

(Lev Vygotsky's) Psychology of Literature: Beyond Critical Impressionism and Quantitative Empiricism

Zuzanna Sala

ORCID: 0000-0002-9083-6148

The scope of the discipline

Psychology of literature is the uglier sister of sociology of literature, associated with critical impressionism, biographism, and a naïve understanding of literary communication. Evoking this term is linked to a history of debates on whether its existence is justified. The scope of this discipline includes a range of research methods and scholarly approaches; once this much is understood, the question “which one to choose: sociology of literature or psychology of literature” begins to sound more like Boy’s satirical alternative of “should one wash the teeth or the hands?”¹

¹ Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński, „Czy myć zęby czy ręce?” [“Should one wash the teeth or the hands?”], *Wiadomości Literackie* 41 (13 X) = 621 (1935): 3.

As demonstrated by John Fizer in his *Psychoaesthetics*², psychology became an independent discipline ca. mid-19th c. and until the end of that century it tried somehow to compensate for its insecurities as a new branch of science, assuring everyone that, in fact, it is the foundation of all humanities. Literary studies – depending on the cultural-geographic context – would either absorb these inspirations or resist them in a variety of ways. It was this strive for panpsychologism that was supposed to evoke a critical reaction, especially powerful from the quarters of phenomenology. To demonstrate this, Roman Ingarden acknowledged the justified methods and perspectives on a literary studies-based consideration of the psychology of a work, but criticized the tendency to dissipate non-psychological phenomena within psychological categories and treat the literary work as a psychological document.³

In order to determine the possible range of approaches to literary texts, enabled by a psychological perspective (in a broad sense of the term), one might recall the summary of different routes of psychoanalytical criticism, summarized by Kuba Mikurda in his *Nie-całość* [*Non-completeness*]:

The first one, whose weak points are discernible soon enough [...] was proposed by Freud himself [...] it sees the text a springboard for psychoanalysing the author. The second one comprises a psychoanalytical interpretation of the protagonist's actions and motivations [...] The third one focuses on the recipient and mechanisms thanks to which the text engages and influences its recipient (an example can be the recipient's identification with the protagonist [...]). Finally, the fourth one is the psychoanalysis of the text itself, which conceives of the text as an analysed person, searching for symptoms of the subconscious in overt textual content and formal means.⁴

Once this typology has been outlined, the author tries to resolve the dispute between Slavoj Žižek and Alenka Zupančič on whether the Lacanian interpretation of the tragedy applies the second of the strategies (a psychoanalytical interpretation of the protagonist's actions and motivations), or the fourth one (the analysis of the text itself). Viewed more broadly, however, possible interpretative perspectives offered by psychoanalysis may actually suggest that more important than identifying specific interpretative actions is establishing what it is that the psychoanalysis of a text is supposed to be. Also, if this practice is to be understood as the most nuanced approach to a literary work that psychoanalysis has to offer, is there not a problem with its founding anthropomorphising formula, which assumes that a text should be treated as a human being (even more so, as a patient)?

² John Fizer, *Psychologizm i psychoestetyka: historyczno-krytyczna analiza związków* [*Psychologism and psychoaesthetics: a historical-critical analysis of relationships*] ed. by Alicja Kuczyńska, transl. by Janusz Stawiński (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1991), 26.

³ See, e.g., Roman Witold Ingarden, „O psychologii i psychologizmie w naukach o literaturze” [„On psychology and psychologism in literary studies”], in his: *Studia z estetyki* [*Studies on aesthetics*], vol. 3 (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1970), 45–55.

⁴ Kuba Mikurda, *Nie-całość: Žižek, Dolar, Zupančič* [*Non-completeness: Žižek, Dolar, Zupančič*] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2015), 85–86. I am quoting Mikurda here due to the concise and precise nature of his list. One should remember, however, that similar interpretative possibilities of psychoanalysis were pointed to in the majority of textbooks or overviews of the topic, e.g., Michał Paweł Markowski, „Psychoanaliza” [“Psychoanalysis”], in: *Teorie literatury XX wieku: podręcznik* [*Literary theories of the 20th c. A textbook*], ed. by Anna Burzyńska, Michał Paweł Markowski (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Znak, 2009), 47–78. Also, Lena Magnone, „Psychoanaliza w badaniach literackich: na marginesach książki «Parabazy wpływu» Jana Potkańskiego” [„Psychoanalysis in literary studies: on the margins of Jan Potkański's «Parabases of influence»], *Przegląd Humanistyczny* 2 (2010): 51–60.

Before we address this problem, let us take a closer look at three remaining interpretative pathways, listed by Mikurda. What the author of *Nie-całość* singles out as a Freudian idea of psychoanalysing an author through their work has its roots in the “psychographic school”, present in literary studies since the mid-19th c. It considered the text as a source of knowledge about its creator’s psyche, interpreted as the entirety of “spiritual interior”, which comprises not only personal traits or emotions, but also philosophy and worldview. It was this reading a work as a “psychological document” that Ingarden took exception to. The least controversial psychographic interpretations seem to be those which, following Edward Porębowicz’s conception, draw psychological conclusions solely on the basis of the formal structure of the work (i.e., they take the form to be a “normal way of operating, imagining and feeling”⁵). It seems that the most recent attempt at pursuing this interpretative path in Polish literary studies has been articles inspired by Charles Mauron’s psychocriticism⁶, such as Inga Iwasiów’s *Przeniesienia*⁷ [*Transpositions*] or Katarzyna Mulet’s *Analiza psychokrytyczna poezji Stanisława Barańczaka*⁸ [*A psychocritical analysis of Stanisław Barańczak’s poetry*].

