

The impossibility of immanence: A contemporary perspective on Algirdas Julius Greimas' *Maupassant*

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Abstract. The book *Maupassant* (1976), which is devoted to an analysis of Maupassant's short story "Two friends", is one of A. J. Greimas' most important works. In it he tried out the semiotic tools he had developed up to that point, tested models for narrative analysis, and anticipated future perspectives in the development of semiotic theory. We discuss how the book puts forward the principle of immanent analysis, and how the "closed" text – the object of semiotic analysis – is constructed. The article reveals that while Greimas declares, in the book's Foreword, that he is distancing from context – the literary sociocultural universe – within the analysis itself he is forced to recognize certain contextual elements. Greimas recognizes the importance of acknowledging contextual facts such as the French concept of *patrie* and does not attempt to hide certain subjective interpretive elements. Yet at the same time Greimas attempts to suppress context's invasion of his interpretation. He recognizes the semantic isotopies generated by context to the extent to which they suit the coherence of his analysis, considering them auxiliary in terms of the syntactic and discursive structures of the text. Nevertheless, a contextual isotopy – based on intertextual ties to a Biblical parable – becomes the main one. We come to the conclusion that the principle of immanence in *Maupassant* is not a negation, but a problematization that demonstrates how relevant contextual material can be integrated into a semiotic analysis.

Keywords: Algirdas Greimas; Guy de Maupassant; text; context; immanent analysis; text as construction; semiotic analysis

Introduction

Algirdas Julius Greimas' book *Maupassant* appeared in 1976 (English translation 1988), after his most important theoretical works *Sémantique structurale* (1966; in English translation as *Structural Semantics*, 1983) and *Du sens* (1970; in English translation as *On Meaning*, 1987) that had laid the foundations for the semiotic theories of the Parisian School of semiotics. As indicated by its subtitle *The Semiotics of Text: Practical Exercises*, *Maupassant* would be a practical illustration of semiotic theory, what Greimas liked to call a “scientific project” – an application of the analytical tools and method he had developed. However, this is not entirely the case. The book that devotes almost 300 pages of analysis to Maupassant's six-page story “*Deux amis*” (“Two friends”) is a work in which the “semiotic project” continues to be developed. *Maupassant* is considered to be one of Greimas' most important theoretical texts – not only does it offer a detailed narrative analysis of the short story, but it further develops, expands upon and calls into question earlier theoretical, analytical models. The principle of binary opposition is complemented by the logic of approximation and the aspect of tensivity, the actant of the Sender (*Destinateur*) is divided into a complex proto-actantial system; there is an attempt to provide a semiotic description of, and to universalize, the existential situations represented in the text (such as the destruction of meaning in the story's first paragraph, or the dilemma in Sequence IX); and the earlier narrative model is recognized as insufficient and a new cognitive dimension is introduced. The possibilities presented by these discoveries – this list could be expanded and discussed separately – are inherent in Greimas' foundational methodological position. The object of analysis is considered a testing site and semiotic analysis – a fruitful dialogue between the object and method that is understood as a fundamental condition for development of both the theory and the method. Greimas describes this attitude, or research strategy, in the “Final Remarks” of *Maupassant*:

With these limited and partial analyses we hope that we have suggested a certain way of reading, a *methodological model* [original italics] today best suited to the strategy of semiotic research. Each time we find ourselves confronting an unanalysed phenomenon, this method constructs its representation in such a way that the resulting model is more general than is required to deal with the fact under examination, so that the observed phenomenon can be accounted for as one of its variables. In this way the practice of the text can lead to theoretical considerations going beyond its singularity by transforming the “problematic” into operational concepts and methodological parameters which, it goes without saying, will be later subjected to possible validation or invalidations. (Greimas 1988[1976]: 245)

Maupassant is clearly a work which enables a creative encounter between the object and method (though Greimas would probably not have liked this description – he

considered himself a rational person with a “geometrical mind” (*esprit de géométrie*), differently from Roland Barthes, whose creative drive he referred to as a “mind of discernment” (*esprit de finesse*)¹. Reading Greimas’ analysis of “Two friends” today it is very easy to see that it contains the potential, development, and offshoots of his later semiotic theory. This includes the question of enunciation and point of view, the origins of the semiotics of the passions inherent in the cognitive dimension (Greimas stresses its importance in the book’s conclusion), the earliest steps of a semiotics of tensivity, the potential of *esthesis* and so-called situational semiotics, later taken up by sociosemiotics (it would be worth delineating *Maupassant* and the further development of the Greimas School of semiotics). However, this work also reveals some of the “semiotic project’s” utopian ideas, some of which – for example the possibility of creating a system of mutually explanatory terms that would allow the analyser to avoid figurative language almost entirely – also Greimas himself acknowledged.² One of the most important principles of the so-called standard semiotics is the immanence of analysis. The goal of this article is to describe the interrogation of this principle, its context, and how it permeates Greimas’ analysis of Maupassant’s story. Still, first it is worth remembering how the principle of immanence is generally understood in Greimas’ semiotics.

