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Comparative literature and the birth of literary theory in Poland*

I will not hesitate to claim that where the larger part of readers is acquainted with world literature through translation, people shy from making a show of their ignorance.¹

Both literary theory and comparative literature have lived through periods of prosperity and moments of crisis. The latter has even made the crisis into the trademark of its institutional logic, one of self-revision, or regularly questioning its bases and condition.² The fortunes of the two disciplines have been tightly interlocked, particularly throughout the previous century,³ and particularly in the United States, though the history of this

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¹ Ludwik Osiński, “Wykład literatury porównawczej (ciąg dalszy),” in *Dziela*, vol. 4 (Warszawa: nakładem wdowy po Autorze, 1861), 9–11.

² David Ferris, “Indiscipline,” in *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization*, ed. Haun Saussy (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 78–99; idem, “Why Compare?,” in *A Companion to Comparative Literature*, ed. Ali Behdad and Dominic Thomas (Oxford, Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2011), 46–59.

³ Rodolphe Gasché, “Comparatively Theoretical,” in *The Honour of Thinking. Critique, Theory, Philosophy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 169–187; Jonathan Culler, “Comparative Literature and Literary Theory,” *Michigan Germanic Studies* 5(2) (1979): 170–184; Anna Balakian, “Literary Theory and Comparative Literature,” in *Proceedings of the XIth Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association, Vol. III*, ed. Eva Kushner and Daniel Henri Pageaux, (Bern: Peter Lang, 1989–1994), 17–24; Tania F. Carvalhal, “Littérature comparée et théories littéraires: le sens du rapprochement,” in *Littérature comparée. Théorie et pratique*, ed. André Lorant and Jean Bessière (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1999), 19–26; Ulrich Weisstein, *Comparative Literature and Literary Theory: Survey and Introduction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973).

relationship might be depicted in various ways. One narrative might begin in nineteenth-century France, apprehending comparative studies in the genealogy of theory. Another would grasp the universalist yearnings and ambitions of the great European polyhistorians like René Wellek, Erich Auerbach, Leo Spitzer, or Renato Poggioli, who found their new home and a new way of leading their profession in American academia after a period of traumatic wartime humiliations. Their biographies pay testimony to a new beginning of comparative studies,⁴ one closely linked to the epoch of the triumph of theory.⁵

Both points of departure – the nineteenth-century and the twentieth-century – deserve in-depth analysis before we move on to set the tasks for the “new comparative studies” and the opportunities for theory in the epoch of migrations and “born-translated literature,” which “approaches translation as medium and origin rather than as afterthought.”⁶ It would seem that the rhetoric of the end, of crisis and exhaustion, is presently losing its persuasive appeal in favour of a turn toward the history of knowledge, which just might support attempts to define the place of the above-mentioned fields in the framework of the humanities. In terms of theory, one manifestation of an interest in its own history has been Andrew Cole’s recently-published *The Birth of Theory*, a harbinger of further volumes (*Elements of the Ideal*), alluding to the earlier *The Legitimacy of the Middle Ages: On the Unwritten History of Theory*.⁷ Last year, this work opened up a wide debate in American literary studies circles,⁸ and prompted

⁴ Lionel Gossman and Mihai I. Spariosu, ed., *Building a Profession: Autobiographical Perspectives on the History of Comparative Literature in the United States* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

⁵ Haun Saussy, “‘Exquisite Cadavers Stitched from Fresh Nightmares’: Of Memes, Hives, and Selfish Genes,” in *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization*, 3–42.

⁶ Rebecca Walkowitz, *Born Translated. The Contemporary Novel in an Age of World Literature* (New York, Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2015), 3–4.

⁷ Andrew Cole, *The Birth of Theory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014); *The Legitimacy of the Middle Ages: On the Unwritten History of Theory*, ed. Andrew Cole and D. Vance Smith (Durham & London, Duke University Press, 2010).

