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**ZGORZELSKI'S THEORY OF LYRIC POETRY:
GENOLOGY AND AXIOLOGY**

I have been puzzled by two statements of Marian Maciejewski about Czesław Zgorzelski, an author of *O sztuce poetyckiej Mickiewicza* (*On Mickiewicz's Art of Poetry*).

The first one comes from *Roczniki Humanistyczne* from 1988 (1/87-91)

[Zgorzelski], in a way, discovers fully for twentieth century readers Mickiewicz's and Słowacki's lyric poetry; *on the margin* (emphasis-B.K.Ch) of his history of literature, Professor Zgorzelski creates *his own theory of lyric poetry*.

The second one, which comes from around 1998, was written down in the book *Czesław Zgorzelski. Uczony i wychowawca*¹ (*Czesław Zgorzelski: A Scholar and an Educator*):

Zgorzelski's *theory of lyric poetry*, this conceptualizing scaffolding, written about the most elusive of literary genres, in an ontological aspect is inspired by the suggestions of Ostap Ortwin (individualism and generalization), while in the description of the literary content it is inspired by Russian formalists.[...] His division into rhetorical, melodious and colloquial lyric poetry allows him to speak about three types of lyric monologue, out of which he drew a synthetic category of the 'tone' of a text.

¹ Czesław Zgorzelski. *Uczony i wychowawca*, ed. by Danuta Paluchowska, *Marian Maciejewski*, Lublin 2002, 26.

Maciejewski puts forward a firm statement, which simply gets lost during the reading of his extensive summaries and commentaries to Zgorzelski's book; it becomes a tiny part, which becomes important only in the larger context of descriptions and information. This information, when singled out, takes on a different meaning. Maciejewski is the only commentator of Zgorzelski's work I know of who is so keen to call Zgorzelski *a theoretician of lyric poetry*, making it clear at the same time that this theory was constructed 'on the margins' of his actions as a historian of poetry. It is a theory very carefully worked out—in internal and factual context—and its claims have been subject to a very deep process of self-verification. The sentence about "conceptualizing scaffolding" and "in some way an ontological aspect" is meaningful and somewhat mysterious. As far as I understand it, it deals again with some 'fundamentalization' of Zgorzelski's achievements as a scholar of lyricism.

Maybe against illusory circumstances, for Zgorzelski, after all, has been widely assessed as a scholar of lyric poetry. I see Maciejewski's brief statement about Zgorzelski as important to understand the biography of this researcher, with all objective and far-reaching repercussions,

The history of research on poetry is full of theories, constructs both universal and effusive, partly congruent with the object of their description, partly not, subjected first of all to the pressures of discursive properties of mind, which at a given moment stop beyond the scope of one's own field of research.

Theories may be created in the way one writes a novel, a fable; a theory may be a grand narrative and as such draw attention to itself. Our times provide many examples of such theories. How fascinating as a narrative is, for example Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence*, how many of those who write about poetry, and not only of them, have been seduced by it. It has seduced them also because of its quite agreeable research findings. Is it not so that through this Bloom's sieve and his drawers there flows away also the most precious essence of poetry, or to be more specific, of lyric poetry? Or the findings of, for example, Jonathan Culler; for someone who has read some

of the Polish treatises on poetry, do not they sound suspiciously repetitive?

According to the dictionary of literary terms:

[Theory is] a branch of research [...] dealing with the structural and evolutionary regularities of literature as a separate field of research within the Humanities, dealing with general features of literary works and their typological differentiation, and, to a certain extent, also with the mechanization of the creative process and the reception of literary works.²

While the simplest definition is like this

Theory (gr. *teoria* = seeing, examining) 1. knowledge explaining some field of phenomena, unlike practise, with which it is, however, connected and on the basis of which it is formulated. 2. group, system of theorems put together logically and factually, connected with certain logical relations, occurring in a given area of knowledge and fulfilling accepted criteria of science, scholarship and correctness.³

In the Greek root word the focus is on seeing, therefore on a kind of experience which is a crucial foundation of any theoretical construct. In the case of Zgorzelski we have an opportunity to see how flamboyantly the experiences of a reader of Romantic poetry are collected, but not only that (Romanticism exists here as an example of the peak achievements of lyric poetry, the climactic moment in its development), also in what way they lead, step by step, inductively, creation in the crucial moments of "a system of theorems put together logically and factually." "Regularities", "features" and their typology are an almost constant point of arrival for Zgorzelski during individual parts of his research process.

² Janusz Sławiński, Entry "Teoria literatury" ("Theory of Literature"), in M. Głowiński, T. Kostkiewiczowa, A. Okopień-Sławińska, J. Sławiński, *Słownik terminów literackich*, ed. by J. Sławiński, Warszawa 1998.

³ *Słownik wyrazów obcych*, ed. by Jan Tokarski, Warszawa 1987.

My teaching experience tells me that, in practise, almost the only way of explaining what lyricism is about it to reach for a fragment of *Romantyzm w Polsce* (*Romanticism in Poland*) which is concerned with this notion. Descriptions of structuralists, for example of Janusz Sławiński, or others, just create a net which does not hold the essence of lyricism. It is worth remarking, in the margin, that this modest pamphlet of Zgorzelski from 1956 is a bravura demonstration how from an analytical description of poetry [one can] draw a clear set of specific features of a given period.

