

# Culturally, Locally.

## A Few Remarks on the Study of Postwar Polish Literature

Jan Galant

To write about the literature of the Polish People's Republic<sup>1</sup> (in Polish, PRL) requires one to overcome hurdles that are (at least) three-fold. The first are of a methodological nature and are linked to the ongoing discussion of the current state of the humanities. In the last few decades, the humanities has lost a certain confidence in its language, whose neutrality is impossible to prove, and in its object of study — literature itself — whose borders have been dramatically displaced to include and prioritize popular mass culture. These hurdles have emerged within the discipline itself.

The idiosyncrasies of scholarship on PRL-era literature are thus obstacles of an ideological and epistemic nature. The ideological entanglement of the PRL's attendant narratives results — and on this point, critics agree — from the fact that the question of the PRL will always be a question of the regime's contemporary ramifications. Przemysław Czapliński writes: “we discuss the PRL and discuss ourselves within the PRL in order to identify our own positions within the debate over its place in post-socialist Poland. We do not dispute the images of this bygone world, but the consequences that emerge from them today”.<sup>2</sup> These discussions have produced a harshly stereotyped portrait of a vanished epoch that adapts its form to the changing needs of the system of oppression on one side of the spectrum, and the “merry barracks” on the other.

<sup>1</sup> For convenience I will refer to this period as the PRL, bracketing the question of its nomenclature, though I am fully aware of the current alternative proposals and their reasonable justifications.

<sup>2</sup> P. Czapliński, *Polska do wymiany. Późna nowoczesność i nasze wielkie narracje*, Warsaw 2009, p. 120.

The epistemic limitations thus emerge from the fact that any description of postwar culture is so often justified by memory, contributing to a portrait of these bygone times that is often hard to verify, inconsistent, and extremely intimate. The domination of individual experience as a defining tendency of PRL-era literature has been pointed out by scholars such as Dariusz Nowacki in his well-known article *Images of a Former World (Widokówki z tamtego świata)*. In this text, he writes: “In Polish prose of the 1990s the theme of the PRL hardly ever appears if not as the problem of “being in the PRL” (the problem of an entity’s entanglement in that reality).”<sup>3</sup>

The collection of essays devoted to postwar literature is in fact substantial. Many publications have a broad and comparative reach and strive to comprehensively describe the epoch. To name a few: Zbigniew Jarosiński’s *Nadwiślański socrealizm*, which summarizes the Stalinist years through the thaw; this same author’s textbook for the series “A Small History of Polish Literature” (*Mała Historia Literatury Polskiej*) – *Literatura lat 1945–1975*; Anna Nasiłowska’s *Literatura okresu przejściowego 1975–1996* appearing in this same series; Edward Balcerzan’s two-part book on the activities of postwar poetry into the eighties *Poezja polska w latach 1939–1965*, which follows up on Anna Legeżyńska and Piotr Śliwiński’s book *Poezja polska po 1968 roku*; and Przemysław Czapliński and Piotr Śliwiński’s well-known text *Literatura polska 1976–1998. Przewodnik po prozie i poezji*. The lectures of Tadeusz Drewnowski collected in the volume *Próba scalenia - obieg, wzorce, style. Literatura polska 1944–1989* also belong to this list. There are additional texts that appeared before 1989, such as *Literatura polska 1918–1975*, edited by Alina Brodzka. This is excluding dictionaries and lexicons! I have cut this list short, and I am fully aware that it is not comprehensive, for there is no way to name even a fraction of the texts devoted to individual writers, works, movements or literary groups, these texts wielding contemporary critical languages (postcolonialism, feminism) in order to renew the interpretation of postwar Polish literature.

For these reasons, I wish to linger over two conceptions of writing on the history of literature that I suspect have much to contribute to the interpretation of PRL-era literature, though fortunately, their applications do not end here. I will, however, bypass a number of propositions that invoke currently prevalent languages and theories. These amount to a substantial list of contemporary academic movements. In some incidents we witness – to evoke Ryszard Nycz’s formulation – “a total distillation of abstract formulas from the contamination of historical experience”.<sup>4</sup>

I am seeking the kind of resolutions in the cultural history of literature that purport – if I understand their premises – to be a means for renewing the historical-literary narrative in the changing conditions by which literary studies and literature itself operate. It is my belief that the obstacles and limitations that await the scholar of PRL-era literature are therefore identical with those that history of literature seeks to overcome today.

