

Teresa Dobrzyńska

"Poetyka teoretyczna. Zagadnienia języka", Maria Renata Mayenowa, Wrocław 1974 : [recenzja]

Literary Studies in Poland 1, 132-141

1978

Artykuł został zdigitalizowany i opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

according to whom drama is the third, after lyric and epic, literary genre. The drama proper—according to Skwarczyńska—is the theatrical drama, realized in system of signs other than language, i.e. seen, not read. The text of such a drama should be analyzed not as a literary one (except the so-called *Lesedrama*) but as a record of the future theatre spectacle, which is never a faithful copy of the original.

In the third part of the said book an interesting article on the so-called “concrete poetry” is to be found, in which the author discusses the origin and modes of existence of this poetry, and postulates that this important aesthetic phenomenon of the 20th century should find more place in the literary studies.

Sum. by *Ryszard Nycz*
Transl. by *M.-B. Fedewicz*

Maria Renata Mayenowa, *Poetyka teoretyczna. Zagadnienia języka (Theoretical Poetics. Problems of Language)*, Ossolineum, Wrocław 1974, pp. 464.

The book by M. R. Mayenowa is devoted to the problems of the study of literature which arise at the analysis of a literary work as a structure determined by its linguistic character. According to the author, the relation of an artistic text to other linguistic messages, including non-literary ones, as well as to the system of language itself on its various levels, is the crucial issue in poetics, for it explains the semiotic processes that take place in a work of literature. The author points out to the transformations and selections of elements of the system of language which are determined by various principles accepted as constitutive for a poem, and she analyzes their nature as signs. Such a linguistic and semiotic perspective is underlying the most general approach of the book, defines its arrangement and range of contents. Within this range, the book by Mayenowa has the status of a university handbook.

As a handbook, however, it is a rather special volume. Its chief aim is to introduce the reader to discussions and polemics concerning the literary problems belonging to the language-oriented poetics which have been continued for centuries and still remain

vital. The historical material set forth in the book is subordinated to this principle. The task is not only to inform the reader about the age-old discussion on the essence of poetics and the contents of its many issues, including its position among the humanities, but also to make him continually face the choices among various research approaches, supporting each of such methodological decisions with the awareness of its causes and consequences. For this reason *Poetyka teoretyczna* is not only an introduction to the discipline, but a powerful source of inspiration by its presentation of poetical studies as vital and dynamic.

This principle of setting forth the vital and varied theoretical themes has formed the arrangement of Chapter I, "A Survey of Opinions in Poetics," which discusses selected doctrines from the history of that discipline, endeavouring to present clearly separate and coherent positions. The discussed authors include Aristotle, W. Wackernagel (against the background of Hegel's aesthetics), R. Müller-Freienfels, Ingarden (with additional report of Staiger's views on the types of poetry) and Tomashevsky (with Vygotsky's views on tragedy). Five questions are asked about each of those types of poetical investigations (classical, romantic, psychological, phenomenological and formal): 1) what kind of object is a literary work for each doctrine; 2) what is the broader context of each of them; 3) how is a literary work segmented and—in consequence—how are the descriptive categories of poetics distinguished; 4) what are the basic concepts of each doctrine; 5) to what extent is history involved or taken into account in them.

Chapter II, "The Language of Poetry, the Poetical Language—a History of the Problem," is directly connected with the main underlying idea of the linguistic determination of a literary work. The author has singled out two essential philosophical approaches to the relation of language and poetry. One, derived from Aristotle, recognizes language as external to a particular literary production, emphasizes the social status of language and the unchanging character of descriptive terms outside of and within literature. The methods of the study of literature are based on linguistic methodology. Taking into account the semantics of social forms of linguistic texts, it refers to the formal and semantic categories acknowledged by the common linguistic awareness. Against the background of these catego-

ries emerges the problem of deviation treated as a sign-forming distortion of normal usage.

