

Phenomenological Subjectivity as an Intersection between Philosophy and Literature

Iskra Tasevska Hadji Boshkova, M.A.

*Department of Macedonian and South Slavic Literatures,
Ss. Cyril and Methodius University, Skopje, Republic of Macedonia
E-mail: iskratasevska@yahoo.com*

Abstract: *Thorough depiction of the problem of phenomenological subjectivity is a profound, and contemporary challenge. Investigations of young and late Husserl, as well as his successors (that upgraded the phenomenological project) – Martin Heidegger, Roman Ingarden, Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, etc. should provide us with a large interdisciplinary context, especially between philosophy and literary criticism. The question of subjectivity is something which contemporary epistemology cannot deny – it is dominant aspect in the domains of literary theory (author, narrator, reader), as well as in philosophical inquiries (practical, metaphysical, transcendental subject, etc.). This paper aims to reunite this concept within a wider context – the question of subjectivity is more than 19th century, modern, or postmodern product. It concerns the provisional status of subject as existential Sein, but also the possibility to consider postmodern subjectivity as its confirmation. On the one hand, in Derrida's terms, solicitation is the movement of self, destruction of totality, but on the other it is also "being" as presence in the living present, that ultimately is not available for diminution, especially because its uniformity cannot be theoretically grasped.*

Keywords: phenomenology, subjectivity, reader, author, interdisciplinary bond, intersubjectivity

1. Introduction

It is an epistemological question of great importance to observe the way subject is being displayed to the empirical speculation. The impossibility of describing one category that would comprise of the elements of the subject (in the literary work of art), and the constant reexamination of Hegelian subject-object relations makes this quest quite a difficult one.

It is the constant need for a stable and proper scientific ground that urges us to define categories of distinct order, that would explain the logical, and the intentional stratification of literary, and scientific work. Although we grasp on some elements of the subject relations, it is still quite hard to reveal the authentic nature of subjectivity as a point by which subject is being made visible.

Thorough depiction of the problem of phenomenological subjectivity is a profound and contemporary challenge. Investigations of young and late Husserl, as well as his successors (that upgraded the phenomenological project) – Martin Heidegger, Roman Ingarden, Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, etc. should provide us with a large interdisciplinary context, especially between philosophy and literary criticism.

The question of subjectivity is something which contemporary epistemology cannot deny – it is dominant aspect in the domains of literary theory (author, narrator, reader), as well as in philosophical inquiries (practical, metaphysical, transcendental subject, etc.). This paper aims to reunite this concept within a wider context – the question of subjectivity is more than 19th century, modern, or postmodern product. It concerns the provisional status of subject as existential Sein, but also the possibility to consider postmodern subjectivity as its confirmation.

Since the Hegelian term subject, grasped as an interconnection between truth and substantiality, the notion of subject has been divided into a kind of "reflection into itself as another existence".

This definition also marks the continuity, contrast, and ambiguity as a crucial aspect of subjectivity overall.

2. Analysis

Our investigation springs out from the German philosophical idealism and Hegel's reviews on Shelling, Fichte, Spinoza, etc. It is necessary to explain how subject was defined through philosophical systems, in order to arrive to a safe scientific path.

Hegel in "Phenomenology of Spirit" (and Heidegger, similarly to him) observes the creation of phenomenological subject, but first he examines the limits, and the notion of the "thing". The thing is defined through its realization, and its difference, which is a discernible boundary. This analysis underscores difference as a unique quality, important for the subject, and for the truth. Since the qualified (scientific) truth exists only in the scientific system, the concept is what matters.

Hegel observes the sequential development of subjectivity as consciousness, self-consciousness, reason, and spirit, but the initial point of this analysis is the crisis in which the spirit is found, and the worthless substantial knowledge. The first and most important premise is the following: "In my opinion, which must be acknowledge only through representation of the whole system, it is most important that the truthful thing is understood and expressed *not as a substance, but, also, as a subject.*" (Xereλ 2010, p. 28).

It is quite remarkable that Hegel rejects the notion of divine/immobile substance, revising Kant's assumptions. His point of demonstration is the "living substance", one which is "as a subject pure and simple negativity, thus representing division of the Simple, or conflicting division, which is again a negation of this indifferent diversity, and its opposition. (...) It is a reflection of itself into a different existence." (2010, p. 29). Here it can be well noticed that the concept of Otherness as a postmodern product of the humanistic sciences (Bakhtin, Kristeva, Foucault, Benvenist, postcolonial critics, etc.) has its origin in this treatise, and it demonstrates the uniqueness, and the coherence of this scientific field.

