

Problems of Contexts and Research Methods in Comparative Studies

The subject of comparative studies

In the first part of the 1959 article "The Crisis of Comparative Literature", René Wellek expressed a radical thesis that comparative literature is seemingly a discipline without a well-defined subject matter, and, what is worse, without precise methodology (149–159). The question whether comparative studies is a subject-oriented discipline or a meta-discipline remains (also in Poland)¹ the topic of an on-going discussion. As a result of those disputes², which prove the ability of self-assessment, more and more comparative analysts³ agree with the contemporary opinion that comparative studies embraces three fields: one connected with methodology, the second with empirical studies, and the third with comparative examination (Kasperski 46–57)⁴. Such an approach allows one to break away from thinking about the discipline in terms of oppositions, with detailed comparative examinations, on the one side, and methodological frameworks, on the other. This binary attitude might lead to a false assumption that an analyst focused on the former does not pay enough attention to the issue of sufficiency and cognitive value of his or her methods. The question is whether we should adopt a broad definition of comparative studies⁵ and presume that they reach beyond one country and one language, in order to:

- 1) examine relations within:

¹ The evolution of Polish comparative studies is analyzed, among others, by: H. Markiewicz, *Badania porównawcze w literaturoznawstwie polskim, Z dziejów polskiej wiedzy o literaturze*, 142–157; M. Cieśla-Korytowska, "Komparatystyka w Polsce".

² Papers voicing different opinions on this subject can be found in: *Antologia zagranicznej komparatystyki literackiej; Niewspółmierność. Perspektywy nowoczesnej komparatystyki. Antologia; Badania porównawcze. Dyskusja o metodzie. Radziejowice 6–8 lutego 1997 r.*, and in a monographic edition of *Comparative Critical Studies* called "Comparative Literature at a Crossroads?", as well as in the quarterly magazine *Tekstualia*, a special volume on: *Komparatystyka – upadek czy wzlot?*

³ Some of them are: E. Kasperski, *Kategorie komparatystyki*; B. Bakula, "W stronę komparatystyki integralnej" – an extended version of this article is also available in: B. Bakula, *Historia i komparatystyka*; E. Szczęsna, "Komparatystyka dzisiaj: propozycje, zagadnienia teoretyczne, rekonesanse. Wprowadzenie"; P. Wolski, "Metaporównanie. Komparatystyka jako system samozwrotny", pp. 40–51; R. Weninger, "Comparative Literature at a Crossroads? An Introduction".

⁴ The validity of this argument has gained more institutional recognition and can be observed in a number of new university departments dedicated to comparative studies.

⁵ The suggested definition is different from Remak's (25), as it states that comparative studies are not literature-focused, but rather that comparative literature is only one of many fields of comparative studies.

- a particular art form (such as literature, painting, sculpture, architecture, music, film, theater);
 - types of writing and semi-artistic practices in popular culture;
- 2) recognize relations between those art forms, types of writing and semi-artistic practices;
 - 3) analyze and describe their relations with humanist fields of knowledge (for instance philosophy, anthropology, or the social sciences);
 - 4) define the precise relations that those art forms, types of writing, and semi-artistic practices create with other means of humanist expression (such as folk culture or religion).

Should we also assume that comparative studies is a discipline which takes into account the properties of the media/medium used to achieve that expression, and which also maintains a theoretical and methodological (Kasperski 46–57) framework? If we answer these two questions positively, then the issue of methods used in comparative studies will prove to be particularly important. That is the more so, considering that comparative analysts do not only – as the name of the discipline suggests – work by drawing comparisons⁶, but can go beyond the defined limits of a discipline and, even when dealing with a given knowledge base, their goal is not only to revise but also to achieve a cognitive boost. Therefore, the aim of my paper is to define a typology of contexts and a list of procedures – a comparative context analysis – understood as one of the possible methods that can be used in historically-oriented comparative analyses.

