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# **Between the Anthropology of Literature and Literary Anthropology.**

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### Between the Anthropology of Literature and Literary Anthropology

We have already experienced several revolutions in the humanities. We are used to blurred genres<sup>1</sup> and we are not surprised by new dictionaries of literary terms, since we ourselves try to reinvent them. Finally, we are not surprised by the discourse that we find in essays and their multi-dimensional pro-literariness. We all know perfectly well that it is advisable, and in good form, to display the *bricoleur's* eclecticism. To say that cultural anthropology in its various forms is triumphing in the humanities, or that literary studies connect with anthropology, sounds banal. Yet, it does not signify a full crystallization and closing of the research domain, or a lack of doubts concerning the existence of issues demanding a debate. Additionally, central problems and questions concerning what seems to be most fundamental keep reappearing: relations between cultural anthropology and literature, and anthropology and literary studies.<sup>2</sup>

#### Anthropology as literature or the literariness of anthropology

For the sake of order we should highlight the fact that we tend to talk about a variety of anthropologies. And even though this feature is characteristic of all of the fields within the humanities, it should be pointed to in this case with particular force. Especially when we want to talk about the relationship between anthropology and literature and literary studies. As anthropologists themselves claim, “soft” anthropology – literary in character – is “anchored in a literary criticism, deconstructionist

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<sup>1</sup> Term coined by C. Geertz.

<sup>2</sup> When using the term anthropology, I mean cultural anthropology.

thought in poststructuralism and in the new social history and postmodernism.”<sup>3</sup> Interpretative anthropology comes to the forefront, based on the awareness of the creation and fictionalization, as well as constructivist or figurative character of cultural representations. It is this particular anthropology therefore, which is defined by various turns, such as the ethical-narratological turn, aiming at the communion of its discourse with literature and thereby shaping its contemporary character.<sup>4</sup>

The act of a literary scholar writing about the literary dimension of anthropology is not without its pleasures, principally because it combines an act of writing – action that has a therapeutic effect – and, for certain reasons, is not necessarily that difficult. This is so, because this particular dimension is often discussed and, most importantly, promoted by the anthropologists themselves.<sup>5</sup> Not only do they keep explaining why literary discourse<sup>6</sup> is close to their hearts, but they also point to moments of intersection and kinship between the two. One can learn (from Brady) about the poetics of anthropology study, or the poetics of culture (Greenblatt). Literature is usually placed on a pedestal and its abilities are described as limitless. The reasons for this fascination were established, with much accuracy, in the texts of Clifford Geertz and other scholars, including Marcus, Tyler, Clifford, and many more (on Polish turf, we are likely to first encounter these reasons in the books of Burszta). Features pointed to most often are figurativeness, fictionality, and its fabulistic character, along with creativity and the role of imagination. Literature’s apology in contrast with scientific discourses, or the cognitive dispositions is characteristic of our times, starting with Rorty and ending with the narrativists (Taylor Giddens and Bruner White). Mentioned on multiple occasions, there are several varying topoi, including “the anthropologist as author,” or “as writer,” “the anthropologist as poet” – or in a more focused rendition – surrealism as “ethnography’s quiet ally” (Clifford<sup>7</sup>). Likewise, there have been suggestions of turning anthropology in the direction of a more literary, narrative, usage of metaphors and synecdoche (Geertz),

<sup>3</sup> Brady, J. “Introduction” in *Anthropological Poetics*, edited by I. Brody, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Savage, Md., 1991: 5

<sup>4</sup> When writing about the “soft” version of contemporary cultural anthropology, Brady states: “certain issues stated in a poetic way, could not be exclaimed with similar strength in any other way.” (Ibid.)

<sup>5</sup> E. Rewers approached this position in a right way when she asked about “what are the benefits of the exchange between anthropology and literature for the latter, because benefits for anthropology are named by the anthropologists all the time.” (Rewers, E. “The Prisoners of Transcultural Imagination” in *Narration and Identity (I) Narrations in Culture*, edited by W. Bolecki, R. Nycz, Warsaw: IBL PAN Press, 2004: 40.

<sup>6</sup> I have in mind essays by Clifford Geertz, which are increasingly available in Polish, as well as texts by James Clifford, for example his *The Troubles With Culture* (translated by E. Dżurak and others, Warsaw: KR Press, 2000.) I am also thinking of important books by Wojciech Burszta. With respect to Polish publications, one should mention the volume *Words From the Motherland* (edited by W.J. Burszta, W. Kuligowski, Poznań: Teglte Library, 2002) and Burszta’s text: “Eye and the Pen of the Anthropologist.”

