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lato 2015

POETICS AFTER POETICS

Problems of poetics cannot, in our day, be captured by the old textbook formulae. They can be newly activated only in collective projects, only through continuous discussion of currently diagnosed problems of poetics. For that reason, we have adopted the convention of open debates on successive issues, and the possibility or degree of their resolution will always depend on the course taken by the discussion and analytic practices. These define the very idea of a "forum," providing a place for public discourse. The time has come for this space to have more dialogue on the subject of poetics.

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„Forum Poetyki | Forum of Poetics” summer 2015 (1) year I

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Poetics

After

Poetics

This inaugural issue of “Forum of Poetics” offers some general reflections on the place of poetics as a field of knowledge within the contemporary landscape of philological and humanities scholarship. The formula “poetics after poetics” reminds us that the renewal of discussion about this discipline is taking place after its marginalization to a considerable extent by the Post-Structuralist paradigm, which – to simplify greatly – privileged rhetoric at the expense of poetics. Has something changed in the way that problems of poetics are understood and formulated? Is the field continuing to undergo new transpositions within the humanities, adopting their continuously contemporary and interdisciplinary attributes? Can poetics in some way become reintegrated along new principles and new foundations? The articles in the current issue certainly provide no unambiguous answer to these questions, if only because the voices themselves that speak about the place of poetics in today’s humanities approach from widely varied places and testify to the diversity of imagination on the subject of the current shape of philological knowledge. In inviting these authors to take part in the discussion, and readers to take part in shared reflections, we were acting in the belief that poetics can form an unexpected but very suitable meeting place for a range of methodologies, and its sharply defined questions will help in clarifying positions, aims, and points of view.

In a certain sense, Mary Gallagher’s article is emblematic for this first issue of the magazine. We have translated her text from a book about “world writing,” in which a diagnosis is made of where

poetics is situated among the problems created by ethical and political issues seen in the context of globalization processes. The following observation of Gallagher's may serve as a particular emblem of the reflections contained in this issue, but also, indeed, of the whole enterprise represented by the systematic study of poetics in today's world: she writes that this kind of enterprise undermines contemporary caution toward or resignation from the problems of aesthetics, poetics, and literature studies. The authors whose work is printed here might even go so far as to say that uplifting poetics, literature studies and aesthetics can lead to some exciting revaluations and innovative cognitive formulations.

Our first publication is imbued with the belief that the problems of poetics cannot, in our day, be captured by the old textbook formulae. They can be newly activated only in collective projects, only through continuous discussion of currently diagnosed problems of poetics. For that reason, we have adopted the convention of open debates on successive issues, and the possibility or degree of their resolution will always depend on the course taken by the discussion and analytic practices. These define the very idea of a "forum," providing a place for public discourse. The time has come for this space to have more dialogue on the subject of poetics.

Poetics

Through the Prism of Cultural Studies

Tomasz Kunz

Reading it today, there's something quaint about the prediction made by eminent scholar and theoretician of literature Michał Głowiński, in a text written in the 1980s, that the dichotomy between internal and external methodologies inherited from the reaction against Positivism would eventually be abandoned, yielding to the advent of a new era in literary studies, thanks to the application of an integral method based on a communicative conception of the work of literature.¹ Reality has not been kind to what then appeared to be well-grounded hopes for a spectacular culmination of the best and undoubtedly the most original period in the history of Polish literary theory. A paradigm change did take place, but it took a form completely different from what our exponents of communications theory expected.

The post-structuralist deconstructionist revolt that occurred in Polish literary studies in the 1990s led to a conceptual dismantling of modern literary theory and a de facto break in the evolutionary continuity of Polish thought relating to literary theory, setting the stage for the later turn that truly, profoundly reshaped both the discipline and the discourse of literary scholarship. From today's perspective, that revolt looks in many ways like an epistemological drama, displaced in time, that overlooked the specific social, political and historical aspects of the Polish humanist tradition, as well as the particular function of literature and Polish Studies in cultural production and identity formation, in both a historical and a theoretical context.² A process that developed in the world of Western literary scholarship through systematic, intensive, critical reflection over the course of nearly a quarter century amounted in Poland to an intensified effort by translators and editors, focused on the presentation and popularization of theoretical foun-

¹ See M. Głowiński, "Od metod zewnętrznych i wewnętrznych do komunikacji literackiej" (From external and internal methods to literary communication) in: Głowiński, *Prace wybrane* (Selected Works), vol. 3, *Dzieło wobec odbiorcy. Szkice z komunikacji literackiej* (The work with respect to the receiver. Sketches from literary communication, Kraków 1998, pp. 7-23.

² There has yet to be written a (cultural) history of Polish literary theory that would take into account not only the complex results for intellectual life of accelerated assimilation of Western theory, but also the influence of specific local historical, political and social factors on the form and effects of the reception of ideas and concepts developed in different cultural conditions. See the interesting approach to this problem in its wider politico-cultural context in Galin Tihanov's article "Why did modern literary theory originate in Central and Eastern Europe? and why is it now dead?" (*Teksty Drugie* 2007, 4).

dations, usually without a clear demonstration of their interpretative application, and rarely leading to any attempt at original, critical development of the concepts involved. The applicability of deconstructionist tools to the study of Polish literature turned out to be so limited that Janusz Sławiński, in the mid-1990s, was able to state with satisfaction and irony the real sense of dissonance between apocalyptic proclamations, on the one hand, and everyday literary scholarly practice on the other, though the examples he gave of such practice even then sounded disturbingly anachronistic³ and gave rise to the conjecture that the picture they painted of academic Polonists' conscientious sedulity, while believed by Sławiński to be a positive one, resulted more from routine and conservative reluctance toward change of any kind than a rational desire to protect the status of one's discipline.

Before this process of accelerated assimilation of the lessons of post-structuralism and deconstruction could reach its conclusion, there began an equally rapid assimilation of theoretical currents associated with the cultural turn. These two great methodological upheavals, which in the West took place over several decades, in Poland happened to some degree parallel with one another, with the result that it was difficult to clearly grasp the peculiar individual effects that each of them had on literary studies. Simply put, the change that swept over literary scholarship during the period of post-structuralism and deconstructionism's expansion represented primarily a departure from the understanding of literary theory as an independent and homogenous entity, a science focused on determining general principles of the literary work's construction and creation and the specific nature of its linguistic structure, that is, everything that had been previously defined under the institutional rubric of literature. Scholars' interest turned toward the literary text, which at the same time was deprived of its objective status, in a putative effort to return it to its separate position by undermining the theoretical framing and metaphysical foundations that had long governed interpretation and the relations between scholar and text. Modern literary theory, in its most orthodox, scientific version, relying on a formalized and technicalized model of the poetics of language – poetics through the prism of linguistics – oriented for the most part, if not entirely, on the description and analysis of literature in its systemic dimension, came under attack. Modern theory had maintained a haughty indifference toward the singularity or historicity of the literary text, and equally toward individual acts of textual interpretation, while also imposing cognitive limitations and uniform procedures on the latter.

In practice, however, deconstruction, while it undermined pretty nearly all the previous axioms of modern literary theory, did not violate the inherent textual paradigm of structuralism, which upheld a concern with linguistic mechanisms of meaning creation. It simply transferred the emphasis to those properties of the text that render impossible the attribution to it of a final, integral meaning and keep us enmeshed within the internal contradictions and aporias that

³ Most literary scholars, Sławiński wrote, move on without further hesitation toward normal career work whose effect is to support and affirm their existence: after all, they must write that article that was commissioned on the necessity of a fifth layer in the Ingarden model of the literary work, explain to students who the real addressee of Słowacki's *Rozłączenie* (Separation) is, review a doctoral dissertation on personal narration in the stories of Żeromski, write a recommendation that a young author's book on the autobiographical secrets of Berent's writings be published... When one looks at the current field of literature studies from the angle of its ordinary tasks, it can seem a singularly stable institution – immunized against the onslaught from all sides of revolutions, upheavals, acts of devastation or nihilistic attacks" (J. Sławiński, "Miejsce interpretacji" [The place of interpretation], in: Sławiński, *Miejsce interpretacji* [The place of interpretation], Gdańsk 2006, pp. 85–86).

accompany its explication. All of which fed the hope that once the critical and theoretical impulse represented chiefly by the deconstruction school at Yale had lost its momentum, literary scholarship could retain its separate disciplinary identity, based on the distinctive character of its subject and methodology.⁴

Post-structuralism and deconstruction undermined the basic beliefs to which modern literary theory swore allegiance, but did not offer a real alternative proposal for how to study literature that could be directly applied to the practice of reading. The absence of new, original readings and interpretations inspired by the theoretical underpinnings of deconstruction allowed proclamations of a “crisis in the discipline” to be taken with a grain of salt and opposed with interpretative and critical practice that continued to rely on traditional categories of literary scholarship and the traditional understanding of what scholars and critics do. Actual change occurred only with the anthropologico-cultural turn, which removed the previous conception of texts and textuality and introduced a new, cultural definition of the subject of literary studies. We must therefore agree with Galin Tihanov, who ties the development of literary theory as a separate scholarly discipline not to post-structuralism, but to Wolfgang Iser’s later turn toward “literary anthropology.”⁵ The place of literary theory was then taken by general cultural theory, and the textual world of literature was plunged into the cultural universe in which the prototypical character of works of literature has been relegated, it would seem, to mere wishful thinking on the part of literature scholars attempting to fight their way with their scholarly apparatus to the first ranks of scholars comprising the avant-garde of contemporary cultural studies. Literature can of course be recognized as a prototypical subject, but with the recognition at the same time that equal value may emerge from the study of “a small, completely nondescript portion of all of the texts functioning in a culture and deformed by that culture.”⁶

In that context, what does the status of the theory of literature and poetics look like today, in a culturally-oriented field of literature studies? In order to be able to give even a provisional answer to the question, it’s essential to remember that the status of these disciplines is directly dependent on the status of the subject of literary studies itself. That subject is certainly no longer literature as traditionally understood, conceived as an individual sphere of reference, distinguished on the basis of certain particular properties assigned to a certain category of texts and determined by their literariness. One may, as Michał Paweł Markowski would have it, see this separation of this specific subject and subsequent creation of specific analytical and descriptive methods as the original sin of literature studies, the “absolutist codification of one language of description, the

4 Peter Brooks, describing the reigning atmosphere in the literature departments of American universities in the mid-80s, recalled among other things a fairly widespread expectation of more advanced and critical textual studies, inspired by post-structural analyses, but continuing to focus on an analysis of generalized rules of meaning creation in literary texts. (See P. Brooks, “Aesthetics and Ideology: What Happened to Poetics?” in *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 20, 3, p. 509).