The other general position towards the relation of language and poetry appeared conspicuously for the first time, according to Mayenowa, in writings of G. B. Vico, though earlier manifestations can be found which have failed to become influential. The themes introduced by Vico were developed in Europe, particularly in Germany. In consequence there has evolved a view on the relation of language and poetry which is different from the Aristotelean; it reduces the poetic quality to linguistic activity and sees in language itself the poetic power serving human expression and manifesting man's creative nature. On this approach, a word and a linguistic utterance are identified, at least in the primitive period when human communication was still natural, with poetic phenomena or simply with poems, while poetry is conceived as intensification of the natural qualities inherent in language. Mayenowa discusses various formulations of those tenets after the Vicean revolution in writings of J. J. Rousseau, J. G. Herder, H. von Humboldt, A. A. Potebnia, K. Vossler, L. Spitzer, B. Croce, E. Cassirer, W. M. Urban, S. K. Langer, C. K. Ogden, J. A. Richards. Against this background she presents and comments the views on the relation of language and poetry in the theory of Ingarden, in works of Russian formalists (mainly R. Jakobson and G. O. Vinokur) and Prague Structuralists. She emphasizes the polarity of attitudes towards the concept of the poetic language in the 20th-century thought. The line connected with structural thinking tends to conceive the language of poetry again as "a game with the system or a superstructure upon the system" and to elaborate the methods of the study of literature with reference to linguistic categories. The author points out the fact that although formalists and Structuralists see the poetic process as exhausted in or by the linguistic experience, they explain the mechanism of the process by means of linguistic analyses which take resort to the structure of the system and to sociological categories.

Describing the two basic types of the relation of poetry and language, Mayenowa indicates that the approach which treats language as the poetic element implies a neutralization of the concept of style. This concept is connected with the Aristotelean tradition and its continuations or modifications: it assumes understanding language

as external to the subject matter of poetry and connected with various social and communicational situations. Only in such a view it is meaningful to speak about various stylistical renderings of the same contents. On the grounds of poetics conceived in the manner of Vico and his followers such a notion of style is meaningless; style comes to be identified with the unity of a work of art as expressing the artist's mind, and determined by it.

The evolution of thought on the relation of language and poetry has been accompanied by the shift of focus of interest concerning the two major pragmatic aspects of artistic creation. Poetics of the post-Aristotelean type has been particularly keen to study the reader's reactions to a poetical message, or his decoding activity, while continuators of the line of Vico tend to lay the main emphasis on the role of the poet and his act of expression manifested by a literary work as a linguistic utterance.

Chapter III of the book, "The General Assumptions and Concepts," offers the actual descriptive apparatus and outlines the research perspective endorsed by the author. *Poetyka teoretyczna* by Mayenowa belongs to that line of reflection on a literary text which refers to the system of social values inherent in language and considers a poem against the background of various acts of communication as peculiarly marked out in its semiotic aspect. In the furthest-reaching perspective this kind of approach reaches back to the rhetoric tradition.

Recognition of the sign character of a poem and of the intensified sign-formating processes taking place in it provides the motive for summarizing in this chapter the views of J. Mukařovský, Ch. Morris, and Soviet students of semiotics of the Tartu group. According to the author, a poem is

a specific organization of signs, and poetics is a discipline studying the ways in which meanings are organized in a poem and analyzing systems of signs functioning in it (p. 113).

Such a semiotic bent of poetics implies that poetical texts are to be decoded as linguistic texts rooted in the system of linguistic meanings; besides, it requires taking into account all transformations and limitations imposed on the linguistic material by the rules of formation of a poem, as well as interpretation of all relations into which the given text enters with other linguistic systems and structures. Such an approach also leads beyond the direct level of linguistic

signs, to the disclosure of sign constructions superimposed on the signs of the natural language as the so-called secondary modelling systems.

In consequence, Mayenowa's poetics is pivoted on the concept of sign (often, but not exclusively, purely linguistic), while the ultimate perspective for a literary text is provided by the relativistic theory of culture.

The chapter, presenting the conceptual apparatus of research, introduces the basic terms of the signs theory and discusses the essential linguistic units of meaning, differing by their degrees of autonomy: morpheme, word and utterance.

The semiotically oriented poetics of Mayenowa finds its conceptual support in Peirce's classification of signs into symbols, icons and indices, and in the three approaches to the functioning of signs: semantic, syntactic and pragmatic. It is the latter aspect which distinguishes Mayenowa's theory; many structural elements of a literary work are interpreted in her book as calling for the reader's activity, or as instructions allowing him to transform in the process of reception the initial data into elements of a coherent whole. The author makes a distinction between the *invariant meaning* of a message (its intent based on the code meanings of words and taking into account the appropriate modal attitude towards the message) and *information* brought by the message, reduced to what is indicated by it, or what can be inferred about the attitude of the speaker to those addressed by him, about his belonging to a definite social group, his attitude to the prevailing system of values, etc. (those properties of a message come to the fore on the pragmatic level; in a spoken text they are often carried by the prosodic contour). Information brought by an utterance can become itself a subject of a communicational intent as a *parenthetical message* (either made formally distinct, or in form of a crypto-quotation which can be recognized as parenthetical). The reader should then attach an iconic character to the message and connect it with a definite linguistic code or sub-code. Such semiotic transformations are characteristic of a literary text and determine its coherent reading, compatible with its communicational intent. Parenthetical message is in Mayenowa's theory the key concept for the understanding of the literary process based on sign synthesis and referring to an active

attitude of readers. Quotation is understood as either a literal repetition of someone's utterance, or a representation of the structural characteristics of such an utterance (the so-called quoted structures). In the broadest sense, the whole literary work, as an integral expression of a definite modelling attitude to the world, is a parenthetical message.

