

Ingarden and Derrida on empty space in literature

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Abstract

This article undertakes a comparative study of Ingarden and Derrida in regards to literature. It is being shown that the former's concepts of 'spots of indeterminacy' and 'empty spots' resemble the latter's notions of 'spacing' and 'blanks'. Yet, although they both share a background in Husserlian phenomenology, it is argued that their ideas can hardly be equated to one another. Moreover, Derrida seemed to have avoided any association with Ingarden. This is due to their fundamentally different take on the literary work. Whereas Ingarden mainly considered the ontological nature of literature, Derrida took into account the broader context of the world in which literature takes place. For Ingarden, Derrida would have strayed too far from the subject matter. For Derrida, Ingarden hardly understood its complexity and only examined a small fragment of the issue: the question what makes us grasp literature as such. To Ingarden, those aspects were essential. To Derrida, they were merely objective rules.

Keywords: Ingarden, Derrida, literary text, empty spaces, essentialism

Opening Quote:

'Each book so to say contains an unwritten book and the writer must know his unwritten book through and through, because it indicates him the boundaries of the book he is writing.' She looked at me inquisitively and asked me with something desperate in her voice if I understood what she meant. [...] 'Lotte,' I asked when I already stood by the door, 'could it be that the unwritten book is really always the same book?' I cannot deny that my heart swelled with pride when she looked at me in bewilderment, jumped out of her chair and embraced me. 'Max, you're a genius,' she exclaimed exalted.

Connie Palmen (1999) – The inheritance [*De erfenis*]

1. Introduction

In the history of the phenomenological tradition, Roman Ingarden (1893-1970) can be considered as the first, and Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) as the last major philosopher to have extensively dealt with the problem of literature. Although there are remarkable parallels between their lines of thought, thus far scholars haven't been extensively discussing them. Moreover, the Husserl-inspired gentlemen themselves seemed to be unaware of each other's work, which is especially remarkable in the case of Derrida, the younger of the two. As they put forth similar research questions and, apparently without a direct influence, in part formulated resembling concepts, their relationship is more than worth investigating.

More precisely, it is striking that both focused on the (literary) phenomenon of empty space, approached by Ingarden as *Unbestimmtheitsstelle* and by Derrida as *Espacement*. Although the basic idea is well-known amongst authors of literature, illustrated by the opening quote, and applies to all texts whatsoever, little attention has been paid to the philosophical backgrounds of the matter. To this aim, this article will shed light on the respective concepts and their mutual correspondence. First, I will argue that the question of the nature of literature is at the heart of both Ingarden's and Derrida's philosophy, showing that they at least in part had similar projects, albeit with different incentives. Then, I will set out the broad lines of the aforementioned concepts their starting points led to; Derrida's 'spacing' followed by Ingarden's 'spot of indeterminacy'. Finally, I will seek common ground in these resembling notions, concluding that in the end they are neither interchangeable nor commensurable.

This is no surprise in itself, as these philosophers had quite a different agenda. The whole of Ingarden's aesthetics and thus his works on literature must be seen in the light of the polemic against his teacher Husserl (1929). The ontology one should adhere to was at stake. In sum, Ingarden defended the realist phenomenology of Husserl's *Logical Investigations* against the transcendental idealism he developed from the *Ideas* onwards. Ingarden's eidetic case study of the literary artwork was a foreplay for his own realistic ontology developed in later works, where he rejected mere objectivism and subjectivism as well as Husserl's alleged tendency to boil everything down to intentional consciousness. Regarding the work of literature or for that matter the immanent 'real world' as such, Ingarden ultimately argued that it is inappropriate and insufficient to solely treat it as a purely intentional object created by consciousness. (Limido-Heulot, 2001: 9-14)

Derrida, too, undertook a Husserlian critique of Husserl (1962), albeit arguing that the father of phenomenology should have consequently scrutinised his metaphysical presuppositions until the end. Language and time were at stake. In short, Derrida blamed Husserl for putting speech before writing, in other words for privileging the present whilst not doing justice to the non-present past or future. Without tradition or history, in a pure living present, the self could not make sense of itself or the world. If it were to talk to itself, it could not even hear itself talking because the speaker would completely coincide with the listener. According to Derrida, Husserl should have traced the structure of speech, marked by the absence of both object and subject, to the structure of writing. As the present of perception is precisely marked by the non-present, addressing this absence is crucial to grasping that lived presence. Husserl ultimately failed to take into account the alterity that divides self-identity and the otherness of the nonperceived. Derrida tackled this deficiency through the problem of writing, introducing the notions, that will be discussed, of *espacement* and *différance*, which to him are always already at work or in play. (Spivak, 1997: li-liiii; Stiegler, 2001: 241-246; cf. Derrida, 2004: 117-119)

