

**“LITERARY CREATION AND CULTURE BASED ON RELIGIOUS BELIEF:
Northrop Frye and biblical matrices; Kenneth Burke and rhetoric of religion;
Hermeneutic of the Literary masterpiece – case of Harold Bloom and George
Steiner and the religiosity of language”**

In my paper I will try to show how recent anthropology of language, conducted by English speaking researchers, can lead us to a better understanding of the duty of literary text, and of the role of writer and reader in the process of producing and consuming fiction novels and poetry. In this respect we will start with the state of research of four outstanding literary critics and theory makers. After that we will provide an ontological explanation based on the works of George Steiner and Karl Rahner, to demonstrate how good literary text can act and play an important role in the humanization of man and his society.

One of various directions of research in literary criticism in North America (USA and Canada) – deals with the rapport between literature and religion.

1. A Canadian, **Northrop Frye**, a protestant pastor, has launched in North America the very first stream of literary theory research, while trying to show that the Bible is some kind of *matrix* of all literary skills and proceedings.
2. **Kenneth Burke**, an agnostic – has insisted on the idea that every system of symbols may be subordinate to the principal premises of Christian theology. Although Burke, in his studies focuses on the religious rhetoric, he does not presuppose God’s existence at all.¹
3. **Harold Bloom** – in general was following Burke’s criticism and has put his attention on literary categories in the field of Jewish Theology paradigms.
4. To **George Steiner**² - the literary criticism is linked with the fact of Creation, and he says that the literature which is not taken into account in theological matters, is sterile (lacks fecundity) and is empty.

Here above I have mentioned four major contemporary Western literary critics to examine the verbal systems of religious texts as a special manner and privileged tool to understand the literary language, especially its ties with various religious typologies.

To understand that, does not require any act of faith. In other words, it is not necessary that the critic has to share the faith of Dante to be able to explain a religious dimension of literary language.

In this respect we might be interested in taking an example from James Joyce, who though considering himself an atheist, for his own purpose, has used the scholastic rhetoric to elaborate some of his great literary inventions.³

¹ Kenneth Burke, *The Rhetoric of Religion*, University of California Press, (1961), 1970, p.2.

² Francis George Steiner, (born 23 April, 1929), is an influential European-born American literary critic, essayist, philosopher, novelist, translator and educator. He has written extensively about the relationship between language, literature and society, and the impact of The Holocaust. A polyglot and polymath, he is often credited with redefining the role of the critic.

Now, we will take into consideration what these four critics have to say to us. However, these four literary voices do not build any homogeneous doctrine on one literary theory. In fact, they show a good number of concordances as well as divergences on the subject of literature and its links with religious language.

1. For **Frye**, the Bible contains the archetypes of all kinds of Western literary genres.
2. For **Burke**, the rhetoric of religion constitutes some kind of paradigm to any research focused on the rapport between life and literature.
3. **Bloom** acknowledges that his approach to literature reveals one kind of Gnostic imagination based on the desecrated statements.
4. **George Steiner** upholds an opinion that a truly literary language presupposes, if not the presence of God, at least a presumption of religious belief or some kind of theological background.

I. Northrop Frye and the Bible's matrix

In his very first book *Fearful Symmetry: A study of William Blake* (1947), and then in his later masterpiece entitled *The Double Vision* (1991) Frye (1912-1991) shows that the Christian Bible is a paradigm of all kinds of symbols, myths, genres and Western literary typologies.

In one of his latest interviews he said exactly what he already had written in his first book *Fearful Symmetry*: The Bible, par excellence, which teaches man that he is free to imagine and create whatever he desires, and then that the power of imagination and of creativity is, in the final stage, what remains in man as divine. In fact Christianity [the Bible] unites in man what is divine with what is human in his inner being. In this way, the Christian religion opens before man the doors of liberty {an inner freedom} which is an infinite way of dealing with his life as well as with life around him.⁴

During forty years Frye was busy with bringing about the classification of diverse archetypes, its modalities and symbols, which could enable him to establish the links between different kinds of literary texts. In his work of unification, Frye, alike recently, Julia Kristeva who shows that literature is tightly linked with religion.⁵

³ Joyce in one of his letters acknowledges that: "I like Dante almost like Bible." This letter is mentioned by Richard Ellmann in "*James Joyce*", Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1982. In his biography Ellmann says that Joyce, although he has lost his Catholic faith, kept his interest in Catholic theology, considered as a source of inspiration for his literary work.

