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Literary Studies in Poland 1, 25-32

1978

Artykuł został zdigitalizowany i opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

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Theory of Literature in the Curriculum of Polish Departments at Universities

The present conception of theory of literature in the curriculum of Polish Departments at university is the result of long-lasting experiences and discussions which in the mid-sixties brought the crystallization of the project of the new programme, thoroughly changing the quantitative and qualitative share of theory of literature in the university course. In the previous model, by many university practitioners considered unsatisfactory, the role of subjects connected with theory of literature was rather of secondary importance in the education of students of Polish Departments, since there were only class on the descriptive poetics on the 2nd year of studies and lecture on theory of literature proper in two semesters of the 4th year, both given only two hours a week. This was an insufficient frame for the systemic treatment of problems of theory of literature, and so, of necessity accidental solutions made efficiency of undertaken didactic efforts rather limited.

In that situation the scholarly staff of the Chair of Theory of Literature organized at Warsaw University in 1955, the head of which was professor Kazimierz Budzyk, came out with the initiative of changes and took upon themselves all the works necessary for their realization. Beside their activities connected with formulation of a new programme and current confrontation of it with the didactic practice, the staff prepared, among other things, a handbook,¹ which in its several successive editions functions

¹ M. Głowiński, A. Okopień-Sławińska, J. Sławiński, *Zarys teorii literatury* (*An Outline of Theory of Literature*), Warszawa 1962.

in the university course to the present day, now alongside with other publications of this kind. In the question of a new shape of Polish Department studies other university circles were involved as well. This was done mainly through conferences on theory of literature, which were initiated by the above mentioned group and organized every year since 1962 in collaboration with the Institute of Literary Studies of the Polish Academy of Science and other university centres in turn.

The present course on theory of literature at Polish Departments, assigned by the Ministry of Science, Education and Engineering for universities and pedagogical high schools, provides the following links: 1) lecture introductory to literary study—on the 1st year; 2) classes on poetics on the 1st and 2nd years; 3) lecture and proseminar on theory of literature on the 3rd year. These are complemented by facultative seminar on chosen problems of theory of literature. Finally, a student can take part in an appropriate seminar for candidates for a master's degree.

Theory of literature, conceived in the broad sense of the term, is meant to be a discipline of literary study which, related to history of literature and linguistics, provides typically instrumental knowledge and, at the same time, constitutes the plane of integration, around literary fact and evolution, of that knowledge of culture and society and of achievements of other humanities which has been gained within the framework of other subjects of study.

The general purpose of the course on theory of literature is to acquaint a student with the notional and terminological apparatus and with methodological principles of contemporary literary study, and to train in him the ability to use this knowledge when dealing with literary phenomena, both from the point of view of didactic needs and of possible research procedures.

Lecture introductory to literary study is of propaedeutical character and should generally inform about branches and main problems of contemporary literary study. Its aim is to show the place of literary study among other humanities, to define its subject, methods, purposes and to present its specialized sections. If the suggestions of the programme are carried into effect, the lecture brings essential orientation in the whole sphere of problems with which poetics

and theory of literature proper will deal more thoroughly later on.

The main course of study of the subjects we are concerned with begins with elements of descriptive poetics. Here the stress is laid on familiarizing with basic categories necessary for analysis of literary works, and then on the ability of using them in practice. As in all other links, the programme only indicates chief problems, defines the scope and general principles of the arrangement of the material, whereas the direct sequence, hierarchy, proportions and formulation of concrete problems, as well as methods of fulfilling the assigned tasks, is left to invention of those who conduct the class. Since the stratification of a literary work can be seen by the increasing complication of its components, the first phenomena to be discussed are those of language and style, and versification problems which are palpable on the linguistic level. Only then it is possible to pass to the level of composition, and finally to some elements of "literary genetics."

Problems connected with the language material of a literary work are considered both on the level of sound and prosodic organization which leads to versification, and on the lexical and semantic level as well as on the syntactic one, which in its turn opens a perspective on styles, their differentiation and conventions, questions of stylization, parody and pastiche, literary allusion.

