

Communication Poetics

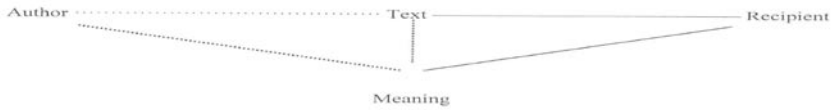
TIBOR ŽILKA

Constantine the Philosopher University, Nitra

ABSTRACT

Since literature is a specific kind of communication, communication poetics was born under the influence of communication theory, textual theory, semiotics and stylistics. Communication poetics is based on the compliance of the particularity of literary works as special kind of texts. The author's strategy to get recipients starts as early as theme and genre selection. The genre itself may sub-serve the information as well as the activation function: in advance, its task might be to mobilize to activity, thus to read or to arouse interest in the text.

Within the framework of the communication plan, this strategy (intention) is utilized by a lot of authors. Application of a detective story in elite or high literature unquestionably fulfils the activating function: it helps to gain readers and by means of a familiar structure it makes them read the text which by its content spins out of the conventional framework of crime stories known from popular literature. The activating elements of literary texts have direct impact on a larger communication range (effect) of the artistic work. Activation emanates from the demands of contemporary communication and may be observed on all levels of the text: besides the popular structure, in the genre itself the denotation-thematic level of the artwork (theme, storyline, characters, milieu) can have a pragmatic function, innovating elements in the compositional plan (whether the literary artwork features classical type of composition or lesser known practices are predominating), advanced or not so evident realization of the theme by means of linguistic-stylistic components (it is mainly a matter of higher or lower degree of signature lexis and textual grammar). Very often different forms of adaptations also foreground prototypes retroactively such as various films, television and radio plays binding to the initial text (for example in the 1980s Jakubisko's film considerably raised interest in the literary work by Peter Jaroš *The Millennial Bee*). In the postmodern era, the gravity centre shifts to the reception, the author as the creator of the literary work moves to the background, respectively the AUTHOR – TEXT relation rarely has a priority and if it does, the concrete work results in a biography, memoirs and the like as an independent communication product, as an individual work of art, a text. This priority of the recipient and text relation might be illustrated as follows (Žilka 2006, 24–25):



Even the genre itself possesses higher or lower degrees of potential possibilities of reader activation. However, without considering other criteria the evaluation would be incomplete and insufficient. Nowadays, the detective story as a genre is very popular; therefore it frequently appears in texts created primarily not so much as detective stories. The composition scheme of detective stories and the emphasis on the code of enigma *id est* mystery is often preferred in texts that address readers or film-goers at most (Barthes 1997, 32–34). Not considering the artistic niveau of the text (film), we may list some concrete examples:

Umberto Eco: *The Name of the Rose*

Patrik Süskind: *Perfume*

Dan Brown: *The Da Vinci Code*

Dušan Mitana: *Koniec hry* [*The End of Game*]

The thematic level of the text owns a special place. Even the theme choice might raise interest in the text or have an archaic attribute (Miko 1978, 93-94). The theme about mafia turns out to be topical, for example the trilogy *Rivers of Babylon* by the Slovak author Peter Pišťanek. Finally, enhanced storytelling, intense representation of action and interaction motives in the story are required from the text. Problems of minorities presented in literature may also have an activating function (the novel by Pavol Rankov *It Happened on September the First (or Whenever)*, the book by Lan Pham Thi *Bílej kůň, žlutěj drák* [*White horse, yellow dragon*], the book by the Hungarian author Pál Závada *Jadviga párnája* [*Jadviga's pillow*]).

It may be said that epic narratives are having their renaissance so the story itself is an activating agent (Volek 2008, 27). A story with a crime plot or autobiographies emphasizing events, story peripeties (the novel by Bernhard Schlink *The Reader* or the short story by Lorenzo Silva *La flaqueza del bolchevique* [*Bolshevik's weakness*]) ensures success with the reader. Communication theory of the text enables us to uncover the mentioned features and peculiarities of a work of art.

Communication poetics is based on respecting particularities of literary works as specific kinds of texts. On behalf of thematic and compositional integration of the artwork, the artist forms and transforms reality according to certain criteria, respectively creates a peculiar reality existing exclusively in the text (story, fictive world, imaginary events). In the short story *The Other* for example the 70-year-old Borges meets himself as a young man. On the one hand it is a specific Borges-like time travel; on the other hand the matter is to create a double-ganger through which the writer questions the uniqueness of the character. In this short story Borges eliminates the border between dreams and reality – one of the protagonists experiences the meeting in his dreams while the other is awake.