<sup>7</sup> Clifford, J. *The Troubles With Culture*, 137. <http://rcin.org.pl>

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oxymoron (Richards), and finally fragmenting, non-continuity, and multiple points of view, etc. All of these positions have been presented and connected many times, with the literary discourse set to discover otherness (every now and again with echoes of Rorty or Ricouer in the background).

Today, auto-analysis within anthropology would have to mean more than merely the ambition to identify the extent of anthropology's literariness. It would have to involve revealing its literary studies dimension or, in other words, its direct connections with the study of literature. It has been said that "anthropological writing" [what anthropologists write] should undergo literary analysis, and that the mutual relations of the two should be strengthened.<sup>8</sup> It would be hard to disagree with such a plea. A few years ago, Clifford Geertz gave a lecture entitled "A Strange Romance: Anthropology and Literature," in which he concludes – relating to his previous theory – that it is time to read other cultures in ways free of ascribing hierarchy or legislative oppressiveness, in ways bringing us closer to more empathetic community. All of this in order to "perceive others" receptions, read others' readings – for all this we need to take a loan from literary studies. This loan seems to constitute a fundamental issue.<sup>9</sup> As we can observe, not only the literary character of anthropological discourse turns out to be interesting and important, but also its, one might say, literary studies dimension (with the ethical background visible at all times).

Looking from our – literary – perspective, it is hard not to notice another, recently emergent, issue for anthropologists beginning to study literature. The process of reading other cultures (through their literature, or literature's counterparts) by means of dense description,<sup>10</sup> and comparison with works of literature (e.g., European), allows for "finding within the translation"<sup>11</sup> relations between particular cultures (including their works of literature). The criteria for the selection or the means of extraction of certain cultural aspects are supposed to be the common factors of literature and other products culture: e.g., rituals and ceremonies. For Geertz, it is one of the most important rules of conducting research. He proposes terms such as symbol, metaphor, plot, narration, motif, etc. On top of that, it is well known that the use of overriding categories, derived precisely from literary studies, such as narration, mimetic fiction, etc. has been productive.

The reading of literature by the cultural anthropologists is undoubtedly an important phenomena. However, it is impossible to talk about one, unanimous perspective in this case. Literature functions in different ways in this particular field. For some, it is treated as a kind of niche, up to this point not used to its fullest extent, or perceived merely as one of the many possible displays of human cultural

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<sup>8</sup> *Between Anthropology and Literature. Interdisciplinary Discourse*, edited by R.De Angelis, London: Routledge: 2002: 1.

<sup>9</sup> Geertz, C. "A Strange Romance: Anthropology and Literature," in "Profession", 2003.

<sup>10</sup> Geertz, C. "Dense Description. In the Search of Interpretative Theory of Culture," in his *The Interpretation of Cultures. Selected Essays*, translated by M.M. Piechaczek, Cracow: UJ Press, 2005.

<sup>11</sup> I am recreating Geertz's assumptions from "A Strange Romance..."

activity. On other occasions, it is utilized as a starting point of given research (as in the case of Erick Gans, representative of generative anthropology). In conclusion, even though it is hard to talk about a kind of cohesiveness of views on the role of literature, it is placed high in the ranks of research subjects.<sup>12</sup>

Thus far, we have highlighted the fusion of literature and anthropology. “In the process of this fusion, science begins to employ the language of aesthetics,”<sup>13</sup> and that is where the term *artful science*<sup>14</sup> originated. Concern is therefore with “a discourse, in which the beauty and the tragic nature of the world are textually legitimated through the subtly researched constructions and subjective explanations of the author.”<sup>15</sup> Through these words, one can hear the hope that this kind of anthropology (poetic or literary) will have its own “input not only into the anthropology canon, but will become useful for other fields of study as well.”<sup>16</sup> It takes even greater prominence when it is decided that the statement “meeting of literature and anthropology” is insufficient and the claim that “literature gave birth to anthropology”<sup>17</sup> is uttered. At the same time, however, everything seems to point to the fact that the sentence by James Clifford still holds true: “Relationships between anthropological research and literature and art, invariably strong in our century, demand attention.”<sup>18</sup> This particular emphasis provides important research motivation, bringing to the surface mutual indebtedness. It operates on the assumption that “anthropology equips literary texts with images, exotic colors, themes and theories on history, evolution and progress, but what is literary and extremely figurative [the author of this text connects figurativeness with painting] radically changes anthropological discourses.”<sup>19</sup>

The very expression – a fusion of anthropology and literature – could be perceived from different perspectives. It is time to proceed to questions concerning how literary studies becoming anthropologized.