In any case, both Ingarden and Derrida approached literature in a phenomenological fashion. For the former, this meant undertaking a descriptive (and not normative, evaluative or psychologistic) analysis of the literary work. Ingarden's goal was to understand how it is ontologically given to us and what can epistemologically be learnt from it. Considered as a perceived intentional object present in our consciousness, he put between brackets its sociocultural features in an attempt to identify its objective structure and mode of being. In other words, in applying the phenomenological method to the literary work, something Husserl had not done, Ingarden sought its essential properties, being the necessary and sufficient conditions that makes us, subjects, recognize and experience the work of literature as such a work. Derrida's phenomenological approach was much less traditional, first because he did take into account the sociocultural embeddedness of literature and how it functions therein. Yet, to examine it, he believed the "phenomenological-type language to be necessary, even if at a certain point it must yield to what, in the situation of writing or reading, and in particular literary writing and reading, puts phenomenology in crisis". (Derrida, 1992: 44-45) More precisely, semi-contrary to Ingarden but using the same Husserlian notions, he held that literarity "is not a natural essence, an intrinsic property of the text", but it still is "the correlative of an intentional relation to the text", whereby the "literary character of the text is inscribed on the side of the intentional object, in its noematic structure, [...] and not only on the subjective side of the noetic act." Phenomenologically speaking, to Derrida there is not only, as for Ingarden, a literary intentionality, but also a literary functioning. (Derrida, 1992: 44-45)

2. Similar concerns, different motives

With his book *The Literary Work of Art: An Investigation on the Borderlines of Ontology, Logic, and Theory of Literature* (1973a), written in the winter of 1927/28 und first published in German in 1931 (4th ed., 1972), Ingarden undertook an ontology of works of literature, trying to lay down the "essential anatomy" [*Wesensanatomie*] they all have in common:

"The main subject of the investigations presented here is the basic structure and the mode of existence of the literary work, and in particular of the literary work of art. Their primary purpose is to indicate its peculiar construction and to free the concept of the work from the various kinds of blurring that in the studies to date stem, on the one hand, from the still strong psychologistic tendencies and, on the other, from considerations of a general theory of art and art works." (Ingarden, 1973a: lxxi) Because: "Our knowledge about the essence of a literary work is, in fact, not only inadequate but very vague and uncertain. (...) And while [this] central question is not posed at the outset, one zealously occupies oneself with various special problems which – though interesting in themselves – do not allow a complete solution as long as one is quite unclear about the essence of the literary work." (Ingarden, 1973a: 3-4)

The young Derrida, too, posed himself questions on the ontology of literature. Back in 1957, still an advanced student, he intended to write a dissertation under Jean Hyppolite with the somewhat Ingardian title *The Ideality of the Literary Object*. His supervisor accepted the proposal, but the thesis never came into being. Still, as Derrida explained in 1980, it set the path of his intellectual pursuit:

"[T]his title was somewhat more comprehensible in 1957 in a context that was more marked by the thought of Husserl than is the case today. It was then for me a matter of bending, more or less violently,

the techniques of transcendental phenomenology to the needs of elaborating a new theory of literature, of that very peculiar type of ideal object that is the literary object, a 'bound' ideality Husserl would have said, bound in so-called natural language, a nonmathematical or nonmathematizable object[.] For I have to remind you, somewhat bluntly and simply, that my most constant interest, coming even before my philosophical interest, (...) was directed toward literature, toward that writing that is called literary. What is literature? And first of all, what is it to write? How is it that writing can disturb the very question 'what is?' and even 'what does it mean?'" [W]hen and how does an inscription become literature and what takes place when it does?" (Derrida, 2004: 116)

From a different point of view, both Ingarden and Derrida raised the question of the nature of literature. As I will specify hereafter, whereas the former thematized the literary work in order to clarify another philosophical problem, the latter started from phenomenological philosophy to also get a grasp on literature itself.

