

THE HERMENEUTICS OF STYLE ¹

Serhiy Kvit,

*PhD, Professor, President of the National University
of "Kyiv-Mohyla Academy" (Kyiv, Ukraine)*

Abstract: *In this article Serhiy Kvit clarifies the concept of the "hermeneutics of style". It was presented in his book of the same name published this year by the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy Publishing House. The concept is related to such key notions of philosophical hermeneutics as "hermeneutic conversation" and the "hermeneutic phenomenon", established by Hans-Georg Gadamer. On the other hand, the concept is directly related to the European essayistic tradition and corresponding "essayistic turn" in Martin Heidegger's thinking. Author also examines terms such as "humanness" and "essayism", and will also make an attempt to review Umberto Eco's term of "overinterpretation".*

Keywords: hermeneutics of style, hermeneutic conversation, hermeneutic phenomenon, humanness, essayism, overinterpretation.

My proposition of the hermeneutics of style is based on Gadamer's ideas about the hermeneutic phenomenon. Comprehending the history of the hermeneutic field, he sees philosophical hermeneutics not solely as a stage of its development. The hermeneutic phenomenon presents itself as an important characteristic of a person, outlining the natural human ability to understand. Based on this position, the conclusion can be made that some elements of the concept of philosophical hermeneutics were suggested and substantiated ever since the Greeks started applying the term in philosophy.

As soon as we presuppose a connection between the hermeneutic phenomenon and human nature, we can try to follow this speculative approach, considering the entirety and cohesiveness of culture to be the main condition of the person's inward comfort. Many contemporary trends in philosophy and criticism indicate the qualitative sophistication of intellectual and social life today, seemingly totally disabling a so-called linear understanding of culture. "Linearity" here is treated as a synonym not only of simplification and one-dimensionality, but of cohesiveness and epicism as well. It is said that the contemporary world has attained such sophistication, that it has long ago (probably, since the Second

World War) become inappropriate to propose old and simplistic constructions of western metaphysics and logocentrism. In addition, these constructions pretend at having power over the person, as a consequence of their schematicism, static nature, and rhetoric relation to some discursive practices.

We should only try to understand part of the person, keeping in mind the person's humanness, unpredictability, and insolence, a permanent balance between rationality, irrationality and indifference, and all the possible and impossible degrees of the person's interests and concerns. This means that we are going to emerge from human nature, as being neither fond of nor afraid of anything. The person will then be: first, a myth – what one thinks about him/herself (one's opinion correlates with the opinions of the people around); second, the person will have certain characteristics and capabilities related to the structures of human mental processes. For example, people move from simple to complex, speak in a consecutive order, have a need for finding answers to their questions, and change the overall picture of their understanding of the surrounding world according to new information received; and third, the person will have a certain algorithm of the process of understanding, which unites the person with other people.

¹ The basis of the article is the paper of Serhiy Kvit presented at the International Congress on Hermeneutics (Warsaw, 5–8 September 2011).

In that case, the hermeneutic phenomenon will be one of the possible names for the third component. It is based, on the one hand, on the physiological characteristics of the human brain, and, on the other hand, on the embodiment in culture of the person's own world created within and, in some measure, in spite of the natural world. The concept of humanness as something characterizing the person as such derives from this vision of culture. At that stage we cannot avoid a degree of speculation, connected, however, not with intent to create new metaphysical constructs, but with a need to describe the object of our consideration. That is why we should mark the Christian origin of the concept of humanness in how we understand it; this concept segregates the person from the natural world, emphasizing, first of all, the person's Godly likeness, which differs the person from the animal world, regardless of biological similarity, because some behavior quite normal for animals is inappropriate for the person.

At the risk of approaching almost critical speculation, let's sum up what we have to deal with. The hermeneutic phenomenon is related to the person, to humanness and to culture. It meets the person's need in understanding the world around; this understanding includes answering questions arising, or those being aroused by the person. The person understands culture through a usual human story, told by people about other people. The stories of ancient Greek myths and the stories of William Shakespeare's writings are common for all people. We perceive the world epically, through these stories, living through and experiencing them as parts of our own lives. The person understands what can be verbalized, but is interested only in what can be represented epically.

Therefore, the understanding of culture is, by its nature, the understanding of people by other people. In consequence, someone who wants to understand the texts of culture (a variety of people's stories) is, more or less, a reader and a critic of these texts. Sometimes just a reader, but sometimes an active reader, who not only reads the texts, but also has something regarding these texts to inform others about, creating critical, i.e. secondary, from a certain point of view, texts of culture. Texts of that kind belong to a marginal essayistic genre, in which the person of the author with his or her original style of thinking and writing come to the fore. The philosopher is also a thinking reader, so, under some circumstances these positions coincide. Both looking for keys to the person and to culture. I treat the hermeneutic phenomenon in application to those intellectuals who are looking for these keys.

