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CHAPTER 1

**The Structures of Literariness**

*Poetry! O sorcerer's lamp  
O laboratory lamp*

*Julian Tuwim, Kwiaty polskie*

The literary studies *Book of Genesis* has two separate, though closely related foundational narratives – one demanding that we begin with LITERATURE, and the other insisting on LITERARINESS. Choosing one path or the other is no mere theoretical question, but also a classificatory (didactic) question associated with the construction of a general interpretation that one way or another must involve the imposition of linear discipline onto multi-dimensional reality. The key point here is for this story line to do the least possible damage, even as it inevitably distorts the panorama of the complex whole.

The early notebook versions of my book include various attempts to sketch out the two aforementioned perspectives. At certain moments, I attempt to convince myself – and thus the reader – that we should respect “literature” as the originary category and as the foundation of literary consciousness in its scholarly formations, in the manifestos of writers and in the textbook lexicons of various subjects associated with verbal art. Elsewhere, I make arguments in support of the thesis that we should above all consider the category of “literariness.” In the end, this second perspective has prevailed, though it has done so neither triumphantly nor conclusively, but largely for what I have characterized as classificatory reasons. At the same time, a substantive element also comes into play here – namely, that LITERARINESS MAY MANIFEST ITSELF OUTSIDE LITERATURE WITHOUT LOSING ITS BASIC DISTINGUISHING FEATURES, WHILE LITERATURE WITHOUT LITERARINESS IS UNTHINKABLE.

## **The “Contradictory” Conception of Literariness: A Universal Model**

In the history of disputes over “literariness,” there has been no single dominant strategy. Indeed, there has been no agreement even on such fundamental questions as whether literariness must represent the “hard” reality of the text or whether it might be more prudent to regard the markers of literariness as “special effects” belonging to the domain of art (or artistry), even if individual users might perceive them in diverse ways.

THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN COMMUNICATIVE FACTS AND EFFECTS implies that – on the one hand – there are certain describable and analyzable features of a text that may be made manifest by anybody with elementary abilities within the bounds of a particular natural language. For this hypothetical person, grammar is grammar, a phrase is a phrase, a sentence is a sentence, a verse is a verse, a paragraph is a paragraph. These conditions of speech are relatively easy to distinguish, differentiate, transform and even lose – for instance, in translation. Indeed, literary translation is often a reliable test of the reality of a given textual feature. If we are able to produce and destroy it, then we cannot claim in any responsible way that it does not exist. Assuming the indisputable existence of such features, one may seek out notions of literariness in their diverse clusters and combinations (whose existence is equally incontrovertible).

On the other hand, as I have already suggested, the distinguishing features of literariness according to various theories are not textual facts, but rather the diverse effects laid down in a work – including imagery, musicality, fictionality, intimacy, etc. These often reflect the authors’ own aims or the slogans of their manifestos, but they also exert their influence in the concretizations of readers. Finally, they represent the desired goal of interpretive procedures. Without them, literature would boast neither charm nor enthusiasts. At the same time, we can only describe them as illusions, since not every user of verbal art submits to the operations of all the same effects observed by others.

Those who seek out the specific features of literariness within the sphere of communicative illusions never lose hope that they will one day stumble upon the

singular, most important, recurring and eternal feature, imposed by the force of a universal, though concealed convention. They hope that the successive schisms and rebellions in the history of verbal art will all turn out to have preserved this very effect as the most enduring feature of literature, like “the last knot” (from the famous poem by Zbigniew Herbert) to be rent by the rebel.

Disputes about literariness do not always respect the antinomy I have drawn here between facts and effects. Indeed, one possible path might lead from the fact to the effect. It supposes that a certain especially essential and incontrovertible condition of the text generates a specifically “literary” state in the soul of the reader. According to the Russian formalists, such an undeniable feature of a poem as delimiting rhyme gives rise to an effect (impression or delusion) of equivalence<sup>1</sup> between structurally and even semantically equated rhythmic sequences. Therefore, literariness in this understanding ultimately turns out to be an illusion created by the equation of values that would not be perceived as equal outside literature.

Another way of overcoming the antinomy of fact and effect is the simple reduction of the effect to the fact, or vice versa.

