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## Writing History – Shaping History of (Not Only Polish) Literary Studies\*

I would like to start by sharing with you a vision. This will remind us of the main focus of the following special issue and, in my opinion, the most important problems underpinning the phrase: “Writing History – Shaping History”.

My vision is something along the lines of “Back to the Future” or “the Future of the Past”. Let us imagine a researcher approaching the history of the humanities and specifically literary studies in one hundred years, the year 2116, who will then identify this year, 2016, as a turning point in history. At least three crucial occurrences have happened so far this year. Firstly, Peter Burke published his short but substantial book *What is the History of Knowledge*, a work that competes somewhat with his two-volume compendium *The Social History of Knowledge*, as the later work discusses the history of knowledge in the plural, that is “histories of knowledges”. Secondly, the University of Chicago Press started publishing the journal entitled “History of Humanities”, sponsored by the Society for the History of Humanities. Its founding editor is none other than Rens Bod, the author of the renowned compendium *De vergeten wetenschappen: een geschiedenis van de humaniora*,<sup>1</sup> which of course only coincidentally appeared in Polish translation also in 2016. In the Polish context it is necessary to mention the edited two-volume compendium

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\* This publication has been prepared as part of the following NCN (National Science Centre) research grant: NCN 2014/13/B/HS2/00310 “Wiek teorii. Sto lat polskiej myśli teoretycznoliterackiej” [The Age of Theory: A Century of Polish Theoretical Literary Studies].

<sup>1</sup> Rens Bod, *De vergeten wetenschappen: een geschiedenis van de humaniora* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2010). The Polish translation changes the sequence of elements in the title, a solution that has probably been influenced by the title of Bod’s next compendium: *A New History of the Humanities. The Search for Principles and Patterns from Antiquity to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

*Język w refleksji teoretycznej* [Language in Theoretical Reflection], a work of exceptional quality on the history of world linguistics.<sup>2</sup> Thirdly, and – of course – most importantly, an international discussion meeting on the disputable and indisputable ways of writing the history of (not exclusively Polish) literary studies took place in June 2016 at the University of Warsaw.

It is good to be a dreamer... This imaginary future historian will possibly take note of many other similar facts. And I am sure each and every one of you can add to this list your own local and historically seminal occurrences. But wishful thinking aside, it is definitely safe to say that the 21<sup>st</sup> century is one that keeps returning to history. History has again become the strongest narcotic of the century, to use the terms by which Walter Benjamin referred to the 19<sup>th</sup>. And it is in this return to history that the humanities have finally found their own place. Their history is no longer treated according to the models developed for natural sciences, as was still the case in the years of Kuhn's paradigm revolution and its successors.

I will leave aside the problem of whether history in the humanities develops in a revolutionary or evolutionary manner, whether it runs in a rhythm of "shifts" or has an accumulative nature. It is impossible to tell offhand. Nonetheless, this problem is directly or indirectly tackled by most of the authors of the following collection. For instance, Peter Steiner discusses it in much detail when contrasting Franco Moretti's Darwinian model of historical process in literature with the anti-Darwinian model by Yury Tynyanov and Roman Jakobson. With respect to the other papers, it is only worth mentioning that the shift towards historical studies in the humanities itself has a historical character. And there are many signals of its return to sources dating back to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which is usually considered the nascent period of modern *Geisteswissenschaft*. Some of the authors would even dare to say that current discussions within the humanities extend back to much earlier formulations than those of the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Reflecting upon world literature as a socio-cultural construct, Galin Tihanov returns to the age when the ideas of *Weltliteratur* came to life. From a different point of view – namely, with respect to the development of Polish literary theory – Tomasz Bilczewski revisits the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and considers the themes that might be fruitful in terms of the latest trends in comparative and translation studies. In his

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<sup>2</sup> Andrzej Bogusławski, Ewa Drzazgowska, *Język w refleksji historycznej. Przekroje teoretyczne*, vol. 1–2 (Warszawa: Katedra Lingwistyki Formalnej Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2016).

paper with the intriguing title: “The Tragedy of Early Literary Theory”, Michał Mrugalski also sheds light on this aspect focusing on how our narratives on the history of modern literary theory develop along the lines of tragic fables. Furthermore, he argues that, having its roots in German philosophy from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the critical theory of tragedy may be perceived as a mediator between the external and internal history of early modern literary theory.

