

On the Silesian Micrological School (1999-2005). A Sprinkling of Reminiscences

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The Small, the Silesian, and the Black

These three adjectives are a kind of paraphrase of the memorable triad *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*. I mention the title of Ennio Morricone's hit soundtrack (from the Sergio Leone film) as a musical emblem of the "spaghetti western," an Italian imitation of American cinema's crowning genre, once regarded with indignation and later acknowledged as anticipating the anti-Western and the deconstruction of the classic form. The mannerism of those films, their exaggeration veering on parody, is something I associate with our micrological adventure. Micrology was the watchword of a series of conferences, debates, MA and PhD theses, individual and collective publications at Silesian University over a period of several years, in which terms featuring the prefixes "mini-" and "micro-" dominated. We repeated those magic words more frequently than the Formalists spoke of form, the Prague Structuralists of structure, or the Geneva critics of theme. The imitative nature of the gesture was obvious; at the beginning of the twenty-first century nobody expected the rise of a new Chicago or Tartu School, let alone a Silesian one. The famous centres of literary studies were no longer forging epochal methods, so the careers of such grand scholarly narratives were thought about with nostalgia and a sense of widening distance. Postmodernism, too, was running out of steam; literary theory was thought of as a closed science, its actual form referred to by the more general term of "Theory." If we were thus doomed to a theory of "everything" and simultaneously "nothing," perhaps we might succeed in averaging out to produce a "theory of the small"? Why not, since a theory "of the written sign" (from Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology*) was enjoying great popularity, together with a "study of speed" (the "dromology" of Paul Virilio)?

It was a playful idea, and at the same time a provocative one, more suitable for a young, provincial scholarly milieu than for the great universities of a capital city. It should be no surprise that the studies of the minor, the trivial, the insignificant and even the wretched found a more favorable climate in Silesia than in Warsaw. I am not forgetting our sister province of Greater Poland (Wielkopolska region), however, where at the same time, though completely independently, two essential micrological books, perhaps the two most important ones, appeared: Ewa Domańska's *Mikrohistorie. Spotkania w międzyświatach* (Microhistories. Meetings in Interworlds; Poznań 1999) and Przemysław Czapliński's *Mikrologi ze śmiercią*. (Micrologues with Death; Poznań 2000). If this tendency toward the micro put down its deepest roots in Katowice, however, it was certainly encouraged by the soil there, or rather its erosion. Dark, dirty, industrial Silesia had left behind the splendour of its past as the world's centre of heavy industry; the gigantism of the Gierek years had ended, most smelting works and mines had been closed, and the largest urban agglomeration in the country was becoming atomized rather than growing into a metropolis. Few standing in the shadow of Spodek and Superjednostka thought about "trifles," but perhaps we were assisted by the aura of economic and ecological dispersion, dissipation and degradation?

Basic Information

What we know for sure is that a series of three volumes came out at that time, collectively entitled *Miniatura i mikrologia literacka*, (Literary Miniature and Micrology, Katowice 2001-2003), supplemented (or "running into overtime") with the collection *Skala mikro w badaniach literackich* (The Micro Scale in Literary Studies, Katowice 2005). All four publications were released by the University of Silesia Press, edited by me with assistance from M.Szczęsny, B.Mytych and M.Bogdanowska. The scholarly reviewers for publication of the successive volumes were: M.Kalinowska, J.Sawicka, A.Fiut, L.Wiśniewska. Those four volumes constitute the bulk of the "school's" activity: a total of 1000 pages, comprised of 53 texts by 40 authors, of whom 34 were affiliated with the University of Silesia and six were guests (including some from France and the USA).¹ An additional, final supplement was my book *Mały Mickiewicz. Studia mikrologiczne* (Little Mickiewicz. Micrological Studies; Katowice 2003), as well as a series of translations made at that time (the final version consisted of translations of R.Barthes and G.Bachelard).² The caesura closing off the era was the year 2005, though several of the authors most heavily involved with the series constructed a "side project" of their own vision of micrology, whose effects were enunciated much later on. Janusz Ryba, a connoisseur of Enlightenment "bibelots," published his filigree essays in *Uwodzicielskie oblicze oświecenia* (The Seductive Side of the Enlightenment, Katowice 2002). Beata Mytych incorporated her work on the trace and the trope into her "hunting" monograph, *Poetyka i łowy. O idei dawnego polowania w literaturze XIX wieku* (Poetics and Hunting. On the Idea of the Ancient Hunt in 19th Century Literature, Katowice 2004). Aleksandra Kunce transferred the "charm of

