

# INTERNATIONAL LEXICON OF AESTHETICS

Spring 2019 Edition, ISSN 2611-5166, ISBN 9788857559926, DOI 10.7413/18258630056

## PHILOSOPHY OF LITERATURE

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(First published May 31, 2019)

It. *Filosofia della letteratura*; Fr. *Philosophie de la littérature*; Germ. *Philosophie der Literatur*; Span. *Filosofía de la literatura*. Even if the relationship between philosophy and literature seems to be as old as philosophy itself, the definition of philosophy of literature as a field of investigation, which focuses on specific problems and presents a relative methodological unity, is a recent phenomenon. As much as its theoretical antecedents can be found at least in the work of Benedetto Croce and Roman Ingarden (Chen 2017), or, even earlier, in Aristotle and in Hegel (Smadja 2009), except for sporadic appearances (Gallagher 1967), the term “philosophy of literature” only started spreading in the 1980s in the English-language philosophical debate and in the analytical tradition (Danto 1984) based on the application of language analysis to the fictional discourse (Searle 1975). Therefore, this entry will only report the trends, in the contemporary debate, of what openly qualifies as philosophy of literature. In this regard, philosophy of literature aims at reflecting in a systematic way on the status of literary work.

### PHILOSOPHY IN, AS, OF LITERATURE

As established by authoritative contributions, both older and recent (by way of example, see at least Danto 1984; Smadja 2009; Hagberg, Jost 2010; Verene 2018), outlining the specificity of philosophy of literature within the inexhaustible scope of the relationship between philosophy and literature means at least distinguishing it from philosophy *in* literature and from philosophy *as* literature.

The research field of philosophy as literature insists on the fact that also discursiveness and philosophical exposition constitute a specific genre, or multiple genres, within literature. In this sense, the object of investigation is philosophy as a practice of writing (on these aspects see Gentili 2002; Thouard 2007; D’Angelo 2012).

The distinction between philosophy of literature and philosophy in literature is more subtle, since their greater or lesser proximity depends on the way in which the genitive "of" is understood, whether in a subjective or in an objective sense. In order to enhance the meaning of philosophy *in* literature, in fact, the genitive must be understood in a subjective sense, as a literature's philosophy. In this case, the philosophical aspect is understood as something that, though in a relatively explicit way, belongs to the literary text and is internal to it. In the case of philosophy of literature proper, however, the genitive is to be understood to be objective. Literature, in this sense, is at least *prima facie* the object of philosophical inquiry, which intends to define the status of literature.

In the case of philosophy in literature and philosophy as literature, it is the research field itself that presupposes, with varying degrees of openness, a substantial contiguity between the literary aspect and the philosophical aspect. The case of philosophy of literature, where the second is the topic of investigation of the first, seems to rely on the assumption of a relative autonomy between the subject (philosophy) and the object (literature) of the investigation. In other words, this also means that the point of view of philosophy of literature tends to take literature as an object of investigation like any other, becoming an instance of the tendency of contemporary philosophy to apply itself to specific objects of investigation in terms of a philosophy of x (Barbero 2015).

#### TOPICS OF ANALYTICAL OF LITERATURE

Judging from the amount of recent publications, including readers, textbooks, handbooks, and companions, it seems that philosophy of literature is about to become a self-standing philosophical discipline in the analytical field. Analytical philosophers have been developing philosophy of literature as a branch of philosophy of art (Lamarque 2009), dedicated to defining the "literariness" of all that is considered literature, regardless of the genres. Specifically, the analysis of literary works and their status focuses on the analysis of literary works as a set of propositions (Phillips, 1999).

1) As for this set of propositions, a main theme is the relationship between the literary aspect and fiction. Beside Lamarque and Olsen (1994), according to whom there is a logical distinction between literariness and fiction, Currie (1990) offers a systematic theory of fiction, while Matravers (2014) highlights a gradual distinction between fiction and non-fiction. The analysis of the relationship between literature and fiction leads to the question of the relationship between literature and truth. On the one side, some believe that, instead of talking about truth, we should talk about make-believe as a mimetic value (Walton 1990). On the other side, there are no-truth thinkers, for whom truth fades in importance when talking of literary works.

2) Fiction is also linked to a paradox (the paradox of fiction, also known as the paradox of tragedy), i.e. the question of whether and how the experience of reading produces authentic emotional engagement (Radford, Weston 1975). On this topic, the main lines of the debate focus on two hypotheses, namely whether the emotions produced by the literature are identical to those elicited in real life or whether they are relatively different. It is also necessary to recall here the non-analytical spin-off of the discussion on the

topic, which focuses on literature, understood as the privileged point of view to highlight the cognitive value of emotions. This approach makes reflection on literature close to moral philosophy, with respect to which see the works of Nussbaum (1990) and Robinson (2005).

