

State of research and perspectives of Polish literary onomastics

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To cite this article: Graf, Magdalena. 2022. State of research and perspectives of Polish literary onomastics. *Onoma* 57, 73–86. DOI: 10.34158/ONOMA.57/2022/5

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.34158/ONOMA.57/2022/5>

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Article history

Received on 30 April 2022.

Final form accepted on 3 January 2023.

Published online on 31 January 2023.

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Abstract: *About the names of characters in 18-th century Polish comedy* – that was the title of the article written by Stanisław Reczek, published in 1953. This article, although written from the perspective of a literary historian, is considered to be the beginning of literary onomastics research in Poland. From 1970 – that is, from the date of the essential to the development of discipline thesis published by Aleksander Wilkoń – research on literary names became the domain of linguists in Poland. The research procedure model proposed in this dissertation set a further direction of research and for many years was used and modified in studies dedicated to literary proper names. Changes occurring in linguistics, as well as in literature itself, led to literary onomastics being nowadays developed in many interesting directions. The interdisciplinary character of research signalled in the thesis written by Wilkoń has found its creative development in recent studies and is today not only a postulate, but

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a research imperative. In the present text, apart from discussing the theoretical foundations of the discipline and the most important methodological proposals, its research perspectives will also be outlined.

Keywords: Literary onomastics, proper names in literature, Polish literature.

État de la recherche et perspectives de la recherche en onomastique littéraire polonaise

Résumé : *A propos des noms des personnages de la comédie polonaise du XVIII^e siècle* – tel était le titre de l'article écrit par Stanisław Reczek, publié en 1953. Cet article, bien qu'il fût écrit du point de vue d'un historien de la littérature, est considéré le début explicite de la recherche en onomastique littéraire en Pologne. A partir de 1970 (la date d'une thèse essentielle pour le développement de la discipline publiée par Aleksander Wilkoń) la recherche sur les noms littéraires est devenue le domaine des linguistes en Pologne. Le modèle de procédure de recherche proposé dans cette thèse a donné une nouvelle orientation à la recherche actuelle des noms propres littéraires. Les changements survenus en linguistique, ainsi que dans la littérature elle-même, ont fait que l'onomastique littéraire entreprend de nombreuses directions intéressantes. Le caractère interdisciplinaire de la recherche, signalé dans la thèse écrite par Wilkoń, a trouvé son développement créatif dans les études récentes et est aujourd'hui non seulement un postulat, mais un impératif de recherche. Dans le texte présenté, outre la discussion des fondements théoriques de la discipline et des propositions méthodologiques les plus importantes, on expose aussi ses perspectives de recherche.

Mots-clés : Onomastique littéraire, noms propres littéraire, littérature polonaise.

Stand der Forschung und Perspektiven der polnischen literarischen Onomastikforschung

Zusammenfassung: *Über die Namen von Charakteren in der polnischen Komödie des 18. Jahrhunderts* – so lautete der Titel eines von Stanisław Reczek verfassten Artikels, der im Jahr 1953 veröffentlicht wurde. Diese Studie, obwohl aus der Sicht eines Literaturhistorikers geschrieben, gilt als Beginn der literarischen onomastischen Forschung in Polen. Ab 1970 – d.h. ab dem Zeitpunkt des für die Entwicklung der Disziplin wesentlichen, von Aleksander Wilkoń veröffentlichten Werkes – wurde die Erforschung literarischer Namen zur Domäne der Linguisten in Polen. Das von der Autorin vorgeschlagene Analysemodell hat der Forschung eine neue Richtung gegeben und wurde viele Jahre lang in Studien, die sich mit literarischen Eigennamen befassen, verwendet und modifiziert. Neue Strömungen in der Linguistik sowie Veränderungen in der Belletristik selbst haben dazu geführt, dass sich die literarische Onomastik heute in viele interessante Richtungen entwickelt. Der interdisziplinäre Charakter der Forschung, auf den bereits Wilkoń hingewiesen hatte, hat in den neueren Studien eine innovative Weiterentwicklung erfahren und ist heute nicht nur ein Postulat, sondern ein Gebot des wissenschaftlichen Vorgehens. In dem vorliegenden Beitrag werden neben der Diskussion der theoretischen Grundlagen der Disziplin und der wichtigsten methodologischen Vorschläge auch ihre Forschungsperspektiven erörtert.