¹ Here is a list of all of the authors included: M.Bąk, W.Bojda, E.Buksa, R.Cudak, J.Dembińska-Pawelec, M.Dziaczo, A.Dziadek, P.Fast, W.Forajter, T.Głogowski, I.Gralewicz-Wolny, E.Grodzka-Łopuszyńska, R.Grześkowiak, E. Hurnikowa, P.Jędrzejko, M.Jochemczyk, Z.Kadłubek, J.Kisiel, A.Kołodziej, R.Koropeczyk, A.Kunce, J.Leociak, P.Michałowski, K.Mokry, B.Mytych, A.Nawarecki, J.Olejniczak, M.Nowotna, D.Noras, U.Paździór, M.Piotrowiak, J.Różyc-Molenda, J.Ryba, T.Stępień, A.Szawerna Dyrzka, M.Szczęsny, B.Szargot, M.Szargot, A.Węgrzyniak, S.Zajac.

² See R.Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Richard Howard, Annette Lavers, New York 2013; G.Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas, London 2014, esp. chapter 7, "Miniature."

micrology” to the area of cultural studies, where she presented here treatise on “the study of punch lines”: *Antropologia punktów. Rozważania przy tekstach Ryszarda Kapuścińskiego* (Anthropology of Points. Thoughts on Texts of Ryszard Kapuściński, Katowice 2008). Wioletta Bojda, author of the programmatic *Historia miniatury*, more recently published the monograph *Anny Świrszczyńskiej odkrywanie rzeczywistości* (The Discovery of Reality by Anna Świrszczyńska, Katowice 2015), whose middle section (140 pages) is devoted to the topic of miniature. Zbigniew Kadłubek and Mariusz Jochemczyk have steadfastly carried out their own projects in Silesian studies and oikology, but in their work on the Silesian “minority” have a sense of being in tune with micrological inspirations.³ Iwona Gralewicz-Wolny has used a different rhetoric in her public scolding of fellow micrologists for their neglect of children’s literature; the author of *Uwolnić Pippi* (Free Pippi, co-written with B.Mytych-Forajter) is nowadays repaying those “childish” oversights with interest.⁴ A final example of continuity is presented by the collective volume: *Balaghan. Mikroświaty i nanohistorie*, edited by M.Jochemczyk, M.Kokoszka and B.Mytych-Forajter (Katowice 2015). Published ten years after the conclusion of the micrological series, the book represents a kind of sentimental reactivation of it. It offers, among other things, texts by 17 of the authors published in *Miniatura i mikrologia*; next to those “veterans” we find new scholars of “disappearance” and “recesses” – so a new generation of nano-experts has risen?