<sup>3</sup> “Znak” 2000, issue 7.

<sup>4</sup> R. Nycz, *PRL: pamięć podzielona, społeczeństwo przesiedlone*, “Teksty Drugie” 2013, issue 3, p. 8.

### *A single year study*

As Włodzimierz Bolecki has argued that the notion of a cultural history of literature has little to do with a standard of accuracy. It does not offer a clearly defined methodology or a repository of concrete terms and procedures. It is, rather, the collective name referring to research practices already in circulation, which have evolved out of the experiences and turning points of contemporary humanities. Bolecki has highlighted this non-programmatic but descriptive or integrative dimension of a cultural history of literature when he notes that it is “a proposition for naming a vast set of activities and studies that will quell all future doubts that what we are doing can still be called a “history of literature”, and is not in fact something entirely different.”<sup>5</sup> Applying the adjective “cultural” here indicates a shift in how we relate to established models in the practice of literary history today.

Much has already been written on the factors driving these changes, their trajectory and their character. I will therefore limit myself to their influences: these include the claim that the languages used in the humanities lack neutrality, the shift in literary studies’ object of research to expand what counts as literature (which now includes all forms of textual production), and finally, a blurring of disciplinary borders within the humanities, which is most visible in the widespread borrowing of terms.

To state it simply, a cultural history of literature would thus be a new strain of historical-literary scholarship that attends to the circumstances stated above: it would gaze reflexively at the contingency of our images of the past on the descriptive and classificatory categories we use. We would divert our focus towards all forms of meaningful creative production, and adapt terms and methods from other fields in the humanities in order to describe this output. To be succinct, and to evoke Bolecki once more: “A cultural history of literature is simply a collection of questions that link the history of literature (as it is understood today) with the history of cultures/culture (as they are understood today), which is to say, questions that enable us to describe literary histories as cultural phenomena.”<sup>6</sup>

In this light, one of the most fascinating motifs in scholarship on PRL-era culture is the analysis of the mechanisms by which we construct epistemic concepts and categories of the past, ranging from the general (eg. the avant garde) to the particular (belonging to critical programs or artistic manifestos). This is linked to the artist’s scope of self-knowledge (immanent to her works of art or made explicit in her programmatic and critical statements), and to the terminology of Polish criticism circulating in the described period or among the specific critics involved (the essays devoted to Kazimierz Wyka as critic and literary scholar might be a good example). This level of reflexivity has great value in its capacity to illuminate the linkages between conceptions of historical and contemporary Polish literature that have reigned for years and the concepts wielded by literary scholars, traditional scholars, and various theoretical schools.

<sup>5</sup> W. Bolecki, *Literackie historie kultury*, in: *Kulturowa historia literatury*, ed. A. Łebkowska, W. Bolecki, Warsaw 2015, p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p. 13.

The cultural approach to literature of the PRL is most visible, however, in publications that draw from diverse material representing different mediums of art, whose analysis does not bypass the customs, everyday practices, and aesthetic standards of the era (fashion, ephemera, architecture, applied design, etc.). A fantastic example is Iwona Kurz's well-known book *Twarze w tłumie. Wizerunki bohaterów wyobraźni zbiorowej w kulturze polskiej lat 1955-1969* (Warsaw 2005), which analyzes the mechanisms of the PRL's production of icons (the sections' protagonists are Marek Hłasko, Zbigniew Cybulski, Elżbieta Czyżewska, Kalina Jędrusik, and Jerzy Skolimowski). The book draws from films, film journals and literary press, but also avails itself of popular press and anecdotes of the time. This record allows us to trace the shifting borders of social scandal, the attempts to adapt the lifestyles of Hollywood stars to accommodate socialist reality, the force of partisan puritanism, and the collision of artistic life with the prescriptions of propaganda.