2.1. Hegel's Phenomenological Subjectivity

Hegel derives the concept of substance through the manifested opposition, and this notion takes him to the definition of individuality, and the knowledge. Individuality as a pure and direct certainty of itself paves the way for knowledge, and for the self-consciousness. Hegel determines the genesis of the science (knowledge) as a basic problem of this phenomenology. It is interesting that in Hegelian terms, the life of the spirit is unequivocally connected with the death (this shows that Heidegger is not that different from Hegel), and it gains its truthfulness only through the absolute fragmentation of the self.

Throughout this analysis, Hegel does not forget to do an epistemological turn, pointing out to the quality of scientific truth (correspondingly, historical truth as a non-discernible without the movement of the self-consciousness, and mathematic truth, whose activity is external to the result), and to connect these speculations with the existence of the being as a "withdrawal in the essence". All of these aspects give rise to the subsequent stages in the spirit's development.

What can clearly be noticed in Hegel's accounts is actually the concept of absolute subject, which is constantly defined as sameness, and difference. The point where philosophy and literature most accurately meet is the field of aesthetics, one which is highly saturated with literary and philosophical notions. The similarity between the absolute subject and the aesthetic subject can be easily observed.

Hegel's notion of consciousness derives from the perception, and from the reason, but perception is being understood as a movement of the aspects generally, where the determination of the perceived thing or the perceiving reason is insignificant (it is only a "sensorial knowledge"). On the other hand, reason embraces the objects of the consciousness, although it cannot be perceived from the self, but "only through the improved object, that manifests to the consciousness as a separate being, its constant change into a consciousness that understands." (Xereλ 2010, p. 108).

It is interesting how Hegel analyses the transformation of the consciousness into self-consciousness – its objectification is actualized through the notion as a movement of knowledge, and it is a consciousness that exists in its ambiguity. The third component is the mind, which can develop its own manifestations only through the observed things; it is a derived unity (existing reality) that understands itself only by "thinking", which is a category of changeable elements (such as body, face, etc.). Since individual is "for itself", and "by itself" real, it is also a fusion of contradictions – the creational principle, and the determined existence.

This analogy depicts the basic elements of phenomenology, whose notion of the phenomenon is connected with the visible, and this activity of the self-consciousness is actually manifestation of the invisible. The highest component in Hegel's account is the spirit, which is consciousness of the self, and the world, absolute essence present in the customs, and the moral life of the peoples. These elements of the spirit (world of education, world of faith/essence) are fused into morality, but this aspect is not just a creational element, it is also the land of freedom:

"The consciousness is absolutely free in its knowing of its freedom, and it is actually this knowledge that is its substance, and its goal, and its unique content." (Xereλ 2010, p. 138).

2.2. Heidegger's Self-Opened and Self-Closed Subjectivity

Hegel's insights can also be reexamined through the statements of his successor, Martin Heidegger (although Heidegger made significant effort to remove all the influences on his work). He made certain aesthetic analysis of the problem of the subject, seen in a relation to the artistic work and the art overall.

It is interesting how these categories are deeply interwoven, and create a certain hermeneutical circle. He is actually in search for what is the essence of the artistic work (Dinghafte), and for that reason he initiates its investigation of "the thingness". His terminology is however quite distinct, and in his search for the subject he firstly stumbles upon the nucleus of the thing, the one that is essential, and pre-given (in the Latin tradition it is named subject, and its elements are called "accidens" – traits). Artistic work, and the thing have mutual characteristics – they are sensorial: "The thing is a formed material (...) It connects with us through its look (eidos)". (XajΔerep 2006, p. 25). Having given the aspects of the form and the material, which are not creative determinations of the thingness, Heidegger sets aside this aspect, and moves to the problem of subject, and the thingness.

The way Heidegger connects the problem of the subject and product is impressive – in his analysis, the first mode of approaching the being is through its kind, and its relationship with the product. The simple product can be seen through its usefulness, and this is the main attribute that shows off its being as well:

"The being of the product, if we tend to be truthful, consists of its applicability. Yet again, this applicability is also found in the plentitude of one existential being of the product. We name this being security." (XajΔerep 2006, p. 38)

Since the artistic work is also a product (although of a different type), Heidegger affirms the product's kind as a *differentia specifica* of art as well. It is actually the position of the truth of being that reflects the dominant aspect of artistic work, and this element relates the work and its truthfulness, one of the most problematic aspects of contemporary literary criticism. If we consider realism as a thorough way of representation, then the artistic component of the work manifests itself into the reproduction of what is essential in the things (and not into the things themselves as isolated beings). This being of the thing represented in the artistic work demonstrates the status of the truth, and the subject. It is an indubitable fact that artistic truth outlives the historic time, and this argument is also applicable to the subject. Most frequently, subjectivity is merely a projection of multiplied accents and consciousnesses, which derive from the quasi-represented characters.

