

HARALD FRICKE

Response: Theses on Literary Theory

(1) The mannerism ›I'm doing theory‹, popular especially in fashionable circles of American and globalized post-structuralism, has little to do with scientifically sound literary theory: the latter assumes a commitment to clarifying basic terms, employing logically coherent argumentation, and critically testing any hypothetically formulated generalizations.

(2) There can be no turning back for literary theory from the achievement of analytic philosophy and its *linguistic turn*, the effect of which was to make those seeking to construct theories on the basis of rational argument engage in critical analysis of the language they use.

(3) There have been several attempts to create a *rule-based model* of literature (with terms such as the ›grammar of poetry‹, the ›sign system of literature‹, ›poetic conventions‹, and ›poetic competence‹). Various such efforts have been dominant at one time or another; they have also been optimistically put forward in the context of linguistic poetics with an analytic/critical orientation, semiotics, and literary theory aligned with structuralism or systems theory. All such efforts, however, have failed. And they are condemned to lasting failure for compelling reasons: Any literary rule can always be individually lifted and is to this extent merely a *quasi-norm* with text-internal status or limited scope in the context of literary history.

(4) Only with a *deviation-based model* of poetics is it possible to generalize successfully about literature as an art form. In such a model, literary texts, text events, and textual strategies are described as *violations* of otherwise binding rules of language, communication, semiotics, linguistic structure, and systems of social action (as cases of *exallaxai*, *priem ostranenija* as alienation, desautomatization, *actualisače*, foregrounding, *écart/Abweichung* as functional deviation). Central importance then lies with the resultant poetic blanks (Frege's *Leerstellen*), points of indeterminacy (Ingarden's *Unbestimmtheitsstellen*), or openness (Eco's *Opera aperta*), and their fundamental appellative function (Bühler) or *Appellstruktur* (Iser) with respect to the ›creative reader‹ participating individually in the making of the work.

(5) It will certainly be possible to say this in an infinite variety of different and perhaps better ways in future. But as far as the heart of the matter is concerned, we will not be able to do substantively better than the two central te-

nets of an aesthetics of deviation and its rational reconstruction in stages (see Fricke 1981, 2000):

- *Literature is functional deviation from linguistic norms.*
- *Art is freedom from the law of time.*

(6) So, we should not expect literary theory to yield anything fundamentally new in its own field: we will continue paraphrasing Aristotle's basic insights. I can see only one possibility for moving beyond what has long since been known: interdisciplinary engagement with the advancement of knowledge in other disciplines, at present above all a new field that has emerged only recently and consists of the philosophy of mind, psychological cognitivism, the affective sciences, cognitive linguistics, and neurological brain research – a *cognitive turn* to follow the linguistic one.

(7) If I were a young scholar starting my career now, I would probably embrace this transdisciplinary field and set myself the aim of developing literary theory into a *cognitive poetics*.

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References

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