Activating of the recipient emanates from the requirements of today's communication and may be examined at all levels of the text. Communication theory of the

text enables us to uncover the mentioned features and peculiarities of the artwork. A complex research of literature is at the same time a reliable guarantee that assessment criteria are not influenced by market economy often negating specific signs and function of literary artworks. Therefore, original artistic work can never entirely conform to market patterns because later – like it or not – it slips into banalities and becomes a supporter of undesirable tendencies and phenomena. The artistic image is constituted and created by specific processes and means included in communication poetics.

In this form, communication poetics explains and interprets mainly the literary text and its disparate relations to other systems associated with verbal art (on the one hand it is a system of other kinds of art, on the other hand it is science, journalism etc. as a collection of factual texts). The reader's literary-historical knowledge is complemented by the development of lyric, epic and drama texts (genres), literary criticism is at the same time discussed on the basis of the principle of intertextual linkage to the primary text (pretext).

Literature does not exist in isolation; it links to different systems of social communication. However, within its framework there are two special subsystems. On the one hand these are texts with aesthetic function, on the other hand these are written memories of the mankind serving to preserve factual information that supplements current creations of scientific, publicist, administrative, legal and other focuses. There is a fluent transition between factual and artistic literature, actually there have always been certain genres emerging on the frontier. Although, the genres of this kind indeed came of the facts and plausible data, by their many features they evoked artistic literature (subjectivity, experience-like narrativity, having a story, using tropes and figures, elements of fiction etc.). At present, they have expanded by some new genres from journalism (reportage, short essay or feuilleton, gloss, feature etc.), that cannot be left out from discussing communication poetics because by certain features they incline toward artistic style (Jedličková 2006, 148). The genres of factual literature with expressive artistic features have their strong position also in our digest.

Consequently, literature links to so-called non-literary texts and genres (to journalism, science etc., respectively to their genres – feature, gloss, reportage, feuilleton, essay, article etc.). However, it would not be enough. Today one has to take utmost account of the relation of literature to other kinds of art. Since we live in an era of panvisualism even the literature itself is visualised. There are two possibilities:

a/ In literature, visual elements emerge in a larger extent (photographs, drawings, graphically organized text and all that). Calligrams (graphic poem) as well as texts where for example photographs play a primary function (Pavel Vilikovský: *Silberputzen. Leštenie starého striebra*. 2006) may exemplify this phenomenon. Even in the case of Vilikovský, the text was created on the basis of photographs: photographs needed to be supplied by stories from the time of Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, from those times which are the most accurately characterized by photographs (picture no. 1 and picture no. 2).



...and this (Mizzi) prescribes the appropriate mode only, while in a rich culture,
it is by its high regards of nature as is shown.

Picture no. 1



Picture no. 2

b/ The story may be expressed primarily by drawings, the verbal text only helps to understand the pictures. The artwork of the Iranian author Marjane Satrapi *Persepolis* (in Czech in 2006) is an example of this phenomenon. *Persepolis* is the first Iranian comics of all times; however, it was written and drawn in Paris. At the same time it is another contribution to the treasury of the more and more popular autobiographic comics: after Thompson's opus *Blankets* and *Epileptic* by David B., Marjane Satrapi has „drawn” her own life. But hers is much more exotic: it depicts childhood and adolescence in Iran during the Islamic revolution and war against Iraq (picture no. 3).



Picture no. 3

And as this is a story about a strong and self-asserting personality who lives in a rigid ideological regime not accepting different opinions, it is naturally a story of mutiny and freedom. Through the exotic subject matter Czech and Slovak senior readers who experienced the pre-November regime will find many things that are confidentially familiar.

