

# What Can Experience Save Poetics From?

Preliminary Investigations

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*Experience is the outcome of work; immediate experience is the phantasmagoria of the idler.*

Walter Benjamin<sup>1</sup>

Kantian philosophical anthropology is based on four questions: “What can I know?” “What should I do?” “What can I expect?” and “What is man?” The first, epistemological, question asks about the subject, the conditions and boundaries of knowledge; the second, ethical, invites us to a reflexion on the tasks and duties of the human being; the third, teleological, commands us to think about the purpose and the end of life, but also allows us to consider what lies beyond the limitations and contingencies of existence, to contemplate what we might be able to hope for. The final, ontological, one poses the question of the essence and understanding of existence, who man is, and all related questions the shaping of subjectivity and the ways it exists in the world. This is not the time or place to turn to the answers that the philosopher from Königsberg gave to such questions. A return toward them in the first issue of this journal, whose guiding theme is “Poetics after poetics,” could be unsettling for participants and exponents of later turns in the humanities which decisively pronounced judgment and imposed their death sentence on the legacy of German idealism, of which Kant was the father and founder. I mention them because as questions, they have lost none of their power; since they remain vital and, in some circles, still keep humanists awake at night, bringing them to bear on the study of poetics seems justified. Above all, I would like to use them as the heuristics in my argument, showing that every theory, whether strong or weak, must at least come into contact with them. Here, I understand heuristics simply as a compositional axis, a modal frame of argument. It will also, however, be necessary to use its more widely understood definition of knowledge whose goal is to search for and test optimal methods and rules for finding the answers to questions or problems posed. In my text, I would like to tentatively examine methods and rules for setting problems and finding answers in selected texts of Polish scholars of literature who have addressed post-poetics in their reflections, and to answer the question contained in the title of my article.

<sup>1</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Cambridge 1999, p. 801.

## Poetics post-what?

Scholarly thought in literary studies has had to come to terms in the past several decades with the philosophical sources of the loss of the metaphysical security that had been provided by the “grand narratives.” These sources have been described by, among others, Richard Sheppard, who in his work entitled “The Problematics of European Modernism,” an attempt at a synthesis of European modernism (understood as the cultural current comprising literature and art from the turn of the twentieth century through the 1950s) noted that at the source of modernist anthropology lies a change in the perception of what constitutes reality and human nature as well as in how the relationship between the human being and reality is felt. The first had to do with putting into question the Newtonian model of the universe and the Euclidean understanding of space as static, unchanging, and three-dimensional. The discoveries of Albert Einstein, Werner Heisenberg, and Louis de Broglie proved that beyond the harmonious world we perceive with our senses, there exists a “metaworld,” impossible to describe in the traditional physics categories of causality, in which discontinuity, gaps, and irregularity are observed. These discoveries awakened the sense that beyond the reality accessible to us in everyday experience, impenetrable and therefore dangerous energies are concealed; these likewise led to a redefinition of the concepts of space and time and a questioning of the grounds for regimenting facts within the laws of cause and effect. The nineteenth-century humanist saw the human being as gifted with the power of reason, allowing him to exercise control over himself, and the positivist believed that social and moral evil could be eliminated by means of education and reform. This ethical optimism and high self-esteem were muddled by the new concepts of subjectivity that arose out of the *Lebensphilosophie* (“philosophy of life”) developed by Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche (to mention the two most important practitioners) and Freudian psychoanalysis. A common feature of these schools of thought was the belief that human behaviour is determined by irrational forces and can only to a limited extent be grasped and controlled by reason, with its demand for adherence to moral imperatives. Sheppard, summarizing Freud, writes:

Thus, Freud concluded, because Western man realized deep down that the repressed divinities and the psychic powers which they represent will not disappear just because he wants them to, he felt profoundly ill at ease. And although he might try to disguise the resultant psychic suffering from himself through such sublimations as religion, culture and the pursuit of knowledge, such displacement activities were ultimately powerless.<sup>2</sup>

Psychoanalysis and the “philosophy of life” inspired literature, which from then on began to take an interest in the destabilizing of its heroes’ personalities, as people who had previously felt themselves in possession of a secure and stable identity were now exposed to the influence of irrational forces; literature also began to unmask the ways these illusions had hitherto been maintained. With regard to the latter change, in the perception of the relationship between the human being and reality, a central component of the modernist experience is the sense of disinheritance, exile, and radical otherness as well as of approaching civilizational catastrophe. The tragic nature of the situation under diagnosis is heightened by a sense of