5 G. Tihanov, op. cit., p. 131.

6 W. Bolecki, “Pytania o przedmiot literaturoznawstwa” (Questions about the subject of literature studies), in: *Polonistyka w przebudowie* (Polish studies in transition), vol. 1, ed. M. Czermińska et al, Kraków 2005, p. 7.

fetishization of one type of discourse,”⁷ but it cannot be denied that the discipline owes both its history and its most spectacular accomplishments to precisely such thorough reflection on its own nature, character and foundations. It should also be remembered that those aspirations represented an ongoing process, whose historical dimension allows us today to perceive in the history of modern literary theory perhaps the critical impulse for the entire body of twentieth-century literature studies – for literary history as well, interwoven with theory in a permanent dialectical tangle, tirelessly problematizing and questioning the foundations and axioms of the discipline to which it gave birth.

If literary theory today has become merely the history of twentieth-century doctrines of literature studies, that is mainly because its subject, the literary work or the phenomenon of literature broadly defined, set aside based on certain historically variable, provisional and always tentative but nonetheless at least locally and temporarily binding criteria, has purely historical status now, belonging to an irreversibly closed-off era whose beginning is marked by the Russian formalist school and whose end, at least in Poland, is marked by the sociologically oriented theory of literary communication, chronologically the last stage of the structuralist approach, aimed at analyzing this specific subject, characterized by a particular form of linguistic organization. This does not mean, however, that literary theory is now of interest only to antique collectors. On the contrary, as a separate area of Polish Studies it is indispensable to that field’s continued existence, since only theory provides the tools that allow a convincing argument to be made on behalf of the separate and specific nature of literature as a field of study that, aside from its culturally and historically conditioned nature, can rightfully aspire to be privileged in certain aspects (both aesthetic and cognitive) above all kinds of other products of man’s cultural activity (if nothing else, by virtue of its formal construction, demanding a certain mode of reception).⁸

Of course literary theory, through the act of binding its subject to a certain specific language of presentation, is to a corresponding extent involved in describing that subject and thereby creating or inventing it. The pedagogical uses of teaching the history of twentieth-century literary theory do not stem from an insistence on the universal (and therefore ahistorical) truth, adequacy, or exclusivity of this language, but rather from showing its historical nature, restoring to the discipline its (to a great extent overlooked) historical and simultaneously constructivist dimension. This is all the more relevant in view of the fact that the cultural-anthropological reorientation of literary scholarship has in practice led, despite its declared premises, to the narrowing and flattening of historical perspectives on the phenomena under analysis.⁹

⁷ M.P. Markowski, *Polityka wrażliwości. Wprowadzenie do humanistyki* (The politics of sensitivity. Introduction to the Humanities), Kraków 2013, p. 209.

⁸ Whether we need to preserve this identity (of Polish Studies and its subject of study) is a different question, and the answer is far from obvious. Perhaps Polish Studies should give up the status of a national philology and become an integral part of literature studies, while the latter should gradually be transformed into a sub-discipline of cultural studies?

⁹ Włodzimierz Bolecki takes a similar position on this issue, observing that the results of the cultural turn in literary scholarship “are marked in terms of methodology by... a radical break with historicism, and in terms of the field of literary scholarship by a break with the history of literature. Both have the effect of rejecting historicity as an integral feature of all social and cultural phenomena and as an elementary cognitive horizon of all cognitive acts in the humanities” (W. Bolecki, op. cit., p. 7).

If modern literary theory today gives the impression of a discipline deprived not only of a future, but also of practical meaning for culturally oriented literary scholarship, poetics would seem to occupy a relatively safe place, as is demonstrated not only by the popularity of the concept, currently used in the humanities in innovative and often controversial juxtapositions (“poetics of gender,” “poetics of experience,” “somatopoetics,” “geopoetics”) but also by the time-tested practical utility of the tools it has developed, serving not only the analysis but also the interpretation of all different kinds of texts (the usefulness of poetological categories in various spheres of the humanities is confirmed by, for example, the career enjoyed by the category of narration in contemporary historical research). Poetics thus understood, oriented toward a pragmatic interpretative and critical approach, is not, needless to say, a “general theory” revealing universal methods of creating meaning in a literary work, but rather a container of practical tools for gauging the functions of various textual and discursive practices. The relations between literary theory, poetics, interpretation theory and interpretation itself are complex in character and, in my view, cannot be reduced – as was recently suggested by Michał Paweł Markowski – to an insurmountable antagonism between affirmative, life-giving interpretation and sterile theory, always finally characterized as “analytic poetics” or “philosophical interpretation theory.”¹⁰

The division proposed by Markowski nonetheless seems apposite. Modern literary theory, in spite of its many different schools and scholarly traditions, can in fact be divided into two fundamental camps. The first one, in which we should place all formal-structural currents (from the Russian Formalists through Structuralism to the French narratological school), but also Ingarden’s phenomenological theory of the construction of the literary work, undertook the search for general, systemic rules of creation and functioning of the literary utterance, a “grammar of literature,” encompassing a formalized model of poetics as well. The second consists of those theoretical schools which centered their concerns on the interpretation of the literary text, attempting to develop some version of a “theory of interpretation,” and thus a type of general guiding principles enabling proper interpretation or, more often, a theoretical model for the act of interpretation itself. Here we would include all hermeneutical currents (including, for example, psychoanalytical readings), the German-Swiss interpretation school, various reader-reception and response theories, and, at least up to a point, deconstruction. Among them there would also be a place for those currents, such as American New Criticism or the Polish Structuralist school, that emerged from the traditions of formal analysis, but devoted great attention to interpretations of particular texts, by no means treating them merely as manifestations of theoretical concepts.

The opposition of poetics – as the science of general, systematic rules of the construction and functioning of the literary utterance – to interpretation – as a subjective practice focused on the unitary dimension of the literary work and the singularity of its reading, though possessing a long and well-established tradition, is nonetheless usually based on a rigid, scientific understanding of poetics, what in fact amounts, in Anna Burzyńska’s phrase, to “an agglomeration of the most radical formulations of 1960s structuralist theoreticians,” a product “rather

¹⁰M.P. Markowski, “Interpretacja i literatura” (Interpretation and literature), *Teksty Drugie*, 2001, 5, p. 51.

of selective reading, than of factual analysis of its varied versions.”¹¹In practice within the field of literature studies, the distinct methods and goals of poetics and interpretation have not on the whole led to their separation or mutual exclusivity, but rather to a search for ways to overcome the gaps between singularity and generality.¹²Dogmatically maintaining this dichotomy now seems an anachronism, carrying associations with, on the one hand, the position of structuralist linguistic poetics’ most orthodox adherents,¹³ and on the other hand, the position of those who represent an anti-theoretical solution, equally radical and disunited in their views.¹⁴

Even Tzvetan Todorov in his *Poetics*, justifiably considered one of the most complete presentations of formalized Structuralist poetics, being far from any kind of revisionism in its treatment of basic Structuralist assumptions, expressed the complementarity of these two types of cognitive activity, referring to their “intimate interpenetration” as the basis of literature studies:

The relation between poetics and interpretation is one of complementarity par excellence. A theoretical reflection upon poetics that is not sustained by observation of existing works always turns out to be sterile and invalid. [...] Interpretation both precedes and follows poetics: the notions of poetics are produced according to the necessities of concrete analysis, which in turn may advance only by using the instruments elaborated by doctrine. Neither of the two activities takes precedence over the other: both are “secondary.” This intimate interpenetration [...] often makes the work of criticism an incessant oscillation between poetics and interpretation [...].¹⁵

Todorov clearly emphasizes that it is possible to differentiate the purposes and methods of poetics and interpretation, and even desirable to do so at the level of abstraction; but where the reading practice of literature studies, and thus interaction with actual literary texts, is involved, what takes place is an “incessant oscillation between poetics and interpretation,” which we recognize as the essence of “literary studies.” Janusz Sławiński tended, as we know, to see the poetic analysis of a literary work as an introductory phase, leading into its interpretation (though he made no secret of the fact that the two cognitive procedures are governed by different laws and oriented toward different goals, so that there is no natural or smooth transition between them).¹⁶Paul Ricoeur took a similar view of the connection between structural analysis and interpretation. In the work of Todorov, this mutual relationship takes on

¹¹A. Burzyńska, “Poetyka po strukturalizmie” (Poetics after Structuralism), in: Burzyńska, *Anty-teoria literatury* (Literature Anti-theory), Kraków 2006, p. 381, footnote 9.

¹²See R. Seamon, “Poetics Against Itself. On the Self-Destruction of Modern Scientific Criticism,” *PMLA* 1989, 3, p. 303.

¹³Maria Renata Mayenowa enunciated this position in the mid-1980s in her extended afterword to Todorov’s *Introduction to Poetics*, in which she polemicizes with the French scholar by unequivocally declaring that “these two positions [poetics and interpretation – T.K.] are utterly irreconcilable and cannot create two complementary modes of cognitive activity,” and that she does not consider “conciliationist” attempts to join them possible or necessary (M. R. Mayenowa, *O perspektywie poetyki inaczej* (A different view of the perspective of poetics), in: T. Todorov, *Poetyka* (Poetics), trans. S. Cichowicz, Warszawa 1984, p. 119).

¹⁴The restrictiveness and harmfulness of all theory, including poetics, understood as a general theory of the construction of the literary work, is argued by, among others, Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels in “Against Theory” (*Critical Inquiry*, 1982, vol. 8, no. 4).

¹⁵T. Todorov, *Introduction to Poetics*, U of Minnesota Press, pp. 7-8.

¹⁶Andrzej Szahaj criticizes the methodological dualism built into this approach. See Szahaj, “Sławiński o interpretacji. Analiza krytyczna” (Sławiński on interpretation. A critical analysis), *Teksty Drugie* 2013, 5.

an intriguing form, suggesting an oscillation without a clear beginning or result, a circular or rather pendular movement, demanding constant verification of the effects of interpretation against the general linguistic rules of meaning construction – both those peculiar to literature in its narrow institutional dimension (genre, style, intertexts), and those that we can educe from the general semiotic rules governing the creation of meaningful utterances, within which the language of the literary work is treated as one type of code, subject to the general principles of understanding that characterize semiotics as the study of signs. The possibility of discerning general rules of organization for the literary work emerges, however from the “observation of existing works.”¹⁷ It is they, in their role as object of scholarly literary analysis, that define the actual state and condition of poetics, which retains its universality, but simultaneously must continually perfect and improve its tools, adapting them to changing needs, defined by new literary works that demand new or at least modified descriptive implements.

