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TOWARDS INTEGRAL COMPARATIVE STUDIES¹

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Abstract: Bogusław Bakula, TOWARDS INTEGRAL COMPARATIVE STUDIES. "PORÓWNANIA" 1, 2004, pp. 5-11 ISSN 1733-165X. The article opens the first issue of the comparative studies journal of "PORÓWNANIA" and constitutes the first programme declaration which pertains both to the content of the journal as well as the methods of comparative studies which are promoted in this journal. These studies originate from comparative literature but reach the area of interdisciplinarity which includes linguistics, history, anthropology and cultural studies and their derivatives. This research style, which involves true interdisciplinarity within the humanities which is not afraid of moving into philosophy and natural sciences, is called integral comparative studies by the author.

Abstrakt: Bogusław Bakula, W STRONĘ KOMPARATYSTYKI INTEGRALNEJ. „PORÓWNANIA” 1, 2004, s. 5-11. ISSN 1733-165X. Artykuł otwiera pierwszy numer komparatystycznego czasopisma „PORÓWNANIA” i stanowi pierwszą deklarację programową, dotyczącą zarówno treści wydawanego periodyku jak również metody badań porównawczych, które będą lansowane w periodyku. Badania te, wychodząc od literatury porównawczej docierają do obszaru interdyscyplinarności, w obrębie której znajdują się inne nauki humanistyczne, a zwłaszcza językoznawstwo, historia, antropologia i kulturologia oraz ich pochodne. Ten styl badań, obejmujący żywą interdyscyplinarność w obrębie nauk humanistycznych i nieobawiającą się wychodzić również w stronę filozofii oraz przyrodoznawstwa, autor nazywa komparatystyką integralną.

Vantage point

The most fruitful attitude towards the understanding of comparative literary studies are those whose main aim is to reach the internal and external relations that shape the identity of foreign literatures and compare the processes, exchanges and influences that take place there with the processes that form both Polish culture and literature. It allows us to see not only our own, as opposed to the other on the level of general ideas, artistic doctrines, and conventions,

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but also to acutely notice that which is different, distinct, non-transferable, or subject to undeniable influences, in terms of the researcher's own language, identity, cultural background, and the world they represent³. The identity of the object of study and the cultural and methodological identity of the researcher are matters frequently separate. However, they do coincide at the level of comparative studies, sometimes uncovering surprising problems hitherto not stated in such a sharp manner. "One of the tasks of contemporary comparative studies is the search for the answer to questions on cultural identity that keep reappearing. (...) The 20th century discoveries in the fields of anthropology, sociology and linguistics reviewed the notion of identity a long time ago, which ceased to be attached to its subject matter. It is known today that the question "who am I" forces one to "go beyond oneself", to subject oneself to comparative procedures. Thus, one can put forward such a thesis that the search for identity is tantamount to the search for one's own distinctness" – states Maria Delaperrière⁴.

Such a perspective does not mean limiting comparative studies to the area of the dialogue of national literatures or autogenic methodology. It seems that it is worth maintaining the traditional understanding of comparative studies as, not merely a separate discipline (though it is difficult to isolate research methods that serve only this discipline) but also an attitude of openness towards the different by means of one's own cultural discourse, including nonliterary areas of culture.

Comparative studies as history and metatheory

"Thus the dilemma of the comparativist is not whether 'to compare' (or 'to be') but what their own vantage point is, which is in fact a metaquestion (how to be a *comparatist*, always being *somebody*). I claim that it implies: 1. a constant search for the subject matter of the research; an area for confrontation on whose horizon there looms a general regulatory idea typical for the particular times, 2. reflection on the theories that condition comparative studies (comparative studies as a metatheory)" – writes Piotr Roguski⁵. A similar position is taken up by Edward Kasperski, who also is an advocate of treating comparative studies as a metatheory

³ Here I approximate the declaration of Ewa Ichnatowicz: "I am in favour of such an understanding of comparative studies that assumes that the aim of research is investigating the identity of literature in the national scope, and not universal or general literature. Striving for an identification of the identity of national literature, we distinguish different barriers, against which researchers from different national circles crash, and as a result have different aims and points of view". Cf. *Badania porównawcze. Dyskusja o metodzie*. Radziejowice 6-8 Feb 1997. Red. Alina Nowicka-Jeżowa. Wydział Polonistyki Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Vol. II, Izabelin 1998, p. 41.