Schlüsselbegriffe: Literarische Onomastik, Namen in der Literatur, Polnische Literatur.

State of research and perspectives of Polish literary onomastics

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Presenting the state of research of Polish literary onomastics is only seemingly a simple task. On the one hand, despite the fact that the research on names in literature is over 60 years old, it is still said, that it is a young discipline, looking for its own methodology. On the other hand, its scientific achievements are already numerous and – which is its significant value – very diverse. It consists of about a thousand scientific papers, mostly articles published in journals and collective volumes.

When reviewing the literature on the subject, I give up the chronological description of the achievements of the discipline – I would like to indicate the most important, in my opinion, studies and discuss the theses contained in them. I pay special attention to the changes taking place in the methodology of literary onomastic research – they show the directions of the discipline’s development and reveal areas of significant omissions.

To begin with, it should be noted that the interdisciplinarity of literary onomastics, obvious today, was already signalled in the first studies dealing with the subject of proper names in literature. This issue is also observed in the works of Western European researchers who indicate that literary onomastics is a borderline discipline between linguistics and literary studies, and this often leads to a misunderstanding of its specificity (see [Kohlheim 2019: 447–454](#)). In case of Polish initial period of research, the interdisciplinarity of literary onomastics was related to the problem of determining the field of research to which it belongs. A characteristic feature of Polish literary onomastics is that the first analyses were written by literary historians (including works presented by S. Reczek, S. Grzeszczuk) and rooted in research in the field of structural poetics of a literary work (see [Reczek 1953](#); [Piszczkowski 1957](#); [Grzeszczuk 1963](#)).

At an early stage of development, literary onomastics was discipline drawing (albeit to a different extent) from the achievements of both fields – literary studies and linguistic studies. Konrad Górski, writing about the literary and linguistic point of view, clearly established the scope of problems that should be of interest to researchers representing one of the fields, clearly indicating that: “dealing with onomastics in a literary work is primarily a task of a literary historian and their goals are crucial” ([Górski 1963: 401](#)). Literary scholars asked about the ways of naming characters and places in the works of the most eminent writers, the source of names and their functions. The linguist’s task was to investigate the etymology of these names and their

relation to usual naming. As Górski noted:

A linguist having no literary interests, can stop at this research, and for a literary historian it has value as a material for the interpretation of a work and getting to know its artistic means (Górski 1963: 401).

However, due to the contribution of analysis and the lack of a broader methodological reflection, literary scholars quickly lost interest in interpreting proper literary names (which characterizes literary studies to this day). As a result, at the beginning of the 1970s, linguists became interested in this issue, and since then (i.e. since the publication of Aleksander Wilkoń's thesis), there has been talk of the linguistic foundations of onomastic and literary research. It was clear for Wilkoń that the scope of competences of a linguist writing about literature, as outlined earlier, should be extended. Hence in the proposed method of strictly linguistic considerations it is supplemented by literary reflection. Thus, from the very beginning, researchers of proper literary names were considering not only the way of introducing proper names into a literary text, the source of names, etymology, linguistic form and their relations to usual naming, but – which is also important – they asked about their stylistic functions. As the author stated:

The name [...] has important ideological and artistic functions. It is often an abbreviation of the problem embodied in a given character, it contains a concise characteristic of the place of action, it is also an important component of the style and functions as a sign of subtly shaded emotional content. In sum: it is [...] related to the appellative layer of the work (Wilkoń 1970: 5).

The research method proposed by Wilkoń set the path followed by his successors over the next decades, but also – probably contrary to the author's expectations – to some extent inhibited the development of the discipline. This procedure included two aspects of the analysis – linguistic and stylistic. A detailed typology of names (interpreted in relation to the text and to real denotes) supplemented the list of stylistic functions, which are still used by subsequent generations of researchers. As recognized by Wilkoń, proper names have the ability to inform about the time and place of the action (*localization function*); social, environmental and national affiliation, i.e. the origin of the character (*sociological function*); they can serve as an allusion to authentic characters and places (*allusive function*); literally or metaphorically characterize a character or place (*content function*); finally, serve as a sign expressing the emotions of the character or the author (*expressive function*). The researcher pointed out that the catalog of functions is open and their description: "should be based primarily on the properties of the proper names themselves" (Wilkoń 1970: 15).

