

ROMAN INGARDEN'S NOTION OF POLYPHONIC HARMONY: PART I

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With the recent translations of Roman Ingarden's works, The Literary Work of Art and The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art, Anglo-Saxon critics and aestheticians have been afforded the opportunity to see how Husserl's phenomenological method may be applied in the case of literary works.¹ In the first text he describes the essential structures of the literary work of art, while in the second he clarifies what is involved in the literary audience's cognition of such works. These efforts have not gone unrecognized nor unappreciated in phenomenological circles. Herbert Spiegelberg has said of Ingarden that "perhaps his most original phenomenological work has been done in the analysis of various works of art, beginning with his book on the literary work of art, but extending to works of music and to the pictorial and tectonic arts."² Nonetheless, Ingarden's work may be highly original and yet not necessarily definitive.

Ingarden's utilization of the phenomenological method in the description of the essential features of literary works may be more easily understood when it is realized that The Literary Work of Art is the noematic correlate of the noetic acts described in The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art. These two terms, taken together, constitute a full description of the act of consciousness involved in the apprehension of the literary work. The word "full" in the above sentence may be somewhat misleading in that Ingarden asserts that the two constitute a full description, but, as will be posited as a possibility, it may be the case that the description is, in part, inadequate. And one example of this proposed inadequacy is found in his notion of polyphonic harmony. It is considered in both of the above mentioned works, but I am here only concerned with Ingarden's treatment of the notion in The Literary Work of Art.³ Polyphonic harmony is crucial in his description of the essential relations of the various components of the literary work of art, but it remains an opaque notion at best.

In The Literary Work of Art Ingarden claims that there emerge four (or five) strata in any literary work of art.⁴ There may be others, of course, but Ingarden is on an eidetic search; and the ones

he describes are the essential strata that must be present if, in fact, a work is to be considered a literary work of art. They are:

- (1) the stratum of word sounds and the phonetic formations of higher order built on them;
- (2) the stratum of meaning units of various orders;
- (3) the stratum of manifold schematized aspects and aspect continua and series, and, finally;
- (4) the stratum of represented objectives and their vicissitudes.⁵

It should be noted, however, that the above quote does not fully describe the whole of the essential structure of the literary work. The horizontal stratifications discovered by Ingarden's phenomenological method demand some sort of unification which has not yet been exhibited. It turns out, according to Ingarden, that the unification of the literary work of art reveals itself as a sequence with a beginning and end. This assertion demonstrates nothing new in essential terms, but it may lead to a different kind of assertion concerning the closure of the literary work. Perhaps a case can be made for a vertical stratum which runs through the others. If the case is made, then that is the end of the problem and questions concerning the unification of fictional worlds should find their answer in the fifth stratum. But, unfortunately, it is Ingarden's neglect of this final stratum that introduces difficulties in his project.

Ingarden variously assures the reader that the fifth stratum is constituted by metaphysical qualities or, as he is sometimes wont to call them, aesthetic qualities. Whether he uses one or the other designation, he claims that "the polyphonic harmony is precisely that 'side' of the literary work that, along with the metaphysical qualities attaining manifestation, makes the work a work of art."⁶ He seems to be saying that the polyphonic harmony is not a matter for analysis since it is self-evident to the reader. It simply appears and irradiates through the whole of the work. But has Ingarden grounded his claim concerning the polyphonic harmony? It is the present assertion of this paper that Ingarden has not provided adequate ground for his notion of polyphonic harmony based on the metaphysical qualities of a fictional world. It may well be that his search for essential structures had left him no alternative in this matter but to say, "To put it more precisely, both the individual

strata themselves--given, of course, an appropriate attitude on the part of the reader--in manifold aesthetic value qualities which, in unison, of themselves produce a polyphonic harmony."⁷ These words assert that the polyphonic harmony is given as a function of the horizontal strata, but they do not establish the fact.

In all fairness, it should be pointed out that Ingarden does demonstrate how each of the first four strata are mutually interdependent. The stratum of represented objectivities is built on the stratum of schematized aspects, and it, in turn, is dependent on the stratum of meaning units which is ultimately formed on the stratum of word sounds. There is an overlap at the point of contact between each of the various layers. Nonetheless, the kind of unity thus being described by Ingarden does not ultimately connect theoretically the mutually dependent strata into a unified whole which exhibits those qualities that makes a literary work of art.

Ingarden's phenomenological investigation of the literary work of art has produced by the cross-sectional analysis, the essential strata of the work. Again, this is only a partial analysis since Ingarden's notion of the polyphonic harmony of the whole of the literary work has not been phenomenologically produced.

Early on in The Literary Work of Art Ingarden poses the following:

. . .the question may be raised whether it would not be necessary to distinguish yet another special stratum of the literary work, one which would, so to speak, "cut across" the above mentioned strata and have the foundation of its constitution in them--a stratum of aesthetic value qualities and the polyphony that is constituted in them. This can be determined, however, only on the basis of analysis of the individual strata. In consequence, the question of what the proper object of the aesthetic attitude is in the total structure of the literary work must also be deferred for later consideration.⁸

And defer it he does. It is not until the concluding remarks of The Literary Work of Art that he finally addresses the problem previously posited. He concludes that "it (polyphonic harmony) is something which stems both from the qualifications or the contents

of the individual strata and from the close interconnection of the strata, and it is perceived as something dependent on the whole work."⁹ He asserts that "one can, of course, for the purpose of analysis, intentionally differentiate these qualities from the remaining elements and moments of the work and--if one wishes to--speak of a special stratum of the work."¹⁰ Thus we are given a conclusion concerning polyphonic harmony, but in no place is an extensive analysis given of it. It is mentioned throughout the text in relation to the various strata, but it is not argued for in any systematic way. This lapse presents the reader with an apparent difficulty. If each of the strata is to be analyzed thoroughly, even to the point of triviality, it does not seem consistent to let the analysis of the total unity of the work slide easily by.

