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"Teoria i interpretacja. Szkice literackie", Kazimierz Bartoszyński, Warszawa 1985 : [recenzja]

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Book Reviews

Comptes rendus de livres

Kazimierz Bartoszyński, *Teoria i interpretacja. Szkice literackie (Theory and Interpretation. Literary Essays)*, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Warszawa 1985, 344 pp.

Kazimierz Bartoszyński has always been consistent in his research interests which he presents in clear contour. Due to this, his literary research is easy to situate in modern literary theory, and not only to situate but also to present. Bartoszyński's greatest fascination is "The Question of Literary Communication in Narrative Works," as the title of one of the essays in this collection says.

The book on *Theory and Interpretation* includes contributions written during a period of almost twenty years.¹ All have appeared before in collections of essays of journals, some of them as printed versions of reports submitted to scholarly conferences or sessions. This collection of Bartoszyński's literary studies, however, does not include a very significant and perhaps the most important of all of his studies, that about "Time as a Factor in Epic Works,"² a circumstance which substantially impoverishes Bartoszyński's scholarly record as it amounts only to the two books which have appeared up to now.

¹ The following essays are included in the book: "Aspects and Relationships of Texts (Source—History—Literature)," "The Theory of Spots of Indeterminacy against the Backdrop of Ingarden's Philosophical System," "Frontier Areas of Literary Criticism," "The Question of Literary Communication in Narrative Works," "On the Study of Plot Types," "Narrative as Deixis and Presupposition. Part One," "On the Amorphous Pattern of Memoirs," "Notes on *Souvenirs of Soplica*," "Ashes and the Crisis of the Historical Novel," "Cosmos and Antinomies. Part Two."

² This essay appeared originally in the collection of essays *W kręgu zagadnień teorii powieści* (ed. by J. Sławiński. Wrocław 1967). An amended and expanded version was included in *Problemy teorii literatury* 2, Wrocław 1976.

Bartoszyński's latest book is not merely a collection of re-edited essays put together for the reader's convenience. As they appear in one volume, the essays constitute a new complete work in which they cease to be fully autonomous and instead it becomes part of one coherent theoretical construction articulated in different ways at different levels of generality but nonetheless preserving their full identities in all their articulations, a circumstance which guarantees they will be recognized as Bartoszyński's own also in the process of interpretation. In keeping with what the author says in the foreword, his book is above all a theoretical work, and it should be construed as such. The interpretative essays in the second part of the book are obviously subordinate to theoretical studies, and so, on the one hand, they illustrate the conceptual tools Bartoszyński proposes in the first part, and, on the other, they complete as well as concretize the entire book.

The essays on Stefan Żeromski's *Popioły* (*Ashes*), Henryk Rzewuski's *Pamiętki Soplicy* (*Souvenirs of Soplica*) and Witold Gombrowicz's *Cosmos* expound theoretical formulations of high degrees of generality, which makes it possible for the interpreted texts to be arranged in various series of types and historical patterns. In these essays Bartoszyński deals with what is a fundamental question in the theory of narrative forms, namely the position of the 20th-century novel (*Ashes, Cosmos*) and of nonclassical 19th-century epic forms (*Souvenirs of Soplica*) vis-à-vis the model of "traditional" novel. These are naturally connected with studies in part one, in particular with the essays on "The Question of Literary Communication in Narrative Works," "On the Study of Plot Types," "Narrative a deixis and Presupposition."

The essay on "A Theory of Spots of Indeterminacy against the Backdrop of Ingarden's Philosophical System" appears as the second in succession, but owing to its specific character it can furnish a good starting point for a discussion of the entire book. Unlike the other ones, this essay concerns not so much literary facts in themselves as a definite theory dealing with them. Bartoszyński unfolds his own theoretical position in direct linkage with a different one which, remarkably, is written into an entirely different research tradition and employs entirely different notional tools. It is the theory of "spots of indeterminacy" put forward by Roman Ingarden, a theory

which plays an important role in the context of the philosopher's entire body of literary-theoretical accomplishments.