⁴ In David Cayley, *Entretiens avec Northrop Frye*, Saint-Laurent (Québec), Éd. Bellarmin, 1996.

⁵ Kristeva accepts Frye's position on the central place of religion in literary studies, but she differs from him in the point that what links imagination with religion is for her, *unconsciousness*, and not any archetype, nor symbol. See Julia Kristeva, "The importance of Frye", in Lee Alvin A. and Robert D. Dham (eds), *The Legacy of Northrop Frye*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1994, p.335-337. It is also recommended to see Kristeva's recent book on Saint Thérèse d'Avilà entitled *Thérèse mon amour*, Fayard, Paris, 2008, 750 pp.

Any respectable culture is rich in its fundamental myths and the Bible represents for Western civilization its final and definitive myth!

Creation, fall, destruction, exile, redemption and restoration are for Frye basic and fundamental diagrams of literature which could be found in the Bible.

In his very influential book *The Anatomy of Criticism* – he has constructed a general vision of literature.⁶ Frye, to be able to summarize his theory, turns to the dichotomy inspired by a strophe of Blake's poem: « Double Vision⁷ »

Frye is telling us that every fictional wording carries a natural aspect, *natural vision*, as well as a spiritual aspect, *spiritual vision*, - and then that the main ingredients charged with organization of the literary masterpiece are the myth (*story* or *narration*) and metaphor (*or figurative language*).⁸ The metaphor makes possible that double vision; it is also a way which permits any religious revelation, because « God reveals to us as a linguistic event⁹ » However, some theorists do not share these, cited above, motivations.¹⁰

In any case, Frye has just wanted his research to become a meeting point between literary spirit and its theological counterpart. At the end of his life, he acknowledged that a secular reading of his theory is, frankly speaking insufficient.

In his research on literature, Frye began with an examination of man's material necessities which leads man towards his spiritual needs. [We can examine his investigation in his following books: *The Great Code* (1983), *Words with Power* (1990), and *The Double Vision* (1991)].

At the end of his investigations he acknowledges that human beings are busy with two kinds of preoccupations which he calls *primary* and *secondary* ones: "Primary" are related to *nutrition, sexuality, property and to the freedom of movement*. "Secondary" are linked to the *political, religious and ideological activities*.¹¹

Frye considers that the fundamental myths can carry anguish (anxiety) which is related to the *primary* preoccupations. However, it is most probable that these *primary* preoccupations could even impose themselves as a inner value and express themselves, by the means of metaphor, like a kind of satisfaction of *spiritual needs* in man's life.

The subordination of the *secondary needs* towards the *primary* ones is, according to Frye, a threat which produces *misery*. However, conciliation between primary and secondary needs, can lead man to the goodness of *redemption*.

⁶ Northrop Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism*, Princeton University Press, 1957, p.11.

⁷ N. Frye, *The Double Vision*, University of Toronto, 1991, p. 16 and p. 78.

⁸ Id. *The Double Vision*, op.cit., p. 17.

⁹ See N. Frye, *la Bible et la littérature*, 2. *La Parole souveraine*, Paris, Le Seuil, 1994, and *The Double Vision*, op.cit., p.6.

¹⁰ Tzvetan Todorov, for example, does not enter into religious considerations while giving an account of Frye's ideas. After all, he will desert Canadian critic to formulate his own literary theory. See the first chapter of his *Introduction à la littérature fantastique*, Paris, Le Seul, 1970.

¹¹ N. Frye, *la Parole souveraine*, op.cit., p. 62 sq.

In *The Anatomy of Criticism*, Frye asserts that two basic models on which literature is built, are *tragedy* (where an individual withdraws himself from society) and *comedy* (where he reintegrates himself into society).¹² There is a choice between the literary representation of “*natural, happy and idealized World* (comedy), and *horrible and miserable one* (tragedy)”.¹³

From a biblical point of view, the *tragedy* is ironic, because in the Bible there are no completely *tragic* stories (situations) which cannot eventually be converted into a *salutary* solution. There, an apparent misfortune can become fortune¹⁴ in an undefined future.

In Frye’s opinion, the Bible constitutes a supreme myth of Western civilization, because it incorporates all the *primary* and the *secondary* preoccupations of human beings, as well as carries out a final resolution of *misery of the World* and its eventual *spiritual redemption*.

II. Kenneth Burke and the rhetoric of religion

Kenneth Burke (1897 – 1993) dedicated 60 years of his life to the study of relations between life and literature. Contrary to the research tendencies in fashion at that time in US Universities, Burke, from the very beginning, wanted to study the literary phenomenon considered as a result of the life preoccupations of human beings.