## The Anthropology of Literature or Literary Studies as Anthropology – The Anthropologization of Literary Studies

From the very outset, the anthropology of literature was accompanied by attempts to solve some fundamental and recurring problems. I want to bring them

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<sup>12</sup> Compare E. Gans, I. Brady, C. Geertz, J. Clifford. Although oftentimes it is art that is being placed in the center, and not necessarily literature itself.

<sup>13</sup> *Anthropology and Literature*, 1, edited by P. Benson, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993.

<sup>14</sup> Brady, I. “Harmony and Argument. Bringing Forth the Artful Science” 3, in *Anthropological Poetics*

<sup>15</sup> Benson, P. “Introduction”, 1, in *Anthropology and Literature...*

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Cesareo, M. “Anthropology and Literature. Of Bedfellows an Illegitimate Offspring”, in *Between Anthropology and Literature*, 161-2.

<sup>18</sup> Clifford, J. *The Troubles With Culture*, 137.

<sup>19</sup> Richards, D. *Masks of Difference: Cultural Representations in Literature, Anthropology and Art*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, 8.

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to the forefront, because I likewise view them as fundamental. In the, so to speak, most famous works of an anthropo-literary character that have been published during the last few decades, one can find a few interesting positions. Here are just few examples: *Literature and Anthropology*<sup>20</sup> (1986) edited by J. Hall; the previously mentioned *Between Anthropology and Literature* (especially the already quoted text by Mario Cesareo “Anthropology and Literature. Of Bedfellows an Illegitimate Offspring”); *Anthropology and Literature* (1993) edited by Paul Benson; *Literary Anthropology: A New Interdisciplinary Approach to People, Signs and Culture*<sup>21</sup> (1998); and most significantly, a text by Th. G. Winner “Literature as a Source for Anthropological Research”;<sup>22</sup> and again with the title *Literature and Anthropology*<sup>23</sup> (1989), this time edited by P.A. Dennis.

It is hard not to notice that what is significant and recurring in all of these titles is not so much some new term describing some new discipline, but rather the combination of the two discourses. That is why we should ask again whether the entire enterprise should be about exposing the literary side of anthropological research, searching for communion, or maybe mining literature for ready-made examples of cultural anthropology? In other words, should we be focused on using anthropological terms to interpret literature?<sup>24</sup> We are well aware that such a delineation of research perspectives would not be sufficient.

Hence, there appears the question of mutual relations between examining literature and anthropology. This relationship tends to be identified as an interdisciplinary, borderline, and the very “anthropology of literature” was explained many times. It is sometimes described simply as “the analysis and understanding of literary texts in a broad, cultural perspective.”<sup>25</sup> Such an interpretation is extremely, if not genially, simplistic, not at all complicated in character. However, (in the 80s) there were much stronger statements that came to the forefront. For example, anthropology as “a discipline to replace theory,”<sup>26</sup> or slightly toned down, “a new communion, [in which] the identity of the two fields” could be heard. And although one can hear rare voices calling for separation and describing it as “more of a branch of anthropology,

<sup>20</sup> *Literature and Anthropology*, edited by J. Hall, A. Abbas, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1986.

<sup>21</sup> *Literary Anthropology: A New Interdisciplinary Approach to People, Signs and Literature. Symposium: 11th International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences. Papers*, Amsterdam-Philadelphia: J. Benjamins Publishing, 1988.

<sup>22</sup> Winner, Th.G., “Literature as a Source for Anthropological Research: The Case of Jaroslav Hasek’s Good Soldier Sveik,” in *Ibid*.

<sup>23</sup> *Literature and Anthropology*, edited by P.A. Dennis, W. Aycock, Texas: Texas University Press, 1989.

<sup>24</sup> Questions, which are posed in such manner are usually ironic to an extent. Compare A. Owen Aldridge “Literature and the Study of Man” in *Literature and Anthropology*, 41. For the scholar, the way to reach the anthropology of literature would be through numerous templates found by the anthropologists and extracted with literature.

<sup>25</sup> “Symposium on Literary Anthropology. Transcript of the Closing Discussion” in *Literary Anthropology* 1983: 335.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 331.

rather than literary theory,<sup>27</sup> the approach affirms the symbiotic relationship and reconfiguration of both sciences that seems to prevail and still dominates. This is challenged by the approach rooting for change by following the claim that there is no theory, there is only anthropology.