Bartoszyński thinks Ingarden's theory has above all the drawback that "it derives its concept of spots of indeterminacy from the difference in the manner of 'labelling' which exists between a described object and some conjectured real object" (p. 57f.). So, to modify the theory it is necessary to adopt an "immanent procedure," in order to "define the backdrop against which spots of indeterminacy can be recognized in such a manner that we can remain within the circle of literary facts in the broad sense" (p. 58). One way of doing that is to link up spots of indeterminacy to some concrete literary convention. If literary convention is regarded as a system conditioning the identifiability of spots of indeterminacy, then those spots can be viewed as special kinds of gaps in the body of information, specifically as gaps which are filled by the reader in keeping with the generic standards holding for the given work. Thus, for instance, if there is no information on the heroes' origin, then such a fact signals a spot of indeterminacy in a traditional 19th-century realistic novel, whereas elsewhere, say in poetic novels written by Romantics, the same circumstance remains just a gap in the information body which is not filled in the process of concretization (p. 59). The theory of spots of indeterminacy has its source, says Bartoszyński, in Ingarden's decision to impart absolute value to "a concretizing kind of reading" with the eventual product of "concretization." But concretization is merely one special "semantic tendency" which tells us to go, in the process of reading, beyond what is supplied directly in the work. Bartoszyński calls the opposite of this tendency "abstraction" (p. 65).

Bartoszyński's attempt to modify Ingarden's theory is designed to bring up the social—as distinct from purely individual—character of concretization moves, to emphasize the unavoidability of a mediating factor each act of reception is likely to yield to. The filling of spots of indeterminacy, Bartoszyński suggests, is a result of a series of decisions a recipient makes in the process of reading in line with a convention. A literary convention, accordingly, can be viewed as a set of standards imposing various constraints on reception processes, which define more or less distinct patterns of concretization.

The essay discussed here signals the questions which are elaborated

in subsequent contributions in the book. "Convention" is the catchword of the questions discussed. If I was to reduce Bartoszyński's considerations to just one thesis, it would be this: "It is only against the backdrop [...] of stereotypes [of which literary convention is a special case—*W.T.* ...] that the sender—recipient communication situation, which is potentially present in narrative works, is actually possible" (p. 143). Now this view situates Bartoszyński's work in a research tradition which is completely different from that represented by Ingarden's work.

Ingarden's theory rests on two premisses: one that the artist can have direct contact with the reality around him, and the other taking for granted the same kind of relationship between recipient and work. The two premisses found expression, among other things, in one of the conditions Ingarden adopted to describe processes of reception, namely that the reader in his contact with the work should—in Ingarden's ultimate view—have a perfect knowledge of the language.³

The recipient appearing in Ingarden's studies is a "direct" recipient, who approaches the work "without prejudice" and "without any preconceptions" about it, a reader who preserves a "natural attitude" in the process of reading.⁴ But in keeping with Bartoszyński's concept outlined in his book, such a recipient would be unable to get into contact with the work at all; he could not become a partner in an act of literary communication. It is probably in this point that the enormous gulf separating the two research traditions is visible better than anywhere else.

Bartoszyński puts strong emphasis on cultural determinants of literary communication. He chooses the term "stereotype" to describe those conditions; the term, by the way, has been around in sociological studies for half a century now. But Bartoszyński does not stick to that tradition, for he proposes an incomparably broader meaning for the term he employs than the one given to "stereotype" by Walter Lippmann. Using some contentions from information theory Bartoszyński says:

All kinds of message or information are taken into account not as self-contained entities but only in opposition towards a certain universe of possibilities implicit

³ See R. Ingarden, *O poznawaniu dzieła literackiego (On Cognition of Literary Work)*, Warszawa 1976, p. 22.

⁴ See M. Gołaszewska, *Estetyka (Aesthetics)*, Kraków 1975, pp. 23, 26.

in a certain "variety." Those universes of information possibilities within which certain kinds of information are distinguished will be called here stereotypes, and we will distinguish between the stereotype of sending, meaning the set of possibilities at the sender's disposal, and the stereotype of reception, meaning the set of possibilities anticipated by the recipient (p. 114f.).