The motive of Ingarden was to tackle the problem of idealism-realism, for which he conceived the literary work as a showcase example of its complexity. (Derrida, 1972: xii-xvii) Famously, he argued that Goethe's *Faust*, for example, can neither be considered as a pure real objectivity [*reale Gegenständlichkeit*], that is a temporally finite, changeable entity. Nor as an ideal objectivity, or a temporally infinite, unchangeable entity. After all, claiming that the literary work is ideal because it is made up of never changing sentences, contradicts the realist fact that the work painstakingly came into being during a specific time frame, and thus had to be written down under creative circumstances in the first place. Note that Ingarden, in considering but immediately rejecting the idea that literary works are nothing but a plurality of experiences by the readers, refrained from taking into account that even justified connotations attributed to the sentences can change over time. For example, contemporary readers could designate the relation between old Faust and youngster Gretchen as paedophile, a word which wasn't used until modern times, and was (at least in that sense) unknown to Goethe. In any case, Ingarden, who belonged to the realist movement of phenomenology, presumed that the literary work exists independently [*seinsautonom*] (cf. Ingarden, 1929: §§6-7, 9) from our cognitive acts [*Erkenntnisakte*]. Consequently, he proposed that it ought to be considered as an "imaginational object" [*Vorstellungsgegenstand*], a sort of combinatory third way that refers to the free, arbitrary fantasy of the author. (Ingarden, 1972: 6-16) This step allowed him to further deepen the problem of idealism versus realism, which is beyond the scope of this paper.

Derrida, who problematised dichotomies as idealism-realism and philosophy-literature in the first place, would approach the literary matter in a totally different way. Instead of starting from those wrongfully uncontested distinctions, he rather had critical and linguistic concerns regarding "certain movements which have worked around the limits of our logical concepts, certain texts which make the limits of our language tremble, exposing them as divisible and questionable." (Derrida, 1984: 112) It can be said that Derrida precisely questioned the sort of commonsensical assumptions regarding ideality, reality, literality and authorship on which Ingarden, without making them explicit, constantly drew. In fact, as we shall see, Derrida's viewpoints are incompatible, perhaps even incommensurable with those of Ingarden. That said, without mentioning him, Derrida formulated concepts that strongly remind of his.

3. Derrida's *Espacement*

Unlike Ingarden, Derrida developed a subversive, indeed deconstructive way of doing philosophy, of dealing with philosophical texts. As Samuel IJsseling noted (IJsseling, 1986: 13-15), instead of declaring all kinds of hard arguments for or against certain positions, he sought to uncover how philosophers, whether deliberately or not, make use of defence mechanisms and rhetorical strategies. Derrida did this by having an eye for what is not being said and thought, for what is forgotten or plainly left out. This sort of constraints may show the problematic nature of each text, but they are not simply 'bad', as they are a necessary condition for each, by definition limited text to be a text – or a complex network of words referring to each other far beyond the boundaries of the given text itself – at all. Now, at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, inspired by the so-called 'concrete poetry' of Mallarmé and also by Saussure and Bataille, Derrida started referring to such inevitable open places in texts with notions as "spacing" [*espacement*] and "blanks" [*blancs*]. These are not only allusions to the literal white space – typographically formed by the margins, by the space between the lines, the words and the letters, et cetera – which physically surrounds any text. But also to the per definition limited information (or context) that is given in any single text. "*Spacing* (notice that this word speaks the articulation of space and time, the becoming-space of time and the becoming-time of space)", Derrida wrote (Derrida, 1997: 68; cf. Derrida, 1981b: 208; cf. Derrida, 1995: 224), "is always the unperceived, the nonpresent, and the nonconscious." For example, obvious blank spaces in a political discourse are inconvenient truths that, if articulated, would impede the message being sent. In fact, if all (counter)arguments would be formulated, there would come no end to the discourse, making it unconvincing and worthless. Or consider a novel in which the author is describing someone as 'very beautiful' without further detail, so that the reader is provided some space to fill in the picture according to his/her own standards. If the author really would thoroughly try to portray each aspect of the beauty in question, he/she could fill half a book with it, making it poor literature. Blank space is not plainly a lack, but on the contrary the necessary background of a text, as it were the fabric in which each text lies embedded. Indeed, as "spacing is not the simple negativity of a lack, but the emergence of the mark" (Derrida, 1982: 317), blank space – that is "the inexhaustible totality of the semantic valences that have any tropic affinity with it" (Derrida, 1981b: 252) – indicates the realm in which meaning is to be constituted. Without it, a text would be nonsensical, because one could not make sense of the infinite number of intertextual or contextual references and allusions it implicitly and explicitly contains. In the words of Derrida (Derrida, 1981b: 257-8):

