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TOWARDS A THEORY OF SYSTEMIC FEATURING OF A LITERARY TEXT THESES

1.1. In modern criticism and theory of literature the most popular systemic view of a literary text has offered—to make a rough distinction—two main perspectives. One of them—suggested already by Plato and Aristotle—is the division of literature into non-historical (“natural”) and “ultimate” kinds: the lyric, epic and drama, although some theoreticians would prefer “to divide imaginative literature [*Dichtung*] into fiction (novel, short story, epic), drama (whether in prose or verse), and poetry (centering on what corresponds to the ancient ‘lyric poetry’).”¹ The drama, sometimes understood as being only a script for a theatrical performance, is often excluded from the above triad of kinds which from time to time gets also complemented by the addition of “didactic” or even “entertaining and autothematic” kinds.²

The other perspective is connected with the concept of genre, which seems to have evolved from the normative and prescriptive to the historical and evolutionary one.³ According to the most common beliefs genres constitute—in a logical order—a sort of a subdivision of literary kinds, although—owing primarily to their historical nature—they appear both genetically and ontologically as different from the “natural” kinds. The number of the genres grows constantly as a result of literary evolution (and as an effect of the metaliterary activity of the critics!⁴), each genre forming the multitude of variants in its historical development.

1.2. The basic difficulty in operating within the suggested two perspectives seems to be connected with their primary function of the referential

¹ R. Wellek, A. Warren, *Theory of Literature*, New York 1956, p. 217.

² Cf. S. Skwarczyńska, *Wstęp do nauki o literaturze*, vol. III, Warszawa 1965, pp. 116, 126.

³ Cf. I. Opacki, *Krzyżowanie się postaci gatunkowych jako wyznacznik ewolucji poezji*, [in:] *Problemy teorii literatury*, ed. by H. Markiewicz, Wrocław 1967, p. 165—206.

⁴ Cf. S. Skwarczyńska, *Niedostrzeżony problem podstawowy genologii*, *ibid.*, p. 145—164.

systems for *classification*. Although the division into kinds might have appeared to the commentators of the classical literatures adequate enough to cover the existing spectrum of literary works, it would be really troublesome to ascribe the majority of the nineteenth and twentieth century writings to particular kinds. In order to suggest the scope of the difficulty it is enough to mention such works as D. G. Rossetti's *Sister Helen* (a *dialogue*, *telling a story*, and *expressing* the whole gamut of the characters' feelings) or J. Conrad's *The Lagoon*, J. Joyce's *Ulysses*, V. Woolf's *The Waves*. In a modern text the three kinds seem to appear as an intricate inherent pattern which defies all attempts at placing the text in a clear-cut category.

The genres — on the other hand — are often differentiated by too many diverse criteria, either *by the theme* (the psychological novel) or *by versification* (the sonnet), *by the length* of the text (the short story), *by the reading public* (the dime novel), *by the means of publication* (the serialized novel), etc.⁵ It is possible, then, to distinguish in one text the characteristics of many genres, e.g. the psychological novel may be often viewed also as the serialized novel and as the political or detective novel at the same time. Moreover, the majority of genres in the field of "fiction" is defined usually according to the theme of the texts only (the psychological novel, novel of manners, prose of adventure etc.) and the procedure seems to be extremely controversial in the light of the modern critical awareness that particular texts might be compared in many more aspects than one. So, both the criteria of genre distinction and the historical process itself of mixing the features of many genres in a text — so pronounced in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries — successfully nullify the genre concept as a means of classification.

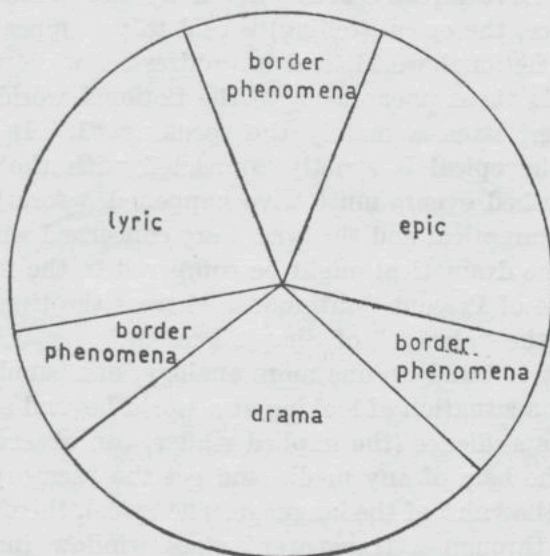
1.3. In the following theses we would not like to treat the propositions as merely convenient ways of applying labels to some classes of objects. We are rather inclined to understand our procedure as working out the critical tools for a description of particular texts of art. The comparison of various works seems to us functional more as the means of studying each of the compared texts in its unique structural unity than as the means of constructing literary systems. In other words, we do not systematize and classify texts but attempt to describe them with the help of some general distinctive characteristics. We suggest these multiple systemic perspectives of literary phenomena in the belief that the proposed understanding of the discussed problems does perhaps better justice to the literary historical reality.