In case of Wilkoń's monography it was the proper names from the texts by Stefan Żeromski, a writer from the border between of realism and naturalism

(the end of 19th and early 20th century). Embedding the research of that time – not only onomastic – in structuralism and the conviction that the developed method was universal, also led to a conclusion that established the direction of onomastic analysis for a long time. In the final part of the work, the researcher states that not every literary text is attractive in terms of proper names and not all names are interesting for onomastic researchers – in his opinion, denotatively authentic names (that is, denoting the same characters and places as in the non-literary reality) were that type of onyms. The conviction about the potential onomastic unattractiveness of certain types of texts influenced the fact that the mainstream research of proper names in literature was directed towards prose, especially realistic prose; an analytical limitation was also the belief, echoed after Wilkoń by other researchers, about the research unattractiveness of authentic names. Including mainly anthroponymy and toponymy in the analysis meant that for a long time researchers were less interested in other onymic categories (e.g. zoonyms, ideonyms), and names were analysed in isolation without reference to a broader context (e.g. taking into consideration their lexical neighbourhood). It has also become a research imperative to link the research with findings in the field of linguistic stylistics, which Wilkoń recognized as a common area of analysis, field that allows for a perfect combination of linguistic analysis with literary interpretation. It should be emphasized, however, that this was the first such comprehensive study of the research methodology, which was referred to by other researchers over the next decades. Since the publication of the *Wilkoń* monograph, literary onomastics has become a fully-fledged field of linguistic research and to a small extent aroused the interest of literary researchers – the exception is the work of *Cyzman* (2009), which is a polemic with the findings of onomasticians-linguists.

In the development of each discipline, however, there is a moment when subsequent researchers modify the research tools. It results from the analysed texts and their names' layer, adopted assumptions, planned goals from paying attention to categories other than anthroponymy and toponymy. Hence, in addition to the studies that accurately follow the scheme of Wilkoń, including a linguistic analysis and a description – with the use of a fixed pattern – of stylistic functions performed by them (e.g. *Głowacki* 1999; *Obrzut* 2012).

There were also works created, whose authors modified the tools and research procedure. The adoption of the genological perspective characterizes *Irena Sarnowska-Giefing's* monograph (1984) on the prose of the period of positivism and naturalism (second half of the 19th century).

Giving a higher rank to functional analysis and a stronger indication of the relation between names and literary text was a priority in the research of *Czesław Kosyl* (1992) and his students: *Adam Siwiec* (1998) and *Izabela Domaciuk* (2003), who continued the reflection on the functions of names initiated by Kosyl. A signal of these changes was the departure from the dual-sided analysis, i.e. the integration of linguistic and literary reflection and resignation

of the study of functions according to the established scheme. A crucial role in shaping the model of describing literary proper names was played by Kosyl, who established the canon of the main stylistic trends of literary proper names. The starting point here was the thesis about a specific form and specific features of proper names in changing literary epochs and literary trends. As a result, the researcher proposed the following trends: expressionistic, conventional, etymological, semantic, grotesque-ludic, fantasy–fairy-tale, pseudo-onomastic and realistic (Kosyl 1993: 363–387). Researchers from Lublin onomastic centre also presented new stylistic functions in their works (e.g. *information* and *camouflage* function), which resulted from the analysis of various proper names from both the realistic prose of Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, works by Michał Choromański, and texts by Stanisław Lem.

The canon of stylistic functions was also extended by Łucja Maria Szewczyk (1993), who in a work dedicated to the onyms of Adam Mickiewicz's texts proposed to study the *poetic* and the *evaluative* function. The monograph also brought about a recognition of the lexical neighbourhood of a name and its equivalents, important for the research methodology, as this researcher also included the analysis of permanent, poetic periphrases of names, noting that from the functional perspective they play a similar role to proper names. Since then, the subject of linguists' observation has been not only proper names (such as anthroponyms, e.g. *Józef Piłsudski* or toponyms, e.g. *Japan*), but also definite descriptions, which earlier used to be omitted (e.g. *Marshal* – here: *Józef Piłsudski* – and *Land of the Rising Sun*), referring both to authentic names, as well as literary names (Szewczyk 1996; Graf 2020).

