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## The Functions of News Items in Literature

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Ryszard Nycz

## **The Functions of News Items in Literature**

### **1. The History of the Problem**

This relatively minor problem is nevertheless important to a literary critic for a few reasons. The way in which news items are used and the attitude to the press language are essential aspects of the literary craft, and not only in the case of realist writers: they may become the source of various artistic techniques and methods of composition, as well as a signal that one of the many possible mimetic strategies has been used. On this basis we can also draw legitimate conclusions concerning the concepts of literature and reality which have been implied in the work of literature, and the understanding of its functions. The problem is essential not only for poetics and theory, but also for the history of literature. We do not have to go back very far into the past (although it is also worth of consideration and significant for the present) to perceive that at least for the last eighty years, in various literary trends in the avant-garde, socialist realism, neo-avant-garde and modern literature, the relations between poetry and fiction on the one hand and the press on the other, between the literary evidence and its press source are of primary significance; the concrete solutions of these problems - both positive and negative ones - testify clearly and abundantly to the fundamental options in the aesthetic, cultural and ideological sense.

Therefore the problem is not only important, but also vast and complex. I do not attempt to treat it in a detailed way; I propose to point out the extent of these phenomena and their most significant literary apprehension, as well as to offer a few general remarks on the functions which news items fulfill in twentieth-century literature and on some implications of these facts for the status, character and significance of literature. Generally speaking, the role of news items in the history of literature seems to be similar to the role which has been played in art by photography and by its predecessor, the *camera obscura* which was known at the latest in the Renaissance period and has been

used ever since. Thus it will be instructive to have a look at a brief account of the history of this parallel medium.

Once the photographic technique was invented, painters began to use photographs widely and commonly, mainly in order to present reality in a more faithful, concrete or objective manner (as was the case with the realist, naturalist or impressionist artists), but sometimes also in order to achieve the effect of artificiality and pose as well as of pure decorativeness (as in the works of Pre-Raphaelites). In spite of the usefulness and obvious merits of photography, practically until the avant-garde (modernist) period painters were reluctant to recognize it as a legitimate, autonomous and artistic means of re-creating reality. It was treated instead as a purely technical and neutral means which was an indispensable tool to achieve the effect of an illusion of reality, for it supplemented the imperfection of individual vision with the objective mechanism of optical reflection; however, *the difference between physiological and optical perception was not recognized*. This situation was rapidly changed in the avant-garde period. Photographs, which used to be destroyed or hidden away after their application, became important components of the artistic structure. In the works of the futurists, cubists, dadaists and surrealists photography is used in its objective function (as a ready-made object or a found one) and in its “magical” capacity of evoking reality, which results from its real relationship to the object. It became a component of the various techniques of collage, assemblage and trick photography (and all other forms which derive from them), and in the epoch of pop-art and hyper-realism it totally dominated visual arts. In her book *On Photography* Susan Sontag writes about the “de-Platonization” of our comprehension of the world which can no longer be conceived in the terms of the original and its copy, the object and its image.<sup>1</sup>

Like photography, news items can also boast a pre-history. André Jolles has recognized the “memorable”, the Latin equivalent of the Greek “apomnemoneumata”, as the early forms in which some “simple forms” potentially present in the language became actualized. Literature has used them since times immemorial (copybooks and notebooks were the means to collect them and store them for later use), and it frequently functioned as a transmitter of news. The origins of the modern novel coincide with the origins of the press; the peculiarity and complexity of their mutual relations in that period have been impressively presented by Lennard J. Davis in *Factual Fictions*. The period of realism and naturalism presented an essentially different situation,

as the domination of the novel in literature, with its autonomy and new aesthetics, corresponded with the results of the "revolution in communication", that is, with the rapid development of the press as a generally available means of transmitting and spreading information and with the rise of autonomous press genres such as press information.