“Hors du texte, point du salut!” The principle of immanence and its conditions in Greimas’ semiotics

As a theoretical premise and principle of semiotic analysis, immanence – which Greimas described using the oft-quoted expression that has been used in the title of this section (“Outside the text there is no salvation!”) – has more than once been reconsidered and revised by members of the Paris School of semiotics themselves. Jacques Fontanille argues that Greimas’ slogan no longer suits semiotics, which has turned from textual structures *stricto sensu* to analysis of objects and social practices, and suggests replacing it with another one – “*Hors des sémiotiques-objets, point de salut!*” (“Outside semiotic objects there is no salvation!”). He is skeptical about the invitation to stretch the limits of immanence by including contextual material, seeing it as a threat to methodological

¹ In letters to a friend of his youth, Aleksandra Kašubienė (Alexandra Kasuba, b. 1923), Greimas mentions that he has more than once publicly discussed this difference between himself and Barthes (Greimas, Kašubienė 2008: 140).

² At the end of his life Greimas had doubts about such a possibility. In a 1988 letter to Kašubienė he wrote “[...] literature and philosophy and my “science” – they are all the same thing. I increasingly believe that poetry and art, rather than philosophy and science, can raise questions, from the abstract to the figurative”. Greimas’ book *De l'imperfection* (1987; *About Imperfection*) had already appeared, revealing this shift and how analytical and figurative languages can complement each other.

and theoretical identity (Fontanille 2006: 14–15). Eric Landowski is moderate in his consideration of this question, arguing that context inevitably participates in the process of semiosis, while being neither prior to or beyond it, as in other theories (e.g., sociology). Rather, it is an integral part of the object (Landowski 1985: 227–228). In his review of the Paris School of semiotics' discussions about the history of the principle of immanence, Ahmed Kharbouch³ (2015) suggests detaching the principle of immanence from formal immanentism. Here the principle of immanence is understood as a methodological premise, an epistemological commitment to study the creation of meaning in the structures of a concrete text (or object) without forgetting the existence of the sentient subject and a historical, cultural, or social context, but leaving these parameters in brackets out of focus (in the semiotics of Juri Lotman these parameters, or “non-textual structures,” are given more direct attention – see Lotman 1998: 269–281). Immanentism is an extreme view of the principle of immanence in which the text (object) is seen as the only site for the appearance of objective meaning (Kharbouch 2015). This is a rejection of the idea that the text (as an object), or the material object or social practice (which are analysed as texts) is not an empirical fact, but a construct. They are multidimensional phenomena that have a historical origin and function in certain conditions of communication, and are understood by one subject or another. According to Gianfranco Marrone,⁴ semiotic epistemology is radically constructivist. Having disconnected the text-object (e.g., a literary work or an academic article, in which case the empirical boundaries are more or less clear) and the text-model (the object or situation which are being analysed following the principles of textual analysis), the Italian semiotician stresses that as objects of semiotic analysis they are both constructs. Only in the former case, that of the text-object, is the process of textualization naturalized and therefore concealed, while in the latter case it is, to the contrary, clearly evident, because the semiotician himself must define the boundaries of the object, its conditions of coherence, define the conditions of its internal dynamic, and so on (Marrone 2008). Greimas himself expresses a similar view:

Greimas argues that any semiotic object, i.e., “any manifested entity under study” (which would in fact be the starting point of the analysis) exists only “within the framework of a descriptive project and therefore presupposes a metasemiotics that, theoretically, encompasses it.” Thus, there is nothing “natural” in the empiricism of semiotics. (Marrone 2008)⁵

³ Kharbouch, Ahmed 2015. Le principe d'immanence et la transitivité du langage. *Actes Sémiotiques* [En ligne] 118. <http://epublications.unilim.fr/revues/as/5437> was accessed on 13 August 2016.

⁴ Marrone, Gianfranco 2008. L'invention du texte. *Actes Sémiotiques* [En ligne] 111. <http://epublications.unilim.fr/revues/as/1643> was accessed on 24 July 2016.

⁵ Marrone quotes the article “Semiotics” from the analytical dictionary *Semiotics and Language* (Greimas, Courtés 1982: 287).

With this textual constructivism in mind, Marrone draws the conclusion that “for Greimas, semiotics is always textual semiotics – *only* textual semiotics exists” (Marrone 2008).

