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ASSESSING THE NARRATIVE FROM THE SOCIAL AND LITERARY PERSPECTIVE: THE CASE OF MACINTYRE AND MURDOCH

This paper deals with the topic of the narrative. The goal is to make a differentiation between the personal, social, and literary narrative. In order to do that, we need to provide a theoretical outlook of the social narrative which is found in the theory of Alasdair MacIntyre and suggest a method of making a differentiation. The method that will be used is the one of semiosis. Through this method we end with a role of the literary author, of the social narrative and the personal narrative. The author is burdened with the process of hermeneutics and mimesis he/she derives meaning and encrypts that meaning within the literary art-piece. The theory used for the description of this process has been developed by Iris Murdoch. After this elaboration, we will end up with clear difference between the personal narrative, social narrative, and literary narrative.

Key words: narrative, mimesis, semiosis, hermeneutics, author

1.0. Introduction

One of the arguments that proved to be recurring when talking about the narrative notion of the personal identity and the social context was the following – what is the difference between psychological narrativity thesis and a literary notion of the narrative? The famous representative of critique is Peter Lamarque. His criticism entails that the narrative theories take the correlation between literature and life in a serious regard which leads to the confusion about both areas. Following from that, this tight correlation brings distortion on how we live our lives. (LAMARQUE 2007: 119.) The goal of this paper is to provide a way to intertwine the personal, social and the aesthetic category of the narrative as well as differentiate them. To provide an answer to this question, we would need to do the following steps – to elaborate what the socially induced notion of the narrative entails, providing the method of which this investigation shall be conducted upon and, at the end, give the clear differentiation between the personal, social and the literary narrative.

The first part will be answered by referring to the notion of the narrative which is found in the theory of Alasdair MacIntyre. MacIntyre does provide us with *differentia specifica* which helps us to think about the literary and the historical narratives (MACINTYRE 1981: 213.); however, the simple distinction leaves us with much to desire for. In this regard, this paper is an addition to MacIntyre's argument and provides a much-needed explanatory power.

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2.0. MacIntyre's conception of the narrative unity

Let us, therefore, elaborate what it is meant by notion of the narrative. The conception of narrative that is used in this paper is strongly MacIntyreian in the sense that it has become an integral part of his system. When we talk about MacIntyre's philosophy and virtue ethics, we are talking about the three important concepts - practice, narrative history, and tradition. Each of them is linked to another and they represent a theoretical unity. Also, I shall skip the overall outlook on his theory and focus on the narrative itself, as it were an independent concept. In this regard, MacIntyre's essay *Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of Science* in *The Tasks of Philosophy* which was written before the publication of his *After Virtue* will prove to be of much help. Narrative is, in short, a world view which is shaped by various patterns that we perceive within the world. (MACINTYRE 2006: 5.) Namely, patterns give us coherence and certainty in our everyday lives in a given culture. These patterns are also a product of our interpretation of the social context in which we find ourselves. In the next part of this elaboration, we would need to briefly explain the ways in which we can think about the narrative.

Narrative is both social and individual. Individual in the sense in which something needs to unify our actions in such a way in which we form a narrative out of the "contingent mess" which is constituted of events, activities, and relations. Our practices are often unrelated, our relations are often all over the place, and the events that happen to us are unpredictable. The way in which this is unified is within one narrative. This effect of the narrative produces intelligibility which is, arguably, one of the most important concepts in MacIntyre's philosophy. Intelligibility is the starting point in MacIntyre's theory of human action and responsibility. (MACINTYRE 1981: 208.) To understand an action as intelligible, we must contextualize that action within the whole state of things of one tradition. We can look at intelligibility as one framework of reason-giving which is unified with the distinct conception of *telos*. One action prepossesses the whole infrastructure of motives, beliefs and events which are a part of a given tradition. Intelligibility explains the unification of practices. (MACINTYRE 1981: 209.) Namely, our actions are guided by being connected to the context which is shaped by the practices and human/political relations. Consider the following example - I am writing a novel on science fiction and I am telling my friend about the history of an alien race I am developing. The reason for me telling my friend this story is because I feel like he is initiated in the same traditional narrative where these stories are considered interesting. The reason for me writing the novel can be connected to my emotional attachment to the media I have consumed during my development. Another reason for my decision of writing the novel is the development of the practices which have influenced me to do so. Practice of literature, practice of movie/series making etc. have given me normative prescriptions on how one sci-fi artwork looks like, while social acceptance, social narrative etc. have equipped me with the motivation and sentiments for acting upon my desire to write a novel. This intelligibility is connected to the *telos*, or a goal which is connected to my way of life. That is to say, for one to attain excellence in one practice, one must be initiated in the way of life that is in accordance with that practice.