<sup>2</sup> R. Sheppard, “The Problematics of European Modernism,” in *Theorizing Modernism: Essays in Critical Theory*, ed. Steve Giles, Routledge 1993, p. 21.

being disinherited from language. Language is revealed to be an imperfect tool, arbitrary and lacking or even depleting veracity, confining all human strivings (cognitive claims, the possibility of expression and self-knowledge) within the boundaries of our linguistic world. Sheppard gives an exhaustive description of the changes that took place in the spheres he covers (modernism as a diagnosis) and classifies the artists' strategies that allowed them to cope, in seeking continuity in a disjointed world, as well as those who found no positive answers and contemplated the ashes of the metaphysical structure (modernism as an answer). In other words, the philosophical ideas, or philosophical consequences of scientific discoveries, mentioned above made people look critically at the possibilities for finding a positive answer to Kant's questions that I cited earlier, they put in doubt the validity of the humanities, including literary studies, and led to the reformulation of the basic assumptions and conceptual models that had previously held firmly within those disciplines.

Structuralist poetics was one attempt to give a positive answer to the modernist problematic within literature studies, but its legitimacy was then subjected to doubt by Post-Structuralist theory. It is making a rather large over-simplification, but an attractive one, to state that the accusing argument was based on the fact that the Structuralist form of poetics did not draw decisive conclusions from the crisis it found. Following Sheppard's classification, can we say that Structuralist poetics were a positive answer to the problematic they faced, while Post-Structuralism, at least in its initial phase, was a negative one?

The critique of poetics in its Formalist-Structuralist version, made within the terms of the latter school, was articulated exhaustively by Anna Burzyńska in her text "Poetyka po strukturalizmie" (Poetics After Structuralism), originally included in the anthology *Poetyka bez granic* (Poetics Without Borders) and later included in *Anty-teoria literatury* (Anti-Theory of Literature), probably the first publication to systematically attempt to confront and deal with the consequences of subsequent turns in the humanities. The scholar noted that Post-Structuralist theory was marked by formalization, fundamentalism, a priori judgments, and binaries (including the cultivation of the opposition between "inside" and "outside"), as well as fetishism and misappropriation of the achievements of the anti-positivist breakthrough in poetics, and led to clear dislocations in the area of the discipline, the most important of which she defined as the change from system to (inter)text, from grammar to rhetoric, from science to literature and from aesthetics to ideology.<sup>3</sup> The shifts she described were followed by strategic changes within scholarship. Here it is worth noting that the displacements described by Burzyńska were laid out by her in chronological order, whereas in Western literary studies thought they evolved over a period of several decades, while they were transplanted onto Polish literary theory in close chronological succession. Thus the move from system to (inter)text led to the abandonment of dreams about the possibility of building a system to support interpretation practice. Structural analysis, focused on building a full-fledged model, was to

<sup>3</sup> A. Burzyńska, "Poetyka po strukturalizmie", in: *Poetyka bez granic*, ed. W. Boleckiego and W. Tomasika, Warszawa 1995, p. 57. Five years earlier, *Teksty Drugie* published two reflections by scholars of the study of literature worthy of mentioning here: Edward Balcerzan's "Zmianastanu" (Change of State) and Michał Głowiński's "Czy schodzimy na pobocze?" (Are we Taking a Detour?). Curiously, these scholars formulated somewhat opposite positions – Balcerzan observed the retreat from poetics with alarm, while Głowiński perceived it continuing to be an important area in the "concert of sciences."

yield its place to open and unbounded textual analysis,<sup>4</sup> placing the text in a universe of other texts, and “voluntarily resigning from scientific claims.”<sup>5</sup> The second shift (from grammar to rhetoric), which we owe chiefly to the lessons of deconstructionism, brought into relief the “tropological” properties of texts, and going further the irrevocably rhetorical character of all types of discourse. It therefore demands that scholars relinquish their investigations in the categories of correctness and similarities, and focus on displacements, deviations, and discontinuities. Here it should be stressed, in continuing Burzyńska’s argument, that deconstructionism also paid attention to the problem of the status of theoretical discourse, assigning it the same figurality as other texts, in addition to something more “bad faith.” Literature “knows” of its own figurality, while theory harbors the illusion that it is developing a transparent language of description. A process parallel to the formulation of these accusations is found in postmodernist literature, which provides post-poetics (or rather, more precisely, the various schools of post-poetics) with arguments against structural poetics (the term is capitalized in Burzyńska’s text) and by the same token designates the frames of the subsequent change from theory to literature:

At the roots of this process stands the phenomenon of the new literature’s growing resistance to traditional poetics. The questioning of restrictive versions of Poetics converges here with the tendency to efface the boundaries between literary discourse and theoretical discourse. Changes in literary discourse itself also play an important role here: in simultaneously becoming a discourse on the rules of its own construction, that discourse begins to take on the function that traditionally belonged to poetics. (...) On the one hand, the author [Christine Brooke-Rose J.K.] emphasizes that the novel itself is becoming an act of knowledge, plainly dominating its strictly aesthetic values, on the other hand, the utterances of leading theoreticians and philosophers are becoming in the highest degree similar to literature.<sup>6</sup>

That constitutes another argument for the weakening of the power, real or somewhat exaggerated by its critics, of Poetics, and its reduction to a “small p” poetics – here Burzyńska invokes Linda Hutcheon’s formulae of an open, variable theoretical structure, an elastic conceptual structure,<sup>7</sup> a “problematics.” The last formula should be kept in mind, since it finds a place in the subtitle of the second volume of *The cultural theory of literature: Poetics, problematics, interpretations*. A somewhat different way of looking at the status of post-Poetics poetics, but which is also a result of rethinking these same theses, is offered by constructivism, demolishing the divide between theoretical systems and subjects. In the constructivist vision (represented in Burzyńska’s text by Brian McHale) poetics becomes a novel. The last shift discussed in Burzyńska’s article, from aesthetics to ideology (and thus from poetics to politics) is another proposal for how to formulate the subject of literary studies research. Where earlier it was conducted in deconstructive or constructivist terms, this opens the way to broadly understood cultural studies and cultural theory of literature. Burzyńskabegins her description of the shift by citing the words of J. Hillis Miller, who in 1987 observed:

<sup>4</sup> A. Burzyńska, op. cit., p. 61.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>7</sup> See L. Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism. History, Theory, Fiction*, New York-London 1988.

a sudden, almost universal turn away from theory in the sense of an orientation toward language as such and (...) a corresponding turn toward history, culture, society, politics, institutions, class and gender conditions, the social context, the material base (...).<sup>8</sup>

This was an invitation to the broadly understood context, not popular with Structuralism, that gave life to the new poetics “the poetics of culture.” The term was devised by Steven Greenblatt, who set before it the task of studying the ways cultural practices are shaped and analyzing the relations between them, describing the processes by which collective experience is formed and the modalities of their manifestation in dominant aesthetic forms. This method, Burzyńska demonstrates, joins “the threads of Foucaultian discourse analysis, neo-Marxian critique of ideology, neo-pragmatism, Derrida’s concept of textuality and the critique of rhetoric” and completely accepts and displays its own “involvement in a network of relations connecting literary discourses and other systems social, historical, political and economic.”<sup>9</sup> This formulation does away with the boundary (rigidly maintained within Poetics) between the literary and nonliterary, treating literature as one type of discourse that can be studied (together with the problematics it enunciates) with the assistance of the methods developed. Burzyńska sees a similar intention in the visions of poetics that have arisen within American feminism; she mentions the anthology *The Poetics of Gender* edited by Nancy K. Miller as well as Elaine Showalter’s “Towards a Feminist Poetics.”<sup>10</sup>

It must be added that the transformations discussed by Burzyńska and referred to herein have taken place on one of two branches of the family tree of Post-Structuralist poetics. The characteristics of the second branch are another subject of interest to the scholar. To summarize, we may state that that second version of poetics develops parallel to the first: it accepts the Structuralist linguistic model and focuses its efforts around overcoming the difficulties of its orthodox interpretation and its expansion to include the conquests of sociolinguistics, speech act theory and communications theory.

