

THE PROBLEM OF POLYTEXT

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Contemporary polemic concerning what the text is¹, whether the being, as it were, of literary, musical, and artistic works is different in principle, constantly refers to the question of notation. The typology which differentiates between various arts through the possibility of reproducing their respective works treats notation as the precondition for iterability. The distinction between autographic and allographic arts, introduced by Nelson Goodman, has achieved a wide resonance and provoked much discussion. It presupposes that literature is amenable to notation qua a set of instructions for iterability which refines the constitutive properties of a work, separating them from the contingent ones².

Goodman's critics referred to the cases where the same piece of music was almost synchronically transcribed through several differently notated versions³. The existence of such versions is one of the landmarks

that leads us to doubt whether notation is in fact a constitutive, rather than contingent, property of a work of art. Can literature tell us something that is relevant to this problem? I would like to draw attention to the multiple edition of the poem *The Forest of Anykščiai* by a 19th century Lithuanian poet Antanas Baranauskas. Following the author's decision, this work was published in two different transcriptions on the facing pages in 1882 in Weimar⁴.

After his studies in St. Petersburg and Western Europe, Baranauskas was, at the time, a professor of Kaunas Seminary and an influential cleric, soon to be appointed a bishop. He was famous as an expert of the Lithuanian language; in which capacity he consulted the Russian Imperial Academy of Sciences, as well as Indo-European scholars from various countries. Hugo Weber, a teacher at the Weimar Gymnasium, was impelled to contact Baranauskas by his interest in Lithuanian as the most archaic living Indo-European language. They never met personally, but maintained frequent

¹ See Peter L. Shillingsburg, *From Gutenberg to Google* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006), 11–24.

² Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1976), 115–116.

³ David C. Greetham, *Theories of the Text* (New York: Oxford UP, 1999), 41–43.

⁴ *Ostlitausische Texte*, Mit Einleitung und Anmerkungen, Hrsg. von Anton Baranowski und Hugo Weber, Heft I (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1882), 2–23.

correspondence for over 20 years⁵. Thus it was Weber who organised the printing of the poem in Weimar. The brochure entitled *Ostlitausische Texte* consists of Baranauskas' linguistic reflections and the text of *The Forest of Anykščiai*.

Neither the autograph of the poem, nor the proofs of the third edition survive. Nevertheless, the 1882 publication complies with the criteria of authorised edition, insofar as Weber worked on the basis of autographs and consulted the author on each single diacritical sign. Furthermore, Baranauskas, when he received the publication, praised the *Ostlitausische Texte* for its appropriately edited texts. One need not doubt the extent of authorial control, since Baranauskas' own awareness of the issue is a further argument that confirms it. In fact, Baranauskas is the first Lithuanian writer to declare explicitly authorial will in its modern sense. 'It's up to me to publish my own work in the way that pleases me'⁶, wrote Baranauskas in a letter to Weber. Furthermore, later on, reacting to a publication of his hymns which was edited without his awareness and consent, he menaces: 'May he never find happiness who alters the orthography, let alone a single word, of the text'⁷.

As this quotation reveals, what is important to Baranauskas is precisely orthography and notation. The fact is, that the standard version of Lithuanian finally

took shape only at the beginning of the 20th century. In the mid-19th century not only several dialects of Lithuanian, but also several methods of spelling, several modifications of the Latin alphabet were competing with each other. Under such conditions, in the 1860s Baranauskas created and started using a unique orthographic system based on the principle of polyphnetics. The basis of his innovation was to supplement Latin alphabet with diacritical signs in such a way that a representative of each Lithuanian dialect could read the transcription after his or her own manner. That is to say, there would be a unified, standard orthography, while the pronunciation would differ and remain faithful to the reader's dialect.

It is in Baranauskas' polyphnetic notation that the poem is printed in the right-hand pages of the 1882 edition. The poet was engaged in collecting linguistic materials of the Lithuanian dialects, on the basis of which he created dialectological classification which, by and large, is used by the linguists up to now. Baranauskas distinguished 11 dialects of Lithuanian. If we add to this the standard forms which were then in the process of shaping we would have 12 different key phonetic versions which Baranauskas' unique system of notation envisaged.