Lately, the relation between literature and film, id est. the issue of film adaptations of literary works has shown as a special circle of questions. As the film has always been dependent on literature, its genres – apart from some exceptions – are formed according to literary patterns. For example the road-movie is an exception (Svěrák's *The Ride*) and maybe some other genres. However, it does not contradict the fact that poetics created on the basis of literature cannot be transferred and applied with some adjustments also into film art. Naturally, the point above all is about dramatic and epic genres, although lyrical poetry may indeed partake in the making of film structure, its genres are not lent for film art (sooner its means of expression). These genres are as follows:

Action and adventure film (Harry Potter)

Drama (Kawasaki's Rose, Sophie's Choice, Somewhere in Europe, The Reader)

Comedy (Some like It Hot, Three Men in a Boat, The Fireman's Ball, My Sweet Little Village)

Historical film (War and Peace, Danton, Alexander Nevskij)

Crime film (films according to Agatha Christie's texts)

Horror (The Birds, Dracula, Frankenstein)

Musical (Jesus Christ Superstar, Na skle maľované [Drawn on the Glass], István, a király [Stephen, the King])

Science fiction film (From the Earth to the Moon, Avatar)

War film (Death is Called Engelchen, The Cranes are Flying, All Quiet on the Western Front)

Western (Lemonade Joe)

A special type of text is the novel *The Reader* and its film adaptation of the same name. Since it is a gripping tale, it was fairly easy to transcribe into a film. Occurrence of thematic categories in the novel:

Environment: a town at the post-war time (the flat of a middle aged woman, tramway, the town and family of the adolescent); court room, Faculty of Law and its students; the flat of the lawyer, the former lover of the imprisoned woman, his study room.

Time: first part – post war years; second part – the sixties (compensating with the Fascistic past); third part – the eighties (releasing the imprisoned from prison, her suicide).

Characters: Michael Berg (15-year-old) and Hanna Schmitz (37-year-old) – love, erotic scenes. Maturing of M. Berg: 15 – 23 – 41 (age). Berg's family, university professor, schoolmates.

Conflict: crimes of Hanna in the concentration camp, her relationship to the adolescent and her mysterious runaway to Hamburg (1st part); the student of the Faculty of Law M. Berg is doing practical work experience where Hanna is tried for her crimes committed in the concentration camp, her life sentence (2nd part); helping Hanna during her imprisonment, cassettes with audio texts of belles-lettres literature, the illiterate woman listens and learns to read, an opportunity for her to be released after 18 years, but before that she commits suicide in the prison (third part).

SHIFTS in the film in comparison with the novel:*Addition:*

Quarrel among the students in the auditorium;
The end – M. Berg visits H. Schmitz's grave with his daughter

Elimination:

A bike trip in the vicinity;
Thoughts on sin/innocence

Substitution:

In the novel, M. Berg shares the secret with his father, in the film with his professor.

Theme:

First part: starts in 1958 – a love affair of a 15-year-old boy with a mature, 37-year-old Hanna (Kate Winslet); Hanna's sudden disappearance;

Second part: in 1966 Michael Berg a law student recognises Hanna among the accused in the courthouse (former guard in a concentration camp), who is sentenced to life imprisonment; rationality vs. feelings; university in Heidelberg; Prof. Rohl's seminar;

Third part: lawyer M. Berg lives in Berlin and is sending tapes into the jail (recorded audio texts of literary works into Hanna's prison), the woman is illiterate and learns how to read in prison; before her release, she commits suicide.

Genre: Drama, thriller, romantic, military.

Director: Stephen Daldry

Stars: Kate Winslet, Ralph Fiennes, David Kross, Lena Olin, Bruno Ganz, Alexandra Maria Lara, Matthias Habich, Susanne Lothar

Cinematography: Chris Menges; Roger Deakins

Screenplay: David Hare

Music: Nico Muhly

Country of origin: United States, Germany

Release date: December, 2008

Running time: 123 min

In the conclusion we should resume the function of communication poetics and its realizations in practice. At present, the gravity centre of communication is shifting on the recipient (reader, spectator), within the frame of AUTHOR – TEXT – RECIPIENT communication scheme, the account in a larger extent is taken of recipient. In the era of modernism and avant-garde, authors adjusted themselves to the reader lesser than nowadays, it was rather the reader (recipient) who had to make certain efforts to capture, understand and work up the artistic text properly. Today we can observe certain courting to and being accommodating toward the reader (recipient), and making up structures that are less demanding on reception. For this reason, the author more often tends towards structures, genres, and themes that have already been tried out and there is a huge demand for them on the book market. An example may be a genre structure of a detective or crime story which also might be filled with

aesthetic and artistically valuable content, of which the success of Schlink's novel *The Reader* as well as its film transcription may bear evidence. Since at present we may speak about panvisualisation of art on the whole it is only natural that there are comics with artistic value. Finally, significant works are transformed into film artefacts regularly many of which compared to the original artwork lose their artistic quality (U. Eco: *The Name of the Rose*), but sometimes we can witness an opposite result – film form features a higher artistic quality than its epic original: from the aesthetic viewpoint the film by Miloš Forman *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is on a much higher level than its pretext (Ken Kesey's novel with the same title). Consequently, communication poetics might be partly applied on film id est. properly utilized for research and interpretations of concrete artefacts of film art.