The last decade of the twentieth century was, above all, the time of stabilization of the research methodology and the discussion of their scope and of the competences of a linguist – a researcher of literary proper names. Literary onomastics already had the status of a sub-discipline, hence efforts were made to establish the limits of its autonomy. The growing position of literary proper names is evidenced by the fact that the 8th National Onomastic Conference was dedicated to these issues. Today's reading of the papers published in the post-conference volume (Biolik 1993) proves that it was the time to establish the basic research goals of the discipline and to stabilize its methodological background. Rzetelska-Feleszko (1993) stated that the competences of the researcher of literary onyms are used in carrying out two research activities: comparing the literary onomasticon with the actual material and examining to what extent inauthentic names reflect the authentic onyms. The remaining research goals went beyond – in her opinion – strictly onomastic research, becoming in fact the subject of stylistic research (Rzetelska-Feleszko 1993: 24–25). A stronger connection of onomastics with stylistics was signalled by the terms used: *stylistic proper names* or *stylistic functions of literary proper names*, but also the fact that the main goal of the research was to search for the style determinants of selected writers. The authors of the articles collected in the

volume also the important directions of the development of the discipline, such as the interest in biblical names, folklore, names in translation and poetic texts. Some researchers (e.g. Rymut 1993) also noted the authentic names and their multitude functions. What is more – the area of research interests expanded to include new types of names, e.g. zoonyms (Głowacki 1993).

Much more attention was paid to the semantic value of names, a novelty was also the notice that characters and places are identified by giving them a proper name, but the author may also leave them without a name (a name or a description in function of a proper name). This phenomenon was observed by Cieślíkowa (1993), who proposed that the analysis should also include the category of *namelessness*. In her opinion, the procedure of avoiding the name, depriving the fictional character of the name or using the name equivalent (e.g. *Nameless*, *J.K.*, *Somebody*) can also perform many interesting textual functions.

The multiplicity of research proposals, especially those presented in the form of scientific articles, constantly widened the space in which researchers of literary onomastic had something interesting to say. The observation included paraliterary genres, apart from the main text, the titles and elements of the text frame were also analysed, attention was drawn to literary chrematonyms, and new artistic functions were proposed by analysing names as determinants of a *linguistic game* or an *onymic allusion*. Changes also took place in the analysed categories of names – apart from anthroponyms and toponyms, researchers began to be interested in literary chrematonyms (Głowacki 1999) or hydronyms (Kęsikowa 2003).

The new century symbolically marked a new stage in onomastic literary research – in the face of the crisis of stylistics, it was difficult to still use its language, so the first decade of the 21st century was primarily a period of searching for new means of expression and constantly shifting the boundaries of analysis. Literary onomastics was more and more willing to open up to new disciplines, thus confirming its interdisciplinary character (Sarnowska-Giefing 2003b). Researchers used not only the tools of stylistics, comparative studies or translation studies, but also textual linguistics (Sarnowska-Giefing 2003a) and sociolinguistics (Łuc 2007), more and more often they combined linguistic reflection with findings in the field of cultural studies, anthropology and philosophy (e.g. Graf 2015; Rejter 2019). The adoption of such different interpretative perspectives resulted in an almost complete break with the research procedure proposed by Wilkoń and resulted in many interesting research proposals. The canon of stylistic (artistic) functions of proper names was enriched by new functions, which resulted from the strong connection of interpretative conclusions with the specificity of new functions of proper names, dependent on the examined onyms (e.g. *didactic*, *persuasive*, *intertextual* or *cumulative* function). It was also noticed that the proper name can perform several text functions simultaneously.

The achievements of the discipline are enriched by synthetic studies dedicated to specific periods and literary trends (Sarnowska-Giefing 2003b; Rejter 2016) or the work of selected authors, not only the “great” names of Polish literature

as Maria Dąbrowska (Raszewska-Klimas 2002), but also the authors of popular literature, such as Małgorzata Musierowicz (Łuc 2007) or Andrzej Sapkowski (Szelewski 2003). Researchers are increasingly interested in contemporary literature and popular culture (Graf 2015; Kiszka-Pytel 2019; Rejter 2019).

