

Teksty Drugie 2012, 2, s. 107-125

Special Issue – English Edition



Modality – Literary Studies and Cognitivism.

Włodzimierz Bolecki

Przeł. Marta Skotnicka

Włodzimierz BOLECKI

Modality – Literary Studies and Cognitivism

I. Theses

I.

In Poland, the linguistic category of modality as a problem in the context of literary studies came up – only incidentally – in the 1970's and 1980's, and only once it became more popular due to Anna Wierzbicka's semantic research regarding so called modal frames. However, even M. R. Mayenowa, in her textbook *Theoretical Poetics* (theoretical, therefore linguistic), mentions modal frames only *en passant*, and in the context of other matters than modality itself.¹ For the last two decades, there have been only two attempts to incorporate the category of modality into the field of poetics in Polish literary studies. The first one was a pioneer article by Ryszard Nycz, entitled *Literature of Modality*, in which Nycz replaced the linguistic concept of “modal frames” coined by Wierzbicka with the issue of limits placed upon literature as an institution, that is its rooting between the historical dimension of the literary

¹ Mayenowa, M.R., *Theoretical Poetics. Matters of language*, Warsaw 1974 (2nd edition). A good example might be Tzvetan Todorov's *Introduction to Poetics* (1968) in which modality is concretized to the point where a statement refers to itself. Recalling ancient differentiation between *mimesis* (speaking of words) and *diegesis* (speaking of events), Todorov claims that modality only concerns the accuracy of references within the first category and not the second one (“speaking of non-verbal events does not have modal varieties...[because] objects do not carry names that are assigned to them”). Warsaw 1984, transl. S. Ciechowicz, 45. Todorov's assumption is too narrow even in the linguistic sense and it is useless for poetics and literary studies – this I will prove further.

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system and the “residual historicity embedded in speech.”² Let me quote the final part of this original study:

when the autonomy of an artistic creation is not supported by an efficient system of literary communication, then a text’s modality cannot rely on this institution either; the modality creates conventions or becomes a problem requiring introduction of valid frames of reference – which define the boundaries of a separate territory of a work – and investigation of actual conditions under which its autonomy is possible. In this sense, modal frames revealed in a text inspecting its own identity are as problematic as a symptomatic range of the type of writing in discussion here, which – by means of insistent subjective activity tries to unify distinct orders and border areas determining its labile status: between the lost and desired form.³

However, when a few years later Nycz included this chapter in his book *Contemporary Silvae*, he not only removed modality from the chapter title, but also removed the first part of the chapter devoted to the problem of modality. He explained that the linguistic category of modality concerns only this area of modern literature that “is contented with possibilities provided by literary ways of speaking and finds in them an opportunity to directly problematize their modal components which make a particular text a statement.” Therefore, it does not cover “an important part of modern literature” which “does not match the level of literariness as defined above.”⁴ Effectively, the category of modality was not mentioned in *Contemporary Silvae* being substituted by the problem of “grammar of the context” – the concept of “silvae as deconstruction of literature.” Another proposition is a reflection of theses formulated by Janusz Sławiński, who treated modal categories as forms of communication within literary life. Firstly, in the process of drafting determinants of postwar poetry, Sławiński indicated that “poetry is not isolated in the emptiness of the monologue but exists, is born and shaped in relation with various, bigger entities...as an answer, question, announcement, allusion, negation.”⁵ Consequently, diversified relations of literary statements towards various historical contexts enable their description in the categories of immanent (textual) and situational modalities. This proposal opened a possibility of different reconstruction of “literary facts” as dialogue elements of the historical-literary process and, at the same time, a different description of particular epochs or literary movements. This description reconstructed the character of references (as if modes) between literature and its contexts but not the order of historical-literary events (works, groups, movements, discussions, etc.). Secondly, the category of modal frames was used by Sławiński to characterize interpretational statements considered as strategies in a communication game conducted by each interpreter not so much with works as with their readers. According to this concept, an interpreter of both newly written texts (debuts) and those already having their readings, locates his or her interpretation within “modal

² *Texts*, no. 2, 1980, 70

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Texts*, no.1, 1980, 112

⁵ J. Sławiński, in: M. Głowiński, J. Sławiński *Introduction in: Polish poetry of the interwar period. Anthology*, Wrocław 1987, LXXV.

frames” which differentiate the level of a given work’s innovation within the literary tradition, and as a consequence, continue or break up with the existing readings. “It would probably be possible to adequately shade and expand the list of hypothetical modal frames of the interpreter’s speech. Undoubtedly, each of them localizes an interpretational statement in literary communication in a different way. I believe, it would be right to try to develop a typology of such statements on the basis of differentiation of their modalities.”⁶

2.

Essentially, the term “modality” has two basic meanings. The first one can be encountered in philosophical works dedicated to so called modal logics deeply rooted in Aristotle’s *Prior Analytics*. It is a classification of sentences with respect to how categorically it is asserted what they assert – these are sentences described by logicians as *assertive*, *authoritative*, and *problematic*. Modality as a logical problem became particularly popular after Łukasiewicz developed many-valued logics, triggering today’s evolution of modal logic. The notion of modality, therefore, was extended beyond classical types of modal sentences referring to expression of necessity and possibility and started to embrace such categories as obligation, consent, prohibition (deontic modality), and cognitive acts such as: knowing, believing, acknowledging, understanding (epistemic modality), as well as existential modality and temporal modality (never, always, someday). Another tendency in the field of modal logics matured under the name of – following Leibniz’s wording – the philosophy of possible worlds. This investigation led to metaphysical issues (ontology), logic and logical semantics, general knowledge theory, and literature theory: e.g., fiction theory.⁷ In the 1960’s, French theorists such as C. Bremond and J. Greimas, influenced by V. Propp’s dissertation entitled *Morphology of the Folktale*, looked for a possibility to create a generative text model (plots, narrations), and suggested considering modal logic’s categories as the grounds for the new narration theory. Greimas, for instance, put forward a proposition to build narration’s grammar, and base it on such modal verbs as “can,” “know,” “want,” and “must.”⁸ The theoretical assumption here was

⁶ J. Sławiński, *Comments on interpretation in literary studies*, 2004, quoted after J. Sławiński *Theoretical-literary attempts. Selected Works*, Cracow 2000, 56-57.