What Mikurda called the second form of a psychoanalytical interpretation, i.e., the interpretation of a character’s actions and motivations, even though justified in the context of psychological novels or other works centered on nuanced images of protagonists, remains ambiguous. In the psychoanalytical format it often manifests itself in presenting literary characters as “personifications of terms taken from a psychoanalytical dictionary”,⁹ and in other approaches it either seems to violate the boundary between a literary character and a living person or it limits the psychological potential of a work to empathetic compassion towards the protagonists, following the Lippsonian theory of empathy¹⁰.

In Polish literary studies of the 19th and 20th centuries there was a constant back and forth between psychologism and ergocentrism. As demonstrated by Tomasz Bilczewski in a chapter from *Wiek teorii* [*A century of theories*], the first decades of the previous century were mostly text-centric; especially in literary studies of the post-war period the favoured approach was to free creation and interpretation from a moral or utilitarian framework¹¹. The development of native structuralism put an end to challenging any form of direct relationship between

⁵ See Ryszard Pawlukiewicz, *Psychologiczne ujęcie problematyki badawczej w polskiej nauce o literaturze do roku 1939* [*Psychological perspectives on analytical approaches to Polish literary studies since 1939*] (Kraków: Uniwersytet Jagielloński, 1987), 85.

⁶ See Charles Mauron, „Wstęp do psychokrytyki” [„Introduction to psychocriticism”], in: *Współczesna teoria badań literackich za granicą: antologia* vol. 2 [*Contemporary theory of literary studies abroad: anthology, vol. 2*], ed. by Henryk Markiewicz, transl. by Wanda Błońska (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1976), 366–394.

⁷ See Inga Iwasiów, „Przeniesienia” [„Transpositions”], in: *Psychologia literatury: zaproszenie do interpretacji* [*Psychology of literature: an invitation to interpretation*], ed. by Joanna Karpowicz (Warszawa: Eneteia, 1999), 15–25.

⁸ See Katarzyna Mulet, „Analiza psychokrytyczna poezji Stanisława Barańczaka” [„Psychocritical analysis of Stanisław Barańczak’s poetry”], *Przestrzeń Teorii* 16 (2011): 157–177, <https://doi.org/10.14746/pt.2011.16.9>.

⁹ Mikurda, 85.

¹⁰ See, e.g., Jarosław Płuciennik, *Literackie identyfikacje i oddźwięki: poetyka a empatia* [*Literary identifications and resonances: poetics and empathy*] (Kraków: Universitas, 2004).

¹¹ Tomasz Bilczewski, „Subiekt – obiekt – abiekt: «pajęczno wiotka tkanina»”, [„Subject - object - abject: „a spiderly tender fabric”], in: *Wiek teorii: sto lat nowoczesnego literaturoznawstwa polskiego* [*A century of theories: a hundred years of modern Polish literary studies*], ed. by Danuta Ulicka (Warszawa: IBL, 2020), 175.

the work and its creator, as this theoretical approach was ideologically consonant with the implicit anti-psychologism of Marxism in literary studies¹².

Art as a social technique of feeling

When juxtaposed with this necessarily cursory historical-methodological overview, Lev Vygotsky's concept of the psychology of art (more specifically, of literature) appears to be a highly interesting proposition. In his 1925 book¹³, published posthumously in 1965 and translated into Polish in 1980, Vygotsky introduces an original idea of considering the psychological potential of a work by means of its formal analysis. He applies the then-available psychological knowledge to conceptualise the text of culture as a stimulus, whose structure can be studied in order to predict the structure of the recipient's reaction to it. As argued by Vygotsky, following Georgi Plekhanov, while the sociology of art is interested in the analysis of artistic trends on the level of classes and societies, the psychology of art analyses aesthetic mechanisms and their purposefulness¹⁴. One can thus avoid naïvely diagnosing the author, treating literary protagonists as if they were actual living people¹⁵ or empirically testing readers' reactions (a trend propagated later as bibliopsychology¹⁶).

