

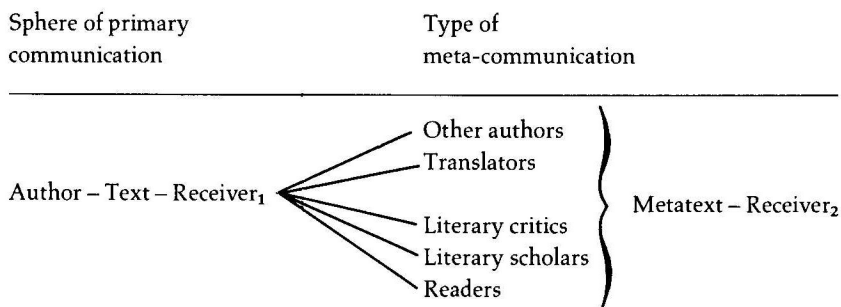
Aspects of Metatext¹

o Comparatists were the first to devote attention to the question of the interrelations between texts under the twin headings of 'contacts' and 'homology.' However, the study of this question has undergone many radical changes. In contrast to earlier positivistic statements about 'influences' and 'dependencies' of authors, contemporary comparatists tend to employ the structuralist model. The observations made in comparative literature on the specific ways in which inter-literary contacts are reflected in the texts themselves, considered as the basic units of the literary process, represent only a rough, little differentiated classification of the forms of literary interrelations. Comparatists were discouraged by the very wide variety of the forms of literary relations, as reflected in individual texts, and by their consequent inability to organize these relations into one general system. As a result, comparative literature limited itself to an isolating study of individual concrete phenomena of inter-textual relations on both the typological and the genetic levels. Although it tried to discover laws in the sphere of generic phenomena, for example, its generalizations were of an *ad hoc* nature and dealt with the concrete use of a textual element only, or with the artistic method of a given author. This description of specific types of relations between texts from the point of view of genre (reminiscence, parody, travesty, quotation, etc.) did not surpass the achievements of traditional poetics.

1 In order to arrange phenomena – in our case kinds of inter-textual relations – in a system, it is not enough to consider them on the level of their specific realization and function, that is, on the level of the *parole* structure of the literary work. Rather, one should arrange these inter-textual relations as such into a system, a paradigm, on the *langue* level. One task of the general theory of texts is precisely to build such a system out of the individual elements or relations. Such a system should comprise all the basic types of modelling relations between texts, but exclude fortuitous, unconnected similarities. These modelling relations may be referred to collectively as 'inter-textual continuity.'

1 The present essay is a brief survey (résumé) of the author's book *Teória metatextu* (Theory of Metatext) (Nitra: KLIKEM 1975), where all the questions discussed here are developed in much greater detail.

A first attempt at a general scheme of inter-textual continuity is provided by the model of literary communication, represented in the following diagram:



As one can see from this diagram, the term 'meta-communication' refers to all types of processing (manipulation) of the original literary text, whether it is done by other authors, readers, critics, translators, etc. This processing is manifested in the form of further texts which are about the original texts. We should introduce at this point two terms which are basic to our discussion here: *prototext* and *metatext*.

Prototext is a text which serves as an object of inter-textual continuity. Every text can potentially be an object of such continuity. The realization of this possibility is a matter of the dynamics of the literary process.

Metatext is a model of the *prototext*; the way in which two texts are linked. The rules of this modelling are realized in the text-forming activity of the creator of the *metatext*.

All the texts produced by participants in this meta-communicative activity constitute the so-called indirect mediation of the original text. The various texts which form the meta-communicative sphere can then be further differentiated into various types according to the specific nature of their relation to the original text. It is to this task that our essay addresses itself.

2 For the study of inter-textual relations, and of *metatexts* in particular, only those relations between texts are important which have a modelling character (continuity), ie, which develop or modify in some way the semiotic, meaning-bearing, side of the original text. We can thus *exclude* from our discussion such operations as the transcription of the original text (copies, reproductions by a copying press) and serial production (eg, several editions of the same literary work which do not introduce any textual changes into the original) which are concerned with pure similarity between texts.