3) A third, more general theme is that of the cognitive value of literature. This is the idea according to which literature can enrich us on a cognitive level – in other words we learn from literature many of the things we know, also about the extra-linguistic world. Although the insistence on this aspect as a symptom of literary value also refers to a humanistic conception of literature (Lamarque, Olsen 1994), in the analytical philosophy of literature the consensus on the cognitive value of literature, though problematic, is almost unanimous.

#### PHILOSOPHY OR PHILOSOPHIES OF LITERATURE?

This section contains the critiques that have emerged from the debate on philosophy of literature, above all in the analytical area. In the first place, there is the problem that the field of literature would not be valued in itself, but only, according to Mikkonen, as a test case for theories of meaning (in Selleri, Gaydon 2016) or, as observes Huemer (2017) for the theory of fiction. Secondly, and consequently, the attitude linked to an instance of ahistorical objectivity would tend to erase the diversity of meanings that the concept of literature has acquired over time, and the irreducibility of the literary object as such. From this point of view, against a generic philosophy of literature, it has been noted that it would be appropriate to rather pay attention to a philosophy of different literary genres (Laidli 2015), which would also mean recognizing the relative peculiarity of a philosophy of the novel (Descombes 1987). In other words, philosophers' striving for universality seems to make it difficult to sustain the attempt to elaborate a philosophy of literature, even if, in the humanistic sense, this investigation were aimed at promoting the cognitive value of literature or the relevance of the experience of reading to the theme of moral agency.

With regard to the critical issues that have emerged within the analytical tradition, the approach of the chapter dedicated to the analytical philosophy of literature in Carroll and Gibson (2016) seems particularly instructive. Instead of addressing the analytical philosophy of literature as if it were a given domain, Boyce's contribution focuses on the relationship between the way in which analytic philosophy, in Frege and Carnap, conceived of itself and of its argumentative methodology precisely in opposition to literary discursiveness; the relationship between literature and the tradition of analytic philosophy is made constitutive by this comparison. This critical approach, in fact, referring philosophy to the "open-ended process with which it began" (in Carroll, Gibson 2016: 62), seems to expose the scope of investigation relating to philosophy of literature not only to plurality (philosophies of literature as opposed to philosophy of literature), but also to the opportunity to review the objective nature of the genitive.

What's more, as noted by Shusterman (in Hagberg, Jost 2010), the proximity between philosophy and literature in terms of a philosophy as literature prevents us from reducing the "of" of the philosophy of literature to a mere objective genitive, weakening the distinction between philosophy *of* literature and philosophy *as* literature. If philosophy is itself a form of literature, is it really possible to make literary

works an object of research whatsoever, equal to any other, in philosophical inquiry? This problematic circumstance therefore opens the domain of a philosophy of literature to multiple traditions. On the one hand, whereas the philosophical reflection on literature tends to include a philosophical self-reflection, the presentation of the field of research of philosophy of literature tends to involve a historical-philosophical aspect. This happens both in Hagberg and Jost (2010), where a section is dedicated to the relationship between philosophy and tragedy, and, in a more systematic way, in Carroll and Gibson (2016), where a section is dedicated to the historical foundations of the theme in the philosophy of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when the term had not yet been coined.

On the other hand, as Shusterman observes, given that the debate focuses on the constitutive intimacy of the relationship between philosophy and literature, a “disconcerting circularity” opens up (in Hagberg, Jost 2010: 7) which one might not hesitate to define, technically, a hermeneutical circularity. From this point of view, a discipline that finds particular fortune in the analytic tradition, ends up evoking precisely a main category of hermeneutics. At this point, albeit to the advantage of a speculative problematicity, it is evident that the previous domain of “philosophy of literature” would risk widening out of proportion.

If this entry has not mentioned some classics of continental philosophy that, starting from the relationship between philosophy and literature, could certainly make a significant contribution to the problem we are dealing with, it is to insist on the inevitability of the contemporary debate concerning what is openly defined as a philosophy of literature. It is the debate within the analytic philosophy of literature, in fact, that seems to make philosophy of literature, by again delimiting its domain, a privileged environment to rethink new meeting points between the analytical and the non-analytical settings of the philosophical approach to the theme. Finally, therefore, it is worth mentioning the most recent monographic publication on the topic (Verene 2018), which, under the title of “The Philosophy of Literature” and addressing the literature on the distinction between philosophy of, in and as literature, conjugates the problem of the relationship between philosophy and literature not only bearing in mind the hermeneutic character, but also the dialectical aspect of this relationship.

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HOW TO QUOTE THIS ENTRY

E. Caramelli, *Philosophy of Literature*, "International Lexicon of Aesthetics", Spring 2019 Edition, URL = <https://lexicon.mimesisjournals.com/archive/2019/spring/PhilosophyOfLiterature.pdf>, DOI: 10.7413/18258630056.

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E. Caramelli, *Philosophy of Literature*, "International Lexicon of Aesthetics", Vol. 2, Milano, Mimesis, 2019.