⁷ See: W.G. Lycan *Meaning and Modality*, London 1994. In Poland, literary fiction about application of the theory of modal logics: A. Łebkowska *Fiction as a possibility*, Cracow 1978; *Between theories and literary fiction* Cracow 2001; G. Sinko *A scenic character and its transformations in the 20th century theatre*, Wrocław 1988, also see: G. Sinko *The crisis of language in contemporary drama. Reality Or illusion*, Wrocław 1977; A. Martuszevska *Fiction and probability*, Cracow 1992; S. Balbus *The world from all over the world. About Włstawa Szymborska*, Cracow 1996.

⁸ See: C. Bremond *La logique des possibles narratives*, “Communications” 1966 no. 8; J. Greimas *Semantique structurale*, Paris 1966; J. Greimas *Elements of structural gramamr*, transl. by Z Kruszyński, “Pamiętnik Literacki” 1984 z. 4, 177-198. The concepts of French generativists (Greimas in particular) were originallz used by

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a conviction that after specifying a limited number of basic units (agents, modi, plots, etc.), all possible ties between them could be characterized. This way modal logic was turning into the foundation of the theory of all “possible” narrations or plots. The French generativists’ concept was further developed by the Czech narration theoretician L. Doležel, who based his analyses on the assumption that modalities “are abstract semantic notions which could be established and examined independently of their narrative modalities’ manifestation.”⁹ The most appealing definition formulated by Doležel concerned the contradiction between modality in a sense of modal logics and linguistic, statement modality he called “anthropological” modality. “Notions related with modality should be differentiated from anthropological ones [which] are used to express human skills, emotions, desires, hopes, etc.,” however, he added, anthropological and modal notions are linked with each other: for instance, the former are manifestations of the latter [i.e., logical modalities] (ibid.). The theory of modal logics (modal narrative categories) was, according to generativists’ assumptions, opposed to “imprecise anthropological language used in critical interpretations.”¹⁰ The generative theory of narration, directed against the impressionism or subjectivism of interpreters, revealed anthropological ambitions, but in a different sense. According to Doležel, the importance of modal logic for narration theory lied in the fact that modal systems (based on such modalizers as consent, prohibition, and obligation) were connected with human behavior because “all modal systems can be understood as restraints to which human activities are subdued.”¹¹

Secondly, modality belongs to the standard linguistic nomenclature and, as it has a wider range than the term “mode” (modus), it has appeared in linguistic papers for a while meaning “a subjective attitude of the speaker towards the content of his or her statement (uncertainty, doubt, supposition).”¹² From the linguistic perspective, therefore, modality is a part of the communication process responsible for expressing feelings and attitudes of speakers. Although linguists formulate various definitions of modality and its criteria, it might be schematically ascertained that research on modality concerns the relation between a statement’s content and the reality, as well as the attitude of the speaker to the subject of his or her statement. Currently, linguistic studies of modality are a full-blown branch of general, historical, and

M. Nowotna in her work *Sujet et son identite. Dans le discours litteraire polonais contemporain. Analyse Semio-Linguistique*, Cracow- Paris 1993 to examine contemporary poetry.

⁹ L. Doležel *Semantics of Narration*, transl. by B.M. Fedewicz, “Pamiętnik Literacki” 1985 z. 2, 303, see: L. Doležel *Narrative Modes in Czech Literature*, Toronto 1978; *Narrative Modalities* in: Trevor Eaton *Essays in Literary Semantics*, Heidelberg 1978, 93-102.

¹⁰ Ibid., 310. Similarly, T. Eaton in: *Literary Semantics: Modality and “Style,”* ibid., 28-47.

¹¹ Ibid., 303.

¹² Z. Gojał, A. Heinz, K. Polański *Glossary of linguistic terminology*, Warsaw 1968, 351; ct. Encyclopedia of the Polish Language, ed. S. Urbańczyka, Wrocław 1974.

comparative linguistics. It comprises dozens of works analyzing modal constructions in almost every language in the world. The core questions of those analyses concern grammatical, syntactic, lexical and stylistic exponents of modality (formal modalizers). Another question concerns informal modalizers, i.e. non-grammatical or even non-linguistic factors, which affect so called modalization of statements. “Modal moods,” “modalizers,” and “modalities” have different designates and ranges. In some national languages and texts, there are more modalities and modalizers than modal moods. In the last decades, modality studies – earlier on the margin of structural linguistics – obtained new, very strong stimuli that made them one of central issues in modern linguistics. The principal impulse was development of cognitive linguistics, in view of which, modalization as a mental effect of speakers’ linguistic operations and their linguistic activity related with creating images of the world, are nowadays not a peripheral aspect of the language but its essence.

3.

Linguists tend to claim that the most important context for their discipline in the last forty years has been deconstructionism. It is worth recalling the concurrent proliferation of cognitivism, which broke into two phases linguists called two cognitive revolutions. The first one took place precisely when deconstructionism was being born – in the 1960’s, the second one started exactly at the decline of the deconstructionist movement – in the 1990’s. Linguists maintain that the second cognitive revolution has lasted until today. Nevertheless, it was deconstructionism, not cognitivism, which almost entirely dominated contemporary literary studies, even though the latter’s arguments are infinitely closer to literary research inspired by dialogue, interactive, or communication theories of language and statements. Undoubtedly, literary studies also find them more productive.

4.