An interesting but rarely used convention of literary studies in which a set of texts, events and processes tied to the PRL but lacking clear borders might find its proper place is known in English-language scholarship as a "single year study". As Krzysztof Kłosiński has written, in the single year study, "the narrative element gives way to a synchronic gaze"<sup>7</sup> allowing one to overcome contemporary borders of discipline, language, and the object of study. The envisioned yet unattainable "everythingism" simultaneously lends a sense (an illusion?) of a certain fundamental whole, untouched by arbitrary choice and theoretical narrativization.

The fact that as a rule, the single year study has what we might call a collective hero and uses simultaneity as the basis for its story means that it can provide the groundwork for a contemporary take on historical-literary synthesis that is nonetheless deprived of what was once the very spine of similar notions – the vision for a historical-literary process, a hypothesis on the direction of literary shifts, and the resultant ability to attempt a prognosis for the future of literature. Anna Łebkowska identifies three overviews of literary history (*A New History of French Literature*, 1989; *A New History of German Literature*, 2004; *A New Literary History of America*, 2009) that manage to meet these criteria: "The past is not grasped into any kind of ideological system or political explanation or rubric that claims to be objectively organized."<sup>8</sup> Of course, this does not mean that no organizational mechanisms are at work here – the selection of sample material and the choice of the year itself establish a hierarchy of events and identify some points in the past as more meaningful than others, or perhaps more significant because they mark the particularly intense intersections of dispersed literary and cultural phenomena (such as moments of political crisis or social watersheds). Łebkowska has noted that the volume offering a history of American literature (or a literary history of America, for its title hints at this double entendre) is distinct from the other two for its significant expansion of what qualifies as literature.

<sup>7</sup> K. Kłosiński, "O roku ów". *Rokowania historii literatury*, in: *Kulturowa historia literatury*, p. 255.

<sup>8</sup> A. Łebkowska, *Przyszłość literatury wpisana w jej historię (wiek XX i czasy współczesne)*, in: *Kulturowa historia literatury*, p. 50. Each of the volumes mentioned here is a collection of articles arranged as a kind of calendar whose constituent parts are organized by dates their authors deemed important for the collective.

Another instance of a single year study is Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's book *1926: living on the edge of time*, from 1998,<sup>9</sup> whose sections (though the reader is encouraged to read the book in any order) refer to the most diverse phenomena and aspects of the life of this (un)remarkable year: boxing matches, airplanes, movie theaters, the League of Nations, as well as more general themes (authenticity and convention, individuality and collectivity, action and passivity, the center and the periphery) and purport to add up to a portrait of this specific historical moment. The publisher promoted the book with the following statement:

Travel back to the year 1926 and into the rush of experiences that made people feel they were living on the edge of time. Touch a world where speed seemed the very essence of life. It is a year for which we have no expectations. It was not 1066 or 1588 or 1945, yet it was the year A.A. Milne published *Winnie-the-Pooh* and Alfred Hitchcock released his first successful film, *The Lodger*. A set of modern masters was at work—Jorge Luis Borges, Babe Ruth, Leni Riefenstahl, Ernest Hemingway, Josephine Baker, Greta Garbo, Franz Kafka, Gertrude Stein, Martin Heidegger—while factory workers, secretaries, engineers, architects, and Argentine cattle-ranchers were performing their daily tasks.<sup>10</sup>

It is also worth citing Gumbrecht's remark from his introduction to *In 1926*. He writes that:

The book's main intention is best captured in the phrase that was its original subtitle: "an essay on historical simultaneity." The book asks to what extent and at what cost it is possible to make present again, in a text, worlds that existed before its author was born—and the author is fully aware that such an undertaking is impossible.<sup>11</sup>

I cite this fragment to note its articulation of the fundamental motivation and objective for any publication structuring itself as a single year study. This motive is the desire for the past to become present for one moment so that we might experience today what happened long ago. This explains its inclusion of a stream of events in which the individual of the era was immersed, the individual for whom these events constituted the unorganized, multifaceted present. This present must be narrated in such a way as to position the contemporary reader in an identical situation. Gumbrecht's proposal "to make worlds present again" seems particularly apt. The many meanings of the word "present" allow us to suggest that through his work, the author "presents" and narrates the past, but more importantly ushers it into "the present", allowing it to be "present" today (here lies the greatest benefit of that "everythingness" of *single year studies*), and "gifts" the reader the capacity to immerse herself in that which has passed as if it were still "present".