Let me explain. Amongst the many options that we can point to in this field, I am much more inclined toward a position that speaks about relocation, and not (as some fear could be the case) one concerned with building a new order on the rubble of the previous. Another inaccurate charge, that can be heard every now and again, is an accusation of “swapping” the tools of one’s field with those of anthropology. And the truth is that anthropological research in literary studies does not require such actions, as it oftentimes encourages using the tools and instruments of the literary realm, without forcing a complete resignation from scientific language. But full homogenization is not the goal here. It is enough to remind ourselves that the concept of a “dense description” by Geertz is implemented not only by Greenblatt<sup>28</sup>, but also proposed by Elaine Showalter, for the cultural interpretation of the women literature (recommended for the gynocriticism, but precisely in its cultural version.)<sup>29</sup> The anthropology of literature should be connected more with the reformulation of literary studies, rather than with narrowly defined scientific method. In other words, it should be identified with the anthropologization of literary studies.

Questions posed in texts, ones that bring together literature and anthropology, oftentimes seek mutual support, asking not only what literary studies can do for anthropology,<sup>30</sup> but also examining the reverse: how an anthropologist can assist in the study of literature. The answers, however, are usually concerned with the intersection of both discourses. It is said that a community can be created by the study of man<sup>31</sup> – the most broadly understood branch of the humanities, combining anthropology and literature.<sup>32</sup> The most convincing element in this particular arrangement is not a concept of interdisciplinary character, greatly insufficient in this case, but rather a more appropriate reflection of the current situation, the idea of trans-disciplinary framework.<sup>33</sup> Trans-disciplinarity does

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 333.

<sup>28</sup> Compare Greenblatt, S. *Poetics of Culture*, as well as his “The Touch of the Real” in *The Fate of “Culture”*. *Geertz and Beyond*, edited by S.B. Ortner, Berkeley: California University Press, 1999.

<sup>29</sup> Showalter, E. “Feminist Critique of the Beaten Track” in *Contemporary Theory of Literary Studies Abroad* vol. 4, edited by H. Markiewicz, Cracow: WL, 1996.

<sup>30</sup> Richards, D. *Literature and Anthropology: The Relationship of Literature to Anthropological Data and Theory, with Special Reference to the Works of Sir Walter Scott, WB Yeats and Wole Soyinka*, Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1982.

<sup>31</sup> Owen, A. “Literature and the Study of Man” in *Literature and Anthropology* (1989), 41.

<sup>32</sup> For example, anthropology is treated as science about how man lives, philosophy – as study of how he thinks, history – of how he operates, and literature as combination all of these, and using both fictitious and non-fictitious characters and situations.

<sup>33</sup> Zeidler-Janiszewska, A. “The Directions of Iconic Change in Culture Studies” in *Second Texts*, vol. 4, 2006: 10-11. Nycz, R. “Cultural Nature, Weak Professionalism” in *Cultural Theory of Literature. Main Concepts and Questions*, edited by M.P. Markowski, R. Nycz, Cracow: Universitas, 2007. <http://rcin.org.pl>

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not resign from professional specialization. On the contrary, it depends upon it. It creates possibilities for “constituting a new research field.” Such an opportunity helps to avoid the hermetic and purifying isolation of the two disciplines, but also allows for the removal of two kinds of inter-disciplinarity: one based on clear borders, which at times can be crossed and connected with the idea of transposing existing (terminological) structures, and a second one, associated with the blurring of boundaries and based on a full, but unfortunately often unproductive, freedom. The concept of trans-disciplinarity, on the other hand, “is concerned, as the prefix ‘trans’ suggests, with what is between the disciplines, what goes through them, and is at the same time outside of them.”<sup>34</sup> Trans-disciplinarity is not about blurring the distinctions and specificities of particular disciplines, even if they call themselves borderline (as is the case with anthropology).

One can speak at the same time of a symbiosis visible in the dissemination of anthropological terms over literary studies (for example, Turner’s concept of liminal ritual).<sup>35</sup> We cannot omit the fact that, when speaking of benefits that literary studies enjoy thanks to its cooperation with anthropology, we can name terms and categories that – seemingly surprisingly – have initially been an object of study for literary studies. And after expanding, reformulating, and being enriched by anthropology – they come back to the literary studies, surrounded by an aura of cognitive attractiveness. The most prominent example in this case would be the category of narration.

At this point, it is important to move on and approach the fascinating question of what proposed perspectives of descriptions (we have already become accustomed to the plural form here) are available. During the last several decades we have observed the development of the analysis of anthropological traits in literature. Literary worlds are the primary targets of such research (worlds from novels or dramas). These are worlds built on the borders between different cultures, with different types of protagonist constructs and points of view – moving from the verbal sphere to what is non-verbal: gestures and senses.<sup>36</sup> In the very center, we can find systems of meaning of a given culture breaking through the work or reflected by it.