An important concept for the description of texts is that of a metatext (introduced after A. Wierzbicka) as an explicit or implicit statement about the text or its part. This is connected with the deep level of analysis of linguistic structures. The concept of metatext will serve the author in subsequent parts of the book, e.g. in the discussion of the problem of a coherent text and the determinants of the beginning and end of a message.

In the next chapter (Ch. IV, "Vocabulary and Grammar") the author considers the sign-formating potentialities inherent in a language system; she discusses the properties of meaningful units of language, the structure of vocabulary, transformations within the meanings of words, and the modelling nature of grammar. Mayenowa points out various sign phenomena superimposed on the established primary meanings in such a manner that "a sign of the natural language becomes the signifiant for the new meaning" (p. 215). She discusses e.g. the polypopton, or the formal parallelism of utterance, and reveals the consequences of the choice of a definite lexical element (tied up by systematic relations within the given semantic field) for the meaning. Subject to reflection are also symbolic meanings of words superimposed on the basic meanings from the dictionary, vital in the given cultural milieu, as well as an individual vocabulary of a poet, often characterized by its shifts within the semantic field. Analysis is extended on the phenomenon of the metaphor, conceived as a distortion of coherence of a text, setting off a peculiar linguistic (and metalinguistic as well) activity of a reader who tries to find the motivation underlying the union of the incompatible elements of the phrase, by taking resort to the common knowledge about reality, fixed in accepted phraseology. The process of reading of a metaphor is described by Mayenowa as follows:

He [a reader] has to actualize the multiple and usually typical contexts in which the two elements of the metaphorical phrase function and then to find out contexts with common predicates for both (p. 244).

Thereby the author shifts the problem of *tertium comparationis* from the ontological level to the domain of linguistic acts. According to this conception, interpretation of a metaphor treated as a specific predicate can differ from reader to reader since it depends on his ability to actualize the relevant contexts for the parts of a metaphorical expression.

The next problem in the semiotic poetics of Mayenowa concerns those potentialities of sings which are related to the concept of text as a coherent, specially organized whole. The author writes:

If it turns out that messages or texts can be comprehended as certain types or institutionalized wholes, we will be able to show that they, too, can bear secondary meanings (p. 185).

Chapter V of the book, "The Structure of Text," is devoted to the idea of the coherent text understood as an utterance made by a single (but not necessarily individual) sender, addressed to one (but not necessarily singular) receiver, about a single subject. These pragmatic components are discussed in detail in various communicational contexts: in oral communication, oral literary expression, written text, since the scope of common knowledge of the participants in each kind of situation is different. Then the author presents a number of linguistic studies concerning the mechanism of textual coherence, and ascribes coherence techniques to various types of utterances (description, narration, logical proof, monologue, dialogue). According to Mayenowa, underlying textual coherence is the phenomenon of redundancy appearing in succeeding parts of an utterance as related to preceding ones, as well as metalinguistic and metatextual performance.

The next topic are markers of the beginning and end of the text in various types of utterances and in various communicational situations. The author points out their metatextual character (explicit or subject to reconstruction through the analysis of the relation of such markers to the whole text) and their grammaticalization in various generic types; new kinds of sings can be formed by transferring markers which have become conventional for one type of utterance into new generic contexts. Different sorts of beginnings set off different active attitudes in receivers, according to the manner and degree to which they refer to the common preliminary know-

ledge, or to the “common world” of the sender and receiver of the message, and to what degree the inner language (as Vygotsky understood the term), called pre-objective by the author, is taken into account.

Analyzing the structure of the text from the point of view of metalinguistic and metatextual inserted elements which break its essential coherence, Mayenowa considers the problem of insertions in a literary work (text). She discusses *oratio recta*, *oratio obliqua*, intermediate form of the reported speech, and quotation (after Bakhtin, Voloshinov, Bally and Wierzbicka). It is significant for the semiotic approach that these structures

are responsible for the necessity of interpreting the text on several levels and thereby bring forth its semantic richness. From the pragmatic point of view—Mayenowa continues—it should be emphasized that they make the reader contribute to the rise of that richness, for they bring instructions allowing to transform sequences of symbolic signs into iconic ones which realize the communicational intent of the actual author. [...] They can [...] bring into relief the community of outlook of the speaker and the listener, or confirm the listener’s knowledge, or display the utterance in the making (p. 314).