The problem is that contemporary “literature studies practice,” joining in itself these two “positions” of poetics and interpretation, is no longer conditioned by its traditional subject, but is revealed to be a certain specific type of procedure, that can be adapted – with varying degrees of success – to all types of texts, including those lacking what at a given moment are the properties assigned to historical literary texts.¹⁸ The results of this “literary” procedure of analysis and interpretation, which joins textual inquiry to an analysis of the text’s formal properties that determine its communicative function, can and often do lead to an expansion of the array of tools and operative concepts of poetics itself. An increase in the stock of available instruments gives rise to the possibility of expanding the competencies and subject field of poetics. That is how the mutual transformation takes place, in which poetics – previously restricted to the study of “literariness” as a particular function of language defining the literary work – loses its autonomous, “neutral,” non-culturally-conditioned dimension and acquires its cultural dimension, thanks to the introduction of discourses other than the literary into its sphere of inspiration, which in turn grow conscious of their textual character thanks to the spectacular expansion of categories and concepts developed by poetics. Since the subject field of poetics is no longer the field of literature, literature becomes by necessity just another form of meaningful expression, by no means a privileged one, forced to fight for its position and deprived of the main weapon that it was guaranteed by traditional formal-structuralist poetics and literary theory, the conviction of its particular status and specific features. Now, in fighting for its prestige, literature must typically resort to pragmatic and utilitarian arguments, proving its usefulness toward achieving various goals which are doubtless important but hardly specific to it, e.g., existential, social, political or emancipatory ones¹⁹ – while its aesthetic aspect, that “purposeless purpose” which once constituted the essence of the work

¹⁷ T. Todorov, op. cit., p. 7.

¹⁸ On the need to develop a pluralistic poetics, understood as particular lexicons of analytical terms adapted to the needs of new critical and theoretical languages, see Adam F. Kola, “Języki teorii – języki poetyki. O zmianie paradygmatu, która wciąż czeka na dopełnienie,” in *Tekstualia*, 2013, no. 4(strony?).

¹⁹ The same is true of literary scholarship that, in overcoming their particular theoretical “instrumentation,” methodology and descriptive poetics created using analysis and interpretation of literary texts, can only be used for extra-aesthetic purposes, external in some way or other to literature: existential, as in Michał Paweł Markowski’s project of “humanistic sensitivity” in which the interpretation of literature serves the renewal of our relationships with the world and other people, or political, as in Jan Sowa’s notes, in his critique of Markowski’s postulates in a review of his book, toward an “emancipatory humanities,” in which interpretation is perceived as primarily a tool of struggle for social justice.

of art in general, has been almost completely marginalized. That marginalization of the aesthetic dimension of the literary work is a natural by-product of the marginalization of classical poetics, since there is no way to speak of aesthetic or artistic properties and virtues of a literary work without reference to its formal features – linguistic, stylistic, or genre conventions – grasped in historical perspective against the background of literary tradition: the history of change and evolution that occurs within and creates tradition. It should be remembered that the spectacular expansion of poetics to other fields of the humanities than that of literature studies has been accompanied by a simultaneous devaluation of the formalist-structuralist model of poetics, which served toward a generalized, systematic description of the literary work, and a transformation of its traditional subject of inquiry, thus also a departure from the study of literary texts and a turn toward broadly understood “discursive” cultural practices, whether social, political, or ideological.

In contemporary culturally oriented literary scholarship, we no longer read about the reflections of “literary theory,” but rather of “cultural theory,” in which sphere categories taken from the arsenal of classical poetics, such as narration, genre, or fiction, emerge side by side on equal terms with concepts from anthropology, ethnography or cultural studies, such as ethnicity, cultural gender, or the body. There should be nothing peculiar about this, given that in twentieth-century literary theory the assimilation of categories, concepts or whole methodologies was anything but exceptional: it should suffice to mention the inspiration provided by psychoanalysis, or Marxist and mythographic criticism, or the sociology of literature.²⁰ In each case, however, these borrowings were meant to enhance (by providing greater depth and versatility) the understanding of the specific problems of this separate sphere of research whose subject was works of literature. The current metamorphosis, however, represents a fundamental transformation not only of literary theory, but also of its subject, by means of its displacement from the relatively independent sphere of linguistic productions, distinguished based on (always insufficient, arguable and temporary) formal and semantic properties toward the considerably less well-defined field of culture, encompassing in addition to literature other forms of human creative and signifying (semasiological) activity and reaching further toward the even wider sphere of human experience as the primary category of all forms (discursive and non-discursive, rational and affective, conscious and unconscious) of communication between people.

The displacement of the works of literary culture into such a broadly defined sphere deprives them of the status of a separate subject of literature studies, one susceptible to even the most provisional definition, and transforms it into a subject of cultural studies. Starting from

²⁰In fact, all modern literary theory is really, in its most influential formalist-structuralist form, based on linguistic reflection. It was from linguistics that theory took its line of basic concepts and methods of studying a literary work. The first modern literary scholars were often above all specialists in linguistics, so that we can with only slight exaggeration state that the independent field of literature was created and set apart as a result of borrowings from linguistics, and that the very autonomy of modern literary theory is inescapably indebted to a separate discipline, whose kinship is far from obvious and results from a particular conception, not in any way predestined, of the literary work as an intentional linguistic production governed by particular principles of structural and semantic organization. The adoption of the hermeneutic perspective, on the other hand, does not require the use of linguistics-based tools, and therefore puts in question the notion of a fundamental intimate relationship between the two disciplines, which to the formalist-structuralist perspective seems obvious.

that point, all attempts at an essentialist definition of one's subject and its nature by means of literature studies become obsolete. They are replaced by narrowly operational definitions, typical for cultural studies – relying on a pragmatic approach that places literary work and its analysis in practical categories (chiefly existential-anthropological) as a unique kind of “practice of understanding” – or wide-ranging definitions which strip literature of its specificity and render it one of many types of human cultural activity, by no means a privileged one, and often treat it instrumentally and with considerable oversimplification. Awareness of the fundamental impossibility of separating the subject of knowledge from the act of knowledge also means that the center of attention is no longer given to the properties of the object of knowledge itself (an ontological problem), nor to the intersubjective procedures of its cognition (an epistemological problem), but our ways of knowing and experiencing it, which are both ways of shaping/forming that object and, reflexively, of shaping/forming ourselves (an existential problem). This participatory formulation of subject-object relations, typical for pragmatic, existential hermeneutics, is actually characteristic of other areas of the humanities as well: in anthropologico-cultural scholarship one sees a change from “participatory observation,” typical for traditional, “ethnographic” anthropology, to “thick description” as a specific method for postmodern, “literary” anthropology, in which the object of a work's description is not so much revealed as constructed. In the study of history, a similar transition has taken place, from the objective understanding of history as a collection of objective facts in need of reconstruction and impartial exhibition to a conception of history as a narrative subordinated to the tropological rules of narration and always primarily produced by the story-teller.


In this context, it becomes difficult to talk about poetics “capturing” new spheres of knowledge or assimilating categories and concepts proper to other areas of reflection in the humanities, since firm boundaries separating particular disciplines from each other are being obliterated, together with the more basic boundary separating the object of scholarly study from the scholar, which enabled the development of methodological foundations for scholarship and of their respective regulatory and verificatory procedures.²¹ In a field thus reorganized, the insistence on being able to maintain some kind of clear-cut methodological and conceptual identity, allowing for relative specificity and separate status for the subject of literature studies, seems not sufficiently to take into account the transformations that have resulted from the deterioration of such disciplinary and epistemological distinctions. Even if one managed, in the proclamatory mode, at the price of considerable conceptual effort, to save this relative specificity, it seems decidedly too paltry to render possible the *de facto* survival of literature studies as a separate discipline. On the other hand, the price that must be paid for the use, in other fields and for other purposes than originally intended, the categories and concepts developed by poetics and literary theory for the study of literary texts (narration, genre, fiction) is the gradual loss of their “identity,” their original, peculiar meaning and function.

In my view, a symptomatic and particularly telling example of this process of “loss of identity” is the new “cultural,” extremely broad understanding of poetics itself, which today signifies the

²¹It is not an accident that it is difficult to speak clearly and precisely about a cultural studies methodology, since cultural studies are characterized rather by programmatic atheoreticity and rather free methodological syncretism (certain individual cases, such as Mieke Bal's proposal, featuring a remarkably systematic approach and highly developed theoretical consciousness, are rare exceptions that confirm rather than disproving the rule).

description and analysis not only of signifying discursive practices, but of any human activity in which some general, to some extent repeatable rules of semiotic organization, apparent in the categories of purpose, regularity, and internal structure, can be perceived. This is leading toward such a profound transformation of the foundational semantics of this concept that it is becoming detached from its original semantic field, laying out an entirely new sphere of inquiry as well as new rules for the use of the tools of poetics themselves, i.e., through their investment with a “practical,” inventive and causative dimension at the expense of the traditional descriptive and systematizing function. I have nothing against measures of that type. I perceive and fully appreciate the benefits they have to offer, but I do not feel that they will enhance the position of literature studies, since the belief in the prototypical nature of literary phenomena, as model examples for new adaptations –outside the realm of autonomously defined literariness – proven in application to literary concepts and categories, seems to me an illusion maintained by literature studies scholars, to whom, because of their professional, narrowly specialized education, attained in the last days of traditional Polish Studies, literature itself represents the natural sphere of exemplification and objective reference. For a scholar whose orientation is not centered on literature, prototypical materials will be something other than literary works, for example, audiovisual culture, film, everyday life, microsociological phenomena, etc., which may have the result (not difficult to imagine) that in their formulation, the “poetics of experience” or “somapoetics” will dispense with literature entirely, or will relegate it to a marginal position, in other words, the position occupied in literature-centered cultural poetics by film, theater, the visual arts, new media, spatial architecture, or the history of ordinary life.