"In the constellation of 'blanks', the place of the semic content remains practically empty: it is that of the 'blank' meaning insofar as it refers to the non-sense of spacing, the place where nothing takes place but the place. But that 'place' is everywhere; it is not a site fixed and predetermined; not only (...) because the signifying spacings continually reproduce themselves (...) but because the semic, metaphoric, or even thematic affinity between 'white' [*blanc*] and 'blank' [*blanc*] (spacing, interval, the *entre*, etc.) means that each 'white' in the series (...) is the trope of the 'empty' white space. And vice versa. The dissemination of the whites (...) produces a topological structure that circulates infinitely around itself (...)"

4. Ingarden's *Unbestimmtheitsstelle*

Remarkably, with “spots of indeterminacy” [*Unbestimmtheitsstellen*] and “empty spots” or “gaps” [*Leerstellen* or *Lücken*], Ingarden (Ingarden, 1973a: 249; cf. Ingarden, 1972: 265) in the 1930s developed notions with which he seems to be preceding Derrida. Ingarden gave the example of a story opening with someone sitting at a table. We can be sure that the represented table is indeed a table and not a chair, he argued, “but whether it is made of wood or iron, is four-legged or three-legged, etc., is left quite unsaid and therefore – this being a purely intentional object – *not determined* (...), although it must be [something].” (Ingarden, 1973a: 249) In this reasoning, he rested on his ontological distinction between immanent real objects of the material world, which are fully determined in numerous ways, and purely intentional objects represented in literary artworks constituted in our consciousness, which are only determined insofar as their properties are featured in the text. To Ingarden, our living room’s table can be known extensively, being a real object that we only have to examine as such. Whereas a novel’s table, being a purely intentional object, can only be known in so far as the author provides us details. As a result, in the finite number of words or sentences in which works of literature speak of the real world, there is an infinite number of indeterminacies of the objects portrayed (cf. Ingarden, 1973b: 50). In fact, Ingarden considered the work of art as a “*schematic formation*” [*schematisches Gebilde*] wherein those places for determination are determined. (Ingarden, 1973a: 250-1; cf. 1972: 265-6) This leads to the heart of Ingarden’s analysis of literature. As we saw, as “*imaginational object*” he ascribed the artwork solely to the artist who wrote it, who has the key for its adequate interpretation. But in order for it to become a true “*aesthetic object*” [*ästhetischen Gegenstand*], the reader must complete the work by the “*concretization*” [*Konkretisation*] of those indeterminacies that bind the text together, allowing him/her to make sense of it (Ingarden, 1973b: 223-5). Even though Ingarden tried to develop a rather ahistorical concept of the reader, this accounts for the fact that a given novel, within the margins or constraints set by the author, is read (or made concrete, or filled in) differently time and time again, although the words of its physical bearer remain the same throughout. Of course, in the four-level ground structure that Ingarden envisaged in the literary work, the words – called “*linguistic sound formations*” – are only the bottom stratum. Upon this, the second stratum of the “*meaning units*” is built which, in turn, is the necessary condition of the third stratum of the “*represented objects*”. Fourthly, that third stratum underlies the highest stratum of the “*schematized aspects*” [*schematisierten Ansichten*] (of objects represented in meaning units of linguistic formations). While spots of indeterminacy are present in all strata, Ingarden stressed that the third stratum of the represented objects, or we could say the fictional world, is the most important one, laying at the core of the literary artwork (Ingarden, 1973a: 288). In the first two layers, as stylishly as possible, the author guides the reader to these objects, whereby the fourth layer virtually makes them alive by mediating them with a touch of quasi-reality, in using, for example, sensory references (Ingarden, 1973a: 277-9). To Ingarden, stimulating imagination to concretise the key indeterminacies of the artwork ideally ought to contribute to the inducement of a valuable aesthetic experience (cf. Ingarden, 1973b: §§24-6).