Relying on Frye’s achievements, Burke can make a statement that the *primary needs* of man are linked with the symbols of the literary work. Burke defines that symbol as a “*verbal parallel of the model of existence*”.¹⁵ In his opinion the symbol is a way of associating words with experience, which however are not identical to the experience. Indeed, “The symbol carries away an essence of the experience which lies behind him”.¹⁶

That is why symbols are *par excellence* enigmatic. But, its enigma allows us to consider literature as a symbolic stratum which helps us to make our response to difficulties that come into our life. A symbol is a kind of invitation addressed to us to provide its interpretation. In Burke’s theory, its presence (presence of the symbols) helps to make clearer and determine both author and reader’s concerns.

According to Burke, every individual (person) is involved in activities of life which eventually can bring them into two kinds of attitudes: *culpability* and *identity*. The example which he gives us is a work of the poet. On one hand, writing poetry is in itself alike the process of *self-purification*, and on the other, it is a rite of *self-renovation*. In fact, all poetry is symbolic in the way in which rhetoric of self is.

Every poem starts from “here” and goes to “elsewhere”. Thanks to poetry, the poet has an opportunity to write down what he cares about in his mind and heart, as well as to find solutions to his problems, to leave his culpability and to acquire a spiritual welfare - in another words, to

¹² N. Frye, *la Parole souveraine*, op.cit.

¹³ Id., *le Grand Code. La Bible et la littérature*, Paris, Le Seuil, 1984.

¹⁴ See *Chinese Moral Tales*, 中國寓言, “塞翁失馬” (安知非福)

¹⁵ Kenneth Burke, *Counter-Statement*, 1931, p. 157.

¹⁶ Id., *Attitudes towards History*, University of California Press, (1937), 1984, p. 329.

pass from “death” to “new life”. In that sense every poem is a cleansing opportunity, a symbolic expiation of undesirable, ugly and hated things.¹⁷

Burke asks himself about the meaning of such and such literary piece and asks writers about their intentions to write such and such poems. What he wants to know, is the *relation (mediation)* between human motivations and the choice of symbolic patterns. In his words he says: “a production (creation) of the ideal has to be different from the ideal. The same matter is with the *incarnated God* (Jesus) who has to be distinguished from the *purely spiritual one*.”¹⁸

In his major masterpiece, *The Rhetoric of Religion* (1961) Burke makes a statement that the theological formal principles bring light to the whole symbolic system.

Indeed, he points out that the genius of language is based not only on its capacity to rely upon the natural and spiritual orders, but also on its capacity *to negate* both of them. Indeed, the negation is a principal of morality¹⁹ (*interdicts*). In fact, the moral standards are a phenomenon that depend on language. “If we could eliminate language from our World, that we will have not anymore moral imperatives in force.”²⁰ That is like, in his opinion, the concept of *culpability* also being a product of language because *culpability* is also a way “to say ‘no’ to the law.”²¹

In theology, the principle which is able to unify the moral code is, according to Burke’s words, the *God-Term*. This term God involves a judgment (classification) of values, which human action provides. That action (human preoccupations) makes us connected with the symbols, which eventually help us to classify these preoccupations according to our literary imagination. That’s why, as soon as someone starts to talk, his speech expresses its values, and then as soon as someone expresses its values, spontaneously we refer to our hierarchy of values. In fact, every hierarchy of values, in consequence, carries on a supreme value which is the *God-Term*.

As an example, Burke refers to the poetry of Walt Whitman (an American democrat) and Pablo Neruda (Chilean Marxist), which both carry a *political vision*. Therefore for Dante, God is God!

III. Harold Bloom and a hermeneutic literary masterpiece

If Burke’s task was to analyze the relationship between literature and life, Harold Bloom’s once was essentially dedicated to establish the relationship between literature and literature. In fact, he engaged himself in the studies of so-called *reversionary ratios (relations of revision)* between literary masterpiece and its forerunner.

Bloom has a great respect for Burke and considers him one of the greatest literary theoreticians and critics in the USA. However Bloom distances himself from Burke, while saying

¹⁷ William H. Rueckert, *Kenneth Burke and the Drama of Human Relations*, University of California Press, 1982, p.97-98. See also K. Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action. Essays on Life, Literature and Method*, University of California Press, 1966.

¹⁸ God the Father = Yahweh.

¹⁹ Kenneth Burke, *The Rhetoric of Religion*, op. cit., p. 187.