2.1.1. While being sceptical about the traditional concepts of the lyric, epic, and drama as literary types, we would feel necessary — however — to speak about three main *modes* of a literary way of passing

* Cf. Wellek, Warren, *op. cit.*, p. 219–221; J. Trzynadlowski, *Rozważania nad semiologią powieści*, Wrocław 1976, p. 42–43.

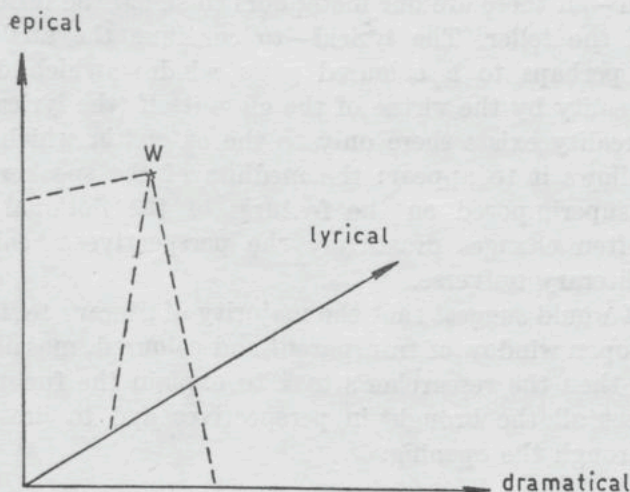
information, namely *the dramatical* (presenting), *the epical* (telling), and *the lyrical* (expressing or implying). But these categories do not appear as defined "fields" of literature—the concept that seems to be prompted by the following diagram:⁶

I.



We understand literature rather as a unified "space" in which each given point "W" (work) might be defined or described in reference to the three "dimensions" of the dramatical, epical, and lyrical:

II.



⁶ Cf. C. Zgorzelski, *Historycznoliterackie perspektywy genologii w badaniach nad liryką*, „Pamiętnik Literacki”, 1965, fasc. 2, p. 361–378.

It would mean—of course—that no particular literary work can exist beyond the suggested “space” and that the majority of the texts possess the features of all the three modes in differing percentages.

2.1.2. Any further attempts at discovering a set of characteristics for each mode would obviously entail taking into consideration many suggestions that have already been offered by the critics and theoreticians. For instance, the epical (telling) is said to presuppose the existence of a narrator, a fictional world, and an addressee, while the dramatical (presenting) limits these phenomena to the fictional world only and the lyrical (expressing) stresses mainly the speaking “I.” It has also been suggested that the epical is strictly connected with the feeling of the past, as the described events must have happened before “telling” takes place. Both the dramatical and the lyrical are concerned with the present, but the time of the dramatical might be compared to the functions of the grammatical tense of Present Continuous, whereas the time of the lyrical seems similar to the “always” of Simple Present.⁷

In an attempt to build up one more analogy, one could perhaps liken the dramatical to a situation of looking at a world beyond an open French window where the audience (the implied reader) can observe the fictional reality without the help of any media and get the “sensory” impressions directly through the “air” of the language. The epical, then, is like viewing the same world through a transparent glass window (narrator) whose main function is—so to say—not to be a wall, namely: to enable the observer to see the world beyond. Of course, it happens often that the glass is dirty or spoiled by a flaw or two, and it distorts the view one sees. That “dust” covering the “pane,” the frame of the window, slight distortions in perspective as a result of glass flaws, the additional distance from the world—all these are our metaphors to signal the influence of the personality of the teller. The lyrical—to continue the analogy—might be compared perhaps to a coloured glass window which deforms the vision of the reality by the virtue of the glass itself (the lyrical “I”). The shape of the reality exists there only to the extent in which the nature of the glass allows it to appear: the medium of the speaker creates its own pattern superimposed on the features of the fictional world and the pattern often changes drastically the perspectives, “colours,” and shape of the literary universe.