On the other hand, any reproduction in which a semiotic moment is

present becomes a metatextual operation. This includes cases where the reproducer pretends that his work is not really his own, such as Meegeren's 'copies' of Vermeer van Delft's paintings. These 'copies' represent production in the 'style of the follower,' but at the same time they form part of the immanent poetics of the reproduced author. The reproducer creates his pretended 'copy' in the spirit of the poetic principles of the original author. This poetics is created, abstracted by him on the basis of knowledge of the whole *œuvre* of the original author, and not of a non-existent concrete work. Meegeren's copies are, therefore, metatexts not in relation to a concrete, non-existing prototext, but in view of the scheme of the original production which has been fixed by him into a frozen formula of some kind. Pseudo-translation constitutes a similar case. The nature of the copy is determined not only by the subjective motives of the copier, but also by the objective constraints which follow from the nature of the work being copied. The transcription of Rembrandt's self-portrait by Courbet is a case in point. Against the background of the confrontation between prototext and metatext, a higher synthesis of meaning is effected in this transcription. Courbet adds to the portrait his historic evaluation of Rembrandt and his poetics, not at the level of superficial copying of the original, but at the level of the deep re-encoding of meaning.

3 In this section, we shall discuss the principal aspects of the relation between prototext and metatext: semantic, stylistic, axiological, and those associated with the author's strategy. Within the *semantic* aspect, we ought to distinguish between meaning invariants, which are those meaning components of the prototext which are kept intact in the metatext (inter-textual invariants)² and meaning variants, which are among those meaning components of the prototext which are realized in the metatext through semantic shifts. Such meaning variants are realized through different semantic shifts in different metatexts. The ratio prototext: metatext can be defined as the ratio of meaning invariants to variants. Translation serves as a key example of this relation. In translation, semantic shifts occur due to the different contexts which the original text enters in each case. The discrepancy between the contexts of the original and of the translations brings about the loss of certain meaning components, but at the same time gives rise to new ones. The ratio of invariant to variant components is different in different metatexts, and defines the various relations between proto- and metatexts (similarity, equivalence, etc.).

The variant:invariant components ratio enables us also to distinguish two extreme cases of relations between texts. At one extreme we find the

2 See V.D. Pedič, 'Odkrytije invariantov v rozvitu poznania,' *Voprosy filozofii i sociologii* 5 (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Leningradskogo universiteta 1973) 65-70.

token:token relation in which the texts have maximum *similarity* to each other.³ The ratio here is 1:1 as in tendentious transcription, plagiarism, etc. In all such cases, there is a tendency towards maximal formal and functional agreement between the texts. At the other extreme stands the token:type relation, in which no such specific agreement exists, and in which the similarity between the texts is based on modelling the *general* qualities of the prototext in the metatext (eg, parody). These two extreme cases form a scale along which one can locate every individual case of inter-textual continuity.

The relation between prototext and metatext can also be studied in its *stylistic* aspect according to the degree of homology between proto- and metatext on the expressive level. If we understand 'style' in a broad sense, which encompasses both linguistic and thematic components of the text, then inter-textual continuity must be regarded as a stylistic relation.⁴ Whenever prototext and metatext are consistent with each other, this indicates a stylistic attitude of expressional approval of the prototext on the part of the metatext. Approval of the theme and expressive structure of the prototext gives rise to a set of rules for making stylistic decisions when creating the metatext. These rules determine which means of expression should be selected for the metatext and which should be excluded (expressional taboo). An affirmative attitude towards the prototext implies also the exclusion of polemic moments in the production of the metatext: the relation between the two must be consistent, non-polemic. Thus, for example, literary advertisements and other procedures (operations) of an affirmative nature rule out critical evaluation, as well as the use in the metatext of expressional categories which imply a polemic attitude towards the prototext.

The model of the affirmative linking of one text to another opens up a certain strategy of production in the field of art, which we might call the strategy of text utilisation. At issue here are the so-called *quasi-metatexts*, which are texts on (about) fictitious prototexts. The first place in this category is occupied by the retold (recounted) intention of the author to write a text. This 'oral' text is a metatext with regard to the original text. We should place here secondly all those cases of the strategy of production referred to as the 'method of pseudonym.' In these cases, the pseudonym (= concealment of the author) is promoted to an artistic method on the level of composition. This includes the following cases:

1 pseudo-quotations

3 This scope of semiotics has been described by I. Osolsobě in the study 'K teorii parodie,' *Slavica slovaca* 8 (1973) Nr. 4, pp 374–85.

4 F. Miko, *Malý výkladový slovník výrazovej sústavy* (Nitra: KLIKEM 1972) 18 (appendix 1) a, p 6

2 mystification of the author:

(a) replacement (filling in) of a text which constitutes a missing link in the development of literature or art in general (Václav Hanka's manuscripts)

3 reconstruction of a lost text (finds of segments of unpublished texts, restoration of pictures, reconstruction of musical scores, completion of damaged segments, etc.)