Like photography, news items, although readily and universally used, were generally regarded as a purely technical aid and an indispensable element of the writer's craft: they supplied up-to-date topics, served as a source of political and social information and as a pattern of a neutral, "transparent", "purely referential" narrative technique, and provided an invaluable store of authentic details which the writers of that epoch availed themselves of so abundantly in order to construct the world of their novels. While it aimed at the effect of reality and referential illusion, press information could also be a topic of dispute and a means of providing a linguistic characteristic of a hero, but it did not penetrate the language of narration as a distinct and autonomous type of discourse. *Moreover, the difference between the subjective impression and the individual point of view on the one hand and the anonymous and institutionally homogenous account of events on the other was blurred or overlooked*, as both these spheres were subject to public opinion. The novel regarded public opinion as the yardstick of plausibility and a measure of the possible (permissible) range of socially justified arguments. While the press was simply the organ of public opinion, it served as a mediator and aimed at reaching a consensus between the conflicting public stands and attitudes.

The harmonious collaboration of literature and the press which took place in that epoch changed into a sharp antagonism in the modernist period, which became expressed for instance in Mallarmé's opposition between the Newspaper and the Book, between the "general report" on everyday life and the symbolic transcendental code. The task of literature was to discover new forms of apprehension of the essential reality, while the newspaper used to categorize new reality in the forms which were fixed, petrified and immutable. Like in the case of photography, it was the avant-garde which made a point to introduce "the newspaper", and news items in particular, into art. In the poetry of Cendrars, Apollinaire, Mayakovsky, the futurists, dadaists and surrealists, as well as in the prose of Joyce, Orwell, Dos Passos, Döblin, Pilnyak (and later also in the prose of Williams, Sartre, the French *nouveau roman*, the Austrian hyper-realists and British and American postmodernists)

news items and related forms have been simply granted the status of a work of art; quoted *in extenso* or in extracts, news items frequently form a part of documentaries, literary collage constructions or the writer's persuasive and critical strategies.

As "a newspaper clipping", a news item is a ready-made object, transferred from the real world into the sphere of art, and a document of a past actuality; it testifies to its credibility or to its ideological falsehood. As a conveyed piece of news it denotes reality with the intense suggestiveness of "the news item which is either good or bad, but always true"; or on the contrary, it may deform or fake reality in the case when "the press tells lies" under the pressure of politics and ideology. As a specific genre of linguistic communication it may be a model of objectivity or an example of empty talk; it may be a voice of the reality or a pattern which fits the reality into its ready-made, prefabricated forms of articulation. Yet in all aspects and ways of exploiting it, news items which are employed in literature face us with the problem of the links between literature and reality, and in particular with the problem of the conditions and possibilities of its documentary character.

## 2. Twentieth-Century Literature: the Functions of News Items

Although news items, their structure and functions have been frequently discussed (the works of van Dijk and his colleagues published in the 1980s are of particular interest), these studies are not of much help here. For I am not concerned with the description of the "primary" functions of news items connected with their proper place, their mission and their tasks, but with their artistic re-functionalization, i.e. with defining those functions which they gain as a component of the work of literature; thus I am not concerned with what these functions are, but *for what* they stand, *how* they are understood in a literary context. The seven functions listed below cannot be regarded as a full comprehensive list; it is only a catalogue of basic distinctions. I shall deal here with the functioning of news items in Polish twentieth-century literature, so my examples and comments will be limited to that particular field, yet it would be both possible and useful to characterize the same functions using some other literary material.

(A) First, we can speak of *the function of evoking reality* which makes use of the somewhat magical illusion of the "pure referentiality" of news items, which seems only to allow the "naked facts" of reality to speak. This peculiar

status of news items can be illustrated on the example of some extracts from the *Prologue* to *The Hunger Song* by Bruno Jasieński:

in multi-thousand, hundred-street cities  
thousands of newspapers come out every day;  
long, black word columns,  
shouted loudly on all avenues.  
They are written by little elderly men who wear glasses.  
it's not true.  
They are written by the City  
with the stenography of a thousand accidents  
with rhythm, pulse, blood,  
long forty-column poems,  
they are typed by a hundred thousand machines  
which can hear the world's pulse for millions of miles,  
the agencies of reuter, havas, pat  
kilometer-long paper tapes,  
news bulletins.  
the city can hear everything  
(.....)  
it's true gigantic poetry,  
the only one, round-the-clock, ever new,  
which affects me, like strong electric current,  
how ridiculous is, confronted with it, all other poetry.  
poets, you are useless!