In order to understand the exceptionality of this proposal, it is worth introducing its author. Vygotsky was an experimental psychologist, the founder and leader of the famous Moscow "Troika" (with Alexiei Leontiev and Alexander Luria). It was that group that established cultural-historical psychology, which remains the biggest inspiration for a class-oriented critical psychology (or even, as some would have it, for "Marxist psychology"¹⁷). Even though Vygotsky is the best known due to his influence on the development of "pedology" (the science of the upbringing), and *The psychology of art* as an early work was, in a sense, secondary to his

¹²By implied anti-psychologism of Marxism I mean the tradition of reducing the problem of awareness to ideological categories, which often leads to juxtaposing psychology, focused on an individual, with sociology (and ideological criticism), oriented towards social mechanisms. This is a source of violent reaction of some Marxist critics of the interwar period towards both psychologism and psychoanalysis (see, e.g., Ignacy Fik's „Literatura choromaniaków” [“The literature of hypochondriacs”], in: „Chamuły”, „gnidy”, „przemilczacze”. *Antologia dwudziestowiecznego pamfletu polskiego* [„Boors”, „scum”, „silent ones”. *The anthology of a 20th-century Polish pamphlet*], ed. by Dorota Kozicka [Kraków: Universitas, 2011], 392–400). I realise the extent of complications brought about by the awareness of marrying Marxist criticism with hermeneutics, Lacan's psychoanalysis or other critical theories. My main point of interest remains, however, the practice of interpreting the basic Marxist understanding of the role of an individual psyche.

¹³Lev Semyonovich Vygotski, *Psychologia sztuki* [*The psychology of art*], ed. by Stanisław Balbus, transl. by Maria Zagórska (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1980).

¹⁴Vygotski, 51.

¹⁵The roots of this interpretative method can be found in Freud's lecture methods, see Zofia Mitosek, „Nieświadomość i język (psychoanaliza)” [“Unconsciousness and language (psychoanalysis)”, in *Teorie badań literackich* [*Theories of literary studies*] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2012), 191. “While reading *Gradiva*, Hoffman's short stories (in his study on the fantastic), Shakespeare's dramas (e.g. *The Merchant of Venice*, *King Lear* or *Hamlet*), Freud studies the psychology of protagonists. He treats them as if they were living people”.

¹⁶The concept of „bibliopsychology” was coined by Nicolai Rubakin. More on it can be found in, e.g., Boris Vladimirovic Birjukov and Jefim S. Geller, „Wykorzystanie cybernetyki w badaniach nad kulturą artystyczną” [“The application of cybernetics in studies on artistic culture”] in: *Cybernetyka w naukach humanistycznych* [*Cybernetics in humanities*], transl. by Jan Sarna (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich Wydawnictwo, 1983), 323–418.

¹⁷This term is consistently used, e.g., by Silvana Calvo Tuleski. See her *Vygotsky and Leontiev: the Construction of a Marxist Psychology* (New York: Nova Publishers, 2015).

most important studies, is perhaps more familiar to psychologists than to literary scholars¹⁸, it still remains an insightful interpretative work, founded on formalist diagnoses.

In his project of the psychology of literature Vygotsky is searching for a space which allows one to move away from subjectivism and introspection, while simultaneously accepting consciousness as a correlate of a socially grounded individual. The concept of subjectivity, which is basic to this approach, was fully reflected in Vygotsky's and Leontiev's later works. The core assumption of a cultural-historical psychology is that every human activity is culturally pre-structured¹⁹. Far from constituting a case of sociological reductivism, this position is inspired by Marx's sixth Thesis on Feuerbach: "the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations²⁰". The subject then is not juxtaposed with society (or with power structures) but complementary to it: what is social, is not the external element of subjectivity but its integral part. Vygotsky's "new psychology" project was inherently critical of what he referred to, following the Marxist tradition, as idealist psychology. His was a psychology that would not only transcend the Cartesian opposition of psyche and body, but also the bourgeoisie boundary between the individual and society²¹.

All these proposals and observations related to human psychology have an influence on Vygotsky's thoughts on literature and art. First and foremost, they drive him towards what Stanisław Balbus calls "sociological poetics" or "the formal-sociological method", which tries to combine formalism with social-historical context".²² Its consequence is a close reading of literary texts, supported by cross-disciplinary knowledge of research and disputes current in psychology and literary studies. Obviously, a number of them have become obsolete or were reformulated over the century since the publication of Vygotsky's work. The method itself and its adjacent intuitions, however, seem equally important for modern thinking about the psychological potential of a work.

Reactologies and strategies

The principal, reactological assumption of *The psychology of art* is that a work of art should be read as a consciously organized "system of stimuli, whose objective, subjectively tangible structure

¹⁸A number of scholars, interested in critical psychology, referred to this book during an international online conference „Cultural-Historical Activity Theory and German Critical Psychology – Revitalizing a dialogue” in September 2021. Vygotsky's works, including the interdisciplinary, literary rather than psychologically oriented *Psychology of art* were of particular importance for scholars from North America, Scandinavia, and Germany.

¹⁹Thomas Slunecko, Martin Wieser, „Cultural-Historical Psychology”, in: *Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology*, ed. by Thomas Teo (New York: Springer, 2014), 352.

²⁰Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach", in: Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Selected Works*, vol. 1, trans. by W. Lough (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969), 13–15..

²¹These proposals are particularly interesting in Vygotsky's articles and reviews. For example, when arguing against the position of the German Psychological Society (1933), which adopted the new ideological line of Nazi Germany, he recognized in fascist psychology a logical continuation of idealist thinking. See Lev Semyonovich Vygotski, „Fascism in Psychoneurology”, in: *The Vygotsky Reader*, ed. by Jaan Valsiner, René van der Veer (Oxford: Blackwell Publ., 1994), 327–337.

