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## The Problem of Sincerity and Insincerity in Literature

### Zagadnienie szczerości i nieszczerości w literaturze

**Streszczenie:** W artykule szczerość i nieszczerość traktowane są jako pojęcia retoryczne. Autor stara się uniknąć błędnego utożsamiania szczerości i prawdziwości oraz retoryki i poetyki, a także równie błędnego utożsamiania szczerości i performatywności oraz retoryki i manipulacji. W analizie zastosowano całe spektrum odmian (nie)szczerości, które okazują się przydatne w badaniach tekstów literackich (przywołano wiele przykładów z literatury rosyjskiej i żydowskiej). Wyjaśniono również dlaczego czytelnik postrzega i uznaje szczerą wypowiedź za mityczny, mimetyczny i metaforyczny obraz prawdy.

**Słowa kluczowe:** szczerość w literaturze, retoryka, prawda, mit, personalizm

### Проблема искренности и неискренности в литературе

**Резюме:** В статье искренность и неискренность рассматриваются как риторические категории, и при этом предпринимается попытка избежать ошибочного отождествления искренности с правдивостью и риторики с поэтикой, с одной стороны, а также не менее ошибочного отождествления искренности с перформативностью и риторики с манипуляцией, с другой. Анализ приводит к разветвлению целого спектра форм (не)искренности, который демонстрирует свою эффективность при анализе литературных текстов (приводится ряд примеров из русской и еврейской литературы). Далее поясняется, каким образом искренняя речь воспринимается и оценивается читателем в качестве мифического, миметического и метафорического образа истины.

**Ключевые слова:** искренность в литературе, риторика, истина, миф, персонализм

Man is least himself when he talks in his own person.  
Give him a mask and he will tell you the truth".

Oscar Wilde

We are used to talk about sincerity as a personal characteristic, with a deep emotional or ethical content. Thus, Jerome Salinger and Nicole Krauss seem to be sincere writers. However, sincerity should possibly be viewed as a rhetorical category, as an appropriate and

persuasive expression of intentions. Several attempts have been made to explain the phenomenon of sincerity in communicative, linguistic, or cultural terms. Among the best known — the conception of rhetorical ethos based on CBS principle (Clarity, Brevity, Sincerity)<sup>1</sup>; sincerity as one of the conditions of the successful act of speech in John Austin’s theory<sup>2</sup>; sincerity as one of the three claims inherent in an effective communication practice according to Jürgen Habermas<sup>3</sup>; and sincerity as “fearless speech”, “parrhesia” in Michel Foucault’s conception<sup>4</sup>. Ellen Rutten wrote about sincerity and rhetoric of sincerity, particularly the “new sincerity” in the “post-communist” Russian culture, in the terms of “production and consumption”, in connection to “its inevitable contemporary twin, postmodernism”<sup>5</sup>. Despite research on the subject of sincerity in Classical and Medieval culture<sup>6</sup>, researchers seem to agree that sincerity as a cultural category consolidated mainly in England, France, and Germany in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, particularly in the context of the Enlightenment and Romanticism. Rousseau’s *Confessions* and such concepts as “plain Englishman” are the well-known examples of this view. On this assumption the best-known research projects in the field are based, such as Lionel Trilling’s book on sincerity in a philosophical context<sup>7</sup>, or the works on sincerity in literature of Leon Guilhamet and of Henry Peyre<sup>8</sup>. An accepted opinion in the field is that of the deep affinity of sincerity to Romantic literature, as in the books of David Perkins and of Deborah Forbes<sup>9</sup>. Pam Morris’s partially sociological research discusses a broad spectrum

<sup>1</sup> For discussion and critique of this principle see R. Lanham, *Style: An Anti-Textbook*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1974, pp. 1–11; see also his, *Analyzing Prose*, Continuum, London–New York 1983.

<sup>2</sup> See: J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 1975 (Lecture 4).

<sup>3</sup> The three basic “validity claims” (*Geltungsanspruch*) include truthfulness, ethical rightness, and sincerity. See: J. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, trans. T. McCarthy, Beacon, Boston 1984, pp. 41–42.

<sup>4</sup> See: M. Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, Semiotext(e), Los Angeles 2001, pp. 19–20. For an extensive discussion on the Greek parrhesia, see: E. Markovits, *The Politics of Sincerity: Plato, Frank Speech, and Democratic Judgment*, The Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park 2008; A.W. Saxonhouse, *Free Speech and Democracy in Ancient Athens*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2006, pp. 85–128.