2.3. Ingarden's Intersubjectivity

The scholar that made the most significant impact on the interdisciplinary bonds between philosophy and literature is Roman Ingarden. Through his investigations of the literary work and its specifics, he gives way to a totally different account of subjectivity that is not only manifested in the figure of the author, character, narrator, etc. His analysis is not only interdisciplinary, but also intersemiotic, since he depicts the whole range of artistic practices (music, film, theater, etc.). His starting point is Husserl's definition of intentional acts (compared with mental acts) that are characterized with their directedness towards a given object, which is a non-existing one. Literary work of art is defined as an intersubjective intentional object, based on the author's subjective operation, and on its ontic foundation.

The meaning in the literary work of art is the aspect through which this intersubjectivity can be widely seen. If we take into account that Ingarden does not exclude Husserl's concepts of ideal objects, but gives them a certain limitation, it is understandable why he sees the text as a pure intentional object. Ingarden investigates the stratum of linguistic units (words and meanings) in order to explain why every sentence is intended, subjective formation: "Every word meaning, taken in isolation, is a self-enclosed unit of meaning. In spite of this, the vast majority of them – as our analyses have demonstrated – conceal within themselves a manifold of various elements, in particular when it is a question of a compound nominal word meaning. These elements are selected from all the possible ones by the meaning-bestowing act of consciousness, and are combined into one unite." (Ingarden 1973, p. 101)

However, one truly important conclusion regarding subjectivity can be derived from this statement – Ingarden considers all the characters, plot structures, objects in the literary work of art not as an "imaginational" objects, since they are representation of the author's subjective meaning bestowed upon them (thus they are not physical), but they are not real in a physical sense either – they are transformed through the subjective experience that happens in the process of reading and writing, and thus they cannot be evoked in the same form again. Ingarden thus tread the way of another phenomenological reduction – what does not belong to the literary work of art are the psychic states of both the author and the reader, and the so-called "realities" of the aesthetic determinations. The stratified structure of literary work and its ontic position allow this formation to be seen through its concretizations, in order to overcome the supposed subjectivity.

Working through the aspect of the life of the literary work, Ingarden positions this phenomenon in correlation with the reader and the respective culture. In his rumination, the literary work can be properly understood only if the reader isolates himself from the disturbances of the everyday life, and if he allows his imaginational acts to come into being. However, the concretization of the literary work clearly differentiates from the literary work itself, and from the reader's experiences:

“(…) the concretization of a literary work, though it is conditioned in its existence by corresponding sentences, has at the same time its second ontic basis in the literary work itself, and with respect to the experiences of apprehension, it is just as transcendent as the literary work itself. (...) Only a theorizing literary critic could hit upon the bizarre idea of looking for the literary work “in the mind” of a reader.” (Ingarden 1973, p. 336)

Ingarden’s suppositions clearly represent themselves as true – the phenomenological subjectivity is something more than the reader or the author himself, since its founding qualities are metaphysical, and this is actually Hegel’s idea of spirit as a knowledge of the self, and also of the liberation of the self. Since in Ingarden’s analysis literary work is subject of changes (through conscious mental acts), it has its own subjectivity similar to the ones that change it, but it never loses its identity:

“As a purely intentional object, the literary work of art needs not to partake in the events of the real world and be drawn into their flow. But precisely because it emerges from the execution of subjective operations and hence lies fundamentally within the range of action of psychic individuals who can effect such operations, and because, at the same time, sentences that have been created do not necessarily have to appear in the form once given to them, the literary work can undergo changes without ceasing to be the same work.” (Ingarden 1973, p. 345)

3. Discussion

So far, our analysis has shown the manners through which philosophy reflects literary criticism, especially in terms of its terminology, definitions, theorizing, etc. However, this relation is reversal, observable if we take into account the role of the stratified structure in the process of explaining the status of scientific works. Still, in this contemporary postmodern movement, one of the concepts submitted to constant undermining is actually subjectivity.