1. Typology of contexts

Jerzy Bartmiński was right to say that “in recent times, the art of interpreting an artistic text... seems to be mainly concerned with context...” (*Komparastyka* Vol. 1, 57). This also applies to an interdisciplinary approach. It is worth noting that the issue of intertextuality⁷ is dynamically developed thanks to Gérard Genette’s *Palimpsestes: la littérature au second degré*. However, in research practice and university education, we can observe a significant freedom in terms of interpreting the texts/phenomena of culture. In extreme cases, this freedom is presented (in a pragmatic spirit) as boundless in terms of the subject matter, which in turn leads to an assumption that a literary/artistic/discourse/intersemiotic text does not have any restrictions, any visible rules governing

⁶ See comparative methods as described in: E. Szczęsna, “Ontologia i epistemologia porównania” and *Problemy teoretyczne*. See also: *Badania porównawcze. Dyskusja o metodzie. Radziejowice 6–8 lutego 1997 r.*

⁷ J. Kristeva, *Word, Dialogue and Novel*; H. Markiewicz, “Odmiany intertekstualności”; R. Nycz, “Intertekstualność i jej zakresy: teksty, gatunki, światy”.

its coherence, or disturbing its integrity, and that there are no and cannot be any intertextual/interdiscursive/intersemiotic properties instilled in a text. Whenever this issue spurs debates in literary criticism⁸, they are usually focused on interpretation and rarely inspire attempts to create a typology of contexts. While both in linguistics⁹ and in philosophy of language¹⁰ the same issue was addressed, they were at least accompanied by such attempts. In the case of the philosophy of language, the debate between supporters of minimalism¹¹ and semantic contextualism¹² is still in progress.

Even if we are to agree with the assumption that knowledge can depend on context¹³, then describing that context allows us to understand what system should be the point of reference in order for the findings to be valid – thus, the context has to be taken into consideration. Moreover, this assumption does not answer the following questions: what is the relationship? does it suggest that knowledge is aspectual, or rather that knowledge always changes with context (i.e. true statements in one context become false in another)? Another problem remains unsolved: in the process of generating cognitive boost, is it important what context is chosen, or is that incidental in the sense that it can be replaced with any other one without compromising the quality of the analysis; in other words – are contexts equal? The assumption that knowledge depends on context does not suggest whether the studied subject indicates its context or whether the analyst

⁸ See the following reactions to the mentioned text by Andrzej Szahaj: H. Markiewicz, "Staroświeckie glosy", pp. 45–49; M.P. Markowski, "Postęp?", pp. 81–82; S. Morawski, "O zdradliwej swobodzie interpretacji", pp. 51–62; W. Bolecki, "Wyznania członka lokalnej wspólnoty interpretacyjnej", pp. 171–186. See polemics: A. Szahaj, "Paninterpretacjonizm, czyli nie ma niczego w tekście, czego by pierwiej nie było w kontekście (Odpowiedź krytykom)", pp. 91–103.

⁹ Linguistic schools based on contextualism are described by J. Bartmiński, Kontekst założony, historyczny czy kreowany", *Polska genologia lingwistyczna*, pp. 57–58. They include the London School of Linguistics (referring to the anthropological functionalism of Bronisław Malinowski and promoting contextual reading of utterances as the element of social communication process), the interactional sociolinguistics of Gumperz (using the term "contextual signals" as defining the interpretation framework of utterances), the interactional discourse analysis of Van Dijk, and lexical semantics practiced by J. Bartmiński, A. Wierzbicka, R. Tokarski, and L. Komnicz.

¹⁰ At first, logicians preferred a narrow definition of the term context. At the end of the nineteenth century, Charles Sanders Peirce presented a graphic representation of logical forms, which acknowledged linguistic contexts. See: C. S. Peirce, *The Writings of Charles S. Peirce: A Chronological Edition*. In Poland, the issue of the dispute between minimalism and contextualism is studied by Joanna Odrowąż-Sypniewska from the Faculty of Philosophy and Sociology at the University of Warsaw. Contextual studies are also conducted by T. Ciecierski; see: *Zależność kontekstowa. Wprowadzenie do problematyki*.

¹¹ Some of them are: Herman Cappelen, Ernie Lepore and Emma Borg. See for instance: H. Cappelen, E. Lepore, *Insensitive Semantics: A Defense of Semantic Minimalism and Speech Act Pluralism*; E. Borg, *Minimal Semantics*.

¹² Some of its supporters are Charles Travis and François Recanati. See: Ch. Travis, *The True and the False: the Domain of Pragmatics*, and F. Recanati, "What is said" and the Semantics/Pragmatics Distinction, *The semantics/pragmatics distinction*. Representatives of this point of view regard it as a remedy to the problem of ambiguity in utterances formed in a natural language. It can be noted that one of the first philosophers ever to take an interest in differences between incidental utterances (dependent on the context) and ambiguous utterances was Edmund Husserl. See: *Logical Investigations*, Vol. 2, part I.