<sup>5</sup> See: E. Rutten, *Sincerity after Communism: A Cultural History*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London 2017, pp. 2–4.

<sup>6</sup> See: B.H. Findley, *Discourses of sincerity: Gender, authority and signification in some medieval French courtly texts*, PhD Diss., Duke University, 2003.

<sup>7</sup> See: L. Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, Oxford University Press, London 1972.

<sup>8</sup> See: L. Guilhamet, *The Sincere Ideal: Studies on Sincerity in Eighteenth Century English Literature*, McGill, Queen’s University Press, Montreal 1974; H. Peyre, *Literature and Sincerity*, Yale University Press, New Haven–London 1963.

<sup>9</sup> D. Perkins, *Wordsworth and the Poetry of Sincerity*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 1964; D. Forbes, *Sincerity’s Shadow. Self-Consciousness in British Romantic and Mid-Twentieth-Century American Poetry*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 2004.

of mechanisms of “shaping” or “imagining” society in literature, the major one of which is sincerity<sup>10</sup>. Among scholars using the concept of the “rhetoric of sincerity”, there is a clear tendency for excess “poetization” of the concept of sincerity, as in the work of Menahem Brinker about Yosef Haim Brenner<sup>11</sup>. This tendency reaches exaggerated proportions in the relativistic concept of sincerity as a theatrical performance, as in Susan B. Rosenbaum’s book<sup>12</sup>, and in the anthology of articles edited by Ernst van Alphen, Mieke Bal, and Carel E. Smith<sup>13</sup>.

Any discussion on the rhetoric of sincerity, with or without quotation marks, would have to include reexamination of two concepts — rhetoric and sincerity. We should try to avoid the Scylla of naively identifying sincerity with truth, and rhetoric with poetics, and the Charybdis of cynically identifying sincerity with theatricality, and rhetoric with manipulation. Apparently, we should not return to the classic concept of subjectivity (if indeed one can speak of a concept of this kind); but, on the other hand, it is impossible to think about both rhetoric and sincerity without subjectivity. We can agree with van Alphen and Bal: the concept of sincerity requires reexamination and restructuring; but we assume that this has to be done *with* the concept of a subjectivity, or, more precisely, with the concept of the subjectivity as personality. We will begin the discussion from the concept of insincerity, and argue that the complex range of sincerity and insincerity types constitute the unity purposed to establishing a rhetorical persona — the subjectivity beyond the discourse, and that this range can serve as a useful tool for analyzing sincerity in literary texts, as well as in other types of communication. We will argue then that sincerity can be connected to truth only by the concept of personality, and that sincerity can be “measured” and judged by three universal, albeit not objective, criteria: mimetic, metaphorical and mythopoetic.

Let us start with a general observation: the complimentary opposite of sincerity is not hypocrisy but insincerity. Iago is hypocrite, the characteristic “insincere” does not fit him; Hamlet, on the other hand, at the certain moment becomes insincere with some of his interlocutors. Hence, we will examine the conditions

<sup>10</sup> P. Morris, *Imagining Inclusive Society in Nineteenth-Century Novels: The Code of Sincerity in the Public Sphere*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 2004.

<sup>11</sup> M. Brinker, *To the Tiberian Alley* [in Hebrew], Am Oved, Tel Aviv 1990.

<sup>12</sup> S.B. Rosenbaum, *Professing Sincerity: Modern Lyric Poetry, Commercial Culture, and the Crisis in Reading*, University of Virginia Press, Charlottesville, VA 2007.

<sup>13</sup> E. van Alphen, M. Bal, C.E. Smith (eds.), *The Rhetoric of Sincerity*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2008.

of existence or non-existence of sincerity not in relation to hypocrisy, but to insincerity. Insincerity is characterized by the explicit simultaneous existence of two identities in the speaker. Generally, the one is called “genuine” and the other “false”. If insincerity is the basic state of dual identities, then falseness is the presentation of one of them as sincere, while hypocrisy is the presentation of each of them alternately as sincere in different contexts. Just as we do not see sincerity as a positive value par excellence, we also do not see insincerity as necessarily a negative value. This is in contradistinction to falseness and hypocrisy, which clearly have a negative status in all areas of social action, in ethics and aesthetics. Moreover, they also have psychopathological manifestations. In itself, hypocrisy as a psychological, ethical, and social phenomenon constitutes an object of intensive research<sup>14</sup>. Another case is that of cunning and sophistication (including its low manifestation — sophistry): these are considered as more exalted “genres”, and their use is supported by broad social-pragmatic legitimacy, such as in the warfare. On the personal level, cunning and sophistication are considered as admirable and sometimes even praiseworthy characteristics (the Homeric Odysseus, the biblical Abraham), as opposed to falseness and hypocrisy. The reason for this is clear: as opposed to falseness and hypocrisy, cunning and sophistication do not undermine the integrity of the personality<sup>15</sup>.