The impossibility of maintaining pure consciousness and stable whole compels Derrida to define the structure of any kind as methodologically impossible:

“Structure then can be *methodically* threatened in order to be comprehended more clearly and to reveal not only its supports but also that secret place in which it is neither construction nor ruin but lability. This operation is called (from the Latin) *soliciting*. In other words, *shaking* in a way related to the *whole* (from *sollus*, in archaic Latin “the whole”, and from *citare*, “to put in motion”).” (2006, p. 4-5)

In Derridean terms, writing is “inaugural”, and the main concept that can upgrade and dissolve the notion of subjectivity. Similarly to these statements, Roland Barthes examines the useless need to find the author in every segment of the text, when it is actually the voice of the reader (or his inner states) that takes us to the journey called reading. This can be observed in his ruminations of the status of the character into the plot:

“When identical semes traverse the same proper name several times and appear to settle upon it, a character is created. Thus, the character is a product of combinations: the combination is relatively stable (denoted by the recurrence of the semes) and more or less complex (involving more or less congruent, more or less contradictory figures); this

complexity determines the character's "personality", which is just as much a combination as the odor of a dish or the bouquet of a wine." (Barthes 1974, 67)

Throughout these statements it is clear how the attempts to diminish subjectivity in fact were not successful – even if we disintegrate the author, the reader or the work, there is still something left, usually defined by the concept of "interpretative community" (one of Fish's terms), the only segment that cannot be taken off by force. This community is represented by the local, cultural, and social determinations, which also provide the text with its significance. In fact, this kind of practice which is always (in a certain aspect) pre-given to all the cultural manifestations actually makes us wonder about the possibility of isolated significance that is not part of this semiotic process. Still, literary or whatever work it may be is always made visible most vividly through its recipients, whose founding concepts can hardly be outgrown.

4. Concluding remarks

Certain reconciliation between the phenomenological stances and the concept of deconstruction can be observed through Foucault's statements on the historic subject and the creation of the discursive field. It is interesting that Foucault begins his investigation with the problem of the author, underlining the pointless effort to circumscribe the existence of any kind of individuality into the work, and the essence of this contradictory attempt. On the one hand, we have the postmodernist "death" of the author, and on the other the constant strive to write after all – writing as a protection from the death and reenactment with the eternity.

Foucault underlines the concepts of the work (oeuvre) and the writing (écriture) as hindrances to the total deletion of the subject, as well as society demands. However, his notion of the author is modified: "The author's name is not, therefore, just a proper name like the rest (...) it performs a certain role with regard to narrative discourse, assuring a classificatory function." (1998, p. 210) Foucault again highlights the plurality of the self in a given discursive field, since the main characteristics of discourse is its applicability to be appropriated, cited, transformed, or merely enunciated. In this context he cites several passages belonging to Saint Jerome, and we can notice the way the author as individual is being replaced by its value, stylistic, historic and conceptual units. Since it is obvious that transdiscursive authors exist, the factual question of subjectivity contradicts itself:

"All discourses, whatever their status, form, value, and whatever the treatment to which they will be subjected, would then develop in the anonymity of a murmur. We would no longer hear the questions that have been rehashed for so long: Who really spoke? Is it really he and not someone else? With what authenticity or originality? (...) Instead, there would be other questions, like these: What are the modes of existence of this discourse? Where has it been used, how can it circulate, and who can appropriate it for himself? (...)" (Foucault 1998, p.222)

The extensive analysis of the problem of subjectivity has made visible the notion of the author as a point of departure to all epistemological inquiries. As Foucault clearly affirms, the extent to which the question of the author manifests itself is enormous, especially if we take into account its aesthetical possibilities. He enunciates the equal status of this phenomenon throughout various disciplines, although they differentiate in their discursive unity. If the author is the obligatory stylistic, formal, historical condition for the unity of one discourse to be obtained, then it is also a diversity through which the notion of the subject as an Other to itself is made discernible. Foucault's notions of scientific and literary discourse as a field where subject's continuity is constantly called

upon question only reproduces the inevitable restructuring/redefining of phenomenological subjectivity, and the need for its plurality and intersubjectivity.

References

- Barthes, R. (1974). *S/Z*. Trans. Richard Miller. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Burke, S. (2008). *The Death and Return of the Author*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Derrida, J. (2006). *Writing and Difference*. Trans. Alan Bass. London, New York: Routledge.
- Fish, S. (1980). *Is there a Text in This Class?* Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: Harvard University Press.
- Foucault, M. (1998). What is an Author? In: J. Faubion (ed.), *Michel Foucault: Aesthetics, method, and epistemology* (pp. 205-227). England: The New Press.
- Gadamer, H. G. (2004). *Truth and Method*. London, New York: Continuum.
- Hegel, G. W. (1977). *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Trans. A. V. Miller. Oxford, New York, Toronto, Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
- Husserl, E. (2010). *The Idea of Phenomenology*. Nederland: Kluwer Academy Publishers.
- Ingarden, R. (1973). *The Literary Work of Art*. Trans. George G. Grabowicz. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Хајдегер, М. (2006). *Грауизбликот на уметничкото дело*. Прев. Киша Б. Колбе. Скопје: Магор.
- Хегел, Г. В. Ф. (2010). *Феноменологија на духот*. Прев. Тони Науновски. Скопје: Гурѓа.