Among many different tendencies we can distinguish one that connects with the analysis of realism in the novel. It is dominated by the representative-cognitive approach to literature. In that vein: “Literature is a beacon of light for culture. Even a poorly written novel can be a fascinating portrait of a specific culture and its documentary value will grow unquestionably as the years go by.”<sup>37</sup> And further: “From early epics to contemporary novels, multiple varieties of literary realism that could be distilled can be systematically researched as invaluable, and sometimes the only

<sup>34</sup> Zeidler-Janiszewska, A. “The Directions of Iconic Change...”

<sup>35</sup> On the importance of Victor Turner for literary studies compare *Victor Turner and the Construction of Cultural Criticism: Between Literature and Anthropology*, edited by K.M. Ashley, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1990.

<sup>36</sup> This is the kind of approach proposed by F. Poyatos in “Literary Anthropology. Toward a New Interdisciplinary Area” in *Literary Anthropology*. Poyatos finds hope in the analysis of non-verbal cultural systems surfacing in literature.

<sup>37</sup> Poyatos, F. “Introduction”, in *Ibid.* XV.



source (outside of limitations characteristic for arts founded on representations) of documentation of cognitive and sensual systems, etc.”<sup>38</sup> To this end, we are working with a documentary approach toward literary worlds.<sup>39</sup>

A second tendency unites those who resign from the simple “homomorphism between a literary work and cultural phenomena,”<sup>40</sup> and as their starting point for research assume, for example, the construction of the novel. Such approaches, for some, connect with revealing multi-levelled borrowings between literature and cultural systems (which, let us add, allow for the avoidance of simplifications that can appear from time to time). For other representatives of this second tendency, the relations between literary formations, cultural-spatial categories and ways of experiencing the world (for example, when examining avant-garde autobiographies<sup>41</sup>) are fundamental. The creator and the recipient are equipped here with a perception of the world close to that of anthropology. Everyone is assigned the role of *bricoleur*:

Similarly to the anthropologist of literature beginning his/her work on the outskirts, at the cracks of the texts by noticing subtle and discrete, often insignificant, factors such as smells, places, sounds, postures, and gestures – all to reach such fundamental cultural dimensions like time and space – works the protagonist of an avant-garde autobiography in his attempts to define himself, while constantly moving, holding to methods of the review and inventory.<sup>42</sup>

Speaking of homology, between the subject and the city (also in the Polish context) we deal with *forma urbis* and *forma mentis* visible in the construction of the narration. The attention of scholars is drawn to, amongst other topics, crime novels, constructed in a way where the main protagonist (a detective) is situated at the meeting point of cultures, creating the necessity for analyzing constantly intertwined cultural perspectives.<sup>43</sup> At the same time, the appeal of literary-ethnographic, auto-ethnographic, or auto-exotic<sup>44</sup> perspectives are being discovered. The primacy of place is undoubtedly assigned to cases that present cultural otherness. The themes

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid. XII.

<sup>39</sup> Also works presented in the magazine *Culture and Society* X-XII, no.4 (vol. XLIX): *Anthropology and Art*, 2005 tend to go in this particular direction: for example, the essay by M. Rygielska “Anthropology of Literature, Literary Anthropology, or one by E. Kosowska “On Some of the Reasons for Practicing Anthropology of Literature”, in *Narration and Identity*.

<sup>40</sup> Poyatos, F. “Introduction”, XVI. Compare Th.G. Winner in *Literary Anthropology*

<sup>41</sup> Boelhower, W. “Avant-Garde Autobiography: Deconstructing the Modernist Habitat”, in *Literary Anthropology*.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 273.

<sup>43</sup> Article by James C. Pierson, entitled “Mystery Literature and Ethnography: Fictional Detectives as Anthropologists” in *Literature and Anthropology* (1989) is dedicated to these questions.

<sup>44</sup> Understood as identification of the subject with the cultural exoticism that is ascribed to him/her. Compare J. Th. Leersen “Identity and Self Image: German Auto-Exoticism as Escape From History” in *Komparatistik und Europaforschung. Perspektiven Vergleichender Literatur und Kulturwissenschaft*, Bonn 1992.