Friedrich states⁴ that the development, the evolution of poetry, could be perceived in an enlarging of the distance between a subject and the world of which this subjects speaks (constructs a certain model of a line subject-world). The characteristic feature of the ‘Lublin theory of poetry’⁵—I am obviously entering the ground of observations about theories of poetry based on definitions—is a ‘geometrical’ (in terms of imagination) construction of systems, drawers, shelves, lines showing logical, inductive regularities, which can be drawn from an object under scrutiny. So, looking in this way and reading, carefully and many times, for example, Zgorzelski’s *Zarysy i szkice literackie* (*Literary Outlines and Sketches*) we can see how Zgorzelski reaches universal statements about lyric poetry starting from very minute details and moving upwards.

These statements can be found, for example, in the subsection ‘innocently’ entitled “Poetics of Romantic Lyric Poetry”. It is there that a ‘Copernican’ statement about evolution of poetry appears, in a way referring to Romantic lyric poetry, but if we know what Romantic lyric poetry was, we would understand that this statement refers generally to poetry written later.

⁴ I also have in mind general judgements and conclusions drawn from the book: Hugo Friedrich, *Structure of Modern Poetry*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1974.

⁵ I also have in mind Marian Maciejewski’s and Ireneusz Opacki’s works on lyric poetry.

So, for example, we observe in the Romantic period the expansions of structural frames of lyric expression, more frequent use of descriptions, stories or even dialogues as forms of expression for subjective expressions of reality, possessing equal rights with the traditional monologue. This phenomenon could be interpreted as a result of a search for a more effective 'objectivization' of a lyrical sense of utterances.⁶

And he speaks on strengthening the presence of the individual in this perspective of seeing:

So, we should speak here not about 'objectivization' but about making the meaning of lyric experience universal. Anyway, both these tendencies are connected. The extension of structural frames of lyric poetry would not have been possible if the simultaneous sharper drawing of the speaking persona in the only and unique situation had not happened. This became a characteristic feature of Romantic lyric poetry.⁷

If we do not read these fragments carefully, we could tend to equate them with tens of others dealing with similar themes, but if we draw our attention to them, and maybe, if we return to them many times, to look at them from different distances and perspectives, we will know that what happens here is a sort of pointing to an 'essence' of the most important threshold in the development of Polish lyric poetry, while the synchronic sense of these sentences is also important.

Zgorzelski drew many universal observations from the historical situation of poetry, but he was relying mostly on Romanticism, the period most fruitful for generalizations.

I am not interested at this moment in defining lyricism; the whole text of *Literary Outlines and Sketches* works towards such a definition, the building of which had started with *Romanticism in Poland*. I will draw on my own experience as a co-author and an editor of a post-conference volume *Liryczność jako przedmiot badań estetyki, teorii*

⁶ Czesław Zgorzelski, *Zarysy i szkice literackie*, Warszawa 1988, 21.

⁷ Ibidem.

*i historii literatury (Lyricism as a Subject of Research in the Aesthetics, Theory and History of Literature).*⁸ The attempt to build a stable definition, of defining lyricism in terms of ideas, were not so much surprising as disturbingly amorphous, often within one, individual presentation. Frequent reliance on various theoreticians from all over the world, especially in texts purporting to be synthetic, resulted in a picture which was nebulous and vague. Culler and other great theoreticians strengthened this impressionist mist, creating a situation adverse to a logic which would make connections between ideas and what is real in a poetic text.

I remember that in those conversations, and then during the editing of the book, that a text by Marzena Kryszczuk stood out, for its author in her analysis of contemporary poetry could not refrain from practical redefinitions and references to the description of lyricism performed by Czesław Zgorzelski. Zgorzelski, in his findings, is rational, logical, coherent, unambiguous and very precise.

Somewhat in the margin, I would like to state that Zgorzelski's theory of lyric poetry enters into a creative symbiosis with Roman Ingarden's understanding of lyric poetry and lyricism (among others, in the filling of gaps, with which structuralism could not cope, for example, the way of treating issues connected with the emotional character of the lyric 'I'). It is very probable that at this point an original Polish theory of lyric poetry, endowed with unique features, could be formulated.

Attempts to weaken the value of this theory the result, for example, of forgetting how intricately Zgorzelski connected his observations with earlier reflections, which had originated outside universities; what mattered was an empirical valour, therefore Ostap Ortwin and Julian Przyboś.

Zgorzelski's Benedictine work as a theoretician of poetry is overseen during a hasty reading bent on a spectacular result. Zgorzelski's theory is connected, which is well known, with careful, unequalled

⁸ *Liryczność jako przedmiot badań estetyki, teorii i historii literatury*, ed. by Bernadetta Kuczera-Chachulska, Ewangelina Skalińska, Warszawa 2013.

observation and description of genres. How does Zgorzelski make such descriptions? I will provide some quotations:

[...] good-natured and smiling drawn-out story.⁹

[...] his elegiac reminiscences never turned into abstract grudges diluted with tears.¹⁰

Or—while writing about a song:

Which other organization of poetic expression could be better suited for the realization of simplicity, empathy [...], these most crucial elements of Syrokomla's lyric muse?

"Good natured and smiling drawn-out story", "empathy of a song" tell us about unity of genology and the axiological reading of the world, and we can state now that the connection of genological and axiological spheres, a full picture of specific aspects of a work of art with its anthropological centre, make Zgorzelski's theory of lyric poetry unique. This theory was later developed by the so called Lublin school of research on Romanticism.

⁹ Czesław Zgorzelski, *Zarysy i szkice literackie*, op. cit., 239.

¹⁰ Ibidem.