⁴ Cf. *Badania porównawcze. Dyskusja o metodzie*, op. cit., p. 75.

⁵ Cf. *Badania porównawcze*, op. cit., p. 126.

or in a wider sense, as metascience. He claims that: “comparative studies – as necessary knowledge and metascience – are crucial for this field”⁶. He goes on by adding: “I think that comparative studies are mainly (...) an interpretation and reinterpretation of the accumulated knowledge on literature. (...) He assumes the role of a reviewer of the accumulated knowledge. He describes the relations between the particular segments of subject knowledge which frequently exist and function separately, in isolation from one another. He formulates the *tertium comparationis* for them. On this basis he establishes the suitabilities and the differences between the phenomena from the subject matter (empirical matter)”⁷. Kasperski’s opinion is filled with skepticism towards the possibilities of phenomenological experience in comparative studies (which is, first and foremost, a critique of the literary and literary studies awareness) but also the opinion derived from Robert Jauss that the history of literature is in fact a history of reception⁸.

The metascientific character of comparative studies is not a commonly accepted option, though many researchers, including Dionýz Ďurišin himself, thought that such awareness is crucial for comparative studies. What is more, it constitutes an important axiological factor⁹. The work of a comparatist frequently requires taking a stand on different often conflicting value systems that are present in the area of the interliterary process and the realm of the reception of this process on a scientific level, in the reviews, in reception research outside the reviews and in strictly literary knowledge. It so happened that axiological systems constituted the basis for the conception and the actions that absolutised the category of national literature (awareness or self-knowledge). Thus, they could lead towards nationalistic and totalitarian ideas. This experience results in the caution on the part of the comparatist in the process of assessment of literary notions that would emphasise in any sense the category of nationality (e.g. due to ideological reasons). It does not imply an end to axiology. On the contrary, it is a basis for a more acute sensitivity towards this problem.

The status of comparative studies as a metatheory requires a precise definition of its relationship with other fields that are also equipped with a number of their own theories. Alina Nowicka-Jezowa claims that: “The comparative dialogue should not (...) substitute for

⁶ Ibidem, p. 36.

⁷ Ibidem, p. 35.

⁸ Cf. E. Kasperski, *O teorii komparatystyki*, in: *Literatura. Teoria. Metodologia* Red. Danuta Ulicka. Uniwersytet Warszawski, Wydawnictwo Dydaktyczne Wydziału Polonistyki. Materiały do ćwiczeń. 6 seria, Warszawa 1998, p. 331-356.

⁹ Cf. i.a.: D. Ďurišin, *Čo je svetová literatūra?* Bratislava 1992; Idem, *Teória meziliterárneho procesu I* Bratislava 1995.

research in literature, philosophy, art, or history, but rather confront the research findings maintaining the methodological identity of the discipline and enrich contextual horizons”¹⁰.

Comparative literary studies would then not only be a metascience or a metatheory, but studies in the form of a binder that are carried out on the boundaries of several different paradigms, and that are sensitive to cultural synapses (links between patterns, points of strong interference). These should be studies that respect the integrity of the fields from which they derive inspiration but, simultaneously, strive for contextual explanation and, nevertheless, are located in literature, i.e. within the realm of artistic conclusions, ideas and aesthetics. As I myself see it, comparative studies should have a well-developed *aggregate instrumentarium* that would allow the creation of a whole from heterogenic elements. It is the knowledge of literary and cultural metamorphism¹¹ that needs tools which gather heterogenic aspects into an image characterized by systemic intuition.

Treating comparative studies as a metascience means that the *contacts* and *metastases* (transfers) on the level of theory influences cannot be omitted. As a result, in the area of comparative literary studies we also deal with *comparing theories* (types of theoretical and critical awareness, etc.). This type of activity is becoming one of the main aims of contemporary comparative studies. It is difficult to agree fully with such a position. However, the fact that the described field consists in contrasting literary theories, particularly the ones from comparative studies, is authorised. However, it leads us in the direction of methodology and not the primary creation and reception process of texts or larger, non-linguistic history and literary phenomena.