Let us now turn to the social aspect of the narrative. Human beings are, accord-

ing to MacIntyre, story-telling animals. (MACINTYRE 1981: 216.) As it was said in the previous chapter, we derive much of what we are through the social narrative. This is what MacIntyre means when he says that, although we are not essentially story-telling animals, we become through our histories. (MACINTYRE 1981: 216.) Social stories that we listen to, read, watch... give us the account of intelligibility that guides our actions. This is what leads MacIntyre to put mythology at the heart of things.

These narratives also have a place in which they are being told. We found ourselves to be the co-authors in the circumstances of the historical picture. For example, MacIntyre proposes historical traditions which differ from one another based on their categories of virtues, conceptions of the self, justice, outlook on the world and the notion of reality. (MACINTYRE 1981: 216.) They are historically oriented and are a product of the historical conversation. We find ourselves within the tradition which has a history behind it, and which proposes a specific world-view. That world view is given to us by a community which gives rise to the context of the history. When we ask ourselves who we are, we are also asking ourselves - of which history am I a part of?

While being embedded within the contextual histories, we are the co-authors of our lives; we are intertwined with other characters within one collective story. One might ask - well, what is the difference between the fictional myths and the historical narratives? History, according to MacIntyre, is the only dramatic story in which the characters are also the authors of it. When we write fictions, the characters are written by the author while the author does not participate in the affairs that his/her characters partake. He/she does, however, shape the events and shapes the development of his/her characters, but he/she is not a part of that narrative. What the author is a part of is a social/historical narrative. The author can influence the social narrative with the product of his/her practice, the same as every individual who is a part of some socially established activity. Therefore, all of us are merely co-authors of our stories, side characters in other people's stories. This is an intuitive response to the preliminary argument that was opened in the first part of this paper. However, it still demands further exploration. The first step that we would need to take is to propose the methodology and elaborate the meaning of the concepts that are important for the overall argument.

3.0. The method of semiosis

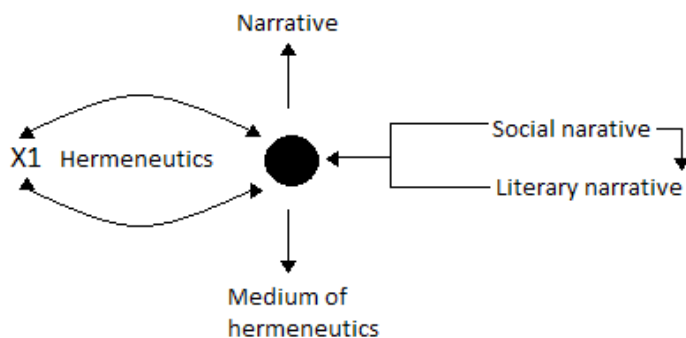
Let us provide the main outline of the method that shall be used to provide a claim in this paper. This method is the one of semiosis. Firstly, we would need to elaborate more on this method. The method of semiosis has received a rather wide attention in the fields of pragmatism and continental theory of language, taking into consideration that it has provided an alternative to the modern analytic philosophy. It is also worth noting that the very method has been a subject to changes and to constant revisions. With this in mind, I do not plan to expand more on this problem; in fact, this method will be taken into its most general form.