More detailed suggestions of the programme concern taking into account instrumentation, rhythm groups, methods of rhythimization, structure of intonation phrase, and meter. Among lexical and semantic phenomena the stress is laid on the relevance of the word within a style, stylistical means of word-formation, tropes based on semantic transformation. On the syntactic level attention is paid to analyzing a sentence as meaningful unit, to stylistic functions of syntactic organization of utterance. Finally, the group of versification problems includes: line—its structure and relation to the sentence, opposition verse—prose, versification system and its types in Polish verse, structure and functions of rhyme, types of strophic forms.

After introducing the concept of composition, the programme suggests to consider elements of the presented world in a literary work: character, situation, event, plot and action, time and spacial

form in literature. Then narrator or lyrical subject should be discussed, his relation to the author, to the presented world and to the fictive reader and, separately, problems of the actual reader.

The third and last complex of themes taken into consideration during the classes on descriptive poetics are literary genres. Subjects of discussion here are genres and sub-genres, criteria of division, then lyrical and epic poetry and drama, their kinds, specific construction of the presented world, and relations between the author and the reader. In the sphere of lyrical poetry attention is paid to lyrical monologue, imagery, types of lyrical poetry, and types of experiences which this poetry expresses. Discussing the epic poetry creates opportunities for more detailed treatment of problems of narrator and typology of forms of narration. Register of indicated problems includes also: narration, description, epic dialogue, interior monologue, stream-of-consciousness technique. Discussion of drama includes, apart from the above mentioned structure of the presented world and internal division into genres, the following items: stage dialogue and monologue, the text of drama proper and the stage directions, drama in relation to the theatre. Moreover the programme suggests that the sphere of the so-called "applied" literature, i.e. didactic literature and satire, should also be dealt with.

This systematic course is closed with theory of literature proper, which embraces: 1) information on the main trends and doctrines of theory of literature in their historical development and against the background of those disciplines which exert some influence on them, such as philosophy, aesthetics, theory of art, psychology, sociology, theory of culture, linguistics, semiotics and theory of information; 2) theory of literary work and artistic text; 3) theory of literary evolution, with elements of theory of culture and sociology of literature and literary life.

The chief task of the subject is to generalize the knowledge acquired previously and, having deepened and synthesized it, to make students familiar with some of the theoretical problems of literary study. The programme provides that the lecture, uniting and systematizing knowledge which students have gained in the course of study and readings, should deal with the main trends

and doctrines of theory of literature from the historical and systemic point of view, but it may concentrate on some problems to be discussed in detail, while confining itself to giving only encyclopaedic outlines of others. It is recommended that, when discussing definite problems from the field of theory of literature, historical sequence should be connected with that of problems, as the latter seems to be more justified.

Proseminar, on the other hand, is to specify theoretical problems on the basis of chosen literary works. Lecture, proseminar and reading list should be complementary to one another.

The survey of trends and doctrines presented during the course on theory of literature includes general information on how formulated poetics and aesthetics were forming from the ancient times till the 17th century, on literary scholarship of the Romantic period, positivist conceptions, and then on the anti-Positivist revolt. As separate items should be discussed: Russian formalists, Prague Structuralists, phenomenological theory of literature as represented by Roman Ingarden's works, trends of contemporary Structuralism and, finally, main methodological assumptions of Marxism in literary study. Also other trends, as close reading, New Criticism, thematic criticism (*critique thématique*), Archetypal Criticism, are taken into consideration.

Theory of literary work deals, from the historical and problem point of view, with wide and manifold scope of things, starting from markers of literariness. These are: literary fiction, Ingarden's theory of quasi-judgements, literary work as a product of the art of word, the examination of which should take into account criterion of poetical function; symbolic picture of the world and its relation to representative and ideological functions of language; literature in relation to other arts; Marxist conception of literature as of a specific form of social consciousness. Next issues of the course are those concerning structure and meaning of the presented world and its axiology; stylistic and aesthetic categories, such as realism, fantasticism, grotesque etc.; structure of an artistic text, its organization, coherence and segmentation; unity and entirety of a literary work; literary typologies and classifications; genological problems and a literary work viewed in the system of culture.