The cognitive revolution was directed against both behaviorism in psychology and structuralism in linguistics. Cognitivism, however, did not exist in the vacuum, therefore the problem of linguistic modality has been situated in the context of those philosophical, sociological, ethnological, and anthropological studies in which the emphasis is placed on one’s cognitive-emotional activity connected with creating images of the world. What I have in mind here are linguistic methods of the world’s creation, constructions of one’s own self-images, models of relationships between an individual and the world, and consequently, between the worlds of various individuals and cultures, therefore also relations between both the real worlds and the so called “possible worlds.” Cognitivism, conventionally speaking, is a result of a methodological threesome where the partners are: linguistics, psychology, and sociology. Regardless of which discipline is the point of reference, in the center of the cognitive approach, always understood as a process of communicational

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interaction between an individual, language, and environment (that is the reality), there is a thesis saying that social images of the world created through one's mental operations are produced by means of linguistic mechanisms. There have been numerous historical contexts of such understanding of the language (among others, Wygotski, M. Mead, and E. Sapir), but one could also place among them Austin's philosophy of speech acts and Bakhtin's concept based on the notion of dialogue. In this sense, Bakhtin was a pre-cognitivist, not a postmodernist, but that is a different story. Many theoretical assumptions of cognitivism are close to historical poetics, especially the concept – developed within poetics – of language as material for literature, poetry, specific artistic language or literary communication. Cognitivist thoughts that are particularly close to poetics are the following: a) language plays a fundamental role in creation of social reality spoken of in a linguistic statement; b) learning the reality is a process taking place in a statement (oral or written); and c) the subject is not a passive recipient of culture but its creator in the act of speech. In light of the cognitivists' assumptions, the language produces the subject instead of trammeling it, hence the language in the act of speech enables creation and expression of subjectivity. From the semantic perspective, a statement is treated not as representation of the reality but as its presentation with cognitive frames in the form of narratives – discursive linguistic constructions of the storytelling nature. Cognitivists call such language function *forming* or *form-creating*, while psychology correlated with it – constructive psychology.¹³

5.

Although modality has not become a category common to all cognitive studies, the problems they touch upon – in fields that are quite remote from linguistics – could be summarized into one basic issue affiliated with modality in a linguistic sense: modality perceived as the way the subject refers to the content and the methods of formulating his or her own statements. Generally speaking, what is important is the speaker's intention towards a linguistic message (assertion, assignment, request, supposition, etc.). By saying that they “could be summarized,” I present a postulate, not an actual state because linguists, even most interested in this topic, do not exert the category of modality in discussions in which this category could be particularly useful¹⁴. Meanwhile, “statement” nature of modality indeed pertains to

¹³ Among Polish papers on the subject, see: *Narration as a Way of Understanding the World*, ed. J. Trzebiński, Gdańsk 2002.

¹⁴ For example, in ethno-cultural linguistic studies by A. Wierzbicka – was notably familiar with the subject of modalities – dedicated to cultural determinants of semantic constructions in different languages, the category of modality is never used. It is obvious, however, that problems dissected by Wierzbicka (speaking about emotions, the theory of “cultural scripts,” speech genres in different cultures, intercultural pragmatics, illocutive semantics, ethno-syntax, and ethno-psychology) are precisely in the area of widely understood modality. Generally, modality concerns influences that cultural and emotional schemas have on the shape and dynamics of

similar, sometimes identical issues in various areas of the humanities. “Modality” could perform such a function in all instances where scientific research concerns expressing the attitude of a speaking subject to the subject of his or her statement or to the very act of his or her own statement. Although this topic is described by discrete terminology, it is paradoxically – and irrespective of a given field of the humanities – named by the same cognitive term: the subject’s attitude.

6.

Two books can be considered good examples of applying linguistic category of modality in non-linguistic studies. The first one, written by Jean Quigley,¹⁵ covers links between psychology and linguistics, and in terms of methodology, it invokes the ideas of the so called second cognitive revolution. It focuses on the role of grammatical categories in the social statement practices of children, especially in the process of constructing the image of their own subjectivity. The tools to describe those statements are (included in them) modal structures which allow us to detect how linguistic structures and linguistic interactions between children help them create images of themselves and the world. Quigley shows what roles various techniques of statements’ modalization play in the construction of a subjective “I” of children at different ages. The author’s theses based on the analysis of statements’ modalities lead to conclusions that are close to themes typical of developmental psychology. The second book concentrates on completely dissimilar application of the category of modality.¹⁶ Durey is interested in modality as a means of characters’ creation in the 19th century realism. The author perceives modality as a set of cultural, textual and linguistic factors which contribute to building a literary character in a novel. She analyzes social norms and structures, values, knowledge systems, etc., which determined subjectivity of men and women in societies in which realist writers lived, then she reconstructs characters’ place in the worlds presented in particular novels. Durey perceives narrative modality as a consequence of interactions and interferences of diverse factors (cultural and textual, linguistic and literary), which shaped both the understanding of human subjectivity in the 19th-century novel and the aesthetic and communicational game between reality and fiction. Subsequent chapters of the book are devoted, for example, to reconstruction of biography and comprehension of biographic elements in the already mentioned writers’ output, modality stemming from linguistic-narrative characteristics of various time and space dimensions in those novels, modality resulting from various interactive games and sociological modalities stemming from the construction of the presented world.

discourses. See: *Language-Mind-Culture*, selection: J. Bartmiński, translators various, Warsaw 1999.

¹⁵ J. Quigley *The Grammar of Autobiography: A Developmental Account*, New Jersey 2000.

¹⁶ J.F. Durey *Realism and Narrative Modality: The Hero and Heroine in Eliot, Tolstoy, and Flaubert*, Tübingen 1993.