It is *true* poetry, for it imparts true, reliable and verified news; and it is *true poetry*, for it is “the script of the City”, the direct speech of the civilized world. While the symbolists, in search for this speech of the world, arrived at silence, as the mystical experience which reveals the primary language of things, the futurist avant-garde discovered it, with naive enthusiasm, in the jabbering hubbub and din of telegraphic news. The peculiar suggestive aura of evoking reality seems to be rooted not so much in the true character of the reference, as in the belief in its indexical relation to the object, i.e. in the existence of a real connection between the telegraphic “script” and “the City”. A news item simply amounts to a transmitted piece of information: a piece of information recognized as true and topical, and its transmission recognized as a neutral, “transparent” medium; these features are to guarantee and protect the rules and norms of the institutionalized system of transmission and circula-

tion of information. Thus double indexical link should connect a news item with the world: for without an event there would be no news about it (or there should not be, as ethics forbids invention, it allows only verified news, for instance, verified by a network of anonymous correspondents); similarly, a news item would not be transmitted without the institutions which collect and circulate news items. This system belongs to the real social world in the same way as an event does: "the City" is the place where events happen as well as the source and channel of transmitting information about events.

This function is fulfilled by numerous news items: in the poetry and fiction (*I Burn Paris*) of Bruno Jasiński, in many poems by Anatol Stern (particularly in the volume *A Race to the Pole*), in *Miranda* by Antoni Lange, in the futurist novels of Jalu Kurek, in *The Dead Sea* by Emil Zegadłowicz, and in many other later works (for instance, by Józef Mackiewicz, Henryk Grynberg, Jerzy Andrzejewski, Adolf Rudnicki, Kazimierz Brandys, Stanisław Czycz). This is the most frequent and most fundamental function; the function which the reader most frequently takes for granted and the one which makes it possible to introduce other functions. It seems that this evocative aura never disappears completely, although it is sometimes suppressed or abused in order to intensify the effectiveness of ideological persuasion (a classical example is Tadeusz Borowski's *Stories from Books and Newspapers*); it is particularly in evidence as the feature of news items of "the underground circulation". A specific variety of this function is the use of old newspapers and outdated news items as a document of a past topicality, which evokes the peculiar aura of historicity or provides a particular experience of temporariness, as is the case in the writing of Czesław Miłosz and Zbigniew Herbert, also to some extent of Tadeusz Różewicz, Sławomir Mrożek and Andrzej Kuśniewicz.

(B) Second, we can speak of *the function of aestheticizing reality*. Everything can be art, claimed the avant-garde artists, and particularly the neo-avant-garde artists; thus a ready-made, a press clipping as a ready-made or a found object, can be isolated from its context and introduced into the context of art which can confer on it the status of a work of literature, by emphasizing its formal organization, or its dramatic, sublime or grotesque character. The "press" structuralization of reality reveals here its artificiality (the non-neutrality of the form of communication), which makes possible its aesthetic re-functionalization. Thus Jan Nepomucen Miller constructs his poem "A Sentence", in the manner which resembles "deconstructs", so fashionable in the

1960s. Tadeusz Peiper, like later Tadeusz Różewicz in "White Polka Dots" (though not for the same reasons), splits a press advertisement into verses to expose its "poetic" features (the examples in the essay "Modern Rhythm"). Jan Brzękowski in "A Fight of the Police with Robbers" reproduces a news item, developing it into a sketch with pastiche and grotesque features; it is reminiscent of the poetic practice of Julian Kornhauser in "A News Item" (yet in this case the poet is closer to the poetry of Różewicz, Williams and hyper-realists). Such an effect is conditioned by a "disinterested" aesthetic attitude, by removal in time, by suspending referentiality and re-contextualization, and in a general sense by the receptive type of the activity of the subject who creates those artefacts. "Time turns advertisements into poems", writes Themerson in one of his stories, and "Time turns poems into advertisements, because Time changes the reader, and it depends on the reader whether a thing is or is not art". This function, though not too frequent, is easily perceived - owing to its extreme character and its simplicity - and eagerly described; apart from many critics, the theoretical aspects of such works of literature have been discussed, among others, by Genette, Culler and Herrnstein Smith.