Literary Miniature and Micrology

I return to the crucial series of volumes we published; the core of its authorship consisted of people working in the Department of Literary Theory- disciples of Ireneusz Opacki. If we keep that in mind, it is possible to see in “Silesian micrology” a continuation, or perhaps only a branch, of the school of the “art of interpretation” founded by our Master in the mid-1970s. We must necessarily include the reservation that Opacki did not care for what was tiny, cramped, or squeaky; as an outstanding interpreter of Romantic masterpieces, he was accustomed to distancing himself from the aesthetic limitations of the previous epoch – whether sentimental emotionalism, rococo perversions or classicist pedantry. But he liked to begin his lectures and articles with a presentation of items that were seemingly trivial or banal, such as, to name a few, Lechoń’s short “brazier poem” (“Śmierć Mickiewicza” [The Death of Mickiewicz]), Prus’s short short story “Z legend dawnego Egiptu” (From the Legends of Ancient Egypt; a modest preliminary sketch for his novel *Faraon* [The Pharaoh]) or the epilogue to *Pan Tadeusz* (a troublesome appendix to that epic, initially omitted by the publishers).⁵ In the course of his interpretation, these diminutive texts quite unexpectedly acquired the gleam of authentic greatness; Opacki elicited a sense of the sublime by working audaciously with the dialectic of great and small. At the same time, we should remember that

³ See *Kwiatki świętego Franciszka z Asyżu* (The Little Flowers of St. Francis of Assisi), trans. L.Staff, Warszawa 1959, p.353.

⁴ See “Czarne krasnoludki. Zamiast wstępu... Z Aleksandrem Nawareckim rozmawiają Beata Mytych Forajter i Iwona Gralewicz-Wolny” (Black Dwarves. In Lieu of an Introduction... A Conversation with Aleksander Nawarecki by Beata Mytych Forajter and Iwona Gralewicz-Wolny), in: *Par Coeur. Twórczość dla dzieci i młodzieży raz jeszcze*, (Par Coeur. Another Look at Works for Children and Youth), Katowice 2016, pp.19-20.

⁵ I have written more on this subject in: “Skarb w Srebrnym Jeziorze. O sztuce retorycznej Ireneusza Opackiego” (The Treasure in the Silver Lake. On the Rhetorical Art of Ireneusz Opacki), in: *Znajomym gościńcem. Prace ofiarowane Profesorowi Ireneuszowi Opackiemu* (A Familiar Guest. Works Dedicated to Prof. Ireneusz Opacki), ed. T.Sławek, Katowice 1993, pp. 181-190.

he had been taught by Czesław Zgorzelski, the author of pioneering studies of Słowacki's and Mickiewicz's miniatures, in which he obsessively tried to understand the mystery of the powerful influence of lyrical scraps, fragments, shreds and patches (viewed with formalist inquisitiveness).⁶

It is not surprising that, having learned from such teachers, we showed a preference for interpretative texts devoted to Polish poetry; in our "tetralogy" there were monographic sections on Mickiewicz and Leśmian, three studies of Białoszewski, and a series of essays whose protagonists were Polish poets of the twentieth century (as follows: Grochowiak, Barańczak, Pawlikowska, Sztaudynger, Wojacek, Wat, Bujnicki, Kamińska, Miciński, Szyborska, Baczyński, Różewicz, Zagajewski, Rymkiewicz). As for prose authors, they were mostly those closer to the model of poetic prose, beginning with Haupt and Schulz (two essays each), followed by Gombrowicz, Tyrmand and Huelle. Next to analytical and historical texts there appear several theoretical explorations, among which those presenting classic theoreticians are particularly important: *Sztuka mikrolektury Rolanda Barthesa* (Roland Barthes's Art of Microreading, A.Dziadek), *Mikroskopia Romana Jakobsona* (Roman Jakobson's Microscopy) and *Przyziemne intuicje. Carlo Ginzburga „Znaki, oznaki, poszlaki”* (Earthy Intuitions. Carlo Ginzburg's *Threads and Traces*, both B. Mytych). We ventured outside of our native literature into Roman antiquity (Z.Kadłubek, E.Buksa), English (P.Jędrzejko), French (J.Ryba, M.Nowotna), Russian (P.Fast) and Austrian (E.Hurnikowa) literature; there were also voyages to other continents – namely, America and Japan (A.Kunce). The scope of Kunce's reflections encompassed the cinema, while K.Mokry dealt with the visual arts and J.Leociak – photography. Among the few guest authors from outside our university, we should highlight the contribution of Roman Koropecky, the American author of a monumental biography (*Adam Mickiewicz. The Life of a Romantic*. Ithaca and London 2008), who gave us a study of "worms" in *Pan Tadeusz*, corresponding in some aspects to "Pchła – zapomniany temat erotyczny dawnej poezji" (The Flea – A Forgotten Topic of Erotic Poetry of Old), an eccentric work by Radosław Grześkowiak, anticipating his later full-length zoocritical monograph (*Amor Curiosus*. Gdańsk 2013). It is a delight as well to see the presence in those volumes of two of the precursors of Polish micrology: Piotr Michałowski, author of *Miniatura poetycka* (Poetic Miniature, Szczecin 1999), and Jacek Leociak, coauthor (with B.Engelking) of the microhistorical "encyclopedia" *Getto warszawskie. Przewodnik po nieistniejącym mieście* (The Warsaw Ghetto: Guide to a Lost City, Warszawa 1997).