4 imitation of titles

5 pseudo-translations or make-believe translations.

However, the attitude of the metatext towards the prototext may also be polemical or controversial. This polemic attitude may consist of an extreme denial of the thematic and expressional qualities of the prototext, the so-called 'destruction' of the text. In other cases, polemic can assume the form of apparent affirmation. Here, a quotation from the prototext is introduced into an inadequate context or situation, ie, a context or situation which are semantically different from it and incompatible (inconsistent) with it. Parody can thus be effected not only through the destruction of the original text, but also by means of mechanical quotation.⁵ In this case, the controversial aspect of the metatext has its expressional background, which determines in what way this polemic with the prototext is to be carried out so as not to disturb the inter-textual invariant.

The stylistic aspect of the metatext is at the same time an *axiological* aspect, since it embodies evaluation of the prototext, as well as of its means of expression. An example from the field of translation may illustrate this point. The very selection of a particular text for translation can, although it need not, be a positive evaluation of the original. Every such choice, however, rules out the polemic tone, eg, the parodying of the original. Nevertheless, the translator has a possibility, albeit a minimal and considerably limited one, of polemicizing with the style of the original. To some extent, any translation that brings the original up to date is a polemic one. One ought to exclude from this category, though, a polemic translation, which is an expression of the translator's disagreement with certain components of the author's poetics. Such disagreement can be expressed by the translator even though he preserves the meaning invariants of the original. Plagiarism, retelling, and other ways of reshaping the original also display agreement with the prototext, while destruction of the text, or *editio purificata*, is an extreme case of the negation of the prototext.

The study of the metatext also involves an examination of the *author's strategy* in linking his metatext to the original one. The author may decide either to conceal or to reveal his intention to draw on another text. This

5 M. Butor, *Powieść jako poszukiwanie* (Répertoire I, II, III – 1960, 1964, 1968) (Warszawa: Czytelnik 1971) 136

decision has, in either case, the character of a style-forming act. An overt reference to the prototext can even become an aesthetic program, or part of the poetics formulated by the author. On the expression level, the moment of revealing or concealing the author's intention to link his text to another one is manifested through the different degree of idiovariability or sociovariability of his text *vis-à-vis* the original one.

Analogous tendencies also appear in the author's strategy towards the receiver: whether or not he counts on the coparticipation of the receiver in the creation of the metatext. From the reader's point of view, some texts seem to be autonomous *vis-à-vis* the prototext. These are the texts which mediate other texts or serve as their substitutes. All forms of literary education (retelling, advertising, epilogue, literary criticism, etc.), as well as translations, belong to this category. On the other hand, there are metatexts whose communicative impact depends on the reader's reference to the prototext. Comic procedures in parody, for example, can not be identified by the reader as comical without the possibility of confrontation with the object being parodied, ie, the prototext.

The problem of the concealing or revealing of the author [of the prototext in the metatext] can also be represented through the semiotic opposition one's own:alien. A reader may perceive a certain textual element of the metatext as a quotation, identifiable in this context, or as a concealed, 'indirect' allusion. In the latter case, this allusion is felt by the receiver to be an alien element in the semantics of the text, but he is not able to identify it. In any case whenever elements of the metatext are identified by the reader as belonging to a given prototext, they are 'naturalized' from the point of view of their own appropriate system, and therefore also from the point of view of the reader's consciousness. The alien element is now regarded as 'one's own' within the framework of its own context of communication. In other words, this alien element adapts itself to one of the systems at the disposal of the readers. Whenever we encounter a pseudonym, for example, the question arises whether or not the receiver is able, at least on principle, to receive and interpret the work in question against the background of the code of the author. The same situation arises whenever the receiver is confronting a painting by an unknown author, or a deliberate torso.⁶

4 One can also enquire about the *textual scope* of the contact between proto- and metatexts: does it involve only individual elements or levels of the text, or does it refer to the text as a whole. Quotation, allusion, cento, and

6 In some cases, metatexts depend on concrete prototexts (intentional texts). In other cases, the establishment of the prototext is not always possible. Two cases could be distinguished here:

(a) The study of texts belonging to an earlier literary period leads us very often to the question of where and how we can discover the literary patterns or traditions to which the authors referred in the production of these texts. Very often we lack the sources which

imitation, for example, are in this respect metatexts in part only, since they are concerned only with specific levels of the original text: verse, theme, opposition. Parody, on the other hand, involves the destruction of the whole text.