(C) Third, we must mention *the instrumental function*. It applies when news items are used for artistic, cognitive, persuasive and ideological reasons. They are regarded as a repertory of factographic data, communication techniques, recognizable styles and genres of expression which are given to the subject to use freely. Even Peiper, who first firmly rejected this "inventory of the world" (because of its "syntax"), in "A Chronicle of a Day" and "For Instance" made use of the artistic and ideological possibilities offered by the collage technique which exploits this function. "The world of an inventory" means - like in the newspaper - the world of decontextualized and unrelated objects and events which are liable to rearrangement or manipulation (by selection, arrangement, re-contextualization etc.). These possibilities were also exploited by the futurists, propagandists, surrealists, Skamandrites and independent artists, among others by Anatol Stern, Bruno Jasiński, Tadeusz Peiper, Jan Brzękowski, Stefan Flukowski, and also by Andrzej Strug (*Zakopanoptikon, A Great Day, The Archives of the Princess Sanoyca*) and Leon Chwistek (*God's Palaces*). The most eminent work of literature in the inter-war period which made use of this function for critical and artistic ends was *The Ball at the Opera* by Julian Tuwim. In the postwar period a full range of possible applications of this function can be seen in the works of such diverse



writers as Tadeusz Borowski, Leopold Buczkowski, Zbigniew Herbert, Józef Mackiewicz, Tadeusz Różewicz, Wisława Szymborska, Janusz Anderman and Chrystian Skrzyposzek. This function is rarely dominant, more frequently it is a component of the final effect. Neither is it independent; of necessity it assumes that the reader is under the initial influence of the evocative function which the former exploits. It presumes the aura of credibility of press information, or in a more general sense, of the twentieth-century belief in the newspaper. As Aleksander Wat remarks in *Lucifer Unemployed*, while the book is the religion for individuals, the newspaper is the religion of the masses. Faith is eternally the same; only its object changes. Today the sanctuary of faith is the press (...) Faith in the press is the faith of the twentieth century. The power of its suggestion is inexpressible. Like all religions, it describes the position of the individual in the universe. Like every religion, it is the rock upon which rests the state.

(D) Fourth, *the modelling function* which in particular emphasizes the fact that the arrangement and character of information in the newspaper keeps modelling the image of the world in its own likeness. According to Karel Čapek, "in each morning paper the world becomes transformed into a jungle in which innumerable surprises, dangers and epic events lurk". The newspaper defines reality as a continuously changeable mosaic of fragmentary and atomized, extraordinary and parallel events. The futurists must have had this function in mind when they published their leaflets in the newspaper form. News items and the newspaper image of the world were used in this function by Peiper in "A Chronicle of a Day", and also by Roman Jaworski in *The Wedding of Count Orgaz*, where a whole chapter is composed of imitations and parodies of news items; Tadeusz Kudliński in *The Outcasts of Eve* introduced leitmotif sequences constructed of newspaper headlines, advertisements and anonymous statements of facts, in the manner sometimes reminiscent of Dos Passos and sometimes of Döblin. However, as *A Document of the Epoch* by Antoni Słonimski testifies, the newspaper image of reality was not so much a prerogative of the avant-garde, as it expressed the common, generally shared apprehension and presentation of reality which tended towards reflection, denial or to parodistic revelation of the oppressive and mystifying power of this stereotype.