A survey of literary criticism – which remains emphatically credulous and takes great delight in the “multiplication of beings beyond any need” (this is one of the essential functions included by Janusz Sławiński in his structuralist system)<sup>2</sup> – permits us to believe that all illusions, delusions and hallucinations (as long as they are colorful) represent communicative facts distinguished by an identical degree of reality. From this perspective, “literariness” exists to the extent that one can compose aphorisms or construct metaphors on the subject of literary art (as in Leopold Staff’s poem: “All the gods are real, and there are too few of them”). Of course, scholars also engage in passionate polemics attacking the banality of competing visions, their datedness, the excessive narrowing or frivolous opening up of the field of artistry, the exhaustion of

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<sup>1</sup> Adam Kulawik points out the illusory (rather than factual) nature of the equivalence of lines in various studies. See: Kulawik, Adam, *Teoria wiersza* (Kraków: Antykwa, 1995), p. 32 onward; *Wersologia* (Kraków: Antykwa, 1999), pp. 44-45.

<sup>2</sup> See: Sławiński, Janusz, “Funkcje krytyki literackiej,” *Dzieło. Język. Tradycja* (Warszawa: PWN 1974), p. 175.

concepts, etc. Yet nobody asks about the essential foundations of any specific notions of artistry. Here any concern for a theoretical grasp or grounding of specifically literary qualities is nowhere to be seen. Indeed, it would appear to be incomprehensible.

In response to the joyful credulity of literary criticism, we hear the protests of philosophers (of a certain orientation), who are not so much mistrustful as entirely convinced that everything that passes for a communicative certainty – including the text – essentially does not exist. Such phenomena are purely illusory or rhetorical, resulting from the distortions and errors of linguistics and literary studies (from Aristotle to Yuri Lotman). Therefore, there is nothing left but the merciless revelation and bold exposure of illusion (that is, of communication).

In this field, as in literary criticism, there is no possibility of any discussion of literariness, though for completely opposite reasons. Literariness treated as the reader's limitless free will (whatever this might mean), or self will, seems to these philosophers to reflect the virtual nature of all speech – colloquial, scientific, free-market and even philosophical. In order to give convincing expression to this idea, the masters of deconstruction have expended an enormous amount of energy on the artistic cultivation of their own texts, though in their view these works – as texts – do not truly exist. We might capture the conclusions that emerge from this original train of thought by paraphrasing the poet Jan Lechoń: “There is only literariness, and literariness does not exist.”

Other complications lead to a lack of agreement on the question of whether literariness springs from the addition to language of new qualities unobserved outside verbal art, or perhaps merely neglected and peripheral, or whether – on the contrary – it arises from the taming of linguistic prodigality through the subtraction of qualities and functions superfluous or alien to artistry. In the contest for literariness, TRANSGRESSIVE AND DEGRESSIVE ORIENTATIONS clash and merge.

Every so often, the conviction has prevailed that since literature is a product of writerly invention, it must be richer than any related codes, swallowing them whole (“all-devouring,” as Miron Białoszewski claimed), while these assimilated forms of expression

also provide it with new attributes. Everything that is possible in language can be regarded as possible in literature, since it develops from superimposed orders. “Literariness” emerges from contravention of the norms of non-artistic communication. Ergo, the source of “literariness” is transgression.

A classic laboratory example here would be literariness reduced to the manifold forms of a superstructure of the utterance – or emerging from its consequences. However, we may perceive these consequences in different and contradictory ways. For some, the superstructure represents a means for conditioning an excess of information, especially when the semantically neutral features of a text bear the semantic load – a move which is impossible outside literary art and highly esteemed within it. Here I have in mind various avant-garde notions of evocative material that does not derive from what the work says, but rather from how the author has shaped and expressed what it says – whether this expression takes the form of “words in freedom” or automatic writing, whether Cubist juxtapositions turn it into a stream of sentences freed from the dictates of logic, whether it is governed by inversions, recurring parallels, refined “efflorescences,” and so on.

In a postwar study of Aleksander Fredro’s work, Tadeusz Peiper explains his interest in the rhythms of Fredro’s poetry – which work to unmask the characters in *Revenge* (*Zemsta*) – thus “provoking” his readers (as was Peiper’s wont):

You are surprised – through rhythms, you ask? Yes, precisely through rhythms. You are enraged – implacable watchdog of form, you exclaim! No, there is more at stake here. Whenever I examine form, I also examine its speech. I point to what it says, together with the work’s other contents. I would write about it less if others could hear it speak.<sup>3</sup>

This avant-garde hermeneutics is opposed by scholars who seek the aesthetic identifiers of literary art – mainly specialists in poetry and poetics. Here the scholarly roads part

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<sup>3</sup> Peiper, Tadesuz, *Wśród ludzi na scenach i na ekranie 1* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2000), p. 77.

ways once again, since some treat poetry in juxtaposition with the artistry of narrative or dramatic prose, while others treat it as the very model for these other forms. They are united by the conviction that the literary superstructure differs from other orders of language by an ostentatious communicative purposelessness, which Janusz Sławiński has likened to a cacophonous hubbub inside the headquarters of a highly bureaucratic institution. Not only does the excess of spectacular operations performed on a text constitute the source of its surfeit or multiplicity of meaning, but the less a given text means, the more intensively it exists. But as what? As material submitted to artistic cultivation or as an artifact intended for itself.

