

Summary

Local Philology – Localness of the Philologist. Stefan Szymutko’s Academic and Literary Practices

The main goal of the present work is bringing to light and interpreting the author’s signature inscribed in the works of Stefan Szymutko, both those considered essays and those treated as academic articles or dissertations. The overriding analytical framework applied to accomplish this goal is the reflection on the mechanisms shaping the history of literary studies.

The first chapter concerns the nineteenth- and twentieth-century transformations of “philology,” understood both as a concept and a set of research practices. Philology is the first subject analyzed in the present work. Following research in the field of the sociology of ignorance, it can be described as “agnotological,” since its reception was influenced by the cultural mechanisms of production, transmission, or confirmation of knowledge and ignorance. The chapter begins with an analysis of the context which determined the marginalization of philology in post-war American humanities, and the reasons why the “returns to philology” nowadays proclaimed in the United States and partially translated into the Polish context in most cases do not contribute to a better understanding of its history or the history of humanities in general. Therefore, instead of creating a new global story, which would lead to generating a new kind of ignorance, I propose to consider several examples of Polish

philologists and linguists from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As a result of this interpretative shift, it is possible to draw a connection between Polish disputes over the shape of philology from the period defined above, often limited to the narrative about an anti-Positivist breakthrough, and the nineteenth-century discussion about the relationship between the “local” (peripheral) and “universal” (global) dimensions of Polish humanities.

The second chapter is devoted to the analysis of Szymutko’s early work. At the beginning, I criticize the reception of his works, wherein it is usually assumed that Szymutko was only able to write about his regional subjectivity after the democratic breakthrough of 1989, the subsequent end of the politics of history practiced by the Polish People’s Republic, and the first Silesian studies sessions organized in the mid-90’s. However, Szymutko’s academic and critical juvenilia allow for a slightly different interpretation. As it turns out, from the very beginning of his career Szymutko wrote (explicitly or implicitly) about issues such as Silesian identity, the relations between the “center” and the “periphery,” and the place of humanities in the contemporary world.

The third chapter concerns the relationships between Szymutko’s theory of Parnicki’s novel and his localness. Although Szymutko himself emphasized that his interpretation of Parnicki had a lot in common with his own worldview, his book *To Understand Parnicki* and later essays about the novel, *Word and Flesh*, have not yet been properly interpreted. As I argue throughout the chapter, Szymutko’s concretization of Parnicki is, firstly, an intervention aimed at changing the way in which the writer is received, and secondly – a statement into which the philologist inscribes his own cultural and geographical situation, thus signaling issues developed in later works (e.g. *Aunt Cila’s Tombstone*, his collection of so-called “Silesian essays”).

The fourth chapter differs slightly from the previous ones. It concerns Stefan Szymutko’s Private Library, located in the College of Inter-Faculty Individual Studies in Humanities (University of Silesia). The book collections of philologists (more broadly: humanists) are practically absent from the so-called “archival turn,” and thus constitute the last agnotological object analyzed in the thesis. I try to argue that private libraries of humanists are an important source of knowledge about the localness of literary researchers. Different kinds of traces left in the books belonging to Szymutko have allowed us not only to reconstruct his unfulfilled ideas for articles or essays, to revise the doxa about him, and to understand the network of professional and private relations in which he operated, but also to be reminded of the obvious, yet still controversial notion: “behind the auctorial narrative of academic works” there is always a concrete man, with his personal anxieties, worldview etc. It is also worth noting that glosses, underlined fragments, and fiches refer to the author’s signature, which marks all the philologist’s texts regardless of their stylistic features.