This newspaper image of reality may be strongly criticized when its deforming and restrictive character is revealed; when it appears that it is not only a *newspaper* image (modelled on the newspaper), but that it is also *the*

*image of a world* (not of the whole, or public, or our own world). This fact results from the basic features of press information as such: while news items refer to what is extraordinary and unknown, so in consequence they divide the social world into two unequal and differently assessed areas - the sphere of what deserves attention, transmission and public comment, and the sphere of what for various reasons does not deserve any mention (see *News Every Hour* by Adam Zagajewski). Moreover, the criteria which decide about including or ignoring events are neither clear nor made public. From the point of view of the reader, news items both focus and distract his attention: they focus his attention on the recognized world which they model as the official picture of the whole; thus they divert his attention from the underprivileged, unofficial social reality which - both in the literal and metaphorical sense - is left speechless and unrecognized. These features of the newspaper model of reality are demonstrated in their extreme form when it is supported by the function discussed below.

(E) Probably never before and never afterwards was the newspaper, and news items, given such a privileged status as in the literature of socialist realism. The history of *Iskra*, *Zvezda* and *Pravda*, as described in *The Brief Course of the History of the Bolshevik Party*, was the most convincing piece of evidence. In the literature of socialist realism the newspaper was given the role of the highest authority which ends all dispute, solves the plot, explains the situation and makes possible its proper ideological assessment. "Is it not beyond dispute", asked Melania Kierczyńska rhetorically, "that today it is newspaper which provides the strongest emotional experience - in the poetic and artistic sense - that it provides it with the simplest, bare account of the deep changes which have affected the working man in Poland?" And she went on: "Yet in a newspaper account the monumentality of the changes will not be revealed clearly enough and vividly enough to everybody - art has much greater possibilities there". This remark, which treats poetry and the newspaper as equal values, seems to resemble the futurist apology of the newspaper; yet its function is apprehended in a completely different way. It is certainly not "the script of the City", the perfect record of the signals from the social world, but the model example: both for reality, which should speedily become like the transmitted image, and for literature, which must of necessity affect the imperfectly educated reader and therefore must be cultivated as its imperfect literary realization (a paraphrase in fiction and an indirect, fictitious presentation of ideological arguments).

News items are used here, then, in their fifth function, *the function of the ideological model, or rather the rotary ideal*: reality should adapt itself to the information about it, and literature should adapt itself to the newspaper account of that information. What deserves special mention here are two works by Tadeusz Borowski, *Stories from Books and Newspapers* and *A Little Chronicle*; both texts are important, for they demonstrate the ways the above mentioned functions can be used for the purpose of this particular function; in these texts the writer reveals the mechanisms of this "great art, the rhetoric of our times", as he himself put it, which was then not only a literary or journalist strategy, but also the language of political power. This function of news items is dominant and fundamental within the persuasive and ideological literary strategy for clearly defined reasons. For according to Alvin Gouldner, "Ideologies, then, are never grounded in an uninterpreted everyday life. Nor are they simply grounded in the oral interpretations of everyday life spoken in ordinary languages. Ideologies always premise tacitly those printed interpretations of everyday life called "news". They are thus not simply commentaries on what is *happening*, but also on what the news *said* is happening. Ideologies are always palimpsestic texts on texts, no less than world-referencing commentaries on "life".

(F) The later applications of news items in modern, post-1956 literature, though important and representative, are generally well known, and besides, can be deduced from the applications we have discussed here. Yet two attitudes should be mentioned at least: the criticism of the press language in the New Wave poetry and the "anti-journalist" prose of Miron Białoszewski, Ryszard Kapuściński or Janusz Anderman. The poetic practice of the New Wave, the writings of Stanisław Barańczak, Ryszard Krynicki, Adam Zagajewski, or Krzysztof Karasek (and partly also those of Wiktor Woroszyński, Jerzy Pluta or Ryszard Schubert) is the climax in the long process of the criticism of the press language which was started by the writers of the older generation (Mrozek, for instance, beginning with his *Progressive Man*). Their works have been frequently and competently discussed, so I shall only say briefly that news items and the newspaper language have been used by them in the sixth function, *the function of a damaged tool*.