Traditionally, Michel de Montaigne is considered to be the founder of the essayistic genre. This genre developed from the essayism of different "non-classic" genres (letters, diaries, notes and confessions). So, prior to Michel de Montaigne we can mention at least Marcus Aurelius and St. Augustine. Texts written before and composing the cultural area are prerequisites for an essayistic text. That is why Tadeusz Breza calls Michel de Montaigne "an active reader" [1]. Neither the content of a piece of writing, nor information presented in it are the main objects of our interest. The author's person and style come to the fore, although we can disagree with them. The essay is driven by the author's ability to have a broad, intertextual and interdisciplinary vision of things, finding hidden immanent connections between phenomena and events. Essayism is philosophy's agent in the person's attempt at living through culture, on the road of completing a person's tasks. The essayist is an active reader interpreting culture by expressing his or her attitude to the texts produced by culture, as if he were communicating with the authors he reads and his own readers, removing the distance of time.

The essay is a synthetic genre. It opens for philosophy a range of opportunities that we call essayism. From this position, essayism can indicate some individual characteristics of thinking and writing, being a different stylistic feature for the critical evaluation of essayistic works. Besides that, it follows from characteristics of the genre, equipping the author with philosophical tools and at the same time demanding from him certain efforts. Essayism can be considered as a philosophic and critical strategy, representing the externalization of modernistic tendencies within a distinct historical period. For example, essayism has a number of genre characteristics in common with post-modernism (the aesthetics of eclecticism, special role of the author's person), based, nevertheless, on the author's internal determinacy and focused on a goal (search for the truth). This means that essayism is in dialectic opposition to post-modernism. It is based on the elaborateness of the national culture and language used in writing essays.

Let's make a short review of the notion's continuity. We can discuss the pre-phenomenology and pre-existentialism of ancient authors and Christian mystics. As long as none of the ancient Greeks, according to Wilhelm Dilthey, "left positions of objectivity for the positions of self-consciousness" [2], Marcus Aurelius was the first in whose writings we find subjectivism by itself, in conjunction with the component of a rigorous ethic, later developed by Christian thinkers. Truth began being associated with goodness and illumination. After St. Augustine

it becomes clear that truth is situated only where it is looked for. St. Augustine's "inner word of truth" draws out the possibility of finding truth. The corresponding "word of the heart", "God's word does not belong to any language" [3] and does not exist a priori, before the discussion began. The thinking person has an opportunity to find truth, verbalizing it by the person's own language when asking a suitable question, which, in its turn, causes the need for having the correct answer.

An extremely important contribution to the development of the understanding of philosophical hermeneutics was made by Ignatius Loyola; he was ahead of Wilhelm Dilthey in forming the strategy of "co-understanding through empathy". Ignatius offers a hermeneutic project of entirety and harmony, which should be characteristics of hermeneutic conversation. He is focused on forming the thinking human being's personality, looking for the truth in meaning later termed by Michel Foucault as "taking care of oneself": not only the philosopher defines the truth, but also the truth forms the thinker. Such Dilthey concepts as life, inner experience, singular descriptive psychology, and historical consciousness construct the process of understanding (co-understanding, common understanding, mutual understanding) through empathy. This means that Dilthey's advice is to trust the written testimony of a thinking person. Finally, philosophical hermeneutics are based on the presence of a serious attitude to what is said by an intellectual.

Consequently, what comprises Heidegger's essayistic turn, announced before? It consists of placing all responsibility for interpretation on its author, namely on the philosopher himself (herself). In this, Heidegger is almost accordant with representatives of romantic hermeneutics. If taking into account that Umberto Eco's term "overinterpretation" contains rather negative characteristics, being based on "incidental and illusive" similarity [4], and, as a consequence, indicating the author's voluntary distancing from the text being researched, in Heidegger's works this phenomenon (if we are going to use the term) has positive connotation only. Heidegger's overinterpretation (essayism) does not deny the demand for facticism stated before. It engages the interpreter in the process of thinking launched by the author of the text being considered. Meditating on Anaximander's statements, Heidegger represents his own translation (interpretation) from Greek, mentioning that he cannot provide scientific proof for it. We also cannot, he states, allow ourselves to just believe the version proposed.

"Scientific evidences would be one-dimensional. There is no place for faith in thinking. This transla-

tion only allows thinking itself, at that by thinking within the limits of this statement. Thinking is the versification of the truth of being in a historically possible interlocution of two thinking people in the past. [...] That is why this verbalization will not call for us as long as we are clarifying it historically and scientifically and philologically only" [5]. The concept of "thinker's conversation" also engages a hermeneutic conversation (co-thinking) between those Dilthey intellectuals who are worthy of trust and consequent of empathy and co-understanding. Gadamer wrote about Heidegger's co-thinking with Nietzsche and Helderlin. Mykhailo Minakov mentioned Heidegger's conversations with George, Novalis and Trakl. Thanks to the essayism of his thinking, Heidegger does not veer off the analyzed text when interpreting, but continues his thinking from the point at which the author left off. The idea that "a statement calls for" an interpreter by causing the frame of its own factuality is important. This presence can coincide in its hermeneutic participation with Dasein, when the language of a philosopher or a poet resonates, able to embody the phenomenological in the individual. The individual, in his turn, again opens for us the way to the stylistic and biographical.