¹³ In his review of the most debated problems of contemporary epistemology, James Pryor pointed out the issues of context. See: J. Pryor, "Highlights of Recent Epistemology", pp. 96–100.

is responsible for defining it. Perhaps we should ignore the issue of signals revealing the speaker's intention, as well as indicators of presupposition and attribution, which could suggest the context or contexts, allowing one precisely to define the significance of the analysed object.

Answering those questions and creating a typology of contexts might make it possible to verify or falsify comparative historical research.

Contexts can be classified according to methods of communication as:

- 1) linguistic;
- 2) nonverbal;
- 3) intersemiotic;
- 4) multimedia.

The first one will be useful to comparative studies, especially whenever the compared texts were written in at least two different languages; the second – if there are references to the first one or it is incorporated in the third and the fourth; the last two components always require comparison and functional analysis.

According to the relationship between the recipient and the context, we can divide contexts into:

- a) visual;
- b) auditory;
- c) polysensory.

According to the occurrence of contextual indicators in a literary/artistic/discursive text, we might distinguish the following types of contexts:

- a) obligatory (when indicators are present in the analysed text and have to be considered in the process of defining the context);
- b) optional (imposed by the recipient) (Nycz 85).

According to the level of awareness of the recipient towards the context of a literary/artistic/discursive text, there are:

- a) recognized contexts;
- b) unrecognized contexts (they can be recognized when more facts are presented).

According to function, there are:

- a) aesthetic contexts;
- b) non-aesthetic contexts.

Literary context is one of many types of aesthetic context (such as contexts of painting or music). It is worth stressing that within one literary text, there can be indicators of intertextuality/intersemiotics/interdiscursivity referring to a number of different contexts

at once (both aesthetic and non-aesthetic), which makes such a text a potential subject of comparative studies.

According to the purpose of contextual comparative studies, we can speak of:

- 1) historical situational context, which can be divided into:
 - a) context of reception/reading (e.g. one author's reception of works written by another author);
 - b) context of the origin of a work (genetic) – auxiliary in comparative historical literature;
- 2) pragmatic context (referred to if the subject of analysis is other than a comparative historical reconstruction).

The first context can be used as the subject of reconstruction of a point of reference in contextual historical analysis, while the second is employed in comparative criticism, which openly constructs or chooses context arbitrarily in order to shape/reinterpret/update meanings. In the first case, there can be no freedom in the choice of context. The pragmatic context, however, will be treated as the subject of analysis for the purpose of describing such properties as reception of a certain work in certain times.

In contextual comparative historical analyses which do not examine texts, it is not enough to study contexts that are linguistic (syntax, lexis and idiom), semi-linguistic (punctuation, orthography), thematic, and structural (genre, style), and then divide them into proximate contexts (present in a given text), author-oriented contexts (characteristic for works written by a given author and determining for example the meaning of specific words), and context connected with a particular period in the history (characteristic for linguistic norms of given times) (Puzynina 258–9). Another issue is objective relations. Depending on their presence (relations of this kind can be detected by genre studies) or absence between certain literary/artistic/discursive/semiotic phenomena, we might distinguish the following contextual relations:

- 1) interliterary/interartistic affiliations (i.e. parallelisms based on literary or artistic contacts);
- 2) interliterary/interartistic homologies (i.e. parallelisms based on contacts with a common literary/artistic original);
- 3) interliterary/interartistic analogies (i.e. parallelisms not based on contacts but on other factors) (Markiewicz 5–19)¹⁴.

Two of the listed types of contextual relations will be of use, for instance, in comparative studies aimed at defining the context of the scope of works written by selected authors

¹⁴ By referring to selected elements of contextual typology outlined by Henryk Markiewicz, I am also trying to suggest that they can be also applied to other fields than literature.

in reference to the literary/artistic tradition of more than one linguistic and semiotic field. It is worth noting that the presence of objective relations does not automatically point to significance of context. Recognizing such connections does not guarantee that poetics are parallel, but it can be helpful in selecting and defining the context. The key to determining an adequate field of reference for analysis will be the indicators of intertextuality/intersemiotics/interdiscursivity in a literary/artistic/discursive text. If it is possible to find additional evidence of their presence by identifying objective relations between the literary/artistic/discursive texts, the selection of this particular text will become even more justified. The third of the listed contextual relations will be the most applicable to studies aimed at preparing a taxonomy of literary/artistic/discursive/media genres.