Diagram II would suggest that the majority of literary texts are rather like a slightly open window of transparent and coloured, mosaic-like pieces of glass. It is then the researcher’s task to explain the function of each piece, to detect all the brought-in perspectives and to “taste the air” that comes through the opening.

⁷ Cf. Wellek, Warren, *op. cit.*, p. 218; B. Chrzastowska, S. Wyślouch, *Wiadomości z teorii literatury w analizie literackiej*, Warszawa 1974, p. 197–198; M. Głowiński et al., *Zarys teorii literatury*, Warszawa 1962, p. 245–260.

2.1.3. It is especially important to note here that the above proposed *modal* aspect constitutes the systemic featuring of literature rather than that of a text. In other words, *every* text is *always* marked "plus" (no text is marked "minus") in that aspect. The other following systemic aspects might be viewed more truly as the *text* featuring, for the work can be marked either "plus" or "minus" in them (the precise quality of "plus" featuring depends upon the given aspect). We differentiate those aspects according to particular semiotic functions a text fulfils.

2.2.1. A literary text functions in the process of social communication as an utterance of a *coder* to a *decoder*. If we concentrate our attention on the overall impression about these two main factors in the process—the impression which the decoder is expected to get from the text—we consider the systemic featuring of the work in the *pragmatic* aspect. S. Żółkiewski calls it a study of the functional model of the text.⁸ Of course, our knowledge about those expectations might be based only on the text-internal signals as the point of view is meant to be that of a literary researcher and not of a sociologist. In this aspect all the dominant signals of the emotive and conotative nature—to borrow here some Jakobsonian terms⁹—might be considered as "plus" featuring. When the coder's interest in suggesting his own attitude towards the matters he communicates is dominant in the text, the "plus" featuring of it appears—for instance—as parody, irony, humour, etc. (H. Fielding, *Joseph Andrews*; Ch. Dickens, *The Pickwick Papers*). If the coder's main aim is to provoke the decoder's reaction, the "plus" featuring of the text might be looked for in satiric, prophetic, moralizing, appealing, and other similar qualities (J. Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*; W. Morris, *News from Nowhere*; A. Huxley, *Brave New World*, etc.).

The dominance of the denotative signals in the text would qualify as a "minus" featuring in the pragmatic aspect—we could call such a text "pseudo-denotative" since neither of the two main constituents of the communication process is stressed; the presentation of the fictional world itself is made to arouse the implied reader's interest (A. Bennett, *The Old Wives' Tale*).

2.2.2. A literary text functions as a structure, that is, it appears to be a meaningful network of elements and relationships. The traditional theory of literature distinguishes some phenomena in a text structure as elements (such as setting, action, characters, etc.), although their true nature is rather that of complex relationships. While the unique character of each particular structure might be viewed as an effect of varying princi-

⁸ Cf. S. Żółkiewski, *Pomysły do teorii odbioru dzieł literackich*, „Pamiętnik Literacki” 1976, fasc. 3, p. 31.

⁹ Cf. R. Jakobson, *Linguistics and Poetics*, [in:] *Style in Language*, ed. by T. A. Sebeok, Cambridge, Mass., 1960, p. 350–377.

ples of choice and combination within each of the "elements," the systemic featuring of a text in this *structural* aspect could be looked for in the principles underlying the changing shifts of the dominance from one element (some elements) to another (some others) in various texts.

The possibility of such a view has already been implied in some pieces of traditional criticism where the attempts have been made to distinguish—for instance—the novel of action and the novel of character.¹⁰ In the structural aspect of systemic featuring we can differentiate—however—many more ways of shifting the dominance. One can speak—for example—about the novels of situation and setting (J. Conrad, *Nostromo*) in contradistinction to the novels of composition and characters (V. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*) or about a poem with a point of view (W. Shakespeare, sonnet 66) as distinctly different from a poem of setting (the descriptive poems). Obviously, the approach would demand first developing a full semiotic theory concerning structural elements in a text.

It might be expected that the systemic featuring "minus" may occur in such texts which are primarily devoted to a philosophic or pseudo-philosophic exposition of an idea, which would involve the resignation from presenting a fictional world and the lack of dominance either of the composition pattern or the language phenomena. Such a "minus" featuring in the structural aspect can manifest itself in what we might call perhaps a "discursive" text (A. Pope, *An Essay on Man*).