The study of the sign-formative properties of a literary text is developed in the chapter on sound structure (Chapter VII, “Verse and Prose. Phonetical Organization of the Text”). The relation of two oppositions: that between verse and prose, and that between art and non-artistic linguistic performances is considered in its historical aspect; it is pointed out that

by providing additional segmentation of the stream of speech, the verse offers opportunities [...] for additional direct expression of a very rich kind (p. 382).

This thesis is developed, after several initial assumptions concerning the presence of prosody in a written and pronounced text have been introduced and the sound organization of prose defined (through the following sequence of discussed subjects: intonation characteristic of the Ciceronian period; mediaeval theory of *cursum*; models of intonation structure of sentence after Karcevski; the statistical emphasis theory by Tomashevsky; postulates of K. Wóycicki concerning the necessity of statistical investigations of prose by means of comparative analysis). The author discusses systematic supra-segmental elements of verse building, presents the basic notions

of versification (verse, system, metre, constant, tendency), and describes linguistic values of versification constants in Polish poetry. Underlying her theory is the belief that versification structures and the language system are interdependent. According to her, the character of prosody specific for the given language determines the choice of verse building units, while a definite metric pattern constitutes, in its turn, a set of limitations imposed on the linguistic material, allowing to choose for the poem the definite units on various levels of the language. Against this background we are offered a discussion of the historical limitations and capabilities of the types of verse which are basic for the Polish system of versification. Sign values inherent in verse forms of various kinds are indicated (e.g. originating in the connections of some types of verse with certain generic contexts), as well as sign-formative, style-modifying functions of repetitions of sounds (such as those brought by the rhyme, etc.). Of the latter the author says:

Repetitions of elements belonging to the signifiant make it necessary to look for juxtapositions of themes and to try to re-interpret the morphology and etymology of words. [...] They may become sings of attitudes which until then had been directly expressed. Finally, within the text, repetitions connect words or larger fragments by definite relationships which either emphasize or cancel the semantic relations. [...] They allow to look at the text as a stylistic structure and to make some kind of repetitions a signal of a new sign of the attitude which, contained in the text, had given rise to the stylization (p. 444).

A consequence of treating the literary text as a result of meaningful choices from among the possibilities of expression created by the linguistic system and the stock of petrified forms of communication is the concept of style accepted by the author. In Chapter IV, "Style, Stylization, Stylistics," Mayenowa continues her discussion of the relation of language and poetry from Chapter II. The two approaches to this problem are now extended on the idea of the style. The author endorses the position which recognizes the existence of supra-individual, functionally specialized structures based on the selection of permitted and forbidden linguistic means; these structures are peculiar index signs. They are subject to significant manipulations both in literary works and in other linguistic performances. Stylistic devices are used as iconic signs. Stylization is described in the following terms:

Stylization introduces secondary information, or information about the sign organization. In this sense it is similar to a quotation, which introduces metalinguistic information (p. 364).

Such an approach to stylistics does not involve a division between the linguistic and literary points of view, but places a work of literature beside and among the other acts of linguistic expression.

Discussing the problem of style and stylization the author points to its broad cultural perspectives as tools to interpret all sign products and behaviours, and their interrelation. (At this point she refers to the anthropological conception of A. L. Kroeber.) With reference to the choice of linguistic means she quotes the ample tradition of stylistic studies related to the most ancient category of *modus dicendi*. A historical outline of the problem reveals the breaking of the concept of style by anticlassical revolt (and decay of rhetoric thinking); it then acquired a new, individualistic and evaluating meaning. Mayenowa describes the revival of the pluralistic idea of style in the 20th century, connected with structural linguistics, as well as contemporary continuations of the opposite standpoints (summarizes the views of Havránek, Vinogradov, Sapir, Enkwist, Marouzeau, Bogusławski and, on the opposite pole, Vossler and Spitzer).

The book ends with a Summary in which the author emphasizes the semiotic character of her approach to poetics by characterizing again a literary work in terms of the operations transforming index signs into iconic ones, and by stressing the meaningful aspect of the choice of a sign from among the store offered by the system. Mayenowa reminds here the thesis of Ingarden about the grammatical or anti-grammatical (but not agrammatical) character of rhyme, extending it on all cases when a choice is made from among definite forms of expressions. A choice is always meaningful. Finally, the author stresses the importance of the pragmatism aspect in textual studies of coherence and interpretations. The understanding of a text is determined by the different communicational situations and contexts of meaning to which it belongs for various receivers. Thus the semiotic approach to poetics provides the ground for grasping the functions of the sender and receiver of the text in their involvement in its sign-formative potentialities.