According to the notion of literariness described above, TRANSGRESSION (excess of order) evokes DEGRESSION (a dwindling of meanings).

Before we move on to the next theories of literariness, we should first make some attempt on the basis of the foregoing observations to recognize the inconveniences and limitations of these and other similar investigations. The ideal distinguishing feature of literariness should appear exclusively and invariably in literature. Yet many scholars have pointed out that the superstructure of verbal expression is neither a strictly literary characteristic nor an attraction with which works of verbal art are always endowed. We may also find the manifestations of this organization outside literature (today newspapers and advertisements – not to mention the poems of postmodern philosophers – have outstripped literature in the superimposed arrangement of texts)<sup>4</sup>. In turn, artistic writing itself is capable of renouncing structural excesses and spectacular “violations of language.” It can express itself “shabbily,” attempting to win readers by the “transparency” of its signs and the simplicity of their arrangement. Decisions at opposite poles of the field may be at odds with any single literary ideology, and ultimately they may co-exist within the work of a single author. For instance, Tadeusz Peiper passed through an evolution from baroque, efflorescent periphrasis through reportorial poems

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<sup>4</sup> The communicative activeness of these kinds of linguistic structures – together with their remarkable diversity, which is no less rich than the diversity of literary structures – requires us to supplement the dichotomy between “literature” and “non-literature” with a third element – “paraliterature.” I shall discuss this in further detail in Chapter 6.

to the simple lyrical notes from the years of his Soviet military wanderings.

Here we see once again – as in the case of delimiting rhythms – the unsustainable nature of these theories on the level of “hard” textual facts. Ultimately, the illusionistic powers of literary art form their final goal. Among these illusions, we find the “ESTRANGEMENT” of our vision of an object suggested by the Russian formalists as a consequence of the de-automization of speech; Witkacy’s “metaphysical shiver,” which results from the encounter with Pure Form; as well as Jakobson’s description of the mechanism of the poetic superstructure, which he bases on the transfer of the EQUIVALENCE principle from the paradigmatic to the syntagmatic axis, thus supposedly bringing about a surprising reorientation of existing value systems. The point here is that the experience of strangeness, the encounter with the metaphysical and the revalorization of the world – all of which constitute, according to their advocates, the basis for masterpieces – properly belong to the psychology of reception and are essentially subjective.<sup>5</sup>

The reversal and failure of artistic aspirations also go together with other conceptions of literariness.

In close proximity to the idea of superstructure, we find theories revealing the literary work as perfectly COHESIVE, like a FUNCTIONAL organism<sup>6</sup> or mechanism, and at the same time as “unique,” created to emerge from multiple rough draft versions and then to ossify into its inviolable CANONICAL FORM. Yet we can easily find evidence that makes it impossible for us to regard these qualities as always, everywhere and only existing in literature. On the one hand, there are documents regulating social life outside literature (constitutions, acts, legal codes, contracts) whose canonical forms are closely guarded down to the last word or comma. On the other hand, many authors are fond of “open” creations that are philologically unstable and problematic. This is especially true

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<sup>5</sup> I remember years ago a tour of the Roztocze region organized for the participants of a literary theory conference in West Pomerania. We were taken down a forest road to a place where we were supposedly going to see wild tarpans. After a lengthy period of waiting in vain, the guide announced: “Let’s go back. The tarpans sometimes come here, but of course they don’t have to.”

<sup>6</sup> On this subject, see: Brzostowska-Tereszkiewicz, Tamara, *Ewolucje teorii. Biologizm w modernistycznym literaturoznawstwie rosyjskim* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UMK, 2011).

today in the age of multifarious silvas and drafts, where breaking down the principle of cohesiveness sells and old metaphors representing the model of artistry (like the organism or the mechanism) have been joined by metaphors of the scrap yard, the rubbish heap and the “haze.” The convention of publishing scholarly critical editions in which canonical versions appear alongside draft versions has become part of the attraction of original manuscripts (here we might point to recent editions of Tadeusz Różewicz’s *Płaskorzeźba* [*Bas-Relief*] and *nożyk profesora* [*the professor’s knife*]).