The image of Dilthey, with his tendency to base himself on the process of the cultural understanding of a thinking witness, appears again and again as we are considering the postulates of philosophical hermeneutics. Even Gadamer unwittingly takes Heidegger's positions in his own biographical reminiscences about Heidegger. "The only thing we have left is the witness of the person who was present at the place where the event happened, and is now passing on the witness to others. The eye-witness relates what happened, moreover – what happened in reality. Therefore, the eye-witness witnessing the moment has every right to say what everybody who has met Heidegger knows – he is a master of thinking, the unknown art of thinking" [6]. We constitute, renew, and create, again and again, the sense of the message in our own manner. Besides the interpreter, the conversation's participants include: the text itself, its author and other people; the historical horizons that can be changed, influencing our prejudgments. And the sense we are looking for, providing we reach understanding, can present itself as a new one.

Consequently, the hermeneutics of style emerges from the dialogical nature of philosophical hermeneutics, and is related to the essayism of intellectuals' statements. Essayism means a special personal engagement of the author (a thinking witness of events, a philosopher or a poet) in the object of conversation, which causes the passion of essayism. By

this, a signal for readers is being formed, causing them to respect the proposed point of view and to reflect and listen attentively. Reading an essay, we always imagine its author with his or her emotions and aspirations and communicate with him or her through reading, and, because of that, we also seem to be looking at ourselves in a mirror. The importance of the essay is caused not by the sources it is based on, and not by the accuracy of the facts or topic chosen. The essay's validity is related to the author's person, his or her capabilities and abilities to see something common in those tangles of phenomena and events, which would never be noticed by other people.

The essay can never be a monolog. It is based on and laid out as a dialog. Meeting an appropriately represented different proposition (including the author's conviction, theoretical base, scientific arguments and ability to listen and to hear the other), the essay does not oppose, but is enriched by a different

understanding, forming an integral polyphonic discourse. The discourse's resonance is truthful inasmuch as it leads us to correct thinking in correlation with known facts. This strategy best fits the bases of philosophical hermeneutics.

Essayistics makes "backward reduction" possible, implementing a properly hermeneutic conversation. It surmounts required phenomenological conventionalities, helping the participant to maintain his or her way toward an answer for a question asked, remembering it and remembering him- or herself – in accordance to the truth. Consequently, the hermeneutics of style analyzes a text in the context of never-ending exchanges of thoughts within culture. From this point of view, the readers' writings are always of utmost importance. The wish to express always arises from something that has really touched the author, causing him to react through his own vision, prevision and style.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>[1] Breza Tadeusz. Reflections on the Essay / Tadeusz Breza // Ukrainian Issues. – 1995. – #2. – P. 49 (in Ukrainian).</p> <p>[2] Dilthey Wilhelm. Introduction to the Human Sciences / Wilhelm Dilthey. – Moscow : House of Intellectual Books, 2000. – P. 461 (in Russian).</p> <p>[3] St. Augustine. The Trinity. – Catholic University of America Press, 1963. – P. 476.</p> | <p>[4] Eco Umberto. Overinterpreting texts / Umberto Eco // Anthology of the World Literary and Critic Thought. – Lviv : Litopys, 2002. – P. 551 (in Ukrainian).</p> <p>[5] Heidegger Martin. Discourse on Thinking / Martin Heidegger. – Moscow : High School, 1991. – P. 67 (in Russian).</p> <p>[6] Gadamer Hans-Georg. Heidegger's Ways / Hans-Georg Gadamer. – Minsk : Propylaeum, 2007. – P. 73 (in Russian).</p> |
|---|---|

Анотація: У цій статті Сергій Квіт пояснює концепт «герменевтики стилю», запропонований в його книжці з такою ж назвою, опублікованою цього року у Видавничому домі «Києво-Могилянська академія». Цей концепт спирається на такі ключові поняття Г.-Г. Гадамера, як «герменевтична розмова» та «герменевтичний феномен». З іншого боку, він безпосередньо пов'язаний з європейською есеїстичною традицією та «есеїстичним поворотом» у мисленні М. Гайдеггера. Автор з'ясовує такі терміни, як «людяність», «есеїзм», а також робить спробу переглянути термін У. Еко «надінтерпретація».

Ключові слова: герменевтика стилю, герменевтична розмова, герменевтичний феномен, людяність, есеїзм, надінтерпретація.