Ingarden’s philosophy was soon picked up in literary scholarship. Already in 1948, it inspired René Wellek and Austin Warren while writing their *Theory of Literature*, of which Ingarden, feeling misinterpreted, was rather critical (Ingarden, 1973a: lxxix-lxxxiii). After his death in 1970, in his footsteps Wolfgang Iser famously picked up and further developed the concepts of spots of indeterminacy and concretization, embedding them in his reader-response criticism and reception

theory of the so-called Constance School (Iser, 1976; see also Warning, 1975). Now, contrary to what could have been expected, there is no hard evidence that Derrida was inspired by Ingarden, and he later stated – in a book dealing with Searle, published by the same publisher responsible for the translation of Ingarden in English – that “I do not believe I have ever spoken of [some vague] ‘indeterminacy,’ whether in regard to ‘meaning’ or anything else.” (Derrida, 1988: 148) As a scholar in the phenomenological tradition, Derrida was not unfamiliar with Ingarden, but apart from a brief mention in a footnote to his translation of Husserl (Ingarden, 1962: 8), he never explicitly dealt with him. Yet, at least on a superficial level, it is hard to ignore a certain overlap between Derrida and Ingarden. Due to the age gap, it is most likely that the latter had never heard of the former. But why did Derrida remain dead silent on Ingarden?

5. With Derrida beyond Ingarden

After all, one could argue that Derrida’s counterpart of Ingarden’s indeterminacy is not so much blank space, but still the rather related term of *différance*; which Derrida describes as “the systematic play of differences, of the traces of differences, of the *spacing* by means of which elements are related to each other”, whereby spacing is “the simultaneously active and passive – the *a* of *différance* indicates this indecision as concerns activity and passivity, that which cannot be governed by or distributed between the terms of this opposition – production of the intervals without which the ‘full’ terms would not signify, would not function.” (Derrida, 1981a: 27)

In order to draw a parallel, it must first be noted that Derrida had a very different account of text than Ingarden. Both considered *différance* and, respectively, *Unbestimmtheit*, to be at work ‘everywhere’ in a text, yet for Derrida – famously stating “*il n’y a pas de hors-texte*” – text is not limited to books (as for Ingarden and his four strata). Rather, “‘text’ implies all the structures called ‘real’, ‘economic’, ‘historical’, socio-institutional, in short: all possible referents.” (Derrida, 1988: 148) Thus, Ingarden’s view on text, not dealing with such a referential account, only covers a fraction of what Derrida considered as such. In any case, in view of the well-known word play in *différance* (the French verb *différer* both meaning ‘to defer’ and ‘to differ’), it can be said that these two meanings are actually already implied in what Ingarden called “concretization”. Let us recall his example of a story beginning with a man sitting at a table. Confronted for the first time with the referent ‘table’, the reader will not make a great deal out of it and will suffice with a rudimentary impression. Yet, as the story goes, it might turn out that the table in question is key to understanding what happens, for example because there is a scratch mark with blood next to it. Now the reader has a sudden interest in knowing the nature of the tabletop. What about, say, questions regarding that corner that was broken off, and that leg that went missing? The table that is been referred to remains the same throughout, but gradually undergoes a transformation in the mind of the reader as well. Both Ingarden and Derrida can account for this phenomenon. In brief, for the former it is a matter of the follow-up of the concretizations of the table’s infinite indeterminacies, for the latter it is an infinite play of differences that suspends our assessment of the table and that at the same time provides progressive insight in its contextual embeddedness.