Perhaps we should move on.

The concepts of the GENOTYPE, INTERTEXTUALITY and INNOVATION belong to the same terminological “cluster.” They suggest a TRANSGRESSIVE impetus, manifesting themselves externally in the panorama of the *signifiant* and concealing their putative depths in the labyrinths of the *signifié*. They are linked by the imperative – and the custom – of reading literature against the background of other literature. The condition for classifying any text among other specimens of verbal art is its similarity to texts identified by tradition as literary, which brings into play: a) the structural conformity of the norms of its poetics with an acknowledged literary genotype (aphorism, cento, parody or stream of consciousness); b) a chaotic saturation with “other words” – that is, citations and paraphrases from fragments of the literary heritage; c) in the case of innovative works, traces of certain customary devices that have been ostentatiously removed from the work and replaced by new solutions (assonance and consonance instead of precise rhymes, free indirect speech instead of the two earlier “standard forms”) or new tasks for elements that have not previously served such purposes (such as rhetorical figures in poetry or stage directions in narrative).

For the moment, I shall not concern myself with the numerous ambiguities evident in the above perspectives. For instance, in the case of intertexts, we cannot say what concentration of “other speech” – which also exists in other forms of discourse – transforms non-literature into literature. Within this package of proposals, there is no place for texts – like the poems of Julian Przyboś before he took up his poetic dialogue with Mickiewicz and Słowacki – that activate non-literary contexts, taking their artistry

from the experience of living speech or from colloquial language. We do not yet know how to reconcile the “literariness” suggested by imitative obedience to ready-made creative models with the “literariness” of innovation.

By contenting ourselves with a package of offers that favors thinking in terms of “precedents” – as in British jurisprudence – we would have to abandon any theory of literariness whatsoever, thus falling into a whirl of paradoxes. This might ultimately imply that we cannot define literariness because *de facto* it does not exist. However, if this were the case, we would be forced to regard such a search for a non-existent thing – whether in tradition or elsewhere – as unworthy of professionals. We might also assume that the philosophy of literariness were simply one of the chapters in the hopeless “philosophy of chance.” It has become “accepted” (for no good reason) to count certain writerly decisions as literature and others as not. Herein lies the whole mystery. In this case, tradition would lose all its authority, exposing the humdrum truth about itself as a reservoir of ignorance and incompetence.

Each of the signs of literariness under analysis here only reveals certain of its aspects or defines its non-compulsory conditions. None of them defines its essence in any indisputable or absolute way. We may say of each of them that, yes, it participates in literary creation and it can be a sign of literariness, but not throughout the whole of literary history, not everywhere and in all its genres or varieties, and not only in literature, since it participates with equal vigor in paraliterature. We may also refer to various other conceptions of literary artistry – which thus far I have not discussed, but which boast vast fields of scholarship and complex histories of debate – including mimesis, fiction, “quasi-judgments,” “quasi-iconicity” and the transformation of the text into a “world model.” These labels – which emerge from the mechanism under discussion as effects of more or less perceptible textual facts, or as variations on the play between transgression and degression – are capable neither of individually capturing the whole field of verbal art nor of effectively “sealing the border” between literature and related systems of speech.

But can they do so as a complete set of labels?

This would seem unachievable. In quantitative terms, it would be impossible to define such a “set.” No period of literary historiography can know its full extent, but instead it constantly appears to us as an incomplete, dynamic and open collection. Certain components disappear, while others undergo transformation, multiply or merge, giving rise to new elements (or to elements renovated beyond recognition). In the changing writerly conventions and poetics of reception, the same approach to textual artistry can evoke all possible responses – sometimes appearing as indispensable, sometimes as acceptable but uninteresting, and sometimes even as deceptive or destructive. All find themselves subject to potential culling or discounting. Every one of them may be removed from circulation for a certain period, making way for flashier methods or sometimes even for their exact opposites.

Therefore, from the viewpoint of a literary historian, literariness cannot be perceived as anything other than a temporary and mutable selection from a repertoire with vague boundaries and inexhaustible possibilities – a selection constantly carried out anew by dominant authorities and triumphant theories of poetics, as well as by emerging, embryonic or developing formations bearing hidden “baubles for Your Lordships” in the ardent faith that this time the last will be first.