What Is Micrology?

The four-volume series also included three programmatic texts of mine, discussing the successive phases of the micrological project – from the introductory premises, through the attempt to describe the phenomenon, up to the final summing-up and closing. The initial statement ("Mikrologia, genologia, miniatura" [Micrology, Study of Genres, Miniature])⁷ was

⁶ I attempted to trace out a portrait of the Lublin micrologist in my essay "Dumania w dzień odjazdu. O tonie elegijnym Czesława Zgorzelskiego" (Dumiana on the Day of Departure. On Czesław Zgorzelski's Elegiac Tone), in *Polonista na katedrze* (Polish Studies Scholar in the Department), ed. M.Łukaszuk, Lublin 2017 (in the course of issue).

⁷ See A.Nawarecki, "Mikrologia, genologia, miniatura," in *Miniatura i mikrologia literacka*, ed. A.Nawarecki, Katowice 2000, pp. 9-28.

first prepared for a session devoted to genre studies, hence the point of departure consisted of elementary questions: is it possible to shrink genres? Does the division into “big” and “small” genres make sense? Contrary to appearances, questions concerning scale are difficult and tricky (even for engineers). The only scholar of “low-capacity texts,” Jan Trzynadlowski, in writing *Małe formy literackie* (Small Literary Forms 1977), confined himself to the level of description and his general impression that the acceleration of civilization dictated a shortening and narrowing of forms. The subtler author of *Miniatury poetyckie* focused on poetry, correctly presenting the category of the “miniature,” but the etymology of that term somehow escaped Michałowski’s attention: contrary to popular belief, it derives not from the Latin adjective *minimus* (small), but from *minium* (lead oxide), the red dye used by medieval miniaturists to write the most important parts of their texts, i.e., theological concepts, important thoughts and symbols. The Gothic miniature did not refer to a minor composition of modest proportions, but the importance and even exceptionality of the message being relayed. The surprising eloquence of the term is a signal that thinking about the miniature is marked by subtlety, elusiveness, and even paradoxicality. This thread was also developed in the Introduction to the second volume, where the concept of micrology eluded an attempt at definition: “we do not control this word, which is almost a neologism; we do not know how it is understood or what it will be in the future.”⁸ But I was sure at the time that we were not talking about a “new method” (for it was neither new nor methodical); a “micro” dimension can be discovered in almost every theory, in all acts of inquiring observation or analysis- “You, too, can become a micrologist!” After such a democratic and hospitable opening, their appeared fears of the easiness, or even trivialization of our practices, hence the sharper tone of the essay that concludes the cycle, “Czarna mikrologia” (Black Micrology). In the title one can hear an echo of Czaplinski’s book, but the micro scale is here linked not with death, but with the sublime in modern art (J-F.Lyotard), and also with everyday life, which “Has a small dimension. High frequency. It is imperceptible” (J.Brach – Czaina). The third aspect is technique, an absolutely fundamental context, though previously overlooked; but in fact everything began with the microscope (unveiling the abyss of the microcosm), while it ends with the might of ever new and more perfect nanotechnologies. Micrology in a *noir* style reveals some kind of ghastliness and brutality; perhaps that was a side effect of my brushes with Mickiewicz’s “greatness,” for is it an act befitting a Polonist to bring the national bard “down to size”?

