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Practising the History of Literary Studies Within the Studies of Particular Authors

The choice of discussing the practising of literary studies here is meant to highlight certain forms of philological activity whose substance cannot be captured using the metaphor of “writing” with its connotations of construction. This metaphor relates to the deeply established belief in the full agency of authors with regard to the material they work with, consisting of the history of literary studies, and to the contention that that past forms a narrative, one written by people whose (self-) creating and rhetorical existence is real. In speaking of these practices, I would like to show and tentatively describe other relations between literary historians and the history of their discipline as well as other formulations of their subjectivity. Let us start by mentioning a few of those formulations. Firstly, the practitioner learns a certain skill, trains in it, and goes through the stage of *Bildung*, not yet functioning as a fully empowered creator of works in his discipline. Secondly, what is important in his perception of the history of literary studies turns out to include not only texts, but also encounters, remembered situations, conferences, interviews, and the influence of people who are important to the adept as representatives of that past – mentors, advisors, and professors, thus, everything that shapes the adept, comprising the sphere of practical conditions in which his or her scholarly work arises. Thirdly, practising the history of literary studies means being in a relationship, belonging to that history; it is one’s own chosen history, in which one participates, a history not only defined by us, but which also defines us and speaks about us. And ultimately, fourthly, the practice of the history of literary studies means placing those studies within certain situational contexts in which it is possible to gain a clearer idea of what part of the discipline’s past is practically indispensable or active, which part or version of the (hi)story should be closed and which opened, what

should be drawn into the present or future, and what (at least for now) omitted. Stanisław Brzozowski said that “everything that belongs to history in any sense is our concern”¹ and the history of literary studies remains entirely “our concern,” partly because it is revealed to a sphere of practices. In the course of specific analyses and interpretations, we return constantly to the situation of the choices that have been perceived in a certain way in the history of the discipline and we must ourselves take another look, often in a way completely different from previous efforts.

One area that provides a closer glimpse of what I have referred to in short as the practice of the history of literary studies is that which consists of studies of particular authors. Studies of Różewicz, studies of Haupt, studies of Dukaj, and others, represent narrowly defined branches of knowledge in which the adept must become thoroughly immersed before attempting to add a further contribution. The shape of these sub-disciplines has usually been determined by the work of a few individuals and their inspiring influence, as well as the effects of their charismatic personalities, important polemics, and conferences that have guided ways of reading. Studies of particular authors are co-created by avowed firebrands, some of whom have spent time in thrall to some scholarly “cult” or other; and when they speak of matters in the history of the sub-discipline they do so with engagement, feeling themselves to be personally responsible for its fate. In each phase of the development of such studies, problems that seemed already resolved are newly raised, questions that were tackled in the past are returned to, and the whole history of the branch becomes a subject of its active scholarly practice. Ways of practising the history of literature turn out, however, to vary depending on the state and stage they are in, a fact which I will attempt to illustrate using three examples of studies in the work of the three authors I have named.

Studies of Tadeusz Różewicz’s work have an unusually long history, compared with work on other contemporary writers. That came to pass because the author of *Anxiety* saw his work recognised as a classic of Polish poetry at the age of 35. For example, the model of poetic form he created was immediately perceived by versification specialists, analysed, and named the Różewicz type of poem or the type IV versification system. Attempts to reflect on the trauma of the Holocaust followed as a natural consequence, since the orientation of his work is centred around that

¹ S. Brzozowski, *Głosy wśród nocy. Studia nad przesileniem romantycznym kultury europejskiej* [Voices in the Night. Studies in European Culture’s Romantic Crisis], (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2007), 217.