²²Stanisław Balbus, „Wygotski i jego teoria kultury: psychologia, język, sztuka” [“Vygotsky and his theory of culture: psychology, language, art”], in: Lev Semyonovich Vygotski, *Psychologia sztuki [Psychology of art]* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1980), 11.

allows one to grasp and objectively (i.e. independently of subjective introspection) describe the structure of aesthetic reaction, which is an adequate reaction to the stimulus".²³ It is worth pointing out that similar assumptions concerning the operating principles of a literary work accompany the "textual strategies" approach. One of the first Polish literary scholars to use this term was Kazimierz Bartoszyński, in his paper *Zagadnienia komunikacji literackiej w utworach narracyjnych* [*Issues of literary communication in narrative works*]. The strategy (as a method communication between the issuer and the recipient) was supposed to constitute the narrative and the issuer's attitude to the setting. It was then a narrow understanding of the term, focused on establishing narrative principles imposed by the setting, but it was clearly focused on a communicative purpose²⁴.

Edward Balcerzan in his *Poezja polska 1939–1965: strategie liryczne* [*Polish poetry 1939-1965: lyrical strategies*] proposed a broader definition of the term. Following Tadeusz Kotarbiński, he recalled its military roots and defined strategy as a series of steps necessary for achieving a goal²⁵. Expanding on his understanding of communicative relations in the text, Balcerzan wrote: "Every lyrical strategy is an action directed towards the recipient. Each one of them has something to offer and hopes for a particular behaviour from the reader"²⁶. Interestingly enough, Balcerzan's peculiar dualistic approach led him to come up with a dubious opposition of strategy and style. For this scholar style is an inherent ingredient of a poetic personality, an element of expression bound with the author's internal imperative rather than with what the author wants to achieve through their creation. Strategies, in turn, are for Balcerzan tools of poetic programs, non-literary motivations creeping into texts, usually for historical reasons.

The problematic nature of this binary division is, however, mitigated in subsequent transformations of this concept, nowadays used in a different meaning than the one sanctioned by the structuralist paradigm. Tomasz Kunz, in his monograph *Strategie negatywne w poezji Tadeusza Różewicza. Od poetyki tekstu do poetyki lektury* [*Negative strategies in Tadeusz Różewicz's poetry. From poetics of text to poetics of reading*] follows Umberto Eco²⁷ and his considerations of the model reader. In this understanding "textual strategy" is to be a "conscious and purposeful textual operation"²⁸, directed towards achieving a specific effect of readership. This procedure is often revealed through formal analysis, which implies a specific, model structure of relations, i.e., precisely what Vygotsky believes to be the manifestation of a literary work's psychological potential. Even though in his recent book *Więcej niż słowa. Literatura jako forma istnienia* [*More than words*.

²³Balbus, 17.

²⁴Bartoszyński distinguishes among three strategies: **elipsis** – when the issuer and recipient share a knowledge of the world and it is possible to imply a possibly large number of cultural texts; **excess** – when the recipient's knowledge of the ways in which the setting operates is much more limited, so that the issuer produces statements which are obvious from the point of view of the world; they perform a kind of exposition; **researcher** – when both the issuer and recipient share only limited knowledge of the world; the issuer then tries to "research" and categorise as much of that world as possible. See Kazimierz Bartoszyński, „Zagadnienia komunikacji literackiej w utworach narracyjnych” [„Issues of literary communication in narrative works”], in: *Problemy socjologii literatury* [*Issues of the sociology of literature*], ed. by Janusz Sławiński (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1971), 127–148.

²⁵Edward Balcerzan, *Poezja polska w latach 1939–1965. Część 1: strategie liryczne* [*Polish poetry in 1939-1965. Part 1: lyrical strategies*] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, 1982), 6.

²⁶Balcerzan, 248.

²⁷See Umberto Eco, „Czytelnik modelowy” [„The model reader”], transl. by Piotr Salwa, *Pamiętnik Literacki* LXXVIII, z. 2 (1987): 287–305.

²⁸Tomasz Kunz, *Strategie negatywne w poezji Tadeusza Różewicza: od poetyki tekstu do poetyki lektury* [*Negative strategies in Tadeusz Różewicz's poetry. From poetics of text to poetics of reading*] (Kraków: Universitas, 2005), 10.

Literature as a form of existence] Kunz stresses the processual development of the elements of a literary text he is most interested in, and which he considers in a specific language-centred perspective of literary communication, he consistently maintains his “strategies”-based approach. In other words, in his later studies he is less interested in the structure of a readership reaction than in the creative process, but he retains the notion of “conscious and purposeful textual operations”.

Similar elements can be discerned among other scholars who investigate this term. Piotr Marecki, writing on subversive strategies in Polish prose of the 21st c²⁹, also focuses on aesthetic and formal tendencies of selected authors, in an attempt to demonstrate their receptive potential. Tomasz Cieślak utilizes the category of “poetic strategies” to demonstrate textual mechanisms characteristic of Maciej Robert’s diction³⁰. Although more examples could be provided, one should be careful when applying this term, as by “textual strategies” some scholars actually mean the themes raised by authors (this is what, e.g., Anna Kronenberg does, while categorizing “the strategies of reclaiming voice and body in the literary activity of Polish women living in Great Britain and Ireland”³¹).