But would it not still be possible to question the conclusion (inevitably drawn from the situation described above) that the historical perspective can be the only one for “literariness”? Is there really no other perspective? Must we exclusively attach literariness to discrete groups and individuals – to the classics, the symbolists, the feminists, Mikołaj Sęp Szarzyński, Cyprian Kamil Norwid, Teodor Parnicki, Tymoteusz Karpowicz, etc.?

We should note that from this perspective “literariness” loses its character as a contentious question for literary studies. Here the sources of writerly and scholarly disputes are unstable norms and temporary declarations with no permanent foundations, while the role of the expert is restricted to the tasks of chronicling and observing other people’s opinions. If it were to emerge that historical “literariness” as a mutable REPERTOIRE could not be opposed by another more theoretical understanding of it (as a system), then literary theory would lose its entire basis, becoming – like linguistics,

according to Stanisław Lem – a theory of phenomena that do not submit to theoretical explanations.

From the observations made above, it follows that the UNIVERSAL DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTIC OF LITERARINESS CANNOT BE ANY SPECIFIC, SUBSTANTIVE QUALITY OF A TEXT. It cannot be any fragment of the text; any component from the level of sounds, images and ideas; or any “place” opened by any other key. Therefore, we must seek out the distinctive feature of literariness elsewhere – namely, IN THE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE DIFFERENT COMPONENTS OF THE TEXT.

In the numerous disputes over the subject presently under discussion, the CONTRADICTION perhaps arises most frequently. In the first place, this appears simply to denote the energy that destroys competing conceptions, a perfidious energy that also brings about the self-destruction of new conceptions with equal efficacy. For every literary method, one can easily find an immediate “anti-method.” Every constitutive device of literariness may be undermined by the appearance of an “anti-device.” Every quality is answered in this game by an “anti-quality.” As a rule, exemplification depletes any polemical argument. The devil is in the specific examples. Indeed, I have already pointed to certain disqualifications of particular criteria for literariness by means of their direct contradictions: cohesiveness versus non-cohesiveness; multiplicity of meaning against the expunging of meaning by an aesthetically objectified text; innovative “estrangement” juxtaposed with styles more traditionally loyal to assimilated genotypes. We find many other similar conflicts within the realm generally regarded as peculiarly “literary.” The “rise of authenticity”<sup>7</sup> has

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<sup>7</sup> The category of “the authentic” – popular in part thanks to the interwar manifesto of authenticity – has formed a constant theme of reflection for many years in literary criticism and press writing. During my own youth as a writer (in Szczecin), this category frequently arose – perhaps too obtrusively – in disputes over nautical literature. I wrote a poem on this subject entitled “The Flood of the Authentic” (“Zalew autentyczny”) in which I entered into a polemic with the dominant rhetoric of the era, showing – at least according to my intention – the conventional and stereotypical nature of the “authentic” qualities of living speech. In the 1980s, the term “authentic” entered the scholarly lexicon of literary studies. For example, see: Jarzębski, Jerzy, *Powieść jako autokreacja* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1984).

undermined the autocracy of fiction. The image must co-exist with the play of ideas. Theories about the disinterestedness of art in general – including literary art – collapse in the face of various proofs of mission, engagement and the ideological or philosophical servitude of undeniably artistic works. The theory of the work as a “world model” encounters serious difficulties with works that seem to present “a fragment” of the real world. The interpretation of literariness as subject to the figure of syllepsis<sup>8</sup> unleashes an avalanche of examples illustrating the possibility of composition guided by other figures and tropes (the work as an enormous metaphor, metonymy or allegory, the work as symbol, and so on). In this sense, if we treat literariness in the broadest terms as one great semantic transformation, thus defending the thesis that individual figures and tropes are specific variants of this norm, then we might just as easily overthrow this thesis by referring to programmatically non-metaphorical works oriented towards literalness or the “thirst for singular meaning.” In short, the situation begins to resemble that of Julian Tuwim’s satirical poem “Stop,” which Franciszek Siedlecki used years ago in a report on the state of translation,<sup>9</sup> thereby illustrating an equally suggestive historical polemic over literariness:

Professor Frask built an anti-gas mask. Professor Gras made an anti-mask gas. Gras called his gas “anti-Frask,” Frask called his mask “anti-Gras.” To which Gras made a new gas. To which Frask built a new mask. And they both started all over again, alas.  
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But are the differences between works fulfilling the antinomic criteria for literariness really absolute? Surely not. It would be very difficult – if not impossible – to demonstrate in any given literary text the triumph of a single, sterile form of artistry, entirely purified

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<sup>8</sup> Michel Riffaterre has proposed shifting syllepsis “from a marginal position in traditional rhetoric’s hierarchy of tropes to the role of meta-trope defining the nature of art or literature,” regarding syllepsis as “the exemplary sign of literature.” See: Nycz, Ryszard, *Język modernizmu: Prolegomena historycznoliterackie* (Wrocław: Fundacja na rzecz Nauki Polskiej, 1997), p. 107.