Towards integral comparative studies

Integral does not mean separate, but rather functioning by the principle of differentiation and focus. It also assumes the idea of *methodological pluralism*. I would venture to say that it is not the purity of method but the achieved effect that is of greater importance. It is not possible to develop a universal model for comparative studies, but there is a possibility of ordering the subjects and the scope of research of particular comparative activities. D. Ďurišin worked his entire life on these issues and presented a map of subject matters and procedures in a series that were not commented on particularly well in Poland. Ďurišin worked within the formalist and then structuralist frameworks, thus his theory is only viewed as one of many.

¹⁰ *Badania porównawcze*, op. cit., p. 52.

¹¹ This is a notion taken from geology. It means secondary rock transformations that take place due to high temperature and pressure. When it comes to interliterary processes, metamorphism denotes the process of transforming artistic ideologies, conventions, motives, topoi, directions and trends under the influence of local, historical, ideological, mental and social features.

The general assumptions of the concept of comparative studies presented here derive from the fact that the author works, first and foremost, within Polish studies and researches some aspects of Polish culture of the 20th century. He thus views comparative studies as an auxiliary field for the studies on the history of Polish literature and its links with processes that take place in the cultures of the region (Central Europe, Western Europe, Europe). Dreams of universal or world literature are kept aside.

There is a lot of space between positivistic objectivism and postmodern relativism particularly for moderation and scientific pragmatism. This refers to the methodological applications which take into consideration a certain eclecticism and are even disposed to adopt other procedures together with their results in order to improve their own outcome. The contemporary loosening of the neopositivistic rigour that stems from a lack of faith in achieving an objective result of a study, that allows nonscientific styles and forms of expression, should not go hand in hand with the dispersion of the subject matter, a rejection of the precise teleology of the research and the methodological framework that ensures controllability of the procedure. I still find the traditional characteristics of the scientific procedure basic and valid. These are thesis statement, adoption of particular research procedures and redetermination of the subject matter in the process of its implementation – I still find them basic and valid. Consequently I declare myself to be, on the one hand, an advocate of methodological pluralism in contemporary comparative studies, and on the other hand, I support the principle of using traditional research bases.

An additional assumption presented here pertains to the very aim of comparative studies, which is to raise cultural and ethnic identity awareness, and then relate the processes that appear in this realm to other parallel processes that are of equal value but of different nature. In other words, it is the reconstruction of national discourse by means of relating it to historically parallel discourses, trends, styles, ideologies and individual artistic conclusions.

This very general description will serve as a basis for formulating convictions about comparative studies. I think that, though greatly simplified, they will allow us to relate later on to the model that I deem to be the most efficient and needed in today's social and economic conditions. Research and educational activity at universities preparing directly for carrying out tasks in the economy cannot disregard the requirements that are imposed by the liberal model of economics that maximizes revenue by means of linking elements and entities hitherto not linked.

1. Each national literature is an integral living component of universal literature. Thus, it is indivisible. Although it is governed by historical and local values, the processes that take

place within its realm incline us to consider it as a whole due to the changes of epochs, competing literary trends and artistic ideologies. These phenomena happen more or less in the same manner in the Euro-Atlantic zone, which at times allows us to speak more easily about universal than national literature (it so happens that the purely linguistic criteria fail, e.g. in the case of the Balkan writers). The conviction about the indivisibility of literature leads, on the one hand, to the thesis about the significance of universal literature and, on the other hand, while not eliminating the national component, it weakens the ideological absolutism that used to contribute to plenty of the misfortunes both within and outside of literature.