I have borrowed this metaphorical expression from Heidegger who maintains that when our tools are efficient their functions determine the aims and objectives which categorize the world of everyday life in such a way that the people who act in this world consider it to be a neutral, direct and proper

image of reality. Yet when the tools get out of order and cannot function properly any longer, their shaping and deforming character becomes revealed and might become a problem as an object of critical reflection. Moreover, this image becomes “detached” from the world and the actual state of things is revealed. The critical attention is focused on the newspaper language in this kind of writing because its features have been recognized as the syndrome of the symptoms of the disease which has paralyzed the whole system of social communication. For it is a language which does not pertain to things any longer, which only simulates the transmission and exchange of information and blocks efficiently the free expression of subjectivity. Moreover, keeping silent on the disregarded aspects of life produces an area of an “unsanctioned” and partly delegatized social reality which, owing to the coercing persuasion latent in the language, becomes hardly perceived, apprehended and accepted, even by the people who live within it. If usually the language betrays us, as it says a little more and not quite what we want to say and can reasonably say, so in its “damaged” form, the language betrays itself: in what it expresses and suppresses, how it exposes and censors, depraves and incapacitates. This trend in literature uses the language mainly because of its indexical features, its links with a whole network of assumptions, presuppositions, appreciations and connotations which both document and unmask its real character.

(G) At last I would like to mention one more function of news items in modern literature, which is particularly noticeable in the kind of writing that is consciously opposed to the conventional principles of press account, to its expressive features and cognitive claims. The best example of it is the prose of Miron Białoszewski. I do not intend to repeat what is well known: owing to the critical analyses of such scholars as Michał Głowiński, it is clear that in Białoszewski’s “little narratives” the key role is played by structured events of the type which occurs in news items or in Barthes’ “fait divers”. I wish to point to something else: his narratives are neither constructed like news items nor taken directly from them; on the contrary, news items are used here in their seventh function, *the function of anti-model* for Białoszewski’s writing, of its negation or *negative*.

A simple example from *In Praise of the Press* by Karel Čapek shows best this basic difference:

I took a ride on the tram lately. Suddenly there is some hubbub somewhere along the rails, the tram driver swears horribly and rings the bell wildly, the

carriage stops all at once, we all tumble on the driver's back, out of nowhere there is a crowd on the rails, two guards carry some heavy parcel into the gate passage, the ghastly pale driver wipes cold sweat from his brow and looks for a policeman; it's some strange, crude chaos in which everything gets slowly and yet hectically disintegrated; I could not come round for the rest of the day. And next morning I read in the paper: "Yesterday at one o'clock, at Národní Trída Street a tram knocked down Frantiek S., an accountant resident in Prague. The slightly injured man was taken by the ambulance and given first-aid." Yes, it's all, and I was liberated from the wearisome chaos I had experienced; at some point I realized that the case was, thank God, quite common. Not a tiny trace of hectic chaos was left. He was given first-aid - that's normalization.

It can be easily noticed that Białoszewski's writing is modelled on non-press or anti-press narrative (which can be seen in the examples similar to the one quoted above, for instance in "A Street Shame (An Accident)" in *Slanders from Reality*. Extrapolating this remark we can say that Białoszewski's world is generally a reality excluded from the newspaper; the type of narrative (which emphasizes its indexical features, modality and the significance of the pragmatic dimension of meaning) is by definition forbidden in shaping a news item. Yet we can also say that this unofficial, private and victimized world, which remains outside the field of interest of the newspaper and its "gregarious", mendaciously impersonal and objective language, speaks out here in its own voice and - thanks to the writer - is generally recognized.