⁸ C.D. Blanton, “Theory by Analogy,” *PMLA* 130(3) (2015): 750–758; Kathleen Davis, “Theory in Time,” *PMLA* 130(3) (2015): 759–767; Warren Montag, “Shattered Syllogisms: Andrew Cole’s *The Birth of Theory*,” *PMLA* 130(3) (2015): 768–775; Jane O. Newman, “The ‘German’ Origin of the Birth of Theory,” *PMLA* 130(3) (2015): 776–786; John Parker, “Valhalla Is Burning: Theory, the Middle Ages, and Secularization,” *PMLA* 130(3) (2015): 787–798; Jord/ana Rosenberg, “*The Birth of Theory* and the Long Shadow of the Dialectic,” *PMLA* 130(3) (2015): 799–808; and Andrew Cole’s response to the above-mentioned papers: “The Function of Theory at the Present Time,” *PMLA* 130(3) (2015): 809–818.

comparative literature scholars to discuss the present state of their discipline.⁹

Cole makes Hegel the protagonist of his book. His main point of reference is the moment in which Hegel founded a theory that broke with the legacy of Kant and situated “a figure, a form of thought, that is decidedly medieval and indelibly *linguistic*: dialectic” within the scope of philosophy.¹⁰ This gesture is supported on three main pillars, which mark out the theory’s terrain: first, the shift from the perspective of the transcendental “I” and its cognitive schemata that deftly structure possible experience toward a realm devoid of geometrical proof, marked by contradictions and disquieting moral dilemmas. In place of the transcendental ego we have the category of the *Other*, which Hegel introduces with all its epistemological and ethical baggage. The second aim was to emphasise the linguistic nature of experience and to assign theory the task of exploring the materiality of thought, and thus of various forms of human expression: from music, painting, and literature to religion and philosophy. This research – moving on to the third pillar of his gesture – is based on the historicisation of thought, which embraces both the synchronic and the diachronic dimension of its material form.

These pillars all mark out the Hegelian dialectic of identity and difference, creating a “fundamental structure” for

the deconstructing of binaries and paradigms, the tracking of identities in difference, the exposition of ‘intersectional’ identity, the critique of ideology, normativity, representation, and institutions.¹¹

Cole seeks its roots in the tradition of Medieval Neoplatonism, in Plotinus, Proclus, and then Pseudo-Dionysus and Nicholas of Cusa. He sees it as crucial that the history of dialectics, generally linking the Ancient and modern traditions, also takes into account the vast space in-between, which was responsible for passing on the Classical texts. As Hegel himself noted, this occurred through some colossal translation projects that first embraced the Greek, Arabic, and Syriac languages, and then, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Arabic and Latin. Moreover, the Arabic and Jewish commentaries to Aristotle translated into Latin made a deep imprint

⁹ Michael Swacha, “Comparing Structures of Knowledge,” in *The 2014 – 2015 Report on the State of the Discipline of Comparative Literature*, accessed October 05, 2016, <http://stateofthediscipline.acla.org/entry/comparing-structures-knowledge-0>.

¹⁰ Cole, *Birth of Theory*, XI.

¹¹ Cole, *Birth of Theory*, XII.

on the Medieval tradition of European philosophy, from which Hegel emerged, and which he came to challenge.

Cole's book coheres with the recent attempts to reread the roots of theory, and also with the latest trends in comparative studies,¹² which try, on the one hand, to juxtapose various ways of constructing knowledge (inquiring into how they are determined by culture, locality, and a world view, into mechanisms of institutionalisation, canonicity, and universalisation, into authority, their shared space and compatibility, their range of effect, and the practices tied to them), and on the other hand, they try to understand their historically motivated bases and origins as never before.¹³ A splendid example here would be examinations of the work by the founders of the discipline.

We know Jean-Jacques Ampère primarily as the author of a panorama of the laws and transformations of the human imagination, one that blends the history of literature and what he calls its philosophy. In *Histoire de la littérature française au Moyen Âge comparée aux littératures étrangères* (Paris 1841)¹⁴ he strives to find the laws (*les lois de permutation*) and mechanisms of development, aiming to generate hypotheses based on an observation of "various branches of the neo-Latin tree" (*ramifications diverses de l'arbre néo-latin*).¹⁵ As César Domínguez has recently demonstrated, however, Ampère is also noteworthy as the author of *La Grèce, Rome et Dante. Études littéraires d'après nature*, published in 1848,¹⁶ in which he puts forward a new brand of comparative analysis, which he calls *critique en voyage*; it involves comparing art with the reality that has inspired it and explaining art through the lenses of that reality ("comparer l'art et la réalité qui l'a inspiré et la expliquer par elle").¹⁷ The voyage the author took with Prosper Mérimée, archeologist Jehan de Witte, and Egyptologist Charles Lenormant into territories now belonging to Turkey recalls the sort

¹² John Park, "Comparative Literature and Hegel's Historical Thinking," *PMLA* 131(2) (2016): 439–448.

