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DARIUSZ SKÓRCZEWSKI

HISTORY OF LITERATURE EMBRACED BY DARWIN

The statement that we live in the age of multiple theories sounds very mild. This euphemism allows one to diminish, in a rhetorical fashion, the feeling of frustration which on the one hand accompanies young scholars of literature trying to get acquainted with the language and methodology of these theories, and on the other hand overcomes (at least from time to time) seasoned researchers, who spend their scholarly energy to a smaller or larger extent on the search for adequate and solid (at times, unfortunately, only spectacular) theoretical grounding for their criticism. Both the former and the latter are assisted by the, to a certain extent correct, premonition that we cannot survive as scholars without this grounding, which anchors our own individual research in one of the key contemporary theoretical approaches to literary studies. This feeling of frustration, we feel ashamed to admit to, is one of the taboos of literary scholars, and it goes against the dominant *comme il faut* in our field of research—it is probably the same in all other disciplines as well. Perhaps the metaphor of 'Purgatory of Theory' is best when it comes to describe the situation in which literary studies are now. Literary studies are now in a position of no return as long as they are not going to pay the last instalment of the loan taken from Theory.

A question can be posed in the context of these considerations: will the synthesis of Polish literature in ten or twenty years be free of 'isms', or will it be saturated with them? If such a synthesis is written at all, which is not certain, if we take into account the variety of different, untranslatable 'languages' and incompatible 'dictionaries' which different theories use? (Let us draw attention to the modest

dimension of the project implied in the question. We are concerned with a single synthesis. Maybe there will be more. Just one example of such difficulties which this enterprise entails: how should we write about the literature of 'Kresy' (the Eastern Borderlands of the Second Polish Republic between first and second world wars) in the context of the Borderland criticism and the character of Polish presence in the Eastern Borderlands in the period before the partitions of Poland at the end of the eighteenth century? Which categories and what methodology should be used in order to: on the one hand avoid the construction of the continuation of Polish cultural supremacy, while on the other not to destroy the 'soft' specificity of the Borderland criticism in contrast with the'"hard' colonial discourses of the European imperial powers in the nineteenth and twentieth century? Władysław Panas was at one time contemplating a project of literary studies on the ethnic borderlands which, "while respecting manifestations of differences, and preserving and stressing autonomy", would show in texts "varied manifestations of difference, stresses and collisions, blending, duality and ambivalence, also of the most dramatic kinds, connected with the notions of national identity".[1] This vision, which has been too hastily called 'colonial', Bogusław Bakuła contrasted with the vision of integral comparative studies.[2] Can some agreement be reached between these two opposing view which would respect their points of view? Or is it that we have to choose one of the two visions, which are, after all, not antithetical? Or perhaps we should look for yet another perspective, some 'third way', of which now we cannot even conceive of. This example, probably one of many which can be listed, shows us the difficulties which authors *in spe* of the future literary and historical synthesis

[1] *Władysław Panas,* "O pograniczu etnicznym w badaniach", in *Wiedza o literaturze i edukacja. Księga referatów Zjazdu Polonistów,* Warszawa 1995, ed. Teresa Michałowska, Zbigniew Goliński, Zbigniew Jarosiński, Warszawa 1996, 613.

[2] Bogusław Bakuła, *Historia i komparatystyka. Szkice o literaturze i kulturze Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej XX wieku*, Poznań 2000; cf. Bogusław Bakuła, *"Kolonialne i postkolonialne aspekty polskiego dyskursu kresoznawczego (zarys problematyki)"*, Teksty Drugie 2006, no. 6, 31-32.

will have to face. Do we have, as literary scholars, adequate language to deal with this type of venture? Or maybe this synthesis will remain immune to the dilemmas into which literary studies are tempted by Theory. And will it follow its own way? However unlikely it may seem to be to us now.

We have to put off these questions because it is so difficult to offer a sound answer right now. Nevertheless, we should all agree that the bliss which existed in literary studies before Structuralist methodology will never return. Does it mean that we are sentenced to a history of literature which will fall apart into many different tongues to complete the destruction of the Babel of Theory? Will it be a History of Literature of history-of-literature-from-this-or-that-perspective? Cultural history of literature? One thing we know for sure: deconstruction is out of the question because (as is known), deconstruction has no inclination in this direction and, moreover, it has not been popular in Poland. So, maybe an evolutionary history of literature?

