequences on the structure of literary discourse. In order to capture them, one needs to refer to the distinction made by Emile Benveniste between two main types of statements: the first one manifests its relation to its surrounding (its text contains references to the participants of the communicative act, its place and time: “I” – “you” – “here” and “now”), and the other is independent of those factors, creating the paradoxical impression of an impersonal act, one that is beyond- or suprapersonal. The first type is exemplified by almost every use of language. To illustrate the second type Benveniste points to story: a report on events whose narrator remains unknown, just as the time and place of its articulation.

It has been a common practice in poetics to attribute this kind of utterance to the unidentifiable and unlocatable narrator of the traditional realistic novel. In fact, all of literary discourse, as a self-constitutive discourse, finds its realization in this separateness from real places, moments, and stages of the process of its creation. It is not the historical and social context of the author that is meant here, but rather physical parameters of the situation from which the work emerges and in which it is written. Literary discourse as self-constitutive discourse by its definition cannot reflect tangible, the real circumstance of its birth. This is why the act of its articulation must be a kind of arrangement of a system of speech assuming the existence of “I” – “you” – “here” and “now.” The thematization of its own founding is one of the important characteristics of each self-constitutive discourse. This happens in the work through thematized aspects of genesis or elements of meta-discourse. And these precisely belong to staging. The latter does not entail pretending identified with dishonesty. The “staging” of speech, individual in each work, is not a device or a set of devices external to discourse whose main current could develop independently of them. An arranged act of speech is literature’s proper and only possible method of communication, of word use and production of meaning. Put differently, the fact that the literary utterance breaks, in a way, its connection to the direct circumstances of its production is both the condition and the product of literary discourse.

I believe that the notion of “installation” as it is used in contemporary plastic art will be of help in understanding what is meant here. One cannot separate it from the work itself as it is its founding principle, its mode of existence, and its characteristic at the same time. It shows in the work as a whole, not as one of its aspects

or elements. In the processual mode of discourse development, “installation” works as a closed circle: through what the work says and through the world it presents, it legitimizes its staging, the one it has imposed from the very beginning. Each work aspires to found a verbal situation that will legitimize its gravitas.

Naturally, there remains the question of the relation between “staging “ and genre choices made by the author.

From the pragmatic perspective, the category of genre regains its universality as encompassing all speech acts. And the literary varieties do not exhaust the repertoire of references possible for literature. Facing the archive of culture that includes all kinds, types and varieties of discourse, the authors of literary work independently determine their individual choices. However, not in a way that leads to yielding to the rules of the genre, but again, through paratopy, in other words, impossible positioning, this time within genre distinctions. Should the author chose for his utterance a clearly defined genre, the latter, from the social communicative convention external to the work, becomes in this very moment a constitutive element of the work’s meaning. In other words: the author does not say things through the medium of the genre but the genre and its realization carry within itself what the author wants to say.

The positioning of utterance in the space of literature takes place through its status as one of discourse constitutive discourses. Genre characteristics, the possibility of author’s pseudonym, the fictionality of the presented state of things, are secondary to this status. The space of specifically literary communication delineated by those properties did not take its final shape until the 19th century, and both the previous periods and the recent developments seem to argue for the facultative character of those properties.

Issues evoked in the first part of this essay are still in the stage of initial recognition. The original proposition of the French scholar has been only signaled here. His unorthodox (or: pioneer) terminology required explicitation and linguistic improvisation in translation. At first glance, the situation described by Sławiński seems to repeat itself: we are facing an increasing number of new terms and methodological inventions with no clear uses. However, I believe the opposite to be true. What we are facing is an attempt to claim for the literary studies benefits of the pragmatic turn which took place not only in linguistics, but also in the philosophy of language and anthropology of communication. While so far the pragmatic approach inspired interest in reading practices or social and historical frames of text circulation, Maingueneau uses it to highlight important aspects of the process of creation as well as the circumstances and the conditions for emergence of the literary discursive act.

Translation: Anna Warso