In general, it can be said that the interest of researchers is shifting from name as a linguistic sign to the functional and communicative role of the onym, hence researchers less and less often pay their attention to such issues as, for example, linguistic and graphic form or the genesis of a proper name (works dedicated to fantasy literature are an exception here, e.g. Domaciuk-Czarny 2015) – while proper names in literature are more and more often discussed within a specific genre and discourse (Rejter 2016), the role of the recipient of literary onyms and their linguistic competences also increases (Graf 2015) and the proper name becomes an essential component of the cultural con/text (Rejter 2019; Kiszka-Pytel 2019).

Contemporary research, dedicated to proper names in literature is not – simply – a linguistic and stylistic analysis of the names' layer of a specific text or texts of a selected author, and the methodological approach preferred by researchers today, results in very diverse types of analyses. Contemporary literary proper names – in the greatest simplification – develop in several parallel trends, therefore, summing up the current achievements of literary onomastics, Rejter (2016) indicated twelve different research trends. Starting from basic issues, most often an onomasticon analysis of texts by a selected author, literary movement, genre or literary form, the authors of the studies expanded the repertoire of stylistic functions or redefined already existing functions. Researchers embed the research methodology more strongly in contemporary stylistics – or, on the contrary, they search for other linguistic contexts (such as the theory of text, ethnolinguistics or cognitivism). The main body of research has departed from belles lettres (and most often realistic literature) towards popular literature (and culture), fantasy, texts from the borderline of fiction and functional texts (such as e.g. diaries), and finally to texts that exist in virtual space. Connections with contemporary literary studies, both with the history and theory of literature, are becoming stronger and stronger. The subject of research is also changing – after all, in the literary text the phenomenon of appellativization can be observed, layer of literary onomasticon was also enriched by onymization of appellatives, and the role of – still differently defined – definite descriptions grew; author's strategies aimed at concealing the name, or finally the lack of it, were increasingly noticed.

Methodological freedom also influenced the terminology used in research, which is despite the postulates of some researchers, subjected to petrification or normalization. An overview of the research achievements allows us to indicate several tendencies in the field of terminology. They indicate both the rooting of literary names in non-literary onomastics and the increasingly stronger multi-methodological nature of the discipline. Those are:

1. *the use of terms from non-literary onomastics*, visible especially in the first years of shaping the discipline. Despite the indicated distinctiveness, the vast majority of the terminology used and the research paradigm (including the confrontation of literary onyms with non-literary onomastics) positioned literary onomastics as a subdiscipline within broad onomastic research – this was also the position of researchers dealing with onomastic theory (Rzetelska-Feleszko 1993);
2. *redefining some of the concepts* related to expanding the field of research through the use of broader interpretive contexts, e.g. feminist discourse, increasing researchers' interest in poetry or translation onomastics. One of the issues currently discussed is the problem of the functionality of proper names e.g. the question about the primary function in a literary text (Cieślikowa 1993), the problem of a schematic approach to the stylistic functions of literary names and their potential hierarchy (Gibka 2018), the existence of functions with duplicate scopes;
3. *creating terms and concepts* that signal the methodological distinctiveness of literary onomastics, among others functional integration of names, topical names, name camouflage function/onymic camouflage, stylistic trends of literary proper names, quasi-name. The phenomenon was most pronounced at the time of shaping the methodological instrumentation of the discipline and in studies proposing new interpretive approaches. In a narrow sense, this distinction also applies to analyses prepared by Polish philologists and researchers representing foreign philology (e.g. Russian or German), who often propose new methodological solutions using the conceptual apparatus in the field of poetonymy (cf. Fomin 2019; Rachut 2020, Jakiel 2020);
4. *deviation from strict, unambiguous terminology* – the multitude of existing terms means that it is often impossible to clearly define them, and hence to apply them. This problem concerns especially issues related to the literary functions of onyms. Currently, more than 30 different functions of names have been recorded by the researchers in academic literature. Many of them are synonymous (e.g. *temporal function/function of location in time, spatial function/function of location in space*) or differ in secondary defining features resulting from the properties of the analysed material (e.g. *mimetic* and *veristic function*). Some of them are characterised by strong interference (e.g. *camouflage, allusive* and *masking function*); sometimes it is even difficult to define them clearly (e.g. *poetic* or *evaluative function*), which may also result from their very wide scope (characterizing also e.g. the *communicative, universalizing* or *cumulative function*). It is therefore not surprising that as the result of this terminological richness in the latest Polish studies in the field of literary onomastics, especially those with an interdisciplinary character, their authors move away from stable