If we do agree, however, that it is still worth defending the specificity and separate status of literature studies in our day (including, and perhaps especially, culturally oriented literature studies), then their disciplinary identity demands that we uphold not so much the broad, cultural understanding of poetics as the narrow, specialized analytical skills that are necessary for the survival of the unique form of reading that literary reading represents, conceived as hermeneutic activity, directed toward the most versatile possible understanding of the text, distinguished from all other hermeneutic acts by its use of the specific tools provided by traditional theoretical and descriptive poetics, slowing down the process of interpretation, taking away its immediate, utilitarian character and bringing to mind the now too often neglected aesthetic dimension, without which no concept of culture and no concept of the study of culture can convincingly or gratifyingly take shape.



New Situations of Poetics

Tomasz Mizerkiewicz

Poetics has often been described in recent times as a field forced into making defensive gestures. There have also been assertions that the charges mounted by post-structuralism of a tendency to search for eidetic literariness, the need to generalize from what is consummately idiomatic, the shuttering of literature inside a closed system, and so on, are still valid.¹ For these reasons, the field should somehow justify its current existence, if only by indicating the propaedeutic virtues of learning literary theory, since aside from those, it remains set in clear contradiction to the widely accepted methodological foundations of literature studies. Seeing the place of poetics in the contemporary landscape of philosophical knowledge in this way is something that recurs each time there is a demand for comment on the situation. I see the current place of poetics somewhat differently than do such diagnoses. Neither the typical poststructuralist objections to poetics presented in the 1990s, nor the conditions for its use stipulated by Anna Burzyńska (as the “most important terms of today’s poetics”) of “pluralism, interdisciplinarity, the pragmatic and rhetorical turn” can today be successfully defended.² Another proposal put forward in that era by the field’s few remaining sympathizers was the slogan of multiple poetics in place of one. Mary Gallagher writes very differently on the subject, observing that poetics can offer intellectually fruitful challenges to such reigning humanities paradigms as cultural studies or post-colonialism. In her opinion, the increasingly vocal reluctance to explore contexts ulterior to literary works themselves will allow a new recognition of poetics’ potential.³

¹ Dorota Korwin-Piotrowska recently recalled this set of widely held objections to poetics – see D. Korwin-Piotrowska, “Życie pośmiertne poetyki,” (The posthumous life of poetics) in *Tematy i Konteksty* (Themes and Contexts), 2013, nr 3, pp. 20-21.

² A. Burzyńska, “Poetyka po strukturalizmie” (Poetics after Strcuturalism) in: *Poetyka bez granic* (Poetics without borders), ed. W. Bolecki and W. Tomasiak, Warszawa 1995, p. 77.

³ M. Gallagher, “Poetics, Ethics and Globalization,” in: *World Writing. Poetics, Ethics, Globalization*, ed. M. Gallagher, Toronto-London, 2008, p. 13.

Gallagher's remarks give us occasion to observe that the situation of literature studies and poetics has changed greatly since the '90s. There is good reason to assert that a significant shift has occurred in the position of poetics, from being somewhere marginal, near the discipline's discard pile, to again becoming fairly central. That has indeed happened, though the new position of poetics is perhaps not always plainly evident. Due to numerous transformations in philology, poetics now occupies or will soon occupy a newly important place, is taking on or will soon take on new cognitive tasks, and is determining or will soon determine certain important problems. Here, I am deliberately emphasizing that present and future poetics in philology should be an important subject of theoretical reflection, since only in time will we be able to grasp the dynamics of change involving issues of poetics that have been set in motion by a series of recent and current revaluations in the humanities that have taken and are taking place before our very eyes.

To begin with, we need to note what kinds of reflections are being offered on the framing of philological work. For some time now, philology has less often been inclined to pretend it is something else (as Ryszard Koziółek wrote a few years back, philology is coming home⁴) – for example, an underprivileged segment of cultural studies or sociology, with whose concepts it was eagerly rewriting its lexicons for a time. On the other hand, there are increasingly frequent assertions aimed at newly challenging concepts that have been in use in the field for centuries. A good example of this would be James Turner's book, which reminds us of the importance of philology in the rise of modern humanities and the modern university,⁵ and also of the thesis of one recent collective volume describing histories of philology.⁶ Such publications belong to a growing current in scholarship on the history of philology and reveal an interesting point of view on the field itself. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's *The Powers of Philology*⁷ is another case in point; the book is the product of theoretical reflections on regular philological tasks such as preparing new editions of texts, writing commentaries on unclear fragments, or placing works presented in their historical context. In works such as Gumbrecht's we face the need to consider what constitutes the proper domain of the field, and in particular, to recognize what once enabled it to be set apart from among other domains, bodies, or fields and what makes possible its further, continually renewed differentiation. In general, contemporary metaphilological reflection often helps understand the reasons why philology, often smoothly and easily subordinated to other fields of knowledge (anthropology, cultural studies, and many others), stubbornly resists that process and continuously separates itself, isolates itself, and claims autonomy with a sometimes perturbing persistence. In the broader temporal perspective that these metaphilological studies establish, the well-known structuralist (or formalist, avant-garde, etc.) formulation of literature's independent existence, the famous literariness, would be only one of many historically documented efforts toward philology's creation of its own separate sphere. It is still taking place today, but on different terms and using different arguments than in the age of structuralist *sturm und drang*. As before, there is reference to the causative force behind philological activity, and the "power" that creates further divisions of philosophical knowledge is exposed. The real substance of the reasons, sources, and energies

⁴ R. Koziółek, "Teoria literatury jako akt wiary" (Theory of literature as an act of faith), FA-art 2010, 3-4 (strongly?).

⁵ J. Turner, *Philology – The Forgotten Origins of Modern Humanities*, Princeton 2014.

⁶ *Philology and Its Histories*, ed. S. A. Gurda, Columbus, 2010.

⁷ H. U. Gumbrecht, *The Powers of Philology. Dynamics of Textual Scholarship*, Chicago 2003.

that perpetuate the production of philology today is quite varied. In Gumbrecht's view, what drives it is the desire, typical for philology in previous ages, to make something vanished present again. That, however, is only one of the possible answers, since the scholar of contemporary literature, as Edward Balcerzan wrote,⁸ must have other reasons for developing his area of study, dealing as he does not with the vanished but with the current. Defining the reasons why philology keeps separate from other domains and bodies of knowledge would appear to be a continually ongoing type of discussion, which in the contemporary world has acquired intensity due to the recent far-reaching subjugation of philological domains by neighboring departments. There is now an aspiration to understand more fully why this area defines and separates itself as independent.

The process of philology's separation from other branches of knowledge sometimes finds support from rather unexpected sources. They include a number of politically and socially engaged theoreticians and philosophers who, in the style of Adrienne Rich or Franco Berardi,⁹ perceive certain unchanging literary qualities. Thanks to these qualities, in their opinion, works possess the ability to regenerate the imagination, to bring into being impartial judgment, to open up the temporal horizon to unforeseeable events, and even new social forms. The road to such beliefs often leads through formal analyses of literary works. Thus a recent book by Franco Moretti rather ostentatiously proposes looking at literature via graphic charts, maps, and "trees" showing changes in the English nineteenth-century novel.¹⁰ The scholar tries to grasp the power of form ("form as force"¹¹), its ability to act, create, and raise awareness. At times, the project is far removed from any precisely defined political goals (though Moretti writes about the "materialist conception of form"¹²), but it certainly deals very closely with philological questions, and even questions of poetics.

Sometimes politically and socially engaged critics or others who were once such engaged speak plainly on the subject of philology's potentialities. A few years ago, queer critic Joseph Boone gave a passionate apologia for close reading. He wrote of the need to follow the rhythms of poetry and prose, the ways narrative threads are interwoven and unwoven, and so on, which leads him to expound on the joy he gets from the analysis of literary texts. The critic told of his will to submit to the text's power, to surrender to its literalness, and of being given over to its otherness. Rita Felski cites Boone's apologia in her book-manifesto *Uses of Literature*¹³, in order to justify the need to reintegrate the phenomenological approach to the literary work. Together with others such as the French scholar Marielle Macé¹⁴, Felski – once primarily a feminist critic and the author of articles in the area of the study of everyday life – is now developing an innovative version of literary phenomenology. She tries to show four tradi-

⁸ E. Balcerzan, "Kim jest badacz literatury współczesnej?" in Balcerzan, *Przez znaki. Granice autonomii sztuki poetyckiej. Na materiale polskiej poezji współczesnej*, Gdańsk 2000, pp. 9-15, online edition.

⁹ See the discussion of their views in Marta Koronkiewicz's article "Does This Poem Work (For You) – Irony, Possibility And Work in Adrienne Rich's And Franco Bernardi's Critical Thought," in *Praktyka Teoretyczna*, 2014, no. 1.

¹⁰ F. Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees. Abstract Models for Literary History*, London – New York, 2007.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ R. Felski, *Uses of Literature*, Malden–Oxford, 2008.

¹⁴ M. Macé, "Ways of Reading, Modes of Being," in *New Literary History*, 2013, nr 2 (*strongy*).

tional poetic categories: anagnorisis, the beautiful, mimesis, and the sublime, in a new light, reformulating them as recognition, enchantment, knowledge, and shock. These are intended to articulate what fascinates her, i.e., the noumenal power of the text or work, allowing it to cross temporal and cultural barriers, increase readers' knowledge, startle them, etc. Felski's demarcations of certain typically literary forces and domains constitute a representative gesture of contemporary philology in arguing its separate and independent status. Because the subject of her consideration is distressingly and thrillingly unchanging, not to be replaced by filmic works, fifteenth-century legal documents, or an anthropologist's tale, it demands a rebooted descriptive approach that phenomenologizes the subject, testifying to and striving to discover the forms of its unique manifestation.

The book by Felski provided as an example is worth remembering for at least two additional reasons. Firstly, it offers a distinct demonstration of the position, increasingly observed in our day, of approaching or dealing with a text in all of its inimitable and irreplaceable literalness. That position is interesting since it connects with the attention that poetics typically devotes to a concrete subject of consideration and analysis. The position makes it possible for there to develop a poetics seen – to borrow a term from Stanisław Balbus – as a “language-intermediary”¹⁵, or a lexicon remaining in constant contact with the empirical experience of reading, but also lending itself to further use, to experimental transposition into the contexts of other works.