Semiosis is a relational process. It deals with the perception of the world and the decoding of the signs that we find in the world. According to the words of Charles W. Morris, we can derive four categories in this process – the sign vehicle, the designatum, the interpretant and the interpreter. (MORRIS 1971: 19.) We shall consider the following ex-

ample in order to shed some light on these concepts. Consider yourself as a person X. X is walking through a main street in the big city and his/her perception goes from Z1, Z2, Z3, Z4, Z5... Let us say that the Zn is something perceivable, or, in short, a symbol or a sign. Now, X is perceiving Z1 which is a snack commercial. As it was mentioned earlier, semiosis is a relational process, so semiosis begins the second in which X is related to Z1 by perceiving it. In this case, X, an interpreter becomes an interpretant of the Z1, which becomes a sign vehicle for the designatum which is the snack that is commercialized. Now, every time the object of our perception changes, in this case, Z1 to Z2, the process is repeated all over again from the beginning. In short, we are constantly in the relational process of semiosis because everything that we perceive carries a complex and encoded meaning.

One might ask – well, what does this have to do with the topic of this paper? As everything that we perceive is sign that we derive the meaning from, the same can be said about the work of art, in this regard, a narrative work of art. I would argue that Morris's schema is a schema of passivity; that is to say, semiotics² is taken only in the regards of perception. What shall we do about the creation of meaning which is a case with art? An author is a creator of meaning, a constitutor of the work of art. The role of an author is not included in this schema. We can, however, find his/her role in the schema that is offered to us by Roman Jakobson. Author is seen as the addresser, a sender of a message which has a context and a code. (Jakobson 1981: 2.) In this regard, author is a creator of meaning which opens the door to the interpreter to become an interpretant of his/her work of art.

By using this method, and introducing the concepts upon the project of a narrative rests, we can get a following schema³:



Narration schema 1. *The process and relation of narration*

X1 is a subject which is an interpreter of the sign that is a part of a bigger picture. This bigger picture is a narrative. The process in which X1 derives meaning from the particular sign will be called hermeneutics – the act of interpretation. The concept of hermeneutics is, in the contemporary philosophy which deals with the notion of the narrative, often in direct correlation with it. Therefore, as Hanna Meretoja states – *to elaborate narrative hermeneutics is to argue that the interpretation is the key concept in understanding nar-*

2 Morris expands the field of semiotics to an all-encompassing science of language and meaning which consists of semantical, syntactical and pragmatological dimension. From: *Ibid*, p. 21-22. It is also true that he is not concerned with the expansion of this theory to encompass the active force of creating a sign. Even in the chapter on the aesthetics, he is still writing on the perceivable object. From: *Ibid*, p. 415.

3 Schema 1.

rative, experience, subjectivity, memory and their interrelations. (MERENTOJA 2018: 43.) In this process, the sign becomes the medium of hermeneutics, as well as being connected to the narrative at the same time. When we are decoding a specific sign, we are never decoding it by its own individual meaning, the decoding is a product of both the individual and the social narrative. We are processing something in the regards of the narrative, or a structure of meaning in which that something is found, as well as in the regards of our personal narrative. Next, there is a relationship between social and literary narrative. In the next chapter, a thesis that the literary narrative is always a derivative of the social narrative mixed with personal interpretation will be defended. In order to do this, it is necessary to turn towards Iris Murdoch and her theory of *mimesis*.