This perspective is also discussed by the other authors. But let me ask some more general questions: What is the evidence for these returns to the past? And what can we do with the past?

Nowadays, probably no one will defend the position that we should reconstruct history and describe it *wie es eigentlich gewesen*, as Leopold von Ranke put it in the 1824 *Introduction* to his *Geschichte der romanischen und germanischen Völker*. But if we assume that since 1974 at the latest “we have all been constructivists”,<sup>3</sup> if we assume that radical historicism and the strong programme of the sociology of knowledge have dominated historiography in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, we also need to admit that the roots of this understanding reach back to Wilhelm Dilthey, Heinrich Rickert, Georg Simmel, and Robin G. Collingwood. Without the questions posed by them there would have been no Thomas Kuhn, no Michel Foucault, no Hayden White, nor any of their successors: the narrativists, gender and postcolonial historiographers, historians practising memory studies and heritage studies, the unmaskers of the powers of discourse, aesthetic politics, and truth politics.

Does constructivism still pose a challenge nowadays? Considerations from the combative years between 1965 and 1985 may be deemed uncontroversial and even justified, given that there were good reasons for them at the time. In any case, the rather conventional hypothesis to the effect that any existing consolidation of history is contingent does not raise any objections. We are aware that the past world known to us is not ultimate, that is: it could have been described differently. We are also familiar with the sociologically-oriented or novelistic alternative histories derived from these considerations. Driven by such ideas, historians have over the last three decades formulated ever bolder proposals of an

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<sup>3</sup> I am quoting here the title of Ewa Domańska and Bjørnar Olsen’s paper published in: *Rzeczy i ludzie. Humanistyka wobec materialności*, ed. Jacek Kowalewski, Wojciech Piasek and Maria Śliwa (Olsztyn: Instytut Filozofii Uniwersytetu Warmińsko-Mazurskiego, 2008), 83–100. Taking year 1974 as a *terminus a quo* can be justified by the publication of the French renowned collection *Faire de l’histoire*, sous la direction de Jacques Le Goff et Pierre Nora (Paris: Gallimard, 1974); English translation: *Constructing the Past. Essays in Historical Methodology*, ed. Jacques Le Goff and Pierre Nora (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); the English translator’s name has not been provided.

alternative unconventional history. Alternative in terms of both the object and method of study, as well as in its spatial and temporal scope, which could be either increasingly broader or gradually narrowing: ranging from a micronarrative about the quotidian to a view of the whole of human history, or even of biological life.<sup>4</sup>

Where do the modest literary scholars and historians of literature fit into all this? They will find their own place. Those daring historiographical constructions are accompanied by a noticeable growth of interest in material studies and archival work. In these approaches, the desire to touch upon the past is born anew, the desire to recreate its possibly most faithful image insofar as the existing or accessible sources allow for that. Such desires are far from any naïve trust in the undeniable truth of documents. While they are aware of all the narrative and discursive rules that govern the remaining records, and increasingly critical of archival discoveries, historians still take ever more sceptical stances towards constructivism. Some of them even dream of “epistemological electroshock therapy” and keep testing “disembodied scientific objectivity”. But the postulated “radical constructivism” means no more than “situated knowledge”.<sup>5</sup> In such studies, a critical reconstruction of the past seems more important than its construction. In the following edited issue, it is precisely with this intention that Przemysław Pietrzak, Magdalena Szczypiorska-Mutor, Joanna Jeziorska-Haładaj, and Danuta Ulicka formulated their respective studies. What they all attempt to do is demonstrate that the reconstruction of global literary theory must primarily include local knowledges. Also, having titled his paper “Writing History” rather than “constructing history” in contemporary Czech studies, Jan Tlustý recreates a self-consciously constructivist approach which demands of the researcher to recognise their own historically determined viewpoints.

By the same token, that which is most essential for literary scholars – philology – is being revived before our eyes. It is conceptualised in a plethora of different ways. Sometimes it resembles new colonialism or a higher stage of postcolonialism, given the cultural material

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<sup>4</sup> The following article can serve as an example of a short-range Polish history: Dorota Malczewska-Pawelec, Tomasz Pawelec, “Historia historiografii jako studium codzienności historyków (zarys programu badawczego),” in *Gra i konieczność. Zbiór rozpraw z filozofii historii i historii historiografii*, ed. Grzegorz A. Dominiak, Janusz Ostoja-Zagórski and Wojciech Wrzosek (Bydgoszcz: Oficyna Wydawnicza Epigram, 2005). The idea of a broad-range history can be found in: Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Postcolonial Studies and the Challenge of Climate Change,” *New Literary History* 1 (2012).