Yet, Derrida unambiguously stated that *différance* has nothing to do with indeterminacy (all without dropping the name of Ingarden), but rather with undecidability:

“I say ‘undecidability’ rather than ‘indeterminacy’ because I am interested more in relations of force, in differences of force, in everything that allows, precisely, determinations in given [e.g. discursive, semantic, ethical, political] situations to be stabilized through a decision of writing (in the broad sense I give to this word, which also includes political action and experience in general). To be sure, in order for structures of undecidability to be possible (and hence structures of decisions and of responsibilities as well), there must be a certain play, *différance*, nonidentity. Not of indetermination, but of *différance* or of nonidentity with oneself in the very process of determination. *Différance* is not indeterminacy. It renders determinacy both possible and necessary. Someone might say: but if it renders determinacy possible, it is because it itself is ‘indeterminacy.’ Precisely not, since first of all it ‘is’ in *itself* nothing outside of different determinations; second, and consequently, it never comes to a full stop anywhere (...) and is neither negativity nor nothingness (as indeterminacy would be).” (Derrida, 1988: 148-149)

Let us zoom in on the final objection that “[*différance*, unlike indeterminacy] never comes to a full stop anywhere”. Elsewhere, Derrida specified this temporal aspect as “postponement by means of which intuition, perception, consummation – in a word, the relationship to the present, the reference to a present reality, to a *being* – are always *deferred*.” (Derrida, 1981a: 29, cf. 8) Here, Chojna defends Ingarden claiming that Derrida rests on a false interpretation of Husserl: “*différance* [was] originally inspired by Husserl’s insistence that constitution involves an infinite process,” but for Husserl “the world is already constituted, the meanings had already been instituted, what infinity is there can be found by the reflective consciousness that inquires into the ways the meanings were put in place”. (Chojna, 2018: 12-13) More specifically, Chojna argues that it is indeed true that constitution will take place as long as there are constituting subjects, but that “does not mean, as Derrida thought, that the constitution is plagued by an ‘endless deferral’, ‘ceaseless postponement’, not resulting in any accomplishment or endurance of objects and meaning beyond any given context.” (Chojna, 2018: 76) Chojna is surely right in that, for Derrida, meaning is always deferred, that one can never really keep up with it and always comes a step behind, too little too late. But what is Chojna’s “accomplishment or endurance of objects and meaning” supposed to mean? As I see it, the point of *différance* is precisely that each interpretation adds a new layer of meaning, which is at the same time revealing and concealing. If we accept this, *the final* constitution of *the* meaning, which is what Chojna seems to be looking for, cannot ever be reached. Remark that he himself adds that “Husserl’s analysis of constitution starts with what is already constituted, and phenomenology uncovers the ways the meanings had been instituted through different perspectives.” (Chojna, 2018: 76) Husserl did not at all exclude, but rather foresaw that analysing constitution implies constituting anew, in fact with a new perspective that, in turn, literally puts the other perspectives in perspective. (cf. Boehm, 1962) Figuratively speaking, Chojna seems to be blaming Derrida for recognizing that when an investigator is investigating the footprints in the sand, he inevitably also leaves his own marks. As with sand, meaning does not come out of the blue, the footprints shake and shift them in new constellations time and time again. Thus, Chojna’s critique of Derrida is not convincing. Moreover, he looks guilty of what is, I will argue, the ultimate reason for Derrida’s dislike of Ingarden: his essentialism.

In the works of Ingarden, there are many indications that he held an essentialist take on literature. Earlier, we saw that he considered literary artworks to be aesthetic objects that ought to provide aesthetic experiences. Also regarding the arts in general, Ingarden talked about aesthetic values that lie embedded in the artistic object, independently of the observer and waiting for a subject to actualize them. To him, these values are a matter of taste and can, as such, not be investigated seriously. (Ingarden, 1962: 247; cf. Ingarden, 1973a: §7) In attributing immutable qualities to the literary work,

Ingarden revealed his essentialism. As Van Stralen argues (Van Stralen, 2005: 86, 95), he could have put these essentialist views in perspective by considering avant-garde art, which already came to manifest itself before he started publishing. Yet, Ingarden settled for established literature. After all, as we saw in part one, he ‘merely investigated the “essence of a literary work” to tackle the phenomenological problem of idealism-realism. The question of what classifies as literature posed little trouble because literature was a given to him, available in the literary canon. By contrast, Derrida paid much attention to the experimental literature of his day and before, literature that challenged its own existence and thus inherently put on the line the question of what literature is. Even without knowing experimental literature, Ingarden could have realised that there are no fixed, timeless essential qualities in a literary work, if only because each generation and each person – with his/her specific insights, social background, spatiotemporal context – evaluates literature, or what might pass for it, with different eyes. (Paradoxically, the true definition of literature is perhaps that it always exceeds its own limits.) (cf. Palmen, 1989-1990) And even if a work is not understood as might have been intended (one can wonder in how far this is possible at all), it is precisely the fact that it can be understood in new ways that can make it art, that can make canonical literature canonical. Did Ingarden confound universalism and essentialism?