Here I return to the first essay in the book *Mały Mickiewicz*, in which critics were eager to perceive an explanation of micrology. Michał Paweł Markowski saw its dominant in the Romantic (mysterious and mythical) aura whose patron saints would – surprisingly – be the philosophical duo Benjamin and Adorno, together with the message: “micrology is, for metaphysics, salvation from the endeavors of intellectual greed.”⁹ Beata Gontarz, on the other hand, was inclined to find in micrology a “homegrown equivalent to a personal version of deconstruction,” with Derrida and Hillis Miller as its patrons.¹⁰

⁸ A.Nawarecki, Introduction to *Miniatura i mikrologia literacka*, vol. 2, ed. A.Nawarecki, Katowice 2002, p. 8.

⁹ See M.P.Markowski, “Miłe/Małe” (Nice/Small), *Tygodnik Powszechny* 2004, no. 44, p.13.

¹⁰B.Gontarz, “Dekonstruowanie Mickiewicza” (Deconstructing Mickiewicz), in *Adam Mickiewicz. Dwa wieki kultury polskiej* (Adam Mickiewicz. Two Centuries of Polish Culture), ed. K.Maciąg, M.Stanis, Rzeszów 2007, p. 570.

God Is Small

In these projects, alongside the philosophical authorities mentioned above, I cited theologians as well: from Pseudo-Dionysus to St. Thérèse of Lisieux (The “Little Flower”), who in 1997 was declared a Doctor of the Church, but the theological, or rather crypto-theological, thread, did not enjoy wide reverberations. I was therefore all the more surprised to note an event that occurred in the Silesian Voivodeship (where Częstochowa is situated) on 17 August 2016 during the celebrations of the 1050th anniversary of the christening of Poland. This great religious and national milestone was marked with monumental pomp and solemnity at Jasna Góra, with bishops, the president, other government officials and members of parliament, the diplomatic corps, thousands of accredited journalists and faithful believers from all over the world assembled together during World Youth Day festivities there. The most important guest, Pope Francis, read a sermon for the occasion, which I would like to examine here more closely, for the reason, as well, that it was scarcely commented upon at the time. Perhaps the reason had to do with the guiding motif, the adjective *piccolo*, repeated at least ten times.¹¹ The intense frequency of the word “little,” intensified by the presence of similar epithets (simple, ordinary, modest, quiet, discreet), so very strongly dominated the sermon that there was almost no reference to history with a capital H in it (not even to Mieszko and Dąbrowka, whose historical role was taken over by our “mothers and grandmothers”). From the national pantheon we saw only Faustyna Kowalska and Karol Wojtyła, situated, as faithful advocates of the mystery of Mercy, in the circle of “little ones” (John Paul the Great – as a humble and “meek” saint!) But it could not be otherwise, given that “God always shows himself in littleness”; the greatest event of all – the divine embodiment in human form – did not take place in a triumphal spirit, but in a manner imperceptible to the world. The Lord is like “the smallest of all seeds” (Mk 4:31), he, too, was a small child, and the first manifestation of his divinity in maturity, the transformation of water into wine, was a “simple miracle,” all the humbler because it occurred in a “little village,” among poor, obscure people. And that same “simple miracle” (quite an oxymoron) was treated by the Pope as the topic of his sermon at the ceremony, since on that day in Częstochowa, things were as they were at the wedding in Cana (and as it must have been in the court of the Piast kings) – a cheerful gathering of family and friends at the table with wine: “God saves us [...] by making himself little, near and real. First God makes himself little.”