Indeed, one of the steps in construction would be the de-contextualization of the object of semiotic analysis – putting context in brackets, rather than eliminating it. The historicity and social nature of value systems is openly recognized in most of Greimas’ works. Take, for example, Greimas’ early theoretical work *Structural Semantics*, which ends with the chapter “History and permanence” (the very title is telling). Here Greimas specifically argues that the researcher should never lose sight of the historical dimension of the signifiatory object under analysis, though history itself is understood as a transformational sequence of synchronic states, which one undertakes to analyse, and in which one can already recognize the beginnings of a narrative model:

The structural definition of the diachronic transformations of the structures of signification is indisputably one of the tasks of semantics: not only because men and societies are both permanent and historical and any exhaustive description must not lose sight of these two aspects, but also because imaginary structural transformations play a considerable role in all types of ideologies – individual or collective – with the help of which men justify the world or explore the future. Thus, in the previous chapter devoted to the examination of models of transformation, the problem of interference and of possible double interpretation of achronic and diachronic structures was already presented in comparable terms. (Greimas 1983a: 293)

Greimas maintained this kind of relationship with the historical and contextual aspects of meaning through his late works.⁶ In *The Semiotics of Passions* (with Jacques Fontanille, 1991; English translation 1992), the authors openly admit that “different cultures, epochs, and places treat the same modal arrangements differently” (Greimas, Fontanille 1993: 96). However, this study of historical interpretations – the analysis of conditions of enunciation – rather is an object of other disciplines (history, sociology, psychology),⁷ with semiotics continuing to be committed to structures located in the text, and their transformations.

However, in the chapter devoted to sociosemiotics in the dictionary *Semiotics and Language*, Greimas foresees another type of relationship to context. He ambitiously raises the question of the semiotic method’s capacity to reconstruct context (situation of enunciation) from the very text (utterance):

⁶ A certain shift can be discerned in one of Greimas’ last books, *On Imperfection*, where he considers questions of connotation, perception, and the conscious subject.

⁷ A relation between semiotics and social sciences is considered in the book *Sémiotique et sciences sociales* (1976; in English translation as *The Social Sciences: A Semiotic View*, 1989).

[...] one can wonder whether the information (probably insufficient, but sure), that the analysis of utterance offer us more about the nature of enunciation than do the sociological parameters, drawn somewhat haphazardly and in indefinite numbers as if from magician's hat. (Greimas, Courtés 1982: 302–303)

Within the context of contemporary debates about historical literary research (which Rita Felski ironically refers to as a relationship between context-as-box and the text-as-object contained in it; Felski 2011: 575) and the push to invitation to rehabilitate close reading (Frow 2010: 273–252), Greimas' faith in the text's capacity to "inform" regarding the conditions of its enunciation and how it is understood sounds very relevant. Without a doubt, this kind of attitude to the text as a site of social expression has affected French sociocriticism, which claims that the text "is so meaningful that when read it has the capacity to attract both the preconditions of its emergence and the effects of its existence" (Barbérís 1998: 133).⁸

Maupassant: Construction of the text-object, or the elimination of context

Greimas begins his construction of Maupassant's story "Two friends" as an object of semiotic analysis from the first sentence of the book's foreword:

The reading of a literary tale that we are proposing can be seen as a series of demonstrations, that is to say, as an illustration of encounters between semiotician, who interrogates the text, and the text, which sometimes offers its opacity, sometimes its transparency, simply reflecting the multi-faceted interplays inscribed in it. Much like the fieldwork done by an ethnologist, for the semiotician this work on the text is supposed to be return, free of preconceived notions, to sources. (Greimas 1988: xxiii)

"Returning to sources" is nothing other than a bracketing of context and its capacity to generate preconceived premises.⁹ Contexts, which are eschewed, are of at least two types. The first, generated by literary criticism, is the totality of interpretations and opinions which determine a concrete author's and work's place within the sociolectal literary

⁸ The sociocritic Pierre Zimma argues that Greimas' narrative model is a very important tool which makes it possible to reconstruct the text's social dimension and to recognize its inherent social order, whose representative is the epistemic Sender, the subject's relationship with this order, and so on. See Zimma 2011: 160–162.

⁹ In the English translation this bracketing action is even more emphasized ("free of preconceived notions"). The same paragraph of the original French Foreword speaks of the naivete of the glance (*un retour naïf aux sources*), revealing the latter's constructive nature.

universe. Greimas makes a distancing move when naming a contextual environment (a sociolectal literary universe is that which is usually referred to as literary history, tradition, literary movements, genre systems, and so on). For example, according to Greimas, the classical rhetorical figure of metonymy remains vague and is not useful in understanding the syntagmatic makeup of a text; he therefore suggests replacing metonymy, metonymic, or more precisely the synecdochal connection with terms related to hyponym and the hyponymic relations (Greimas 1988: 9–11).