2. Recognition of the characteristics of national literatures cannot be done objectively and in a valid way by excluding them from contacts and confrontations with other literatures. Hence, the aim of a comparative study will be to determine and examine the various relationships that are present between the literatures that are different linguistically though they respect the assumptions as to the integrity and indivisibility of the same phenomenon. The years after the Second World War are characterized by the “forgetting” of this issue observed in Polish studies. This was a result of several, seemingly contradictory, causes such as the feeling of threat to the national integrity and disconnecting literature from genetic research and directing it towards autonomism and structural universalism. Both directions eventually contributed to saving the essence of literary studies from the communist ideology, particularly the vulgar sociological and Sovietocentric versions. Yet, they distanced it from the sources of culture.

3. Comparative studies do not only include “influence” research but also modelling of the historical and literary process. This idea greatly expands the interests of comparative literary studies and points its attention towards the existing historical and social codes between which there are multiple relations that shape the history and literary process. According to Douwe Fokkema, a postmodernist and comparatist, when we speak about a social code it is all about the content: “the code designated by a group of writers that frequently belong to different generations, movement or trend that has been assumed by its contemporary and future readers”¹². Historical and social codes function not only in particular national spaces. Of greater interest is their existence in regional and, simultaneously, in supranational spaces such as the area of Central and Eastern Europe, the Balkans, etc. This makes way for an important conviction that neighbouring elements, developing side by side to the Polish element, are of the greatest interest for the comparatist. This does not seem to be very

¹² D. Fokkema, *Historia literatury, modernizm, postmodernizm*. Transl. by Halina Janaszek-Ivaničková. Instytut Kultury, Warszawa 1994, p. 18.

popular among the Polish comparativists. It is so obvious in, e.g. Balkan studies, that it has developed special significance these days. However, I am of the opinion that it is not everything. It regulates pragmatically the scope of comparative research in a natural way, not encasing it in this perspective at all. Unfortunately, the abundance of neighbouring cultures and literatures has not been sufficiently utilised in Polish comparative practice. It seems that the Polish critique and philology is mainly acquainted with the achievements of American, French, English, or even German literature and literary studies rather than those of The Czech Republic or the Ukraine (not to mention Belarus or Lithuania). Whereas it is the neighbours with whom one maintains a relationship, though not necessarily always an open one. Poland is surrounded by an enormous and incredibly interesting cultural region. It is explored much better by historians of different specialties, much less by scholars from literary, comparative and culture studies. Hence the inevitable necessity to draw from their research.

4. Comparative studies is a field that needs to refer to the intercultural factor and interdisciplinarity. These two claims constitute the two wings of modern comparative literary studies that does not avoid confrontation with other non-literary elements of culture and other scientific fields, such as history, political science or sociology. Jerzy Such, the well-known methodologist, in his article *Rola badań interdyscyplinarnych we współczesnej nauce* [Significance of contemporary investigations in science] claims that “Even the greatness of the scholar, their caliber I should say, can today be measured by the vastness of the perspective of their research that is of the scope of interdisciplinary research that they undertake”¹³. Then he puts forward a question: “What (...) else is there then for the scholar who does not want to be a specialist in a narrow fragmentary area of science? There is interdisciplinary research”¹⁴. The conclusion to the above considerations is a sentence which I fully adhere to: “There come times in which mere craftsman of science, some kind of scientific workmen will be narrow specialists in their fields who do not venture outside their own narrow discipline. All the rest, the real researchers, will undertake interdisciplinary studies, the wider the scope the better”¹⁵.

5. The conviction of the necessity to use an intercultural and interdisciplinary perspective forms the basis for the project of *integral comparative studies*¹⁶. I see this as an open field, possibly eclectic. It derives inspiration and perhaps its methodological attractiveness from the

¹³ J. Such, *Rola badań interdyscyplinarnych we współczesnej nauce*. ”Humaniora”. Biuletyn. Poznań 1998, no. 8, p. 34.

¹⁴ J. Such., op. cit.