I find this same intention – to approach and scrutinize the past – in Jacek Łukasiewicz's well-known article *One Day in Socialist Realism (Jeden dzień w socrealizmie)* ("Teksty Drugie"

<sup>9</sup> Kłosiński's article discusses this book in the context of many others. K. Kłosiński, "O roku ów". *Rokowania historii literatury*.

<sup>10</sup><http://www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog.php?isbn=9780674000551> [July 14 2017]

<sup>11</sup>H. U. Gumbrecht, *In 1926: living at the edge of time*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge London 1997, p. XIV,

2000/1-2) as well as in Maciej Drygas's documentary film from 2006 *One Day in the PRL* (*Jeden dzień w PRL*). This leads me to believe that this very intention constitutes the main epistemic merits of this form of writing about the past, and that the desire to experience the past (rather than understand it) is a high priority of the reader.

Łukasiewicz's article attempts to recreate one day – November 14, 1951– using materials from the press that were available on that day. It therefore resembles the press in form, and refers to the contents of Wrocław newspapers just as an average citizen might have seen and read them.

One day in socialist realism is a day spent in an echo chamber. It is the day of the reader (or listener, or audience member). From the various texts thrust upon him, he weaves a text of his own. I reconstruct – of course, not comprehensively – one such personal text, coming together on the 14th of November 1951 in the city of Wrocław. Above all, I reconstruct this text after reading a sample of popular press that a resident of Wrocław might have read on this day, or might at least have skimmed.<sup>12</sup>

It goes without saying that the objective of this reconstruction is to lay bare propaganda's role in manipulating our picture of reality. As we can see, Łukasiewicz offers us the ability to zoom in on the everyday, prioritizing this over historical generalization and descriptive profiles of the bygone epoch (although by virtue of the subject referencing and appraising the contents of old newspapers, such things are impossible to eliminate entirely). In so doing, he gives us the opportunity to experience life in socialism.<sup>13</sup>

Maciej Drygas' documentary film *One Day in the PRL* (*Jeden dzień w PRL*)<sup>14</sup> yields a similar effect. Assembling a collage of archival materials (films, amateur recordings, documents read out loud, reports, denunciations, notes) he reconstructs one day, from dawn to dusk: September 27, 1962. As is the case with Łukasiewicz's text, this is a day on which nothing special happened. This day did not witness any grand events that would enter the chronicles of the twentieth century. The archival sources of Drygas' materials were to attest to the authenticity of the emerging image of this era of Poland and to the neutrality of the narrative. The choice of day, however, enabled the director to avoid inevitable references to already familiar historical moments, economic conditions, and so forth. The aspect of this point of view that interests me most is the potential for identification. Małgorzata Kozubek has written of this film that its source is its quotidian perspective:

<sup>12</sup>J. Łukasiewicz, *Jeden dzień w socrealizmie*, "Teksty Drugie" 2000, issue 1/2, p. 7.

<sup>13</sup>Thus has Michał Głowiński summed up Łukasiewicz's intention in his review of the book: "Jacek Łukasiewicz reflects upon what might have caught the eye of a resident of Wrocław on November 14<sup>th</sup>, 1951 as he perused the local and national press available to him in this place and on this day. Łukasiewicz reflects upon what might have been said to him, what he might have been led to believe, and what cautionary anecdotes might have come his way." ("Pamiętnik Literacki" 2009, vol. 1, p. 216).

<sup>14</sup>Reż. M. Drygas, Polska 2006.