However, Greimas also stresses that regardless of the studied object's belonging to a sociolectal literary universe, his work is not devoted to analysis of the story as a literary work and is not even a work of semiotic analysis of literature – an approach which often uses the tools of semiotic analysis for heuristic goals. Rather, it is an attempt to comprehend general, and, as was hoped, universal, syntagmatic narrative principles (though the question of style, or idiolect, still arises for him). Distancing the analysis from the literary context is not, therefore, a negation of its existence or importance, but a methodological step that suits his goal. For similar reasons Greimas stresses that he has chosen a simple, and some would even say outdated, text for his analysis: “[...] by taking slightly jaded text, we wanted to ensure that there was a distance between it and a reader, whose vision has not been distorted by modern interpretations” (Greimas 1988: xxiv). This is also consistent with his research strategy, “according to which simple semiotic objects must be examined before complex ones are” (Greimas 1988: xxv–xxvi).

“Two friends” seems somewhat out of date and too transparent also because it is usually, almost without a question, classified as realist literature. Yet by declaring his lack of confidence in literary taxonomies and convincingly reconstructing the symbolic poetic level, Greimas demonstrates that the influence of context (on both the work and the interpreter) is inevitable. This question will be discussed later in this article.

The other context which Greimas attempts to bracket is referential – i.e., the obvious historical, geographic, and cultural implications present in Maupassant's story. The events of “Two friends” take place in concrete geographic locations (the first word of the story is *Paris*), and during a concrete, though not directly identified, time (during the 1870–1871 French-German war). In choosing such a text Greimas once again indirectly highlights the need for analytical discipline, the crucial importance of focusing attention not on the history of the narrative, but on narrativity itself and the conditions which make it a coherent narrative. Thus, in the analysis Paris is not important as a toponym (“[...] the topos, Paris, as a proper name in principle void of any signification...”, Greimas 1988: 2). On the one hand, it is a spatial figure, represented as a sort of spatial pot (Greimas 1988: 13). On the other hand, it is the principal actor of the sequence.

It may be added that Greimas also suggests bracketing typical reading habits, which allow us to comprehend the text as inherently coherent (in the case of the first paragraph, we do not even question whether the action described in each of the three

sentences takes place in Paris), or as incomprehensible. However, what is unproblematic from a naïve perspective raises fundamental questions about the conditions of the text's coherence for the semiotician:

Though an intuitive reading of these four propositions¹⁰ makes it seem obvious to us that their topic is always “Paris” the text does not manifest as such. Set alongside one another, *up to the point* [original emphasis] these four propositions can be read as autonomous figurative expressions, comparable to, let's us say, four juxtaposed images constituting the verse of a symbolist poem. (Greimas 1988: 3–4)

Having bracketed the literary context in his Foreword, Greimas returns to it barely several pages later. His mentioning of the possibility of reading the first paragraph of “Two friends” as a symbolist poem is clearly a theoretical provocation which makes it possible to go on to describe the text's anaphoric organization and syntactic procedure of catalysis, in this way relating the actions of all four propositions to the same space. However, the choice of comparison with a symbolist poem is not accidental – one of the outcomes of Greimas' semiotic analysis is the reconstruction of the symbolist poetics of “Two friends”, and, consequently, specification of place in the so-called literary sociolectal universe.

This kind of fluctuation between methodological goals of creating distance from the context and constructing the object of semiotic analysis, and the use of context, consciously or not, is marked throughout the book, even more so in its second half. This will be discussed in a later section.

Restoration of context, suppression of context

Greimas consistently adheres to the methodological approach of entering the analysis through the text without allowing contextual knowledge to predetermine the path of the analysis, and sometimes even questioning understanding of the context (as in the case of the “realist” nature of Maupassant's story). It seems that the principle of immanence is not hampered in cases when context is invoked as an example, or for the purposes of comparison. For instance, in “Reinterpretation”, his analysis of Sequence VIII, Greimas discusses the thematic role of the spy, which the Prussian officer ascribes to the two friends. To describe how this role functions, Greimas offers an example from a Hindu fairytale:

¹⁰ Paris was bloated, famished, a death rattle in her throat. The sparrows rarely appeared on the roofs, and even the sewers were being emptied of their regular tenants. People were eating – no matter what.

That is where the mask comes in, the beads that the cat puts around its neck to pass a Buddhist monk. In their role as spies, the two friends could have dressed up in Prussian uniforms, for example. They did not do so, preferring to camouflage their doing but not their being. Instead of masking their faces, they are alleged to have superimposed the thematic trajectory “fishing” on the trajectory “spying”, the first of these trajectories covering the veridictory status /s+b/ [seeming + not-being – D. S.]. (Greimas 1988: 165–166)

Here the contextual reference functions as a member of the typological analysis, and this perfectly suits Greimas’ goal of discovering universal structural elements of narrative through his analysis of “Two friends” (in this example this kind of element is a veridiction category). On the other hand, this reference is also a figurative example that complements the abstract veridiction scheme.¹¹

However, there are also numerous instances in which the analysis would lose direction and perhaps even coherence – which Greimas considered one the main criteria of truth – without the use of one context or another.