4.0. Murdoch's theory of *mimesis*

I would like to open this part with two quotations from Murdoch. Both of them referring to the earlier parts of this paper. *We are all story-tellers and in this sense we are all literary artists.* (MURDOCH 1999: 260.) The first quotation is referring to the notion of the narrative. In essence, Murdoch says the same thing as MacIntyre – we are story telling animals who perceive the world and themselves within this world through the stories they tell. Let us take a look at the next quote. *It is, in its primitive form, concerned with the communication of emotion, and I think that art is clearly communication...* (MURDOCH 1999: 260.) In this sense, art is corresponding with the method of semiosis with an expanded schema we found in Jakobson's theory. According to Murdoch, even our everyday communication is based on a story. (MURDOCH 1999: 260.) When we talk with someone about how our day went, we are reconstructing the events in the form of a story – we tell stories about the events, people, times, occurrences etc. We tell these stories to other people, but also, Murdoch argues, to ourselves as well.

What is worth noting is that this claim is based on the series of arguments given by Murdoch in the opening of her text. The primary claim of this paper is the following – *art imitates nature – art is the imitation of nature.* (MURDOCH 1999: 251.) In this regard, Murdoch is invoking the concept, which is one of, if not the oldest concepts that was used in the philosophy of art. Murdoch, I think rightfully, mentions painting as the paradigm of this claim; that is, when we paint, we either replicate what we see in the world, or we transform it. In other words, the artist derives the substance from the world around him/her and gives it an artistic form which is embedded within a work of art. This process would be in line with the very meaning of *mimesis*, which is *the act of representing or imitating reality in art, especially literature.* (CAMBRIDGE DICTIONARY) It is, indeed, interesting that the literature is stated to be the prime example of *mimesis* in the dictionary. Nonetheless, this would also be in line with Murdoch's claim. She opens a question whether literature is also incorporating the process of *mimesis*. The answer, as one might imagine, is – yes. (MURDOCH 1999: 252.) The literary author is not only using the process of *mimesis* to constitute the literary work of art, but his/her artwork is the most intuitive to grasp.

Yet, we must also, in reaction, tell ourselves how ordinary and how natural and how instinctive art is. Literature, which might seem more sophisticated than painting or music, is just as natural – perhaps, given the existence of speech, more natural. (MURDOCH 1999: 259.)

The language that the artist uses is encrypted with the meaning derived from the social narrative. Following from this, literary authors use language which has acquired its meaning from the social narrative to construct their literary narrative art piece. It is through language that the author opens his/her door to the world of meaning to the reader. The language that the author uses, as mentioned by Murdoch, is often, if not always, evaluative. (MURDOCH 1999: 260.) The moral significance of the literary artwork also rests within the use of language. Be as it may, it is also the case that the value judgments are conceptually induced. These concepts gain their meaning in response to the structure of one social narrative. It would be, all things considered, very beneficial to make a distinction between the aesthetic sphere and the social sphere of the narrative. Reading, for example, Dostoyevsky's *Brothers Karamazov* or Homer's *Odyssey* opens a way for us to "time travel" into the past times and seemingly experience the social context in which the authors have written in. What is missing from this equation, however, is the life within that structure. Again, when we read Dostoyevsky or Homer, we are reading them within our language framework which is derivable from the social narrative in which we are encumbered. The illusion of stepping into a different social narrative is aesthetically induced; we are stepping into a literary narrative which we invoke from our current state of affairs. Homer and Dostoyevsky lived within a time which is inaccessible to us, and they have interpreted that time within their works of art. We can only access the literary narrative which is the derivative of the social narrative.

Hence, following Murdoch's text, we can sum up her point in the following manner. Art is a product of *mimesis*. In order to create a work of art, an artist is interpreting the world around him/her and forming it within an art medium. Literature (and other narrative work of art) comes from an Artist deriving the data from the world around him/her and transforming it into a literary work of art by using language. Even in our everyday lives, we are using language to describe the occurrences that have happened in the past and potential scenarios which might happen. We use language to communicate, and we communicate in the story-based form. When we tell stories, we are deriving data from the events, situations, or potential scenarios and, in the same regard, literary artists do the same process.

