

Game Hermeneutics: For a Game Theoretic Reading of Bach Concerto by Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu

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Abstract

Although frequently used in economic analyses, the use of game theory as a hermeneutic tool is less well known, since, as any mathematical instrument applied to literature, it may seem like a simplistic and reductionist approach to the complex constellation which defines great works of literature. This paper seeks to present some possible applications of game theory to the fictional world of Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu's Bach Concerto [Concert de muzic? din Bach], treating it as one of strategic interactions between different characters, each pursuing their own best interest, without betraying the prescriptive social and moral norms which imbued Romanian society in the interwar period. This approach allows for a spotlight shift, from texts as places where meaning is produced through the intertwinement of language, culture, and ideology on texts as series of decisions in which each individual's choice is dependent on the choices of the rest, so that something which might seem highly irrational becomes explicable on rational terms in the context of the game. Using instruments such as "cooperation", "strategies", "payoff", "Nash equilibrium", and "Bayes' Theorem", I will try to reconstruct the fictional space defining Papadat-Bengescu's novel on the basis of this mathematical matrix, not aspiring to reach a definitive interpretation, but attempting to bring mathematical and literary knowledge to a common denominator.

Keywords: Game Theory, Pierre Bourdieu, Habitus, Illusio, Bayes' Theorem