The involvement of the individual levels of the text in inter-textual relations has been discussed recently by the Polish scholar Stefania Skwarczyńska,⁷ who uses the term 'stylization' to denote a variety of textual phenomena which possess a metatextual character. According to her, the process of stylization can take place on three basic textual levels: linguistic, thematic, and compositional. Stylization can take place between two individual texts, between one text and several other texts, and between one text and one or more generic models. As we can see, her concept of style, like that of the Czech school of stylistics, includes both language and theme. In her view, the notion of stylization can be used for the analysis of individual texts, but also as a literary-historical category. In either case, stylization has to be studied from the point of view of its function in the text.

The next step in our enquiry consists of an examination of the nature of the *transformations* which the prototext can undergo in the metatext. One can establish the following forms of continuity between proto- and metatexts:

(a) imitative continuity: the metatext refers to a concrete object – metatext

could help us identify these patterns, and these sources may well have been lost altogether. Examples are the loss of proto-patterns of allusions or quotations of various types and origins.

- (b) The study of folklore presents us with a complex process of communication which is divided into several phases. According to V. Voigt, *A folklór alkotások elemzése* (Budapest: Akadémiai kiadó 1972) 175, folklore production proceeds in the following stages: (1) creation (preparation, production); (2) recitation (preparation, realization); (3) reception (including reproduction, learning in the speaker-audience or master-pupil context, active or passive preservation of tradition); (4) chain of traditions (extensions; the law of the aesthetic and historic completeness of folklore, the law of the artistic uniqueness of the folklore product).

In view of the special character of tradition in folklore as represented in this communication scheme, it is very difficult to determine in folklore the prototext of individual metatexts. The problem is further compounded by the fact that folklore, by its very nature, is governed by the principle of affirmative continuity (both synchronic and diachronic). In such a case, a certain degree of neutralization between proto- and metatexts takes place, represented by mediated consciousness of the prototext. Whenever it is impossible in folklore to determine the prototext empirically, this determining can only be done in a theoretical way, by replacing the concept of prototext with that of archetext. (K. Dvořák. 'K problematice metatextu,' lecture delivered in KLIKEM, Nitra, March 1974). Such an archetext is not embodied in any concrete variant, but rather in the invariant shared by a number of metatexts which exist in the communicative consciousness of the receivers of dance and folklore. This relation can be represented as follows: archetext (prototext) metatext.

7 S. Skwarczyńska, 'Stylizacja i jej miejsce w nauce o literaturze,' *Stylistyka polska* (Warszawa: PWN 1973) 235–7

sensu stricto – and imitates its pattern (quotation, transcription, translation, plagiarism),

(b) selective continuity: the metatext makes use of a selection of certain elements of the text, eg, the rules of the construction of the prototext, in a broader, modelling sense (parody, pastiche, imitation),

(c) reducing continuity: the metatext develops the prototext on the principle of reduction, or condensation of the text (commentary, title, summary, annotation, digest),

(d) complementary continuity: the metatext develops or completes invariant qualities of the prototext (appendices, epilogue, notes).

Typology of Metatexts

Way of linking a text to a text	Affirmative ↔ Controversial	
	Apparent ↔ Concealed	Apparent ↔ Concealed
Scope of linking		
Elements or levels of text	Quotation / motto / allusion, cento, reproduction of text / direct, indirect /, mediated 'reading' / title, annotation, summary, retelling, etc. /	Subconscious allusion, reminiscence, paraphrase, imitation
Text as a whole	'Editio purificata' / censorship /; parodically interpreted quotation;	Critical allusion without giving source
	Translation; 'tendentious transcription'; praising review* /, pastiche	Formulated intention of the author to write a text; plagiarism; second-hand translation, 'pseudo-translation,' method of pseudonym'
		Polemical translation; travesty; literary pamphlet, critical polemic**

*Literary portrait, literary essay, impressionistic étude, article-treatise, criticism, article-instruction, literary survey, feuilleton-critical, obituary, note-recommendation, literary advertisement, reader's reaction, etc.

**Literary and critical pamphlet, dialogue, parody, letter, aphorism, etc.

5 The relation of prototext and metatext has an inevitable *temporal* aspect. One important factor here is the time interval between the rise of a work of art and its primary communication on the one hand, and its metacommunication, ie, the rise of its metatexts, on the other hand. In principle, there exist two ways of temporal continuity between texts: present work-present work, and present work-'historical' work. Since continuity is essentially a diachronic phenomenon, we cannot ignore the temporal aspect in the study

of metatexts. At the same time, we must distinguish the temporal aspect from the developmental aspect. The temporal aspect does not answer the question when the metatext can itself become a prototext. It deals only with the question of communication differences between the receiver of the prototext and the receiver of the metatext, or with the possible loss of the connection between the two in the course of communicating the works, eg, the loss of allusiveness of the original text. It is also concerned with the stylistic interpretation (rendering, expression) of the time difference between original and translation.