¹⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁶ It remains ”compatible” with the antireductionist project of comparative studies promoted by E. Kasperski. See footnote 1.

opening onto various influences. According to my outlook, integral comparative studies is a basic instrument not so much of the integration but of the dynamic investigation of complex cultural problems of the nations in Central and Eastern Europe in order to derive a deeper understanding of the significance of national culture in its internal structure and external relations. In our part of Europe, the central and eastern part, thus also in Poland, two positions clash. The first one aims to emphasise the importance of national traditions and is reluctant to dissolve the newly rebuilt links. From time to time it perkily waves the national flags, but mostly it boils down to a certain *cultural autism*. It debates only with itself in this realm, which is small but cosy, for which it builds a closed circuit. It is a typical attitude within the trend of national philology, which emphasizes the continuity, indivisibility, permanence and rank of literary texts that are created in the language of the ethnic group that usually is predominant. Another attitude could be defined as *cultural nomadism* which is characterized by sensibility to broad inspirations, or even some sort of “plagiarism” which means an open attitude towards external inspirations. Moreover, it includes a propensity to internalize one’s own national issue. It is change-oriented, inclined towards constant revaluation and easily captures and propagates novelties in a constant hunger for the new. Another feature is its presentism, which is the identification only with the current literary process. Both attitudes are present in every culture, though the proportion between them varies. The dialogue in which they engage explicitly defines the atmosphere and directions of evolution in the Polish, Czech, Russian or Ukrainian cultures. The relation between them is not equal. Autistic attitudes prevail in the East, i.e. Russia, Ukraine, Slovakia, or even Poland. Cultural nomadism, sometimes understood as yielding to foreign trends or models, was viewed as a threat to identity or an indication of, e.g. American expansionism. Particularly important and painful were the relations between cultural autism and nomadism in the Balkans. The two tendencies are being equalized in the Czech Republic. Simultaneously, the Czechs, as we know, are a nation that is most abstemious when it comes to taking on the novelties of MacDonaldisation or globalisation. The process of confrontation of autism and nomadism is perceived not only in the literary realm or, wider, in the cultural realm. Its course and dynamics can be a serious argument in debates and social and political conflicts that clash in post-communist Europe. It is also an important experience of the contact between hitherto closed societies with Euroatlantic globalism, liberal economy, and freedom of movement of workers, capital and cultural values.

Integral comparative studies assume methodological pluralism. I would even say that purity of method is less important than the obtained result. Nowadays it seems impossible to

develop a universal model for comparative studies. It might be that it is not needed at all. One should rather strive for exact precision and consistency, and also complementary use of different methods, or even the theoretical models of comparative studies. Surely, sooner or later, there will arise a need to isolate and develop common ground on which there could exist different complementary models of science. Therefore, the issue of their adaptability is equally important to the comparativist as will be the issue of the efficiency of application that results from the effectiveness of previously applied procedures. Thus viewed, integral comparative studies also provide an answer to questions posed to the world of postmodern culture and effects of globalisation. It becomes a necessity. It follows the deepening dialogue between different areas of culture with economic, political and legislative factors.

Integral comparative studies and education

Integral comparative studies design various directions for research that link national literature with other literatures (works, ideas, topoi, directions, trends) and other areas of the humanities: history, sociology, political science, law and even economics and ecology, on the common ground of reconstructing discourses.

In today's world there is a diminishing need for specialist in narrow fields, let's say, historians of Serbian literature or experts on one of the Montenegro dialects. Even the school curricula strive for the integration of different areas, which results in the broadening of the educational spectrum. Universities in Poland still remain quite oblivious to this process. However, both the humanities and natural sciences must create new common grounds or new fields of science that reflect the changing reality. There is an obvious conclusion for philology – it does not make sense to teach narrow specialties; one has to teach as broad as one can, especially in terms of principles and methods of communication, foreign languages and complementarity of fields of science. I foresee that in 20 years time the currently observed proportions in university education will change. The history of literature that dominates in Polish philology (as well as all other philologies) will have to yield place to, i.a. pragmalinguistics, theory of communication in various cyber- and socio- spaces and interdisciplinary comparative studies. It is not naïve futurology, but a conclusion made upon reading the curricula from leading world universities available for perusal on the Internet.

This process requires new specialists who cannot be trained by today's, frequently distinguished, academia. The present university structures with their historicism that guarantee the stability and solemnity of knowledge constitute a resistant aspect to this model which cannot be broken even by the most attractive didactic ideas.