PRIMARY SOURCES

- BORGES, Luis Jorge: *Rozhovory mrtvych* (Výber z poviedkovej tvorby). Transl. Vladimír Oleríny. Bratislava: Slovart, 2000. 323 p.
- ECO, Umberto: *Meno ruže*. Transl. Adriana Ferenčíková. Bratislava: Tatran, 1991. 524 p.
- LAN PHAM THI: *Bílejší kůň, žlutější drak*. Praha: Knižní klub, 2009. 138 p.
- MITANA, Dušan: *Koniec hry*. Bratislava: Smena, 1984. 303 p.
- PIŠŤANEK, Peter: *Rivers of Babylon*. Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Archa, 1991. 286 p.
- RANKOV, Pavol: *Stalo sa prvého septembra (alebo niekedy inokedy)*. Bratislava: Kalligram, 2008. 328 p.
- SATRAPIOÁ, Marjane: *Persepolis*. Transl. Richard Podaný. Praha: Nakladatelství BB/Art, 2006.
- SCHLINK, Bernhard: *Předčítač*. Transl. Ladislav Šimon. Bratislava: Slovart, 2006. 174 p.
- SILVA, Lorenzo: *Bolševikova slabina*. Transl. Eva Blinková Pelánová. Praha: Garamond, 2009. 163 p.
- SÜSKIND, Patrick: *Parfum*. Transl. Viera Juričková. Bratislava: Tatran, 1987. 203 p.
- VILIKOVSKÝ, Pavel: *Silberputzen. Leštenie starého striebra*. Bratislava: Albert Marenčin Vydavateľstvo PT, 2005. 104 p.

LITERATURE

- BARTHES, Roland: *S/Z*. Budapest, Osiris Kiadó 1997. 316 p.
- JEDLIČKOVÁ, Alice: *Mají strukturalismus a poststrukturalismus společný předmět?* In: Sládek, Ondřej (ed.): *Český strukturalismus a poststrukturalismus*. Sborník z kolokvia pořádaného k připomenutí třicátého výročí umrtí Jana Mukařovského (1891–1975). Brno: Host 2006, pp. 141–151. 244 p.
- MIKO, František: *Estetická komunikácia*. In: Miko, František – Popovič, Anton: *Tvorba a recepcia*. Bratislava: Tatran 1978, pp. 13–236.
- VOLEK, Emil: *Narativ, mýtus, historie a jiné f(r)ikce: modelování příběhu po strukturalismu*. In: Jedličková, Alice – Sládek, Ondřej (eds.): *Vyprávění v kontextu*. Praha: Ústav pro českou literaturu AV ČR, v. v. i. 2008. 267 p.
- ŽILKA, Tibor: *Vademecum poetiky*. Nitra: Univerzita Konštantína Filozofa v Nitre, Filozofická fakulta, Ústav literárnej a umeleckej komunikácie, 2006. 437 p.

KOMUNIKAČNÁ POETIKA

Communication Poetics. Communication Theory. Genre.

Keďže literatúra je špecifickým druhom komunikácie, zrodila sa komunikačná poetika pod vplyvom teórie komunikácie, teórie textu, semiotiky a štylistiky. Komunikačná poetika je založená na rešpektovaní špecifickosti literárnych diel ako osobitného druhu textov. Stratégia autora získať príjemcu sa začína už výberom témy, ale aj žánru. Sám žáner môže plniť nielen informačnú, ale aj aktivizujúcu funkciu: v „predstihu“ môže mať za úlohu mobilizovať k činnosti, čiže k prečítaniu textu, alebo vzbudiť záujem o text. Túto stratégiu (zámer) v rámci komunikačného plánu využíva nemálo autorov. Aktivizujúce prvky literárneho textu majú bezprostredný vplyv na väčší komunikačný dosah (efekt) umeleckého diela. Aktivizácia vychádza z potrieb súčasnej komunikácie a dá sa skúmať na všetkých úrovniach textu

*Prof. PhDr. Tibor Žilka, DrSc.
Ústav stredoeurópskych jazykov a kultúr
Fakulta stredoeurópskych štúdií
Dražovská 4
949 74 Nitra
tzilka@ukf.sk*