Context, which Greimas first bracketed in the Foreword, probably appears most frequently through references to the so-called sociolectal literary universe. Interpretation of semantic structures requires taking into account all of Maupassant’s oeuvre (in Greimas’ terms, idiolect) and French literature of the late 19th century – of the period to which the story belongs. It is only by referencing these contexts that Greimas can interpret the end of Sequence XI, the so-called funeral, as the two friends’ victory – in the story’s semantic universe, water represents non-death. The phrase “the stones dragging down the feet” is not interpreted by Greimas first (either from a narrative or a figurate perspective), because he considers it irrelevant to his chosen interpretive approach, and he draws on the two aforementioned context as an argument:

The lexeme “upright” must be considered as the last word of this sentence: “the stones dragging down the feet first” is simply a stylistic device, used by Maupassant (and also by Flaubert), to efface the “symbolist” semantic effects of the writing by a “realist” notion. (Greimas 1988: 228)

This comment is presented as a footnote – as an adjunct to the main analytical text, as though reinforcing that the context is to remain in brackets. On the one hand, Greimas

¹¹ The same example of a cat masquerading as a Buddhist monk also appears earlier, in the analysis of Sequence III, and also in discussion of the category of being-seeming and in description of the trickster’s actantial role (it is attributed to absinthe and warm air). The contextual example here also functions as a reference to the role’s possible universality. The English translation omits a phrase that emphasizes the goal of universalization and typologisation – “whose (the trickster’s) typology must still be created (*“et dont la typologie reste à faire”*)”. See Greimas 1988: 68.

remains faithful to the semiotic position that context should be dealt with after analysis of the text. On the other hand, it is paradoxically demonstrated that context still works its way into the actual analysis – in this case in what could be called a negative way, as a tool for separating irrelevant textual elements which do not support the coherence of interpretation. At the same time, however, it has a direct impact: by rejecting the idea of Maupassant as a realist author, Greimas steadily reveals the story's symbolic stratum and connects the writer to symbolist poetics. Of course, at the end of the Foreword (which also fulfills the function of a conclusion),¹² Greimas criticizes himself, asserting that such generalisations do not lead the semiotician anywhere (or distract him from his primary goal). Moreover, several paragraphs earlier he has raised a rhetorical question in which he suggests looking for semantic universes in the works of artists who lived in the same epoch:

Nonetheless, we cannot but ask naively how it is possible for people who belong to the same generation, are part of the same sociolectal universe and participate at the same episteme, to be so different in their productions and, more importantly, in the forms and modes of their thought – metaphoric and metonymic, symbolist and realist. How it is possible for Zola to be at the same time a writer concerned with sticking “reality” be the critic who best understood Manet's work? For, if poetic language has its own demands – the necessary correlation between the planes of expression and content – we fail to see why the organization of semantic universe and its discursive realizations, be they metaphoric or metonymic, cannot be comparable in poetic or prosaic texts. (Greimas 1988: xxviii)

Such questions open up possibilities for future research that could fruitfully relate immanent semiotic analysis and studies of context: cultural semiotics, sociocriticism, historical poetics, and so on. It could be said that Greimas (and later Landowski) is indirectly recommending that context be reconstructed from the text, in this way avoiding the aforementioned context-box effect – of fitting the text-object into a box.

One of the more interesting examples of context breaking through in *Maupassant* is Greimas' interpretation of anti-phrase and “cheeky Parisian humor” in Sequence IV (“The Quest”): “Mr. Sauvage replied with that cheeky Parisian humor which nothing can extinguish: ‘We offer them a dish of fried fish.’”

¹² In the article “About accidents in the so-called social sciences” [*Des accidents dans les sciences dites humaines*], in which he analyses the introduction to Georges Dumézil's *The Birth of Archangels* [*Naissance d'archanges*], Greimas argues that the introduction is not part of the book: “In the axis of time it constitutes closing words and it goes after the research discourse after its written expression. It is a metadiscursive reflection about a discourse that has already been produced.” The same could be said about the Foreword to *Maupassant*, which it would be worth, following the author's example, analyzing as a “narrative about the acquisition of knowledge” (Greimas 1983b: 174; my translation, D. S.).