experience. In the subfield of Różewicz studies, there was no shortage of questions about the artistic value of his works, and there was a time when their repetitive structure was noticed, what Janusz Sławiński years ago called the “rhetoric of helplessness.” The library of Różewiczology is extremely vast and contains not only successive canonical interpretations of his poetry, but also many studies of his plays, his translations, the Polish and international reception of his oeuvre. In recent years the relative deficit of scholarly interest in his prose has begun to be corrected. A new chapter in the history of Różewicz studies began in the 1990s with the poet’s return to writing and his publication of important verse collections, the play *Kartoteka rozrzucona* [The Card Index Scattered], and more. These events were simultaneous with the initial emergence of a new generation of scholars who read his work in the context of deconstruction, postmodernism, and many other contexts and schools of reading previously little-known in Poland. New canonical interpretations of his philosophy of literature appeared, including monographs by Andrzej Skrendo and Tomasz Kunz, and a multi-authored volume entitled *Przekraczanie granic* [Overstepping Boundaries]², testified to the importance of new methods for studying Różewicz’s work, manifestly displaying as it did, the birth of new methodologies and their application to analyses of contemporary Polish literature.

I have briefly mentioned the history of Różewicz studies in order to define more closely the forms of historical studies, as practised by contemporary scholars, which I wish to examine. These scholars face a highly specialised discipline, where familiarity with numerous scholarly works recognised as canonical is required. Each poem by Różewicz in fact boasts several influential, often mutually exclusive, interpretations, and the accretion of new works shows no sign of slackening. The subfield of Różewicz studies has its tireless patriarchs, such as Jacek Łukasiewicz, author of the recent book *TR*³, to name one; over many years, they have demonstrated through their commitment to reading his works that their scholarly relationship to these works can represent a lifelong, profoundly formative intellectual and existential adventure. Writing about that relationship can encompass the whole of a person’s scholarly trajectory; through it, a scholar can learn the philological craft, can mature, and encounter a large number of experienced scholars as well as other and then younger novices. The history of Różewiczology is thus

² *Przekraczanie granic. O twórczości Tadeusza Różewicza* [Overstepping Boundaries. On the Work of Tadeusz Różewicz], ed. W. Browarny, J. Orska, A. Poprawa, (Kraków: Universitas, 2007).

³ J. Łukasiewicz, *TR* (Kraków: Universitas, 2012).

not only constructed, but also undoubtedly practised; it possesses its own abundant group of creators and witnesses who remain active and it finds adepts whom it puts through sometimes very rigorous tests; for many scholars, it represents their chosen history of literary studies, one which belongs to them.

It is time we asked how it happens that the history of Różewicz studies has become a part of current scholarly practices. The writer himself offered us a good opportunity for such observation when he published several books towards the end of his life which presented serious problems for Różewiczology. Books such as *Kup kota w worku* [Buy a Cat in a Bag]⁴ had the effect of forcing scholars to reconsider many dilemmas thought to have been decided earlier, and the history of Różewicz studies opened up once again, transforming itself into an area with many “issues of the day” waiting to be dealt with and examined anew. It was particularly astonishing, at the same time, to see that even questions regarding the artistic value of texts from Różewicz’s pen were once again being raised. The quietly accepted certainty that all currently published works by him were excellent could finally be questioned and there was a partial return to the reservations formulated in the history of such studies by, for example, Błoński or Barańczak. In any case, today’s Różewicz studies have become too disengaged from debates on artistic value and need to appraise more carefully the quality of his works, once again mastering the evaluative faculty, as Henryk Markiewicz reminded us a few years ago with his analysis of the accomplishments of young scholars working on Prus’s *Lalka* [The Doll].⁵ In addition, issues relating to Różewicz and Jerzy Braun’s *Języki teatru* [Languages of the Theatre] that had previously been somewhat overlooked were enunciated at that time: in the book, as in the late works mentioned above, *ressentiment* is revealed to be the source of some of his views and statements. That fact could no longer be ignored, and one splendid result of the practical use of that knowledge from the history of Różewicz studies was Grzegorz Niziołek’s concept of reconstructing how the principle of *ressentiment* functioned in the writer’s works.⁶ We could also mention that the problem of the ridiculous and humorous aspects of Różewicz’s writings, of interest to Różewiczology only at certain moments in its development, requires some new, comprehensive interpretative approaches; the comedic aspect of his texts clearly contains a capacity, hitherto not yet explained, to shift

⁴ T. Różewicz, *Kup kota w worku (work in progress)* [Buy a Cat in a Bag (work in progress)], (Wrocław: Biuro Literackie, 2008).