Evolution of literary studies in the twentieth century (if we agree that we have an evolutionary model here and not, for example, anarchic, for revolutionary it is definitely not) has been carried on, to the large extent, through interdisciplinary and extra-disciplinary, and lately also of trans-disciplinary inspirations. The direction of this evolution was given by, first of all, semiotics (Ferdinand de Saussure and Roman Jakobson) and structuralism with the later inversions of Derrida and Foucault's theory of discourse, psychoanalysis (Freud, Jung, Lacan, and to a much lesser extent Fromm), but also Marxism, with its sociological perspective (I am not concerned here with the ideological and institutional background and specific forms Marxist literary studies had in Central Europe and in the Soviet Union, as I consider it is as deviation and hope that it will never resurface again). Phenomenology was not as influential in the development of literary studies, a fact that is regretted by Polish admirers and followers of Ingarden. This list of influences of varied intensity and range could, obviously, be extended by far, and separate phenomena could be finely nuanced.

Over the last twenty five years the humanist paradigm has been changed so much, mostly due to radical post-structuralism. As a result, there exists within it a widespread idea that the cognitive content of our experience is linguistically 'intermediated' or culturally 'constructed', and therefore it is not objective, *ergo*: not reliable, incoherent, incorrect, or even totally 'invented'. The subject, engaged in studying reality, turns out to be yet another cultural and linguistic construct. The irrationality of these convictions, which can be best seen when we draw final conclusions from them, has not been noticed by and is probably still not noticed by the creators of postmodernist discourse, their supporters and disciples. Because this point of view is not only popular but also dominant and compulsory at most universities of both hemispheres, a serious debate with it occurs only in places which may be considered niches, located away from the mainstream. This debate is carried out by some conservative journals, for example in the excellent American quarterly *Modern Age*, and in other publications polemical in relation to the mainstream of contemporary Humanities with its preferences and fashions. One of the best known anthologies opposing the postmodernist paradigm is the substantial *Theory's Empire*.[3] Another book which deals with these issues is Dorota Heck's *Four Dilemmas: Theory, Criticism, History, Faith. Sketches on the Threshold of Literary Anthropology.*[4]

(My commentary: the presence and the perspective of presence of the scholarly achievements of Polish literary scholars, writing on literary history and theory in English is a phenomenon worth the serious consideration of a separate study. Here I can only make my point and in a Cassandra-like tone warn that the alarming demographic date, together with the solutions used not only

[3] *Theory's Empire. An Anthology of Dissent,* ed. by Daphne Patai and Wilfrido H. Corral, New York 2005. See Polish review of this publication: Stefan Głowacki, "Teoria literatury bez Teorii", Teksty Drugi", 2006, no. 3, 182-187.

[4] Dorota Heck, *Four Dilemmas:Theory, Criticism, History, Faith. Sketches on the threshold of literary anthropology*, translated into English by Robert Kielawski, Kraków 2010.See the review of this book in *The Sarmatian Review*, vol. 30, no.3 (September 2010), 1529-1530.

at universities of EU countries, such as international exchange programmes, the so called academic mobility of Ph.D. students and other students may lead in the future to the situation that English will become the second (alongside Polish) language of instruction at departments of Polish. Even if this pessimistic scenario does not happen, the obligation to use English in literary research is also the result of the process of globalization. The strongly felt necessity to absorb the existing languages and discourses in order to adjust to (catch up with?) the contemporary trends in Academia has been accompanied by the following motto: "If you want to be read and quoted, use the discourse understandable to the majority and publish in English"—this is supported by clearly pragmatic criteria such as the *impact factor.* I sincerely hope that Polish literary scholars—if they decide to act in accordance with the above quoted motto—will not only not succumb to the temptation of imitative repetitions of the banalities of contemporary global literary discourse, but that they themselves will, through their texts, try to influence, even though on a small scale, the shape of contemporary global literary discourse—both in terms of historical studies, which is a relatively easier feat, but also as far as theoretical proposals go, which is far more challenging.

One of the solutions for saving literary studies from the sorry state in which they were plunged as a result of post-modernists 'innovations' is an idea – so characteristic of the times in which we live—to integrate literary studies with sciences.[5] This idea seems to be paradoxical, because these two areas have been seen as being in a state of conflict, and the traditional structure of Academia, based on narrow specializations, has made it difficult for a long time to 'humanize' sciences, while the Humanities have not been encouraged to adopt ideas from sciences. Moreover, it is the sciences, with their cult of technology and myth of tangible, pragmatic use, out of reach for

[5] I have analysed some of the problems connected with this kind of tendency to 'overcome duality' of science in "Dokąd zmierza humanistyka? O sytuacji wewnątrz i wokół dyskursu humanistycznego (i teoretycznołiterackiego)"., *Teksty Drugie* 2004, no. 6, s. 199-211.

the Humanities, which are blamed for creating a technocratic society, and therefore, for the decline of Western culture.[6] Taking all this into consideration, we should ask a question: can sciences play any role in the revival of the Humanities?

