

Derrida and Literature

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In his collection of four essays, *Fiction & Diction*, Gérard Genette ([1991] 1993) carefully distinguishes between regimes (constitutive and conditional) and criteria (thematic – characterized by the concept of fictionality; and rhematic – given by textual, stylistic, discursive features, diction) that contribute to the delimitation of modes of literariness. The overall postulate of Genette’s book, however, is that the parameters determining condition or property of literature (modes of literariness) occur unevenly and asymmetrically. Given this complex, ambiguous and shifting relationship between fictionality and its perceptibility, Genette calls for a pluralist theory of literariness that would highlight the diverse literary uses of texts.

The example of Genette’s reasoning is instructive, because it suggests that if we are to show how deconstruction specifies the concepts of literature and literariness and how they are integrated into a consideration of the general structure of textuality, then Roman Jakobson’s concept of literariness as the aesthetic aspect of literature loses much of its justification (by proving to be unstable and undecidable) and the investigation (when approaching verbal objects) must be extended beyond the field of “poetics”. As Jacques Derrida puts it in “This Strange Institution Called Literature” (Derrida and Attridge 1992, 71–72), modern literary writing not only opens access to the general structure of textuality, but as an institution, it consists in transgressing and producing its constitutional law, since its discursive forms contest, threaten, and deconstruct the possibility of a fundamental constitution. The reason for the interest in literature and literariness is not *differentia specifica* (primarily as the aesthetic aspect of literary practice), but the play of writing, marking, and loosening of the limits of the language system, the ability to confirm and shake logocentric and ethnocentric assuredness. The specificity of literature, literarity, is viewed primarily from the perspective of grammatol-

ogy (which is to replace semiology), that is, in terms of the broad implications of the gram/grammé as *différance*. Derrida argues against an essentialist form of literarity – literarity should not be understood as a natural essence, as an intrinsic property of the text (44). Literary texts suspend to some extent the “thetic” naivety of the transcendent reading (45) – the difference between the literary and the non-literary is established by text features or moments in a text with the tendency to resist the transcendent reading. Literature and its work with language (its displacement) has, according to Derrida, a revealing power which makes us more receptive to writing and to the limits of the interpretation of writing (71–72).

The individual articles in this issue of *WORLD LITERATURE STUDIES* show various ways of approaching literature both in its uncertainty and its potentiality. By changing attitude with regard to the text, by becoming aware of the difference between transcendent and nontranscendent reading (and of the possibility of doing both ways of reading of any text of various discourses – philosophical and scientific, journalistic, conversational etc.), one can experience the specificity of literary intentionality and develop, cultivate, recover, or update the consciousness of the rules revealing the convention, institution, or tradition of literature. The research on “Derrida and Literature” thus extends in a way to texts of different communication (social) systems (questions of ethics, politics, science, law, economics or mass media also emerge).

The opening study by Marcel Forgáč takes a closer look at the argumentation that Jürgen Habermas ([1985] 1998) used to accuse Derrida of showing no respect for discursive boundaries and for entirely different roles that the rhetorical elements of language assume in various texts of specialized languages (of philosophy, science and technology, law, economics and morality), which Derrida (allegedly) handles as literary texts (although they would not like to be considered as such). Forgáč points out the inadequacy of Habermas’s critique and in contrast, highlights Derrida’s intention to refine differences and work out the system of these borders once more. Referring to the context of Prague structuralism, he explains the tension that arose between Habermas and Derrida over the levelling of the genre distinctions between philosophy and literature. In contrast to Habermas, who (following Jakobson) called for a hierarchical order of the functions of language for both types of texts (philosophy and literature), Jan Mukařovský thought of a double-pole function (2021, 9–12) – some verbal messages systematically activate two dominant functions, and the diversity of functions is coordinated within contamination model ([1937] 2007, 94). Mukařovský’s double-pole function and his reflections on the participation of verbal functions in the contamination model could serve well to describe philosophical texts in the “logocentric” tradition and avoid measuring them on the same scale as literary texts (their irreducible differences would thus be preserved).

Jacqueline Hamrit provides an outline of Derrida’s responses to a wider range of literary (and non-literary) texts and examines Derrida’s taste for literary writing, for something about literature, which would be “*in place of the secret*” (Derrida [1993] 1995, 28). This secret is linked to passion and to the right/power to say

everything. Literature as a modern invention provides the experience of saying everything without touching upon the secret, the experience of exceeding, of displacing the rules, of suspecting the conventional law and history. Literature and democracy cannot be dissociated from each other (28). Hamrit traces how this connection and the notion of secret is approached and commented upon in Derrida's various works. Her study also shows how the experience of literature/secret is present in the process of reading a text and is related to concepts such as structure, genre and interpretation.

Juan Evaristo Valls Boix points out at the beginning of his study that the political and literary dimensions of performativity are closely intertwined in Derrida's works. Derrida's literary performativity makes visible the inoperativity of writing, by which the constitution of the symbolic order may be threatened. Therefore, several stages of Derrida's reflections on the relation between performativity and literature are highlighted. First, Derrida's critique of John Langshaw Austin and John Rogers Searle reveals how the complex functioning of language has been overlooked, and that literary discourse makes it possible to understand textuality and its performative condition. Next, Valls Boix is interested in how and with what consequences the inoperability of language and its openness to otherness is developed in language theory and in political theory. Finally, he examines the anarchic character of literature, that strange institution that is Derridean performativity, and its structural connection to democratic institutions.