One might think that, a similar category to Vygotsky’s “stimulus” or the above-mentioned “textual strategies”, is Dawid Kujawa’s “text as a plan”, which he applies in his description of Natalia Malek’s poetry. However, just as the Silesian critic has defined conceptual frames in the poetry of the author of *Karapaks* [*Carapace*] and the “mechanisms which spur the author to action”, Kujawa relieves her of the responsibility for the reactivity of her text. “Text as a plan” for Kujawa is not an authorial textual strategy, a pre-designed stimulus, but a space created by the author to allow the occurrence of what the critic calls “creating the seeds of new ways of speaking, new «manners of existence» [...] or new «lifestyles» [...], from which we can draw handfuls, looking for a way out of the modern production regime”³². The interpretative goal, then, or an attempt to answer the question “how were specific elements of the text construed in order to achieve some kind of a readership effect?” will be similar to Vygotsky’s *Psychology of art*. The basic difference will rest, however, on a radically different ontology of the literary text, or maybe on putting the interpretative emphasis on the receptive specification, rather than on the authorial message.

The poem as a stimulus in programs and discussions

The manner of thinking about the text, recognized in Vygotsky’s project of the psychology of literature, could become an ally of a number of critics, who participate in important literary-critical discussions, including disputes concerning incomprehensibility after 1989.

²⁹Piotr Marecki, „Strategie subwersywne w polskiej literaturze XXI wieku” [*Subversive strategies in Polish literature of the 21st century*], *Teksty Drugie* 6 (2012): 313–324.

³⁰Tomasz Cieślak, „Między obserwacją a wspomnieniem: strategie poetyckie Macieja Roberta” [„Between observation and memory: Maciej Robert’s poetic strategies”], *Czytanie Literatury. Łódzkie Studia Literaturoznawcze* 5 (2016): 233–242.

³¹Anna Kronenberg, „Migracje kobiet: strategie odzyskiwania głosu i ciała w twórczości literackiej Polek mieszkających w Wielkiej Brytanii i Irlandii” [„Women’s migrations: strategies of reclaiming voice and body in the literary activity of Polish women living in Great Britain and Ireland”], *Teksty Drugie* 3 (2016): 98–115.

³²Dawid Kujawa, *Pocałunki ludu. Poezja i krytyka po roku 2000* [*The kisses of the people. Poetry and criticism after 2000*] (Kraków: korporacja Ha!art, 2021), 218.

It is worth recalling Bohdan Zadura's well-known text *Daj mu tam, gdzie go nie ma* [*Give it to them where they are not*], in which he writes about poetic communication:

I really like it as a description of the relationship between poetry and its recipient. "Give it to them where they are not" could be the title of a poetic program [...] To treat poetry like a game is to avoid a lot of nasty dilemmas; to treat it like a game is to take its recipient seriously. To treat that recipient as a partner. It is, indeed, a peculiar game, where the victory of the reader is the victory of the poet³³.

The table tennis metaphor, proposed by the author of *Starzy znajomi* [*Old acquaintances*] is not only based (as emphasized in the ensuing discussions³⁴) on the implied effort of the recipient ("Give it to them where they are not – chase them around the corners, let them run, let them move"³⁵), but also on understanding the structure of readership reaction as intertwined with the structure of the text. Therefore, for Zadura, the ability to predict and plan this structure skillfully is key to artistic success. Formal games and authorial strategies only work when there is a chance they will be understood. This does not mean, however, that the goal has to be unambiguous, coherent, clearly visible or instrumental.

An interesting concept is the juxtaposition of Vygotsky's reasoning with texts of probably the best-known defender of comprehensible poetry, Czesław Miłosz. His two most important public addresses concerning this issue were his 1989 lecture *Z poezją polską przeciw światu* [*With Polish poetry against the world*] and the speech *Przeciw poezji niezrozumiałej* [*Against incomprehensible poetry*], delivered a year later. Both share a vision of a coherent space of national poetry, conceptualized as a "homestead". The Nobel-laureate's main problem is the gradual development of cultural individualism, which occurred in post-transformation Poland and was connected with the adoption of styles of consumption from the West. Miłosz is against "such subjectivisation of language that it is no longer a means of interpersonal communication".³⁶ He is searching for, both in Polish poetic tradition and in Far-Eastern poems, a method of demystifying the opposition between the subject and the object³⁷. The need for objectivization, searching for links between literature and reality, as well as opposition to extreme relativism and individualism are probably the most interesting elements of Miłosz's program, emphasized in the debates on incomprehensibility. To a degree, they are in line with Vygotsky's and Leontiev's way of thinking about subjectivity, alluded to in the first part of this paper. What seems problematic are Miłosz's further discursive turns, in which he identifies incomprehensible poetry with a poetry focused on the subjective and comprehensible

³³Bohdan Zadura, „Daj mu tam, gdzie go nie ma, czyli języki obce poezji” [„Give it to them where they are not, or foreign languages of poetry”], *Polska Poezja Współczesna. Przewodnik encyklopedyczny*, [*Polish Contemporary Poetry. An encyclopedic guide*] 8.02.2017, <http://przewodnikpoetycki.amu.edu.pl/daj-mu-tam-gdzie-go-nie-ma-czyli-jezyki-obce-poezji-i/>.