Literary utterances imply not only a definite "universe of information possibilities" but also repertoires of literary possibilities. It is only against the backdrop of those repertoires that a literary utterance can be identified (p. 119). The relationship between stereotypes of sending and reception can be considered not only in reference to a specific, historically identified, literary audience but also in reference to intratextual communication levels. This implies a further assumption, namely the recognition that sending–reception situations built into a narrative are actually models of real situations (pp. 118–119). The changing relations between stereotypes of sending and reception enable us to distinguish—at any definite level of the narrative—a number of communication strategies designed to "meet halfway" the addressee's most likely stereotype. When the stereotypes of the sender and the recipient alike are the same, then it is possible to apply a "strategy of ellipsis" or else a "strategy of redundancy." When the stereotypes differ from each other, then there may be a "strategy of information level," a "strategy of the outsider," a "strategy of researcher." A description of the "spectacle of communication" furnished in a narrative work must take account of the superimposition of strategies which occur at different levels of communication.

Apart from stereotypes, the role of context which determines the identifiability of the literary message is played by the convention governing the given work. The convention is something like a specific "receptive device" which cannot be reduced to ordinary knowledge of the language. A reader armed with such a "device" has nothing in common with Ingarden's "direct" recipient who adopts a "natural attitude" in reading.

One element of the convention is what Bartoszyński described as "paradigm of plot," "plot matrix" or "plot dendrite," which enables the reader to comprehend the plot of the work (p. 132). Bartoszyński's presentation of plot is a very unique case of scholarly approach to the issue. As is known, the pattern of events in a work can be described with infinitely many languages operating infinitely

many terms which are nontranslatable from one language to another. In such a situation, the choice of any one language is bound to be an arbitrary decision. The charge of arbitrariness is not invalidated by the argument about the greater operability of a given set of tools, because this operability may refer just to one definite category of works. One solution has been suggested by Culler, among others, who says that the language should be chosen which takes more closely account of the reader's intuition than the other languages.⁵ The essays on "The Question of Literary Communication in Narrative Works" and "On the Study of Plot Types" contain suggestions for such a language. Such a language enables us to explain one fact which is inextricably bound up with the process of reading but which is usually not taken into account in the description of the plot: namely the anticipation of a definite type of solution, the existence of suspense, surprise and amazement (p. 132f.).

Anticipation is another important notion in the language used to describe plots as proposed by Bartoszyński. This notion enables the student to consider literary communication in terms of "game". A recipient of literary works not only reads but also anticipates, tries to guess what is going to happen in the future—and all that makes him an active participant in the game. The reading process, accordingly, is connected with the reader's anticipation of the course events are going to take further on in the plot, with guesses about the systematically growing likelihood (pp. 132–134).

The literary character itself of the text is the first and weakest signal which touches off certain expectations in recipients. This happens above all when a text's proper place within a given universe of literary utterances is connected with a greater or lesser "thematic determinacy" (p. 30). A work's substance is clearly signalled—and anticipations are spurred—by the work's generic status, which touches off anticipations of different degrees of likelihood (which is higher in petrified genres, which belong to "low" literature, and lower in "high" literature). The various kinds of tension which may occur between readers' expectations (following from a knowledge of conventions)

⁵ See J. Culler, "Defining Narrative Units," [in:] *Style and Structure in Literature. Essays in New Stylistics*, ed. by R. Fowler. Oxford 1975.

and ensuing “moves” or “steps” made by the sender cause different reactions in the recipient—strong or mild surprise, or, the other way round, satisfaction with the anticipated facts having come true (p. 171).

Plot, says Bartoszyński, is a complex entity which involves, first, linguistic appearance, function and sequence, and, next, a definite plot pattern. One important feature of plot patterns is that they are rooted in broader systems—namely in plot matrices. On account of this close dependence of patterns on matrices, which for their part are elements of the literary tradition, plot must be regarded as essentially a relative notion. The specific arrangement of processes and events in a given work will be viewed as the plot, provided it is reducible to a pattern that tallies with what is commonly regarded as a legitimate plot matrix.

The main question to answer in this kind of description of plot concerns criteria of division of the narrative, of setting apart certain portions in it which correspond to the sender’s successive “moves.” Bartoszyński’s answer to this question is his introduction—next to the notion of plot pattern—the category of plot figures. Figures, in Bartoszyński’s vocabulary, are kernels of patterns, or recurring elements discernible in many plots. A plot pattern is a system emerging as a result of combinations of figures with one another, put together by adding, gradation, or framing (p. 168f.). Sometimes, as in short stories, plot patterns are filled by only one figure.