Preoccupied with the “ordinary” man who no one remembers, Maciej Drygas expands the field of identification. He studies the consciousness of “ordinary people”. He recalls something that is unknown to the younger viewer, while evoking the very form of memory that people living in those times experienced.<sup>15</sup>

To reiterate more clearly the need to experience the PRL as a means for understanding the period, and to offer an example of the extreme nature of this need, I would like to reference a book that documents an experiment led by journalists Izabela Meyza and Witold Szablowski. For half a year, they decided to live “as if they were in the PRL”. Their book *Our Little PRL. Half a year in an M-3 with a perm, a moustache, and a Fiat 126 (Nasz mały PRL. Pół roku w M-3 z trwałą, wąsami i maluchem)* (Kraków 2012) is a record of this undertaking. The pitfalls of the idea seem quite obvious to me — there is no way to reconstruct the period simply within the confines of a modest apartment (something similar is attempted in Wolfgang Becker’s famous film *Goodbye, Lenin* from 2003). We can only reconstruct the accoutrement of everyday life: furniture, diapers, a car, and clothing. The findings emerging from this experiment come as no surprise: technological advancements have made everyday existence more convenient, today’s cars are larger, disposable diapers make parents’ life easier, and clothing is now made from materials of higher quality. The biggest takeaway from *Our Little PRL* is the book’s testament to the belief that the past can only be truly accessed through the attempt to relive its experiences.

In the methods suggested here for discussing the literary past, I am struck not only by the ease with which literature dissolves among the most diverse cultural texts, becoming one of many reference points for a bygone experience. Another aspect embedded in these methods is the reluctance to issue hypotheses on the latent mechanisms of the epoch: those social and literary processes that lurk below the surface. By concealing its own hierarchy and selectivity, these “portraits of the past” put forth an impression of completeness. Yet this completeness, taking the place of generalizations and conceptualizations, does not make it any easier to write the represented events into a broader historical or historical-literary process. Indeed, it curtails in advance the temptation to construct such integrated “wholes”. For in the end, we are dealing with statements whose definitions are confined to the chosen moment in time. This inevitably renders history null and void – as isolated points, individual days can not contribute to building up the march of events on a broader scale. In its place, in the place of history, the microscopic scale of the everyday steps in: the perspective of one average individual, the so-called “gray” man, the material of memory.

<sup>15</sup>M. Kozubek, *Jeden film z PRL-u. Maciej Drygas jako historyk kultury?*, “Dyskurs. Pismo Naukowo-Artystyczne ASP we Wrocławiu” 2013, vol. 16, p. 50. To confirm this potential for identification and for approaching an experience of the past, I will quote a few words on the film found online: “Thanks to the materials collected in Maciej Drygas’ portrait, it is possible to learn more about this totalitarian system than from hundreds of books or films devoted to the period. (...) Some moments are touching, some funny, some sad - and all this contributes to a portrait of the ‘60s that is mesmerizing in its authenticity...” (<http://culture.pl/pl/dzielo/jeden-dzien-w-prl> [14 July 2017]).

### Literature of the PRL from a Regional Perspective

Another proposal for a history of literature equal to the challenges of a changing world (the blurred borders of literature) that could replace the traditional model for writing literary history (its neutrality of language, its dubious scientism) and finally satisfy the need for a form of knowledge rooted in experience is the notion of historical-literary research through a regional or broader approach: geopoetics. At the service of a history of literature, I advocate for mobilizing the terms, objectives and theoretical premises of scholarship on local culture, regionalism, border culture (and border-crossing culture), and centroperipheral relations, as found, for instance, in several articles by Ryszard Nycz.

Departing from the conditions for literary history described in *A Possible History of Literature* (*Możliwa historia literatury*) to the conditions already articulated in this article, I should add the demise of the national model of literary history (based on the singularity of nation, language and territory) and the crisis of historical knowledge. Nycz identifies three sources for a new history of literature: the notion of global systems, postcolonial theories, and the conceptualized processes of globalization, all of which compel us to attend to local phenomena and to the relations between the center and the periphery. The concept of the borderland extends and contributes to this last mode of thought. In another text, Nycz elaborates on this issue by referring to themes of displacement and migration, which he identifies as critical social processes of the postwar period. Building on Nycz's points, we can recover a record in the culture and literature of the PRL of a social experience that has been robbed of its place: "postwar Polish society is a displaced, deterritorialized and dislocated society. This is a society in which no one (or hardly anyone) is at home, in their rightful place, and within their community".<sup>16</sup>