Burzyńska’s text serves an informational function, though it is clear that the author’s sympathies are with poetics in the plural and that what interest her most are the destinations reached by the shifts she describes. It can be said that she treats the problematics of Poetics and indicates various ways of developing those problematics (poetics as diagnosis and poetics as answer), but does not transfer them to the territory of Polish literary studies, nor does she envision a new type of scholarship. Aware of the epistemological difficulties, she does not tell us what to do or what to hope for.

The title of the book *Poetics Without Borders*, in which Burzyńska’s article was published, is, in my view, symptomatic. After multiple turns from and befoggings of the field’s clarity, paradigm changes and reformulations, it was possible to get the impression that the discipline had lost its formerly rigid and impenetrable borders. As is well-known, territories with no

<sup>8</sup> J. Hillis Miller, “Presidential Address. The Triumph of Theory, the Resistance to Reading, and the Question of Material Base,” in: Miller, *Theory Now and Then*, Durham 1991, quoted in: A. Burzyńska, op. cit., p. 70.

<sup>9</sup> A. Burzyńska, op. cit., p. 71.

<sup>10</sup> *The Poetics of Gender*, ed. N. K. Miller, New York 1986, E. Showalter, “Towards a Feminist Poetics,” in: *Women, Writing, and Writing About Women*, ed. M. Jacobus, London-New York 1979.

borders are easily swallowed up by various colonizers. The dangers that lie in wait for a poetics stripped of a firmly defined position as a literary studies subject have been perceived and analyzed by Ryszard Nycz, who then drew on his conclusions in presenting his proposal; I will discuss them in the next part of my argument. Before moving on to the inquiries of this Krakow-based scholar, I would like to consider some observations made by Dorota Korwin-Piotrowska in her text “The Afterlife of Poetics,” included in the last issue of *Tematy i Konteksty* (Themes and Contexts), devoted to the present and future of the field.

### Poetics After Poetics

Korwin-Piotrowska describes the posthumous life of the discipline. Is it, the author of a new textbook on poetics asks, a resurrection or a phantom? This description begins with the important remark that the term “poetics” is now reassigned innumerable different meanings and appears surprisingly often in various agglomerations. That allows it to be defined very generally as “the way something is organized or structured.”<sup>11</sup> Formulated thus, it is revealed to be an all-embracing area, whose strategies fit any type of discourse, as well as subjects that manifest a discursive nature. Korwin-Piotrowska then enumerates and arranges the accusations made against poetics, which turn out to be accusations not against poetics *tout court*, but specifically against Structuralist poetics. Using as reference points the law of social psychology that claims we tend to treat views different from our own as more radical and Nycz’s thesis of the retroactive nature of human existence in the world,<sup>12</sup> Piotrowska posits the intriguing hypothesis that perhaps the poetics described and attacked by Post-Structuralist critics never really existed (draining further the metaphor of the life and death of poetics, one might say that reports of its death are greatly exaggerated). Why, then, do they do that? Korwin-Piotrowska never directly asks the question, but gives a camouflaged answer to it, evoking the reluctant gesture of the title character in Melville’s “Bartleby the Scrivener.” Loathing his legal office job and his boss, the scrivener ceased completing his tasks, communicating his decision through the formula “I would prefer not to.” Rather than refusing to engage with the alleged anachronism and inadequacy of the Structuralist poetics project, Korwin-Piotrowska suggests looking at the status and place of the field in a new light:

If we cross the Rubicon delineated by various reservations and categorical judgments, we perceive the dissimilarity and simultaneous complementarity of phenomena that, even if they are opposed at the level of names and concepts (such as essentialism and pragmatism, model and creation, interpretation and use) coexist alongside one another as different ways of conceptualizing the sphere of the humanities’ establishment of relations between a way of looking, a way of naming and describing, and the subject of the gaze. Poetics already exists in the broader and also more metaphorical sense as an area of research connected with the expression of human experience and cognitive skills, and with the narrower and more textually linked meaning as an area concerned with studying the properties of works..<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup>D. Korwin-Piotrowska, “Życie pośmiertne poetyki” (The Posthumous Life of Poetics) in *Tematy i Konteksty* (Themes and Contexts) 3/2013, pp. 20-21.