How can the listener differentiate which identity is genuine and which is false? Clearly, he does this on the basis of the signs he receives from the speaker and from the various contexts of the speaking (situation, knowledge, memory, etc.). The listener interprets. If so, he in fact chooses one option from (at least) two. His choice of one or another identity is based on his preference, which, of course, depends upon social, psychological, and other conditions and motives. It will always be his personal preference and choice. Ivor Richards once commented on the source of choice as the basis for creating meaning<sup>16</sup>. The listener’s choice of the speaker’s specific identity is the basis for creating the “genuine” meaning of the speech. In insincere speech, the speaker offers

<sup>14</sup> See for example: R. Grant, *Hypocrisy and Integrity: Machiavelli, Rousseau, and the Ethics of Politics*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1997; B. Szabados and E. Soifer, *Hypocrisy: Ethical Investigations*, Broadview Press, Toronto 2004.

<sup>15</sup> It may very well be possible to arrange a taxonomy of these phenomena according to the basic genre-based archetypal distinction of Northrop Frye: tragedy — sophistication; romance — cunning; comedy — falseness; satire — hypocrisy. Developing this hypothesis appears promising but is not included in the objectives of this article.

<sup>16</sup> I.A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, Oxford University Press, Oxford and London 1976, pp. 30–36.

the listener two identities, and therefore his identity is not only the “genuine” identity, but *also* the “false” identity. The speaker’s ability to create multiple identities is a rhetorical ability. What is the “genuine” identity of Dostoevsky, or of his personages? The arguments concerning this question begin anew every day.

For certain reasons inherent in the quality of a given rhetorical act, the listener defines identities according to the extent of their “authenticity”, and this defines the speech as lacking sincerity. The problem, however, is that he can never be sure that the definitions he has constructed matches reality. For him there is no single vantage point from where he can simultaneously see both the identity of the speaker and the (“genuine”) reality. If one observes the identity taking shape right before his eyes in the rhetorician’s speech, he is a prisoner of this identity’s myth. No realistic standard is capable of measuring its authenticity; no “reality principle” can reject the spectacle of the creation of the personality in its myth. Whether it is false, a mask, an impersonation—is immaterial. It is *his* falseness, mask, impersonation, that of the person speaking. This is *also* his personality. For example, the intelligent hero of *My first goose* by Isaac Babel is insincere, when he tries to imitate some of the habits of his barbarian fellows, but this imitation is an integral part of his personality’s development.

This perception is closer to the perception of the rhetoric of sincerity as a game. But this is a most serious and authentic game. It is based on the mental split of self-image of the personality: the current, existing identity is drawn into the other, desired, identity. Sincerity, after all, is the realization of desire; insincerity, therefore, is the realization of the desire in a mask. Hamlet becomes insincere because he wants to know, to reveal the truth, and to identify with another Hamlet — Hamlet the father. At the basis of this game is the aspiration to identify with another character, to be realized in it and through it. This identification, perceived in Kenneth Burke’s well-known concepts as a continuous and never-ending process, lies at the basis of rhetoric. Johan Huizinga, in his classic work, had clarified the importance of rhetorical play in culture, in which “pretense”, a performance, is an essential technique, which is perceived as fair and legitimate, of maintaining the philosophical discourse on behalf of discovering the truth, and not only persuasion<sup>17</sup>. It should be emphasized that this game, in which insincerity is revealed as the dialectical counterpart of sincerity, is necessary not only for the existence of cultural practices, but also

<sup>17</sup> J. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, The Beacon Press, Boston 1964, pp. 146–157.

for realizing the personality. It is necessary in the face of the cultural authorities (the reading public, community, nation), internal psychological authorities (complexes, neuroses, traumas), and metaphysical authorities (God, law, dogma, prophecy). In contrast to falseness and hypocrisy that cannot realize the personality, and in contrast to sophistication and cunning that do not necessarily realize personality, the game of insincerity is *intended* to realize the personality, similarly to sincerity itself. Thus, Shylock from *The Merchant of Venice* is sometimes insincere in order to prove his rightfulness, to fight for his individuality and justice.