²⁰ Ibid. p. 295.

²¹ Id., *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, University of California Press, (1941), 1973, p. 61.

that “the *negation* is a kind of taking into account what once have been repressed (Freud); it is a manner of taking away the repression without, accepting what once has been repressed”.²²

Bloom thinks that in modern poetry, sense is *illusion*. For him a contemporary poem has no sense; it is only a product of *procrastination of the other's poems*. For Bloom, what is original and unique about the poem, remains mostly in the achievements of the past, especially done by Romantic poets, and Shakespeare, who, according to Bloom is a maker of impassable heights of literature.²³

Since the literary heights have already been reached and established, the poet of our times comes too late to be original in his own creativity. He has no way of being dominated by anxiety. In *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973), Bloom has elaborated a theory of literature according to which, the literary masterpiece is a result of its confrontation with the literary work created in the past.

In consequence, beginning from *Kabbalah and Creation* (1975), Bloom became a supporter of religious connotations in literature: “A religious illusion which in poetry produces the *real presence* (because in his opinion *poems* do not possess any presence, any unity or either any sense) – this *presence* is faith, a *promise*, relying on the things we are expecting for, it is an evidence of the presence of things we haven't yet seen”.²⁴

Bloom clarifies his position, in his book *The Breaking of the Vessels* (1982) which declares him as *agnostic*. And that is because of his inner sentiment of transgression, his own culpability of becoming a *Gnostic Jew*, which came as a result of his orthodox education, he has been received.²⁵

In his book *Ruin the Sacred Truths* (1991) (*Ruiner les vérités sacrées*) Bloom defends his thesis while relying on some significant examples: one of them is, taken from the Jewish Bible and its supposed author, which 19th century philology calls the “Yahvist author”,²⁶ another one from Dante and the Catholic theology, especially of Dante's remarkable invention of Beatrice as a personified myth of his salvation (Beatrice is in the centre of a singular gnosis²⁷), and another one is taken from Milton and his Protestant theology.

In his latest book, *Omens of Millennium*, Frye accuses orthodox dogmas such as: *normative Judaism, Catholic Church, Sunnite Islam, Chit's regime of Iran* for suppressing the imaginative element of Western religion which is called *gnosis*.²⁸ Here, Bloom is talking about spiritual experience which in his understanding is closely related to illusion of sense in poetry.²⁹

²² Harold Bloom, *The Breaking of the Vessels*, University of Chicago Press, 1982, p.11.

²³ *The Western Canon*, New York, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1994, p. 50. In *Shakespeare. The Invention of the Human*, New York, Riverhead Books, 1998, Bloom goes even further (p.717).

²⁴ *Kabbalah and Criticism*, New York, Continuum, 1975, p. 122. In *Genius. A Mosaic of One Hundred Exemplary Creative Minds*, New York, Warner Books, 2002, Bloom makes use of kabalistic figures to organize its book dedicated to the genius of literary work. See: p. xi.

²⁵ Id., *The Breaking of the Vessels*, op.cit., p. 43. See also an essay “Lying against Time: Gnosis, Poetry, Criticism”, in Harold Bloom, *Agon. Towards a theory of Revisionism*, Oxford University Press, 1982.

²⁶ *The Book of J*, New York, Vintage, 1991, p.71.

²⁷ Id., *Ruin the Sacred Truths*, op.cit., p.47.

²⁸ Gnosis is high knowledge of mysteries of religion. It is a philosophical eclecticism which pretends to reconcile all religions and to explain their deep meaning and mission.

²⁹ H. Bloom, *Omens of Millennium, The Gnosis of Angels, Dreams and Resurrection*, New York, Riverhead Books, 1996, p. 227.

He confesses that “Every poet, more than any other man, starts, even if that is unconscious to him, by a kind of rebellion against the awareness of an inevitable death he has to face”.³⁰

IV. George Steiner and the religious reality of language.

In his latest book, *Grammars of Creation* (2001), George Steiner acknowledges the importance of Harold Bloom’s research. However, in contrast to the priority he gives to the literary influence, Steiner considers it a secondary element. What is important for Steiner is not a literary fight with Shakespeare, but an aesthetic one, especially one which is based on theology: “a struggle with the angel was an archetype of the human creativity”³¹ - says Steiner.

He also supports Greek myths and tragedies which in his opinion have a lot to do with so-called *dimension of transcendence*.³² Steiner also believes that Shakespeare has dodged the fundamental questions of literature.³³ In his literary thoughts, Steiner pays an important tribute to religious themes.