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under consideration include the relations between authors, or narrators and, at the same time, ethnographers, poets, anthropologists, etc. However, more than the subjective dimension is being brought to light. The genealogical dimension is equally as important: in particular, the ethnographic novel seems to play an important role. Relations between the scientific and literary approaches, visible in novels of this kind, are particularly revealing. Another distinct variety is constituted by the genre of travel fiction. The ethnographic novel is the most commonly cited example when analyzing factors connecting anthropology and literature.<sup>45</sup> Undoubtedly, interest in epic prose dominates the field, but drama plays a significant role in this kind of research (particularly with respect to clarifying relations between ritual and performing arts)<sup>46</sup> or lyrical poetry.<sup>47</sup> Literary figures of the immigrant, traveler, detective, the fictitious anthropologist, and finally, the writer and the poet are extremely inviting. They may all be analyzed through the prism of their attitudes, points of view and cultural masks. Primary categories in this case usually include: a person, narration, mimesis, and gender,<sup>48</sup> as well as senses, emotions, etc. This is how the situation presently appears. However, this does not preclude new sites of interest from emerging.

It would be hard to miss the obvious preferences, at least so far, that have gathered researchers around certain works of realism, historical novels, travel novels, alongside autobiographical, and ethnographic writings – rather than extremely avant-garde or experimental works. Although, these do appear from time to time. One can find far more scholarly texts concerned with works of literature playing with different genres and forms of cultural representation, thematizing it in many different ways, than with works that disregard norms and traditions and actively turn away from them. In order to establish relations between discourses of literature and anthropology, one sometimes seeks to anchor research in terminology. This is an area that brought the term hybridity its fame within the field. And so, genre varieties which are treated precisely as hybrid cases will be the primary choice for scholars, and the hybrid character of the texts under discussion will be repeatedly highlighted. Moreover, the hybridity is set forth as the foundation for relations between literature and anthropology.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> For example in the book *Between Anthropology and Literature...* see articles “The Ethnographic Novel. Finding the Inside Voice” by J. Tallman and M. Cesareo’s “Anthropology and Literature. Of Bedfellows an Illegitimate Offspring”

<sup>46</sup> Compare de Angelis or V. Turner *From the Ritual to the Theater. The Seriousness of Play*, Warsaw 2005.

<sup>47</sup> Compare C.A. Daniels “The Poet as Anthropologist”, in *Literature and Anthropology*, Texas 1989.

<sup>48</sup> Yet, we hear critical voices accusing J. Clifford, for example, lack of appreciation for the feminist studies. F.E. Mascia-Lees, P. Sharpe and C.B. Cohen write about it in “The Postmodernist Turn in Anthropology: Cautions From a Feminist Perspective” in *Anthropology and Literature* (1993).

<sup>49</sup> On this subject one can find comments in *Between Anthropology and Literature...*, also compare M. Schmeling’s “Story about Confrontation” and “Other in the

All of this does not entail full harmony or lack points of disagreement. Predictably, reality is otherwise. I will cite two such issues, which cannot be ignored.

The first concerns the fact that if the anthropology of literature is supposed to be treated as an interdisciplinary field of research (although it may happen that it is aimed at researching exclusively its own culture<sup>50</sup>), and if it is to be built on the crossroads of many cultures, then the very notion of literature needs to be reformulated. This reformulation, as might be anticipated in the current situation, has already taken place. The concept of literature has been expanded through the attempts to depressurize the canon and through the introduction of new literary forms – genres, means of circulation, etc. These changes have usually been inspired by the ethical turn, connected with the cannon becoming more flexible and allowing space for works from marginalized and excluded cultural areas (thanks to feminist, gender, postcolonial or ethnographic studies, amongst others). The career of ethnographic, travel or various different forms of autobiographical, biographical and epistolary literature is not surprising. We are already aware of and accept this current state of affairs. But the proposed changes go even further. There are ideas to include not only the works of historians and philosophers into the realm of literature (which would not be entirely surprising), but also texts coming from the advertising industry. Such an immense expansion of the literary field is not only far removed from the options mentioned before in this text, but also from the pragmatist perspective.

In some respects, the second issue is an extension of the first. The question it poses is as follows: Does the anthropological turn allow us to avoid the danger of mishandling literature in its uniqueness (which I also want to defend)? Or is it perhaps accelerating this mishandling? This particular problem, which constitutes the driving force behind the article, could be presented in a grotesque form of alternatives: instrumentalization v. the autonomy of literature. Either of these variants carries the danger of reducing or simplifying literature to cultural exemplification, or an exaggerated idealization.

