

# Aesthetics and Literature: Ontological and Anthropological Aspects (An Introduction)

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Among the prototypical conceptions of Western aesthetics is Diotima's discourse on man's ascent to Beauty, which does not reach a fulfilment "until he arrives at the notion of absolute Beauty, and at last knows what the essence of Beauty is" (Plato, *Symposium*). This meta-ontological perspective, which contemplates Beauty in absolute connection with the Real and the Good, is preserved in apophatic philosophical-religious traditions to this day. Literature is a part of these traditions, insofar as with its semantic openness the absolute openness of the creative Primordial is invoked. However, in the Early Modern Period at the latest, a different ontology of beauty—with equally old roots to those of the Platonic ones—prevails in the West: the subject's appropriation of creative potentials in the process of his gradual independence. This tradition culminates in (post)modern projects of social differentiation and aesthetic self-realization. In the freedom of the artistic field, the connections between the Beautiful, the Real and the Good are seen in a new light. Their manifestations range from pragmatic instrumentalization to radical degrammatization.

The articles in the thematic issue titled "Aesthetics and Literature: Ontological and Anthropological Aspects" explore the intricate connections between aesthetics, ethics, and epistemology within literature, considering very diverse contexts. They encompass various sectors of the contemporary field of literary aesthetics, which is inherently interdisciplinary and intertwined with philosophy, art history, theology, sociology, anthropology, and more. It can be confidently stated that the selected papers, publicly presented on the 6th and 7th of September 2022 during the 20th International Comparative Literature Colloquium as part of the Vilenica international literary festival, present a mosaic of case studies that offer fertile grounds for further research.

The first author of the thematic issue, Veit Lindner, delves into the literary genre of the essay, with a specific focus on Octavio Paz's work "El mono gramático." This remarkable and multifaceted text defies easy categorization. Lindner meticulously explores how Paz, through the use of Hindu mythology, establishes an ethic-aesthetic endeavor

that compels the subject to confront compromises, resulting in realization of its unfulfilled and fragmented existence. This “post-modern” tour de force can ultimately be understood as a poignant reminder for contemporary aesthetics that (essayistic) subjectivity, despite its fragility, is always inherently performative and self-critical.

The next article by Elisabeth Flucher addresses the core problem of Western aesthetics as she explores the traditional boundaries between philosophy and poetry. She does so by examining Nietzsche’s poem “The Song of Melancholy” (later entitled “Only Fool! Only Poet!”), and convincingly argues that the poem presents a complex relation to truth. This relation involves transcending the dichotomy between poetry and philosophy, drawing on the historical semantics of the melancholic fool in Shakespeare’s works.

The relationship between literature and painting is addressed by Milovan Novaković who discusses D. H. Lawrence’s understanding of painting and his role as an art historian. The author maintains that Lawrence viewed art through his unique ontological perspective, seeing it as a reflection of opposing forces. While he believed Western art was dominated by ideas and light, he also recognized the importance of darkness in certain artworks. Novaković highlights that Lawrence sought to reconcile these opposing elements in his own literary texts, wherein he often emphasized the corporeal, tactile, and “dark” elements that Western metaphysics tried to downplay.

The paper by Vesna Kondrič Horvat opens up the social possibilities of literary aesthetics as she explores the literary works of Erica Pedretti, a Swiss author of Sudeten German origin. Known for her experiments with language and autobiographical writing, Pedretti’s works navigate the challenges of modern society, offering a transcultural experience. The analysis covers her various literary works, revealing how personal experiences can be transformed into convincing fiction while challenging societal norms.

Milosav Gudović delves into what can be called apophatic aesthetics as he examines the poetological ideas of Semyon Frank, with a focus on his concept of the unfathomable. According to Frank’s (meta)ontology, the unfathomable is seen as a primordial reality that defies definition. Hence, in its purest form, poetry must become an expression and imprint of this unfathomable through the literary language.

The concluding article of the thematic issue focuses on lyric poetry itself. According to the author, Brane Senegačnik, this form of poetry is facing challenges in contemporary culture due to the so-called anthropological reduction, resulting in decreased understanding and

marginalization of poetry. The author maintains that at its core, there is an ontological issue of the self that is at stake. In contemporary culture and literature, human subjectivity is often entangled in the superfluous games of “surface,” while lyric poetry, in contrast, operates on the pre-reflective (non-objectual) consciousness. The author decidedly argues that lyric poetry leads its readers into “the depth” as it establishes a relationship between the self and reality as a whole.