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## THE PRAGMATICS OF LITERARY TEXTS AND
## THE PRAGUE LINGUISTIC CIRCLE

0.   What is the nature of an artistic text? How is it distinguished
from that of a primarily "practical" text? This formidable question
has troubled the community of literary scholars ever since the
ancient Greeks addressed it and provided it with divergent answers.
It has emerged with renewed vigor in the last years in the decon-
structionist argument that words in an artistic text do not refer to
a real world of things and concepts but merely to other texts and
their words. Perhaps the greatest impetus to the current reemergence
of discussions about the ontology and epistemology of the literary
text has been the debate swirling around the work of Stanley Fish
who, in a recent book with the provocative title *Is There A Text in
this Class* (1980), asked whether the artistic text has any specific
existence at all. (Cf. Davis 1984a, 1984b, Fish 1984). Fish asks:
is the text (and thus indirectly the author) responsible for the
reader's experience; or is the situation reversed, so that the
reader-critic (or as Fish calls it, the "interpretative community")
through its "interpretative strategies" (again Fish's term) coerces
the text and, in a sense, creates it? Fish's question thus is: is the
text an immanent entity that can stand independently of its author
and without articulation with the society, the norms and values of
which affected those of the author and thus, in a sense, the text
itself?
On this question  the study of the verbal arts, a time-honored
discipline reaching back to Aristotle's descriptive poetics, but
still -- to use the astute words of Gerard Manley Hopkins -- a
"baby science" which has yet to find firm methodological grounding,
has twisted and turned in many directions. Answers have moved from
fixation to fixation. For some, the focus of interest has centered
on the act of creation by the author, following Plato who, in his
*Ion*, provided a psychological account of artistic creation. To this
direction belongs the long history of genetic criticism that was
particularly dominant among the Romantics: that is, the tendency to
describe poetry in terms of the poetic process emanating from the

poet. Various schools of modern psychology each had something to say about the psychological condition out of which art arises. For others, the focus is on the way the text exists, on "what it is". Thus Aristotle was less concerned with *how* tragedies come to be written than with *what*, tragedies *are* (although in his theory of catharsis he was of course also concerned with the affect of tragedies on the audience, so in a sense he was also a predecessor of modern reception theory). This text-oriented approach finds its flowering in the work of the Russian Formalists and the Anglo-American New Critics who, to a certain extent, even excluded meaning from the purview of the critic and the poetic work (e.g. Cleanth Brooks "A poem must not mean but be"), and whose theory of the "affective fallacy" (W.K. Wimsatt), effectively made the reader into an irrelevant part of the literary equation. This approach is continued in various modern hermeneutic theories and practices.
Then there are those who have been concerned with the social and cultural context of the literary text. This, in a sense, is also a quasi-genetic approach, since the socio-cultural context effects the creative process by imbuing the author with certain norms and values. Here we would class the French critic Hyppolite Taine and his school, or the English critic Matthew Arnold who asked questions about the relation of the Victorian ethos to literature. Edmund Wilson's inquiry into the social features affecting Dickens's attitude would also belong here. Still another direction is reception theory, developed, though not originated, by the so-called Konstanz school of Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauss.

Today it has become increasingly clear that it is never just a matter of only two epistemological alternatives. The text is not *either* immanent *or* dependent on author, reception, or culture; and to ask the question, "Is there a text in this class?", which anticipates a univocal yes or no answer, is thus to ask the wrong question.
But if we deny the yes/no opposition and opt for a pluralistic approach, then what kind of methodologies can we devise? This becomes an enormously important, but also extremely complex, question; for we are now dealing not only, or not even primarily, with the author, *or* with the text, *or* with the reader, *or* with the socio-cultural surroundings. We are preoccupied with *all* these, and we

need thus a methodology which addresses the totality of these domains but guards against reductionism. What is needed thus is a global approach to the literary object that can marshall a program capable of conjoining the many disparate perspectives of poetics into a comprehensive theory that would not only bridge the form/content and synchrony/diachrony dichotomies and relate text to code, but also link the entire literary series and its individual manifestations to other systems in culture and society and to their individual manifestations. It is in this area, I shall argue, that the Prague Linguistic Circle, which has anticipated so many problems and contemporary solutions to them, began to formulate semiotic methodologies in the 1930s which synthesized the earlier-mentioned monistic approaches. I shall devote the remainder of this paper to this methodology and its applications.