The language discussed here is applied tentatively by Bartoszyński for a study of Żeromski’s novel *Ashes*. Considered in the aspect of organizing a series of events, Żeromski’s novel turns out to be free of any of the plot patterns that are typical of 19th-century historical novels (p. 258). For that reason, much of the plot of a work must have been received as “a string of things happening which are running into empty and indefinite time” (p. 257). This specific pattern indicates the decline of traditional poetics which, as far as plot organization was concerned, was based on a coherent composition well-grounded in familiar patterns, and thus predictable (p. 276).

The distribution of another element of that poetic, namely the rules of character creation, furnishes an opportunity to describe literary communication in a sphere which is complementary towards the plot. What Bartoszyński has to say on *Ashes* amounts to

a major contribution to structural analysis of character. Those remarks furnish an answer to the question once asked by Culler:

Do we, in reading, simply add together the actions and attributes of an individual character, drawing from them a conception of personality and role, or are we guided in this process by formal expectations about the roles that need to be filled? Do we simply note what a character does or do we try to fit him into one of a limited number of slots?⁶

Bartoszyński's reply is this: a literary character as such is perceived by readers referring themselves to "patterns of human personality" (p. 264), a definite "personality structure", which are "restrictive patterns" towards the potential information supply (p. 265). Character creation, like the unfolding of a plot, presupposes the reader's prior familiarity with a definite set of features, his ability to anticipate a further set of features. Due to that, in reading we experience sudden surprises or, vice versa, we arrive at a harmonious combination of expectation with fulfilment. Only by assuming that the reader's "reception system" embraces the set of character patterns (as determined by the convention holding for the given genre) can we meaningfully talk about a "de-substantiation" of some characters in *Ashes* which are perceived as open and vaguely defined constructions. The disintegration of the traditional model of psychological coherence is one sign of the crisis of the historical novel of which *Ashes* is first-rate evidence.

The consistent treatment of literary communication processes as conditioned by stereotypes draws Bartoszyński's attention to the conventional character of the same processes. The basic idea he propounds in this connection is that "all cases of literary communication [...] are functioning in contexts of different nonliterary forms of cognitive contact" (p. 137). Bartoszyński pays particularly close attention to two such contexts. First, there are certain widely accepted models of research procedure; second, there are different kinds of "pragmatic speech" (p. 200).

The function of stereotype as the foundation of literary communication can further be performed by the repertory of forms of

⁶ J. Culler, *Structuralist Poetics. Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature*, New York, 1976, p. 235.

literary criticism. When this stereotype is invoked in literary communication, phenomena follow which, according to Bartoszyński, properly belong in "the frontier region of literary criticism." What he means is literature emulating criticism. This holds mostly for self-descriptive works (p. 90f.) and works mostly involving dialogues (pp. 94–96). In either case, literary texts disclose one of the fundamental features of critical utterances, that is, they reveal some convention, raising the "space of possibilities" which is partly being realized by the text from its latency. One phenomenon which is symmetrical to emulation of literary critical operations is "pseudo-critical literary work;" this is an outcome of features of "creative literary texts" infiltrating literary-critical discourse.

The issue of features of "criticism" which are present in literary texts is raised by Bartoszyński also in his penetrating study on Witold Gombrowicz's novel *Cosmos*. That novel is a "critical" work, for it keeps referring—in parody—readers to different literary conventions which are proper for detective stories or the *roman nouveau*, among other things (p. 306f). Bartoszyński moreover points at those features of *Cosmos* that enable us to see in that novel also a parody of the 19th-century typical novel. In *Cosmos*, Gombrowicz carries to the extreme as prominent a feature of realistic novels as its tendency to present the reality in its full richness and specificity. That tendency is visible, among other things, in those elements of the presented world which cause an "effect of reality" (Roland Barthes's term), that is, some "odd" elements the presence of which does not explain itself immediately as a necessary element of the work's composition but which are introduced for the very purpose of being present in the work. Gombrowicz's novel casts a glaring light on this particular feature of traditional novels as he swamps his readers with a host of elements that do not yield to integration and consolidation with the work's general semantic lay-out. Parody of the realistic novel, a work purporting to articulate each and every little thing—these formulas are suggested by Bartoszyński in his interpretation.