I want to defend the thesis that the anthropology of literature encourages a consideration of the uniqueness of its research object. But the issue is not as simple as it might seem at first glance, especially since scholars tend to be on the lookout for the exactly opposite framework. There exists a clear divide on the issue and there are warnings and concerns being voiced – primarily, warnings against the reductive force that comes from bringing all cultural products under the heading of literature. In other words, if all cultural products are supposed to be analyzed as literature, the uniqueness of the latter is potentially lost (the same issue emerges among theoreticians of fiction when their subject of study escapes in the gathering swarm of pan-fiction).

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Contemporary Narration”, in *Story from the Perspective of Comparative Research*, edited by Z. Mitosek, Universitas, Krakow 2004; there is a discussion of hybridity of given genre forms, etc. – for M. Cesareo hybridity would be a fundamental term.

<sup>50</sup> Compare E. Kosowska *Negotiations and Compromise. Anthropology of Being Polish in Henryk Sienkiewicz's Work*, Katowice: US Press, 2002.

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“The goals of the poet and anthropologist are the same”<sup>51</sup> – such views, usually perceived as an apotheosis of literature’s uniqueness, can evoke unrest. In short, the most significant danger is that literature is absorbed or diluted in other cultural systems. In which case, these systems could potentially utilize literature solely in order to find its own reflection, or limit its mission to a reference function.

Proof of the acute awareness of these dangers is provided by the fact that there is a constant need to use arguments, which deflect accusations of literature being treated like the source of objective knowledge about the world.<sup>52</sup> Some highlight the uselessness of such perspectives, and others promote them. There are voices claiming that literature is merely a cognitive tool in the context of ostensive knowledge of the world, that it is “the richest [in other places: the invaluable] source of documentation for...the analysis of human behavior”<sup>53</sup> One can hear opinions – thankfully rare – stating that when the work of literature becomes dominated by aesthetic elements (according to Jakobson’s understanding of aesthetics) it becomes less interesting from the perspective of anthropology.<sup>54</sup>

I try to extract this particular kind of statements on purpose, even though I do not approve of them. It needs to be underlined that such statements are truly marginal. The anthropology of literature could (and indeed it does) look different. I raise them only to justify the need to ask such questions, as well as to point to the fact that similar questions and accusations are being vocalized within the field. Moreover, our academic environment also attempts to put a set of such assumptions in place for the anthropology of culture.

On the other hand, some explanations from scholars studying literature from (as they claim) an anthropological perspective, but situating themselves on the other end of the spectrum – one of the admirers of literature’s uniqueness – are sometimes a little too obvious. Yet, it is hard not to agree with them. Here is an example:

Writers are not obliged to strictly stick with the code of descriptive honesty. Novels and other examples of fictive writing are not designed by their respective authors as descriptive ethnographies of actual, real societies. Realism can be the goal of some fiction writers, but it never equals the descriptive accuracy. But this kind of accuracy should be a standard for all ethnographies. It is not a praise of ethnography, nor a critique of literature – it is merely an observation of the fact that they are both separate disciplines with their own, respective histories, aims and techniques. What is literature’s strength could be ethnography’s weakness, and vice versa.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Daniels, C.A. “The Poet as Anthropologist”, in *Literature and Anthropology* (1989), 181.

<sup>52</sup> The need to defend literature appears also in the field of literary-cultural studies. Among many voices heard see R.Felski “The Role of Aesthetics in Cultural Studies,” in *The Aesthetics of Cultural Studies*, edited by M. Berube, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

<sup>53</sup> *Literary Anthropology* (1988), XXII.

<sup>54</sup> They are noticed, although they are in a minority (debate in the book *Literary Anthropology*), 332.

<sup>55</sup> Erickson, V.O. “Buddenbrooks” Thomas Mann and North German Social Class. An

The fictional character of the world presented in literature is obvious, but at the same time – as we learn from another scholar – “the only condition laid out for fiction is to create a sense of similarity toward our world and understanding within the culture of the reader.”<sup>56</sup> Here, however, we stumble upon yet another problem:

How far can we go when using literature in order to arrive at a clear image of a society and its culture? How does literature shed light over the structure of our society and the accompanying blueprint of its behavior? How is literature completing, containing, or negating cultural assumptions? How is literature documenting historical development of both sensual and intellectual aspects of the society, as well as their mutual relations?<sup>57</sup>

The above quote by Erickson (defining himself as an anthropologist of culture) is engaged in the analysis of the novel *Buddenbrooks*. Asked if literature can really be treated as anthropology – or, in even more focused approach, as ethnography – he answered: “I don’t claim that there is no use for literature in anthropology.” In relation to the analysis of crime novels with a protagonist of “foreign” nationality, he explains, trying to escape oversimplification: “These novels are not ethnographic novels in disguise.”<sup>58</sup> He underlines that the goals of an anthropologist and of the writer can be similar and, among other things, can help in bettering the “human condition, through better understanding of his place in the world. However, both the techniques and means used for that purpose (used for establishing one’s superiority) can cause conflict.”<sup>59</sup> We are being warned against the reduction opposite to the one mentioned before, against the one entailing reducing literature through equating it with the totality of cultural manifestations.