The recognition of anti-phrase, which can be seen as a type of irony, generally requires both understanding of the text's structure and knowledge regarding the context.¹³ Greimas describes the structural role of the phrase, its connections to the story's ending (when the promise of a gift in anti-phrase is paradoxically fulfilled) and how it supports and predicts the nature of Maupassant's text, and its paradigmatic function, i.e., the poetic organization of the text. In Sequence X we also come across a reference to idiolect and how Maupassant's antiphrases are almost always "true" (Greimas 1988: 216). The story's author himself offers a reference to the context through a certain sociolectal modus which gives the phrase an ironic tinge. However, Greimas – this time not in a footnote but in the main text – enters into a sociocultural excursus, almost imperceptibly moving into a description of the narrative function of humour:

This cheeky Parisian humor resembles eighteenth century "French wit", also of an antiphrastic nature, consisting in attributing no importance to serious things and, inversely, importance to trivial ones. What interests us here is the exact place in the text where it is introduced. We already noted that it appeared as a "Paris's" response to the "Prussian" attack. The *anti-sender's* aggression resulted in "superstitious terror", and the *sender* "Paris's" answer consisted in *desacralizing* [original emphasis] the "invisible and all-powerful" enemy's image. Humor is the best antidote against fear, and it also has a precise function: in negating the contrary hypostatized wanting, it restores S1 [Subject 1, two friends – D. S.] initial /wanting to do/, his desire to continue the quest. (Greimas 1988: 95–96)

This is not the only place in which the analysis is related to the French cultural context. In his discussion of the landscape spectrum in Sequence III, Greimas points out that it is very narrow and limited to blue, white and red. The allusion to the French flag is not made directly, though it can easily be inscribed into the patriotic isotopy which will be discussed in the analysis of Sequence X. In discussing the figures that connect the patriotic isotopy, such as mentions of French and German characters, or the uniform-like apparel of the two friends (which reference French identity), Greimas raises the question of how to maintain the coherence of the interpretation. For such referential citations and the values invested in them ("good Frenchmen" vs. "bad Germans") seem to contradict the hypothesis presented in the beginning and maintained throughout the entire analysis – that Mont Valérien is the embodiment of universal evil – situated on the French side, but sowing death on both sides. To explain this contradiction, Greimas offers a rather broad contextual footnote:

¹³ Juri Lotman (1992: 60) has written about the contextual nature of irony and how it depends upon both the text's structure and its functioning.

It seems to us that the explanation of this fact can be found in the persistence of the revolutionary myth of 1789 – a myth which is assumed collectively to such a degree that in dictionaries and the texts of the period the word homeland (“patrie”) unanimously signifies “country where one is free”, which crops up once again under the restoration of République (we are in 1883¹⁴), and is still alive today (cf. the posters exposed in 1945 at the French border, on the German size, to indicate, that “here starts the country of freedom”). Situated in its historical context, French patriotism, considered in its mythical dimension, is only the product of universal demand of liberty. We can see that the patriotic isotopy, introduced in a quasi-implicit way by the enunciator with the mention of German and two Frenchmen is basically a *hypotactic* manifestation of the fundamental isotopy on which the NP [narrative programme, D. S.] of the “wanting-to-be-able-to-be-free” unfolds. (Greimas 1988: 202)

Greimas tries to neutralize the historical context that has forced its way into the analysis by attributing a hypotactic, that is secondary, role to the isotopy created by the context. However, the very appearance of the context and the arguments for its “suppression” clearly demonstrate the constructivist nature of immanent analysis.

On the other hand, we should not forget that Greimas suggests understanding culture as one of the macro-semiotic components that make up a semantic universe. He explains the concept of the natural world – another semiotic component – as a means of providing “a more general semiotic interpretation to the notion of referent or of extra-linguistic context” (Greimas, Courtés 1982: 66). When that same argument is applied to culture, culture, like the natural world, begins to function like a web of figures (such as freedom, or homeland) requiring a certain type of competence on the part of the reader. A similar line of argument is used to describe the use of a Christian parable in an impressive interpretation of the episode in which the two friends die. Having offered a list of “possible analogies” with biblical intertext and Christian context, Greimas raises the theoretical question of how, working from the chosen premise of immanent analysis, this kind of reading is at all possible. He explains this problem as formation of the second level, i.e. cultural, isotopy:

In proposing a new interpretation of a segment, we have just postulated the existence of *a new figurative isotopy* of reading underlying the first one, which is also figurative. This reading, which for the time being corresponds to the dimensions of only one segment, appears to be *possible*, but not *necessary*. It would be *acceptable* only if, on one hand, a new reading permitted extending it to the entire text and if, on the other hand, it did not bring¹⁵ to the fore the existence

¹⁴ 1883 is the year of publication of Maupassant’s story.