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II. Modality as a problem of historical poetics

In literary works, modality may be analyzed on many different levels of statements.¹⁷ Traditionally, it mainly comprises conventionalized genre modalities (satire, comedy, tragedy), conventionalized naming modalities (genres' names serving as definitions of textual modalities), thematic modalities (war, religion, love, the state, etc.), but also – as T. Skubalanka maintains – elements of a work's morphology: a title, accentuation of incipits and punchlines, compositional frames, stylizations, lexical forms with expressive functions, modes, or any violations of statements' norms¹⁸. On the most elementary level of a literary work, modality is one of several phenomena in the grammatical-stylistic composition of the text. Therefore, linguistic description concerns, among others, modes, formal and informal modalizers, modalities of so called personal statements, etc. Defining them as elements of a literary statement does not require more precise justification than explanation given to description of other elements of the linguistic structure of the text¹⁹. Generally speaking, modality analyzed in linguistic categories always provides information about differences between the character of particular sentences. It is, therefore, a collection of differences marking out the speaker's attitude towards the facts he or she speaks about.²⁰ Modes in the linguistic system are nothing else than oppositions both between themselves (question – condition – certainty – probability – wish – intention – necessity, etc.) and towards sentences considered by the majority of linguists as not affected by modality, that is declarative sentences (linguists speak about factive modality as opposed to deontic modality, i.e., obligatory modality and epistemic modality expressing the subject's conviction about veracity of his or her statements). Nevertheless, quoting these sentences, for example in indirect speech, actually means that they are interpreted which means assigning them a certain *modal* attitude²¹. The basic criterion of modality's examination is, therefore, distinguishing "types of a speaking subject's attitudes" whose determinants are linguistic (syntactical, lexical) or non-linguistic modalizers. In literary texts analyzed from the poetics' perspective, there are no neutral elements, therefore each type of statement conveys information about the choice of particular speech modality. For a linguist, the problem is that the same modes

¹⁷ An overview of linguistic positions, see: B. Boniecka "About the Notion of Modality: An Overview of Research Problems," in: *Źęzyk Polski* 1971, 91-110; E. Jędraszko "Modality in Language and Text: From Grammar to Stylistics" in: *Pragmatic Categories in the Literary Text*, ed. E. Stawkowa, b.m., b.d., 113-155. Great thanks to prof. B. Witosz for calling my attention to this valuable publication. T. Skubalanka *About Poetic Modality on the Example of Selected Poems by J. Czechowicz* in: *Introduction to Stylistic Grammar in the Polish Language*, Lublin 1991, 71-95.

¹⁸ T. Skubalanka, *ibid.*

¹⁹ See: Jędraszko, E., *Modality in...*

²⁰ Nowotna introduces a definition: *meaningful difference* to her interpretations.

²¹ I. Bellert *Selected modal attitudes in semantic interpretation of declarative sentences*, in: "Prace Komisji Słowianoznawstwa," Cracow 1971, no. 23, 155-169.

(modi) and modalizers of statements, which are numerous, may have so many different semantic functions that trying to categorize them somehow – important to the description of a text’s poetics – seems hopeless²². What is more, being both elementary phenomena in the linguistic system and single acts of speech, modes and modalizers appear in each linguistic construction without bringing in any artistically significant information regarding the way statements are formed. Yet, various social customs or linguistic behavior conventions, rituals, or linguistic etiquettes neutralize differences in meanings that can be consequences of purposeful application of various modalities. Therefore, a condition to make modality the subject of literary studies (poetics and literature history) is proving that in specific statements, various modalities stem from artistic activities of a given author and have crucial meaning functions for the poetics of his or her works. As a result, they are not solely incidental components of statements following individual reactions of the subject, the system of a given national language or speech customs and rituals that exist in it. However, how to justify the fact that modality is a significant element of both semantics of a literary statement, and the poetics of particular writers’ works analyzed in the context of literature history? What functions of modalities would make them riveting to literary studies, especially historical poetics and literature theory? What is interesting, the first systematic answers to the above questions in Polish literature did not appear in literary scholars’ writings but in linguists’ works, mainly the already mentioned excellent studies by T. Skubalanka, M. Nowotna-Szybistowa, or E. Jędraszko. Taking their conclusions into consideration, it is worth pointing to a few areas where the issue of modality in statements could be a starting point for literary studies, i.e., areas where it could be transposed onto the issues important to literature history.

I.

Naturally, the first area relates to modality as a part of a writer’s style. Modal categories, regardless of the level of communication, are characteristic elements of presenting reality from the perspective of a speaking subject in a text. This pertains to both characters and a narrator in prose or a lyrical subject in poetry. This suggests that modality is particularly visible in all first-person statements, especially autobiographical and other corresponding narrative genres or discourse types such as commentaries, confessions, reports, letters, memories, diarist notes, etc. Modal forms provide not systematized information about a speaking subject which gives a possibility to precisely apply a category of “the attitude of an author” of a given statement towards reality and others’ statements. This is how Roger Fowler uses the description of narrative modality in his works;

²² Jędraszko combines types of modalities in text with human attitudes towards the world among which he distinguishes: volitive, postulative-deontic, intellectual-judgemental and emotional-evaluating, *Modality in...*, 137.

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lately, in his book on George Orwell's language.²³ According to Fowler, modality in Orwell's prose is a constitutive element of the writer's "personal voice" and it allows to discover in the poetics of his narration a specific attitude of "certainty" (*authority*) grounded in his own value system. In other words, the way he uses modal categories turns out to give information about the writer's hidden axiology. Modal categories belong to surface elements of each text, but they can also be exceptionally meaningful elements of the subject's statements. Analyzing a well-known Orwell short story entitled "Shooting an Elephant," Fowler shows, for example, a special role of the conditional as a semantic filter in the writer's narrative through which he faces the conflict of two worlds: the one of the British policeman and the one of the Indian crowd. Obviously, these are not all modalizers that are present in this text but all of them become interesting for a literature researcher only when it is possible to notice in them – invisible at first sight – determinants of one's outlook on life, hidden senses, a specific game of meanings, values noticeable in statements, etc.