¹³ Doris Bachmann-Medick, "The Trans/National Study of Culture. A Translational Perspective," in *The Trans/National Study of Culture. A Translational Perspective*, ed. Doris Bachmann-Medick (Berlin/Boston, De Gruyter, 2016), 1–22; Natalie Melas, *All the Difference in the World. Postcoloniality and the Ends of Comparison* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 1–43.

¹⁴ Jean-Jacques Ampère, *Histoire de la littérature française au Moyen Âge comparée aux littératures étrangères* (Paris: Just Tessier, 1841).

¹⁵ Idem, *Histoire*, LVIII.

¹⁶ César Domínguez, "Comparative Literature and Decoloniality," in *Introducing Comparative Literature. New Trends and Applications*, ed. César Domínguez, Haun Saussy, and Darío Villanueva (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 45–46.

¹⁷ Jean-Jacques Ampère, "Préface," in *La Grèce, Rome et Dante. Études littéraires d'après nature* (Paris: Librairie Académique Didier et Cie, 1870), I.

of encounter with the other practiced by anthropology (fieldwork): they gained their knowledge from local informants and traced the divisions between East and West through reference to the tradition of Homer. The author turns the focus of French criticism to Dante's work, stressing the role of the landscape in creating a piece of literature.

Ampère's first book allows him to show the ambitions of the new discipline, which joined a refurbished philology in striving to develop its own methods and scientific credibility through the discourse of the natural sciences, inspired by Georges Cuvier's achievements in comparative anatomy.¹⁸ From this standpoint, he began treating language and literature as a kind of corpus upon which the anatomist's deft hand performs operations and analyses to extract conclusions of a universal nature. This stance was considerably reinforced by the century of theory, and remains vital to our day, if we take into account the comparative morphology of Franco Moretti.¹⁹ His second book, in turn, writes the discipline into the history of the colonial gaze and decolonisation, Occidentalism as a condition of Orientalism,²⁰ the formation of national languages, apprehending it (much like Walter D. Mignolo or Guy Jucquois²¹) as a new stage in the development of comparative cultural practices, one which is epistemological and ethical in nature. It also allows us to root comparative studies in the post-Napoleonic epoch that engendered the notion of *Weltliteratur*.²²

Of equal importance in researching the forgotten origins and contexts of the discipline would be a historical investigation into its foundations, beginning with the category of comparison²³ as it pertains to both mental

¹⁸ The inspirations were mentioned by Zygmunt Lempicki in 1928. See: "Vergleichende Literaturgeschichte," in *Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturgeschichte*, vol. 3 (Berlin: de Gruyter, ed. Paul Merker and Wolfgang Stammeler, 1928/1929), 440–442.

¹⁹ "This is what comparative literature could be, if it took itself seriously as *world literature*, on the one hand, and as *comparative morphology*, on the other." Franco Moretti, *Graphes, Maps, Trees. Abstract Models for Literary History* (London, New York: Verso, 2007), 90.

²⁰ Baidik Bhattacharya, "On Comparatism in the Colony: Archives, Methods, and the Project of *Weltliteratur*," *Critical Inquiry* 42 (2016): 677–711.

²¹ Walter D. Mignolo, "Canon and Corpus: An Alternative View of Comparative Literary Studies in Colonial Situations," *Dedalus: Revista Portuguesa de Literatura Comparada* 1 (1991): 219–243. Guy Jucquois, *Le Comparatisme*, vol. 1 (Louvain-la-Neuve: Peeters, 1989).

²² John Pizer, *The Idea of World Literature. History and Pedagogical Practice* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006).

²³ Rita Felski and Susan Stanford Friedman, ed., *Comparison: Theories, Approaches, Uses* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013); Olivier Remaud, Jean-Frederic Schaub, and Isabelle Thireau, ed. *Faires des sciences sociales. Comparer* (Paris: Éditions de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 2012).

and linguistic operations, as part of our grand inheritance from Greco-Roman rhetoric and poetics, in the context of literary and educational practices, and of European philosophy, particularly empiricism and the philosophy of consciousness, from Descartes to Husserl.²⁴ Locating comparative studies in the whole constellation of concepts related to *ars bene dicendi* (*synkrisis*, analogy, metaphor, *similitudo*, *comparatio*, parallel, contrast, counterpoint, *parathesis*, etc.) as well as Western metaphysics and its later discrediting,²⁵ highlights both the historical and geographical limitations of comparative studies, the scale of its effect, its ethical baggage, and the vast range of issues tied to the culture of the image, translation, and the intermingling with various spheres of knowledge: from linguistic research to cognitive science.²⁶ Through the use of various critical discourses, it allows us to show how the institutionalisation of comparative studies that occurred in the nineteenth century also took place in Poland.