He sees literature as a kind of activity which gives us an opportunity to formulate a theological dilemma of all the times (especially those coming after the Holocaust and Auschwitz extermination).³⁴

Steiner was always worried about the *absence of God*, especially when he really was in need of presupposing His presence. That mainstream of his research can be seen well in *The Death of Tragedy* (1961). The tragedy, according to him, expresses essential problems of human beings, involved into the mysteries of creation: “There are in the World mysteries of injustice, of disasters which surpasses human understanding of his culpability. There are the things which violate our moral expectations”.³⁵ The fundamental dilemma of human beings is always present when he is facing the divine. In Steiner’s view, the tragedy implies a shared responsibility of the hero (protagonist) and of divinity (God) for the earthly things happening under the sky.

In his understanding, tragedy is a kind of protest against the difficulty of the relation between divine and profane: “The tragedy is born from a sentiment of insult and it is a protest against conditions of life, which in itself involves a possibility of disorder (see rebellious spirit of Antigone)”.³⁶

³⁰ Id., *The Anxiety of Influence*, op.cit., p. 10.

³¹ George Steiner, *Grammars of Creation*, op. cit., p. 327.

³² G. Steiner, *Les Antigones*, Paris, Gallimard, 1986.

³³ Contrarily to H. Bloom for whom Shakespeare is the most important writer. See: H. Bloom, *The Western Canon ...*, op. cit., p. 50. See also: “Une lecture contre Shakespeare”, *Passions impunies*, Paris, Gallimard, 1997, p. 234.

³⁴ G. Steiner, “A Responson”, in Scott, Nathan A. and Ronald A. Sharp (eds), *Reading George Steiner*, Baltimore and London, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994, p. 280.

³⁵ G. Steiner, *la Mort de la tragédie*, Paris, Gallimard, 1993, p. 17.

³⁶ Ibid.

Steiner in his analyses on language and on translation written down in *After Babel* (1975) speaks about his thoughts upon the tragedy: “the language is a main instrument through which a man pushes away the World, such one as he has found”.³⁷

But, the other side of the coin has appeared in *Real Presences* (1989), when Steiner has made a statement that: “all coherent knowledge of language is, in its final authority, carried out by the presupposition of the presence of God”.³⁸

Steiner himself is not interested by profane literature as well as he has not either interest in sacred texts. That’s why the literary language becomes for him a privileged field of exploration opened to its inner tensions between religious and Creation’s influences.

If the art was for him a human tentative to face death, especially the degradation of death, which nowadays has become a mockery of artist’s creative intuition: “there is no anymore any kind of assurance for poetry and arts in analogy of divine being”.³⁹

That suggests that the flash of spirit (*conceit*) of immortality, which always has been at the centre of Western aesthetics and its intellectual ambitions, became not more then just: “a flash of spirit”.⁴⁰

Since *After Babel*, Steiner has reaffirmed a good number of times, that one of the most important - a supreme creation of language - was a concept of hope⁴¹ which remains “inseparable from the grammatical development of the future tense”.⁴² Steiner is afraid that with the spread of death and the degradation of the Earth, the time of hope (and time of important artistic creativity linked to divine Creation [or at least with its idiom]) will very soon come to an end.

Steiner believes that the contemporary culture, that one of unlimited consumption and of liberal democracies, is not anymore able to produce a serious, aesthetically high standard of art.

In his other book, *Masters and Disciples*, he says that: “a good teacher has always to be insatiable (thirsty) of Hope. A good reader likewise too”.⁴³

Steiner is an ambassador of fundamental values of old, good Europe. He calls modern and post-modern societies to redefine, to reformulate its cultural traditions and to transmit them to the younger generation. Europe, after two World Wars and the extermination of the Holocaust⁴⁴ is not anymore worthy to revive. Paul Valéry has already predicted the death of civilizations: he has said: « Let’s they die! » This is a decline of Europe, because she is tired of the World. Her own History makes her feel tired.⁴⁵

³⁷ G. Steiner, *Après Babel. Une poétique du dire et de la traduction*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1978, 1991 and 1998.

³⁸ Id., *Réelles Présences. Les arts du sens*, Paris, Gallimard, 1989, 1991 and 1994.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 83.

⁴⁰ Id., *Grammars of Creation*, op. cit., p.334.

⁴¹ See: “Spe Salvi” – the Encyclical Letter of the Supreme Pontiff, Benedict XVI on Christian Hope. Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican 2007.