And finally, it is time to reveal what is most important. Today, the advocates for literature’s uniqueness, calling for its appreciation, are definitely in the lead: “The anthropologist of literature must construct a method which will deliver anthropological data, not through omitting aesthetic strategies, but thanks to them.”<sup>60</sup> In other words, according to the quoted author (Boelhower), the anthropologist of literature transforms specific conventions into documents of a cognitive character, but he or she should be careful not to reduce the object of the study to merely one of the manifestations of culture or traits of it.<sup>61</sup> Attention is paid to the relations between anthropology and literature, which allow us to bring to the surface the fact that the latter “becomes both the creation and the creator of culture,” while anthropology allows us to assume the perspective of the “observer/reader/interpreter.” It is concluded, at the same time, that this “two-fold role of literature and function

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Application of Literary Anthropology” in *Literary Anthropology* (1988), 97.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. 123.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Boelhower, W. *Avant-Garde Autobiography*, 281.

<sup>61</sup> Among many titles on the subject, book by N. Bentley, *The Ethnography of Manners (Hawthorne, James, Wharton)*, [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.] is particularly interesting.

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of anthropology allow for multiple readings...interpretations of people, places, perspectives both real and imagined.”<sup>62</sup>

All of this, however, does not exhaust issues brought to our attention here. That is how we reach the question of literary anthropology.

## Literature as Anthropology

If we were to agree with such an interpretation of anthropology (as literature), mentioned previously, or in other words: if we will take anthropology in its literary form, then we need to agree to the reverse equivalency according to which literature is a kind of anthropology, or the literary author is as an anthropologist. This is the source of previously mentioned titles like the *Poet as Anthropologist* and others. We could add to this perspective research on the construction of such fictional worlds, in which the narrator or a protagonist plays the role of an anthropologist, ethnographer, traveler, alien, etc. In other words, projections of reality are shown through the usage of literary fiction and cultural constructs, points of view and images of the world. This is where a chance to grasp the autonomous character of the literary experience of the world appears.

At this point, it is impossible to forget one of the most interesting propositions of literary anthropology. If we list Clifford Geertz among the great patrons of the anthropology of literature, then as a patron of literary anthropology we should name Wolfgang Iser<sup>63</sup> (although we could point to an antecedent in the writings of Ricoeur, for example, to whom Iser is greatly indebted – as the role of hermeneutics is unquestionable here). Iser’s<sup>64</sup> findings, partially known to Polish readers and constantly developed by their creator, could be summarized as an attempt to identify literature as one-of-a-kind type of anthropology – one that allows for the revelation of cultural constructs explaining/discussing the world in a given epoch, or among given social groups. Literature, as a separate kind of interpretation of the world and of man, was intended to reveal aspects that were otherwise ungraspable. Iser’s approach sanctions literature’s privileged character, allowing for the appreciation of the fact that literature, in its own way, opens up the possibility of transgressing borders, observing worlds through their projections and examining existing cultural templates from the perspective of assumed distance.

One more issue should be mentioned here. Within contemporary literature, anthropological self-awareness is particularly strong – which does not mean that it was not before. Undoubtedly, except for twists and turns in the humanities, this is what made the anthropological perspective of literary studies so attractive.

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<sup>62</sup> *Between Anthropology and Literature...*, 2.

<sup>63</sup> Victor Turner is listed as performing both roles.

<sup>64</sup> Iser, W. *The Fictive and the Imaginary. Charting Literary Anthropology*, Baltimore 1993; “Varying Functions of Literature” in *Discovering Modernism*, edited by R. Nycz, Cracow: Universitas, 1998; “What Is the Anthropology of Literature?” *Second Texts*, vol.5, 2006.

In conclusion, one might say – even though it sounds a little bit paradoxical – that the anthropological perspective of literary studies should extract literary anthropology from literature. Such an approach would allow for an escape from the threat of reducing literature to a handbook-like description of reality. In this context, a chance emerges to actualize various anthropological objectives: aiming for an understanding of man, an interpretation of the world, the subject, and otherness. This would be realize a latent ability to cross over the cognitive systems of a given culture, even while inescapably anchored within them.

*Translation: Jan Pytalski*