³⁴See, among others, Jacek Podsiadło, „Daj mi tam, gdzie mogę dobiec” [“Give it to me where I can run up to”], *Polska Poezja Współczesna. Przewodnik encyklopedyczny*, 8.02.2017, <https://przewodnikpoetycki.amu.edu.pl/daj-mi-tam-gdzie-moge-dobiec-i/>.

³⁵Zadura.

³⁶Czesław Miłosz, „Z poezją polską przeciw światu” [„With Polish poetry against the world”], in his: *Eseje* [*Essays*] (Warszawa: Świat Książki, 2000), 340.

³⁷Czesław Miłosz, „Przeciw poezji niezrozumiałej”, [„Against incomprehensible poetry”] in: *Kartografowie dziwnych podróży* „wypisy z polskiej krytyki literackiej XX wieku [*Cartographers of strange journeys: excerpts from 20th-c. Polish literary criticism*], ed. by Marta Wyka (Kraków: Universitas, 2004), 575.

with that which describes the “likethisness” of objects. These categories do not need to overlap; the author of *Przeciw poezji niezrozumiałej* seems to gloss over what in subsequent stages of the debate on incomprehensibility will plant the seeds for conflict, i.e., entirely clear and unambiguously subjective confessional poetry. It is probably this glossing over which will later allow for a discursive utilisation of Miłosz’s voice. Dorota Kozicka summarises the problem in the following manner:

Interestingly enough, Podsiadło, both in his criticism of “the incomprehensibles” and in his support for a linear structure of the poem and “leading” the readers by giving them readable clues, repeats a whole gamut of critical ideas on the “hermetic” state of poetry, which were voiced in Miłosz’s speech *Przeciw poezji niezrozumiałej*. Those same arguments will be raised ten years later by Andrzej Franaszek – another opponent of hermetic poetry³⁸.

Insofar as Vygotsky could have supported Miłosz’s sociological identifications, aimed against a progressing individualization of culture, it would be hard to paint him as an enthusiast of the Nobel-laureate’s programmatic conclusions, i.e., as a defender of “communicativeness” or “comprehensibility”. In principle, this manner of understanding “the psychology of literature” also would not support Andrzej Franaszek’s future theses voiced in the continuation of the literary-critical debate on incomprehensibility. Even though on the face of it the critic from Cracow utilises terms from the affective-psychological dictionary (because he postulates emotive, moving or comforting poetry) he juxtaposes the reactive-emotional potential of the work with “writing about language for the sake of ‘inventiveness’, ironic parody, a game”³⁹. “The simple reader”, defended by Miłosz’s biographer, does not exist (or at least not in the form aiming at directness) in the psychology of art, proposed by Vygotsky. That is because every reader (“simple” or professional) receives literature (on the emotional level, inseparable from the intellectual one), precisely by means of those inventions and textual games, which Franaszek shuns.

Similarities between Vygotsky’s conclusions, which allow him to distinguish general categories governing the discipline of his interest, and modern interpretative and critical practices are plentiful. First of all, his conclusions to *The psychology of art* contain an intuition about the supreme function of contradiction, antinomy, disharmony. In his versological analyses of Pushkin’s poems the author of *Thought and speech* finds a space to express his general dislike for the category of meter and supports rhyme. The context for his reflections is the more general debates on the non-naïve treatment of the category of rhyme, from which he posits a thesis that breaks, inaccuracies and deviations from meter are responsible for triggering the most important emotional mechanisms⁴⁰. It is hard not to acknowledge the innovative character of these thesis, which will later materialize in insightful interpretations based on the category of pre-Platonic rhythm, like the analyses of Adam Dziadek, based on the theoretical

³⁸Dorota Kozicka, „Poezja w klinczu (z)rozumienia” [„Poetry in the clinch of understanding”], *Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne. Seria Literacka* 26 (2015): 62.

³⁹Andrzej Franaszek, „Poezja jak bluza z kapturem” [„Poetry like a hoodie”], accessed under a changed title „Dlaczego nikt nie lubi nowej poezji?” [„Why does nobody like new poetry?”], *Gazeta Wyborcza* supplement 68, 22.03.2014, http://wyborcza.pl/magazyn/1,136823,15666202,Dlaczego_nikt_nie_lubi_nowej_poezji_.html.

⁴⁰The most important inspiration for Vygotsky’s reflections here are versological works by Andrei Bely.

works of Stanisław Mleczko and Henry Meschonnic (and the project of somatic criticism⁴¹) or Marta Koronkiewicz's interpretations of Andrzej Sosnowski's⁴² poetry, inspired by similar considerations of rhyme.