Baranauskas himself was a representative of East-Highland-Anykščiai dialect. In the first publication of the poem⁸, the editor had changed some of the dialect features, while in the second⁹ they were retained. Baranauskas

⁵ Publication of the letters: "Vyskupo Antano Baranausko laišškai Hugo Weberiui", ed. Kazys Alminauskis, *Archivum Philologicum* 1–8 (Kaunas: VDU, 1930–1939).

⁶ 26 01 1876, *Archivum Philologicum* 1 (1930), 99.

⁷ The letter to Justinas Dovydasaitis from 08 01 1900, in: Antanas Baranauskas, *Raštai* 2, ed. Regina Mikšytė (Vilnius: Vaga, 1970), 173.

⁸ *Kalendorius ukiszskasis nuog užgimima Wieszpatis 1860 Metu paprastunju, turenčiun 365 dienas*, parašitzas par Ł. Iwiński, metai 13ti (Wilnius: J. Zawadzki, 1859), 61–63; *Kalendorius ukiszskasis nuog užgimima Wieszpatis 1861 Metu paprastunju, turenčiun 365 dienas*, parašitzas par Ł. Iwiński, metai 14ti (Wilnius: J. Zawadzki, 1860), 59–60.

had initially intended to publish the Weimar edition only in the polyphonic notation. At Weber's behest he decided to publish it in two versions. Lexically and syntactically, the two versions are identical. One can interpret that which is printed on the left-hand pages of the *Ostlitauische Texte* in several ways. First of all, it is simply an example of the East-Highland-Anykščiai dialect; it is important to the linguists who were one of the addressees of the publication. Secondly, it is a text which is close to the early form of the poem's text, its original phonetics. Thirdly, it is a transcription of one of the twelve phonetic versions which the polyphonic notation presupposes; in other words, it is an actualisation of the potentiality for reading the right-hand text.

The right-hand pages of the publication sanction variation. The transcription presupposes fluctuation between differing readings and the document not in an accidental, but in a fundamental way. The left-hand side of the publication could be treated as an authorial example of how the transcription given on the right-hand page ought to be performed, or put into action. Theoretically, a representative of the East-Highland-Anykščiai dialect could read (that is to say, perform) both the left-hand and the right-hand page transcription, giving it identical phonetic expression¹⁰. Moreover, left-hand pages constitute a reference to the fact that it is possible not only to read out, but also to transcribe the right-hand pages in at least 12 versions which would be

significantly different through the phonetic texture that each of them represents.

It is important to emphasise that *The Forest of Anykščiai* is characterised by especially subtle phonetic expression. The poem abounds in onomatopoeias and assonances. Most of the rhymes in Baranauskas' own dialect version are the deep ones. Any other dialect-version or standard-Lithuanian version show a clear damage to the poem's phonetic texture. For example, the nature of between 15 to 20 percent of the rhymes is fundamentally altered, as from the precise deep rhymes they become imprecise ones. Therefore phonetic aspect of the work clearly belongs among its constitutive properties, while its notation, instead of refining constitutive properties, encourages diversity. Baranauskas took conscious care of the phonetics and patently reflected on the extent to which the pronunciation of a text in a different dialect changes its phonetic aspect (see his linguistic remarks in the Introduction to the *Ostlitauische Texte*). Despite that, he legitimised significant variation through the system of notation which he introduced.

One should note that the variation we are talking about belongs to a different plane than the variation inevitably created by at least a minimal difference between any two performances of the same work¹¹. The right-hand page transcription implies not just any variation, but various phonic types and various ranges of performance each of which could in turn be actualised through many unique readings. Perhaps one could find an analogy in comparing the extent of variation between various orchestrations of a piece of music,

⁹ *Litauische Studien*, Auswahl aus den ältesten denkmälern, dialektische beispiele, lexikalische und sprachwissenschaftliche beiträge von Leopold Geitler (Prag: T. Mourek, 1875), 40–48.

¹⁰ Conf. Greetham, *Op. cit.*, 42.