Theory of literary evolution is represented in the course by the following problems and groups of problems:

1. historicism in literary studies (notions of system, evolution, turning point, development of literature; categories of synchrony and diachrony in literary evolution);

2. postulated poetics and realized poetics – their role in forming new lines of development of literature;

3. internal conditioning of literature—conventions and tradition;

4. markers of literary movements and problems of division into literary periods or epochs;

5. evaluation in literary study;

6. elements of sociology of literature and literary life (main institutions of literary life, writer, publishers, publishing market, patronage, censorship, criticism, reading public);

7. the place of literature in the life of society.

The course is supplemented in all its links with wide reading lists, which should be constantly modified and to which newly published positions should be added.

It should be emphasized once again that the programme presented above is meant only as an outline of problems which are to be taken into account while planning, and then organizing in detail an actual course of study. So it is not to be treated as a set of instructions directly programming the order in which the problems will be dealt with during the classes, or determining the way of their elaboration. For particular groups of academic teachers the programme, which was primarily inspired by the practice, is stimulating rather than restricting. Keeping in mind the essential purposes of education and actual conditions in which they will try to achieve these aims, they variously render the general suggestions of the programme into the practice of their classes.

Thus, for instance, one of Polish Departments, taking advantage of close cooperation between groups of theoreticians and historians of literature, synchronized the two separate courses conducted by them. Classes on poetics started later and their programme was arranged in such a way that the 3rd, i.e. the last, semester of these classes and the 1st proseminar on theory of literature, both falling on the 2nd year of study, were harmonized with classes

on history of literature, the problems of which were treated from the point of view of historical poetics. At that time in the chronologically realized course on history of literature material from the Enlightenment and Romanticism is introduced, which offers an opportunity for taking up problems of literary evolution, as those connected with evolution of literary forms made conspicuous by opposing those two epochs.

Besides, at the cost of versification stylistics was expanded since the latter was estimated as containing more problems which are difficult and interesting at the same time.

The main form of the work during the classes on poetics is analysis of literary texts, the choice of which is such as to exemplify theoretical material. At the end of that course a student is supposed to write a paper, which is to be an analytic interpretation of a chosen literary work.

At the same time, during the classes on history of literature devoted to the Enlightenment and Romantic period, changes taking place e.g. in ballad or hymn are discussed which can be traced in differences between descriptions of landscape in lyrical poetry of the Enlightenment and those of Romanticism. These classes also end with annual paper, in which a student is either to analyze a literary work against the background of the tradition, or to present, on the example of chosen works, transformations of e.g. types of narration or description.

Lecture on theory of literature, starting after the 3rd semester, i.e. in the middle of the course on history of literature, presents basic conceptions of a literary work and their methodological consequences. Then, subjects of a more thorough discussion are theory of literary evolution and contexts of literature (sociology of literary forms, poetics and outlook on life, etc.).

In proseminar groups some problems chosen from among those presented on lectures are dealt with in a more detailed way. The text of a literary work is of lesser importance here than during the classes on descriptive poetics; material for analysis and discussion is provided by chosen scholarly treatises.

It is worth mentioning in the end that certain amount of knowledge in the field of literary study, beside knowledge of the most important literary works in the historical perspective, a student

of Polish Department receives in the secondary school. The course on the Polish language and literature in the secondary school introduces some information about composition of a literary work, stylistic devices, structure of verse, literary genres, etc., though it does it occasionally and not in systematic way. University educators appreciate the importance of those school prolegomena of Polish philology, and try to exert some influence on their quality. Many of them are of the opinion that representatives of literary scholarship should, for the sake of propagation of humanistic values, and of high standard of their own discipline in the university education, assist schools not only by writing popularizing works, but also by elaborating a new model of literary education.²

Transl. by *A. Korzeniowska*

² Cf.: S. Burkot, B. Faron, Z. Uryga, *Wiedza o literaturze na użytek szkoły (Literary Study at School)*, "Pamiętnik Literacki", 1975, vol. 2, p. 82.