In terms of Ingarden’s teacher Husserl, Derrida considered an essentialist take on literature:

“[There] is no text which is literary *in itself*. Literarity is not a natural essence, an intrinsic property of the text. It is the correlative of an intentional relation to the text, an intentional relation which integrates in itself, as a component or an intentional layer, the more or less implicit consciousness of rules which are conventional or institutional – social, in any case. Of course, this does not mean that literarity is merely projective or subjective (...) The literary character of the text is inscribed on the side of the intentional object, in its noematic structure, one could say, and not only on the subjective side of the noetic act. There are ‘in’ the text features which call for the literary reading and recall the convention, institution, or history of literature. This *noematic* structure is included (...) in subjectivity, but a subjectivity which is non-empirical and linked to an intersubjective and transcendental community (...) [By] changing one’s attitude with regard to the text, one can always reinscribe in a literary space any statement (...) There is a literary *functioning* and a literary *intentionality*, an experience rather than an essence of literature (natural or ahistorical). The essence of literature, if we hold to this word essence, is produced as a set of objective rules in an original history of the ‘acts’ of inscription and reading.” (Derrida, 1992: 44-45)

Remarkably, Derrida did hold on to a certain essential dimension in literature, but only insofar as literary texts have aspects that trigger us to conceive them as such. Certainly, a novel somehow makes clear that it ought not to be read as a scientific paper or a pamphlet, but indeed as a literary work. Even if Derrida was not concerned with its aesthetic values, it can be said that this – the search for the nature of these ‘hints’ that flag something as literature, by which a work begs to be read in a literary fashion and not as a newspaper – is somewhat the working domain of Ingarden. But for Derrida, this was too limited, although complicated enough in itself. To understand literality, one must also question what happens *between* the book and its reader. For Ingarden this relation only goes in one direction, from the work to the actualising subject. Whereas for Derrida this goes in both directions, furthermore with the time and space in which this happens, say our lifeworld, in between. These reading acts, in turn, define the always evolving ‘institute of literature’, that is how those triggers saying ‘read me as a literary work’ are received or perceived. Ingarden would understand these triggers as essential aspects,

Derrida only as “objective rules”. (Cf. *supra*) In sum, Derrida was not excited by Ingarden’s project because his take on literature is too static to take into account what happens around it: text is also at work when it is not being read.

6. Concluding thoughts

Let us conclude our exploratory research here, with answers that raise more questions. To dig deeper into the relation between Ingarden and Derrida, a profound study of their conception of Husserl should be undertaken. The former’s *On the Motives which led Edmund Husserl to Transcendental Idealism* (Ingarden, 1975) and the latter’s *Edmund Husserl’s Origin of Geometry* (Derrida, 1962) are evident suggestions for further reading. On the problem of essence, the former’s *Essentiale Fragen. Ein Beitrag zum Problem des Wesens* (Ingarden, 1925) and the latter’s “Ousia and Grammé” in *Margins of Philosophy* (Derrida, 1982). Anyhow, little additional common ground is to be found. They might both have been scholars of Husserl, but unlike Ingarden, of course Derrida was also strongly influenced by Heidegger, Levinas, Blanchot and Bataille.

However, our comparison of Ingarden and Derrida was not undertaken only for the sake of comparison, but to shed a light on how phenomenologists view literature. At least from the less philosophical perspective of literary theory, it is remarkable that these very different philosophers both focused on empty space. Hence, it is no reprise that the concept got picked up by the Constance School, amongst others. (Warning, 1975) But remarkably, just as Derrida did not refer to the name of Ingarden, they did not mention the name of Derrida either, although they were his contemporaries. Still, as they left Ingarden’s essentialism behind, it seems that they were indeed aware of some challenges that Derrida posed. Was it Derrida who, indirectly, led the Constance School to adjust Ingarden’s thought? Without a doubt Ingarden’s contributions to the phenomenology of literature resonated more within the Constance School than with Derrida. One next step might thus be to undertake a Derridian reading of authors like Wolfgang Iser and Hans Jauß – At least if there is some space left.

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