

INTRODUCTION

This book is the outcome of an encounter, a dialogue and scholarly collaboration between representatives of two academic bodies: The Department of Theory and Anthropology of Literature of the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Poland, and The International Institute for Hermeneutics, Toronto, Canada. In April 2008 we co-organized a symposium "Hermeneutics, Psychoanalysis and Literary Studies," which was held at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin. The papers presented there originated an intense and productive discussion, which went far beyond the conference itself. They are included in this volume in a significantly reworked and extended version: Andrzej Wierciński's *Hermeneutics and the Indirect Path to Understanding*, Boyd Blundell's *Paul Ricoeur's Narrative Arc*, Sean J. McGrath's *Hermeneutics and the Unconscious: The Mercurial Play of Interpretation in Phenomenology, Psychoanalysis, and Alchemy*, Edward Fiała's *The Evolution of Psychoanalytic Hermeneutics of Literary Work*, and Andrzej Bronk's *The Rationality of Belief and the Significance of Prejudgments for the Act of Interpretation*. For the purpose of this book, these papers have been complemented by four more articles: Ashley D. C. Cake, *The Insufficiency of Recollection: The Heritage of Sin and Symbol in Kierkegaard and Lacan*, Paweł Dybel, *Beauty and Transience (The Aesthetic and Historical Implications of Freud's Concept of Beauty in On Transience)*, Dariusz Skórczewski, *Towards a Better Understanding of the Self: Polish Literature in the Light of Postcolonial Theory*, and Andrzej Tyszczyk, *Interpretation, Sense and Value: On the Axiological Consequences of the Problem of Undecidability in Literary Interpretation*.

Interpreting is central to any human activity. We exist, therefore, we interpret. Interpretation as a mode of human existence also justifies the content and the arrangement of this book. The main reason why we are coming together as philosophers, psychoanalysts, and literary scholars is the shared conviction that hermeneutics is the *koine* of our age. We are confident that there is something which brings us together: the act of interpreting, and all of the questions which it raises. By bringing into discussion that which is uniquely related to our respective disciplines, we concur that our common ground, our shared value, is the understanding of the infinite character of interpretation. Being attentive to the essentially temporal and finite character of human existence, we know that every interpretation is a different interpretation because it opens up new horizons. Every interpretation happens in the life world of the interpreter and accentuates the importance of the historicity of human understanding.

The texts gathered in this volume have fused the horizons of three seemingly unrelated disciplines: philosophy, psychoanalysis and literary studies. These different vantage points and methodologies cannot be reduced to each other. Consequently, the authors in this book reflect upon diverse problems in diverse ways, yet their considerations are united by a common link, namely: the imperative to interpret and the subject of the interpretative act. What is essential is the conviction that methodology is not the formal set of rules directing the research in these respective disciplines, but the

matter which calls to be understood.

From a hermeneutic perspective, every person has a different understanding of the object due to his or her prejudgments and conditions. Presuppositions do exist and they determine our understanding of the matter. The richness of hermeneutics lies in the consciousness of the fact of preunderstanding as an indispensable condition to understanding. We always bring our prior knowledge, perspectives, goals, presuppositions, and pre-understandings to that which we interpret. The horizon into which we move, moves with us as we interpret. We are mediators in the dialectic between the prejudice prior to the encounter (the horizon we bring with us) and the new horizon which opens up before us. By fusing the different horizons we discover the hermeneutic truth: we witness the transformation in understanding which is the interpretive act. Consequently, by interpreting the world we come closer to understanding ourselves. The deciding factor in the hermeneutic understanding of the self is the understanding of the human being as finite. Therefore, the limits of any understanding of the self are not as much the limitations of language or intellect, but are rather rooted in the facticity of being-in-the-world. Hermeneutic inquiry into the nature of human being is a constant interplay of questions and answers. The situatedness of the human being in the horizon of finitude creates dynamic possibilities of opening toward transcendence. The limitations, both in the context of understanding the self and understanding the other, are not so much epistemological but ontological.

Psychoanalysis is the attempt to assist the individual in the lifelong process of adapting to the unconscious. It is not a decisive interpretation of oneself provided by the analyst but rather an invitation to discover oneself. The unconscious is not to be overcome and made into the conscious but to be understood as constant factor which needs to be reflected upon. By inscribing ourselves in words we perform analysis. We should never generalize interpretation. Rather than dealing with objective reality, which can be universalized, or typified, we always deal with a living subject. The path to the understanding of the unconscious is necessarily indirect. We do not have a direct access to the "soul." Such access is always through something else. Every attempt to understand ourselves is a dialogical experience. Even retrospection is a dialogue with oneself (*soliloquium*).

Modern literary criticism is a battlefield, where diverse and competing concepts, methodologies, languages, and even philosophies of interpretation clash. In this battle, both hermeneutics and psychoanalytical interpretation become part of the ongoing controversy within literary studies concerning the purpose, the sense and the justification of interpretation. The main contribution of literature to the understanding of the self is the testimony of the existential drama of human freedom in literature. Both individual and collective experience comes to expression in the literary testimony to responsibility toward oneself and the Other.

In the chapters that follow we engage a multiplicity of voices, representing particular horizons, always aware that no one of them can be definitive. It is not because we consider them to be somewhat defective. We are rather aware of the limits of our unique perspectives. On the one hand, such awareness may relate to and correct some threads, which have been articulated in a preceding chapter.

On the other, it expands these threads and invites other perspectives. The hermeneutic conversation, the dynamics of question and answer, brings these authors and their texts together. We believe that it also energizes the content of this book and hope that it will appeal to the readers.

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