Taking these remarks as a point of departure, and expanding the scope of their focuses to include other spatial categories associated with the borderland, one might attempt to formulate a proposal for research on the culture of the PRL whose core tenets would be regionalism broadly construed, and the theme of the local. This method would be situated in the scholarship of new regionalism that is rapidly evolving today, whose axis – in broad strokes – is the relation between identity and territory. The border, the borderland, the cross-border, centroperipheral relations, and historicity (or rooting/uprooting) are some of the themes most often engaged in this field. Investigating the culture of the PRL in this framework might take on a form that is at least three-fold.

The first point pertains to the representation of local culture and the literature of particular regions. Documenting the literary life in specific regions of postwar Poland (Szczecin, Wrocław, Poznań, Warmia and Masuria, Podlasie, and Silesia) might allow us to reconstruct local traditions, mores of local literary life, and local artistic hierarchies that prioritize certain themes or style conventions. Several targeted studies have already been written on this subject (such as the book *The Career of a Writer in the PRL [Kariera pisarza w PRL-u]*).<sup>17</sup> Małgorzata Mikołajczak's fascinating articles on postwar literary affairs in Lubusz,<sup>18</sup> Inga

<sup>16</sup>R. Nycz, *PRL: pamięć podzielona, społeczeństwo przesiedlone*, p. 9.

<sup>17</sup>Ed. E. Dąbrowicz, K. Budrowska, K. Kościwicz, M. Budnik, Warsaw 2014.

<sup>18</sup>M. Mikołajczak, *Nie-miejsca pod arkadyjskim szyldem*, "Teksty Drugie" 2013, issue 3, p. 245-256.



Iwasiów's overview of neo-post-resettlement prose). Themes of this kind are quite prominent within the scope of regional studies.

I find that tracing the transmission of principles (hierarchies, conventions, themes) from the center to local regions (on the periphery) is particularly valuable for describing regional literary life. I am also interested in the forms of adaptation, accommodation and resistance that local authors adopt against these pressures and, on a broader plain, the analysis of relations between the templates imposed by the culturally dominating center of the epoch and the emancipatory needs of local literary communities. In this second scenario, literature plays a similar role to other means for constructing local, regional identity. A sociology of literature might also include reflections on the writer's position in his local environment, personal entanglements, as well as the mechanisms of social mobility and of transgressing the borders of the local and approaching supra-local forms of literary life.

Another field of historical-literary reflections on the PRL addresses the foundations of literary life that stem from regional categories. This deserves deeper attention. I have in mind the laws, mechanisms and dependencies of literary life beyond Warsaw. Regional literary life gained new impetus in the years following 1956, with the help of the popularizing efforts of the "56 Generation". Having been institutionally galvanized in countless poetic competitions, local projects (tournaments, competitions, poetry nights, meetings with students, publishing houses and periodicals) regional artists joined mass culture on an accelerated timeline. On the very border between amateur and "professional" art, they cultivated (and continue to cultivate, for this persists today) their own hierarchies and literary icons partially independent from the Warsaw model whose names rarely make their way into scholarship. For years, Stanisław Barańczak penned much criticism on this topic, but it has its defenders as well (A. K. Waśkiewicz, J. Leszin-Koperski).

In the article cited above, Ryszard Nycz introduces a third way to apply regional categories (concepts of the border) to the study of postwar Polish culture. He reads PRL-era literature in search of a record of displacements resulting from forced resettlements that tore asunder the traditional social fabric.