Secondly, Felski's philological manifesto displays the widespread contemporary interest in a rather enigmatic ontology of the literary work. It has become widespread because the field of contemporary literature studies has re-opened the question as what constitutes the nature of the subject they are attempting to define. The belief in the strictly textual nature of works of literature, dominant for several decades, seems no longer to be entirely in force. Some, like Derek Attridge, have said that certain features of the material itself require that we bring back the category of the literary work.¹⁶ An increasingly important persuasion argues that the textual existence of works is accompanied by the uncanny shadow of the text, the work's voice. The vocal dimension of the literary production, long ago repudiated by the deconstructionist critique of the voice as an avatar of metaphysical presence and dislodged by literary analysis, is now returning, bringing with it the possibility of new categories of thought. This current of reflection is visibly linked with those phenomenological descriptions of the noumenal force of what is written and its ability to violate textual principles. The current also corresponds to certain experimental literary forms such as, for example, poetry recorded in vocal performances, where the work itself is a printed amplitude chart depicting the changing frequencies of acoustic waves. We should further take note of the categories of form and substance, which are making a comeback to literature studies, if nothing else in the formulations of the Copenhagen school. They represent an important concept in the work of scholars such as Gumbrecht or Hayden White, and Moretti, mentioned previously, is also reviving the concept of form and assigns momentous significance to it. Gumbrecht is developing studies of mood for similar reasons; it is his conviction that many works cannot be understood without due consideration of how they often are embodiments of ephemeral, elusive moods. In such

¹⁵S. Balbus, “Granice poetyki i kompetencje teorii literatury,” in *Poetyka bez granic*, p. 16.

¹⁶D. Attridge, *Jednostkowość literatury*, trans. Paweł Mościcki, Kraków 2007, p. 146.

cases the literary work draws attention through what is material in it or at least through its uncanny residual material aspect. Some scholars have observed in relation to electronic literature, however, that its literary quality exists not on the screen, but somewhere in the sphere of its invisible programmed code, recorded in the word processor, from which it has the potential to be generated infinitely. This gave rise to the proposal by scholars of e-literature to speak not about texts but about techsts, in order to stress the technological redefining of the ontology of what is literary. All of these positions suggest that an interest in the ways works exist or appear is generating and will continue for some time to generate careful analyses of what is literary, where the activities of poetics belong to privileged procedures. It is not entirely reasonable to expect traditional poetics to be able to cope with the tasks connected with this, but we can expect that its lexicon will quickly become more complex, will to some extent be replaced, and will be challenged. An example of how poetics dealt with a similar task would be Felski's book referred to earlier, with its group of four concepts tentatively replacing canonical categories from the past. Something alone those lines will continue to take place, and we will, it seems likely, see poetics lexicons tested and re-conceptualized in some interesting ways. That will be a result of the need to take into account some exceptionally complicated intuitions, impossible to synthesize, of what literariness is. Since the text, work, form, voice, and techst are different names for the power of literature, experienced as something noumenal, that must be accompanied by an expansion of the lexicon of poetics, placing it in a new configuration with previously existing resources and traditions.

It is easy to arrive at the conclusion that such an approach to the phenomenon of literariness prepares the knowledge production specialist whose field is poetics for a particular type of cognitive work. It is necessarily based on experimentation, testing various concepts, whether new ones or those previously used and worthy of reviving. All different kinds of practical and training activities especially need to be intensified. In various forms of engagement with literary works, the person conducting research undergoes exercises and practices that allow him or her to acquire knowledge in ways similar to what is now called practice theory. The production of new poetics knowledge often takes place as a direct result of text-producing activities, operations performed on the work, playing with it, or exercises inspired by it. We may wish to go so far as to state that the part of poetics knowledge that is worth developing or revealing is discrete knowledge in the sense used by Michel de Certeau, the scholar who developed a theory of the practice of everyday life. We could then conceptually grasp the sphere of literary inventiveness as a little-known poetics present in extremely widespread practices of writing submerged in everyday life, inventive and equal to philology in its autonomy. This means that engaging in training and also planning and participating in practices of producing literary utterances enables the creation of a poetics viewed in the direct combination of acquired knowledge with the context or situation that made its acquisition possible. This reminds us of the Greek roots of the term poetics, about which Teresa Kostkiewiczowa wrote that originally referred to "the development of something, the process of producing, composing, inventing, and only later – to the products of these activities."¹⁷ Seen in this light, poetics is linked with practice, production, and action; in current usage, the connection with creative writing is thus not accidental.

¹⁷T. Kostkiewiczowa, *Poetyka dawniej i dziś*, „Tematy i Konteksty”, 2013, nr 3, s. 35-36.

The remarks made above may also stimulate a new framing of the frequently repeated view that poetics can be useful in the literature studies didactic process. We seem habituated to statements that poetics is a body of concepts that students need to recognize in order to be capable of taking part in important discussions of literary theory that reveal the true state of literature studies. That sometimes leads rather to the conclusion that adepts of philosophical knowledge should be kept for a certain time away from pluralism of scholarly thought and led through poetics, treated quite wholeheartedly as pristine, since what remains of the structuralist achievement is pedagogically useful. In addition to the duality of thought that that shows, there also remains a presumably unconscious conviction that poetics is not so much an isolated form of knowledge instrumentally used by various scholarly isms as a philological first estate, its first domain, the place where it is actively created. For this reason the didactic value of poetics is not in becoming acquainted with a philological koinè, a lingua franca, but perhaps chiefly in its shared use by those teaching and learning how to produce the study of poetry, and philological studies generally, with reference to concrete works or fragments, leading to unexpected observations in reading and analysis. In this frame of reference, poetics is accordingly not only something given, but also something created. The teaching situation and discussions in seminars would belong, then, to privileged contexts of creation of poetics knowledge, as a kind of cognitively productive philological laboratory. This function of a laboratory of poetics could – at least potentially – be fulfilled by frequent workshops in class, writing schools, discussion meetings, and other activities.

We can therefore assert that revisions of the status of poetics carried out in the spirit of post-structuralism have paradoxically done a good job of preparing the discipline to play a new role. It has emerged from those revisions more deeply aware of its historicity and the accidental relationships that connect it with the historically changing institutional frameworks of philological knowledge. At the same time, poetics has become more sensitive to the multiplicity of sources and energies that bring about its continuous renewal and creation. In this broader perspective on the conditions that interact with poetics, one can see more clearly how it constitutes a form of situational knowledge, where together with uncertainty as to the durability of its concrete conceptual constructions, there is certainty as to the particular cognitive tasks imposed by the context of studying a particular given work. Without poetics, a certain new value that appears in the reader's situational experience would remain unexpressed and the entire process of reading would be considerably impoverished. Furthermore, without new, situationally developing reading-based conceptualizing possibilities, poetics would remain out of touch with the times and of little use in practical contexts of reception. That is why this situational poetics must be linked to new cognitive developments worthy of thorough study. Perhaps the potential of these new developments will also prove useful in observing contemporary methodological changes. Poetics constitutes the privileged sphere for encounters between increasingly bold centrifugal reading methods and weakening but still dominant centripetal methods. Today, in the realm of poetics, there can and should be a particularly absorbing and sober debate between the two, one which will no doubt take a somewhat longer time to settle.

What can experience save Poetics from?

Preliminary investigations

Joanna Krajewska

Experience is the outcome of work; immediate experience is the phantasmagoria of the idler.

Walter Benjamin¹

Kantian philosophical anthropology is based on four questions: “What can I know?” “What should I do?” “What can I expect?” and “What is man?” The first, epistemological, question asks about the subject, the conditions and boundaries of knowledge; the second, ethical, invites us to a reflexion on the tasks and duties of the human being; the third, teleological, commands us to think about the purpose and the end of life, but also allows us to consider what lies beyond the limitations and contingencies of existence, to contemplate what we might be able to hope for. The final, ontological, one poses the question of the essence and understanding of existence, who man is, and all related questions – the shaping of subjectivity and the ways it exists in the world. This is not the time or place to turn to the answers that the philosopher from Königsberg gave to such questions. A return toward them in the first issue of this journal, whose guiding theme is “Poetics after poetics,” could be unsettling for participants and exponents of later turns in the humanities which decisively pronounced judgment and imposed their death sentence on the legacy of German idealism, of which Kant was the father and founder. I mention them because as questions, they have lost none of their power; since they remain vital and, in some circles, still keep humanists awake at night, bringing them to bear on the study of poetics seems justified. Above all, I would like to use them as the heuristics in my argument, showing that every theory, whether strong or weak, must at least come into contact with them. Here, I understand heuristics simply as a compositional axis, a modal frame of argument. It will also, however, be necessary to use its more widely understood definition of knowledge whose goal is to search for and test optimal methods and rules for finding the answers to questions or problems posed. In my text, I would like to tentatively examine methods and rules for setting problems and finding answers in selected texts of Polish literature studies scholars who have addressed post-poetics in their reflections, and to answer the question contained in the title of my article.

¹ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Cambridge 1999, p. 801.

Poetics post-what?

Scholarly thought in literature studies has had to come to terms in the past several decades with the philosophical sources of the loss of the metaphysical security that had been provided by the “grand narratives.” These sources have been described by, among others, Richard Sheppard, who in his work entitled “The Problematics of European Modernism,” an attempt at a synthesis of European modernism (understood as the cultural current comprising literature and art from the turn of the twentieth century through the 1950s) noted that at the source of modernist anthropology lies a change in the perception of what constitutes reality and human nature as well as in how the relationship between the human being and reality is felt. The first had to do with putting into question the Newtonian model of the universe and the Euclidean understanding of space as static, unchanging, and three-dimensional. The discoveries of Albert Einstein, Werner Heisenberg, and Louis de Broglie proved that beyond the harmonious world we perceive with our senses, there exists a “metaworld,” impossible to describe in the traditional physics categories of causality, in which discontinuity, gaps, and irregularity are observed. These discoveries awakened the sense that beyond the reality accessible to us in everyday experience, impenetrable and therefore dangerous energies are concealed; these likewise led to a redefinition of the concepts of space and time and a questioning of the grounds for regimenting facts within the laws of cause and effect. The nineteenth-century humanist saw the human being as gifted with the power of reason, allowing him to exercise control over himself, and the positivist believed that social and moral evil could be eliminated by means of education and reform. This ethical optimism and high self-esteem were muddled by the new concepts of subjectivity that arose out of the *Lebensphilosophie* (“philosophy of life”) developed by Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche (to mention the two most important practitioners) and Freudian psychoanalysis. A common feature of these schools of thought was the belief that human behaviour is determined by irrational forces and can only to a limited extent be grasped and controlled by reason, with its demand for adherence to moral imperatives. Sheppard, summarizing Freud, writes:

Thus, Freud concluded, because Western man realized deep down that the repressed divinities and the psychic powers which they represent will not disappear just because he wants them to, he felt profoundly ill at ease. And although he might try to disguise the resultant psychic suffering from himself through such sublimations as religion, culture and the pursuit of knowledge, such displacement activities were ultimately powerless.²

Psychoanalysis and the “philosophy of life” inspired literature, which from then on began to take an interest in the destabilizing of its heroes’ personalities, as people who had previously felt themselves in possession of a secure and stable identity were now exposed to the influence of irrational forces; literature also began to unmask the ways these illusions had hitherto been maintained. With regard to the latter change, in the perception of the relationship between the human being and reality, a central component of the modernist experience is the sense of disinheritance, exile, and radical otherness as well as of approaching civilizational catastrophe. The tragic nature of the situation under diagnosis is heightened by a sense of

² R. Sheppard, “The Problematics of European Modernism,” in *Theorizing modernism: essays in critical theory*, ed. Steve Giles, Routledge 1993, p. 21.

being disinherited from language. Language is revealed to be an imperfect tool, arbitrary and lacking or even depleting veracity, confining all human strivings (cognitive claims, the possibility of expression and self-knowledge) within the boundaries of our linguistic world. Sheppard gives an exhaustive description of the changes that took place in the spheres he covers (modernism as a diagnosis) and classifies the artists' strategies that allowed them to cope, in seeking continuity in a disjointed world, as well as those who found no positive answers and contemplated the ashes of the metaphysical structure (modernism as an answer). In other words, the philosophical ideas, or philosophical consequences of scientific discoveries, mentioned above made people look critically at the possibilities for finding a positive answer to Kant's questions that I cited earlier, they put in doubt the validity of the humanities, including literature studies, and led to the reformulation of the basic assumptions and conceptual models that had previously held firmly within those disciplines.

Structuralist poetics was one attempt to give a positive answer to the modernist problematic within literature studies, but its legitimacy was then subjected to doubt by Post-Structuralist theory. It is making a rather large over-simplification, but an attractive one, to state that the accusing argument was based on the fact that the Structuralist form of poetics did not draw decisive conclusions from the crisis it found. Following Sheppard's classification, can we say that Structuralist poetics were a positive answer to the problematic they faced, while Post-Structuralism, at least in its initial phase, was a negative one?

The critique of poetics in its Formalist-Structuralist version, made within the terms of the latter school, was articulated exhaustively by Anna Burzyńska in her text "Poetyka po strukturalizmie" (Poetics after Structuralism), originally included in the anthology *Poetyka bez granic* (Poetics without borders) and later included in *Anty-teoria literatury* (Literature Anti-Theory), probably the first publication to systematically attempt to confront and deal with the consequences of subsequent turns in the humanities. The scholar noted that Post-Structuralist theory was marked by formalization, fundamentalism, a priori judgments, and binaries (including the cultivation of the opposition between "inside" and "outside"), as well as fetishism and misappropriation of the achievements of the anti-positivist breakthrough in poetics, and led to clear dislocations in the area of the discipline, the most important of which she defined as the change from system to (inter)text, from grammar to rhetoric, from science to literature and from aesthetics to ideology.³ The shifts she described were followed by strategic changes within scholarship. Here it is worth noting that the displacements described by Burzyńska were laid out by her in chronological order, whereas in Western literature studies thought they evolved over a period of several decades, while they were transplanted onto Polish literary theory in close chronological succession. Thus the move from system to (inter)text led to the abandonment of dreams about the possibility of building a system to support interpretation practice. Structural analysis, focused on building a full-fledged model, was to yield its place

³ A. Burzyńska, *Poetyka po strukturalizmie*, in: *Poetyka bez granic*, ed. W. Boleckiego and W. Tomasika, Warszawa 1995, p. 57. Five years earlier, *Teksty Drugie* published two reflections by literature studies scholars worthy of mentioning here: Edward Balcerzan's "Zmianastanu" (Change of state) and Michał Głowiński's "Czy schodzimy na pobocze?" (Are we taking a detour?). Curiously, these scholars formulated somewhat opposite positions – Balcerzan observed the retreat from poetics with alarm, while Głowiński perceived it continuing to be an important area in the "concert of sciences."

to open and unbounded textual analysis,⁴ placing the text in a universe of other texts, and “voluntarily resigning from scientific claims.”⁵ The second shift (from grammar to rhetoric), which we owe chiefly to the lessons of deconstructionism, brought into relief the “tropological” properties of texts, and going further – the irrevocably rhetorical character of all types of discourse. It therefore demands that scholars relinquish their investigations in the categories of correctness and similarities, and focus on displacements, deviations, and discontinuities. Here it should be stressed, in continuing Burzyńska’s argument, that deconstructionism also paid attention to the problem of the status of theoretical discourse, assigning it the same figurality as other texts, in addition to something more – “bad faith.” Literature “knows” of its own figurality, while theory harbors the illusion that it is developing a transparent language of description. A process parallel to the formulation of these accusations is found in postmodernist literature, which provides post-poetics (or rather, more precisely, the various schools of post-poetics) with arguments against structural poetics (the term is capitalized in Burzyńska’s text) and by the same token designates the frames of the subsequent change from theory to literature:

At the roots of this process stands the phenomenon of the new literature’s growing resistance to traditional poetics. The questioning of restrictive versions of Poetics converges here with the tendency to efface the boundaries between literary discourse and theoretical discourse. Changes in literary discourse itself also play an important role here: in simultaneously becoming a discourse on the rules of its own construction, that discourse begins to take on the function that traditionally belonged to poetics. (...) On the one hand, the author [Christine Brooke-Rose – J.K.] emphasizes that the novel itself is becoming an act of knowledge, plainly dominating its strictly aesthetic values, on the other hand, the utterances of leading theoreticians and philosophers are becoming in the highest degree similar to literature.⁶

That constitutes another argument for the weakening of the power, real or somewhat exaggerated by its critics, of Poetics, and its reduction to a “small p” poetics – here Burzyńska invokes Linda Hutcheon’s formulae of an open, variable theoretical structure, an elastic conceptual structure,⁷ a “problematics.” The last formula should be kept in mind, since it finds a place in the subtitle of the second volume of *The cultural theory of literature: Poetics, problematics, interpretations*. A somewhat different way of looking at the status of post-Poetics poetics, but which is also a result of rethinking these same theses, is offered by constructivism, demolishing the divide between theoretical systems and subjects. In the constructivist vision (represented in Burzyńska’s text by Brian McHale) poetics becomes a novel. The last shift discussed in Burzyńska’s article, from aesthetics to ideology (and thus from poetics to politics) is another proposal for how to formulate the subject of literature studies research. Where earlier it was conducted in deconstructive or constructivist terms, this opens the way to broadly understood cultural studies and cultural theory of literature. Burzyńska begins her description of the shift by citing the words of J. Hillis Miller, who in 1987 observed:

⁴ A. Burzyńska, op. cit., p. 61.

⁵ Ibid., p. 62.

⁶ Ibid., p. 67.

⁷ See L. Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism. History, Theory, Fiction*, New York - London 1988.

a sudden, almost universal turn away from theory in the sense of an orientation toward language as such and (...) a corresponding turn toward history, culture, society, politics, institutions, class and gender conditions, the social context, the material base (...).⁸

This was an invitation to the broadly understood context, not popular with Structuralism, that gave life to the new poetics – “the poetics of culture.” The term was devised by Steven Greenblatt, who set before it the task of studying the ways cultural practices are shaped and analyzing the relations between them, describing the processes by which collective experience is formed and the modalities of their manifestation in dominant aesthetic forms. This method, Burzyńska demonstrates, joins “the threads of Foucaultian discourse analysis, neo-Marxian critique of ideology, neo-pragmatism, Derrida’s concept of textuality and the critique of rhetoric” and completely accepts and displays its own “involvement in a network of relations connecting literary discourses and other systems – social, historical, political and economic.”⁹ This formulation does away with the boundary (rigidly maintained within Poetics) between the literary and nonliterary, treating literature as one type of discourse that can be studied (together with the problematics it enunciates) with the assistance of the methods developed. Burzyńska sees a similar intention in the visions of poetics that have arisen within American feminism; she mentions the anthology *The Poetics of Gender* edited by Nancy K. Miller as well Elaine Showalter’s “Towards a Feminist Poetics.”¹⁰

It must be added that the transformations discussed by Burzyńska and referred to herein have taken place on one of two branches of the family tree of Post-Structuralist poetics. The characteristics of the second branch are another subject of interest to the scholar. To summarize, we may state that that second version of poetics develops parallel to the first: it accepts the Structuralist linguistic model and focuses its efforts around overcoming the difficulties of its orthodox interpretation and its expansion to include the conquests of sociolinguistics, speech act theory and communications theory.

Burzyńska’s text serves an informational function, though it is clear that the author’s sympathies are with poetics in the plural and that what interest her most are the destinations reached by the shifts she describes. It can be said that she treats the problematics of Poetics and indicates various ways of developing those problematics (poetics as diagnosis and poetics as answer), but does not transfer them to the territory of Polish literature studies, nor does she envision a new type of scholarship. Aware of the epistemological difficulties, she does not tell us what to do or what to hope for.

The title of the book *Poetics without borders*, in which Burzyńska’s article was published, is, in my view, symptomatic. After multiple turns from and befoggings of the field’s clarity, paradigm changes and reformulations, it was possible to get the impression that the discipline had lost its formerly rigid and impenetrable borders. As is well-known, territories with no

⁸ J. Hillis Miller, “Presidential Address. The Triumph of Theory, the Resistance to Reading, and the Question of Material Base,” in: Miller, *Theory Now and Then*, Durham 1991, quoted in: A. Burzyńska, op. cit., p. 70.

⁹ A. Burzyńska, op. cit., p. 71.

¹⁰ *The Poetics of Gender*, ed. N. K. Miller, New York 1986, E. Showalter, “Towards a Feminist Poetics,” in: *Women, Writing, and Writing About Women*, ed. M. Jacobus, London - New York 1979.

borders are easily swallowed up by various colonizers. The dangers that lie in wait for a poetics stripped of a firmly defined position as a literary studies subject have been perceived and analyzed by Ryszard Nycz, who then drew on his conclusions in presenting his proposal; I will discuss them in the next part of my argument. Before moving on to the inquiries of this Krakow-based scholar, I would like to consider some observations made by Dorota Korwin-Piotrowska in her text “The Afterlife of Poetics,” included in the last issue of *Tematy i Konteksty* (Themes and Contexts), devoted to the present and future of the field.