<sup>9</sup> See: Siedlecki, Franciszek, “Przekłady z poezji rosyjskiej,” *Pisarze polscy o sztuce przekładu 1440-1974: Antologia*, ed. Edward Balcerzan (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 1974), p. 247.

of its own internal contradictions. By concentrating on works that are exemplarily faithful to the directives of fictionality, imagery, the superstructure, ludicity, de-automization with its accompanying strangeness, and so on, we make things a lot easier for ourselves by concentrating on poetic dominants and bracketing any deviations from the artistic norms in particular works (as Mikhail Bakhtin did when he emphasized the dialogical, carnivalized structure of Fyodor Dostoevsky's novels by marginalizing the highly conspicuous or even obtrusive views of the author, which are more suggestive of authoritarian homophony than of any egalitarian or sensitive polyphony). The same thing happens with reconstructions of poetics that govern greater wholes (consisting of multiple texts), such as the oeuvre of a single author or the library of a particular literary trend. The strategy of searching in these areas for a homogeneous, one-dimensional and coherent "dominant" leads to problematic simplifications that verge on falsifications of literature. In order to maintain a thesis about the disciplined coherence and functionality of all the particles of speech in the lyrics of Julian Przyboś, we must close our eyes to his redundant, relaxed, colloquial and verbose passages – or simply treat them as errors in his art or as uncharacteristic features. In the name of our pure image of Witkacy's dramatic art – which shocks with its strangeness and renounces any ambitions to understand or interpret the world – we have no choice but to ignore various scenes and dialogues from *Mother (Matka)* and *The Shoemakers (Szewcy)*, which are so ordinary as to be almost banal. And what should we do with the perspicacity of the social diagnoses made by this theoretician of Pure Form?

We should note that the majority of interpretive disputes in our field play out according to the same schema. The response to any attempt to define a dominant is inevitably to point out its opposite (and this desire to track down the manifestations of the "anti-dominant" in contentious texts seems to be the strongest polemical impulse). When somebody says that the poetry of Miron Białoszewski is characterized by a penchant for basic, primitive, childish, colloquial and oral forms of communication, we are immediately struck by the presence within it of higher, bookish, erudite, elitist and even specialist forms. In response to the spectacular Romantic cult of youth and

Mickiewiczian “feeling and faith,” sooner or later somebody will find an antidote in Romanticism’s fascination with antiquity, reason and skepticism. We shall be forced to modify our belief in the frenetic optimism dominating the early poetry of the Skamander movement, since other works from the same time and place speak to us in a language of depression, fear and despair.

So what does this all mean? The same old thing – “Professor Frask built an anti-gas mask.”

Yet the situation undergoes a radical change if we choose not to seek out the homogeneous dominants in the poetics of a work or in systems that embrace entire sets of works (perceived as greater literary wholes), but rather search for their polarizations, splits, quarrels, dramatic ruptures and divisions into  $x$  and not- $x$ . THEREFORE, THE ESSENCE OF LITERARINESS IS THE CONTRADICTIONARY RELATION. More precisely, literariness is a network of these relations. It is based on the clarification and simultaneous suspension of the formal and logical norm of non-contradiction (*lex contradictionis*) prevailing outside verbal art. According to this norm, we cannot regard two contradictory assessments of the same object made at the same time and in an identical direction as simultaneously true. In practical communication, it is not permissible for something to be both  $x$  and not- $x$  at the same time. In literary communication – on the contrary – this circumstance is not only widespread, but indispensable.

Outside verbal art, the violation of *lex contradictionis* can sometimes become a genuine scourge of social life, since the social order is devastated by factual contradictions, illogical arguments, misleading accusations, confusing instruction manuals, muddled therapies, and laws or directives based on mutually exclusive imperatives. Not long ago the oxymorons of newspeak still plagued us (and not only in George Orwell’s novel). Today we are familiar with similar nonsense in more amusing versions, such as the “black is white” declarations that emanate from the jungles of party politics and free-market advertising.