<sup>5</sup> Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” *Feminist Studies* 3 (1988): 579–599.

and geographical area taken into account. The problem of science in the service of ideology is discussed by Craig Brandist, who successfully shows that early Soviet approaches have exerted a formative influence on contemporary postcolonial theory. Owing to this study, there is no need to elaborate on it now. As an example, let us only look at the well-known compendium *World Philology*.<sup>6</sup> We can learn a lot about Arabic, Indian, and Chinese philology from it, but it does not feature a single Russian, let alone a Pole. Similarly, in *A New History of the Humanities* by Rens Bod one paragraph on Propp along with a triple mention of Jakobson together represent the only reference to Central and East-European humanities. Funnily enough, the note on Jakobson suggests that we do not exist at all since Chapter 5.1. announces the “miraculous disappearance of poetics and rhetoric”.

The attempts to redress the imbalance between knowledge about the scholarly cultures of the West and the East are historically understandable. We will probably need to wait out the period in which history undergoes a politically correct deformation in the name of historical justice. Regardless of the easily noticeable distortions, most advocates of new philology still construe it according to the tradition. They perceive it as a discipline engaging with the possibly multifunctional analysis of textual language, with the text being situated in the historical, biographical, political, and economic environments of the authors and recipients – and the text is not only culturally determined, but also actively creating the culture itself.

Is it possible to translate the methodological assumptions of new world philology into the history of science and postulate a history of literary studies written from a philological and cultural perspective? And to identify this approach as a third way between radical constructivism and antiquarian positivism? As one of the editors of the *History of Russian Literary Theory and Criticism. The Soviet Age and Beyond* (2011), Galin Tihanov is familiar with the problem of choosing a style for historical writing inside out. Yet another expert featured in our special issue has significant experience in this matter: Craig Brandist who is an excellent author of works such as *The Bakhtin Circle. Philosophy, Culture and Politics* and *The Dimensions of Hegemony: Language, Culture and Politics in Revolutionary Russia*.<sup>7</sup> Their

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<sup>6</sup> *World Philology*, ed. Sheldon Pollock, Benjamin A. Elman and Ku-ming Kevin Chang (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> *History of Russian Literary Theory and Criticism. The Soviet Age and Beyond*, ed. Yevgeny Dobrenko, Galin Tihanov (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011); Craig Brandist, *The Bakhtin Circle. Philosophy, Culture and Politics* (London: Pluto Press, 2002); *The Dimensions of Hegemony: Language, Culture and Politics in Revolutionary Russia* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2015).

help in answering the question of what chances philology has as a cultural foundation for the history of knowledge cannot be overstated.

I myself need to admit openly that I find such an opportunity very attractive. And with respect to the culture of our region, Central and Eastern Europe, writing the history of literary studies from a philological and cultural perspective sounds to me as something that is not only possible, but even necessary. This involves the reconstruction of academic texts in terms of literary texts: as performative utterances deliberately formed and explicated within the context of other cultural texts that stem both from the source milieu, as well as the past and future textual environments defined by their reception and impact. Approaching academic texts on par with literary texts would result in treating them as non-anonymous enunciations that are strictly connected with the biographies of their authors and readers; that are inseparable from their cognitive engagements and reach beyond them; and finally that reflect all these factors in their thought processes and writing styles as well as the textually documented styles of their reception. Only such a reconstruction can reveal the specific nature of these cultures, and perhaps also offer an interesting reading instead of a dead textbook on dead history. Placing the *modi significandi* as a representation of the *modi intelligendi* in the very centre, the philologically and culturally oriented history of literary studies that I suggest here of course entails not only a new approach to old philology but also transformations in comparative literature, translation studies, and new biographism. We will also have a chance to reconsider this problem owing to the texts by Schamma Schahadat, Tamara Brzostowska-Tereszkiewicz, Tomasz Mizerkiewicz, and Tomasz Bilczewski which are included in the following issue.

