CONTEXTUALIZING ANNA-TERESA TYMIENIECKA’S CONCEPT OF FABULATION

ABSTRACT

Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka’s Book three of Logos and Life is devoted to the exploration of the life-significance of literature and the fabulating creativity of the human being. Her work is to be viewed in contrast to the postmodern treatment of narrative as an ever-present factor in private or social discourse and ultimately without any essential or epistemological foundations and values.

The fabulating creativity of literature as a particular form of aesthetic involvement in the arts is specifically human: it engages the individual human being in a given historical time and culture. However, Tymieniecka eschews the underlying possibility of relativism, so strongly implied in postmodern thinking, on the grounds that the richness of life’s variables is not “random.” Instead, these variables constitute the very primeval laws of life. It is the vocation of literature to embrace these variables and, thus, to engage in philosophical investigation as well.

From formalism to postmodernism, from the interest in a variety of narrative strategies and techniques to the concept of narrative as crucial to a political discourse of power—we have witnessed a continuous reinterpretation of one of the fundamental human activities of telling stories, writing stories and critiquing stories. A contemporary field of narratology represents one of the disciplines specifically interested in the production of narratives and their existence through written, spoken and visual language in a variety of media, whether in film, graphic novels, television news, miming, etc. The traditional focus of literary studies on the rules, structures and conditions of telling a story in literary texts, folk stories or myths, as initiated by Shklovsky and Propp, is now augmented by a strong interest in telling stories and producing narratives in other fields. Whether in political science, sociology or cultural studies—we observe a shift toward analyzing the ways of grasping knowledge and conveying it through various narratives as a means of interpreting social and political control or execution of power.

Modern psychology, though no longer under Freudian sway, certainly has its share of incorporating private stories and interviews into its general body
of knowledge, particularly in its clinical component. Such acceptance of private stories on a large scale is also evident in the field of history influenced, though at times reluctantly, by a new historical push in the direction of obliterating a distinction between a document and text, any text. A postmodern approach to history accepts individual stories of average citizens and grants them an important role in constructing some larger historical narratives with unclear boundaries, negotiable by textuality and varied historical context. Whether indicated as Lyotard’s “grand narratives” or Foucault’s “episteme,” these attempts at reinterpretation of validity of historical experience, primarily in social sciences, explain all normative behavior as contextualized by ever changing historical processes or, in other words, narratives not grounded in any essential norms and values.

Lyotard’s thought, so instrumental to the poststructuralist distrust in the human being’s epistemological faculties and the human being’s role as the central subject of knowledge, stresses such non-rational elements of human existence as sensations, emotions and subconscious reflexes. According to a grand narrative of the postmodern era, an individual human being is ultimately unaware of his or her role in the production of any grand narrative, past or present.

To introduce, at this point, Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka’s Book Three of *Logos and Life*, devoted to the life-significance of literature, is a calculated effect: only in contrast to the prevailing context of the postmodern treatment of narrative as ever present factor in private or social discourse but ultimately without any essential or epistemological foundations and values, we can appreciate her work on the fabulating creativity of the human being.

“Fabulating” or “fabulation” as used by Tymieniecka should not be confused with the use of the term by Robert Scholes who incorporated it in his work *The Fabulators*, dealing with the twentieth-century novels not fitting into the traditional category of realism because of their experimentation with the fantastic, mythical or gothic, in other words, what we would call now magical realism.

In the Introduction to Book Three of *Logos and Life*, Tymieniecka talks of the fundamental role of individualizing each human life through unfolding in successive steps of that life’s inward/outward functioning. However, “The Human Condition is a set of functional virtualities which accounts for the emergence of the specific type of living beingness that is man within which the interiorization/exteriorization vectors of life assume a unique amplitude and significance” (10). The human being, then, is able to grapple with “the final metaphysical question” about the onto-poietic factors behind the individualizing progress of life and “the first elemental factors behind the establishment and subsistence of life” (10). Thus, the fabulating creativity of literature as