1816 is considered a symbolic date in the creation of comparative literature. This year saw the re-edition of an anthology by François J.M. Noël and François de La Place, *Leçons françaises de littérature et de morale*,²⁷ gathering texts that were to serve a young person's intellectual development based on the authority of the *auctores* immortalised in script, furnished with the unexpected sub-heading "cours de littérature comparé." This fairly surprising tactic, combining comparative literature and upbringing, ceases to perplex when we consult the lectures of Ludwik Osiński, which join the writings of Euzebiusz Słowacki, Leon Borowski, and Kazimierz Brodzinski in presaging the development of Polish literary theory in the century to come, and inscribing the perspective of the "new" comparative studies into a language grounded in many

²⁴ Pheng Cheah, "The Material World of Comparison," *New Literary History* 42 (2009): 523–545.

²⁵ Jacques Derrida, "White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy," in *Margins of Philosophy*, transl. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 207–272.

²⁶ Natalie Melas, *All the Difference in the World: Postcoloniality and the Ends of Comparison* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007); Jacques Derrida, "Who or What Is Compared? The Concept of Comparative Literature and the Theoretical Problems of Translation," transl. E. Prenowitz, *Discourse* 30 (1-2) (2008): 22–53; W.J. Thomas Mitchell, "Beyond Comparison. Picture, Text, and Method," in *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representations* (London, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); idem, "Why Comparisons Are Odious," *World Literature Today* 70(2): 321–324; Catherine Fuchs, *La Comparaison et son expression en français* (Paris: Edition Ophrys, 2014); William Croft and D. Alan Cruse, ed., *Cognitive Linguistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

²⁷ François J. M. Noël and François de La Place, *Leçons françaises de littérature et de morale. Cours de littérature comparé* (Paris: Le Normant, 1816).

centuries of rhetorical and philosophical tradition (dominated by Aristotle, Longinus, Horace, and Quintilian).

In Osiński's work, in which all the above-mentioned authors appear as sources of inspiration, comparative studies serve to assemble the diverse fruits of a genius in both a chronological and a typological structure, to take them apart and pair them together, and for learning the art of writing, judging, and evaluating. Alongside experience, comparison "[...] illuminates and establishes a judgment," forges a "path of seasoned criticism," and is a kind of cognitive *attention* (as in Étienne Bonnet de Condillac: *double attention*, or Edmund Husserl: *Ichzuwendung, Aufmerksamkeit*²⁸), allowing us to discover "the hidden springs that set in motion the happy literary whole."²⁹ As such, Osiński says, it leads us toward "unerring causes," "before we should seek to garner praise from the novelty of a theory."³⁰ The rhetorical tradition that stands behind comparative studies supports his conviction that the capacity to "share thoughts and feelings" is fundamental to human speech and writing, and is deserving of the "most diligent study and proper cultivation."³¹

In other words, the author designates three intersecting structures for comparative studies: historical (displaying an artist's work), theoretical (describing how "one ought to proceed in creating such a work"), and critical (evaluative by nature).³² This last point in particular often forms an image of a well focused mind, of a reasonable use of the power of judgment; it ties Osiński's programmatic project with the ambitions of the French founding fathers of the discipline: "we need to become closely acquainted with those masters of the art, who employed exact study, analysis, and comparison to invent infallible truths, and to isolate the domain of the good writer and good scholar."³³ The language of the above quotations at times strikingly recalls the discourse of early French comparative studies, crafted in the spirit of Georges Cuvier

²⁸ M. l'Abbé de Condillac, *Traité des sensations* (Londres, Paris: de Bure, 1754); Idem, *La logique, ou les premiers développements de l'art de penser*, Paris: Houel, 1798; Edmund Husserl, *Erfahrung und Urteil. Untersuchungen zur Genealogie der Logik* (Prag: Academia/Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1939).

²⁹ Osiński, "Wykład (ciąg dalszy)," 3, 4, 9.

³⁰ Ibidem, 3.

³¹ Ibidem, 4.