1.1 The Prague methodologies are based on a number of premises, including the three following: 1. the notion of *structure* in the very specific sense in which the Prague scholars saw this concept; 2. the concept of the literary work as *sign*, i.e. the anticipation of modern semiotic theories; and 3. the view, formulated most cogently by Mukařovský, that the literary process is always *dialogic* in nature, involving thus all elements of the literary equation: the author, the text, the readers, as well as the total socio-cultural-historical environment, and involving furthermore Mukařovský's concept of the *system of systems* complexly articulated with each other. In effect, the Prague Linguistic Circle formulated, without so naming it, a theory of literary pragmatics and, by extension, of aesthetic pragmatics in general. These theories were of course based on the broad view such scholars as Roman Jakobson, N. Trubetzkoj, Bohuslav Havránek, and Vilém Mathésius held of language and its broad way of functioning and meaning.

2. In the sense in which we shall use the term, pragmatics is the most complex dimension of the semiotic interpretation of the various factors composing the sign text. The American philosopher Charles Morris, basing himself on the work of Charles Sanders Peirce, identified three spheres of semiotic activity, stressing their inseparability and their interrelatedness: 1) The first domain is that of syntactics or syntagmatics, which investigates the relation-

ship of the individual signs of a text to each other and thus asks
questions about the inner structuration of the text. In literary
theory syntactics dominated the interest of the Russian Formalists,
the Anglo-American New Critics and some contemporary hermeneuticians.
Syntactics is the most 'formal of all domains, since it does not
concern meaning. It is thus related to Saussure's signifier. 2) The
second domain is that of semantics, concerned with the relation of
the given sign text to its object(s) and the relation of the
individual microsigns of the text to their objects. The semantic
domain must of course subsume the domain of syntactics, for it is
only by the interrelationship of the text's formal elements to each
other that meaning is achieved, just as in "practical" language
meaning is achieved by the interrelationships within the hierarchy
of formal linguistic elements, from the phonemes to the largest
textual units. 3) the most complex sphere is that of pragmatics,
which is concerned with the relation of the sign or sign text to
what Morris called the "agents" of the text, i.e. to its producer
and audiences; in the literary text thus to its author and its many
readers. The pragmatic region must of course subsume the first two
domains of syntactics and semantics, thus dealing with the greatest
number of systems and possessing the most complex metalanguage
(cf. Pelc 1979:82). We recall that artistic texts are dynamic
structures, charactetized by norm violation as basic structural
features, as was pointed out by Jan Mukařovský in the 1930s. Thus
the pragmatic domain is extremely complex since the text itself is
so dynamic and subject to numerous interpretations.

3. While the Prague scholars of the 1930s did not use the term
pragmatics, and were acquainted neither with Peirce's nor with
Morris's work, they moved persistently from the predominantly formal
to the predominantly meaningful levels of the artistic text and, in
ever expanding circles, to the relation of the text to other signs
or sign systems (Peirce's interpretant), including those of the
text's agents.

3.1 Basicaly, these approaches are founded on the view of the work
of art as an autonomous -- and thus not immanent -- system which is
seen as only *semi-closed*, that is, it is structured and evolves
according to its own inner laws, along the lines of Hegelian

*Selbstbewegung;* but it is open through the mediating role of the subjects engaged in its production and recreation, i.e. the author and the reader, or the many readers. Here the Prague scholars again came close to the concept of the interpretant chain of Peirce, whom they did not know. Aesthetic texts are thus seen as partially open, autonomous systems which are related, but never reducible, to other systems of culture: language, social hierarchies, social and cultural norms and values, etc. How these extratextual systems enter into relation with the autonomous text is a complex issue pertaining to the pragmatic domain; for it is through the meditation of the sending and preceiving subject that these systems penetrate the artistic text. The view of the autonomy of the artistic text was first advanced in the well-known joint declaration by Roman Jakobson and Jurij Tynjanov (1928:37), who stressed that the work of art, while not reducible to other systems and texts, must nevertheless not be seen as totally immanent. In a somewhat later paper, Roman Jakobson (1933-4) posits all art as part of social systems, a component among other socio-cultural components, a view which changed forever dialectically the range of art and its relation to the other sectors of social structure (1933-4:30). For many years this position was not adopted by Jan Mukařovský, the leading aesthetician of the Prague school, who, as late as 1929, continued to insist that literary analysis must never go beyond the work itself (Mukařovský 1929:387). It was only in 1934 that Mukařovský adopted the position of the Jakobson-Tynjanov Theses. In his evaluation of the lyrical poem "The Majesty of Nature" (Vznešenost přírody (1813) of the Czech Romantic poet M.Z. Polák (1788-1856) (Mukařovský 1934a), he insisted that the structuralist view entailed all components of the work of literature, both their inner relationship (what we would call today their syntactics) and their relation to other series of social phenomena (1934:91), that is semantics and pragmatics. It was in this work that Mukařovský formulated his concept of the structure of structures, positing culture as a kind of macrostructure, anticipating thus the view of culture as an overarching system for the transmission and storage of information as developed in the 1960s and the 1970s by Lotman and other Soviet semioticians (e.g. Lotman *et.al.* 1973; for a discussion see Winner and Winner 1976:101-156). We must not place literature in a vacuum, Mukařovský argued, and we must never under-rate the relation of literature to other evolutionary series.