Thus, irrespective of any possible controversies and accusations of transferring conclusions relevant to a literary sphere to literary studies, I will insist on the idea of a philologically and culturally oriented history of literary studies. In fact, I do not have anything against projecting conclusions about literature onto literary studies. Such a stance has already been sufficiently legitimised in the narrativist and post-narrativist philosophy of history. The most profound justifications, however, come from the literary theory of our region itself, as it stays closer to literature than academic literary studies (i.e. “science”, specifically in the Polish and Russian meaning) or even becomes identical with literature. In their texts, Eliza Kącka, Artur Hellich, and Magdalena Szczypiorska-Mutor touch on one of the most essential problems related to such an approach in Polish literary studies, which is the definition of theory, its object, and its scope. Then, Schamma Schahadat deals with the “other” side

of translation studies – not so much with the academic discourse but rather with the essayistic forms that have developed around translation(s) since the very beginning of translation theory. In her discussion of these forms, she even sees something specific for Polish studies as such.<sup>8</sup>

And what do all these problems revolving around earlier and current historiography that I have signalled so far have to do with the theme of the following special issue? In particular, how does its focus relate to the question of how to study history of science; or in a narrower sense: history of the humanities; or in a yet narrower understanding: a single discipline, literary theory, which since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century at least until the 1970s served as the key domain for the entire humanities. Why should we be occupied at all with history of science?

The necessity could be legitimised on either a general or a top-down level. The general justification should read as follows: history of literary studies is more important in diagnosing the erstwhile and current social awareness of culture than history of literature. Though not as lasting as the artistic one, the scholarly imaginarium definitely constitutes a driving force for its artistic counterpart. It is literary studies that processes texts assumed to be literary, “develops” them from memory as if from a photographic film, and transforms them into cultural events. Without the mediation of literary studies these texts might merely have remained “non-events”. The very status of a “non-event” is itself a cultural event that tellingly points to the historically-grounded scholarly culture.

The top-down justification hinges on the acknowledged authorities who assert that scientific texts are of a double status: they belong to texts of culture, but on par with other texts that are in fact the objects of their study. Russian semioticians formulated this claim very clearly in the following words: “Scientific texts, being metatexts of the culture, may at the same time be regarded as its texts. Therefore any significant scientific idea may be regarded both as an attempt to cognize culture and as a fact of its life”.<sup>9</sup> It is worth noting that thirty years earlier, the Polish cultural scholar Stefan Czarnowski voiced similar opinions and insisted that the act of acquiring knowledge about culture is also culture.<sup>10</sup> But I will attempt to justify

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<sup>8</sup> See also: *Übersetzungslandschaften. Themen und Akteure der Übersetzungslandschaft in Ost- und Mitteleuropa*, ed. Schamma Schahadat and Štěpán Zbytovský (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2016).

<sup>9</sup> Vyacheslav V. Ivanov, Yury M. Lotman, Alexander M. Piatigorsky, Vyacheslav N. Toporov, Boris A. Uspensky, “Tezisy k semioticheskomu izuchenyu kultur (w primenenyakh k slavianskim tekstam),” in *Semiotyka i struktura tekstu*, ed. Maria Renata Mayenowa (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich 1973).

<sup>10</sup> Stefan Czarnowski, “Kultura,” (Warszawa: 1946), 21 (first printed in Warsaw by Wiedza i Życie, 1938).

the necessity of reflecting on the history of literary studies by making use of and explicating the parenthesis formulated in the title of this edited issue. The phrase in brackets rather deliberately specifies: “of not only Polish literary studies”. But why “not only”, which automatically implies “but also” or even: “especially”?

Rhetoric teaches us that a parenthetical clause, just like the device of paralipsis (or preterition), attracts attention more effectively than the main clause. The parenthesis featuring in the title of this special issue title aimed precisely to bring “Polish theory” to the fore. Why? Because Polish literary theory does not exist in the history of literary studies as a cultural fact. It is absent from introductory compendia written and taught all over the world. In textbooks and anthologies, it is confined to structuralism and Ingarden. As opposed to the continuously updated *Russkaya teoriya*, and also contrary to *French Theory*, Polish theory does not have any widely recognisable identity.

It is difficult to establish the reasons for this state of affairs and the mechanisms that have led to it. The cause was certainly not the provincial or half-provincial character of Polish literary theory. From the moment of its birth – and let us take some time around 1912–1914 as the beginning, although the name was actually used as early as 1901–1903 – Polish literary theory lay at the heart of European theories and at least until the 1980s developed in close collaboration with Russian and Czech and Slovak theories.

