

Summary

LITERATURE – SOCIETY – SYSTEM

Studies on German-language Writers from the Late 20th Century and Early 21st Century (Peter Handke, Siegfried Lenz, Botho Strauß, Dietrich Schwanitz and Peter Turrini)

The first part of the monograph presents selected studies on authors of German and Austrian literature. They are based on Niklas Luhmann's systems theory, which, despite having its roots in sociology, has many applications in other fields, including literature studies.

The discussion around Peter Handke, a controversial, but highly acclaimed writer who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2019, concerns the media dispute over his aesthetic and political manifesto in favour of the universally condemned Serbs in the mid-1990s. It is about showing a specific feature of the media which in the dispute over the value of a politically involved, but ultimately literary description of a journey, in the end engage in dealing with social irritation. The voices raised in the media as part of the debate (from literary critics, important cultural figures, political experts) seem to illustrate Luhmann's thesis that "people are outside the system". Adjusting to a certain line of argument sheds light on the phenomenon of a kind of independence of social communication from the presupposed awareness of particular individuals.

In the analysis devoted to Siegfried Lenz, the crucial element is Luhmann's principle of distinguishing the system from the environment, or in other words, separating mental systems (operating by means of thought) from social systems (operating by means of communication). Politics (power) and literature (art) belong to the latter category. In the case of Lenz (a man with rather clear, moderately left-wing, social-democratic political

inclinations), such a pattern can be illustrated very easily on the basis of his attitude to so-called engagement. It transpires that the evolving spiritual habitus of this German novelist, oscillating between engagement and distance (Elias) depending on favourable conditions, remains in close correlation with the attitudes of his characters.

Botho Strauß is a writer who has remained extremely controversial for years because of manifesting his conservative-right-wing political beliefs. The culmination of these views came in his essay *Swelling Goat Song* (*Anschwellender Bocksgesang*, 1993), as well as the media debates revolving around him from 1993 to 1994. Not only does Strauß himself provoke controversy (which can be explained on the basis of systemic concepts), but he is also, in his prose and his essays, a keen social observer, who uses concepts similar to systems theory, such as emergence, self-referencing or evolution. With the help of these concepts, the author considers the possibility of the transformation of social consciousness, a conversion of consumer society into a society willing to sacrifice, based on mythical and religious order.

Dietrich Schwanitz is primarily known as the author of several entertaining novels and popular science books, especially the bestselling novel *The Campus* (*Der Campus*, 1995). Schwanitz was above all a specialist in English literary studies, but also an expert on Luhmann's theories. His novel *Der Campus* has something of a deeper meaning. Under the guise of a fictional story (albeit with many references to the academic reality and tabloid journalism of the 1990s) about the scandalous love affair between a sociology professor and his female M.A. student, Schwanitz demonstrates how the society described by Luhmann works in practice. The scandal, resulting in the extensive production of communicative statements, whether of a political, media, legal or scientific nature, serves to define the limits of functional subsystems that have to re-create themselves anew under circumstances that have changed.

With regard to the Austrian writer Peter Turrini, who is a clear continuator of the ideas associated with the '68 generation (*68er-Bewegung*), Luhmann's insightful diagnosis that it is impossible to find a place from which to critically observe a particular society without being a part of it, proves to be true. Every assessment of a society expressed in communication is de facto a self-description (*Selbstbeschreibung*), it is the realization of a society in practice. Society is also evolving. Turrini's drama *Love in Madagascar* (*Die Liebe in Madagascar*, 1998) paradoxically fits into the topos of media criticism, popular in cultural texts at the turn of the millennium. The analysis

of the drama also reflects the most important principle in systems theory, i.e. the principle of differentiation. The point is that some perceived facts are processed within the system (*Selbstreferenz*) and others remain in the external environment (*Fremdreferenz*). The subsystems distinguished this way make it possible to qualify what is the product of imagination, sleep, film as opposed to what is real.

The second part of this monograph consists of two theoretical chapters, with the chapter *Positioning* showing the most important concepts of systemic literature studies, which are relatively unknown in Poland, by making references to the Polish literary research tradition. The chapter *Deepening*, on the other hand, is a kind of sketch that deals with the theoretical-systemic view of communication, realism and fictionality.

Translated by Rob Pagett