Conclusions

I made Vygotsky's work the central element of this paper, even though neither the author nor the category of "psychology of art" are central to modern critical discourse. I acknowledge a measure of nonchalance implicit in this gesture but it has not been my intention to prove a "primacy" of this theory against the actions of all scholars and critics who have been referred to above. The aim of such distribution of emphases is to recall the observations of that Soviet psychologist-literary scholar from almost a century ago and encourage polemics with a few lingering myths. The first of these is the implicit anti-psychologism of traditional Marxism. Vygotsky is evoked here as a suitable link: his psychological works, where he fights with the myth of a rational, autonomous individual, were supported by his urge for experimentally developed scientific theories and prove that adopting Marxism as a research basis does not automatically lead to sociological reductionism in social sciences or the humanities. Vygotsky's story proves that a nuancing of research premises stands in opposition to the interests of totalitarian authorities. After publishing "On pedagogical perversions of the system of People's Commissariat for Education" in 1936, his works became illegal in the USSR. The other myth concerns the supposed opposition between psychology and sociology, both in the study of literature and beyond. A peculiar understanding of the subject allowed Vygotsky to practice psychology as complementary to rather than in juxtaposition to sociology. He did the same in his remarks on literature and art. Thus, it is possible to reclaim the concept of psychology of literature and discard harmful connotations with panpsychologism, biographism or the interpreters' pretense to becoming diagnosticians of literary characters or authors. This reclaiming also lets us have a non-naïve look at the psychological aspect of the literary work and accept it as something which literary criticism (and more broadly – studies on literature) has always been doing, even if shying away from using the term itself.

translated by Justyna Rogos-Hebda

⁴¹See Adam Dziadek, *Projekt krytyki somatycznej [Somatic criticism project]* (Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich, 2014).

⁴²See Marta Koronkiewicz, *I jest moc odległego życia w tej elegii: uwagi o wierszach Andrzeja Sosnowskiego [There is a power of distant life in this elegy: remarks on Andrzej Sosnowski's poems]* (Wrocław: Fundacja na Rzecz Kultury i Edukacji im. Tymoteusza Karpowicza, 2019).

References

- Balbus, Stanisław. „Wygotski i jego teoria kultury: psychologia, język, sztuka”. In: Lew Siemionowicz Wygotski, *Psychologia sztuki*, 5–45. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1980.
- Balcerzan, Edward. *Poezja polska w latach 1939–1965. Część 1: strategię liryczne*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, 1982.
- Bartoszyński, Kazimierz. „Zagadnienia komunikacji literackiej w utworach narracyjnych”. In: *Problemy socjologii literatury*, ed. by Janusz Sławiński, 127–148. Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1971.
- Bilczewski, Tomasz. „Subiekt – obiekt – abiekt: «pajęczko wiotka tkanina»”. In: *Wiek teorii: sto lat nowoczesnego literaturoznawstwa polskiego*, ed. by Danuta Ulicka, 161–230. Warszawa: IBL, 2020.
- Birjukov, Boris Vladimirovic, Jefim S. Geller. „Wykorzystanie cybernetyki w badaniach nad kulturą artystyczną”. In: *Cybernetyka w naukach humanistycznych*, transl. by Jan Sarna, 323–418. Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich Wydawnictwo, 1983.
- Boy-Żeleński, Tadeusz. „Czy myć zęby czy ręce?”. *Wiadomości Literackie* 41 (13 X) = 621 (1935): 3.
- Calvo Tuleski, Silvana. *Vygotsky and Leontiev the Construction of a Marxist Psychology*. New York: Nova Publishers, 2015.
- Cieślak, Tomasz. „Między obserwacją a wspomnieniem: strategię poetyckie Macieja Roberta”. *Czytanie Literatury. Łódzkie Studia Literaturoznawcze* 5 (2016): 233–242.
- Dziadek, Adam. *Projekt krytyki somatycznej*. Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich, 2014.
- Eco, Umberto. „Czytelnik modelowy”. Transl. by Piotr Salwa. *Pamiętnik Literacki LXXVIII*, z. 2 (1987): 287–305.
- Fik, Ignacy. „Literatura choromaniaków”. In: „Chamuły”, „gnidy”, „przemilczacze”. *Antologia dwudziestowiecznego pamfletu polskiego*, ed. by Dorota Kozicka, 392–400. Kraków: Universitas, 2011.
- Fizer, John. *Psychologizm i psychoestetyka: historyczno-krytyczna analiza związków*. Ed. by Alicja Kuczyńska. Transl. by Janusz Stawiński. Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1991.
- Franaszek, Andrzej. „Poezja jak bluza z kapturem”. Accessed as: „Dlaczego nikt nie lubi nowej poezji?”. *Gazeta Wyborcza* 68 supplement, 22.03.2014. http://wyborcza.pl/magazyn/1,136823,15666202,Dlaczego_nikt_nie_lubi_nowej_poezji_.html.
- Ingarden, Roman Witold. „O psychologii i psychologizmie w naukach o literaturze”. In: *Studia z estetyki*, vol. 3: 45–55. Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1970.
- Iwasiów, Inga. „Przeniesienia”. In: *Psychologia literatury: zaproszenie do interpretacji*, ed. by Joanna Karpowicz, 15–25. Warszawa: Eneteia, 1999.
- Koronkiewicz, Marta. *I jest moc odległego życia w tej elegii: uwagi o wierszach Andrzeja Sosnowskiego*. Wrocław: Fundacja na Rzecz Kultury i Edukacji im. Tymoteusza Karpowicza, 2019.
- Kozicka, Dorota. „Poezja w klinczu (z) rozumienia”. *Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne. Seria Literacka* 26 (2015): 51–72.
- Kronenberg, Anna. „Migracje kobiet: strategię odzyskiwania głosu i ciała w twórczości literackiej Polek mieszkających w Wielkiej Brytanii i Irlandii”. *Teksty Drugie* 3 (2016): 98–115.
- Kujawa, Dawid. *Pocałunki ludu. Poezja i krytyka po roku 2000*. Kraków: Korporacja Ha!art, 2021.
- Kunz, Tomasz. *Strategie negatywne w poezji Tadeusza Różewicza: od poetyki tekstu do poetyki lektury*. Kraków: Universitas, 2005.
- Magnone, Lena. „Psychoanaliza w badaniach literackich: na marginesach książki «Parabazy wpływu» Jana Potkańskiego”. *Przegląd Humanistyczny* 2 (2010): 51–60.
- Marecki, Piotr. „Strategie subwersywne w polskiej literaturze XXI wieku”. *Teksty Drugie* 6 (2012): 313–324.