⁵ H. Markiewicz, *Obrachunki lalkarskie* [Reckoning with *The Doll*], *Wielogłos 2* (2008).

⁶ G. Niziołek, *Fakt teatralny* [Theatrical Fact], *Wielogłos 1* (2013).

from critical and revelatory formulae to shadings indistinguishable from the widespread journalistic genres of parody and lampoon. In each of these three areas, the contemporary scholar of Różewicz's work practises the history of Różewicz studies in the sense that he or she not only introduces new currents into them, but above all, faced with specific textual situations, must inventively manage problems solved at earlier points in the discipline's history, yet which continue to present themselves to exegetes in the midst of their scholarly practices.

The example of Różewicz studies appears to be fairly similar to many well-developed studies of authors from earlier eras. We see a strikingly different case in studies of the emigré author Zygmunt Haupt. Though Haupt belongs to the generation before Różewicz, studies of his work constitute a relatively new field. They truly came into being in the second half of the 1990s with the first monograph on the subject, by Aleksander Madyda⁷, and the first Polish edition of the only book published in Haupt's lifetime, *Pierścień z papieru* [Paper Ring].⁸ To date, the history of Hauptology is composed of books and articles which were also tasked with ascertaining the artistic and interpretative value of Haupt's writings, as a result of which it was possible to carefully and gradually begin to accord him the status of a writer whose work merits the creation of its own sub-discipline. Today it can be said that the author of *Cyrk* [Circus] is one of the most zealously studied Polish authors of the twentieth century, and his works have shown the potential to reshape our thinking about the experience of modernity recorded by Polish literature. That was largely due to the work of Madyda, including his second monograph⁹, which contained important biographical and bibliographical findings, as well as a thorough description of the works by Haupt kept in the library at Stanford. Shortly after that publication, Andrzej Niewiadomski's comprehensive monograph was published, in which he discusses the principles governing the edition of Haupt's texts and proposes an interpretation of the experience of modernity in Haupt's prose.¹⁰ That book was preceded by a series of comparative studies (Jerzy Borowczyk), essays on Haupt's artistic philosophy (Ewa Wiegandt), analyses of the basic

⁷ A. Madyda, *Zygmunt Haupt. Życie i twórczość literacka* [Zygmunt Haupt. His Life and Work] (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 1998).

⁸ Z. Haupt, *Pierścień z papieru* [Paper Ring] (Czarne: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 1999).

⁹ A. Madyda, *Haupt. Monografia* [Haupt. A Monograph] (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2012).

¹⁰ A. Niewiadomski, *Jeden jest zawsze ostrzem. Inna nowoczesność Zygmunta Haupta* [One Always Is a Sharp Edge. Zygmunt Haupt's Other Modernity] (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marie Curie-Skłodowskiej, 2015).

problems of his work (melancholy, as described by Jagoda Wierzejska), and works which examined Haupt's writings in the context of various methodologies (such as Stanisław Zająć's deconstructionist reading). Within the sphere of institutional activity, the plan for a conference of Haupt specialists this year did not come to fruition, but the very fact that such a plan existed testifies to the fact that a circle of scholars is engaging with the history of Haupt studies, and they are increasingly able to communicate productively and inspire each other, driven towards new encounters that will expand and deepen their ability to practise the history of Hauptology. In contrast to Różewicz studies, Haupt studies have not yet established a set of dilemmas that chronically recur throughout the field's history; those still need to be formulated, since this history remains in its initial phase.