One of the reasons for this new alliance with science is the need, felt by some parts of Academia, to change the contemporary Humanist discourse. It could lead to a neutralization of the effects of radical epistemological scepticism, which is usually blamed for the relativism and methodological anarchy rampant in the Humanities. At the basis of the critique of such phenomena there exists a strong objection to the idea that the rules of discourse are superior to the rules of social and empirical sciences, or, to put it differently, to the idea that everything is governed by words, which are unable to grasp reality. Therefore, we have a clear turn, mostly within American Academia, in the direction of a commonsensical approach to empirical and social sciences, differing from the academic Humanities in the respect of staying clear from the perception of scientific discourse as a construct imposed on reality as a result of some interests, power or cultural practice.(Let us not forget that common sense, which stands behind this conviction, is one of the most suspicious categories for postmodernists and also one of the most often attacked by 'masters of suspicion'). Scientifically oriented critics, hostile to the results which post-modernism has had on the Humanities, would like to see in their discipline first of all a record of cognition corresponding with reality. Because reality—they claim against the dominant post-modernist discourse—is available to the mind and could be communicated with the help of tools which humanity has at a given stage of its development as a civilization, This reasoning sounds sensible, and we can suspect that, for example, physicists, regardless of their country, language or ethnic background, would all laugh together when confronted with the claim of the narrative nature of the theory of relativity or constructed foundations of Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle…

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[6] See Wolfgang Smith, "Science and the Restoration of,.Culture," *Modem Age*, vol. 43, no. l (Winter 2001), 91.

The Humanities, together with their university avant-garde, are based on the fundamental belief in culture and the power of its autonomy ("*omnis cultura ex cultura*")—in the ability of self-regulation, transmitted from one generation to the next, this specific 'soteriological' potential to uplift man and humanity (nations and societies), to make a change. Derrida, despite his fundamental polemics with almost the whole epistemological tradition, in a certain sense has strengthened this autonomy by stating that text is 'everything;—*il n'y a pas de hors-texte.* Therefore, literature could become an autonomous area of reality, or, in other words, a textual universe, which—as *matrix*—stands in opposition to the external world, instead of occupying a referential position towards it. Some literary scholars have followed this path—fascinated not necessarily and not exclusively by Derrida himself, but more by the perspective that the deconstructing of texts promises—and are glad in their opinion to be enjoying the privilege of access to final, 'highest' reality. They perceive this reality, in turn, as hermetically sealed in the area of literature—and therefore devoid of metaphysics, eschatology, or connections with transcendence. Perhaps the most spectacular example of such an approach to literature is the so called Christian deconstruction[7].

Arguments against the constructionist thinking, of which pantextualism is an extension, come from different sides. Pantextualists believe that the link between language and reality is broken, and therefore we are 'trapped in language'. Such arguments, however, come only from conservative circles,. Some American scholars remind us that the at the centre of 'narrative basis' is the sequential ordering of observed (reported) phenomena, which takes into account 'actor', 'plot', 'setting', 'props', etc. Such is the common-sense category of the cause and effect thinking distinguished over a hundred years

[7] See, e.g., Gerald Comelius Monsman, *Walter Pater Art of Autobiography,* New Haven 1980; Clyde de L. Ryals, "The Concept of Becoming", *Nineteenth Century Literature* 1988, no. 43, 157-174; W.D. Shaw, *Crisis of Representation*, New York 1990. Quoted after Joseph Carroll, *Evolution Theory*, Columbia 1995, 129.

ago by William James[8] (Let us add that James was not the first one to do so; its history goes all the way back to Aristotle's rationalism.) If we were to look for support in more contemporary concepts, treatment—for example by cognitive linguistics—of narrativity and casual matrix as a fundamental frame within each human thought and communication take place, is convergent with ways of analysis of E.O. Wilson who accepted an epigenetic rule, that is evaluating understanding of the world transmitted beyond genetics. From here it is quite a short way to say that there is some necessity written into nature, which can be learnt by human reason and which seems to be an objective feature of nature. If, therefore, that "narrative principally serves to give coherent shape to the events of social life", then "imputation of necessity to nature suggests a profound predisposition to discover casual order in nature."[9] Both these properties of human thinking are, according to bio-epistemologists, 'adaptive techniques' enabling understanding (and therefore learning) of relations between events (objects). If, however, it turns out that an order of things discovered in this particular moment is not a 'real' property, but a construct created by the mind, the fallacy of subjectivism is not implied, nor a return to radical scepticism. They are only confirmed by the process of development of our cognitive powers, which, thanks to such experiences, evolve all the time from one level of "relative [that is temporary—D.S.] adequacy.[10] In this way the problem of the alleged incompatibility of human language and external reality is explained; the problem raised by contemporary nominalists as an alleged proof against the supporters of realism,

What sort of perspectives are open to literature and literary criticism, the position which I have managed to present only in very general terms; the position which has been referred to as 'Darwinism'

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[8] Nancy Easterlin, Making Knowledge: Bioepistemology and the Foundation of Literary Theory", in: *Theory's Empire. An Anthology of Dissent,* ed. by D. Patai and W.H. Corral, Columbia University Press, New York 2004, 629.