Evolutionary series of individual structures which change in time(e.
g.politics,ideology,literature)do not simply run parallel to each
other without relations,but form an integral structure of a higher
order of which they are components.This structure of structures has
its own hierarchies,but. these are not fixed; they are dynamic and
changeable. Since we are dealing with live structures and not with
static systems, also this "structure of structures" is full of inner
antinomies, in  constant movement, and forever regrouping; and
individual components alternate in the dominant position. In other
words, in Mukařovský's view  the history of a series cannot  be
reduced to a commentary on the history of another evolutionary series
because one is not subordinate to the other. The history of literature
is not, Mukařovský argued, reducible to the history of ideology,
economics, or to history itself. Mukařovský is somewhat less clear
in this paper on just how the various series (structures) which form
his higher structure influence each other. He simply states that,
being components of such a higher systems, they influence each other
mutually, but that such an external impetus is realized only through
the internal laws of evolution of each series, and such laws are
different in, and specific to, each series, the results of such a
stimulus never being a copy of the stimulus, but rather of a dual
force,meaning apparently the opposition stimulus vs.the internal laws
of *Selbstbewegung* (Mukařovský 1934a:166).
It is the individual who, both as author and as reader  of the text,
as the bearer of various cultural-ideological influences, is the
intermediary through whose instrumentality external stimuli enter
the system. It is thus not only the author but also the reader who
can be seen as the initiators of change. For the Prague scholars,
and especially Mukařovský, insisted on the reversibility of the
roles of author and receiver. In fact, Mukařovský called literary
evolution a result of an eternal dialogue between all those who
create and all those who receive, and thus recreate, the text.
In spite of the acceptance of the individual's role in literary
evolution, a certain amount of determinism underlay Mukařovský's
view of the suprapersonal character of change, since the effectiveness
of individual action is, as Mukařovský maintained in a paper of 1940,
largely predetermined (*předurčen*) by the preceding evolution. "A
certain evolutionary stage of the structure," he argued, "requires
for its transformation individuals with certain qualities, whereas

individuals with other qualities are, at that particular moment, not required by the evolution" (1940:19). Three years later, Mukařovský repudiated such causalistic views and, directly contradicting his earlier deterministic bias, rejected the view that the needs of the system predetermined the timing and qualitative character of such external stimuli. For behind the regularity of evolution, he now saw the play of ever active chance (*náhoda*) represented by the intervening individual. Chance and law are thus no longer seen as mutually exclusive, but rather are related in a dialectical opposition (Mukařovský 1943-5) in which both the individual's personality and the structure in which the individual intervenes are seen as dynamic evolving structures. Literary evolution is thus seen as the result of two antithetical forces: the constancy of the evolving series (for without retention of such identity it would not be perceived as a series) and the disturbance of this identity, with the latter constantly subject to change. In other words, change is not totally predictable, but represents, as Jakobson and Tynjanov had pointed out in their 1928 Theses, an indeterminate equation.