We are unable to explain the phantom presence of Polish theory by reference to the peripheral position of its language, either. Our scholars wrote and published in German, and in French, among the most significant languages in the Interwar period.

Nor can we really turn to victimology and put the blame on post-War repercussions. Although nowadays seen from a post-colonial or post-dependent perspective, these circumstances in fact triggered quite a unique boom in Polish literary studies in the period between the 1950s and the 1970s. Unprecedented within the region and arguably the most intensive in Central and Eastern Europe, this growth brought about numerous achievements and literary theory played the role of their safe-keeper at least until the political transformation.

Finally, we cannot accuse anyone of “the theft of history”; even if we did, we might only blame ourselves for letting the rest of the world rob us of that overlooked theoretical lineage of Polish literary scholarship.

If any convincing explanation of the non-event comes to mind, it would be the weakness of our “small” emigration of literary scholars (“small” as opposed to the Great Emigration in Romanticism). Russian



and Czech literary studies had their powerful ambassadors in the United States, Canada, and France (such as Roman Jakobson, Victor Erlich, René Wellek, Lubomir Doležel, Julia Kristeva, Tzvetan Todorov, Thomas Pavel). In contrast, Polish literary scholars in exile who started their academic careers with a theoretical approach (Manfred Kridl, Zbigniew Folejewski, Wiktor Weintraub, Tymon Terlecki, Jan Kott, Stanisław Barańczak) neither continued their interests, nor propagated the Polish theoretical output of the Interwar and post-War period. In principle, they were inclined rather to introduce the history of Polish literature to the general public. Alternatively, in their capacity of Slavists, they presented it in a comparative perspective, most often alongside Russian literature, which sparked far more lively interest. Our ambassadors were Russians or scholars taken as Russians (Jakobson, Erlich) and Czechs (Wellek). It is due to them that the information about Polish Interwar circles and schools, individual and collective initiatives, as well as achievements by outstanding scholars, came to light in the English-speaking world. The post-war waves of academic emigration did not care about the migration of theory either, be it through individual undertakings or within institutional structures. This is a completely different turn of events from the respective waves of Russian and Czech emigration that made it possible for Translation Studies to emerge in Tel Aviv and possible-world theory in Canada; and from numerous French, English, and German anthologies of Russian formalism that nourished Franco Moretti's history of literature deriving from Jakobson and Tynyanov, as discussed in Peter Steiner's paper.

We can dream about a hypothetical scenario in which Andrzej Walicki in Notre-Dame wrote an overview of Polish philosophical and social thought instead of a Russian one. And that he included in it not only the Warsaw school of historians of ideas, but also the Warsaw school of Structuralism that operated in conjunction with it, in the same moment and within the same human and urban space.

But the fact that previous historians of literary studies and current historians of the humanities have been unaware of Polish theory's existence becomes an advantage today. Contrary to all appearances, this absence works in our favour. A scholarship that has not grown in interpretations and still remains youthful can be more easily presented and popularised than one burdened with a long reception history. The current methodological state promises a period of prosperity for relevant actions to this end. The awareness that the very object of knowledge is an active and meaning-generating part of constructing the history of knowledge has increased, or is rather undergoing a renaissance.

What also puts us in a beneficial situation is more than a half-century of weakening the “strong” theory. This period calls for rethinking the official definition of theory as it aligns itself with merely one single idea of science. Writing obituaries for theory seems to have come to an end, too. Though often replaced by anti- or post-theory, theory as such was nonetheless very much permanently present throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Leaving aside the discussion of whether literary theory still exists, it is already dead or has perhaps changed its status to post- or anti-theory, I propose to define it on the grounds of century-long academic practices rather than methodological declarations or disputes. And such practices provide clear evidence that the objective scope of literary theory has encompassed not only texts assumed to be literary, but also those belonging to other discourses and semiotic systems (philosophy, psychology, historiography, folklore, film, theatre, visual arts, music, circus, and opera). On the one hand, they constituted an indispensable component of literary theory but also a repository of its tools and terminology; on the other hand, they themselves kept using its dictionary. On this basis, literary theory can be considered a critical, conscious, and self-aware interdisciplinary reflection on texts of culture founded upon the analysis of language texts and with a special focus on those assumed to be literary. For this reason, we can search for a literary theoretical reflection in photography studies, as suggested later by Magdalena Szczypiorska-Mutor, as well as draw from it some historiosophical conclusions, as argued by Michał Mrugalski.