¹⁵ The negative form is omitted in English translation: “*elle ne met pas en évidence*” is translated as “it brought to the fore”. This translation completely distorts Greimas’ assertion which appeals to the necessity of interpretative coherence.

of semantic and narrative elements that would be in contradiction with the first figurative isotopy. (Greimas 1988: 221)

The semiotician recognizes that this kind of second-level interpretive procedure depends largely upon the receptive reader's competence. Using a Christian parable as an interpretive key, Greimas once again attempts to suppress the intruding context: on the one hand, by making it "complementary"; on the other hand, by shifting such interpretive references to the reader and the text itself:

Still, the enunciator's competence to produce pluri-isotopic texts can be easily admitted. From this perspective, parabolic discourse is the institutionalization of this competence: "to speak in parables" corresponds to the successive translation of one figurative isotopy into another. (Greimas 1988: 222)

But the attempt to find a theoretical model that can textualize context is also a recognition that no text exists in isolation – it exists amid other cultural texts, and only exists by being read. Any interpretation, even a supposedly "objective" semiotic structural description is likely to leave footprints from the context that shaped the interpreter – historical, intellectual, aesthetic, etc.

Although Greimas claims that he did not choose Maupassant's texts for emotional reasons, but because they were useful for creating interpretive models, the semiotician's biographer Thomas F. Broden (2014: 23, 31) mentions Maupassant and the Symbolist poets among the most important authors the young Greimas read (he translated Arthur Rimbaud into Lithuanian, and published an article in Lithuanian about Paul Verlaine). To say that such youthful literary passions determined Greimas' reinterpretation of the sociolectal context of "Two friends" would be too bold. However, there is reason to argue that being a good judge of 19th-century French literature and Symbolist poetry had some impact in shaping Greimas' competence as a reader (which he discusses in the book being analysed here) and the very direction of his analysis, including his reconstruction of Symbolist poetics in Maupassant's story.

It is worth noting that, from Sequence VI to the very end of the book, Greimas mentions Albert Camus several times. In one case a reference to Camus functions as an opportunity for the above-mentioned typological comparison. In the analysis of Sequence VI Greimas argues: "Just as with a Camusian hero [it is likely that he is referring to Meursault from the novel *L'Étranger*, D. S.] an external element has to be introduced to bring about the conditions of a *wanting-to-be-able-to/refuse/ to a being-able-to-refuse*" (Greimas 1988: 139). In the analysis of Sequence VII, the same hero of Camus's is remembered in a discussion about the semantic motivation behind the name of the story's hero, Morrisault (Greimas 1988: 153). However, in the analysis of

Sequence IX (“The refusal”), the comparison with Camus appears without any attempt at hiding personal associations, and the author’s, as a reader’s, interpretive context:

The narrative trajectory is completed: starting from the act of silence, which is the manifestation of /being-able-not-to-do/ and corresponds to the attitude of Camus’s revolted man, we ended up with the attitude of the “upright” subject facing death and capable of negating it. This “dying upright”, curiously enough, reminds people of my generation as the pacifist slogan between the wars, according to which it would be better to live “on knees than to die upright”. (Greimas 1988: 195)

We can see here that the interpreter’s personal trajectory begins to participate in the interpretation of the characters’ narrative trajectories. Both existentialism and Saint Francis of Assisi, mentioned at the end of the analysis of this sequence (“The two friends will have to confront Saint Francis of Assisi *dolce morte corporale*”), are important figures in Greimas’ intellectual biography. In his Lithuanian criticism, especially in his texts dating from the Second World War, Greimas explores ideas connected to existentialism – choice, commitment, responsibility. He himself has acknowledged that the experience of war played a significant, if indirect, role in shaping the project of semiotics as a science of meaning: “[...] to be a semiotician is to raise the question of meaning. The absurdity of war forces one to be concerned with the meaning of all the horrors one is witnessing” (Greimas 1991a: 93). He refers to his return to Saint Francis of Assisi as a reaction to the 1968 student revolts in Paris (Greimas 1991b: 35).

At the end of the book it becomes clear that the semiotic analysis of “Two friends”, with its use of analytical tools, both those already existing and those newly created, is at the same time an interpretation of Greimas himself – a 20th-century intellectual who was shaped by Eastern Europe and later the intellectual atmosphere of France, and therefore belongs to two cultures.

In lieu of a conclusion

If we follow Greimas’ narrative theory and consider the concept of context as a narrative actor, then *Maupassant* can be read as a story about how this actor’s roles are transformed. At the beginning of the book he is treated as an opponent interfering with the pursuit of the object of value – the description of the text’s narrative and semantic structures. If, in the second half of the analysis, we see his role as helper take shape, the enunciator resists this shifting status and determinedly tries to return context to the text, or recommends seeing the isotopies it is forming as secondary, hypotactic. At the end of the analysis the number of contextual footnotes, and of well-founded personal associations on the part of the enunciator increases considerably, so that context secures

the role of helper – without Biblical comparisons, the French notion of *patrie* and the question of existential choice, and without the reconstruction of Symbolist poetics the analysis of “Two friends” would likely become what was described at the beginning of this article as formal immanentism.