⁴² Id., *Grammars of Creation*, op. cit., p.243.

⁴³ *Maîtres et Disciples*, trad. P.E.Dauzat, Paris, Gallimard, 2003, p. 184.

⁴⁴ 70 million people perished in the atrocity of the Second World War.

⁴⁵ *Héritages et présences de l’esprit européen*, l’Entretien avec George Steiner, in « Esprit » nr. 300, december 2003, p.20.

Today, if we look upon the state of the novel, in which state does it find itself now? The novel (a roman) has supposed to be an instrument of discussion and of perception, a metaphor between world, its knowledge and lifestyle of the people ... Steiner is really disappointed with nowadays fiction.

In the work of Marx, we can find a very illuminative page, coming from his diary written in 1848: “It was a time when we haven’t exchange currency by currency, but love by love and the confidence by confidence (trust by trust)”.⁴⁶ What has happened? Marx is not telling us what day and at what time the things changed and came to condemn the man. This is the work of the well-known *spirit of history*.

The Hassidic tradition says that God has created man for the purpose that man will tell his story (narratives) to his God. Creativity is a result of *belief* and invention is a result of common, anonymous effort. Creativity imitates (*per analogy*) the very first creativity of God the Creator (St. Thomas of Aquinas).

A wandering Jew⁴⁷ has always his bundle at hand. A Jew considers himself “an invited guest to the life”, a guest on the Earth – and guests usually try to leave the host’s home a little bit proper, a little bit enriched. In this sense, Steiner understands a duty of Jews: *teaching men and women to feel and be like an invited guest on this Earth* (Hakkas, 客家人 *kejiaren* in Chinese reality).

V. How does theology consider literature?

In the great fictions - says Karl Rahner⁴⁸ - theology finds her place and feels at ease. A single fact that literature is speaking about *beauty*, *magnanimity* and *sufferings* of human nature, shows that she deals with elusive and imperceptible mysteries, which can lead and dominate human life and death. Indeed, in the field of language, linguistics and theology meet each other and have a lot of things in common. From the very beginning, language, in its internal structure, was marked by *the infinity*. In fact *the infinity* has left an indelible mark on the internal structure of language and of its functions. Its syntax confirms that fact!

Since the main role and duty of literature is the translation of man’s life reality into words, that activity gives a field to the elevation of human beings and enables *transcendence* to be grasped and preserved in literary work. Here is an important responsibility of writers who, in front of double world’s appearance, *scientific* and *symbolic* (death, sufferance), are supposed to keep a balance between these two realities of human life and give equal measure and respect to both of them in their work.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Id., *La création et l’invention*, p. 24.

⁴⁷ Id., *Le juif errant*, p. 31.

⁴⁸ *Éléments de théologie spirituelle*, DDB., Paris, 1964, p. 276.

⁴⁹ This knowledge of symbolism, says Rahner, is some kind of knowledge put in *mise-en-abime* of its essence within its phenomenon, of the *all* into a *part* and of a *part* into the *all*. See: Id. *Éléments de théologie spirituelle*, DDB, Paris, 1964, p. 268.

Witold Gombrowicz,⁵⁰ a Polish philosopher and drama writer, confesses that: “an excessive respect and importance given to the truth issued from sciences, has concealed, even worst, has blocked out our own truth. Many times, while we are trying to more understand our reality, we are easy forgetting that our first duty is to express that reality not by ideas but by our own person. Because since we are persons, that is our duty to be aware, to be attentive, that in our fast changing and sophisticated world, that will be no lack of life carrying words expressed by man⁵¹”.

In this context (as above), the literature can initiate and facilitate the works of *thinking God*. Even before talking about God. Therefore, in the true literary style and expression, the – *Aussage* – (term used by Ranher) – the reader can see its point (focus) – *Zusage* – in which God is working through the reader’s intelligence and sensibility. It is a way and great chance which could lead man back to his origins, to the resources of his very being.

With this intention, the theologian needs poets who molt by the transcendence, speak out the words of origins (water, rice or bread, sea, mountain, earth, sun, sky) and the words of nostalgia after creation.⁵² These words which do not come from the vocabulary of science, can make theological concepts more familiar and at hand for all. Intuition and a taste for symbolism⁵³ are two characteristics of a good poet that can enable him to describe the mysteries of the World through the simplicity of his words. Likewise, literary creation reminds one of the very first sources of its creative mystery, its sensibility and the place of beauty in human life.