Of course, we tend to be more lenient on the logical inconsistencies of such personal

confessions or laments as “I want and I don’t want,” “I know and I don’t know,” or “yes and no.” In them, we find the indecisiveness, helplessness and disorientation of the human individual stuck between various imponderables in labyrinths of vague, subjectively perceived values. According to certain writerly conventions, these breakdowns in logic under the pressure of life are natural sources of literature. Both tragedy and comedy emerge from them. They are at the center of all plot, fictionality and the dramatic impact of the lyric monologue. Nevertheless, the main point is that the violation of the *lex contradictionis* in non-artistic texts applies exclusively to the meanings of words and sentences, while literariness – on the contrary – can represent an intentional operation on the semantic or logical level, manifesting itself in certain styles as “contrarian” speech and thus becoming a game of paradoxes, aporias, antitheses and oxymorons (as Tadeusz Różewicz writes: “life without god is possible, / life without god is impossible”). Yet this is merely one of its many possibilities – neither absolute nor obligatory.<sup>10</sup>

The contradictory essence of literariness may manifest itself in the semantic flow of words and sentences within a work. It may also operate on levels higher and (or) lower than the level of the word. Any attempt to point to specific qualities – which are inevitably intertwined with the contradictory web of poetic principles that define any

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<sup>10</sup> Thematized antinomies are a conspicuous way of manifesting the contradictory nature of literary art, but they are neither indispensable nor the only way. When the contradictions engulf the level of authorial judgments (or views), this in turn threatens the “authoritarian” forms of poetics – which are ultimately no less literary – oriented towards the expression of selected values explicitly opposed to other values, which are negated and regarded as defective or “harmful.” Julian Przyboś spoke out against this restriction of the lyric, entering into a polemic with the automatism of the new wave of “contrarian poetry.” He regarded its impulse as a symptom of a crisis, whereby “in literature we hear the reverberating voices of theorists doubting the possibility of writing. ‘A crisis of the the word,’ they cry. How can we write poetry when the consciousness of the contradiction or incommensurability (inadequation) between the thing and the word is constantly present in the poet’s mind, so that having pronounced the adjective ‘ridiculous’ he immediately feels its opposite – ‘tragic’ – and vice versa. [. . .] As long as they feel this way, it becomes impossible for those talented poets [Ryszard Krynicki, Stanisław Barańczak – E. B.] to take any definite position whatsoever – emotional, intellectual or of the will. Whatever they say evokes its opposite. They speak and counter-speak. And thus, do they say nothing at all? [. . .] I am not sure whether anyone can construct more than one, two or three poems with this regrettably popular method” (Przyboś, Julian, *Zapiski bez daty* (Warszawa: PIW, 1970), p. 185).

individual work or set of multiple works – must be exclusively exemplary and thus consistently outside any definition. Any contravention of this prohibition would imply an automatic return to the state I have described above – in other words, to a game we are doomed to lose. Above all, the question of which textual characteristics and which specific layers or inter-level relations we can include in the drama of contradiction – or in our definition of literariness – should go to creative authors. This problem lies at the root of both artistic inventiveness, whereby the artist becomes the discoverer of new antinomies, and of the derivative nature of many “literatures of exhaustion,” whereby the writer uses previously invented methods for building these tensions. The theorist ought not to participate in this contest. Instead, his or her responsibility lies in models, not actualizations (in invariants, not variants). If we take the example of enjambment, observing in it both the symptom and cause of a contradiction between syntax and poetic rhythm, our target should be the mechanism itself – and not merely a list of sentences and their meanings to be subjected to the contradictory “treatment.” After all, when we consider the concept of a literary boundary – which may be crossed by a figure who thus becomes a hero – there are no pre-established types of boundaries, methods of transgression or associated risks. Similarly, in the theory of plot conflict one would search in vain for a closed catalogue of conflict engendering values or situations. In the same way, in the contradictory conception of literariness, the aim should be a model, relation or principle. The more surprises in the evolution of this model, the greater its theoretical legitimacy.

In *Point of Departure* (*Punkt wyjścia*), I drew attention to the multilingual and multi-metalingual status of literary scholarly consciousness, which has developed alongside an analogical multiplication and alternation of linguistic and metalinguistic functions within literature itself. In the structure of the individual work, this also applies to the active contradictory relations existing within it. In any specific literary creation, we usually find more than one contradictory relation, while in the web of these relations – within the boundaries of a given work – we observe not an ossified hierarchy, but rather a contest for significance and a struggle for privileges. In the later sections of this chapter, I

shall undertake detailed analyses of selected conflicts and tensions.