[9] Ibidem.

[10] Ibid., 630.

or 'evolutionism' in literary studies? Some scholars believe that "psychological theories convergent with biological evolutionary theory can help us resolve contradictions between theory and practice now besetting literary studies."[11] The main populariser of such changes in literary studies is Joseph Carroll, who has been called the founder of 'literary Darwinism'. He has voiced the need for 'adaptive' or 'evolutionary' literary studies.[12] The project, developed over the last few years by Carroll with a group of scholars, is based on the assumption that the Humanities in general, and literary studies in particular should—under the influence of so-called Neo-Darwinism—take into consideration the evolving nature of this 'literary animal'[13] that man is. Constant ('genetic') features of this nature, creating a frame for and shaping the cultural formation of a given period (or style), etc. are modified as a result of external forces, adapting to a given set of the environment. The existence of this evolving 'cultural nature' are, perhaps, confirmed by the findings of socio-biology (among others of E.O. Wilson) and evolutionary psychology (among others of. Tomassello[14]) which have been made

[11] Ibid., 621.

[12] The first (and to the best of my knowledge, the only) description of this method was presented by the invaluable Ewa Domańska, "Jakiej metodologii potrzebuje współczesna humanistyka?", *Teksty Drugie*, 2010, no.1-2, .45-55.

[13] This expression comes from the title of the book *The Literary Animal. Evolution and the Naturę of Narraiive*, ed. by Jonathan Gottschall, David Sloan Wilson, Evanston 2005.

[14] See, e.g., Michael Tomasello, *The Human Adaptation for Culture,* "Annual Review of Anthropology" 1999, no. 28, 509-529. Tomasello in this book argues that at one moment in the history of the world a mysterious, uncommon "genetic event" had taken place as a result of which people acquired abilities which differentiate them from other primates, to accumulate cognitive (cultural) modifications and therefore – to use a different language - to create culture and to learn thanks to it. Yet, it is not an unknown "genetic event" in itself that is responsible for varied forms of culture. As Tomasello argues, "this event merely opened the way for some new social and cultural process. that then with no further genetic events, created many, if not all, of the most interesting and distinctive characteristics of human cognition (526).

since the middle of the twentieth century. Fascinated by the novel approach embedded in these disciplines, Carroll stated, not without satisfaction, that "in the past fifteen years or so, literary scholars have begun to assimilate the findings of evolutionary social science, and these scholars now constitute a distinct movement in literary theory and literary criticism."[15] The founder of 'literary Darwinism' admitted himself that at the beginning of the 1990s, frustrated with "irrationality and textuality of dominant doctrines in literary studies"[16] he got interested in the evolutionary perspectives of socio-biology and evolutionary psychology. This impulse was turned into a constant fascination, and Carroll started his own research project which incorporated categories and ideas from both disciplines. The first extended presentation of the new theory was included in the monumental *Evolution and Literary Theory* (1995), which served as a kind of manifesto and a 'confession of faith'. This book also defined the scope of research and key themes.

Carroll relies in his project on the cumulative theory of cultural transmission which was described (among others) in Tomassello's *The Cultural Origins of Human Cognition*.[17] One of the central assumptions of this theory is the conviction that people, similarly to different animal species, exhibit a set of behaviour typical for their species, conditioned or intermediated genetically, and transmitted with a speed much faster than in the case of biological features—from one generation to the next. Tomasello recognizes two factors shaping human cognition and the culture built on it: biology and environment:

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[15] Joseph Carroll, "Adaptationist Literary Study. An Introductory Guide", „Ometeca", no. 10 (2006), 18.

[16] Joseph Carrol, Literary Darwinism. Evolution, Human Nature, and Literature New York 2004, s. XVI. In the personal statement (see footnote 21) Carroll adds that the direction of his research has been defined by his rejection of faith and becoming a radical atheist.

[17] Michael Tomasello, *The Cultural Origins of Human Cognition,* Harvard University Press, 1999

> Modern human adult cognition is a result not just of processes of biological evolution, but also of other processes that human biological evolution made possible in both cultural historical time and individual ontogenetic time.[18]

Applied to a field of reflection over artefacts of human culture, this theory interprets them in progressivist Darwinian categories. As Carroll admits, the goal is not to start a new research school or a 'movement', but to fundamentally restructure the frame in which literary studies are performed, through the realization that all human behaviour, including the products of individual and group imagination, take on a new important dimension when perceived from the evolutionary perspective.[19] This declaration does not disperse fundamental doubts if we are not confronted with the project which may lead to a radical loss of autonomy of literary studies.

