

---

Translation  
Prevod

UDC: 801.73

# REVIEW OF INGARDEN'S *THE LITERARY WORK OF ART*

Leopold BLAUSTEIN

*Translated from Polish by Filip Gołaszewski*

*Abstract and keywords prepared by Filip Gołaszewski*

*Bibliography edited by Filip Gołaszewski*

---

## *Abstract*

The translation presents Blaustein's examination of Ingarden's ontological theory of literary works as developed in *Das literarische Kunstwerk* (1931). Literary works are analyzed as four-strata structures comprising linguistic sound formations, meaning units, represented objects, and schematized aspects. They are characterized as purely intentional creations with non-independent beings, founded on ideal concepts and subjective operations. The review examines how readers achieve an understanding of

leopold blaustein

literary works and gain access to their ontological foundations. Blaustein discusses epistemological concerns about the accessibility of ideal concepts to readers and addresses the multiplication of metaphysical entities. An alternative approach based on linguistic directives and sentence systems is presented, in order to preserve intersubjective identity without metaphysical commitments. The study discusses Ingarden's approach to literary theory, particularly with respect to the multi-stratal structure of literary works, and examines the underlying ontological assumptions.

*Keywords:* work of art, literary work, ideal concepts, multi-stratal, four-strata theory.

---

### **Ocena Ingardnovega dela *Literarna umetnina***

#### *Povzetek*

Prevod predstavlja Blausteinovo obravnavno ontološke teorije literarnih umetnik, kakor jo je Ingarden razvil v svojem delu *Das literarische Kunstwerk* (1931). Analiza literarnih del razkriva, da so štiriplastne strukture, ki jih sestavljajo jezikovne zvenske tvorbe, pomenske enote, predstavljene predmetnosti in shematisirani videzi. Karakterizirati jih je mogoče kot čisto intencionalne stvaritve z ne-neodvisno bitjo, utemeljene na idealnih pojmovanjih in subjektivnih operacijah. Ocena obravnavava vprašanje, kako bralci lahko dosežejo razumevanje literarnih del in pridobijo pristop k njihovih ontološkim temeljem. Blaustein pretresa epistemološke zagate glede dostopnosti idealnih pojmovanj za bralce in se dotakne pomnoževanja metafizičnih kvalitet. Z namenom, da bi ohranil intersubjektivno identiteto dela brez metafizične zaveze, predstavi alternativni pristop, zasnovan na jezikovnih smernicah in stavčnih sistemih. Študija obravnavava Ingardnov pristop k literarni teoriji, zlasti z vidika večplastne strukture literarnih del, in pretresa njene ontološke predpostavke.

*Ključne besede:* umetnina, literarno delo, idealna pojmovanja, večplastnost, teorija štirih plasti.

---

[[ 98a]<sup>1</sup> **Roman Ingarden.** *Das literarische Kunstwerk. Eine Untersuchung aus dem Grenzgebiet der Ontologie, Logik und Literaturwissenschaft.* Halle, Max Niemayer, 1931. XIV + 389 pp.

[[ 98b] The question of what a literary work actually is belongs to the most fundamental problems for the theory of knowledge within literary studies. Ingarden's publication is a large-scale attempt to address this question.<sup>2</sup>

In the opening chapter, Ingarden limits his analysis to examples from literary fiction, and investigates whether literary works should be understood as real or ideal objects. A literary work does not constitute an ideal object, because such a work arises at some point in time and perishes at another, changing throughout the period of existence. Therefore, a literary work is not a timeless object. Furthermore, the view that a literary work is psychical leads to a series of absurd consequences, for instance, undermining the identity of the concrete literary work. Finally, a literary work is not a common-sense object of presentation, according to which the object of presentation is a psychical component of the psychic life of the author or reader. (Ingarden erroneously believes that the intentional object of representation is commonly understood in this way; however, the transcendent character of the intentional object in relation to experience has been emphasized for many years). The problem of the mode of existence of a literary work thus remains unresolved.

Proceeding to consider this problem, Ingarden holds that his investigations will concern exclusively an accomplished literary work, without examining its genesis, ways of knowing it, and possible attitudes that readers may adopt

357

---

1 [This translation indicates original pagination directly in the text in square brackets; all page numbers refer to: Blaustein, Leopold. 1935/37. “[Review of] Roman Ingarden. *Das literarische Kunstwerk. Eine Untersuchung aus dem Grenzgebiet der Ontologie, Logik und Literaturwissenschaft.* Halle, Max Niemeyer 1931.” *Ruch Filozoficzny* 13(5-10): 98a–102a.]