This favourable timing also coincides with regional and local studies which question the delocalised processes of learning about the past and indispensably opt for reading time in space. Furthermore, such a “chronotopical” attitude overlaps with the ongoing discussions about World Literature in relation to national literatures, yielding important conclusions on the asymmetry between local studies and the mainstream strand functioning as global. Historical geographies of science zones keep coming into being, which is welcomed even by the proponents of the Transnational Turn and Transculturality, and by those who advocate for the unity of the humanities beyond the multiplicity of local knowledges. Even in such publications it is impossible to avoid distinguishing between the local and the global, the national and the international (or the cosmopolitan, or the universal). After all, from the viewpoint of literary theoretical studies, founded in the region of Central and Eastern Europe, the very opposition between local and global or dominant and subordinate needs some revision. In any case, this distinction at least requires the introduction of a mediating domain: a region (or a neighbourhood, as I prefer to say).

Will this mapped situation allow for Polish theory to come into existence? And not just the Polish; the Ukrainian, Bulgarian, Romanian, Lithuanian, Belarussian, Croatian theories are in a similar condition. Lying dormant, they exist only on a local level, being submissive to the hegemony of language.

An attempt to create Polish Theory and make it known to a wider audience does not necessarily entail any revaluations that would erase the commonly understood image of the past literary theoretical world. And it would definitely not introduce any radically different scientific zone of literary studies in its stead, a history written completely “backward”. Decanonising the canon, especially if it consists in canonising the younger strand, first of all requires this strand to have already existed. Secondly, it belongs to the practices that bear fruit in confrontation with a stable frame of reference, which can be countered with a new model. However, the current circumstances are not really fit for purpose since multiple propositions coexist without competing or even being in contact with one another. And so any development of this barren area can aim not to establish an anti-canon or post-canon, but to find some parallel canon at best.

Moreover, taking up this challenge begs important questions of a more general nature than the ones relating exclusively to Polish Theory.

One of them pertains to the national identity of science. It is closely associated with the local vs. global dimension of literary studies as well as the role that language plays in science, being not only an instrument of cognition, but also shaping the process of cognition. Asking about the nationality of science can at first sound somewhat absurd. But since we have come to terms with science being treated in terms of gender, then why should not we pose the question about its geography and ethnic specificity anew?<sup>11</sup> Pose it anew, just as at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it was tackled by scholars of such standing as Jan Baudouin de Courtenay. Of course, we can formulate it more elegantly in order to avoid any echoes of nationalism, including a methodological nationalism,<sup>12</sup> and replace the word “national” with its synonym: “vernacular”. Irrespective of the verbal garment, the act of posing the question in its own right seems a necessary condition when discussing the relationship between local, partial or “situated” knowledges (or in other words knowledges

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<sup>11</sup> See, for example: Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge MA/London: Cambridge University Press, 1995); David N. Livingstone, *Putting Science in Its Place. Geographies of Scientific Knowledge* (Chicago–London: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

<sup>12</sup> Andreas Wiemer and Nina Glick-Schiller “Methodological Nationalism and Beyond: Nation-State Building, Migration, and the Social Sciences,” *Global Networks* 4 (2002).

concentrated on parochialism) and “national” ones. In our edited collection of texts, Adela Kobelska approaches this problem with reference to the local material of Polish regional studies.

With regard to literary theory, the question of “nationality” is particularly interesting. Literary theory was founded in specific historical conditions as a transnational discipline of literary studies that remained in opposition to national histories of literature. These circumstances are well known to us thanks to, among others, Galin Tihanov’s discussion of theory’s origins.<sup>13</sup> But still, from the beginning theoreticians have usually worked on their own national material. What if this fact distorted their conclusions that aspired to universality? Does *priem ostraneniya* recognise the universal mechanism of poetic language or perhaps solely the historical poetics of Russian futurism, which was only later (and has been till now) extended to all artistic phenomena? And *vice versa*: what if the descriptions of Polish verse through the (transnational, systemic, synchronic) lens of literary theory that came to fruition in the 1930s had already tailored the studied material? Among others, Przemysław Pietrzak addresses this issue by reconstructing the Polish reflection on genre criticism. After all, this state of affairs was often determined by the translations of basic terms from literary theoretical glossaries existing in a foreign language, as Tamara Brzostowska-Tereszkiewicz proofs. I’d like to add that not only thanks to the *Dictionary of Untranslatables*,<sup>14</sup> but also from Stefania Skwarczyńska’s 1965 textbook do we know that:

literary theory and poetics draw nourishment from the sphere of culture in which they bloom to such an extent that it is not easy for them to attain any universality in their judgments. The facts they establish in one sphere sometimes not only do not fit the experiences of other spheres, but even establishing them and adjusting them to their own concepts meet with difficulties there.<sup>15</sup>

In the light of potential refractions caused by focalising the universal theory onto a local material, how can we assess its pretence to transhistorical objective knowledge? This is not to say that we should again unmask its illusions and reprimand it for such utopic thinking. We know that refractions are inevitable and cognition does not come out of nowhere.

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<sup>13</sup> Galin Tihanov, “Why Did Modern Literary Theory Originate in Central and Eastern Europe? (And Why Is It Now Dead?),” *Common Knowledge* 10 (2004).

<sup>14</sup> *Dictionary of Untranslatables. A Philosophical Lexicon*, ed. Barbara Cassin, trans. Emily Apter, Jacques Lezra and Michael Wood (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press: 2014).

<sup>15</sup> Stefania Skwarczyńska, *Wstęp do nauki o literaturze*, vol. 3 (Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy PAX, 1965), 67.

What I would suggest instead is approaching a literary theoretical project of a transnational science identified with objective knowledge and considering it from a historical perspective as a component of the Modernist (or more widely: Enlightenment-grounded) ideology. Likewise, a historical approach is also demanded by the other component, namely: national science. Science, or more specifically the humanities with their ethnic attribution, were not necessarily linked to nationalism as a worldview. The instances of the humanities with the “national” epithet being propagated officially and implemented institutionally thanks to political and economic instruments at the disposal of the authorities are, historically speaking, particularly blatant. Such national science policies would often lead to abolishing entire disciplines: Slavonic Studies, General Linguistics, Classical Philology. But it used to be the case that names such as “Polish theory” did not fall under the mechanism of power-knowledge. They manifested solely the relevant scholars’ sense of belonging to an imaginary community that could not be defined by their language, citizenship, or religion. That community was constituted through reference to tradition and by acknowledging the importance of “themes” specific to a given culture as well as the styles of examining them.<sup>16</sup> It is only against this backdrop that the specific nature of “glocal” literary theory comes to the fore. And there is yet another separate issue that is rarely addressed, though it is fundamental from the viewpoint of the Modernist *Bildung* ideology, a science serving to shape social consciousness. It concerns the consequences of these two trends, the global and the local, clashing with each other in academic teaching, an important aspect that Maciej Gorczyński examines in his paper. In discussing this complex area marked by the titular problem of “writing” or “shaping” history of not only Polish literary studies, another general issue might arise, pertaining to the canon: the mechanisms of shaping it, maintaining, promulgating, circulating, as well as exchanging it. This involves yet another question: that of the mechanisms leading to success in academia; and more specifically, a range of various mechanisms, personal, institutional, political and economic, that made some theories globally successful and others not. On this occasion, a few further problems will come up, such as the significance of translation politics for creating an academic authority or the concept of academic translation as such.

Supposedly, a different image of Modernist scientific cultures, aside from literary theoretical ones, should emerge from discussions on similar

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<sup>16</sup> Morris E. Opler, “Themes as Dynamic Forces in Culture,” *The American Journal of Sociology* 3 (1945).

aspects. We will need to set aside the migrations of theoreticians and theories, the transfer of concepts and terms from the erstwhile centre of literary theory (Central and Eastern Europe) to the erstwhile peripheries (the U.S.) and back again, as well as the question of interdisciplinary transfer, for next occasion. For now, it looks like Warsaw is a good checkpoint, making it possible for all to come together for a two-day panel meeting from around the world: from Western Europe and the United States via China; and allowing them then to depart to Prague, Zurich, Tübingen, London, Philadelphia, Wrocław, Poznań and Kraków. Resulting from the discussion among outstanding scholars, the following papers are the best evidence thereof.

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