VI. Literary masterpiece – sacramental nutrition of the human soul

Once welcomed, interiorized, learned by heart, the literary text is able to play a role of *sacrament*,⁵⁴ which could nourish and even heal the inner heart (soul) of man. It is a matter of fact that someone who regularly reads and writes can naturally grow as a person. He can grow in wisdom and in spirit.

The literary universe shall give input to the inner, (an interior) universe of a reader’s life because as says St. Luke, “*Man’s life is not only relying on food, but on every Word of life* (Luke

⁵⁰ Gombrowicz was a declared atheist and rationalist. However, he recognized himself to be shaken by the reading of Simone Weil’s book entitled, *Pesanteur et la Grâce*. While reading the book he felt (experienced) a *presence of God*. See Witold Gombrowicz, *Dziennik 1961-1969, (Diary 1961-1969)* vol. 3, Wyd. Literackie, Kraków, p.141.

⁵¹ W.Gombrowicz, *Cours de philosophie en six heures et quart*, Préface de F.M. Cataluccio, Éd. Rivages, 1995, p.35.

⁵² *Paroles maternelles* or *paroles-de-l’origine (urworte)* is an essential term used by Rahner in « Prêtre et poète » (« Priest and Poet ») in Karl Rahner’s, *Éléments de théologie spirituelle*, DDB., Paris, 1964.

⁵³ Jacques Maritain, “*Intuition créatrice dans l’art et dans la poésie*”, DDB, Paris, 1966, p. 420, especially the first chapter, « La poésie, l’homme et les choses », chapter four, « L’intuition créatrice et connaissance poétique » and chapter nine, « Le sens poétique ou la mélodie intérieure. »

⁵⁴ In western Christianity, a traditional definition of a sacrament is that it is an outward sign that conveys an inward, spiritual grace through Christ in western Christianity - a traditional definition of a sacrament is that it is an outward sign that conveys an inward, spiritual grace through Christ.

4, 4). An authentic, salutary (beneficial) sacramental Word takes origin in two sources: *one in the author (creator)* and *one in the reader*, which interaction carried from both sides can bring a final reference to its sense.

During a reading session, the author's creative dynamic comes in touch with the reader's *re-creative* dynamic. These inter-connected dynamics provide a place for the birth of the *text*, which appears as a gift of *truth*, a *gratis* given gift which instructs both writer and his reader. In other words, the intersection of both contributions (this of author and that of his reader) becomes an outlook, a representation of sacramental and salutary text.⁵⁵

When a text is carrying *the sacramental function*, we can detect it, while looking at its special character, which is its *unfinished nature*. This *unfinished nature* or *state* can become *finished* or *accomplished* only because of our *reading*, of our *reception*.

Consequently, the literary text enjoys *a double existence*: he can exist independently outside of the reading (in books and in libraries), *in potentiam* as we would say, but also can become *concretized* only by the reading, because the literary action is always double: *an interaction* between text and its reader. The sense which is about to be born, is a result of that correlation of textual signs and of the work of its reader, of his own understanding.

Therefore, the reader opens himself to be stimulated, to be worked by the text. Even more, both of them become one, because there is no longer any division between the subject and its object. It can be also that the sense is no longer to be defined, but only a pure effect which can be experienced. Be that as it may, it is the writer's duty to write the *word of origin*, (an efficient word, a sacramental word) as well as to assume (to take) responsibility for the appropriate reading of his masterpiece.

It is matter of fact that the masterpiece that contains and carries out art and the genius of its creator (of his maker) is only able to father new writers-creators who in time and space keep literary works alive.

A literary author, knows well that the gift of talent he has received (free of charge gift) comes from above. It has been given to him *gratis*.⁵⁶ This « gift of genius, of literary talent » testifies of *unknown, infinite* origins of that creativity and of its *continuous presence*. Therefore, an attentive reader should welcome the text as a gift and as a medium leading him to the truth of text's origins (the work of the writer and of his talent, struggles of writing put in it).

H. Urs von Balthasar used to say: "*any symbol* can't be correctly interpreted if it is not seen and understood from the *centre*, from the *heart*".⁵⁷ Consequently, the reader will not be

⁵⁵ In the Chinese language the number *ten* is written as follows 十, (*shi*), which might illustrate a *double vision* crossed in the middle; this of *God's love to mankind* and that of *mankind's love to mankind and its nature*. That could be an image of a divine-human fullness *presented* in the cosmic world.