<sup>12</sup>Nycz notes that what a person does and “what they tend toward changes to some measure what the world they experience has been” (R. Nycz, “Od teorii nowoczesnej do poetyki doświadczenia” (From Modern Theory to the Poetics of Experience) in: *Kulturowa teoria literatury 2 (Poetyki, problematyki, interpretacje)* (Cultural Theory of Literature 2: Poetics, Problematics, Interpretations, ed. T. Walas and R. Nycz), Kraków 2012, p. 54.

<sup>13</sup>D. Korwin-Piotrowska, op. cit., pp. 23-24.

The conciliatory nature of these considerations by the author allow her to then go on to formulate an optics in which seemingly oppositional perspectives can be grasped as not only not mutually exclusive but even capable of being joined together. Korwin-Piotrowska shows the dynamic nature and historical variability of this area. She neither can nor does remain indifferent to the turns that have taken place in the humanities, but she urges us to look at the changes that have resulted in terms proportionate to their effect on literature. Poetics today is, for her, “a group of questions and continually renewed attempts at answers, description and expression, not a group of assumptions.”<sup>14</sup> In this sense, poetics is a “school of analytical thought that lends itself to the exploration of man’s semiotic spaces.”<sup>15</sup> Korwin-Piotrowska appears to make nothing of the debates on the differences between subjects in the humanities and the natural sciences and the many doubts as to whether it is possible to come up with a definition of literature. Bartleby, faced with these many “hermeneutical suspicions,” would reply “I would prefer not to”; Korwin-Piotrowska replies with a commonsensical “Let’s not get too carried away”:

Parenthetically speaking, some form of “literature-centrism” among literary studies specialists (like the focus among chemists on chemical compounds important for the human organism, or the focus on stars and planets among astronomers, etc.) appears something that should be the most natural thing in the world, rather than felt to be embarrassing – coexisting with the need to continuously assimilate the changes taking place in culture and literature, and engage in dialogue with all of the humanities, and also accompanied by self-knowledge relating to the continually shrinking social function of literary.<sup>16</sup>

Here we should add that she is saying this as an academic teacher – for what is there to teach the adepts of literary studies, if we believe that their subject has disappeared, unable to face the pressure from various philosophers and anthropologists? The subject of poetics is in this sense programmatic—we don’t know whether it exists, but we should live as though it did. Korwin-Piotrowska also declares her belief in the practical benefits of launching a debate on the role and place of poetics (or several types of poetics) in a culture of trust, though the latter remains a relative term. Her proposal is made in the spirit of cognitivism, since she writes that concepts developed within that discipline must be thought about as “notations of a cognitive effort to study and describe the work of the human mind, imagination, and language”<sup>17</sup> and she also indicates that every type of concept or category is simultaneously both an operational construct and a form of conceptualization of a given problem. Her approach, practical and geared toward the teaching of literature at all levels of education, leads to a project, outlined towards the end (and carried out in a textbook written by her later), that uses the experience of *creative* and *uncreative writing*, designating an attempt to preserve the connections between poetics and linguistics and a foray into the area of careful reading and invention or creation.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

Poetics, then, is not dead, but its subject has undergone numerous reconfigurations, which does not mean we can give a straightforward or categorical answer to the question asked right at the beginning of the argument as to what we know. Still, the lack of such an answer, in the light of Korwin-Piotrowska's text, does not doom us to ignorance of what to hope for or what is to be done.

### What can experience save poetics from?

"Perhaps no term has been as heatedly contested in recent Anglo-American cultural debates as 'experience,'" Martin Jay begins his argument.<sup>18</sup> It has been argued and written about so much that this is not the place to reckon even with its key concepts. What particularly interest me are the conceptualizations of the category of experience that have enabled their authors to get beyond the impasse in the humanities resulting from Post-Structuralism. The matter is made more complicated by the fact that for Post-Structuralism, experience as a category was treated with suspicion and most often identified with naïve empiricism or phenomenology. It was therefore necessary to find a different more convincing and philosophically significant form of reflection on experience. In a later portion of his argument, Jay beautifully summarizes this difficulty:

[...] these critics of a putatively foundationalist notion of experience, and they are not isolated examples, draw much of their ammunition from the assumed lessons of post-structuralist thought, which they claim fatally undermine the notion of coherent subjectivity subtending any belief in the self-evidence of experience. For such critics [...] discourse, language, and structures of power provide the matrix out of which experience emerges, not vice versa. To posit experience as itself a ground is thus a misleading attribution of a constructive capacity to what is itself only a rhetorically or discursively constructed category. [...] The very quest for an authentic experience lost in the modern world they damn as yet another version of the nostalgic yearning for a presence and immediacy that has never existed and never will.<sup>19</sup>