It seems that the alleged confusion concerning Ingarden's notion of polyphonic harmony has its origin in that there are as many as four candidates for nomination as the determining factor in the constitution of the polyphonic harmony of the literary work. The first of these is the polyphony of the mutually interdependent strata. This particular option, however, is somewhat tainted by Ingarden's own indecisiveness concerning the number and, ultimately, the relation of the various strata. This is to say, that the concept of mutual interdependence would be more convincing if it were clarified as to whether there are four or five strata. Obviously, the relations between the strata would emerge as a different compound if a stratum is added or subtracted. This does not mean that Ingarden's concept is faulty here, but only that it needs to be crystalized.

The next obvious choice as the polyphonic harmony of which Ingarden speaks is the fourth stratum, that of represented objectivities. This is a natural alternative because this stratum is founded in the other three. The roles of the various other strata are, in part, to make this stratum present to the reading consciousness. Therefore, the founding nature of the essential elements becomes manifest in this stratum. In other words, the mutual interdependence of the other strata produces this stratum, so in it, the harmony becomes apparent.

Third, there is the notion of aesthetic value qualities which results in the manifestation of a polyphonic harmony of an aesthetic nature. As it turns out, each of the individual strata has its own values. The stratum of sounds contains specific literary values, i.e., the values of the sounds themselves. Examples of these

values are poetic rhyme and onomatopoeia. The stratum of meaning units contains relevant value qualities in that the meaning units found the values represented in the work which are realized in a reading. Such values are transferred to the stratum of schematized aspects which forms the skeleton of values which becomes fleshed out in the stratum of represented objectivities through the act of reading. The mutual interdependence of these value qualities results in a polyphonic harmony of relevant aesthetic qualities. And, not surprisingly, since Ingarden's pattern of relations has been established in the description of represented objectivities being founded on the mutual interdependence of the essential strata, the polyphony of the component value qualities founds the metaphysical qualities. These qualities, like the represented objectivities, result in a polyphony that is founded on a polyphony.

Ingarden asserts concerning this final candidate that:

if the manifestation of a metaphysical quality is to occur, the strata must cooperate harmoniously in a determinate way and fulfill specific conditions. In particular, the polyphony of value qualities must not merely show a harmony that permits the appearance of a metaphysical quality; instead, it must be harmoniously compatible with it so that the given metaphysical quality is required by the harmony as a complementing element.¹¹

The metaphysical qualities, the tragic, the comic, the sublime, etc., are revealed directly as a result of the polyphony of the aesthetic value qualities of all the strata of the work, including that of the represented objectivities which is founded in the polyphony of the mutual interdependence of the various strata. It is almost as if a case could be made for a fifth polyphony which would be the polyphony of the stratified component polyphonies or the polyphonic harmony of the whole.

So it seems that if one is to determine which polyphonic harmony Ingarden is referring to at any one time, it is necessary that the context be examined with great care in order to decide. Even though the possibility of a fifth polyphony is suggested above, the polyphonic harmony of the whole, Ingarden nowhere makes a similar point except to speak of "the harmony" of the

whole. Which of the first four is the best candidate for this harmony or, better yet, which of these candidates is Ingarden speaking of when he refers to the polyphonic harmony of the whole? Again, context may be a guide but it is still an issue as to whether the multiple use of the term is a confusion or not.

There is an obvious logic of mutual founding and interdependence in my reading of Ingarden and this reading may help to render the notion of polyphonic harmony in its different uses less confused than before; but it is not at all clear that my original objection has been overcome. Do Ingarden's strata actually capture all of the essential strata and elements of the literary work of art?¹² If you will remember, it was earlier stated that Ingarden was not absolutely certain about this matter himself since he sometimes considers that a fifth essential stratum is possible which cuts vertically through the horizontal strata.

So, where do we stand now? It seems that Ingarden has placed himself in the ambiguous position of wanting it both ways. He asserts that there is an invariant essential structure to be found in every literary work of art but his analysis is ultimately inconclusive as to what this invariant structure is since he is indecisive concerning the possibility of a fifth stratum. And the incompleteness of his description of the literary work of art rests on this indecisiveness.

NOTES

1. Roman Ingarden, The Literary Work of Art, trans. George B. Grabowicz (Evanston, IL: Northwestern, 1973). The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art, trans. Ruth Ann Crowley and Kenneth R. Olsen (Evanston, IL: Northwestern, 1973).
2. Herbert Spiegelberg, The Phenomenological Movement, 2 vols. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), I, 266.
3. Ingarden's treatment of the notion of polyphonic harmony in

The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art will be addressed in a forthcoming paper rather than here because of length limitations.

4. I say four or five strata because Ingarden generally describes the polyphonic harmony of the literary work in terms of the aesthetic value qualities which emerge because of the interdependence of the various strata and not as stratum. Nevertheless in The Literary Work of Art, p. 369, he describes polyphonic harmony as "... a separate stratum, cutting across the entire literary work."

5. The Literary Work of Art, p. 31.

6. Ibid, p. 369.

7. Ibid, p. 370.

8. Ibid, p. 31.

9. Ibid, p. 370.

10. Ibid, p. 371.

11. Ibid, pp. 297-298.

12. See Felix Martinez-Bonati, Fictive Discourse and the Structures of Literature, trans. Philip W. Silver (Ithaca: Cornell, 1981), pp. 97-102. The criticisms leveled against Ingarden here are certainly not original with me. In the above work can be found one of the best short and direct criticisms of Ingarden.