Darin Tenev attempts to elucidate a particular aspect of the way Derrida approached literary texts and, with this aim, examines Derrida's reading strategy. His article draws on Derrida's conception of the event and his rejection of any essentialist form of literarity and shifts the attention to the singularity in literature and the singularity of literature that opens the work to the other, to different readings while making it irreducible to any particular reading. Tenev claims that deconstructive reading should indicate the singular potentiality of the work, and he explains in detail the self-referential aspect of the literary work as well as the procedure of its non-identity with itself – the text always remarks itself in a different way. Derrida's reading of Blanchot's *The Madness of the Day* ([1973] 1999, 189–199) is an example of how the text gives itself the law and at the same time undermines, subverts, transgresses, and transforms that law. Tenev demonstrates how Derrida's readings of literary texts outline the singularity of the text, its peculiar sort of potentiality, the “rare force” (Derrida [1974] 1986, 199) that is irreducible to any general theory or classification.

Manuel Ramos do Ó notes that the act of making literature visible, through which it becomes an object of study, also remains one of the main objects of deconstruction. In addressing the question of literature in Derrida's works, his study first considers what form of question can preserve the singularity of the literary. The question as a form imposed on literature can only be understood here in the context of the deconstruction of metaphysics. Next, Ramos do Ó follows Derrida's analysis of the role of law in the constitution of the literary object and of the status of the question of literature. Laws are both constraining and cre-

ative, and this creative gesture constitutes the fundament of every possible object. There are two constitutive moments in the autonomization of the word “literature” – the dependent autonomy of literature as a peculiar form of expression on the one hand, and the move towards independence from its national boundaries on the other. Literature thus stands on the edge, and “finds itself on both sides of the line that separates the law from the outside-the-law” (Derrida [1985] 2018, 71). The law of literature as institution tends to overflow the institution. Since transgression and law seem to be the two necessities of the question of literature, Ramos do Ó proposes a description of the fundamental principles of literature based on the notion of *parergon*.

In the introduction to his essay, Ernesto Feuerhake warns against overlooking or reducing the differences between the literary and the philosophical when thinking about the text. The interplay of the members of this opposition resonates in a series of other interrelated pairs (the signified and signifier, the meaning and form, etc.). Efforts to refine the differences and acknowledge their complementarity seem necessary when literary acts raise questions about the crisis or end of literature, and when the transcendental reduction might be the very condition of literature. Feuerhake attempts to approach this specific emptiness as the situation of literature, and in particular the way in which a literary act, “this nothing *itself* is determined by disappearing” (Derrida [1967] 1978, 8). Feuerhake closely observes how the logic of the event is examined in Derrida’s works and comments on the operation/force by which the event is made to happen. Feuerhake focuses on the thinking of the unique, on the experience of uniqueness, on the question of the event, which is also that of the unique, and points at “the limit at which the opposition of form and meaning [...] loses its pertinence, and calls for an entirely other elaboration” (Derrida [1972] 1982, 304–305).

In his comparative analysis, Salim Haffas points out that common themes and interests can hide fundamentally different projects. His aim is to show what the concepts of “author” and “death” mean for Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, and Michel Foucault in different theoretical contexts. Haffas argues that the specificity of Derrida’s analysis of writing cannot be reduced to themes characteristic of late-1960s literary theory. Starting with Barthes and “The Death of the Author” ([1967] 1977), which affirms the verbal, linguistic, intransitive condition of literature; questions the author as a historically constructed figure and expresses a desire for a critical approach to literature, he goes on to measure the differences between Foucault and Derrida in relation to this theme. For Foucault, the death of the author imposes itself as an obligatory frame of reference for philosophical or critical analysis; the author-function as a discursive principle is an analytical tool to highlight the way discourse functions in relation to the question of the subject. Derrida made the death of the author a condition for the possibility of any communication.

Miroslav Kotásek presents a view of autobiography that questions the whole network of relations concerning the categories of literature and genre, focusing on the relationship of autobiographical writing with the literary. Not only is

the (philosophical) question of life and death central to auto-bio-graphies, but they also call in question key concepts of literary theory and communication (author, text, narrative, fiction). Kotásek carefully considers the writer's position to the writing process as autobiographical texts deconstruct inside/outside or subject/object dichotomies. The inevitability of "death", or "a heterodidactics between life and death" (Derrida [1993] 2006, xvii), changes the status of the "I" and the "other" – Kotásek points here to the differential structure of the identity (of the *auto*) and its impact on narrative and linguistic structures in autobiographies. The study also provides valuable contextual notes on Derrida's perception of autobiography, his interest in the body and bodily affects in relation to life and language, iterability and singularity in (autobiographical) writing, and positivity and negativity in language. On these grounds (and with reference to Maurice Blanchot), Kotásek attempts to describe how, in autobiography, the speaker's absence from being takes place. He explains how autobiography marks the split between the non-fictional and the fictional, literature and non-literature, and opens ethical and political dimensions. Finally, the life-death relationship presented in writing (autobiographies) can be placed in the context of the spectral logic characteristic of memory media in general, opening up new dimensions for autobiography.

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