Insincerity is perceived differently from sincerity. In general, the whole process of creating and receiving an impression of sincerity is not automatic. And if it is not automatic, it is no longer only an impression, but rather also a process of assessment, examination, and judgment. A distinction needs to be made between an impression of sincerity and judgment of sincerity. The impression of sincerity is the more initial, spontaneous, automatic one, which can be followed by the judgment stage. This occurs when the initial impression is not uniform, but complex and ambivalent. When the listener asks himself whether he is being spoken to sincerely, mechanisms are activated that do not operate at the impression stage —the cognitive mechanisms of judgment, assessment, consideration, and decision-making. The most striking examples of this are memoirs, biographies, and confessional literature: in the course of reading books of these genres, the first impression of sincerity and truthfulness is gradually replaced by difficult questions and doubts concerning the author's/protagonist's personality.

Judgment consists of two actions: (1) assessing the nature of the identities, and (2) determining a hierarchy of identities according to their authenticity, persuasiveness, reliability. The way the listener reacts is a result of the hierarchy he has determined. If the listener rejects the suggested identity, the speaker can change his identities and try to recreate the impression of sincerity. A rhetorical act, therefore, can become long and complex, not to mention cumbersome, and could ultimately lead to a dead end.

Clearly, any change in the hierarchy of identities adversely affects trust and authority. However, the growing deficiency of authority could intensify the speaker's need for sincerity as a means of compensating for this deficit. The moment the listener is free to determine the hierarchy of identities, nothing can guarantee the speaker that he will succeed in coercing the listener to accept the hierarchy that he proposes. On the contrary: the more the hierarchy

changes, the more freedom and arbitrariness the listener has in his decisions, the result being a further blow to authority. And again, the increase in the deficit of authority leads to a further attempt to create the impression of sincerity, which requires further changes in the hierarchy of identities, and so on and so forth. Oscar Wilde's heroes, such as those from *The Importance of Being Earnest*, are champions in practicing insincerity and sincerity by rotation, in order to maintain and enhance their unsteady authority in the eyes of other people.

Sometimes, in the initial situation of insincerity, the speaker succeeds in suggesting a hierarchy that is so powerful, effective, and adequate, that the listener prefers to adopt it and to build the continuation of the game on it. In this case, every further revelation or reinforcement of this hierarchy leads to the strengthening of the authority and diminution of its loss, which creates the impression of sincerity. Thus, with a few moves, the speaker can lead the listener from a feeling of insincerity and suspiciousness to a feeling of sincerity and trust. This is the case of Anton Chekhov. The heroes of *Uncle Vanya*, *The Cherry Orchard*, and other plays move between insincerity and sincerity, gaining more and more sympathy and solidarity from the public.

The judgment of sincerity is thus not a dichotomous, disjunctive decision of "sincerity or insincerity", but rather a complex system of tactical considerations and decisions. Judgment is part of the rhetorical game. We can rank the (in)sincerity from the perspective of its rational judgment, and present the result in the following (*in*) *sincerity range*:

1. Non-authoritative insincerity that is rejected by the listener (which implies failure of the rhetorical act), such as the insincerity of Moliere's *Tartuffe*;

2. Non-authoritative insincerity that is accepted by the listener (*despite* the insincerity), such as the insincerity of Truffaldino from *Servant of Two Masters*;

3. Authoritative insincerity (that is to say, accepted *by virtue* of its insincerity), such as this of the narrator in *The Praise of Folly* of Erasmus, or in many of J.L. Borges's stories;

4. Non-authoritative sincerity that is rejected by the listener (that which does not succeed in compensating for the deficiency of authority);

5. Non-authoritative sincerity that (*despite* this) is accepted by the listener, such as the sincerity of the prince Myshkin in Dostoevsky's *Idiot*, at least in the first chapters of the novel, where his sincerity is perceived by others as absolutely delirious;

6. Authoritative sincerity (the sincerity “itself”), such as this of Rousseau’s voice of confession, of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn, or of Camus’s protagonists.