It was an astonishing speech, recognizably rooted in the Gospels, but resonating also with the radical commentary of the desert fathers’ apophthegms and negative theology as well. The other chief primary source is the thought of Saint Francis, the apologist of the “little brothers,” understandable from a Pope who chose to take as his papal name that of the “beggar of Assisi.” There is also, with this first Jesuit Pope, the Jesuit context, relating to Saint Ignatius of Loyola’s personal micrology, the essence of which is supposed to be expressed in the inscription said to be carved on his tomb: “Non coaceri maximo contineri tamen a minimo, divinum est” (To not be limited even by what is greatest, and to be contained in what is smallest, is divine). The maxim does not belong to Loyola, but is a monastic apocryph popularized

¹¹Quoted from: Vatican Radio, “Pope Francis marks 1050th anniversary of ‘Baptism of Poland,’” http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2016/07/28/pope_francis_marks_1050th_anniversary_of_baptism_of_poland/1247369.

by Hölderlin, who chose it as the epigraph to his poem *Hyperion*.¹² Pope Bergoglio is well-acquainted with the fragment and has publicly quoted it, including in Hölderlin's version, in the original and from memory. To learn from memory is, as we say in English, to "learn by heart," or as Derrida has it, "to take to heart," where he thinks of the poem that should be internalized with all our heart, swallowed, curled up within us.¹³ "[A] poem must be brief, elliptical by vocation," since God reveals himself as small.

Is Micrology an Innovation?

The theological, or perhaps rather religious and devotional, context should be supplemented or contrasted with the perspective of contemporary science. The relevant question regarding the "innovative nature of Silesian micrology" was raised recently by Ewelina Suszek; in her extensive and inquiring study, Suszek even considers whether it has "a chance of becoming a fashionable interpretative practice?"¹⁴ She contemplates the problem in the light of Wallerstein's theory (according to which innovation is a privilege of the centre) and the "peripheral" conception of Florida, but treated Ryszard Nycz's definition of innovation, the first condition of which is "an original solution to an essentially relevant problem," the second, "development of a repeatable procedure," and the third, grounding "in a method that leads to the discovery of a problem area" and finally the "initiation of a new field," as her decisive criterion.

There are many eloquent arguments in favor, but none of them entirely persuasive, because the micrologists themselves decline the privilege of pioneerhood: "We were only trying to integrate the 'micropoetics' of Gaston Bachelard, the 'microreading' of Jean-Pierre Richard, Jakobsonian 'microscopy' and Barthes's theory of the punctum as well as other concepts of 'micropoetics' or 'microscopic phenomenology' encountered at the borderline of literary criticism and philosophy in the writings of Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, Jacques Derrida, and Jean-Francois Lyotard."¹⁵ In this admission, there can be discerned an "intriguing fusion, a surprising hybrid, an often innovative combination of what are frequently fashionable tendencies;" similar unions of the humanities and natural sciences can occur even in Poland, "but the scholarly triumph that carried the day was that of microbiologists, microphysicists and microeconomists."¹⁶ Suszek appreciates the innovative effort to transfer such inspiration to literary studies, but also observes a deconstructive counter, a programmatic reluctance to repeating tested procedures, an adherence to the spirit of invention rather than that of repeatable innovation. That is why she tries to acknowledge as a criterion in her inquiry "intellectual fashion," a status of some weight in the humanities, but here, too, indecision looms,

¹²See M.Bednarz, "Sekret osobowości św. Ignacego Loyoli" (The Secret of Saint Ignatius Loyola's Personality), in I.Loyola, *Pisma Wybrane. Komentarze* (Selected Writings of I. Loyola. Commentaries), vol.2, Kraków 1968, p. 570; A. Spadero, *Ignacjańskie korzenie reformy Kościoła papieża Franciszka* (The Ignatian Roots of Pope Francis's Reform of the Church), trans.. J.Poznański, „*Posłaniec Serca Jezusowego* (Messenger of Jesus's Heart) 2016, no. 8.