2.

The second area where modal categories have a key function is the field of interpersonal relations in literary texts, because any characters' statements about other characters and a narrator's statements about characters are always influenced by the selection of specific modalities. Paraphrasing the title of a popular study by A. Okopińska-Sławińska, one could say that the description of those relations may bring an answer to the following question: "how do modal forms act in the theatre of speech?"²⁴ Modalities, similarly to personal pronouns, not only provide information about the way the world is presented from the speaking subject's perspective, but they can also perform semantic functions contradictory to their grammatical functions. Questions can be orders, orders can be questions, the conditional can be a disguised form of expressing certainty, certainly can be hidden doubt, while directness of expression can be a routine convention.

3.

The third area of modality as a subject of literary research is not provided to us outright, and it entirely depends on finding equivalents for linguistic modal categories in the area that will be operationally called – due to lack of a better term – "modalities of culture." Linguistic modalities – both the elementary ones (certainty, will, necessity, permission) and all others – do not have to be only treated as speaking subjects' attitudes in literary works. They can also be perceived as a wider – and determinant to their existence – collection of attitudes or mental frames characteristic to historical phases of cultural evolution and their social

<http://rcin.org.pl>

²³ R. Fowler *The Language of George Orwell*, London 1995; ct. R. Fowler *Language in the News: Discourse and Ideology in the Press*, London 1991.

conditions, i.e., to historical periods, epochs, events, philosophical schools, ideas and political circles, literary schools, artistic tendencies, and movements. Modalities are cultural facts because they create in culture a dense, though sometimes invisible system of emotions, attitudes and values that manages one's beliefs and statements in very distinct fields of human activity. Since there are works on the history of fear or boredom in the European culture, why can't we imagine papers on modalities as cultural forms?²⁵ Being semiotically and functionally distinguishable, art and literature participate in creating those forms by employing the same or different modalities, among others, by creating the new ones and revaluing the existing ones. Nevertheless, culture modalities are not autonomous, they do not exist for themselves because they are intertwined with historically changeable facts and phenomena of civilization or even everyday life. For example, a modal category of "certainty" concerned completely different matters in the Middle Ages, in the period of Enlightenment and in the 20th century, and this could also be said about "probability," and all other modalities and their types. Obviously, there are many more modalities and modalizers in a given culture than *modal moods* in the linguistic system²⁴. Every culture not only produces its own modalities, which we discover only thanks to comparative studies, but it also modalizes in its own way both linguistic statements and any texts of behavior. Describing modalities' execution and their mutual influences requires that literature historians assume new methodology and source research.

We could formulate a test problem to be at the core of such research: what were the sources, areas and forms of certainty in the Polish writing of the interwar period or in the 1950's? What types of modalities were present in literature of those periods, with what statements' topics and genres were they related? I have merely drafted the problem's range – if it was taken up, it would open the doors to numerous unexpected possibilities and discoveries for literary studies²⁵.

One of the most controversial issues with modality is so called emotional statements and personal feelings excluded by the majority of linguists from the field of modal phenomena in the linguistic system. However, from the point of view of a historian of literature, communicating emotions and personal feelings appertains to the group of informal modalizers as well as textual and cultural modalities. In a positive sense, the group include: joy, delight, contentment, surprise,

²⁴ Describing the Hopi language, B.L. Whorf stated that it contains more systemic modalities than Indo-European languages, for instance, he distinguished declarative modality, quotative modality, suppressive, potential, unresolving, advising, permissive modality, modality of necessity and ineffectiveness. *Language, Thought, Reality*, transl. by T. Hołowska, Warszawa 1982, 173.

²⁵ The presence of modal categories "goes far beyond texts and even beyond literature in general being a phenomenon of verbal Messenger and can be noticed, it seems, on various other reflections of our civilization and contemporary culture such as plastic arts (an object presented as existent and non-existent at the same time) or cinema (numerous anti-heroes, a figure uncertain of its identity, indecisive – literally and figuratively, etc.), Nowotna *Le Sujet...*, A.

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astonishment, admiration, love (e.g. to homeland). In a negative sense: discontent, disappointment, irritation anxiety, sadness, anger, resentment, contempt, rage, and hatred.²⁶ It is obvious that emotions of such kind are expressed in literary texts, and that in some works they happen to be objects of interpretation, but we do not treat them as modalizers typical of statements within particular units of the historical-literary process. Still these feelings – perceived not as short-lived or chimerical emotions of particular people but as repetitive and, what is more important, conventionalized modalizers of statements – constitute one of the most significant anthropological indicators of culture in general, culture which shapes and is shaped (!) by literary culture. In intercultural and interlinguistic translations, modality is a rudimentary condition of an agreement before any of its content is formulated or identified: first, we identify the content's modality, then information it conveys. In his early work on philosophy of the language – admittedly, without using the category of modality – Bakhtin wrote: “in reality, we never hear words but we hear truth or a lie, good or bad, important or unimportant, pleasant or unpleasant etc.”²⁷ In such cases, modality becomes more important than information or even effectively pushes out real information included in messages. This situation frequently concerns reception of literature or art. In opinions such as: “I can't read these terrible moans” or “this is not literature but some screaming and questioning everything that's human,” textual information has been reduced to hypothetical modalities assigned to a work or its author by its recipient. By means of deconstructing political, ideological, artistic or literary polemics, it is often possible to unveil that they are not an exchange of real arguments but confrontation of modality or even applied modal techniques. Undoubtedly, the reconstruction of cultural modality and its diverse modalizers would enable discovering contexts thanks to which a literature historian, who examines linguistic modal structures in specific literary texts, could move from linguistic descriptions to cultural history phenomena and to the history of mentality without abandoning the specificity of the topic and tools belonging to literary studies.