The educational tasks of the humanists whose responsibility is to prepare the Polish youth to compete in a Europe that has been opened for them, requires a transformation of structures, tradition or even customs. It is a requisite of the intercultural future of the humanistic reality (the processes that take place between cultures and by means of mutual influence) that is superimposed on interculturalism (processes brought about exclusively by culture-internal phenomena). This will shape a transcultural process that is impossible to foresee in detail. Those who can manage to understand its functioning and be prepared to utilize its lift force will succeed in the reality of the future. The ability of graduates of, generally speaking, Slavic philology to peacefully enter the different ethnic areas, their ability to engage in dialogue with different cultural manifestations and detect latent characteristics¹⁷, their ease of communication, and their background in political science and ethnography will determine professional success. Graduates that are prepared as described above are, of course, a dream for a comparativist, but also have an ideal personality from the point of view of marketing theory. Consequently, interdisciplinarity is an imminent process.

Interdisciplinarity in education

Interdisciplinarity is directly linked with territorial studies that are being popularized also in Poland. In my opinion it is another solution for Polish Balkan, Slavic, Western Slavic and eastern culture studies. There is a growing need for building science and education on the basis of the experience of Central and Eastern Europe. Territorial studies are not *sensu stricto* philological studies. They combine the intracultural with the transcultural and interculturalism with interdisciplinarity. They train specialists that are vested with knowledge outside of philology. They allow us to implement crucial elements of territorial education such as the history of thought, economics, ethnography, law and political science. The idea that integral comparative studies should refer to territorial studies is certainly not new. In fact, it has been carried out by research institutes that are not didactic in nature. Today, we claim that we should go one step further. In this view, I clearly see limitations to the subject matter of comparative studies as a science that is seemingly about everything, which is an idea proposed carelessly by some Polish and foreign researchers. Each literature due to a particular historical conditioning cannot be encased in the realm of artistic ideas only. In order to grasp the historical and artistic aspect of the literary work correctly, one needs to go beyond its

¹⁷ Latensification means the “increase of sensitivity of films through irradiation of the image by a very weak light”. *Słownik języka polskiego*. Ed. by prof. dr hab. M. Szymczak. Vol. II, L-P, p. 14.

structure to a certain extent and account for it within the systems of value that pertain to fields outside the art of words and sciences that deal with this art.

The inclusion of proposals that refer to territorial studies is a result of market needs and today's view of the future value of education. Surely there will be a need for both philology specialists that will serve a particular purpose in tourism, translation and trade, but also for specialists with a general orientation in the whole region, vested with knowledge of at least two languages from the region, educated not only philologically but who also are knowledgeable in the basics of history, political problems, law, and marketing. The so called "pure" philologist of Polish, Serbian or Russian will most surely fight a losing battle on the labour market of Central European contacts or even wider with a lawyer or economist if the latter supplements their education with elements of philology (journalism, culture studies, ethnography).

The basic question – from where to get specialists that would be able to educate students with the above described profile – is a matter of a more general problem. It is the current structure of universities that does not allow mobility of staff or the creation of new fields of study. There are only optional specialties. This, however, is not enough. The new structure would undoubtedly force many university lecturers to change their specialties or supplement them with new elements. This is a delicate matter and a revolution is not to be expected. The costs of such a revolution are difficult to predict. So are the costs of its neglect.

The interdisciplinarity of comparative studies results from the inevitable consequences of cooperation between different areas of science or even the blurring of the boundaries between them in the postmodern era. However, this refers more to the artistic areas. Undoubtedly the marriage of Polish and comparative studies is, on the one hand, obvious, but on the other hand, it calls forth questions about the future of this discipline. Today, it seems, it is only of a philological and historical nature. But what and which skills will be required in the future? The fact that radical changes are taking place in the economy and culture, that economy, politics, literature, and music interpenetrate, that new forms of social activity, frequently in contrast with the strong ethnic tradition and national canons, arise, should be somehow commented on by interdisciplinary studies. Though by many specialists deemed to be risky, this attitude is a chance for success that has up till now been impeded by traditional Slavic philology even if based on the best of models.