¹³J.Derrida, "Che cos'è la poesia?" in *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*, ed. and trans. Peggy Kamuf, New York 1991, p. 225.

¹⁴E.Suszek, "Moda na małe? Innowacyjność śląskiej mikrologii literackiej" (A Fashion for the Small? The Innovative Nature of Silesian Literary Micrology), *Postscriptum Polonistyczne* 2016, no. 1, pp. 179-191.

¹⁵A.Nawarecki, *Mały Mickiewicz*, Katowice 2003, p. 11.

¹⁶E.Suszek, "Moda na małe?..." p. 180.

because there are imitators of the Silesian “micro” school in Kielce, though it is harder to find any in Kraków.¹⁷

To these considerations of the innovative nature of our micrology I would add an argument that appears in the work of E. Rogers and other scholars of innovative diffusions, who believe that the essence of such processes is perfectly expressed by Schopenhauer’s remark on the three phases of learning the truth: “To truth only a brief celebration of victory is allowed between the two long periods during which it is condemned as paradoxical, or disparaged as trivial.”¹⁸ And if that is the case, then it gives me pleasure to report that our founding text, “Mikrologia, genologia, miniatura,” read at the twenty-ninth conference on Literary Theory organized by my alma mater, the Department and Workshop of Historical Poetics of the Polish Academy of Sciences’ Institute of Literary Studies (on September 17-22, 1999 in Cieszyn) was not granted approval for publication in the subsequent conference volume, *Genologia dzisiaj* (The Study of Genres Today, ed. W.Bolecki, I.Opacki, Warszawa 2000). I have been unable to get access to the review, but I flatter myself to conjecture that my paper was found absurd and elicited strong opposition.

Micropoetic Beginnings

While I am bursting with pride at having been the “initiator” of Silesian micrology, let me ride this wave and try to show where the initial impulse lay. The first term used, undoubtedly taken from Bachelard or Bakhtin, was “micropoetics.” It was not a flight of inspiration but rather a moment of downward inclination, because all micropoetic activity is close to the earth; in a Franciscan style, we do it “lowering the head to slither about the earth on our bellies,” and, according to the rules of philology, with our noses buried in papers.¹⁹ For Zgorzelski, a founding micrological moment appears to be the encounter with a manuscript of Mickiewicz’s Lausanne lyrics – a sheet covered with illegible scrawls, an ill-treated scrap of paper on which the poet’s most beautiful poems (de facto mere fragments) had landed. I experienced similar emotions while counting up the periods and commas in the Lausanne manuscript, but I had earlier been astonished when reading the poems of Baka in the one surviving first edition of *Uwagi śmierci niechybnej* (Comments on Certain Death, 1766). My encounter with this tattered, dog-eared leaflet convinced me that the original differed in major aspects from the widely familiar version of the text (the anonymously published edition from 1807). In the original, the author, a Jesuit priest in Wilno (Vilnius) arranged his poems in the form of a regular stanza (with lines of the following successive syllabic lengths: 8+8+6+6):

Za igraszkę śmierć poczyta,
Gdy z grzybami rydze chwyta:
Na dęby ma zęby,
Na szczepy ma sklepy.

¹⁷Suszek points to the case of the reception of Silesian micrology (A.Wileczek, *Świadectwa-ślady-znaki. Lapidarium jako strategia formy* [Testimonials, Traces, Signs. Rock Collection as a Strategy of Form], Kielce 2010) and its omissions (A.Zawadzki, *Obraz i ślad* [Image and Trace]. Kraków 2014).

¹⁸A Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. F. Payne, New York 1969, vol. 1, p. xvii.

¹⁹See M.Jochemczyk, *Wobec tradycji. Śląskie szkice oikologiczne* (Toward Tradition. Silesian Oikological Essays). Katowice 2015; Z.Kadłubek, *Bezbronne myśli. Eseje i inne pisma o Górnym Śląsku* (Defenseless Thoughts. Essays and Other Writings on Upper Silesia), Katowice 2016.