¹¹ Conf. Peter L. Shillingsburg, *Scholarly Editing in the Computer Age: Theory and Practice*, 3rd ed. (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan P, 1996), 44–51.

with the extent of variation between various performances of a particular orchestration. Different types of pronunciation coexist in all living languages. Orthography based on conservative principles, for example, English, enables one to 'perform' the transcription according to various significantly different models of pronunciation. Baranauskas' case is rather different, however. The publication of his poem integrates the principle of variation as something that the very fact of notation determines. It is no longer merely a possibility or ignored necessity. In the publication under discussion, the instability of the text becomes admissible and is thus granted a positive status.

One more aspect I would like to draw your attention to is the fact that the authorial sanction for variation echoed, in a way, the socio-cultural functioning of the poem itself. Due to the prohibition of Latin-alphabet based publications, for half a century the transmission of Baranauskas' works in Lithuania itself took place predominantly orally, in the varying pronunciation of different dialects. Moreover, in order to facilitate recollection his poetry was recited or sung, which in turn increased the extent of phonetic variation. Thus the author in his 1882 edition *de facto* sanctioned the phonetic multiplicity already in use.

As I have mentioned, Baranauskas was very demanding whenever it came to notation. Using copious diacritical signs, through his polyphonic system he sought to demonstrate the universality of the Latin alphabet. However, strict attitude to transcription meant latitude and freedom in (phonetic) reading¹². As a socio-

cultural figure, Baranauskas represents a dignitary of the Church; from psychological point of view he emerges as a strong-willed personality. In both cases he appears to be a quintessentially authoritative figure. Nonetheless, the 1882 publication of *The Forest of Anykščiai* is a surrender of the aspiration to control the single standard of performance, renunciation of linguistic domination. This constitutes a unique relationship both with the tradition of written culture, and with the process of innovation, insofar as the other authors of that time chose either to remain with their dialects, or made a resolute transition to the standard language with its standardised phonetics.

Does the paradoxical suspending of authority in one area, that of phonetics, testify to the erosion of authority as a whole? Perhaps, on the contrary, it is an attempt to control 12 types of reading at once? It is beyond doubt, however, that Baranauskas relinquished that cultural principle according to which one dialect or standard version predominates. Even if we parenthesise the standpoint of the author himself, we cannot but view the right-hand pages of the *Ostlitausche Texte*, and especially the totality of the multiple edition, as a pre-programmed polytext¹³. It is a polytext in an entirely different manner than the one which comes about when the manuscript is corrected, when the work is given to two different publishers etc. 'Attempts to repair or restore original or pure texts of a work' in this case would literally mean 'to proliferate texts rather than to refine them'¹⁴.

¹² Conf. Jerome McGann, *The Scholar's Art: Literary Studies in a Managed World* (Chicago&London: The University of Chicago P, 2006), 160–161.

¹³ Conf. Joseph Grigely, "The Textual Event", Philip Cohen (ed), *Devils and Angels: Textual Editing and Literary Theory* (Charlottesville&London: UP of Virginia, 1991), 176.

¹⁴ Peter L. Shillingsburg, "Text as Matter, Concept, and Action", *Studies in Bibliography* 44 (1991), 75.

At the end of the 20th century, a facsimile¹⁵ and a computer transcription¹⁶ of the 1882 edition of the poem were published. It is doubtful whether the alphabet accepted in the standard Lithuanian can convey the variety of the phonetic variants which are documented in the original

¹⁵ Antanas Baranauskas, *Raštai* 1, ed. Regina Mikšytė (Vilnius: Vaga, 1970), 406–427.

¹⁶ Antanas Baranauskas, *Raštai* 1: Poezija, ed. Regina Mikšytė, Marius Daškus (Vilnius: Baltos lankos, 1995), 188–211.

notation. Obviously what we encounter here is ‘shared ontology’. As states Joseph Grigely, ‘a work of literature is ontologized by its texts’¹⁷. And in this case, we encounter a polytext, related to twelve phonetic versions. This refutes the idea of literature as an allographic art. In turn, this encourages criticism to deal with collections of texts, a polytext, and not with a platonic idea of literary work.

¹⁷ Grigely, *Op. cit.*, 185.

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