Poetics After Poetics

Korwin-Piotrowska describes the posthumous life of the discipline. Is it, the author of a new textbook on poetics asks, a resurrection or a phantom? This description begins with the important remark that the term “poetics” is now reassigned innumerable different meanings and appears surprisingly often in various agglomerations. That allows it to be defined very generally as “the way something is organized or structured.”¹¹ Formulated thus, it is revealed to be an all-embracing area, whose strategies fit any type of discourse, as well as subjects that manifest a discursive nature. Korwin-Piotrowska then enumerates and arranges the accusations made against poetics, which turn out to be accusations not against poetics *tout court*, but specifically against Structuralist poetics. Using as reference points the law of social psychology that claims we tend to treat views different from our own as more radical and Nycz’s thesis of the retroactive nature of human existence in the world,¹² Piotrowska posits the intriguing hypothesis that perhaps the poetics described and attacked by Post-Structuralist critics never really existed (draining further the metaphor of the life and death of poetics, one might say that reports of its death are greatly exaggerated). Why, then, do they do that? Korwin-Piotrowska never directly asks the question, but gives a camouflaged answer to it, evoking the reluctant gesture of the title character in Melville’s “Bartleby the Scrivener.” Loathing his legal office job and his boss, the scrivener ceased completing his tasks, communicating his decision through the formula “I would prefer not to.” Rather than refusing to engage with the alleged anachronism and inadequacy of the Structuralist poetics project, Korwin-Piotrowska suggests looking at the status and place of the field in a new light:

If we cross the Rubicon delineated by various reservations and categorical judgments, we perceive the dissimilarity and simultaneous complementarity of phenomena that, even if they are opposed at the level of names and concepts (such as essentialism and pragmatism, model and creation, interpretation and use) – coexist alongside one another as different ways of conceptualizing the sphere of the humanities’ establishment of relations between a way of looking, a way of naming and describing, and the subject of the gaze. Poetics already exists in the broader and also more metaphorical sense as an area of research connected with the expression of human experience and cognitive skills, and with the narrower and more textually linked meaning as an area concerned with studying the properties of works..¹³

¹¹D. Korwin-Piotrowska, “Życie pośmiertne poetyki” (The posthumous life of poetics) in *Tematy i Konteksty* (Themes and Contexts) 3/2013, pp. 20-21.

¹²Nycz notes that what a person does and “what they tend toward changes to some measure what the world they experience has been” (R. Nycz, “Od teorii nowoczesnej do poetyki doświadczenia” (From modern theory to the poetics of experience) in: *Kulturowa teoria literatury 2 (Poetyki, problematyki, interpretacje)* (Cultural theory of literature 2: Poetics, problematics, interpretations), ed. T. Walas and R. Nycz, Kraków 2012, p. 54.

¹³D. Korwin-Piotrowska, op. cit., pp. 23-24.

The conciliatory nature of these considerations by the author allow her to then go on to formulate an optics in which seemingly oppositional perspectives can be grasped as not only not mutually exclusive but even capable of being joined together. Korwin-Piotrowska shows the dynamic nature and historical variability of this area. She neither can nor does remain indifferent to the turns that have taken place in the humanities, but she urges us to look at the changes that have resulted in terms proportionate to their effect on literature. Poetics today is, for her, “a group of questions and continually renewed attempts at answers, description and expression, not a group of assumptions.”¹⁴ In this sense, poetics is a “school of analytical thought that lends itself to the exploration of man’s semiotic spaces.”¹⁵ Korwin-Piotrowska appears to make nothing of the debates on the differences between subjects in the humanities and the natural sciences and the many doubts as to whether it is possible to come up with a definition of literature. Bartleby, faced with these many “hermeneutical suspicions,” would reply “I would prefer not to”; Korwin-Piotrowska replies with a commonsensical “Let’s not get too carried away”:

Parenthetically speaking, some form of “literature-centrism” among literature studies specialists (like the focus among chemists on chemical compounds important for the human organism, or the focus on stars and planets among astronomers, etc.) appears something that should be the most natural thing in the world, rather than felt to be embarrassing – coexisting with the need to continuously assimilate the changes taking place in culture and literature, and engage in dialogue with all of the humanities, and also accompanied by self-knowledge relating to the continually shrinking social function of literature.¹⁶

Here we should add that she is saying this as an academic teacher – for what is there to teach the adepts of literature studies, if we believe that their subject has disappeared, unable to face the pressure from various philosophers and anthropologists? The subject of poetics is in this sense [programmatic—regulatywny] – we don’t know whether it exists, but we should live as though it did. Korwin-Piotrowska also declares her belief in the practical benefits of launching a debate on the role and place of poetics (or several types of poetics) in a culture of trust, though the latter remains a relative term. Her proposal is made in the spirit of cognitivism, since she writes that concepts developed within that discipline must be thought about as “notations of a cognitive effort to study and describe the work of the human mind, imagination, and language”¹⁷ and she also indicates that every type of concept or category is simultaneously both an operational construct and a form of conceptualization of a given problem. Her approach, practical and geared toward the teaching of literature at all levels of education, leads to a project, outlined towards the end (and carried out in a textbook written by her later), that uses the experience of *creative* and *uncreative writing*, designating an attempt to preserve the connections between poetics and linguistics and a foray into the area of careful reading and invention or creation.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 25.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 25.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 29.

Poetics, then, is not dead, but its subject has undergone numerous reconfigurations, which does not mean we can give a straightforward or categorical answer to the question asked right at the beginning of the argument as to what we know. Still, the lack of such an answer, in the light of Korwin-Piotrowska's text, does not doom us to ignorance of what to hope for or what is to be done.

What can experience save poetics from?

"Perhaps no term has been as heatedly contested in recent Anglo-American cultural debates as 'experience,'" Martin Jay begins his argument.¹⁸ It has been argued and written about so much that this is not the place to reckon even with its key concepts. What particularly interest me are the conceptualizations of the category of experience that have enabled their authors to get beyond the impasse in the humanities resulting from Post-Structuralism. The matter is made more complicated by the fact that for Post-Structuralism, experience as a category was treated with suspicion and most often identified with naïve empiricism or phenomenology. It was therefore necessary to find a different – more convincing and philosophically significant – form of reflection on experience. In a later portion of his argument, Jay beautifully summarizes this difficulty:

[...] these critics of a putatively foundationalist notion of experience, and they are not isolated examples, draw much of their ammunition from the assumed lessons of post-structuralist thought, which they claim fatally undermine the notion of coherent subjectivity subtending any belief in the self-evidence of experience. For such critics [...] discourse, language, and structures of power provide the matrix out of which experience emerges, not vice versa. To posit experience as itself a ground is thus a misleading attribution of a constructive capacity to what is itself only a rhetorically or discursively constructed category. [...] The very quest for an authentic experience lost in the modern world they damn as yet another version of the nostalgic yearning for a presence and immediacy that has never existed and never will.¹⁹

In all of the cases referred to, asserts Jay, author of *Songs of Experience* and historian of the Frankfurt School, the attack concerns one of two conceptualizations: *Erlebnis* or *Efahrung*, whereas in the work of Georges Bataille and Michel Foucault, themselves Post-Structuralists, it is possible to read a path beyond the horizon designated by traditional philosophy for both concepts and the binary opposition of directness of experience vs. discursive mediation of experience.²⁰ Tracing the thresholds and borders of experience in modernity, Anna Zeidler-Janiszewska²¹ calls on us to remember that other heirs of turns in the humanities – taking various forms and meanings – have laid claim to this category. For example, Frank Ankersmit proclaimed outright that it was the antidote to the effects of the crisis of representation,

¹⁸Martin Jay, "The Limits of Limit-Experience," in *Constellations. An International Journal of Critical and Democratic Theory*, Volume 2, Issue 2, April 1995, p. 155.

¹⁹Jay, op. cit., pp. 156-157.

²⁰"It is [...] the great merit of Foucault, Bataille and other so-called post-structuralist defenders of its [experience's – J. K.] importance," Jay writes, "that they have forced us to go beyond the sterile choice between naïve experiential immediacy and the no less naïve discursive mediation of that experience that has for too long seemed our only alternative." Jay, op. cit., p. 169.

²¹A. Zeidler-Janiszewska, "Progi i granice doświadczenia (w) nowoczesności," in: *Nowoczesność jako doświadczenie*, ed. R. Nycz and A. Zeidler-Janiszewska, Kraków 2006. I am indebted to Zeidler-Janiszewska for the information that follows in the remainder of this paragraph.

which were manifested with particular intensity in the reflections of historical theory on the problem of the Holocaust. For their part, the authors of the texts included in the volume *The Anthropology of Experience*, edited by Victor Turner and Edward Bruner, refer to the role of experience as a basic metaphor with the power to reorganize the humanities' sphere of inquiry. Zeidler-Janiszewskasums up the examples she provides with the statement that modern philosophy in its entirety can be seen as a kind of theory (or metatheory) of experience.