Before we try to answer this question, let us consider if 'literary Darwinism' has anything interesting to offer as far as individual literary texts are concerned:

For example, Joseph Carroll has this to say about novels:

> They reflect a point of view, a specific way of organizing the world so that it conforms to the artist's particular needs, the artist's characteristic way of organizing his or her perceptions, thoughts, and feelings. When we read novels, we are participating vicariously in the novelist's point of view–the novelist's whole vision of the world. We learn that way, not just about what is being depicted, but about the novelist's way of looking at things. That kind of knowledge is good to have in itself, as social information, but we might also use it in a more practical way, picking up possible strategies for coping with challenges in our own lives.[20]

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[18] Michael Tomasello, "The Human Adaptation for Culture", op. cit., 527.

[19] See Joseph Carroll, "What is Literary Darwinism: An Interview with Joseph Carroll", *Neuronarrative* February 27, 2009, after: http://neuronarrative.wordpress.com/2009/02/27/what-is-literary-Darwinism-an-interview-with-joseph-carroll [access: 4.01.2011].

[20] Ibidem.

Scholars following the adaptive theory analyse canonical works of English and world literature. For example, they study: *Wuthering Heights, The Picture of Dorian Gray, Pride and Prejudice, Lolita* or *We* by Zamyatin, the poetry of William Wordsworth, or even the Odyssey.[21] They apply the tools of behaviouristic and cognitive analysis and take into account the historical and cultural context. Such a method allows them to see in the characters of these texts models of behaviour and models of cognition which are characteristic for humankind and replicable. Such a treatment of works of art is the result of the conviction that literary studies should be based on—obviously apart from evolutionary biology—social science with the adaptive bend. They are to provide a literary scholar of Darwinist orientation

> with the most thorough, detailed guide to the actual content and structure of human nature, and they use that guide in analyzing the content and form of literary depictions, the perspectives of authors, and the responses of readers.[22]

Such a formulation of relationships between disciplines is the result of the acceptance of certain perspectives, which are fundamental for this project, which define the sphere common to literary studies and bio-epistemology.

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[21] See, for example, Joseph Carroll, "The Cuckoo's History. Human Nature in *Wuthering Heights*", *Philosophy and Literature*, vol. 32, no. 2 (October 2008); Joseph Carroll, "Aestheticism, Homoeroticism, and Christian Guilt in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*" , „Philosophy and Literature" vol. 29, no. 2 (October 2005); Joseph Carroll, "Human Nature and Literary Meaning. A Theoretical Model Illustrated with a Critique of *Pride and Prejudice*", in *The Literary Animal. Evolution and the Nature of Narrative*, op. cit;, Brian Boyd, "The Art of Literature and the Science of Literature, "American Scholar", vol. 77, no. 2 (Spring 2008); Brett Cooke, "Human Nature in Utopia: Zamyatin's *We*", Evanston 2002; Nanelle Easterlin, "Psychoanalysis and *The Discipline of Love* " Philosophy and Literature", vol. 24, no. 2 (October 2000); Jonathan Gottschall, "Homer's Human Animal: Ritual Combat in the *Iliad*, "Philosophy and Literature", vol. 25, no. 2 (October 2001).

[22] Joseph Carroll, *"Adaptationist Literary Study. An Introductory Guide"*, op. cit., s. 19.

> Adaptationist literary scholars accept the basic logic of an adaptationist understanding of human behaviour In concord with both evolutionary psychologists and with the majority of literary authors and theorists from the time of Aristotle to the later part of the twentieth century, they believe in Human nature. That is they believe that humans in all ages and cultures display a common set of motives, feelings and ways of thinking.[23]

Literary Darwinism reminds us therefore about an old and forgotten (because it is unfashionable) truth: that literature is a means that opens access to all elements which create the human world, with its problems, obsessions, goals, motifs and emotions. What matters is—simply—the most basic cognitive function of literature, allowing readers to learn from literary texts knowledge about the world and of their own existence in it, to learn new skills and master others, and ultimately, to plan their own strategies and life goals.

Carroll's recent statement is extremely optimistic, almost pastoral:

> Perhaps on ten or twenty years, looping back cultural historians will be denying that humanities and the evolutionary social sciences were ever in any way at odds with one another. The integration of historical scholarship with the knowledge of human universals will have become standard equipment in literary study. Humanistic expertise in manipulation cultural figurations will have flower into a smooth and harmonious stream with Darwinian findings on the element al features of human nature. Humanistic sensitivity to the fine shades of tone and style in literary works will have blended seamlessly with a rigorous empirical analysis of cognitive mechanisms, and a facility in Whiting's elegantly nuanced prose will mingle happily with the severe logic of a quantitative methodology.[24]

This moving vision of synergy, presented by Carroll, does not hide the fact that this approach, although it connects in a very spectacular

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[23] Ibidem.