Here the concepts of acceptance and rejection replace the concept of trust. The rhetorical act is a game, and often the listener accepts the declared identity of the speaker, even though he knows that it is only one of his many identities, and not always the most authentic. “Acceptance” is a pragmatic concept, and is therefore more appropriate for describing general cases, in not all of which is acceptance accompanied by trust, which, after all, is a moral category. We will sometimes discover complexity and depth in places we would possibly not have expected. We quickly realize that it is virtually impossible to find writers who can unequivocally be defined as sincere or insincere, just as predicted by the first researchers of literary sincerity, such as Henry Peyre<sup>18</sup>. Generally we will discover more or less complex relations between different levels of the (in)sincerity range.

We will take a classical example to show the effectiveness of the new approach — the poem of Rabbi Yehuda Halevi *My heart is in the East*:

My heart is in the east, and I in the uttermost west —  
How can I find savour in food? How shall it be sweet to me?  
How shall I render my vows and my bonds, while yet  
Zion lieth beneath the fetter of Edom, and I in Arab chains?  
A light thing would it seem to me to leave all the good things of Spain —  
Seeing how precious in mine eyes to behold the dust of the desolate  
sanctuary<sup>19</sup>.

The poet suggests a dual self-identity. One of the proposed identities represents insincerity: the person is not sincere with himself, is not at peace with himself, and does not realize his genuine personality. The author presents the reader with an inauthentic personality, that which for him is identified with the West. He does this in order to present and emphasize his authentic personality, that which is connected to the East — the Land of Israel. The two identities are the personalities of the writer himself. Which will be perceived as genuine? What hierarchy will the reader construct in reaction to the writer’s suggestion? Despite the presented insincerity, the reader still accepts this text as sincere, by virtue of the exposure of the insincerity<sup>20</sup>. The speaker lives a life of insincerity,

<sup>18</sup> See: H. Peyre, *Literature and Sincerity*. . . , pp. 80–90, 150–160.

<sup>19</sup> Yehuda Halevi, *My heart is in the East*, trans. by N. Salaman, in: J. Neusner, A.J. Avery-Peck (eds.), *The Blackwell Reader in Judaism*, Blackwell Publishers, Malden, MA 2001, p. 115.

<sup>20</sup> Note Karl Frankenstein’s pertinent distinction in this respect: “A person’s characteristic is genuine when it co-exists with its existential (non-value) opposite” (K. Frankenstein, *Sincerity and Equality* [in Hebrew],



but the presentation of this insincerity appears as discursive sincerity, as a confession. The authentic identity is connected with the East, because this is how the author planned it, and generally the reader accepts this identity and reads the poem as sincere, while precisely to the same extent, and for the same reason, one can say that the poem is insincere. This implies that the two concepts are not effective to the same degree in this case, which is why one should refer to the (in)sincerity range suggested here.

We can say that the poem demonstrates explicit insincerity on the side of one identity, and implied sincerity on the side of the other identity. Thanks to the success of the rhetorical act, the reader generally accepts (and identifies with) that identity that suggests implied sincerity, that is to say, the level of discursive sincerity is dominant in the hierarchy constructed in the poem. But this hierarchy is only a result of choice. The reader can always choose, and he chooses the identity that is more comfortable for him. The poet offers a multiplicity of identification options. He offers complexity, and, of course, pushes for one particular choice. What is our standard for defining his sincerity? This is the time to apply the range of (in)sincerity.

At first glance, the poem expresses accepted authoritative sincerity. The speaker realizes his personality, demonstrates insincerity in his behavior, and this demonstration persuades of the sincerity of the speech itself. The reader is prepared to accept this personality as it is, because of its insincerity and by virtue of the persuasive power of the statements that expose this insincerity. This poem, therefore, cannot be described as being sincere, but rather as having authoritative insincerity that is accepted (by the reader). The fact that this type of insincerity is similar to sincerity should not surprise us: every rhetorical act is a game of masquerading and substituting, and it is no wonder that one type of (in)sincerity can masquerade as another type.