Then, if in the first of the indicated areas, modality is an instrument of uttering senses intended by an author, in the second one it is a set of senses resulting from the historical reconstruction. If in the first field the characteristics of modality is an introduction to defining statements' semantics, in the second one the characteristics of modality means going beyond the text. It is, therefore, an attempt to translate linguistic categories of the text into modal mechanisms of specific culture reconstructed by a historian out of the whole universe of sources, especially the linguistic ones.

²⁶ See: *Feelings in language and text*, ed. I. Nowakowska-Kempna, A. Dąbrowska, J. Anusiewicz, Wrocław 2000.

²⁷ V.N. Votoszynow *Marxiizm i filozofia jazyka. Osnovnyje problemy socjologiceskowo metoda w naukie o jazykie*, (Leningrad 1930), quoted after: Mouton, The Hague-Paris, 1972, 71.

4.

From the perspective of literary studies, the real problem with analyzing modality begins, once the subject of research is not modality of a subject of an intratextual statement (so, for example, a character or a narrator) but the modality of the entire work. It is modality which should be assigned to a non-empirical, purely functional category, namely an author understood as the subject of the whole work (“the subject of creative activities”). This simultaneously shows a fundamental difference between the perspective of poetics and linguistics, the latter treating modality as a component of so called writer’s intention and assigning it to literary texts as “global modality of a work.”²⁸ Contrary to this stance, I maintain that modality and intention are two extremely different issues. An author’s intention is either a non-textual category, i.e., reconstructed from his or her statement, or an interpretative hypothesis, while modality is a textual category and one of the empirical elements of the text’s poetics. On the other hand, from the poetics’ point of view, the expression “global modality of a work” seems to have been created after the so called “global sense of a work.” It also stems from personifying “the subject of creative activities” in a given work and transferring the category of modality from the subject’s act of speech into the sphere of generalized senses of the text. From a poetics’ perspective, we come across a double contradiction. Firstly, the specificity of linguistic modality is based on the assumption that there is an empirical subject of statements. Following Austin’s terminology, presence of a speaking subject conditions the success of the modality analysis within a language and within a statement. Modality, in this view, is nothing else but a functor of the subject’s existence (this is what Derrida criticized Austin for, tracing himself proofs of “metaphysics of presence” in the acts of speech).²⁹ Secondly, describable in linguistic categories modality of particular sentences becomes problematic if looked at in the context of a (literary) text, where it can signify a genre convention or can be interpretation of semantics, but it cannot stand for sum or logical conjunction of modality on lower levels of statements. In other words, we speak about linguistic modalities of a work (on the level of a statement) but we cannot use the same categories to speak about modality of an entire work. We cannot, although in fact we constantly do it. This is the fifth of the anticipated matters which I need to introduce before I return to the fourth one.

5.

The fifth area in which modal categories should be interesting in the context of literary studies is perception of literature. Years ago, Sławiński pointed it out to historians of literature,³⁰ because modal categories are standard interpretative formulas used by critics and literary historians. They do not result from the lack of

²⁸ E. Jędraszko, *Modality in...*

²⁹ J. Derrida, *Signature Event Context* in: *Pismo filozofu*, trans. by B. Banasiak, Cracow 1993, 279.

³⁰ J. Sławiński, *Comments on interpretation...*

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knowledge about the fact that an author does not identify with speaking subjects in his or her literary work. Categories are specific interpretative and conversational conventions which inevitably personify literary communication by assigning particular modalities to a text or its author. What is even more interesting, it also happens when an interpreter declares that there is no relation between a work and its author, and that the text itself speaks to us with its own discourses and voices among which there is no real author's voice. Sentences that can be found in almost every single literary dissertation: "the writer indicates," "the work is a huge accusation," "the author suggests," "the writer is delighted," "this work is a writing necessity," "the writer wants to save his or her character at any price," "the author tries to convince us," "the writer demands from the reader," "the writer's own tone," "the poet doesn't trust," etc. are modal frames assigned to texts or their author's subjects. So, why are there in the discourse of "experts" – as Sławiński called literary researchers³¹ – modal categories and formulas modalizing literary texts, if at the same time these "experts" are aware of impossibility to identify a work's subject with an empirical author? First of all, the modalization of the text shows that in our (artistic and intellectual) culture, texts – contrary to many theoretical declarations – are perceived as messages conveyed by their causative subject. In other words, personal texts are a norm in this culture. This norm is not unchangeable because determinants of personal treatment of statements (these are methods of modalization in reception) are affected by historical and contextual determinants and changes. The modalization of texts which we perform in the process of reading, also indicates the boundary – there is no accurate term to describe it – between works and objects (which means that some texts can be handled as objects). This boundary is more noticeable in art history dealing with works analyzed in the context of an artist's expression or sometimes even works physically identified with their author (for instance in various types of *body art*), but also literally understood artistic objects which are not interpreted in modal categories. Decorative art could be a good example. In literature, the boundary between a work and an object is more problematic. In my view, all statements characterized by recognizable, although not always straightforward modalities, should be subsumed under a group of works, pieces of writing and texts. Objects will be such sequences of information (but not texts) which are deprived of modality, so they are not personal. Train timetables, iron instructions, information about ingredients on a jar of mustard, etc. have their pragmatic functions but they do not have modalities, because we cannot assign to them a pronoun in a modal frame (this is why commercials increasingly use images of people). On the contrary, literature can modalize such verbal objects in order to transform them into texts. Second of all, the scale and forms of works' modalization in literary reception are elements of a general communication game in any period in the history – the game which attracts all statements, also non-literary. Modalization – paraphrasing a well-known category – seems an "*a priori* form" of a work's reception. Regardless of our (best) knowledge of a complicated structure of the text and its internal mechanisms, we

³¹ J. Sławiński *Selected Works*, vol. 4, 116-136.

are not able to talk about texts in the context of communicational categories without personalizing them, therefore without assigning utterly non-hypothetical modalities to their hypothetical subjects.