3. Contextual analysis as a method of comparative historical research

The procedure of contextual analysis described below was prepared with particular attention to one comparative method – comparative literature (focused on historical research into poetics). However, the said method, when modified (according to properties of the subject), can be also used as a tool to identify and describe relations between other texts and phenomena of culture.

Any analyst who takes up the challenge of systematic research into the context of works of literature, has to make an attempt to address a number of issues. The first one is connected with the semantic scope of the term. The context (from Latin *contextus* meaning link, connection, course) in the narrowest, grammatical sense can be defined as a part of a text which is indispensable in order to understand a given work or expression correctly. Thus, it is a set of linguistic units (such as sound, morpheme, word, sentence) with a particular structure, which surrounds another unit and makes it possible to identify its meaning and function. In terms of literary criticism, context is a set of references that are essential for the analysis and interpretation of a work of literature. In its broadest meaning, it is a set of (not only literary) factors which are connected with the given subject of analysis and which have to be recognized and identified in order to respond to a work in a certain way. Should we concentrate on the second and third meaning, we are inevitably facing questions as to whether those references and factors can be connected with the given work of literature and whether they determine its meaning, as well as what research stages would be required by comparative historical research.

The first, essential stage of such an analysis is to recognize immanently and describe the structure of the text, which could not have functioned as a work of literature, had it not been for the said linguistic and artistic structure. The results of this

examination require placing within a context, which involves defining intertextual/in-tersemiotic signals written into the text, verifying them based on the history of given languages, and placing the text in its historical context. However, not every placement of a work of literature within a context equals comparative research in this particular sense. For instance, a work written in the poetics of a specific genre, or a motif present in the work, might be analysed in terms of other texts (written earlier or later) by the same author that have some similarities as well as formal differences in comparison with the initial work. In this case, the context will be the whole scope of works written by this particular author. Literary critics will apply a comparative method, but the narrow context will place the analysis within literary historical research. Exceptions include cases of genuinely bilingual authors. Similarly, when the point of reference in examining a particular work, or all works by one author, will be a literary trend included not only as part of a national literature, but as a category making it possible to distinguish a large group of texts (written in a particular historical period) and their artistic properties (structure, lexis, style, theme). Moreover, if we apply contexts understood broadly as thought patterns dominant in a given culture (place and time) and assume that they are prone to be conventionalized, while their primary function is to stabilize the framework of communication, then the reconstruction of those contexts might make it possible to grasp all that is individual and original in literary, artistic, or discursive practice. Consequently, this might lead to a rediscovery of works of literature which were unjustly underestimated by their contemporary reading public.

Contextual analysis – placed strictly within comparative literature, which treats historical research as an auxiliary method – if applied after defining a historically verifiable comparative basis (rooted either in markers of intertextuality and objective relations, or aimed at classifying¹⁵ observations leading to a conclusion that analogous phenomena can be significantly different from one another when they occur in culturally diverse areas), will apply to works written in different, not only national, languages. They can be also understood as languages of other art forms or discourses, such as languages used by certain sciences or jargons – but under the condition, that their elements incorporated in a work of literature are sufficient to identify their source¹⁶. It would be important to recognize that they constitute a semantically dynamic quality capable of changing its meaning and function in a new system, but also acquiring properties

¹⁵ The classification process is here understood – in Aristotle’s sense – as assigning certain phenomena (in this case – literary) to selected classes and types of objects with definable features. This course of action is necessary if we are to predict properties of new objects and describe the changes that they undergo.

¹⁶ The source could be found not only in a particular work, discursive text, or an intersemiotic phenomenon, but also in whole groups defined as genres of styles.

of literariness they did not include at the outset. That is why in this particular case, we would describe not only the relations within a given work, but also the role they played in the original context, as well as the function they performed in new textual, intersemiotic, or interdiscursive surroundings. If such processes as expanding other languages with literary texts and/or spreading literariness into other languages or disciplines, are far-reaching, the said changes might determine either the emergence of new trends in humanist thought or a redefinition of disciplines (merger or division). In other words, it might reorganize the established approach. Contextual analysis offers a chance to capture those transformations.