2.2.3. A literary text functions also as a systemic code—a supersystem of signs which acquire their meanings while being operative in a number of sub-systems: the natural language and various cultural and literary codes.¹¹ In each text signs undergo the final organization into an utterance according to a dominating principle. We have suggested elsewhere¹² three main principles of joining signs, the principles discernible only in a study of the construction of a text. These principles are the following:

1. metaphorical—signs acquire their meanings as a result of a fusion of meanings of some signs operative in the same code;
2. allegorical—signs acquire double meaning in the effect of their functioning both in the natural language and in a given cultural code;
3. symbolical—signs acquire manifold meanings since they function not only in the ethnic language but also in a number of cultural or literary codes or—additionally—in a supersystem of the text itself.¹³

¹⁰ Cf. E. Muir, *The Structure of the Novel*, New York [1932].

¹¹ Cf. J. Lotman, *Struktura khudozhestvennogo teksta*, Providence 1971, pp. 34–36, 44–64.

¹² A. Zgorzelski, *O funkcjonalnym pojmowaniu tropów. Propozycje*, „Teksty”, 1976, no. 1(25), p. 54–70.

¹³ Cf. the terms proposed in the theory of reception in M. Głowiński, *Style odbioru*, Kraków 1977, p. 127–132.

Accordingly, we would propose to treat the metaphorical, allegorical, and symbolical principles as the three ways of systemic featuring "plus" in the *syntactic* aspect of the text.

The remaining possibility—that there is no overall tendency of the signs to enrich their meanings in comparison with the meanings they usually have in a given natural language—might suggest that the text is "minus" marked in this aspect. The principle underlying the sign organization in case of a "minus" featuring would be called—in contradistinction to the formerly coined terms for "plus" featuring—a "mimetic" one.

2.2.4. The evolutionary concept of genre (cf. 1.1.) constitutes—as it seems—one of the possible ways of systemic featuring of a text. This *genological* aspect enables us to view the text in more or less traditional perspectives of the established canon of genres since the terms and notions themselves are deeply rooted in both the critics' and readers' awareness of the systemic shape of literature in their epoch and in the literary heritage of the past. From the semiotic point of view, a text in the genological aspect functions as a sign in a system of accepted and conventional literary tradition.

So, a genre is envisaged as a diachronic set of systemic features which manifests itself in a sequence of synchronic structures. These structures differ from one another very little when only contiguous ones are observed. It might occur, though, that some distant structures in such an evolutionary sequence would diverge to the extent that they might not have one factor in common. These genre variants generate the successive conventions which are both the effect of the inherent evolutionary tendencies in the genre itself and the result of its response to conceptual changes in a given culture.¹⁴

Similarly to the situation in other proposed aspects, the genological featuring of a text might—of course—appear polymorphic. A text which defies the conventions of the established hierarchy of genres in the given literary synchrony and functions as the parody of one of the royal genres might be considered as "minus" marked in the genological aspect of systemic featuring (eg. first historical texts of the mock-heroic).

3.1. It would seem that the modal, pragmatic, structural, syntactic, and genological aspects form the *sensu stricto* intratextual systemic featuring of a text since all these ways of featuring can be detected in the text-internal signals within the broadly understood domain of literature.

This proposition does not exclude some other possibilities of studying extratextual aspects of the systemic featuring of a literary text. It would appear possible—for instance—to see a text in reference to the norms of the natural language (the *stylistic* aspect), or to view it in relation to the established opinions about the nature of beauty (the *aesthetic* aspect).

¹⁴ Cf. R. Scholes, *Structural Fabulation*, Notre Dame—London 1975, p. 31–32.

Especially interesting results could be also achieved in a search for a systemic correspondence between literature and historical documents, between literature and scientific treatises or between literature and journalism (the *paraliterary* aspect).

3.2. The theses present the theoretic view which is far from being complete. The phenomena which are decisive in modal featuring, the full typology of "plus" featuring in pragmatic aspect, the semiotic theory of structural elements of a text—all of them demand most urgently further investigation.

KU TEORII SYSTEMOWYCH NACECHOWAŃ TEKSTU LITERACKIEGO TEZY

STRESZCZENIE

W świetle osiągnięć współczesnej nauki o literaturze — zdaniem autora — perspektywy genologiczne łączące się z pojęciem rodzaju i gatunku literackiego okazują się często — zwłaszcza w zastosowaniu do literatury dwudziestego wieku — niewystarczające lub po prostu nieadekwatne w stosunku do zjawisk literackich zarówno wtedy, gdy służą one jako systemy klasyfikacyjne, jak i wtedy, gdy przyjmiemy się je za narzędzia opisu poszczególnych tekstów.