Cny młodziku migdaliku,
 Czerstwy rydzu ślepowidzu,
 Kwiat mdleje, więdnieje.
 Być w kresie, Czerkiesie.²⁰

(We read death for a plaything / when we pick poisonous with good mushrooms; / oaks have teeth,
 / seedlings have monuments, / the virtues of a young man a fop, / the health of a milk cap a blind
 man, / bloom withers and fades. / The Circassian will have his end.)

Whereas the new publisher in 1807, the satirist Julian Korsak, aiming to achieve a comic effect, spread out the eight-line poem into a longer series of truncated lines:

Za igraszkę śmierć poczyta,
 Gdy z grzybami rydze chwytą:
 Na dęby
 Ma zęby,
 Na szczepy
 Ma sklepy.
 Cny młodziku
 Migdaliku
 Czerstwy rydzu,
 Ślepowidzu.²¹

(We read death for a plaything / when we pick poisonous with good mushrooms; / oaks / have
 teeth, / seedlings / have monuments, / the virtues of a young man / a fop, / the health of a milk
 cap / a blind man.)

Thus this was how the eighteenth-century rhymer became the author of “interminable” poems that sometimes resemble avant-garde “stair” poems. The misrepresented Baka not only used unique tetrasyllabic forms, but also three-line measures- never used since in Polish versification. His famously “scanty” poem, also called “buck-shot,” accentuated by clamorous rhyme, became a poetic scandal and aroused merriment or contempt, enhanced by the fact that his sing-songy poems deal exclusively with death and dying. Baka quickly became known as the worst scribbler in Polish literature, before becoming known as an eccentric who fascinated the Romantics (Mickiewicz, Syrokomla, Kraszewski), while for poets of the twentieth century (Pawlikowska, Wat, Czechowicz, Miłosz, Twardowski, Rymkiewicz) he became an absolutely phenomenal poet.

There would be no legend of Baka, nor transformation of a poetaster into a genius, if his stanza and versification had not been “chopped up” into a pulp. And this micropoetic occurrence, at the level of stanza, line, and rhyme, was to have unimaginable consequences! In

²⁰J.Baka, *Uwagi*. Eds. A.Czyż, A.Nawarecki. Lublin 2000, s.62.

²¹*Baka odrodzony. Uwagi o śmierci niechybnej wszystkim pospolitej* (Baka Reborn. Comments on Certain Death Common to Everyone), ed. W.Syrokomla. Wilno 1855, pp. 96-97.

the context of Baka's "little death" it becomes acutely visible that micrology is not limited to small things; no less important is the aspect of degradation, rejection, even repulsion (the status of fragments, crumbs, remnants, scraps, refuse, dejecta, offal, and so on). From the perspective of the philologist, however, what remains most important is focusing on the visual, morphological or stylistic detail, for that opens our eyes to the world, and not only the world of literature.

KEYWORDS

micrology

ABSTRACT:

The text recalls the history of “micrological” studies at Silesian University in Katowice: the three collective volumes of *Miniatury i mikrologii literackiej 2000-2003*; *Skala mikro w badaniach literackich* (2005) and the book written by the cycle’s editor, A.Nawarecki, *Mały Mickiewicz* (2003) as well as the monographs by J.Ryba, B.Mytych, A.Kunce, W.Bojda. 40 authors participated in the series; the idea of studies in the small, minute and despised was inspired by the masters of the “art of interpretation,” I.Opacki and Cz. Zgorzelski. The Silesian school is compared with its Poznań counterpart (E.Domańska, P.Czapliński), its innovative aspects, regional and provincial roots, and initial philological impulse (Baka’s “micropoetics”) discussed as well as its historical, political, and religious contexts (including Pope Francis’s theology emphasizing the *piccolo*).

SILESIOLOGY

*micropoetics***NOTE ON THE AUTHOR:**

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