Other treatments of context can result in methodological mistakes, preventing any substantial cognitive findings. In literature-focused studies, there are three typical practices of this kind. The first one regards a work of literature as an illustration of discursive theses formed within an inadequate frame of reference. This happens when poetics is disregarded, when the analysis of the text's aesthetics is replaced by searching for ideological implications, which are assessed only from the "here and now" perspective, irrespective of either a broad horizon defined by the history of ideas, or the question of principles governing historiography. The second risk stems from an analysis and interpretation of phrases out of context, resulting in an involuntary modernizing of the work and in an ignoring of the history of the language. The third case is connected with underestimating the source context, the elements of which were used by the writer, or with granting the source context too much importance. The following examples illustrate the potential complexity of literary processes.

In the case of the reception of the literary heritage of a certain author, we can often speak of borrowings from this heritage by artists born in later periods, other cultures, or writing in other languages. A good example are works by Bolesław Leśmian, who was profoundly influenced by Edgar Allan Poe. However, Leśmian was inspired indirectly, by means of translations, literary and critical works written by other authors, such as Charles Baudelaire, as well as by writings of Russian symbolists, particularly Konstantin Balmont. In this case, direct comparisons between Leśmian's works (Leśmian did not speak English) or his opinions about Poe and the American reception of Poe's works, would be inadequate, ahistorical, and plainly pointless. This is the more so, since both his French and Russian admirers of Poe, who represented Symbolism in literature, remained under the influence of Baudelaire's works and adopted the majority of his opinions about the literary significance of Poe, as well as consistently isolating his works from their original context. Such an approach was meant to "punish" American literary circles for not recognizing Poe and consequently underrating his position. From this point

of view, it is clear that “Poe read by Leśmian” was a different author from Poe read by the American Romantics, or Poe read by Russian and French Symbolists (valid analysis in this respect requires not only taking into consideration the reception and contexts of the period, but also conducting extensive comparative analyses).

It is easy to imagine how unsatisfactory findings could be the result of criticism of Leśmian’s translations of Poe’s prose, should this be based only on a comparative analysis of English source texts and Polish translations, since we know very well that the Polish poet used French translations by Baudelaire.

The case was similar with the issue of folk motifs in Leśmian’s works. They were not drawn – contrary to his claims – solely from original sources (which can be proven by philological comparative analysis and by a verifiable knowledge of facts), but from writings by Russian Romantics, particularly by representatives of the literary period called the Silver Age. The important thing here was Leśmian’s interest in “*byliny*”, which was also an inspiration – due to the popularity of Slavic culture – for Russian Romantics. Comparing Leśmian’s works directly with results of research into folk tradition would undoubtedly add something to the reputation of the Polish poet, as they would promote him to the rank of an ethnographer (which he was not), but they would entirely falsify our picture of an international literary transmission of motifs, and prevent our determining their anthropological transformations in time. But most of all, they would make the study ahistorical. In other words, Leśmian’s borrowed inspirations drawn from folk tradition were not, and could not be, equivalent to folklore, understood as folk tradition, its oral forms of literature (such as folk tales, ballads, parables, proverbs), customs, and artistic products of material culture.

Those examples should be enough to illustrate a general rule of contextual analysis as a method: analysts who decide to apply it must be, first of all, aware of the historical and relative properties of textual meanings; however, they should not confuse the latter with relativism, which would legitimize complete freedom in the choice of the frame of reference. In the case of artistic works of literature, the interactions discussed cannot be reduced to simple influences and idle repetitions of established artistic solutions (if that was the case, then every author inspired by another author would deserve the rank of epigone), nor to defining the sum of elements or origins, and they do not need to be one-dimensional or solely literary.

We should remember that contextual analysis must remain aspectual; however, the choice of context should guarantee that the findings made by different analysts can be complementary. The conclusion is that at the preliminary stage of contextual analysis, it is necessary to address issues of adequacy and to design the most efficient framework,

so that the selected points of view on the subject matter can provide the most comprehensive description. Therefore, planning contextual analysis requires meta-awareness of the context. However, deficiencies in this respect are not to be treated as a potential weakness of particular analysts. They might also be connected with the fact that at certain points in history, some patterns of thought are transparent, invisible to people living in those times. This can be observed when literary historians claim that some texts cannot be placed in any historical and critical context, or that they can be placed in an infinite number of contexts, while clearly they are limited, even if it seems otherwise at the time. It is often comparative research that makes it possible to verify context choice.