5.0. Social narrative and the literary narrative: the difference

Beforehand the schema was offered which is central to this paper. Having in mind that we have all of the necessary theoretical substance, we can elaborate this schema and by doing so, come towards a differentiation between the social and the literary narrative. A medium of hermeneutics is an object of our decryption and, in this instance, it is a literary work of art. Of course, like any medium of hermeneutics, it is connected to the whole infrastructure of meaning which we call a narrative. An artist is doing a hermeneutical reproduction, that is, a process of *mimesis* directed towards the world around him/her. That is to say, I find hermeneutical reproduction to be a process in which the artist is simultaneously deriving the meaning from the narrative and reproducing that meaning into the medium of hermeneutics. In this regard, the literary narrative is a derivative of the social narrative. Now, consider the X1, an interpreter or a subject who is deriving the meaning from the work of art. One might notice that, on the schema, the relation is twofold. When

participating in the process of hermeneutics, X1 is at the same time bestowing meaning unto the work of art, as well as deriving meaning from it. We can think of this process in the altered version of the Rawlsian notion of the reflective equilibrium. (RAWLS 1999: 43.) As we have mentioned, every individual considers himself/herself as a part of a story, therefore, he/she has a narrative conception of the self⁴ This personal narrative can be seen as a lens through which X1 is acquiring meaning from the medium of hermeneutics. At the same time, the medium of hermeneutics is shaping the personal narrative of the X1. This equilibrium opens the door for the seemingly Schillerian interplay between the personal and the literary, the author and the reader. I believe that this would describe the unity of which Murdoch speaks:

The work of art in so far as its sketchy existence is completed by the ready fantasy of the writer and the reader, that wicked co-operating pair, is an illusory unity and pornography is, again, the pure case of this collusion between the artist and his client. (MURDOCH 1999: 259.)

But I digress. The main point of this paper was to elaborate the difference between the personal, social and the literary narrative. Following this schema, we can make a clear-cut distinction between the personal, social and the literary narrative. In the act of reading, this distinction does indeed blur because of the narrative intertwinement. However, this should not lead us from the distinction which was already given.

6.0. Concluding remarks

In the final part of this paper the need arises to conclude everything that has been said. The paper was opened with the problem of differentiation between the social, personal and the literary narrative. The first step in solving this issue was to provide the argument with the theoretical substance. The portrayal of the social narrative and the way in which it affects the ones who are embedded within it was taken from the theoretical account of Alasdair MacIntyre. Afterwards, we have provided a much-needed method of semiosis which serves, for this paper, as a basis in which reader interprets the work of art. Iris Murdoch has provided us with the notions of *mimesis* which is in line with the project as proposed so far. This method has helped us in the goal of illuminating the distinction between the social and the literary narrative. Lastly, when everything was set on the table, we could, following the schema given in the third part of this text, elaborate a clear distinction between the personal, social and the literary narrative.

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4 This is a big premise that requires much more elaboration, however, let us take it, in this paper, for granted.

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Владимир Лукић

ИСТРАЖИВАЊЕ НАРАТИВА ИЗ ДРУШТВЕНОГ И КЊИЖЕВНОГ УГЛА: СЛУЧАЈ МЕКИНТАЈЕР И МУРДОК

Овај рад се бави темом наратива. Циљ истог је да направи разлику између личног, друштвеног и књижевног наратива. Да бисмо то урадили, потребно је пружати теоријски поглед на друштвени наратив који се налази у теорији Аласдера Мекинтајера, те да предложимо метод прављења диференцијације. Метод који ће се користити је метод семиозе. Кроз овај метод долазимо до улоге књижевног аутора, друштвеног наратива и личног наратива. На аутора утиче процес херменеутике и *мимезиса*, он/она извлачи значење и шифрира то значење у оквиру књижевног дела. Теорију која се користи за опис овог процеса развила је Ајрис Мурдок. Након ове разраде, доћи ћемо до јасне разлике између личног наратива, друштвеног наратива и књижевног наратива.

Кључне речи: наратив, *мимесис*, семиоза, херменеутика, аутор