The question of relationship between the traditional novel and nonclassical narrative forms raised in his studies of *Ashes* and of *Cosmos* is supplemented with a study of the amorphous pattern of memoirs. He relies in his considerations on Henryk Rzewuski's

Souvenirs of Soplica. Using terms borrowed from information systems theory, Bartoszyński describes the main feature of memoir-like texts as “a great amplitude of informativeness and, along with that, a great amplitude of redundancy” (p. 227f.). Considering the “equal distribution of informativeness of text” in the traditional novel, memoirs can be recognized as a phenomenon which is parallel to the novel (p. 236).

In his essays on *Souvenirs of Soplica*, *Ashes* and *Cosmos*, Bartoszyński studies different variants departing from the model of traditional novel (suspension of time sequences, selection and economy in the work’s organizing pattern). The three books he submits to analysis each contain elements of nonpragmatic narrative and “pragmatic speech.” In such a combination, Bartoszyński perceives a distinctive feature of all modern forms of story-telling (p. 199f.).

The book *Theory and Interpretation* opens with an essay called “Aspects and Relationships of Texts (Source—History—Literature).” His chief idea in that essay is to question the purpose of furnishing a substantive definition of texts, which ignores “the fact that the situations into which they are placed doom them to become works of many aspects” (p. 13). What I think is important for the theory of “aspects and relationships” is the thesis about the equal status of various cognitive procedures vis-à-vis the same utterances. The fact that a text is viewed in three aspects the author distinguishes (source, history, literature) is not at odds with the text being labelled. Labelling, in fact, follows only in a concrete cognitive act. Since all three aspects exist in each utterance, it is possible to transform them when moving to a different context (pp. 31–41).

Some of the essays now appearing in the book have already become something like classics. You will hardly find a modern Polish study on literary communication that in no way takes advantage of Bartoszyński’s findings; there is probably no study on plot in the Polish literature of the subject that would not refer to Bartoszyński’s own study of that issue, nor does there seem to exist a study of historical novels that ignores his essay on Żeromski’s *Ashes*. Bartoszyński’s view of literary communication as a process conditioned by a set of cultural codes (stereotypes) and literary codes (conventions), along with the derivative theses about reading as a multi-decision process resting on a specific kind of cooperation between sender

and receiver and that about reader as a complex "reception system" (the vehicle of a matrix into which the text is fitted)—together make up what is a coherent and very interesting concept.

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Transl. by *Zygmunt Nierada*

Aleksandra Okopień-Sławińska, **Semantyka wypowiedzi poetyckiej. Preliminaria (Semantique de l'énoncé poétique)**, Ossolineum, Wrocław 1985. 202 pp.

L'ouvrage d'Aleksandra Okopień-Sławińska appartient sans doute aux réalisations les plus remarquables dans les recherches littéraires polonaises de ces dernières années. Issu d'un projet de recherche en poétique historique, d'une portée assez restreinte à l'origine, le livre s'élaborait doucement durant plusieurs années, dépassant de loin et de diverses manières le dessein initial. En effet, les doutes concernant les bases théoriques utilisables de l'entreprise analytique, qu'elle envisageait, et notamment la théorie générale du sens de l'énoncé, ont obligé la chercheuse à « établir et systématiser » au préalable « les préliminaires théoriques d'une sémantique de l'énoncé poétique » (p. 7). Il se trouve cependant que ce qui peut être considéré comme « préliminaires » par rapport à toute analyse textuelle concrète à venir — lu d'une manière autonome — s'est avéré un exposé, impressionnant et très clair à la fois, des problèmes-clés d'une théorie communicationnelle de l'oeuvre littéraire.

Les parties de cet exposé, publiées antérieurement sous forme d'articles, suscitaient d'habitude un vif intérêt et parfois même de longues discussions dans les revues spécialisées. Quelques-unes — surtout les « Relations de personne dans la communication littéraire » — sont même devenues des travaux classiques, exploités par d'autres chercheurs comme solutions toutes prêtes ou, au moins, comme points de repère indispensables, déterminant — à côté de certains autres — les fondements théoriques et le style de pensée des études littéraires actuelles.

La thèse sur la nature communicationnelle de l'énoncé — selon