First of all, the various antinomies between selected qualities (or “attitudes”) in the poetics of the work do not have equal force. Instead, they exist to different degrees, situating themselves between the poles of resolvability and irresolvability, reconciliation and destruction. This provides a strong basis for the formation of the **NORMS OF A GRADATIONAL POETICS**.

Secondly, the contradictions may engulf and antagonize “anything” – in other words, whatever exists within the boundaries of the work’s poetics. This includes qualities that constitute themselves on the same level (rhythms, sounds, images, communicative situations, ideas), as well as qualities from various other levels of the work (for instance, conflicts between explicit and implied information, between meanings emerging from the plot and from the genre, between space and style, etc.).

Thirdly, the contradictory relations are both internal and external to the text. They may include tensions between phenotype and genotype, as well as between the text and non-verbal reality (we may find various types of fiction and their contradiction or suspension in the web of these tensions).

Fourthly, an especially interesting form of literariness exists in tensions between what is explicit (directly given in a text and absolutely dominant at first glance) and what has been rejected and – as a result of this rejection – subsequently recalled. Above all, this applies to poetics that manifest negation or destruction. Dadaist chaos gives rise to a yearning for order. Irrational babble brings to mind lucid speech. Anti-aesthetic nightmares send us back to lost beauty. Ostentatious nihilism refreshes memories of positive or restorative values. These are phenomena of an “illusory” literariness, and yet we still decide to respect them.

Theory is concerned with the genotype, attempting to problematize it, whereas the target of interpretation remains the phenotype. This division of labor – which is essentially straightforward and logical – gives rise to tedious collisions, time and again forcing scholars to choose one of the two fields and then to dispense with the other (as delusive and invalid). Accordingly, we find theorists (genotypists) treating interpretation

as the domain of unprofessional emotion, while interpreters (phenotypists) accuse theory of insensitivity to the beauty of the text. A “solution” recently proposed by certain specialists involves a simultaneous abandonment of all activity – both in the theoretical sphere and in the art of interpretation. After the “death” of the author, genre, the text and reality, we find ourselves faced with another two funerals (without a single wedding).

The conception of literariness that I have proposed would be unthinkable without the cooperation of theory and interpretation. The greater the variety of phenotypes revealed in explications of individual works, the greater support they will provide for the MODELING ambitions of theory.

This conception clearly has its forerunners and allies (one of the most insightful was Jan Mukařovský), but the tradition of contradictory thought also demands its own special story.

I shall reiterate the most important elements.

It is impossible to defend the thesis that we might point to any single, immutable and omnipresent “method for literariness” among the components of a literary work in its linguistic substance. Whenever we can easily identify a group of works in which a specific, exceptionally active attribute becomes a sign that all the examples from this group belong to the category of verbal art, then we can also assume that the same attribute will probably be marginalized in contiguous realms of literature or perhaps even disappear completely from view. Meanwhile, new and competing signs of literariness will appear. The more we take into account texts from diverse linguistic domains, from distant eras and literary schools, the more clearly the internal antinomies within the area under discussion will manifest themselves. In certain acts of artistic speech, ostentatious artificiality of expression confronts the unpretentious naturalness of everyday communicative practice. In others, imagery opposes conceptuality, triviality competes with sublimity, stylistic homogeneity clashes with stylistic multiplicity (both within the boundaries of a genre and in a single work), specimens of sober cohesiveness rub shoulders with the “babble, patchwork and hot air” of disordered speech, while wild fantasy writing and realistic fiction do not preclude documentary ambitions, and so on.

Taking these circumstances into account, I am in favor of renouncing any search for the quantifiers of literariness in any separate, individual attributes of a work (such as imagery, fictionality, multiplicity of meaning, coherence, etc.). Instead, I would propose that we turn our attention towards the work's internal conflicts (tensions and antinomies). Their specific contents are obligatory only within the bounds of particular literary conventions, while these are not pre-determined for all creative endeavors, past and future. THE SHIFTING CONTENTS OF THE ANTINOMICAL MODEL OF LITERARINESS DO NOT THREATEN THE FUNDAMENTAL IMMUTABILITY OF THE MODEL ITSELF. BY RECURRING AS THE INVARIANT OF INNUMERABLE VARIANTS, THIS MODEL PRECISELY RETAINS ITS STATUS AS THE UNIVERSAL DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTIC OF ALL PHENOMENA OF LITERARY ART.

*Translated by Stanley Bill*