³² Ludwik Osiński, "Wykład literatury porównawczej," in *Dzieła*, vol. 2 (Warszawa: nakładem wdowy po Autorze, 1861), 8.

³³ Ibidem, 1.

(Philarète Chasles, Jean-Jacques Ampère), and later adopted by Ferdinand Brunetière and Hutcheson Macaulay Posnett.³⁴

The fact that Osiński – a translator and theatre specialist – was well acquainted with these French models is indicated by his lectures, and also a later commentary by F. S. Dmochowski: “Osiński set about lecturing on literature following a method that was widespread at the time, namely in France.”³⁵ We owe not only this confirmation of the methodological origins of Osiński’s inspiration to Dmochowski; he also demonstrates the context in which Polish comparative literature was born, in a period when literature “emerged from its torpor”³⁶ and staggered under the burden of acknowledging the legacies of Greece, Rome, and France. The writers were stifling their own talent, he writes, to assimilate the most important works and the world of values in these works into the Polish language. As Dmochowski noted, it was Osiński’s lot to work in an “epoch of emulation and translation.”³⁷ Moreover, his twelve years of lectures on comparative literature (21.04.1818 – 12.03.1830) combined with practical exercises in style at the University of Warsaw, which Dmochowski attended in 1819, show that for Osiński, one of the most important perspectives on Polish literature in the context of other literatures – an inextricable part of “the noble art of writing and critiquing,”³⁸ – became the issue of translation:

I will not hesitate to claim that where the larger part of readers is acquainted with world literature through translation, people shy from making a show of their ignorance.³⁹

It is true that from today’s perspective we see that some of the theses in Osiński’s lectures adhere to the characteristic nineteenth-century tendency to overestimate the capabilities of the author’s national tradition (the Polish language as speech privileged by its similarity to the Classical languages of the Greeks and the Romans); yet many of his remarks and intuitions are confirmed by later findings in translation and comparative

³⁴ Hutcheson Macaulay Posnett, *Comparative Literature* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co, 1886); Ferdinand Brunetière, *L'Évolution des genres dans l'histoire de la littérature* (Paris: Hachette, 1890).

³⁵ Franciszek S. Dmochowski, “Życie, dzieła i epoka Ludwika Osińskiego,” in Ludwik Osiński, *Dzieła*, vol. 1 (Warszawa: nakładem wdowy po Autorze, 1861), XIV.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, II.

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁸ Ludwik Osiński, “Wykład,” 1.

³⁹ *Idem*, “Wykład (ciąg dalszy),” I.

studies (the translation as a creative act, enriching a language, popularising the best models, assimilating foreign riches into the local soil). We ought to add that Osiński himself is conscious of the dangers arising from ethnocentric absolutism, and expresses his disdain for “a nation’s arbitrary acceptance of a despotism of taste.”⁴⁰

For early Polish comparative studies, translation was not only an issue of observing the linguistic mechanisms of transfer and reception; it was also a necessity, a painful sign of a homelessness and the national community’s struggle to survive. A *translatio* of sorts, involving an attempt to situate Polish intellectual culture in conditions that would favour its development, was behind Mickiewicz’s project of lectures on Slavic literature. The parallels marked by the poet/scholar, the joining of paths of development in the multilingual traditions of the East and West, the tracing of influences and borrowings crucial to Polish literature and the great chains linking the literature of the Slavs, were accompanied by the need to make use of the new way of speaking about literature and literary history initiated in France. In his Lausanne lectures, Mickiewicz noted that,

the French have created comparative literature, and in this way they have broadened the field of vision by introducing a new object for comparison, that is, modern literature.⁴¹

Mickiewicz turned his attention to the innovation of this undertaking and its intellectual resources in his inaugural Paris lecture, where he indicated the functions and tasks of ancient and modern languages, reflecting Slavic speech in its dialectical diversity. He compares the discovery of this “unusual and unique” linguistic panorama with the possible “discovery of the anatomist” (*un anatomiste*), finding “an organic entity,” which, “travers[es] through all of the lower stages of life, preserv[ing] together within itself vegetable, animal and human forms of life, and each of them evolved to its fullness and wholeness.”⁴² He also points out his concrete circumstances and the historical context behind his academic duties at the Collège de France:

⁴⁰ Idem, “Wykład,” 2.

⁴¹ Adam Mickiewicz, “Pisma historyczne. Wykłady lozańskie,” in *Dziela*, Vol. 7 (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1999), 191.