I will now go back to the fourth of the earlier enlisted possible areas of modality analysis from the point of view of literature history. The relation between a work characterized by its reception and a work characterized in categories of intratextual senders is dramatically unsymmetrical. A literary scholar who reaches the level of a given work's subject, will have a thousand reservations: that no modality, no meaning, even no reliable information can be assigned to the subject of the whole work. In accord with a precise formula prepared by Okopień-Sławińska, "I thematized in words is not equivalent of the real author's I"³². However, an interpreter will have all possible modalities (differences between them, as mentioned earlier, make every type of polemic more dynamic) allotted to this subject by considering his or her statement as an act of reading and not an analysis (this differentiation here is purely heuristic). The problem is not that this results from the difference between research procedures and literary criticism but the fact that in both cases the subject of *not complementary* concepts of text is the same work. By assigning various modalities to a work's hypothetical subject, a critic begins a dialogue with an individual who, according to a researcher, does not exist. And it often happens that a critic and a researcher is one and the same person. I try to problematize well-known matters in order to gather arguments for the benefit of the overarching thesis of this paper: the problem of modality, although not associated with this term, is constantly present under different names in contemporary metaliterary practices and statements. Now, the category of modality enforces the acknowledgement of a subject's presence in the text of a statement and insists on acknowledging that literary communication is of personal nature. This means that a reader wants an author in a text to guarantee a given work's modal frames, although he or she is aware of the fact that statements come from fictional (sham) instances. The most vivid example of a need to modalize "a work's subject" (the subject of creative activities) is an idea of treating texts as transcription of the author's "voice." It is complementary to another concept according to which texts are equipped with an author's "signature" (or Derrida's *signature*) or its "trace." Regardless of theoretical conceptualizations, both these categories – of "voice" and "signature" – are attempts to verbalize the problem of modality in a literary statement. The first of them, the hypothesis of an author's "voice" inscribed in a text, is interchangeable with another category of the identical acoustic provenience, i.e., the category of "tone" or synonymously, the category of "register." It is beyond the discussion that these acoustic categories applied in a written text are only oxymorons and metaphors. However, if we try to translate them into linguistic categories, the terms "tone" and "register" turn out to be the closest ones to the very category of modality. In their reconstruction of Ingarden's philosophy of language, first M. R. Mayenowa, then D. Ulicka took note

³² A. Okopień-Sławińska *Semantics...*, 125.

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of the place of the concept of “tone” in it.³³ Even though the matter quoted after Ingarden concerned simple oral statements, metaphors of “voice” or “tone” have always existed in literary criticism: in the 20th century they are traced back to both ancient tradition and metaphors typical of modernist literature. For a few decades, the “voice” metaphor has regularly appeared in various dissertations being attempts to name subjectivity of the subject hidden or inscribed in texts. What has been an inspiration for these papers is both philosophy (mainly Heidegger, Derrida,

Deleuze) and literature theory (Kristeva, Barthes). A few years ago, Donald Wesling and Tadeusz Sławek, in their book *Literary Voice*, even proposed examining “an author’s voice” as a separate discipline of literary studies.³⁴ Referring mainly to Heidegger and Derrida’s writings and other examples from literature (including *Pan Tadeusz*), the authors drafted a philosophy of voice in literature where the central category is “a speaking subject.” However, it turns out that eventually the book’s theoretical-literary parton is – easy to guess – Bakhtin and his theory of a dialogue considered, not for the first time, as the main source of the postmodernist philosophy of “voice” in text. Taking over this category within Bakhtin’s concept, however, requires caution. First of all, basic categories used by Bakhtin such as voice, word, dialogue or polyphony, are metaphorical, semantically extensive, often sketchy and always axiological, therefore their transpositions into all kinds of scientific and philosophical jargons of today effectively suppress the specific style of the great thinker. In the West, Bakhtin’s concepts – as long noticed by J. Sławiński – have been stoned of its core, i.e., its radical subjectivity. But the most relevant context for the modality problem is not a dialogue theory but Bakhtin’s theory of speech genres. His basic thesis is that we speak only with the help of specific speech genres³⁵ and communication would be impossible without them. Striving for maximal statements’ personalization, Bakhtin underlined that different speech genres can reveal different layers and aspects of one’s personality, that through the choice of a speech genre the subject fulfils his or her intentions (a speaker’s intent and linguistic will) and that they enable personal relations in communication³⁶. Okopień-Sławińska commented on Bakhtin’s distinctions specifying: “speech realizes itself by means of superior genre constructions,” “speech genres are conventionalized methods of textualizing intentions” of the

³³ M.R. Mayenowa *Poetics...*, 35; D. Ulicka *Boundaries of Literature and Borders of Literary Studies. Phenomenology of R. Ingarden in View of Linguistic Philosophy*, Warsaw 1999, 243-283.

³⁴ D. Wesling, T. Sławek *Literary Voice. The Calling of Jonah*, New York, 1995; por. J. Derrida *Voice and Phenomenon* (1967), transl. by . Banasiak, Warsaw 1997. Cf. on the same topic, monographic “New Literary History” vol. 32, Summer 2001, o. 3, (*Voice and Human Experience*: min. M. Fludernik *New Vine in Old Bottles: Voice, Focalization, and New Writing*; B. Richardson *Voice and Narration in Postmodern Drama*; M. Jahn *The Cognitive Status of Textual Voice*).