2 [See Ingarden 1931 [1973].]

toward it. Ingarden is thus interested exclusively in questions related to the ontology of the literary work, and not to the psychology of creativity, theory of knowledge within literary studies, etc. According to Ingarden, the scope of the literary work excludes the experiences of both, the creator and the reader, as well as the realm of objects and states of affairs that may serve as real models for the objects and states of affairs “appearing” within the work.

[| 99a] A literary work involves multi-strata products, and various strata form an organic whole. This whole consists of the following strata: a) linguistic sound formations, b) meaning units, c) represented objects, and d) schematized aspects. Considerations presented in the second chapter analyze individual strata of the literary work and the role of each in its totality.

Linguistic sound formations that constitute the first stratum of the literary work, should not be identified neither with sound material nor with individual concretizations; linguistic sound formations are therefore not real. These formations are also not ideal objects that exist independently, since sound formations arise and change over time under the influence of various real conditions. Linguistic sound formations are rather typical sound formations that appear identically in numerous individual concretizations.

The meaning units—the meanings of words, sentences, and sentence complexes—, which form the second stratum of the literary work, are products of subjective operations. They exist neither in the form of real, concrete, experienced psychical “contents” nor in the form of ideal meanings. Word meanings are rather partial actualizations of corresponding ideal concepts that exist autonomously, and are, thus, as Ingarden puts it, *seinsautonom*. Due to this actualization, something new undoubtedly arises that lasts longer than given subjective operations: meaningful content of a sentence or a sentence complex. Ideal concepts are not components of these formations, but constitute, alongside subjective operations, a second foundation of their existence. The fact that both of these existential foundations are transcendent in relation to this stratum of the literary work, and that ideal concepts serve the creator as a model for components of actualized sentences means that literary work possesses heteronomous existence, and is, thus, *seinsheteronom*. An object that exists heteronomously does not possess the foundation of its existence in it itself, but in an object that exists autonomously. Whoever accepts [| 99b] the

heteronomous existence of sentences must also accept all foundations of their existence, including ideal concepts.

The third stratum of the literary work consists of purely intentional correlates of meaning. Among these, Ingarden distinguishes primary intentional objects from derivative intentional objects. The former are correlates of intentional acts of consciousness, and the latter are correlates of meanings that also possess derivative intentionality. Derivative intentional correlates of meanings, deprived of direct contact with experiences, are only skeletons, schemas of primary intentional correlates of those experiences.

The fourth stratum consists of the so-called schematized aspects, which are idealizations of concrete, flowing, transitory aspects in experience. Schematized aspects are only skeletons, which are schemas of imaginative aspects, in which objects belonging to the third stratum of the literary work are grasped. Elements of the literary work also include “inner aspects” of one’s own mental events and character traits. (The concept of these inner aspects is one of the less clear elements in Ingarden’s publication.)

On the basis of the above characterization of individual strata, it becomes clear that Ingarden considers the entire literary work to be a purely intentional object possessing non-independent being. Given this intentional character of the literary work, Ingarden believes that his publication contributes to solving the problem of idealism and realism. Transcendental idealism claims that real objects are formed as purely intentional. An evaluation of idealism, therefore, requires examining the structure and the mode of being of purely intentional objects, which include literary works. However, in *The Literary Work of Art*, Ingarden does not draw consequences from the results of his investigations for the idealism–realism debate.

In analyzing the individual strata, Ingarden examines not only their nature, but also their role in the overall structure of the literary work [§ 100a] as well as their interdependence. It is impossible to exhaustively review the numerous results of these considerations. As an example, we can note that the stratum of linguistic sound formations provides external support and expression for other strata, and fulfills the important function of “revealing” the literary work to the psychical subject; the stratum of meaning units intentionally determines the third stratum and influences the fourth stratum; the fourth

stratum enables intuitive grasping of objects from the viewpoint of the third stratum, etc. Each stratum brings its own distinctive material to the literary work, and constitutes its own aesthetic values, while all together, especially the third stratum, contribute to the emergence of “metaphysical qualities,” such as sublimity, tragedy, etc., which manifest themselves in situations and events, and are neither features in the ordinary sense nor properties of psychical states. The manifestation of these qualities, along with the polyphonic harmony of the aesthetic values of the individual strata, creates the distinctive aesthetic value of a literary work. (The concept of “metaphysical qualities” is a less clear concept in Ingarden’s publication.)