This same scholar's notion of a "possible history of literature" has a similar theoretical anchoring (border studies and cross-border studies). Alluding to the suggestion of Bohdan Jałowiecki, who has said that our image of the history of all of Poland since the nineteenth century has been dominated by the events of Russian annexation, along with the canon of patriotic virtues, heroes and historical events (at the expense, naturally, of the remaining regions), Nycz introduces new theoretical approaches that might offer an alternative to "historical studies based on this "congressional" image of nineteenth-century Poland, through contemporary symbolic struggles over the politics of history and of memory."<sup>19</sup> Regionalising our narratives of the PRL might benefit the representation of those fields of literature and literary life that push back against the dominant narrative of Polish past, driven by the intelligentsia's experience of Russian annexation. I would argue that the postwar culture of the so-

<sup>19</sup>R. Nycz, *Możliwa historia literatury*, in: *Na pograniczach literatury*, ed. J. Fazan, K. Zajas, Kraków 2012, p. 31.

called “Recovered Territories” also has a place in this project. One critical component of this culture was the effacement of historical memory and the imposition of ideologically proper narratives of the past through the coercive practices of the propaganda apparatus.<sup>20</sup>

Studying PRL-era literature and culture through a regionalist prism (geopoetics) offers substantial potential for reparations – it opens up an opportunity to focus on the phenomena of postwar culture so often cast to the margins of literary criticism and literary history. These phenomena include: local culture, regional forms, and mechanisms of literary and amateur life. This approach allows us to witness the experience of forced relocations and the reality of the dominating “congressional” perspective in general culture.

Both proposals articulated here for studying the culture of the PRL are open resolutions: their potential applications for the interpretation of other cultural moments are clear. In both cases, the concepts in question have evolved out of shifts in the humanities. They are situated within the scope of a cultural history of literature. The single year study and the regionalist approach both relate to the literary work as a cultural text (just one of many), and adopt the point of view of an individual observer. Both push back against official languages, prevailing theories, and all ideas that favor cultural homogenization. To this end, they invoke the category of experience (memory) as an epistemic tool. While the convergence between these two approaches is fundamentally coincidental, we should take it as an indication of and testament to the continuity and the inevitability of change endemic to literary studies.

<sup>20</sup>An excellent introduction to post-war regionalist ideas is Małgorzata Mikołajczak’s article *Wstęp: Regionalizm w polskiej refleksji o literaturze (zarys problematyki i historia idei)*, which opens the anthology *Regionalizm literacki w Polsce. Zarys historyczny i wybór źródeł* (ed. Z. Chojnowski, M. Mikołajczak, Kraków 2016), as well as several source texts included in this anthology.

# KEYWORDS

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**ABSTRACT:**

The aim of this article is to put forth two exemplary methods for writing about literature from the PRL period and, in a broader context, two forms of constructing a history of literature by this model. Enumerating the basic premises for a contemporary history of literature (the loss of neutrality for critical languages, the blurring of borders that define the object of literary studies, and the altered state of the human sciences), this article's author proposes the form of the single year study as well as studies inspired by the conceptual apparatus of new regionalism. These approaches offer a chance to investigate thematics that have thus far been ignored in scholarship on PRL-era culture (local culture, the relationship between official and local culture, and the persistence of the internal borders of partitioned Poland in postwar culture) as well as an intimate approach to postwar experience through the multifaceted representation of an isolated moment in time (the single year study).

## history of literature

### single year study

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Jan Galant – PhD, Professor at the Institute of Polish Philology at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan. Galant’s interests include the history of literature and of twentieth-century Polish culture, with special emphasis on the socialist period and themes related to new regionalism. He has published the following books: *Marek Hłasko* (Poznań 1996), *Polska proza lingwistyczna. Debiuty lat siedemdziesiątych* (Poznań 1999), *Zszywacze, spinacze, pinezki. Krótkie szkice o literaturze* (Ostrów Wielkopolski 2007), and *Odmiany wolności. Publicystyka, krytyka i literatura polskiego Października* (Poznań 2010). He has edited the following anthologies: *Powroty Iwaszkiewicza* (Poznań 1999), *PRL - świat (nie)przedstawiony* (Poznań 2010) and *Pokolenie “Współczesności”. Twórcy. Dzieła. Znaczenie* (Poznań 2016). From 2014 to 2016 he participated in a conference series organized as part of the grant project “New Regionalism in literary studies”.