4. Contextual comparative analysis of a literary text and the issue of history

Defining historical context in comparative research is necessary in order to limit the material analyzed. Literary critics are obliged to do this if they do not want their selection to be entirely arbitrary, although it seems impossible to avoid some degree of arbitrariness. Without restricting the field of research and without defining the context, the analysis would have to be conducted *ad infinitum*, as the horizon of the text's meanings and the time horizon remain permanently open (Husserl, Buczyńska-Garewicz) and partially inaccessible. In the case of comparative literature, openness should be considered because the context could be identified as comprising both contemporary and earlier sources of inspiration, as well as the circumstances determining the final shape of the work (and a work of significant artistic value cannot be fully limited to them) and influencing its reception.

This is where we encounter the issue of limited access to context, as a knowledge of the past tends to be aspectual and full of gaps. The issue becomes more troublesome the more time had passed since the work was written. This state of affairs will mark the limits of the applicability of contextual analysis. It seems that as a method, it will be less efficient in cases where the context needs to be reconstructed and there are not enough sources to do so. Then any hypothetical reconstruction will be based not only on data coming from other linguistic areas, but also from other semiotic spheres. However, it must be stressed that in both cases of comparative research we can only draw hypotheses. Yet, they are not equivalent and cannot be subject to evaluation. In the first case, the more adequate the contexts are that are taken into consideration when examining a literary phenomenon, the greater is the chance of arriving at a hypothesis which is more comprehensive and verifiable. The fewer the factors are that are incorporated in a comparative historical research, the greater risk will be of simplification

and ideological additions reducing the description. In a model situation, we will deal with a reconstructive and comparative approach aiming at establishing a certain vision of the past, which goes beyond one natural language (one artistic language, in the case of intersemiotic comparative analysis, or one discourse, in the case of discursive comparative analysis). The findings will include – inevitably – not only a set of facts, but also probabilities. However, it is advisable that the former be in the majority.

Obviously, one might question the attempt to verify historical findings, including comparative ones, and remember that an analyst is also immersed in time. For a historian refers to what exists on the cognitive horizon, within cognitive access (and what can only be done from a particular point of view), determined by a certain paradigm of thinking, current convention, dominant cultural patterns etc. (Gadamer 287). It is good when such criticism results in increased methodological awareness, but much worse when it hinders the development of detailed research, boils down to shifting attention to other issues, and concentrates on listing circumstances which make certain comparative historical research tasks impossible and thus not to be undertaken.

Undoubtedly, historical circumstances have an impact on an understanding of the subject matter. However, this does not mean that analysts should feel excused from continually attempting to be aware of their own temporality (and thus the temporal quality of their findings, and a historical contextualization of their cognitive process), and permit themselves to create fantastic constructions resulting from thoughtless associations, wishful thinking, fabricating myths, or pragmatic (for instance political) goals, which use the literary past as a tool to complete tasks, other than finding (despite obvious limitations) its essence. This understanding of the contextualization of works of literature written in the past and in other languages, will on the one hand stem from an awareness of the process of disontologization of the past, and on the other hand, it will become a sign of protest against complete freedom and anarchy in comparative historical research. Therefore, it is important for comparative historical research to assume that defining the context is necessary in order to establish a comparative framework.

In comparative analyses using historical poetics, the crucial issue is a diachronic approach going beyond national categories, and becoming cross-period (naturally, this does not exclude a synchronous perspective, especially if large groups of literary phenomena, written in the fairly recent past, are analyzed) and cross-cultural. As far as possible, those analyses will be empirical and will have to be systematically verified according to new sources.

What is important, is that the context, understood as a set of points of reference necessary to grasp the meaning of literary text, does not only provide a connection

to the past, but can also be applied to on-going artistic practices. This perspective requires examining the literary reception of the range of works written by a particular author and selecting those aspects of his/ her writing that turned out to be artistically fertile for his/her successors, and that were – even despite linguistic and cultural difference, or perhaps because of them – creatively transformed. There will be some other questions: In a new artistic context, what is the function of the elements of poetics used by the successors of the said author? Why were those particular components chosen? How were they transformed? Were they mythologized? How did they change their function? Are there cases of stylization? Is it a creative stylization, or merely a non-substantial pastiche of subject or form? Is it a creative continuation, for instance in a form of polemical parody (of subject, genre, or style)? Or do the new texts complement the original, or fulfil the function of a literary commentary with a dialogic structure? etc.

It needs to be stressed once again that contextual analysis treated as a method that can be applied to examine literary, artistic, or discursive practices, does not have to be limited to a context based on facts. In the age of digital revolution – the emergence of new means of communication, but still in the presence of the once dominant – the context can be identified in the very medium that contains the text and that may play a crucial role in shaping form and meaning, and have an impact on speaker-reader dynamics.