Ingarden addresses a wide range of related questions when examining individual strata. We thus find in this book analyses of rhythm, sentence melody, etc., semantic investigations of names, function words, *verbum finitum*, sentences and sentence complexes, their correlates, etc. Questions discussed in connection with the third and the fourth strata are addressed below. The second chapter concludes with an examination of the meaning and sequence,

360

in which parts of the literary work follow each other.

The third chapter distinguishes literary works from theatrical works, cinematic pieces, pantomime, and scientific works. This distinction is based on the thesis that all these objects lack one or more strata of the literary work, whereas certain new strata appear within them. Furthermore, Ingarden discusses the “life” of the literary work in its concretizations and its transformations due to changes in these concretizations. These concretizations are distinguished by Ingarden from the psychical [100b] experiences of the reader during reading, although these concretizations exist—unlike the literary work—only as long as given experiences exist.

Ingarden’s main objection to psychologicistic theory is the impossibility of explaining the intersubjective identity of literary work on the basis of this very theory. The intersubjective identity of the literary work depends on the intersubjective identity of its meaning stratum; all other strata depend on this [intersubjective identity], except for the stratum of linguistic sound formations. In order to justify this intersubjective identity of the meaning stratum, Ingarden accepts some metaphysical and epistemological assumptions, particularly a) the existence of ideal concepts and b) the heteronomous existence of meanings

as products of subjective operations (these products—as we already know—arise through subjective operations, but after creation, meanings continue to exist, even if they are not thought of by any subject); c) the ability to understand ideal concepts, since only through grasping the content of ideal concepts can readers of the literary work identically actualize the meaning of the sentence that the creator gave it, which is the actualization of given ideal concepts; d) the possibility of knowing an identical literary work, even if a reader—similarly to the creator—can grasp the literary work only in some concretizations, and these concretizations—as Ingarden admits—differ from each other and usually inadequately realize the literary work, adding to it a series of things that the creator did not intend.

It seems that the epistemology of literary studies would encounter significant difficulties, if such an approach were based on Ingarden's conception. Even if we accept that there exists a heteronomous system of meanings, while the subjective operations that created it no longer exist, and grant that this heteronomous system is identical owing to its foundation in ideal concepts, the following question remains: how will the reader, who is given only concretizations, access this system? To what ideal concepts will the reader refer to in case of dispute with another reader? In addition, in what kind of a cognitive act [§ 101a] does this grasping of ideal concepts occur, and what is the cognitive value of these acts? Until Ingarden develops a satisfactory epistemology to accompany this ontology of literary work, the adopted assumptions may give the reader the impression of multiplying entities, regarding which one does not yet know how to determine whether they exist or not.

361

Many readers will use Ockham's razor as a criterion for resolving their doubts. However, such readers will have to find another way to preserve the intersubjective identity of the literary work—unless the reader abandons the intersubjective identity of the literary work, accepting all those consequences that Ingarden denounces as absurd and skeptical. These consequences, when applied to academic theories, lead—according to Ingarden—to the abandonment of the possibility of intersubjective science.

A different approach might preserve the intersubjective identity of the literary work without requiring these metaphysical and epistemological assumptions. We accept that a literary work is simply a system of sentences in

a particular language created through the subjective operations of the author and fixed in writing or some other medium. When the reader focuses on this language and understands the sentences, she intentionally grasps the fictional world that is designated by these sentences. The identity of the fictional world, as grasped by various readers, is guaranteed by the identical form of sentences given to them, and by the fact that, when focusing on a given language, readers understand these sentences according to the same directive. If these directives fail, different interpretations of given sentences or sentence complexes arise, but, on the whole, all readers grasp the same fictional world, since directives can fail only in rare cases of ambiguity, etc. From this standpoint, one has to distinguish the stratum of signs (linguistic sound formations or their visual artefacts) from the stratum of meanings, which the reader does not normally grasp, because the reader intentionally and directly grasps [| 101b] the stratum of objects. Some of these objects are sometimes given in terms of aspects.