[24] Joseph Carroll, *An Evolutionary Paradigm for Literary Study,* "Style", vol. 42, nos. 2-3 (Summer/Fall 2008), 135.

fashion such diverse disciplines (of very diverse objects of study and methodologies) as biology, psychology and literary studies, is yet another version of a speculative theory of literature. In this respect it is not very different from post-structuralist theories, despite all declarations to the contrary. Similarly to evolutionary psychology, it may give attractive and inspiring insights into literature as a sphere of human cognitive and cultural activities. And similarly to evolutionary psychology, because of the speculative nature of its claims, it is not falsifiable.

On the other hand, in relationship to human cognition and its social and cultural conditioning, this theory enables an explanation of many phenomena which are not dealt with successfully by other approaches. From the evolutionary perspective, for example, post-modernism pessimism as to the cognitive powers of man and referential possibilities of language as an instrument of record of epistemological reality and the contemporary fetishism of theory, would be—as might be expected—one step—probably necessary, but hopefully not final—of the evolution of human cognition. This stage—as we can assume when we take into consideration the foundations of evolutionary theory—maybe has been necessary to distance ourselves from the surplus of self-confidence and research optimism, which was characteristic of structuralism, but it has also brought anarchy, diverse aporia, which need to be overcome if further sensible, methodological research in the Humanities—including literary studies—is to be conducted and lead to valid results, which will transcend the series of subjective 'false readings', concentrated more on literary critique than criticism, or, if you prefer this phrase, of 'no readings'.

No matter how we are going to evaluate the future results of evolutionism for literary studies carried out under its auspices (such research has not even started in Poland yet), one thing seems to be certain: we have here a distinct, clearly drawn proposal to overcome the impasse in which the Humanities are after post-structuralism. This proposal, it should be noted, is not neutral ideologically. It is clearly materialistic, which is the direct result of the philosophical

assumptions on which literary evolutionism is based. This trend, supported by the theory of consilience proposed by Wilson[25] puts in front of science, and through it in front of humankind, a utopian perspective of a 'glorious future' in which the integration of cognition achieved through various channels will lead to a total rejection of religion, which is treated as a social anachronism.[26] It is not difficult to see that we have here one more incarnation of Enlightenment progressivism, this time dressed nicely in the attractive costume of a 'reformed Humanism'—that is of Humanism which has been influenced by science, a type of 'techno-secularism' which is more 'metaphysical', and sensitive towards culture. Let us not forget that this specific, re-created scientism, apart from temporary promises in the area of knowledge and culture, ultimately offers the elongation of human life (a substitute for 'eternal life') and the cloning of man (substitute of 'Creation')—therefore manipulation in two spheres of human life which have so far not been open to humankind. It is not possible here to include a detailed analysis of this problem.[27]

This project is definitely a challenge to the Humanities. The old debate between evolutionists and creationists discretely re-enters the field of the Humanities. Let us note that the rejection of the biological grounds (and therefore, of evolving nature) of the universals of human cognition, and also of *poiesis,* of creativity—places philosophers, anthropologists and literary scholars sceptical of Neo-Darwinism in front of the question about the alternative source of universals. Where do we look for them? In this way— in the way probably not intended by bio-evolutionists—the interpretation of genealogy and historical changes in human creativity fostered by their theory dovetails with the long debate, carried out over recent centuries, about first cause.

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[25] Edward O. Wilson, *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge,* Vintage Press, 1998.

[26] See Grant Morrison, "Science, Tradition, and Utopia", *Modem Age*, vol. 43, no. 1 (Winter 2001), 32, 33.

[27] See also John C. Caiazza, "The Arrival of Techno-Secularism", *Modem Age*, vol. 44, no. 3 (Summer 2002) and Peter Augustine Lawler, *Our Friend Mr. Darwin? (Larry Arnhart, "Darwinian Conservatism "), Modem Age*, vol. 48, no. 3 (Summer 2006), in particular 268.

This debate induces fundamental questions which science, with its rationalism, has not been able and is still not able to answer in a firm manner, putting aside these problems into the sphere of 'epiphany', which has the nature that is 'above rational' (often falsely referred to as 'irrational') and the individual 'subjective faith', which cannot be verified through the use of scientific methods.