The *spatial* aspect of metacommunication investigates the typology of metatexts from the point of view of their realization in the historical space of one or several cultures. It studies the geographic and ethnographic relations of cultures, and the relation of artistic folklore to popular, trivial production. These questions were mostly dealt with in comparative literature, where the typology of literary contacts was formulated. This typology included initially interliterary relations, but can also be adapted to the study of intraliterary relations.

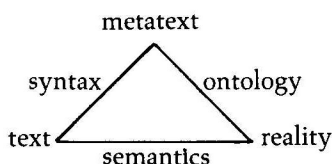
Finally, we ought to delimit, as an independent aspect, the question of the specific styles and the relations between different artistic systems. Here we should distinguish the following cases: the meta-communication of an artistic text by a non-artistic one, metatexts of art which have non-artistic prototexts, metatexts in the fine arts whose prototext is literary, etc.

6 We should now make some observations on the *text – metatext – reality* set of relations. We regard as metatext only a text which calls attention to another work. The context of referring may be unlimited (speaking) or limited (text, element of text or a text-forming method, such as the method of composition). Quotation, transcription, translation, parody, and so forth are models of their prototexts. A metatext is a meta-sign of a work which is already in existence. In metatexts, textual ontology has priority over extratextual ontology. However, it would be an oversimplification to explain the text-metatext relation from the immanent standpoint, ie, the text → text sequence, only. Without the relation to reality, the proper stimuli of continuity could not be realized. For example: translation, as a text, does not come into being merely as a reflection of the original; it is rather determined by the relation of the translator as creator to reality. The meta-communicant (the translator) is related to the textual ontology of the work to which he refers, but also to the ontology of his own complex of experience. Both relations are inevitably projected into the textual activities of the translator. This means that the translator performs two operations: he conveys information about invariants of the original and, at the same time, discovers in the original further virtual or concealed meanings. These observations about translation are obviously valid for metatexts in general.

The two ontological aspects of metatext can be shown in the following scheme:



Using Ogden and Richard's triangle, the relation text – metatext – reality would appear as follows:



7 Finally, the concept of metatext, as defined in terms of communication theory and semiotics, can serve as a common point of departure for several types of further intertextual relations in *the literary system as a whole*:

(a) interliterary relations: the relations of a text to works in 'foreign' literatures, as well as to earlier works in the same literature.

(b) The relation of secondary (reserve) texts to the original text: These secondary texts arise as 'superstructure' of the original text, and their function is to replace contact with the original text in the economy of literary reading. According to their function within the system of aesthetic knowledge, these texts can be divided into reproductive texts (plagiarisms, second-hand translations, quotations, tendentious transcription), liquidatory texts (changing of a text, censorship), summarizing texts (digest, annotation, bibliographical entry), appending texts (parerga, glossary, mamot-rekt, epilogue), and interpretational texts (literary criticism and its genres, curricular and extra-curricular literary education, literary museum).

(c) Literary continuity in tradition: diachronic projection of metatext, tradition as the *langue* of intertextual relations. Here is a summary of the forms of interliterary relations in tradition:

polemic negation

affirmation, conformity

delayed or premature
developmental realization
of a text

calquing of texts

translation of a scheme and its
transformation

destruction of the text

montage

discarding of the text

introduction of texts with closed
potential for development (with
no chance of further development)

reconstruction of a text

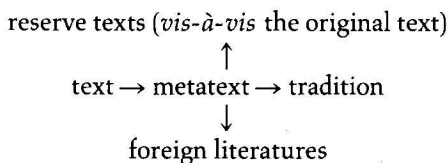
the rise of archetext

revival of texts which have declined
or been surpassed

restoration of lost or missing text

discovery of a new text.

These various relations can be summarized in the following scheme:



Tradition is in fact a superconcept which covers all metatextual operations, that is, relations to foreign literatures, to one's own literature and the ways of manipulating the original work by means of reserve texts.⁸

Comenius University of Bratislava, ĆSSR and University of Alberta

⁸ The author wishes to thank Uri Margolin of the Department of Comparative Literature, University of Alberta, for a discussion of terminology and for the preparation of this article for publication.