However, despite doubts raised by Ingarden's views concerning the nature and mode of existence of individual strata, his book contains a wealth of valuable contributions and subtle observations in respect to questions about individual strata of the literary work and their mutual relations. These include investigations concerning the stratum of linguistic sound formations, analyses of the role of the aspect stratum in the literary work, remarks on "truth" within the literary work, distinguishing a literary work from the theatrical work, cinematic work, etc., and explanations of the meaning of the sequence of individual parts of the literary work, among others. The semantic and ontological considerations are especially extensive and could constitute a separate treatise. Therefore, semantic and ontological considerations require separate evaluations.

Among Ingarden's most interesting observations are the illuminating investigations devoted to the stratum of objects represented in the literary work. The results obtained by Ingarden regarding the quasi-reality of these objects and regarding the time and space, in which these objects are located, regarding the temporal perspectives and the role of the so-called center of orientation reveal significant similarity between literary objects and imaginative objects. Ingarden's approach points to a deeper kinship between belles-lettres and plastic arts, theater, cinema, etc., as distinguished from architecture and music.

Evaluating the book as a whole, one can state that Ingarden wrote an interesting book of fundamental significance for this field of research. He consistently developed one of the possible positions, and traced its consequences to the smallest details. Ingarden overlooked almost no questions along the way and perceived the most subtle differences. Regardless of the above-presented reservations regarding Ingarden's ontological views, one has to hold that his book deepens, to a high degree, our knowledge of the structure of the literary work [| 102a] and its strata, especially by emphasizing its multi-stratal character and the implications that follow therefrom.

### Bibliography | Bibliografija

Ingarden, Roman. 1931. *Das literarische Kunstwerk. Eine Untersuchung aus dem Grenzgebiet der Ontologie, Logik und Literaturwissenschaft*. Halle: Max Niemayer Verlag. [Reprint in: Ingarden, Roman. 1965. *Das literarische Kunstwerk. Mit einem Anhang von den Funktionen der Sprache im Theaterschauspiel*. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag.]

---. 1973. *The Literary Work of Art. An Investigation on the Borderlines of Ontology, Logic, and Theory of Literature*. Trans. by George. G. Grabowicz. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

# phainomena

REVIJA ZA FENOMENOLOGIJO IN HERMENEVTIKO  
JOURNAL OF PHENOMENOLOGY AND HERMENEUTICS



*Phainomena* 34 | 132-133 | June 2025

## Transitions | Prehajanja

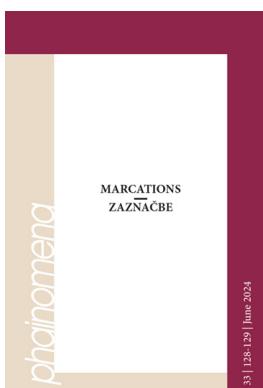
Dean Komel | Paulina Sosnowska | Jaroslava Vydrová | David-Augustin Mândruț | Manca Erzetič | Dragan Prole | Mindaugas Briedis | Irakli Batishvili | Dragan Jakovljević | Johannes Vorlaufer | Petar Šegedin | Željko Radinković | René Dentz | Malwina Rolka | Mimoza Hasani Pllana | Audran Aulanier | Robert Gugutzer | Damir Smiljanić | Silvia Dadà



*Phainomena* 33 | 130-131 | November 2024

## Human Existence and Coexistence in the Epoch of Nihilism

Damir Barbarić | Jon Stewart | Cathrin Nielsen | Ilia Imishev | Petar Bojančić | Holger Zaborowski | Dragan D. Prole | Susanna Lindberg | Jeff Malpas | Azelarabe Lahkim Bennani | Josef Estermann | Chung-Chi Yu | Alfredo Rocha de la Torre | Jesús Adrián Escudero | Veronica Neri | Žarko Paić | Werner Stegmaier | Adriano Fabris | Dean Komel



*Phainomena* 33 | 128-129 | June 2024

## Marcations | Zaznačbe

Mindaugas Briedis | Irfan Muhammad | Bence Peter Marosan | Sazan Kryeziu | Petar Šegedin | Johannes Vorlaufer | Manca Erzetič | David-Augustin Mândruț | René Dentz | Olena Budnyk | Maxim D. Miroshnichenko | Luka Hrovat | Tonči Valentić | Dean Komel | Bernhard Waldenfels | Damir Barbarić

ISSN 1318-3362



**INR** | INSTITUTE NOVA REVJA  
FOR THE HUMANITIES

 *phainomena*

PHENOMENOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF LJUBLJANA