The project of evolutionary literary studies is also not concerned with other problems which have been dodged or neutralized (de-constructed) by post-structuralism; the problems which belong to literary axiology—such as, for example, the relationship between literature, morality and sacrum. The problems connected with values and the assessment of values is generally poorly approached by research, for which the starting point is the alliance of literary studies with sciences. The development of this project, and therefore of strengthening the co-operation between the Humanities and other areas of research (in the name of 'consilience' or some other theory of 'the unity of knowledge') is the most important goal on this research horizon. Even if evolutionists analyse aesthetic and ideological aspects of literary works, they do it, first of all, while searching for the overarching adaptive function, disregarding both values revealed in literature, the values of the literary work as such, and the situational values of literature.[28] The most important dimensions of literature are simplified and manipulated in the name of the truth of evolutionary axiology.

This is the price paid for compromise, which has been very clearly posited by Carroll: Unless the Humanities are willing to make a bargain with this particular devil [that is with science—D.S.], I think they are doomed to irrelevance and triviality. Unless the humanities are willing to make a bargain with this particular devil, I think they

[28] I am referring here to the classical work of literary axiology presented in the works of Stefan Sawicki, See Stefan Sawicki, "Ku świadomej ocenie w badaniach literackich i Problematyka aksjologiczna w nauce", in *Wartość — sacrum — Norwid: Studia i szkice aksjologiczno literackie*, Lublin 1994.

are doomed to irrelevance and triviality.[29] [...]. Although evolutionary literary studies are to retain "what is peculiar and special to the nature of literary experience",[30] what is this going to look like if we take the alliance of literary studies with other disciplines? It is hard to tell. At least as of now. However, an important question could be asked: Will not literary studies become "doomed to irrelevance and triviality" precisely because of the alliance with biological psychology. From time immemorial people have been telling stories which influence the consciousness and fate of whole generations. These stories have different forms: morality plays, novels, jokes, pornography, 'high' and 'popular' literature, works of art and works of media. Does it mean that we should analyse all of them with the same diligence? If we were to consistently follow the rules of literary Darwinism, the answer would seem to be in the affirmative.[31]

The evolutionary approach to literature also reveals one more aspect— reductionist. The area of application of literary Darwinism is, in practise, limited by the assumptions of this theory, This approach is not able to shed new light on texts which—instead of implementing adaptive function, most important from the perspective of biological reproduction, and the preservation of the species through natural selection—perform its transgression, for example by presenting an ethos going against the grain of the biological survival of an individual, or even a community. And yet, such works of art, by pointing at imponderables and by showing the fragility and, at the same time, greatness of an individual coping with herself and her fates, are often the most valuable testimonies of man's ability to transcend limitations. The attempt to explain such a refined form

[29] Joseph Carroll, "What is Literary Darwinism? An Interview with Joseph Carroll", op. cit.

[30] Ibidem.

[31] For example, Catherine Salmon ("Crossing the Abyss. Erotica and the Intersection of Evolutionary *Psychology and Literary Studies*", in *The Literary Evolution and the Nature of Narrative*, op. cit.) compares male visual pornography with romances for women.

of culture, as literature, exclusively in terms of bio-psychological categories of 'selfish genes', should raise justified objections.

Let us have another example of reductionism, related to the one discussed above: while arguing for the existence of the adaptive function of literature, Carroll indicates the universality of literature: "Imaginative verbal constructs—myths, tales, and dramatic enactments—are common to all cultures.[32] common to all cultures. He gives one more 'ontogenic' argument "humans have a universal, reliably developing aptitude for producing and consuming narratives. Every normally developing child learns language, and every normally developing child uses language to produce and consume imaginative narratives."[33] Obviously, it would be difficult to deny this. This argument, however, does not take into consideration the qualitative differences between various forms and types of these 'narrations' I have mentioned before, but also it does not take into consideration something which is most important for research in the Humanities (not only in literary studies, but also, for example, in anthropology)—that is the cultural difference. Artefacts of various cultures—and at the same time, these very cultures *per se*—are, from the neo-Darwinian perspective, are equally valuable, and this value is simply a result of their participation in the process of shaping and directing a system of beliefs and behaviour of individual and whole communities at a given stage of development.[34]

It would be difficult to find in this approach some traces of the post-modernist concept of the 'melting pot', or elements of multi-cultural philosophy. Carroll's theory, however, despite a wide range of contexts and references, going back both to historical and pre-historical times, does not explain—and what is more it does not even notice—the specific nature of Western culture in relation to other cultures. Using the language of Remi Braque, we can say

[32] Joseph Carroll, "The Human Revolution and the Adaptive Function of Literature", "Philosophy and Literature", vol. 30 (2006), 43

[33] Ibidem.

[34] Ibid., 36.

that Carroll, as a result of his assumptions, is not able to see in this culture its 'eccentricity'.[35] This unique feature, which is the result of the meeting of 'Athens' with 'Jerusalem'; the meeting which resulted in the only such civilization in the history of the world (no matter how politically incorrect this may sound)—self-critical, aware of its own shortcomings, and therefore receptive and open to 'the other'.