Readers may investigate how the brief history of Haupt studies is practised through the example of a recent work by Tomasz Gruszczyk.¹¹ Gruszczyk is well aware that Haupt studies represent a sub-discipline offering a chance to hone one's philological skills, a chance to develop as a scholar; and he has demonstrated this awareness by making Hauptology part of his first serious scholarly work. He treats his encounters with the creators of its short history as a matter of profound interest, and there is no doubt that this is a history he has chosen, desiring as he does to work out an innovative theory of the literary work based on his participation in that discussion. He focuses, however, on a series of questions that have provided an impulse to the history of Hauptology's forward movement, referring to the textological discoveries made by Madyda, the mannerist conception of Haupt's modernity developed by Niewiadomski, Wierzejska's interpretation of the Haupt oeuvre's melancholic foundation, and others. Practising the history of Hauptology leads him toward a new understanding of genre, as he proposes introducing into the analysis of Haupt's short stories a newly invented genre he suggests calling a "guidebook to reminiscences." Apart from the problem of melancholy, he proposes examining certain innovative poetics of the fragment; he seeks to supplement previous notions of subjectivity with a hermeneutic subjectivity. In all of these efforts, there are crucially relevant references to two other histories of studies of particular authors. Gruszczyk, while practising the history of Hauptology, examines these other histories in order to find something in them that could become part of the history

¹¹ T. Gruszczyk, *Ocalające zatracenie. Rozważania o doświadczeniu, pamięci i pragnieniu w twórczości Zygmunta Haupta, Stanisława Czyczka i Krzysztofa Vargi* [Saving Destruction. Reflections on Experience, Memory, and Desire in the Work of Zygmunta Haupt, Stanisław Czycz and Krzysztof Varga], (PhD diss., Uniwersytet Śląski, 2016).

of Haupt studies he has chosen, expanding the possibilities for its further practice.

We thus arrive at the studies of the work of Jacek Dukaj. They present a most singular case, since this living author, extremely active literarily and attaining increasingly substantial recognition, has only recently attracted acute interest among literary scholars. Perhaps his background in the world of science fiction, usually kept separate (and keeping its own distance) from the literary mainstream, presented an obstacle to such interest. Or it may be that his high artistic rank, eccentric aesthetic idiosyncrasy, and the somewhat radical variability of his novelistic poetics has discouraged scholars from too quickly approaching and studying his works in the context of academic analysis. In any case, until recently the literarily outstanding work of Dukaj was the subject of an inappreciable number of scholarly articles, a handful of works of literary criticism, and a great many testimonies of readerly esteem. The first monographic study of his prose, Piotr Gorliński-Kucik's book,¹² was therefore written with a sharp awareness that the history of Dukaj studies had yet to be begun. From Gorliński's statement of his intent, we may gather that he realises the enormous potential such studies would offer for practising literary history. As viewed through the prism of his work, the history of those studies exists, for now, in three forms. Firstly, there is history as imagination, the potential for practical participation in a kind of history of philological thought. Secondly, in Gorliński-Kucik's book we find Dukajology deeply rooted in two histories of studies in particular authors endowed with an atypically rich history: Gombrowicz studies and Lem studies. In his monograph, the author shows how meaningful and interesting the dialogue of Dukaj studies with the history of studies in the reception of those two earlier novelists' works promises to be, as the new field simultaneously learns to build and practise its own history. Thirdly, the book proposes an interesting, far from obvious, set of fundamental questions and problems of Dukajology: the problems of techgnosis, uchronia, and post-humanism. He thereby establishes a distinct point of reference for his successors in practising the history of Dukaj studies.

For a more multifaceted image of practising the history of literary studies within studies of particular authors, it would be necessary to discuss fields of study whose history is practised with decreasing frequency or has not yet been launched. The examples of studies in the work of Różewicz,

¹² Gorliński-Kucik, *TechGnoza, uchronia, science fiction. Proza Jacka Dukaja* [TechGnosis, hideouts, *science fiction*. The Prose of Jacek Dukaj], (PhD diss., Uniwersytet Śląski, 2016).

Haupt, and Dukaj at least allow us, I believe, to defend the thesis that their history is not simply the product of the writing of philologist demiurges, but also constitutes a sphere of varied and multitudinous practices.

Translated by *Timothy Williams*

Abstract

This article discusses ways of practising literary history in three selected examples of studies in the works of particular authors (studies in Różewicz, Haupt, and Dukaj). The author analyses practices of literary history in four dimensions: the acquisition of certain abilities by the practitioner, encounters with acknowledged masters of scholarship in literary history, the recognition of a certain literary history as one's own, and the actualisation of various problems from earlier stages in that literary history, in particular interpretative contexts.

Key words: theory of practices; theory of literary history; author studies