In summary, in the given example, we can see, firstly, the appearance of the hierarchy, and secondly, its assessment. From these two stages the judgment of sincerity is constructed. Initially we found a multiplicity of identities in the poem. We found that one of them is characterized by a certain type of sincerity, the second by a certain type of insincerity, and the discourse of the lyrical I "itself" by a third, complex type of sincerity-insincerity. We found that explicit insincerity expressed in the speaker's behavior (the

Ha-kibbutz ha-meukhad, Tel Aviv 1977, p. 216). Thus, for example, a pair of existential opposites is pride/modesty and not pride/arrogance. One can continue by saying that sincerity itself is genuine when it "co-exists" with its existential opposite, which is insincerity, and not its value opposite, which is hypocrisy.

speaker is not at peace with himself, with the place he is in) is non-authoritative, but despite this, the reader accepts it. This acceptance later facilitates the integration of this insincerity in the overall hierarchy of sincerity-insincerity, so that ultimately the system as a whole is similar to sincerity. The sincerity of the second identity, if we take it separately, the identity that is known as sincere thanks to the fact that it exposes its insincerity and confesses, functions as a mechanism of compensating the deficit of the speaker's authority. It succeeds in this respect, it is authoritative sincerity, and occupies a higher level in the hierarchy, but the discourse of the poem is not restricted to one, more dominant type of (in)sincerity. The accepted authoritative insincerity is a kind of dialectical unity, a synthesis of different levels of the hierarchy. This description of the "sincerity system" in the poem is far more appropriate and effective than the simple determination that the poem is sincere, which seems to be unsatisfying simplicity.

How does the transition from one type of sincerity to another take place in such systems? Is this transition continuous or intermittent, reminiscent of a phase transition? Does this transition have any energetic characteristic (in psychoanalytical terms)? Let us assume that the transition from a lower to a higher level (for example, from non-authoritative unaccepted insincerity to non-authoritative accepted insincerity) is accompanied by the consumption of energy, because in order to cause acceptance or create authoritativeness there is a need for persuasion, an extra effort. In the transition from a low to a high level the intensity and the persuasive power of the discourse rises, and this intensity requires energetic resources. The energy is "pumped" into the discourse, or condensed, again in psychoanalytical terms. This is the case of the prince Myshkin, whose enthusiastic speeches transit from non-authoritative to authoritative sincerity, sometimes gradually, sometimes by the slight change in the point of view, and sometimes — with long regressions. However, the transition from the third to the fourth level, that is to say, from insincerity to sincerity, is special and is accompanied by an identity substitution, or, more precisely, by the substitution of multiple identities with one identity. Moreover, this transition from high, complex, and sophisticated insincerity of the third level (which requires considerable strength) to low, simple, and spontaneous sincerity of the fourth level (which hardly requires any effort) is accompanied by the release of energy, a kind of explosion. This is characteristic of resolutions of many of the Baroque and Neo-Classicism plays (of Lope de Vega and Beaumarchais, for instance). On the other hand, Bal-

zac's Rastignac makes great efforts to "advance" from his natural, simple sincerity to the level of accepted authoritative insincerity of the third level. The transitions from the fourth to the fifth level, and from the fifth to the sixth again require energy, like in the case of the protagonists of Nathan Englander and Etgar Keret.

All the transitions constitute processes of condensation or substitution, or a combination of condensation and substitution. This combination is a transition from insincerity to sincerity (or vice-versa) together with a change in the energetic gradation. The "sincerity system" in any situation of communication, in any rhetorical act or series of rhetorical acts, comprises sequences of transitions from one level to another. This is a dynamic system. According to these transition sequences, energy consumption or production is executed. From a poetic perspective, the two phenomena create a very powerful effect. Each transition carries a rich poetic potential, a salient emotional character, and this is the reason writers so love to play the dynamic games of sincerity. It might even be possible to say that this dynamism and complexity constitute the major purpose of sincerity as a rhetorical figure. In other words, the purpose of rhetorical acts is to create these complexity and dynamism. This dynamism lies at the foundation of such themes as Joseph and his brothers (in the Bible and in literature), Faust and the Satan (in folklore and literature), deceptive love, impostors and doubles, carnival and disguise, egoistic charity and self-sacrifice, false pioussness.

What happens when a person begins to speak sincerely? Essentially a transition occurs from insincerity to sincerity. It is very possible that from a rhetorical or psychological, or even a social perspective, the purpose of sincerity is not to convey specific information, but rather to execute the energetic transition. The value of these transitions is in their energetic potential. For the speaker, in the rhetorical act there is value to those phenomena that lead to a decrease or an increase in the energy level, according to cultural and psychological needs. We can say that the signs produced in the sincerity system are a result of the sincerity game, that is to say, the game of identities, whose motivations could be totally pragmatic, prominent among which is the accumulation or use of power. Let us see for example this well-known scene with Myshkin and Keller, and later with Lebedev, from Dostoevsky's *Idiot*:

"Listen to me, Keller," returned the prince. "If I were in your place, I should not acknowledge that unless it were absolutely necessary for some reason. But perhaps you are making yourself out to be worse than you are, purposely?" [...] Keller confessed, with apparent sincerity, to having been guilty of many acts of such a nature that it astonished the prince that he could mention them, even to him. [...]