In all of the cases referred to, asserts Jay, author of *Songs of Experience* and historian of the Frankfurt School, the attack concerns one of two conceptualizations: *Erlebnis* or *Efahrung*, whereas in the work of Georges Bataille and Michel Foucault, themselves Post-Structuralists, it is possible to read a path beyond the horizon designated by traditional philosophy for both concepts and the binary opposition of directness of experience vs. discursive mediation of experience.<sup>20</sup> Tracing the thresholds and borders of experience in modernity, Anna Zeidler-Janiszewska<sup>21</sup> calls on us to remember that other heirs of turns in the humanities – taking various forms and meanings – have laid claim to this category. For example, Frank Ankersmit proclaimed outright that it was the antidote to the effects of the crisis of representation,

<sup>18</sup>Martin Jay, "The Limits of Limit-Experience," in *Constellations. An International Journal of Critical and Democratic Theory*, vol. 2, no. 2, April 1995, p. 155.

<sup>19</sup>Jay, op. cit., pp. 156-157.

<sup>20</sup>"It is [...] the great merit of Foucault, Bataille and other so-called post-structuralist defenders of its [experience's – J. K.] importance," Jay writes, "that they have forced us to go beyond the sterile choice between naïve experiential immediacy and the no less naïve discursive mediation of that experience that has for too long seemed our only alternative." Jay, op. cit., p. 169.

<sup>21</sup>A. Zeidler-Janiszewska, "Progi i granice doświadczenia (w) nowoczesności," (Thresholds and Borders of Experience in Modernity, in: *Nowoczesność jako doświadczenie* (Modernity as Experience), ed. R. Nycz and A. Zeidler-Janiszewska, Kraków 2006. I am indebted to Zeidler-Janiszewska for the information that follows in the remainder of this paragraph.



which were manifested with particular intensity in the reflections of historical theory on the problem of the Holocaust. For their part, the authors of the texts included in the volume *The Anthropology of Experience*, edited by Victor Turner and Edward Bruner, refer to the role of experience as a basic metaphor with the power to reorganize the humanities' sphere of inquiry. Zeidler-Janiszewska sums up the examples she provides with the statement that modern philosophy in its entirety can be seen as a kind of theory (or metatheory) of experience.

To Nycz, the path beyond the horizon of that opposition is provided by literature. The texts generated by his poetics of experience comprise the 2012 book by that name, previously published in various other places; those that lay the foundations of his theory were first published by him in the two-volume *Kulturowa teoria literatury* (*Cultural Theory of Literature*). The author of *Contemporary Annals* intensively and indeed, somewhat poetically has thought through the consequences of the later turns already mentioned here and is inclined to see them as a threat to (Modernity as Experience), literary studies. Where Korwin-Piotrowska moved past them to set her agenda, Nycz looks them straight in the eye. The rhetoric of threat employed in the text that opens his proposal, "Cultural Nature, Weak Professionalism. A Few Remarks on the Subject of Literary Knowledge and the Status of Literary Studies Discourse" provokes the reader to read the interpretation of the poetics of experience as his defense. Let us look at those dangers and the way he formulates them:

Does not the din of methodological disputes (in fact gradually dying down, but increasingly subject to routine reanimation) conceal nothing more than an unspoken situational drama of theoretical discourse, condemned to display self-complacency because of the utterly unconstrained reach of its pursuits in the absence of any kind of agreed attributes of its separate identity and status? Should it then enclose itself (and consent to marginalization) or rather strive to acquire social importance (at the price of being submerged within cultural studies)? [...] Perhaps it would be better to take refuge in its own scholarly niche (as a sub-subdiscipline) and attempt to wait out the theoretical storm, in the hope that a philologist's solid craft will always find a place? [...] Among many controversial theoretical problems, this concern with the *raison d'être* of our profession the place of literature and the status of literary studies is today without a doubt uncontested.<sup>22</sup>