This transformation of the role of context is a problematization, but not rejection, of the principle of immanence. Context is allowed into the analysis not *a priori*, but gradually removing brackets in places where the analysis itself requires it, and without threatening its coherence. Greimas, who referred to his semiotic theory as a scientific project, never attempted to deny the subjectivity of the interpreter, or the multiple meanings within a text, especially a literary one; he considered the goal of analytic coherence to be productive restriction upon subjectivity and the use of subjective context.

We can agree with Marrone, quoted at the beginning of this article, as pointing out that, from a methodological perspective, *only* textual semiotics exists for Greimas. But Maupassant nevertheless shows that *il y a hors du texte* – both in terms of the reader’s cultural competence and other texts with which the analysed text has some connection, as well as in how the text itself belongs to the cultural context of a specific epoch. The principle of immanence – grounded not in disregard for context, but in a methodological “bracketing” – can help find new contexts.

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(Не)возможность имманентности: «Мопассан» Альгирдаса Юлиуса Греймаса сегодняшним взглядом

Книга «Мопассан» (1976), посвященная анализу новеллы «Два друга» французского писателя XIX века, – один из главных трудов Альгирдаса Юлиуса Греймаса, в котором используются ранее созданные им инструменты семиотического анализа, проверяются и дальше создаются модели нарративного анализа, намечаются будущие перспективы развития семиотической теории. Автор статьи обсуждает, каким образом в книге постулируется принцип имманентного анализа и конструируется «закрытый» текст – объект семиотического анализа. В статье показывается, что несмотря на то, что в предисловии к работе Греймас декларировал отстранение от контекста – социолектического универсума литературы, в самом анализе Греймас вынужден принимать во внимание определенные элементы контекста, а некоторые из них интегрировать в интерпретацию новеллы. С одной стороны, Греймас признает необходимость считаться с данными контекста, такими как французское понятие родины, и не скрывает некоторых субъективных элементов интерпретации (опираясь на биографические данные, автор статьи обсуждает возможный генезис некоторых из этих элементов). С другой стороны, в то же самое время автор «Мопассана» старается совладать с ворвавшимся в интерпретацию контекстом. Генерируемые контекстом семантические изотопии он признает настолько, насколько они вписываются в когерентный анализ, и считает их вспомогательными по отношению к синтаксическим и дискурсивным текстовым структурам. Однако в кульминации анализа такая контекстуальная изотопия возвращается интертекстуальной связью с библейской параболой (притчей) и становится главной. Автор статьи делает вывод, что принцип имманентности в «Мопассане» не отрицается, но становится проблемным, показывая, как релевантные данные контекста могут быть интегрированы в семиотическую интерпретацию.

Immanentsuse võimatus: A. J. Greimase “Maupassant” tänapäeva perspektiivist

Raamat “Maupassant”, mis on pühendatud 19. sajandi prantsuse kirjaniku novelli “Kaks sõpra” analüüsile, on üks Algirdas Julius Greimase tähtsamaid töid. Selles katsetas ta semiootilisi tööriistu, mille oli selleks ajaks välja töötanud, pani proovile narratiivianalüüsi mudeleid ning jätkas nende loomist ja ennetas tulevikuperspektiive semiootikateooria arengus. Artikli autor vaatleb, kuidas selles teoses esitatakse immanentse analüüsi printsiipi ja kuidas konstrueeritakse “suletud” teksti – semiootilise analüüsi objekti. Artiklist ilmneb, et kui Greimas kuulutas raamatu eessõnas, et ta distantseerub kontekstist – kirjanduslikust sotsiaalmajanduslikust universumist, on ta analüüsis eneses sunnitud tunnistama teatavaid kontekstuaalseid elemente ning isegi lõimima mõningaid neist tõlgendusse, mille ta loole annab. Ühest küljest tunnistab “Maupassant’i” autor selliste kontekstuaalsete faktidega, nagu seda on näiteks Prantsuse mõiste ‘*patrie*’, arvestamise tähtsust ega ürita peita teatavaid subjektiivseid interpreteerivaid elemente (artikli autor kasutab nende võimaliku geneesi vaatlemisel biograafilist materjali). Ent samal ajal üritab Greimas alla suruda konteksti pealetungi oma tõlgendusele. Konteksti loodud semantilisi isotoope tunnistab ta määral, mil need sobivad tema analüüsi sidususega, pidades neid teksti süntaktilisi ja diskursiivseid struktuure silmas pidades kõrvalisteks. Siiski saab peamiseks üks kontekstuaalne isotoopia, mis põhineb intertekstuaalsetel sidemetel Piibli võrdumiga. Artikli autor jõuab järeldusele, et immanentsuse printsiip “Maupassant’is” ei ole eitus, vaid problematiseering, mis tõestab, kuidas on võimalik olulist kontekstuaalset materjali semiootilise analüüsi lõimida.