⁵⁶ In Christianity, divine grace refers to the sovereign favour of God for humankind — especially in regard to salvation — irrespective of actions ("deeds"), earned worth or proven goodness. Grace is enabling power sufficient for progression. Grace divine is an indispensable gift from God for development, improvement and character expansion. Without God's grace, there are certain limitations, weaknesses, flaws, impurities and faults (i.e. carnality) that humankind cannot overcome. Therefore, it is necessary to increase in God's grace for added perfection, completeness and flawlessness.

⁵⁷ On *centre of human being*, see Hans Urs von Balthasar, *La Gloire et la Croix*, vol. *Apparition*, Aubier, 1965, p. 172. .

easily satisfied with the written signs, but he will rather look for an in-depth and spiritual message encoded in these signs. That is exactly the function of the signs which provides, according to St. Thomas of Aquinas' words, a *punctum saliens experimentationis* (the main point of experimentation) of God's creative words.⁵⁸

The reader, likewise a child, is invited to grow in the ocean of words and then discover that he is not anymore the *centre of the World*. In future this experience of language will contribute to situate him in a *just milieu*.⁵⁹ It will help him to find his own place in society and to develop his intellectual and human capacities.

An author's literary masterpiece is able to enrich the human and spiritual level of its reader, and then its aesthetic achievements can eventually help him to discover *transcendental truths*. This kind of literary *pedagogy of text* could be translated into theological terms as a *Christian Mystagogy*.⁶⁰

That mystagogy⁶¹ works thanks to a well selected scope of *words of origin* (*urworte*) which can help the reader in his reflection and consideration of his own life and its surroundings. The *words of origin* lead him to experience a grace of meditation which relies on the silence which alimnts all prolific reflection.

Every word is thirsty of *silence*,
Emptiness is always filled up with an invisible *fullness*,
Useless always remains *efficient* and *salutary*,
And *listening* welcomes an *invigorated breath*
Of the *spokenWord*.

Zhuangzi, 莊子

NOTE: Here I would like to refer all above presented matters to Prof. Yves Tourenne's outstanding and very important essay entitled "*Rahner's Esthetics of Theology*" (*L'esthétique théologique chez Rahner*, RSR, t.85,n°3, Paris, 1997.) – thereupon I quote from the French original, some important formulations of the concept matters I have exposed in my paper:

« *En essence suprême, le poétique est un présupposé du Christianisme. La parole humaine est portée par le mystère de la grâce, qui est don de Dieu Lui-même, sans lequel rien de vraiment humain n'est possible* » (p.388).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

⁵⁹ *Zhongyong*, 中庸.

⁶⁰ See NOTE down below the page.

⁶¹ Mystagogy is the period after the rites of initiation into the Catholic Church. It's a time for settling in. Have you ever started a new job? A new school? A new family? It's exciting to begin, but those first steps can be wobbly. We rely on people around us to help us feel at home. That's the purpose of mystagogy. Technically, the word "mystagogy" refers to catechesis for the newly baptized. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults does not use the term for those baptized in other Churches and now in full communion in the Catholic Church.

“In its supreme essence the poetry carries a presupposition of Christianity. Human words carry a mystery of grace, which is a personal gift of God - without it nothing can be truly human.”).

« *L'homme est lecteur, auditeur de la Parole. L'écrivain en tant que tel se tient sous l'appel de grâce du Christ. La qualité d'auteur est un agir humain, qui en tant que tel, a une dimension christique. « Christique » - chez Rahner veut dire, tout ce qui est marqué ontologiquement par le Christ »* (p.389).

“Man is a reader, and listener of the Word [Speech]. The author (writer) as such, acts upon the call of Christ's grace. His own status allows him to act humanly (in a humanistic way) which is *par excellent* Christ's way (God became man [Creation and Incarnation]) – a *Christic dimension* – in Rahner's words it does mean *all things which were ontologically marked by Christ.*”).

« *Rahner regarde l'existence de l'homme en théologien de la grâce. L'existence est structurée d'emblée par la Parole de Dieu, qui se fait chair dans le Christ Jésus* (p.392). *Le théologien d'aujourd'hui doit être 'mystagogue', qui montre la grâce (Dieu se donnant Lui-même), qui est au centre de l'être-homme »* (p.405).

“Rahner looks on human existence throughout with the ocular of theologian of grace. The existence is composed by and relies on God's Speech [Word] which was incarnated [took flesh] in Jesus Christ. Consequently, nowadays any respected theologian has to be a '*mystagog*' and has to show up the grace (God's free gift to humanity) which remains right in the middle of a human being's life experience.”).

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