In this ominous situation the most pressing need would appear to be the reinstatement and close study of literature's cognitive dimension, as well as a search for the fundamentals of what makes literary studies discourse specific. Nycz finds these in a differentiation derived from Iser of explanatory fictions (in the natural sciences) from exploratory ones (in the humanities),<sup>23</sup> and above all else in Adorno's concept of the text as a form of knowledge. This last idea, explained in his study *Lekcja Adorna: tekst jako sposób poznania albo o kulturze jako palimpseście* (*Reading Adorno: the Text as a Form of Knowledge, or On Culture as a Palimpsest*)

<sup>22</sup>R. Nycz, "Kulturowa natura, słaby profesjonalizm. Kilka uwag o przedmiocie poznania literackiego i statusie dyskursu literaturoznawczego" (*Cultural Nature, Weak Professionalism. A Few Notes on the Subject of Literary Knowledge and the Status of Literary Studies Discourse*), in: *Kulturowa teoria literatury. Główne pojęcia i problemy*, ed. M. P. Markowski and R. Nycz, Kraków 2006, pp. 33-34.

<sup>23</sup>See Wolfgang Iser, "What Is Literary Anthropology? The Difference between Explanatory and Exploratory Fictions," in *Revenge of the Aesthetic: The Place of Literature in Theory Today*, ed. Michael Clark, Berkeley 2000.

sest) allows the possibility of moving beyond the two oppositional epistemological stances threatening literary studies – realism and constructivism. A crucial place in the redefined knowledge process will belong to experience:

[it – J. K.] allows us to break through this compulsory identification, to penetrate through or deconstruct the facade of a closed, monolithic, unchanging existence – and enter into contact with what is without identity, other, unrepeatable, what settles or leaves a trace in existence's unconscious layers.<sup>24</sup>

Literature plays a particular role in the process Nycz describes of experiencing the world and oneself. It cannot be described in the categories of expression and representation, and functions not so much to inform about the world or as a means of knowing it, as to through its power to probe deeper, as the one type of discourse that provides access to that which “without its inventive intervention would not find itself embodied.”<sup>25</sup>

The author of *Tekstowy świat* (Textual World) proposes a “weak” theory that would answer all of the Kantian questions I posed at the beginning of this article. It delimits the boundaries and purpose of (literary studies) knowledge. It brings a definition of literature and the subject of literary studies, describing the methods of operation (interpretation, case study) and indicates what needs to be done; above all, it allows us to think about what goes beyond the horizon of what is given.

The tentative diagnosis I would like to make here is the observation that students of literature caught in the trap of the Post-Structuralist impasse and the realism-constructivism dichotomy will resort to different strategies of deliverance. In this sense, post-poetics poetics may reveal itself as a history (as yet unwritten) of reactions to one's situation. It appears that those imprisoned have several possible strategies at their disposal: they can attempt to get out of the trap, remain inside it and contradict the fact, stubbornly declare that the trap does not exist, or stay there in a gesture of resignation, judging that besides the place of imprisonment, nothing else exists.

<sup>24</sup>R. Nycz, “Lekcja Adorna: tekst jako sposób poznania albo o kulturze jako palimpseście” (Reading Adorno: the Text as a Way of Knowledge, Or On Culture as Palimpsest) in: Nycz, *Poetyka doświadczenia* (The Poetics of Experience), Warszawa 2012, p. 76.

<sup>25</sup>R. Nycz, *Poetyka doświadczenia*, op. cit., p. 9.

# KEYWORDS:

*poetics*

## ABSTRACT:

The author analyzes the methods and rules of posing problems and finding answers in selected texts of Polish literature scholars who have devoted some thought to the place of poetics in contemporary literature studies discourse, and demonstrates that the category of experience may provide a way out of the Post-Structuralist impasse.

*P o s t -*

# experience

## NOTE ON THE AUTHOR

Joanna Krajewska – PhD in the Humanities, author of the book *Spór o literaturę kobiecą w Dwudziestoleciu międzywojennym* (The dispute on women's literature in the interwar period, Poznań 2014). Her scholarly interests are focused on literary history of the first half of the twentieth century, theories of literary scholarship, the study of biography and empirical studies of reader response and the psychology of reading. Krajewska is a long-standing collaborator with the Department of 20th Century Literature, Literary Theory and the Art of Translation in the Faculty of Polish Philology at Adam Mickiewicz University.

*S t r u c t u r a l i s m*