4. A fundamental basis for the pragmatic view as developed by the Prague scholars in the 1930s is their extension of the field of semiotics to areas other than "communicative, or practical" language. Not acquainted with the works of Peirce, they based their views on the writings of Saussure, who had called in his *Cours* for the extention of semiotics to other field of human culture, when he said (*Cours*, Intr. III, para. 3:33-34) that language is only one of the many sign systems and called semiotics (*sémiologie*) "a science which studies the life of signs as part and parcel of (*au sein de*) social life". He calls this science a part of the field of psychology, understanding psychology as relating to all perception, since signs are material objects which become signs only through the perception and interpretation of the cognizing subject. Semiotics has of course undergone vital transformation since the days which Saussure called for such a general science. Since then we have become familiarized with the theoretical formulations of Peirce, so much broader and less logocentric than Saussure's; and also Saussure's theories have been extended and expanded. However, it was largely from Saussure's theories that the Prague scholars, and especially Jakobson and Mukařovský, constructed their theory of semiotics.

The Prague school extended the scope of semiotics from practical language to other fields, first of all, and most importantly, to the verbal and nonverbal arts. When Mukařovský wrote his path-breaking paper for the international philosophical congress held in Prague in 1934 (Mukařovský 1934b), in which he initiated the view of art as a semiotic fact, he laid the basis for modern semiotic art theory, where art is a communicative sign system operating in full cultural context. The semiotic approach enabled Mukařovský and his colleagues to take account not only of the formal aspects of the work of art (syntactics), but also of its many meanings (for art was posited as being polysemic) (semantics), as well as of its full cultural context, its author, readers, and their cultural norms and values (pragmatics). Basing this partly on Saussurean and party on Buehlerian theories, the Prague scholars formulated a unified process which would take into account all those elements and which, in largely simplified fashion, we could state as follows: An author creates a work, in this his only constraints are the code of the art in which he is creating, the direction of the preceding evolution, as well as some regard for the consumer for whom the artistic text is destined; for consciously or not, an artist always addresses his work to potential consumers, he "turns to someone," as Elemér Hankiss put it (Hankiss 1972:205). The artist's relation to the artistic code, that is to the prevailing "language" of a given art, its rules and constraints, was complex for the Prague school which saw art as being in dialectical relationship to norms, both maintaining and violating them, the relationship of norm and norm-violation varying from artistic period to artistic period. The reader then interprets the text, making use of the many cultural codes -- and their norms and constraints -- which are at his disposal, by projecting his own psychological energy onto the text. The structure of the text, as it appears during the act of perception, is thus the result of cooperation between author and reader, a "dialogue" justifying Mukařovský's assertion that the reader "is just as important a need for literature as the author, with whom he (the reader) jointly creates the work by accepting or rejecting it and by imbuig it with a final meaning (*do tváŕeje jeho smysl*) (1946:243). Literature is thus a communicative act and literary communication is dialogic. It has been said that literature is an act of saying to which one responds by turning oneself into the mind of the other. But a literary text, in contrast to other verbal

texts, exerts a particulary strong pressure on the reader himself to
"speak," not only to take issue with the text, but to interpret it.
Here the Prague scholars came close to Ingarden's reader who makes
concrete the indefinite parts of the text (*"die Unbestimmtheiten*
*zu konkretisieren"*). But there is a fundamental difference: for a
basic premise of the Prague school was that the artistic text is,
in its creation and particularly in its reception, dependent partly
upon conditions of concretization determined *outside* the work itself,
i.e. general cultural and artistic codes, other texts, etc., whereas
Ingarden, although he acknowledged the existence of these factors,
remained focused upon the relations between text and  perceiving
subject. And this focus carries of course always the danger of
relativism, in its most extreme form like Fish's theories and that
of the deconstructionists. According to the Prague school, the text
is related to, but never reducible to, author and reader as well as
the total cultural context. Its meanings are given it by the reader,
again in context with the text's structure,cultural norms and values
and the reader's partial knowledge of the author's codes.
It is true that, because of its polysemy, every text admits of many
kinds of concretizations by the reader, in fact such plural interpre-
tations are often required by the very nature of the text itself. We
arrive,therefore,at the contradictory situation that every text re-
presents many texts. Since each text admits of many meanings, a poem
is a somewhat different text each time it is read by the same reader,
by different readers in the same generation and culture, by different
generations of readers (not to speak of readers from cultures
divergent from that which produced the text). Even each individual
reading of the same poem by the reader creates a partially new text.
But, as we have noted, this does not imply a total relativization
of the text, for this instability is counterbalanced by the stability
created by the partial overlapping of the author's and the readers'
many-fold semiotic codes, without which a text would be incomprehen-
sible, and by a positioning of the text in a cultural tradition.

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