terminology to descriptive textual interpretation of the role of literary onyms, which is the case, for example, in the works of [Górny \(2013\)](#), [Graf \(2015\)](#) and [Kiszka-Pytel \(2019\)](#) dedicated to proper names in contemporary literature or studies by [Rejter \(2016\)](#), who wrote, among other issues, about proper name as an element of cultural memory.

The lack of a uniform research procedure and strong connections with other, not only linguistic, disciplines is – in my opinion – a very positive feature of Polish literary onomastics. As a consequence, we can still talk about it in the context of the development of the discipline, showing new areas of future research. Researchers are still reluctant to pay attention to avant-garde texts (e.g. the works of Witold Gombrowicz or Stanisław Witkiewicz), academics are little interested in poetic and dramatic texts (e.g. the works of Zbigniew Herbert, Czesław Miłosz or Stanisław Mrożek and Tadeusz Różewicz). The literature of Young Poland (i.e. the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, e.g. the works of Stanisław Wyspiański, Władysław Reymont or Stanisław Przybyszewski) and the interwar period as well as the works of the writers of the so-called small realism and the New Wave (e.g. Marek Hłasko, Tadeusz Konwicki) all these topics are waiting for a comprehensive study. These are just the examples of how many research areas are waiting for their interpreters.

This problem concerns both original texts and translations ([Cieślíkowa 1996](#)). In this aspect, the achievements of Polish literary onomastics are less numerous – it is worth mentioning here the works of [Eliza Pieciul \(2003\)](#); an analysis of the onomastics of the novels written by Thomas Mann), [Maciej Szelewski \(2003\)](#) dedicated to proper names in translations of Polish and Russian fantasy literature, and the latest studies by [Martyna Gibka \(2018\)](#), [Konrad Rachut \(2020\)](#) and [Rafał Jakiel \(2020\)](#) dedicated to proper names in the works of Terry Pratchett, C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien and in the series of novels about Harry Potter.

Summarising the achievements of Polish literary onomastics, it is worth noting that an important aspect of the analysis was the biographical context, i.e. searching for onymic connections with the author's biography (e.g. authentic anthroponymy or toponymy). In process of time, researchers abandoned biography, focusing more on the name as an element of the text (and its relation to non-textual reality), hence these analyses often resembled statistical research. This method is successfully used in comparative studies and in the field of onymic translation ([Jakiel 2020](#)), to a lesser extent the study of the frequency of names was used in the analysis of original texts, often their use was associated with the modification of research tools ([Graf 2006](#)). In the next stage of the development of the discipline, researchers focused primarily on the textual interpretation of the role of onyms – in this approach, the proper name became a microtext ([Cieślíkowa 2001](#)) analysed in a narrower (i.e. linguistic, e.g. stylistic, genological, textological) or broader (inter- and transdisciplinary) context. It should therefore be emphasized that, regardless

of individual methodological proposals, it is the functional interpretation of literary onyms that is the research problem most frequently undertaken by Polish linguists. Interest is aroused not only by specific stylistic functions referred to for the needs of the analysis of the names of selected texts, e.g. *poetic* (Szewczyk 1993), *intertextual* (Cieślikowa 1993) or *persuasive* (Graf 2006) functions, but also the *permanent* or *momentary* functions in a literary work (Gibka 2018) and finally, the answer to the seemingly basic question about the identifying function of literary proper names (Cieślikowa 1993).

A review of the achievements of literary onomastics to date not only allows us to notice the richness of the problems undertaken and issues that are still await their researchers, but – above all – shows that literary onomastics is a dynamically developing, modern and open discipline which, crossing the boundaries of traditional linguistics, in an excellent way reflects the multi-methodological and transgressive nature of modern science.

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