W przedstawionych tezach poszukiwanie układów systemowych nie stanowi celu samego w sobie, ma ono służyć przede wszystkim jako postępowanie pozwalające na porównanie tekstów. Stąd też nie kierowano uwagi na zabiegi klasyfikacyjne, nie starano się stworzyć typologii dzieł. Położono natomiast silny nacisk na fakt, że to tekst właśnie bywa nacechowany systemowo w wielu aspektach, że jego rozliczne funkcje semiotyczne umożliwiają zobaczenie go w odmiennych przekrojach, w odrębnych perspektywach teoretycznych.

Wyróżniono pięć podstawowych aspektów nacechowania systemowego.

1. Literaturę pojmowano dotąd często jako pewne „pole” tekstów, dające się podzielić na trzy rodzaje (diagram I). Tutaj natomiast zaproponowano rozumienie zbioru tekstów jako swistego rodzaju „przestrzeni”, w której każdy utwór (nie ma tu „minus” nacechowania) da się umieścić poprzez odniesienie do trzech „wymiarów” tej pseudoprzestrzeni: do epickości, liryczności i dramatyczności (diagram II). Takie rozumienie nacechowania rodzajowego nie prowadziłoby więc do klasyfikacji dzieł — stanowiłoby po prostu instrument opisu tekstów.

2. Tekst pojmowany jako pewnego typu wypowiedź w procesie społecznej komunikacji pomiędzy nadawcą i odbiorcą oferuje nieraz sygnały pełnionych przez niego funkcji emotywnych i konatywnych. Jeśli funkcje te okazują się dominujące, tekst jest nacechowany systemowo w aspekcie pragmatycznym jako parodia, przepowiednia, satyra, apel itd. W przypadku gdy takiej dominacji brak, można mówić o „minus” nacechowaniu: tekst ujawnia się wówczas jako „pseudodenotatywny”.

3. Tekst rozumiany bywa również jako struktura, czyli jako znacząca sieć relacji między elementami. Poetyka teoretyczna wylicza niektóre z tych elementów i relacji: postaci, akcje, tło, kompozycję itd. Dominanta któregośkolwiek z nich sprawia, iż tekst zostaje silnie nacechowany w aspekcie strukturalnym jako np. powieść akcji, liryk punktu widzenia, czy też poemat tła (poemat opisowy). Brak takiej dominacji świadczyłby o „minus” nacechowaniu dzieła w tym aspekcie; byłby to tekst „dyskursywny”.

4. Tekst funkcjonuje także jako kod systemowy, czyli jako supersystem znaków funkcjonujących w szeregu podsystemów. Ów supersystem rządzony jest zazwyczaj przez zasadę organizującą sposoby łączenia znaków i nadawania im znaczeń. Mogą to być zasady:

a) metaforyczna — gdy znaczenie znaku równoważne jest zbitce znaczeń kilku znaków funkcjonujących w tym samym kodzie;

b) alegoryczna — gdy znaczenie znaku równoważne jest zbitce znaczeń tego samego znaku w dwóch różnych kodach (np. w języku i w kodzie kulturowym);

c) symboliczna — gdy znaczenie znaku równoważne jest zbitce jego znaczeń w więcej niż dwóch kodach lub w podsystemach generowanych przez sam tekst.

Jeśli w tekście dominuje którakolwiek z powyższych zasad, okazuje się on nacechowany w aspekcie syntaktycznym. W przypadku gdy znaki w utworze nie wykazują tendencji do wzbogacenia swych znaczeń w porównaniu ze znaczeniami języka etnicznego — tekst ujawnia się jako „minus” nacechowany i mógłby zostać nazwany „mimetycznym”.

5. Tekst ujmowany być może — zgodnie z ustaleniami genologii — jako znak w systemie tradycji literackiej. Jego nacechowanie w tym genologicznym aspekcie okaże się równoznaczne dominancie określonych konwencji gatunkowych. Przypuszczać można, że historycznie pierwsze teksty parodiujące konwencję gatunkową byłyby w owym aspekcie „minus” nacechowane.

Oczywiście, poszczególny tekst może okazać się nacechowany systemowo w kilku naraz aspektach. W *Tezach* zaproponowano zresztą wyróżnienie tylko aspektów intratekstowych; przyjęcie systemów pozatekstowych (język naturalny, systemy estetyczne, dokumenty historyczne itp.) jako systemów odniesienia pozwoliłoby na wyodrębnienie szeregu innych aspektów nacechowań systemowych (aspekt stylistyczny, estetyczny, paraliteracki i in.).