“One point in your favour is that you seem to have a child-like mind, and extreme truthfulness”, said the prince at last. “Do you know that that atones for much?” [...]

“What did I want? Well, to begin with, it is good to meet a man like you. It is a pleasure to talk over my faults with you. I know you for one of the best of men... and then... then...”

He hesitated, and appeared so much embarrassed that the prince helped him out.

“Then you wanted me to lend you money?” [...]

“An idea from hell struck me. ‘Why not, after confessing, borrow money from him?’ You see, this confession was a kind of masterstroke; I intended to use it as a means to your good grace and favour — and then — then I meant to walk off with a hundred and fifty roubles. Now, do you not call that base?”

“You have confused your motives and ideas, as I need scarcely say too often happens to myself. [...] At times I have imagined that all men were the same,” he continued earnestly, for he appeared to be much interested in the conversation, “and that consoled me in a certain degree, for a DOUBLE motive is a thing most difficult to fight against”. [...]

At this moment Lebedeff appeared, having just arrived from Petersburg. He frowned when he saw the twenty-five rouble note in Keller’s hand, but the latter, having got the money, went away at once. Lebedeff began to abuse him.

“You are unjust; I found him sincerely repentant”, observed the prince, after listening for a time.

“What is the good of repentance like that? It is the same exactly as mine yesterday, when I said, ‘I am base, I am base’, — words, and nothing more!”

“Then they were only words on your part? I thought, on the contrary...”

“Words and actions, truth and falsehood, are all jumbled up together in me, and yet I am perfectly sincere. I feel the deepest repentance, believe it or not, as you choose; but words and lies come out in the infernal craving to get the better of other people. It is always there — the notion of cheating people, and of using my repentant tears to my own advantage!”<sup>21</sup>

In the course of the scene, the type of Keller’s (in)sincerity changes several times, and in addition, it is perceived differently from the viewpoints of Myshkin and the narrator. At the beginning, Keller presents non-authoritative sincerity (insincerity, from the viewpoint of the narrator) that is firstly accepted, later rejected, and again accepted by Myshkin. Then he reveals that, after all, this is non-authoritative insincerity (“Then you wanted me to lend you money?”), but he accepts it, striking Keller on the spot. This is the energetic apogee of the scene. After the shock and Myshkin’s speech on the “double motive”, some of Keller’s utterances express authoritative sincerity. Myshkin inclines to accept the “confession” of Keller as a whole as authoritative. Lebedev doubts Myshkin’s vision but claims that non-authoritative insincerity could easily be the other side of authoritative sincerity, and vice versa, exactly in accordance with Myshkin’s theory of double motive.

<sup>21</sup> F. Dostoevsky, *Idiot*, trans. E. Martin, 1915. Source of the text: eBooks@Adelaide, Part II, Chapter XI.

This Dostoevskian complexity of the personality philosophy leads us to a few additional remarks about the nature of sincerity regarding the personalistic conception of myth. Alexei Losev defines myth as a miraculous personalistic history conveyed in words, where miracle is viewed as realization of a personality's transcendental purpose in the empirical history<sup>22</sup>. The stronger the presence of the personality, the less the possibility of recognizing the truth. Myth is the total realization of personality. In myth the personality is realized to the extent that there is no room left for discovery of the truth. This matches the well-known problem of the relationship between philosophical truth and myth<sup>23</sup>. In myth, it is not the truth that we recognize, but rather the personality that embodies its truth, and this negation of "rather" is unavoidable. We recognize the personality's creation, opening through its story, which cannot be genuine or not genuine, just as the personality cannot be genuine or not (but only its expression).