The "anti-journalist" poetics of Białoszewski's prose is a forceful, though by no means the only example of realizing this negative function which is clearly competitive as regards the first function discussed in this paper. Another, even more emphatic example is provided by the works of Ryszard Kapuściński. His writing demonstrates, in the successive phases of its development, a process of a gradual departure from the canonized principles of referential account and the accepted convention of the documentary; this process aims at formulating its own poetics which is consistent with the idea of "new journalism" that aspires - in order to achieve a "more complete" truth (which the old journalism was unable to render) - to combining the factographic reliability of information with the literary techniques of transmission and with self-reflection concerning the writer's possibilities and limitations. In this type of non-fiction, which includes also the works of Janusz Anderman, the conventional models of journalist account function only as a crucial

negative tradition: as illusory objectivism, false neutrality, apparent lack of prejudice, deformation of events in homogenized forms and mystification of their meaning in the schematic and familiar categories of official scripts.

Truth is guaranteed here by the clearly personal and critical structuring by the author of his complex experience, and literary techniques and styles, and even devices borrowed from fiction tend to be the best and the most adequate form of account. If a news item appears in this context, it is not only deprived of its essential informative function, but it seems to require explanation, that is, a reconstruction of the intricate situation which, when apprehended, makes it possible to grasp the meaning and character of the facts officially proclaimed. It can be said that the emphatic renouncement of news items in the conventional form (as they are either untrue or inaccurate) results in adopting such forms of literary expression which can become, in a sense, "more faithful" information and a "fuller" account; that is, such forms which can be corroborated by their immanently documentary character and which can establish their own truth in the primary aspect of literature.

### 3. Conclusion: Literature and Document

I do not intend to discuss the relations between the various functions presented here, however necessary it seems to be; it can be briefly said that these functions are to some extent mutually exclusive. Yet I wish to formulate some general remark which does not seem to result from the list given in the paper.

Press information, whatever its generic associations and actual functions, is a part of the body of source accounts which includes social documents. Thus the introduction of press information into literary texts and its transformation in those texts can be regarded as an example of the possible relations between literature and documentary writing. It is significant that all types of employing press information in literature (and their various refunctionalizations) do not infringe upon its documentary character, although they define it variously each time. What is preserved is a kind of indexical link which is made credible because of the real connection with the object which has made the creation of the given text possible; this connection is not necessarily physical, it can be based on habit, institution etc. As a literary text acquires documentary features - and the works of Białoszewski and Kapuściński are extreme cases of such a development, because they seem to adopt this

primary source aspect which modern press information tends to suppress or abandon - more significance is given to such literary strategies whose credibility is based on the fact of participating in what is being presented, that is, to such strategies which can cause *mimesis* to be *methexis* as well.

The indexical character of literary documentarism explains the most frequent and most troublesome problems posed by this kind of writing. First, the indexical sign, because it provides "an evidence of existence", cannot lie (hence its particular aura of credibility), yet what can be questionable is its interpretation, correctness of deciphering sign relations and accuracy of inferences etc. From this point of view, if there is no question that literature is authentic evidence, the problem is *what* it is reliable evidence of.

Second: the fact that indexical relations include not only physical and causal relations, but also customary and institutional relations, points at the difficulty of drawing a clear line between the natural and cultural orders and between the causal and conventional sign relations. This situation often leads to reinterpreting the former as the latter (for instance, as the effect of rhetorical and intertextual literary strategies). In particular it makes it possible to realize that the concept of the indexical or documentary sign refers not only to the distinct category of sign relations of causal and natural character, but also - and perhaps first of all - to what within a given cultural community is *sanctioned* as possessing such semiotic features.

Third, this procedure of legitimization means in literature mainly the recognition of the identity of the subject (both existential and textual) which becomes a guarantee of the authenticity of indexical inferences. For literary documents of this type thematize or at least expose the cotextual and contextual indirect relations which define and authenticate referential meaning. They are constructed in such a way as to make the necessary condition of apprehending *the full truth* about facts the apprehension of their broadly understood pragmatic involvement and determination. It is *certain* truth in both meanings of the word, for it results from the same *act of subjective corroboration* which, when stating an opinion, takes a relativistic view at the same time. Thus it is truth both perspective and interpreted; some truth, someone's truth, learned once, and articulated in such and such a way; the truth which always has something or someone behind it, who verifies and validates it.

trans. by Danuta Piątkowska