CHAPTER 17

FIVE TYPES OF SCHEMATIC ICONICITY
IN THE LITERARY TEXT
– An Extension of the Ingardenian Viewpoint

When the universe of discourse relates to a common experience, but this experience is of something imaginary, as when we discuss the world of Shakespeare’s creation in the play of Hamlet, we find individual distinction existing so far as the work of imagination has carried it, while beyond that point there is vagueness and generality.

Peirce ‘Multitude and Number’, 1897, 4.172

We have have already encountered Husserl’s theory of fictionality (defined by the ‘quasi’ attitude) as well as his gradual realization that fictions and pictures possess an ideal quality – to the extent that none of them are fully determinate and thus necessarily contain Unbestimmtheiten. These observations form the point of departure for his famous pupil Roman Ingarden who is well-known for being the phenomenologist who earliest and most thoroughly worked out the foundations of a phenomenological aesthetics in general and a phenomenological theory of the literary work in particular. What is less well known is that at the same time as Ingarden developed these possibilities within Husserlian phenomenology, he undertook this enormous work in order to correct what he conceived as a fallacy in the heart of phenomenology, namely Husserl’s transcendental turn towards transcendental idealism. Ingarden saw little difference between Husserl’s understanding of fictitious objects after the ‘quasi’-mode on the one hand, and the reformulation of his theory in Ideen where the object pole of phenomenological acts under the concept of noema was made a consciousness-immanent entity, on the other. So transcendental idealism, in Ingarden’s account, treated the whole world as a fiction. The initial impetus for Ingarden’s obsession with phenomenological aesthetics was thus to develop it to an extent where the crucial difference between real and fictive objects became evident. Thus, Ingarden’s aesthetics, beginning with his chef-d’œuvre Das literarische Kunstwerk (1931) and continuing with Vom Erkennen des literarischen Kunstwerks (1938, 1966) and numerous other aesthetic investigations, has a double aim: one, of course, is to found an aesthetics on a phenomenological basis, the other, to provide ontological arguments for philosophical realism – such as it is finally laid out in the unfinished three-volume work Der Streit um die Existenz der Welt (1966–74).
The literary work is thus placed as non-real as opposed to ordinary reality – and this crucial idea is argued on the basis of two observations: the objects to which it refers are quasi-objects merely, referred to by quasi-judgments. And the literary work itself is non-real, albeit in another meaning of the word: it is general, schematic, and (in a certain sense) ideal. While the former of these reasons is what allows Ingarden to counter the basis of Husserl’s idealism, the latter is what forms the basis of his own theory of the literary work, a theory which is, in many respects, the direct heir to Husserl’s own theories of fictions and pictures (cf. Chap. 14).

Here, we shall discuss Ingarden’s detailed theory of the literary work with emphasis on the implications of his ideas about the schematic character of the work – or, to put in a Peircean vein, the diagrammatical character of it.

Ingarden’s account for the structure of the literary work contains, as is well known, four Schichten, four strata, levels, or layers: the level of word sounds, the level of meanings, the level of represented objectivities, and the level of schematized aspects. As is evident, the three of these levels roughly correspond to aspects of the sign which have been discussed at least since Aristotle: its expression, its content, and its reference. The fourth stratum, the level of schematized aspects is not part of average sign definitions – but stems from a phenomenologically classical idea, namely Husserl’s observation in Ideen that perceived objects may never be grasped in their totality but only through one or several out of a huge variety of possible ‘profiles’ or aspects, dependent on which point-of-views they are perceived from. The basic set of conceptual tools in Ingarden’s account is thus surprisingly general and deals with perceptual and linguistic issues not specific to literature. Thus it is no wonder that something like 90 percent of Das literarische Kunstwerk is spent on the construction of an ambitious phenomenological linguistics – the main part of whose results covers any language use whatsoever. When Ingarden talks about ‘the literary work’, it thus also includes e.g. scientific treatises, and only a minor part of Das literarische Kunstwerk is spent on outlining the specificity of the literary work of art – in Vom Erkennen he further tries to single out the precise difference between scientific texts and literary works of art. When it comes down to what distinguishes a literary work of art from any old literary work, the answer is threefold, added on top of the linguistic theory: it is the special use of schematized aspects in order to making intuitive the represented objects; it is the polyphony between the ways the four levels are articulated in the particular work – and it is the evanescent ‘metaphysical qualities’ which the work – if successful – is able to manifest: the humorous, the tragic, the merry, etc. This is not to say, however, that the pheno-linguistic doctrine he presents as its foundation is trivial, quite on the contrary. Let us run through the single levels of the construction.

The level of word sounds is probably the least problematic – even if an already classic criticism adds to it the fact that most literary works have their privileged form of existence as printed books, so that the graphic form properly ought to be included in this level. This is, however, possible without major problems. Das literarische Kunstwerk is written simultaneously with the first articulations of linguistic structuralism in Prague (which was, through Jakobson, heavily influenced by Husserl’s