⁴² Idem, “*First Lecture* in Collège de France 1840–1844,” transl. Bożena Shallcross, *Sarmatian Review* 2 (2009): 1476–80.

the French have created comparative literature, and in this way they have broadened the field of vision by introducing a new object for comparison, that is, modern literature.⁴³

Translation and transformation in an exile situation are at the heart of one of the most important founding texts of Polish comparative literature, and a crucial point of reference for its future; they also help us recognise that in our tradition, the history of the discipline was from the very outset marked by experience which was to turn a new page in postwar comparative studies in the twentieth century:

The history of comparative literature as a professional and academic discipline is a complex and, in some measure, a sombre one. It is made up of accidents of personal and social circumstances together with larger currents of a cognitive and historical nature [...].

It is no secret that Jewish scholars or scholars of Jewish origin have played an often preponderant role in the development of comparative literature as an academic-critical pursuit. [...] Driven into exile – a masterpiece of modern comparative literature, Auerbach's *Mimesis*, was written in Turkey by a refugee deprived overnight, of his livelihood, first language and library – the Jews (my own teachers) fortunate enough to reach North America, would find traditional departments of literature, departments of English first and foremost, barred to them. Thus much of what became comparative literature programmes or departments in American academe arose from marginalisation, from partial social and ethnic exclusion. [...] Comparative literature therefore carries within it both the virtuosities and the sadness of a certain exile, of an inward diaspora.⁴⁴

Osiński's comparative approach, infused with the spirit of Classicism, shows the discipline's initial institutionalisation and modernisation of practices familiar from the traditions of rhetoric, poetics, and philosophy, with its characteristic striving to reinforce ethical standards and a sense of good taste. From the very outset it also brings in the issue of translation, as well as an attempt to uncover the fundamental laws of the world of literature and culture. Mickiewicz's lecture on comparative studies is also splendidly rooted in this tradition, allowing us to foreground the situation of exile, the necessity of switching the codes, and the assimilation of foreign speech. This would go on to be characteristic of the later development of Polish comparative literature, which has a chequered history and has

⁴³ Ibidem.

⁴⁴ George Steiner, "What is Comparative Literature?," in *No Passion Spent. Essays 1978 – 1996* (London, Boston: Faber and Faber, 1996), 148.

passed some of its duties on to the sphere of literature (as in the case of Czesław Miłosz).⁴⁵

These two points of orientation – Osiński and Mickiewicz – make for an interesting juxtaposition with the beginnings of French comparative literature: on the one hand, they draw inspiration from its method and ambitions, and on the other, like other initiatives created in the territory of the old multilingual and multicultural Austro-Hungarian Empire, they anticipate experience, which was to become a key factor in its reemergence in the mid-twentieth century, in close conjunction with a matured literary theory.⁴⁶ The lesson of Mickiewicz and Osiński also helps us to understand why two Polish scholars, Anna Burzyńska and Michał Paweł Markowski, have regarded comparative studies, alongside poetics and philosophy, as a nineteenth-century tributary of the great river of twentieth-century theory.⁴⁷

Abstract

This article presents nineteenth-century harbingers of the development of Polish literary theory, found in the writings of the first Polish comparatists. It particularly brings into relief those themes that might be fruitful in terms of the latest tendencies in comparative studies: the turn toward the history of knowledge, the origins of the disciplinary tradition, and the development of translation studies.

Key words: early comparative literature; origins of literary theory; history of knowledge; translation; exile

⁴⁵ Czesław Miłosz, *The History of Polish Literature* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1969).

⁴⁶ Mihai I. Spariosu discloses the complex nature of the whole generational experience which encompasses both the American dream about the unlimited possibilities of creating a new “self,” and a deep, often unconscious fear smothered by a desperate struggle to maintain the continuity of life experience. He accomplishes this by first recalling his childhood spent in the multicultural areas of Timisoara – where he learnt the effects of Stalinist control over hearts and minds the hard way – and subsequently telling the history of his intellectual fascinations with the schools of criticism flourishing in America. Mihai Spariosu, “Exile, Play, and Intellectual Autobiography,” in *Building a Profession, Autobiographical Perspectives on the History of Comparative Literature in the United States*, ed. Lionel Gossman and Mihai Spariosu (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

⁴⁷ Michał Paweł Markowski, Anna Burzyńska, *Teorie literatury XX wieku* (Kraków: Znak, 2006), 19.