What does this imply about sincerity? In myth, sincerity reaches its peak, the limits of its ability. Sincerity reaches its peak because in myth the creation of the personality reaches its peak and negates the possibility of recognizing the truth. Sincerity is neither truth, nor the opposite of truth, but rather it is a metaphor of truth. If so, it transpires that the more the personality is realized, the greater the possibility of sincerity, and therefore the sincerity increasingly distances itself from the truth. As a result of this distancing, the metaphoric dimension of sincerity and of myth is strengthened. We could say "distance from the truth", but here the distance from the truth does not imply lying and fraud, but rather that metaphorical distance that imbues sincerity with strength. The further the realization of the personality and the recognition of the truth are from each other, the more they strive towards each other. This force of attraction of the personality to truth, and of truth to personality, is no more than sincerity itself, which is so characteristic of myth. Sincerity embodies the vector

<sup>22</sup> A. Losev, *The Dialectics of Myth*, trans. V. Marchenkov, Routledge, New York 2003, pp. 185–186.

<sup>23</sup> Colin Falck formulates this precisely: "The truth of art is not representational [...] it resides instead in the power of art to inscribe new imaginative unities rather than to manipulate already-familiar descriptive counters" (C. Falck, *Myth, Truth and Literature: Towards a True Postmodernism*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1994, p. 150). Mythical and scientific truth are perceived as moving closer to each other, for example, in the seminal work of Kurt Hübner *The Truth of Myth*, in which myth achieves renewed legitimacy (K. Hübner, *Die Wahrheit des Mythos*, Verlag C. H. Beck, München 1985). And finally, P. Ricoeur arrives at a new synthesis of myth, truth, and personality in concepts of the plot (or quasi-plot in historical research) that continues to emerge each time anew, and that re-establishes the meaningful world and the metaphorical truth (P. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, trans. K. McLaughlin, D. Pellauer, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1984, pp. 52–90).

of the desire of the personality to truth, its striving to identify with the truth. The further the personality is from the truth, the greater this desire. Sincerity is thus a reflection of the personality's unrealizable desire to identify with the truth, the eternal plea, in Kenneth Burke's terms.

If sincerity constitutes a way of embodying the truth in personality, in the case of a literary character we can see that the mode is defined of the relationship between truth and literature, or between reality and art that embodies this reality. We can easily see that for thousands of years this mode of relationship is defined by means of the concept of mimesis. Of course, we are talking of mimesis not only as imitation, but rather in its original, earliest meaning, that is deeply connected to ancient religious beliefs, as embodiment or realization. Myth is the embodiment of truth in a character. Therefore, we can say that sincerity is a form of mimesis. In speech, a subject tries to embody a certain reality or truth, and he does this so that the affinity between the truth and its embodiment (the character) will appear convincing. Convincing sincerity is actually successful mimesis. Possibly this is the essence of the great aesthetic importance of sincerity.

Sincerity appears, therefore, as a universal aesthetic category, at least like the category of mimesis that has accompanied aesthetic thinking for thousands of years, changing and adapting itself over and again to changing cultural and philosophical systems. Its core, however, has remained unchanged from Plato to Ricoeur. In his *Time and Narrative* Ricoeur does not speak about imitation, but rather about rebuilding the world, refiguration. If literature does not reflect, but rather rewrites, rebuilds the world, at the spearhead of its action is still the embodiment or the (renewed) realization of that world. Moreover, in Ricoeur's hermeneutic approach, mimesis is connected to metaphor: it too is little more than a type of mimesis, of reconstruction of the world. This conception strengthens our insight into the mimetic and metaphorical essence of sincerity.

In the course of this article, the question arises repeatedly: How can one distinguish between sincerity and insincerity? What are the criteria of sincerity? It is difficult to point to completely objective criteria, because sincerity appears either as an impression, a certain affect, or, alternatively, as a judgment. Both are completely subjective. Nevertheless, we can distinguish a few universal, albeit not objective, criteria of the judgment of sincerity, namely whether and to which extent it is mimetic, metaphorical, and mythopoetic. All three are in fact one, but they

reflect different dimensions of sincerity in a work. Each separately and the three together create that convincing impression that the reader perceives as the sincerity of the author or the work.

We can thus define what the persuasive power of sincerity consists of. Sincerity establishes a character with the following characteristics: a character based on mimesis —embodying an idea, truth, reality; a character not only embodies the truth, but also does this in a certain way — metaphorically; a character is realized in this mimetic-metaphorical embodiment, in its myth, as an imagined human personality; not only does the personality embody an idea, but also it is realized in history by means of this embodiment. In realizing the truth, the personality experiences its historical becoming, so that it is no longer possible to separate the realization of the truth from the realization of the personality. The sincere character that is created in sincere speech is, therefore, a mythical, mimetic, and metaphorical image of truth. The characteristics of the process of becoming of this character serve as the criteria of sincerity.

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