³⁵ M. Bakhtin, *The Problem of Speech Genres*, in: *Aesthetics of Verbal Creation*, transl. by D. Ulicka, introduction and edition: E. Czaplewicz, 373.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 353, 372, 375.

subject³⁷. On the other hand, according to Bakhtin's concept, speech genres seem to take control over a speaking subject. In extension of this idea, Bakhtin also claimed that: "on each stage of the literary language evolution, particular speech genres impose their own tone. A speaker is vested with imposed forms of statements, i.e., speech genres, while his or her linguistic will is materialized mainly by choosing a particular speech genre"³⁸. A. Okopień-Sławińska is less precise: "Some conventionalized verbal actions don't have their genre equivalents, though they are well recognizable."³⁹ In view of the above understanding of the matter, Bakhtin's attitude towards the problem of modality was ambivalent. For Bakhtin, "a statement expresses an active attitude of the speaker towards these or other subjects and meanings" and the speaker's reference to another person. According to Bakhtin, speech genres "require an adequate tone, which means that its structure is completed by a specific expressive intonation."⁴⁰ Yet, the description of the relation between speech genres as well as between the subject's intention and expressive intonation is not fully elaborated in Bakhtin's concept. As such, this part of Bakhtin's concept is more of a problem itself rather than a useful tool for literary texts' analysis. It is crucial from the point of view of research on modality in literary texts. It is obvious that modality in statements – dissimilar to speech genres – are not imposed onto participants of communication. Everything said by now is merely an attempt to gather arguments to support a thesis that the problem of modality in statements as an issue of forming the subject in acts of linguistic activity is one of the most intriguing problems in the humanities of today. Some disciplines may consider it a side matter, but some may see it as a central issue. The problem concerns consequences of the fact that linguistic constructions shape statements with the help of which a person places himself or herself among others and within culture. It regards both matters hardly related with literature (as in Quigley's book) and areas we are interested in: history of literature (Durey), culture anthropology, literature anthropology (as far as it has to touch upon subjectivity), research on cultural patterns of linguistic behavior and of course poetics.

I will now go back to the theory of statements and to the most difficult theoretical issue, which I think is constituted by the following question: is it possible to define a work's modality understood as a relation of "a work's subject" to its content. Thesis number one. In public space, a fluid boundary separating literary texts from the non-literary ones is marked out by a social custom and a modal attitude of a real author. This distinction is conventional and historical, not essential. I would assume – following this concept – that statements subsumed to the category of non-literary texts are the ones in which a work's subject (on the basis of the communicational agreement) is seen as identical with a real subject. This means that the real subject decides on the modality of the statement. On the other hand, literary texts are

³⁷ A. Okopień-Sławińska, *Semantics...*

³⁸ M. Bakhtin, *The Problem of Speech Genres*, 375, 372, 375, 376.

³⁹ A. Okopień-Sławińska, *Semantics...*

⁴⁰ M. Bakhtin, *The Problem of Speech Genres*, 375, 381, 399

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characterized by inability to define their modality, although, as I proved, assigning modalities to them by readers is basically how they exist in reception acts. Non-literary texts, therefore, shift to literary categories when their modality begins to be treated as problematic. Similarly, literary texts shift to non-literary categories when their modality is made unequivocal. When do they shift? Of course in time, in history but also in synchrony – in diversified reception acts or even in an author’s attitude towards own text. Thesis number two. The problem of real modalities of a work’s subject is not a problem of poetics but of culture. Inability to define modality of a work understood as a statement of its subject is a structural feature of a work – this is what A. Okopień-Sławińska describes as “speech theatre.” In this sense, lack of modality of a work seen as a statement is the modality’s ontological *non-determinant* which co-creates so called semantic openness of a literary text. Still, inability to define modality on this level is not interesting itself, since it can be considered as one of textual poetics’ axioms. Modality becomes interesting if we see it as an irreducible element of all readings of a given work, an element of its historicity. I will risk an assertion that modality is one of its most important components.⁴¹

Thesis number three. What makes literature specialists, linguists, philosophers, psychologists, anthropologists and other “experts” consciously or unconsciously use an impression of a given text determined by a personal statement endowed by some modality (on the level of a work’s subject)? The answer, the most risky part of this reasoning, is the following: this happens because in our culture (beginning with antiquity), the theory of literary works and any other verbal texts has been based on the model of a monologue (lyrical and narrative). Its structural element is a speaking “I” – a subject who, as a maker, is linked by a speech act with his or her own statement. Let us imagine a situation when a dramatic text becomes a model of a literary text. It is the only type of text which invalidates the question about the relation between the subject and the statement. Then all our deliberations about text must have been completely different because all types of literary statements (narration, plot, stylistics, morphology and modality) should have been defined differently. Of course, a dramatic text has a subject but it doesn’t pose questions about modality of the subject’s statement because drama, as a whole, is not a narrative statement⁴². The fact that our linguistic activity is of a narrative character makes narration a basic tool to examine verbal creations of culture. Awareness of this fact

⁴¹ E. Jędraszko claims that in contemporary (postmodernist) literature, linguistic modality is “a new, original means of artistic creation” (E. Jędraszko, *Modality in...*, 152, cf. Nowotna *Le Sujet...*). This thesis is precisely opposite to the one formulated in 1980 by Ryszard Nycz who regarded this type of “modality” as anachronistic (see footnote 4). I don’t think there is a need to “modernize” modality in contemporary literature. Both as a means of a linguistic statement and a textual convention, statement modality equally – although having its varieties – characterizes all (literary) epochs.

⁴² By the way, Bakhtin’s concept of polyphony and dialogue, according to which character’s replicas are not subordinated to the author’s voice, seems to be a model describing only dramatic text but not a novel.

emerged in many disciplines of the contemporary humanities and this is how the popularity of this category is justified. Interest in one's subjectivity as well as the cognitive concept of the dynamic interaction between the language, the subject and the world enforces a question about modality used in those interactions. On the other hand, for about a hundred years, modern art (including literature) has been breaking with narration as a model of artistic expression. A gimmick, being a typically dramatic suspension of modality, was one of the modal gestures that started modernity in literature and art⁴³.

Translation: Marta Skotnicka

⁴³ The most “visual” example may be here *Fountain* by R. Mutt (M. Duchamp) exhibited in New York in 1916.