5. Aims of contextual comparative analysis

In the proposed model of contextual comparative analysis, we can distinguish the following historical and literary aims:

- generating aspectual increase of historical knowledge (going beyond the limits of one language and culture);
- restructuring elements of national historical and literary models (revisiting the existing simplifications, which can stem from too narrow a context);
- creating components, which can be incorporated in cross-national historical and literary syntheses which recognize intercultural transmission and transformations of genres, styles, motifs, aesthetics, and ideas in time);
- describing (by comparison) present codes of literary culture (trends) in works written by selected authors; describing the share of dominant codes (contemporary to an author) and the input of selected authors in creating emerging literary codes;
- describing (in a broad context) all inherent elements of writings by selected authors (defining signals of changes in a cross-national historical and literary process);

- recognizing components of cross-national literary taxonomy (such as genres or motifs and their functions) – in the case of analyses focused not on affiliations and homologies, but on analogies;
- presenting national literatures as opening out, in a history-oriented process of international/intercultural/intersemiotic contacts, not only to one- but also two- or multi-sided dialog with other literatures, semiotic spheres¹⁷, and discourses.

In the light of these aims of literature-focused contextual comparative analysis, it is good to remember that the tendency to identify the issue of context with the idea of influences¹⁸ (Wellek, *The Crisis...*) dominated not only at the initial stage of forming the discipline of comparative studies in its traditional variation, which was connected with comparative literature (whose origins are dated to the beginning of the nineteenth century), but also as late as in the twentieth century – in the course of defining fields of comparative studies as a discipline. As a result, comparative historical research was also unjustly identified only with futile searching and cataloging of contexts, which in turn led to a biased assessment of the discipline. Consequently, comparative historical research was not acknowledged as capable of providing new information, which could be used in identifying important phenomena and describing their interactions. The very attempt to classify context should prove that the issue at hand is much more complex and requires developing such methods as would make possible a comparative analysis – one example of such research being contextual analysis. It is also worth reiterating that this method is potentially not limited only to studying literatures in different languages. It can, but does not have to, be literature-oriented, just as relations between literature, semiotic spheres and discourses can hardly be focused on one field. The scope of the applied method and its orientation should be determined by the competence of the analyst – the broader the better – on condition that the research is thorough. Paradoxically, thoroughness of analysis will depend on the diligence of analysts and the amount of time they can dedicate, rather than – contrary to the common

¹⁷ In the case of non-literature-focused intersemiotic and intermedia studies, the aims of comparative historical research will include among others: a) recognizing and defining historical progress of relations between semiotic spheres; b) creating foundations for an intersemiotic and intermedia historical poetics based on empirical and detailed research; c) preparing a dictionary of the history of intersemiotic terms; d) preparing (based on analogies) the taxonomy of intersemiotic and intermedia genres, and studying their transformations in time (for instance, in terms of contextual relations stemming from objective relations of affiliations and homologies).

¹⁸ The pejorative term of “influenceology” became popular in Polish critical discourse in the interwar period. Previously, it was used mainly by literary critics. It occurs for instance in a work by Karol Irzykowski *Słoń wśród porcelany. Studia nad nowszą myślą literacką w Polsce*. Irzykowski attributes the coining of the term to Tadeusz Boy Żeleński. The word also appeared in a pre-war critical work by Adam Grzymała-Siedlecki *Ludzie i dzieła*. See: K. Irzykowski, “W obłączeniu”; A. Grzymała-Siedlecki, “Wpływologia”, pp. 245–49; A. Grzymała Siedlecki, “Jeszcze o wpływologii”, pp. 250–253. Later, the term “influenceology” became a colloquial expression in scholarly argot; it is used in order to discredit comparative historical research without an attempt to identify and describe its procedures.

opinion – on the desire to address issues which are not complex, which supposedly prevents the drawing of too far-reaching assumptions. Yet, the threat of oversimplifying conclusions is present also in specialized research, and inadequacy usually stems from insufficiencies in determining the context, which in turn result in easily falsifiable findings. Therefore, the success of both types of research will lie in the cognitive potential and diligence of the analyst. If comparative studies is to be understood as a discipline focused not only on literature, then we can hardly speak of its death, especially if we take into account the vast scope of detailed research and the theoretical and methodological challenges awaiting its practitioners.

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