I am obviously aware that in these times of the plurality of theories, it is not entirely honest to find faults with one theory; faults which create its inherent limitations, which could easily be filled by another theory. (This, in turn, does not mean that theories may not be valued. They can be valued in many respects: how detailed they are, the ability to explain more and more complex and more varied phenomena, etc.) Let us return now to our mainstream considerations. The 'founding father' of literary Darwinism is not shy to express the hopes he has in connection with his project. When asked about perspectives of literary studies reformed in the spirit of evolutionism, he gives the answer, which must create certain doubts because of the totalitarian nature of the vision embedded in it:

> Literary Darwinists integrate literary concepts with a modern evolutionary understanding of the evolved and adapted characteristics of human nature. They aim not just at being one more 'school' or movement in literary theory. They aim at fundamentally transforming the framework for all literary study[...] They have to participate in fashioning the linkages between their own specific fields of endeavor and the broader field of the evolutionary human sciences. They have to make the world anew.[36]

Taking into account the philosophic and ideological context of this approach, this last sentence seems to possess more than mere rhetoric.

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[35] See Remi Brague, *Eccentric Culture. A Theory of Western* Civiliz*ation*, translated into English by Lester Samuel, South Bend 2002.

[36] Joseph Carroll, "What is Literary Darwinism? An Interview with Joseph Carroll", op. cit.

Whenever a new theory announces a new, quasi-soteriological order of things, one cannot be too cautious.

How can we today—in the light of what has been written before—perform literary studies? So that the relationship between literary studies and the external world is not broken, and its integrity and autonomy are saved. This is not an unimportant problem, or an exaggeration in the light of the tendencies to include literary studies in the area of anthropology and social studies, or even of binding them with science. And next: is the use of the Darwinian theory of evolution to create a new programme for the reform of the Humanities a last chance or a threat? Between radical epistemological scepticism and cognitive objectivism of the strange techno-humanist type, there seems to exist a space for us to do what we should do, to be scholars who, on the one hand will not disregard various theories, and on the other, will be strongly connected to thoroughly analysed material, which will not be viewed from the perspective of one specific theory, accepted in an *a priori* fashion. Moreover, we should not undermine the autonomy of literary studies as a discipline.[37] The evolutionary theory of literature, based on bio-epistemology, is inclusive (at least in its declarations) toward earlier approaches and literary theories, which is a positive feature (provided its assumptions will not be 'diluted' in the post-modernist 'soup'). This theory—after the anti-historical assumptions of post-modernism—offers a chance of return to a historical perspective in the area of literary and cultural phenomena. This is a promising change in the attitude to literary studies. However, claims of literary Darwinism to a complete change in the area of the Humanities constitute more of a threat to the discipline's autonomy than a chance for its revival. Moreover, the project of the systemic grounding of literary studies on

[37] Ryszard Nycz, "O przedmiocie studiów literackich", *in:* Polonistyka w przebudowie. Literaturoznawstwo — wiedza o języku — wiedza o kulturze — edukacja. Zjazd Polonistów, Kraków, 22—25 września *2004, op. cit,. 16.* I am inclined to agree on this with Ewa Domańska „Jakiej metodologii potrzebuje współczesna humanistyka?", *Teksty Drugie*,2010, no. 1-2, 45-55.

the assumptions taken from a theory postulated in a discipline so far removed from ours, a project which in fact is a radical form of "trans-disciplinary integration", does not correspond well with the call for "correlating a professional specialization with inter-disciplinary approach (understood [...] as a stimulus to critical self-reflection and redefinition of one's own discipline)".

It is too early yet to give a final verdict. Maybe the proposal of neo-Darwinists will bring important results not only for the original field—that is bio-epistemology—but also from the perspective of literary studies. In the project described here—if certain conditions are preserved, there may be room for literature treated as a real, autonomous area of research, and not only as material to make conclusions about biological phenomena and socio-psychological processes, or as a testing ground for a new 'offensive weapon' in the armoury of a 'reformed Humanities'. However, in order to make it happen, the researchers relying on this approach will have to show a lot of autonomy in the face of potential doctrinaire tendencies, directed as proving that the method selected is the right one. If this does not happen, it is only to be expected that Neo-Darwinists will treat literary works of art as by-products of evolution, and not as one of the most precious human artefacts. And then the integration of literary studies with socio-biology, evolutionary psychology and other borderline disciplines between the sciences and social sciences—if it ever happens in Poland—will probably be a very painful experience for Polish literary studies, carried out in the 'Purgatory of Theories' we are all in. Time will show if literary Darwinism will ever be practised in Poland and what 'fruit' it will give. Time will show if it has any influence on the future synthesis of Polish literature or on our perception of individual works.