- Markowski, Michał Paweł. „Psychoanaliza”. In: *Teorie literatury XX wieku: podręcznik*, ed. by Anna Burzyńska, Michał Paweł Markowski, 47–78. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Znak, 2009.
- Marx, Karl. “Theses on Feuerbach”. In: Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Selected Works*, vol. 1, trans. by W. Lough, 13–15. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969.
- Mauron, Charles. „Wstęp do psychokrytyki”. In: *Współczesna teoria badań literackich za granicą: antologia* t. 2, ed. by Henryk Markiewicz, transl. by Wanda Błońska, 366–394. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1976.
- Mikurda, Kuba. *Nie-całość: Žižek, Dolar, Zupančič*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2015.
- Miłosz, Czesław. „Przeciw poezji niezrozumiałej”. In: *Kartografowie dziwnych podróży” wypisy z polskiej krytyki literackiej XX wieku*, ed. by Marta Wyka, 573–581. Kraków: Universitas, 2004.
- — —. „Z poezją polską przeciw światu”. In his: *Eseje*, 334–344. Warszawa: Świat Książki, 2000.
- Mitosek, Zofia. „Nieświadomość i język (psychoanaliza)”. In her: *Teorie badań literackich*, 182–205. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2012.
- Mulet, Katarzyna. „Analiza psychokrytyczna poezji Stanisława Barańczaka”. *Przestrzenie Teorii* 16 (2011): 157–177. <https://doi.org/10.14746/pt.2011.16.9>.
- Pawlukiewicz, Ryszard. *Psychologiczne ujęcie problematyki badawczej w polskiej nauce o literaturze do roku 1939*. Kraków: Uniwersytet Jagielloński, 1987.
- Płuciennik, Jarosław. *Literackie identyfikacje i oddźwięki: poetyka a empatia*. Kraków: Universitas, 2004.
- Podsiadło, Jacek. „Daj mi tam, gdzie mogę dobiec”. *Polska Poezja Współczesna. Przewodnik encyklopedyczny*, 8.02.2017. <https://przewodnikpoetycki.amu.edu.pl/daj-mi-tam-gdzie-moge-dobiec-i/>.
- Sluneco, Thomas, Martin Wieser. „Cultural-Historical Psychology”. In: *Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology*, ed. by Thomas Teo, 1 (A-D): 352–356. New York: Springer, 2014.
- Vygotski, Lev Semenovitch. „Fascism in Psychoneurology”. In: *The Vygotsky Reader*, ed. by Jaan Valsiner, René van der Veer, 327–337. Oxford: Blackwell Publ., 1994.
- Wygotski, Lew Siemionowicz. *Psychologia sztuki*. Ed. by Stanisław Balbus. Transl. by Maria Zagórska. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1980.
- Zadura, Bohdan. „Daj mu tam, gdzie go nie ma, czyli języki obce poezji”. *Polska Poezja Współczesna. Przewodnik encyklopedyczny*, 8.02.2017. <http://przewodnikpoetycki.amu.edu.pl/daj-mu-tam-gdzie-go-nie-ma-czyli-jezyki-obce-poezji-i/>.

KEYWORDS

PSYCHOLOGY OF LITERATURE

literary criticism

ABSTRACT:

The author discusses the concept of Lev Vygotsky's psychology of literature against the background of various interpretations of the term. Through reconstructing a reactological understanding of the text as a stimulus, she juxtaposes different applications of the category of "strategy" in Polish literary studies and criticism. This makes it possible to reclaim the concept of the psychology of literature and discard the unfavourable connotations with pan-psychologism, biographism or interpreters' pretense for being diagnosticians of literary characters or authors.

i n c o m p r e h e n s i b i l i t y

VYGOTSKY

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR:

Zuzanna Sala (1994) – Ph.D. student at the literary studies program of Doctoral School of the Humanities at the Jagiellonian University; literary critic, deputy editor-in-chief of “KONTENT” quarterly, co-founder of KONTENT foundation. She has published, inter alia in “Wielogłos” and monographs “„Doświadczenia negatywne w poezji XXI wieku” [„Negative experiences in 21st c. poetry”] (Toruń 2017) and „Współczesne życie literackie” [“Contemporary literary life”] (Toruń 2018).