To Nycz, the path beyond the horizon of that opposition is provided by literature. The texts generated by his poetics of experience comprise the 2012 book by that name, previously published in various other places; those that lay the foundations of his theory were first published by him in the two-volume *Kulturowa teoria literatury* (*Cultural Theory of Literature*). The author of *Contemporary Annals* – intensively and indeed, somewhat poetically – has thought through the consequences of the later turns already mentioned here and is inclined to see them as a threat to literature studies. Where Korwin-Piotrowska moved past them to set her agenda, Nycz looks them straight in the eye. The rhetoric of threat employed in the text that opens his proposal, “Cultural Nature, Weak Professionalism. A Few Remarks on the Subject of Literary Knowledge and the Status of Literary Studies Discourse” provokes the reader to read the interpretation of the poetics of experience as his defense. Let us look at those dangers and the way he formulates them:

Does not the din of methodological disputes (in fact gradually dying down, but increasingly subject to routine reanimation) conceal nothing more than an unspoken situational drama of theoretical discourse, condemned to display self-complacency because of the utterly unconstrained reach of its pursuits – in the absence of any kind of agreed attributes of its separate identity and status? Should it then enclose itself (and consent to marginalization) or rather strive to acquire social importance (at the price of being submerged within cultural studies)? [...] Perhaps it would be better to take refuge in its own scholarly niche (as a sub-subdiscipline) and attempt to wait out the theoretical storm, in the hope that a philologist's solid craft will always find a place? [...] Among many controversial theoretical problems, this concern with the *raison d'être* of our profession – the place of literature and the status of literature studies – is today without a doubt uncontested.²²

In this ominous situation the most pressing need would appear to be the reinstatement and close study of literature's cognitive dimension, as well as a search for the fundamentals of what makes literature studies discourse specific. Nycz finds these in a differentiation derived from Iser of explanatory fictions (in the natural sciences) from exploratory ones (in the humanities),²³ and above all else in Adorno's concept of the text as a form of knowledge. This last idea, explained in his study *Lekcja Adorna: tekst jako sposób poznania albo o kulturze jako palimpseście* (Reading Adorno: the Text as a Form of Knowledge, or On Culture as a Palimpsest)

²²R. Nycz, “Kulturowa natura, słaby profesjonalizm. Kilka uwag o przedmiocie poznania literackiego i statusie dyskursu literaturoznawczego,” in: *Kulturowa Teoria Literatury. Główne pojęcia i problemy*, ed. M. P. Markowski and R. Nycz, Kraków 2006, pp. 33-34.

²³See Wolfgang Iser, “What Is Literary Anthropology? The Difference between Explanatory and Exploratory Fictions,” in *Revenge of the Aesthetic: The Place of Literature in Theory Today*, ed. Michael Clark, University of California Press, 2000.

sest) allows the possibility of moving beyond the two oppositional epistemological stances threatening literature studies – realism and constructivism. A crucial place in the redefined knowledge process will belong to experience:

[it – J. K.] allows us to break through this compulsory identification, to penetrate through or deconstruct the facade of a closed, monolithic, unchanging existence – and enter into contact with what is without identity, other, unrepeatable, what settles or leaves a trace in existence's unconscious layers.²⁴

Literature plays a particular role in the process Nycz describes of experiencing the world and oneself. It cannot be described in the categories of expression and representation, and functions not so much to inform about the world or as a means of knowing it, as to through its power to probe deeper, as the one type of discourse that provides access to that which “without its inventive intervention would not find itself embodied.”²⁵

The author of *Tekstowy świat* (Textual world) proposes a “weak” theory that would answer all of the Kantian questions I posed at the beginning of this article. It delimits the boundaries and purpose of (literature studies) knowledge. It brings a definition of literature and the subject of literature studies, describing the methods of operation (interpretation, case study) – and indicates what needs to be done; above all, it allows us to think about what goes beyond the horizon of what is given.

The tentative diagnosis I would like to make here is the observation that students of literature caught in the trap of the Post-Structuralist impasse and the realism-constructivism dichotomy will resort to different strategies of deliverance. In this sense, post-poetics poetics may reveal itself as a history (as yet unwritten) of reactions to one's situation. It appears that those imprisoned have several possible strategies at their disposal: they can attempt to get out of the trap, remain inside it and contradict the fact, stubbornly declare that the trap does not exist, or stay there in a gesture of resignation, judging that besides the place of imprisonment, nothing else exists.

²⁴R. Nycz, *Lekcja Adorna: tekst jako sposób poznania albo o kulturze jako palimpseście*, in: Nycz, *Poetyka doświadczenia*, Warszawa 2012, p. 76.

²⁵R. Nycz, *Poetyka doświadczenia*, op. cit., p. 9.

Poetyka, etyka i globalizacja

Mary Gallagher

Czy ścieżki globalizacji przecinają, czy mogą się przecinać z pracami dotyczącymi poetyki, a w szczególności etycznego momentu pisania? W jaki sposób i gdzie – w pisaniu i czytaniu – oddziałują siły oraz ciążenie globalizacji (lub można na nie oddziaływać)? Jak wyglądają konsekwencje tego „oddziaływania” dla związku między poetyką a etyką? Jak to możliwe, że „coraz bardziej homogeniczny, napędzany markami rynek światowy”¹ pisarstwa dotyczy lub wywiera nacisk nie tylko na twórczą wyobraźnię – zwłaszcza na sposób, w jaki wyobrażenia werbalna nawiązuje etycznie do świata – ale także na kulturalną, polityczną lub etyczną wartość poetyki? Impuls stojący za tą książką częściowo odzwierciedla powyższy zestaw pytań, lecz istotną rolę odegrała tu również uporczywa kwestia relacji odwrotnych. Innymi słowy, czy zamiast postrzegać globalizację jako zjawisko lub kontekst, który może zmieniać poetykę i etykę, nie byłoby możliwe lub nawet konieczne, wyobrazić sobie poetykę i etykę niczym wymiary, które – być może wspólnie lub po-etycznie – zwracają się do lub nawet odwracają, czyli modułują, zmieniają kierunek albo protestują przeciwko procesom i efektom globalizacji, a nie tylko je odzwierciedlają lub odnotowują? Oczywiście podstawowa kwestia poruszana przez wszystkie powyższe pytania dotyczy samej natury relacji między poetyką a etyką – nieco pod prąd temu pytaniu, chodzi o refleksję nad tym, czym właściwie są oraz co robią poetyka i etyka, a także co mają ze sobą wspólnego.

¹ Theory, *Globalization, Cultural Studies and the Remains of the University*, red. M. Redfield, „Diacritics” 2001, nr 3(31), s. 3.

Żadne z czterech kluczowych dla tej książki pojęć nie ma oczywistego lub ustalonego znaczenia. Zapożyczając trafne podsumowanie redaktora zbioru na podobny temat: „z żadnego z tych pojęć nie sposób wytrącić stałego osadu, a ich wspólne reakcje są równie nieprzewidywalne”². Z pewnością pozornie bardziej przejrzysty tytuł tego tomu – *Pisarstwo światowe* (*World Writing*) – chociaż sam chwiejny, sygnalizuje zasadnicze skupienie na pisaniu. Zaznacza wyrażenie, że siły i procesy globalizacji mogą się odbijać ogólnoswiatowym echem na współczesnym pisarstwie (całym lub tylko jego części, a jeśli części, to jakiej?). Co więcej, chociaż problematyczna – a może tylko wyobrażona – powszechność wyrażenia „pisarstwo światowe” powinna zostać odróżniona zarówno od „literatury światowej”, czyli pojęcia często przypisywanego Goethemu, lecz przywoływanemu także przez Marksa i Engelsa³, jak i od swojego popularniejszego współczesnego homologu: „muzyki światowej” – tytuł ten odnosi się do obydwu powyższych pojęć, nawet jeśli tylko podprogowo i na zasadzie kontrastu.

Poetyka, poiesis

Zanim rozważymy pojęcie „pisarstwa światowego”, należy przyjrzeć się bliżej zasadniczym pojęciowym odniesieniom tej książki: poetyce, etyce oraz globalizacji. Z owej trójki poetyka może być uznawana za najbardziej kontrowersyjną, ponieważ jej historyczne oraz współczesne stosowanie są wyraźnie kłopotliwe. Filologicznie i historycznie rzecz ujmując, poetyka musi być odróżniana od poezji, bo w przeciwieństwie do tej drugiej, w kategoriach gatunkowych jest przede wszystkim metadyskursem. Ma wyraźną teoretyczną, a nawet normatywną wartość: poczynając od użycia tego pojęcia w starożytności i wczesnej współczesności Zachodu – przez greckich klasyków, a później w siedemnastowiecznej krytyce neoklasycznej – odwołuje się ono do zbioru zasad rządzących kompozycją dzieła poetyckiego (na przykład w poetykach Arystotelesa, Horacego, Boileau lub Pope’a). W słowniku Arystotelesa termin *poiesis* oznacza tworzenie, wymyślanie, wyobrażanie, itd. przez poetę prawdopodobnych (raczej niż rzeczywistych) wydarzeń. Jednak w postromantycznym wieku XX, kiedy to przedmiot coraz bardziej deskryptywnego i nienormatywnego dyskursu „poetyki” zaczął obejmować wszystkie gatunki, „poetyka” może dotyczyć każdej ogólnej teorii literatury, sprowadzając się ostatecznie do określania wszystkich teorii „literackości”, a nawet poza literackość wychodzących. Kiedy bowiem zastanowić się nad użyciem terminu „poetyka” przez Gastona Bachelarda w *Poetyce przestrzeni*⁴, widać, że zostaje ono uruchomione w tym kontekście, by mówić raczej o semiotyce, semantyce czy imaginarium przestrzeni, niż zapośredniczeniu takiej semiotyki lub imaginarium konkretnie poprzez mimesis, pisanie albo sztukę słowa. Mimo owych luźnych powiązań, współczesne rozumienie poetyki, głęboko naznaczone u początków XX wieku przez formalizm rosyjski, dotyczy przede wszystkim teorii języka literackiego i, co za tym idzie, teorii znaczenia oraz znaku w ogóle, nawet jeśli granica między teorią, a jej zastosowaniem lub praktyką bywa rozmyta.

Zupełnie niezależnie od tego, że termin „poetyka” nasuwa kuszącą grę słowną: „po-etyka”, która sprowadza się do czysto – lub nieczysto? – ludycznego poziomu pewnego, albo raczej

² Tamże, s. 4.

³ Zob. D. Damrosch, *What is World Literature?*, Princeton 2003; P. Casanova, *La République mondiale des lettres*, Paryż 1999.

⁴ G. Bachelard, *Poetyka przestrzeni*, tłum. A. Tatarkiewicz, [w:] tenże, *Wyobrażenia poetycka. Wybór pism*, Warszawa 1975; tenże, *Poetyka marzenia*, tłum. L. Brogowski, Gdańsk 1998.

niepewnego, uwikłania etyki oraz poetyki, w tym akurat projekcie zdawało się słuszne uruchomić go zamiast pojęcia „literatura”. Po pierwsze dlatego, że jego semantyczne echo jest – z historycznego punktu widzenia – zdecydowanie bardziej, niż w przypadku znacznie młodszego terminu „literatura” – skoncentrowane, właściwie od Arystotelesa, na (w szczególności) formie werbalnej, teoretycznie lub spekulacyjnie wyobrażonej w kontekście własnej wartości lub efektów, a zwłaszcza w kontekście etycznych lub przynajmniej moralnych wartości czy efektów (u Arystotelesa to przede wszystkim katarctyczna realizacja afektu). Po drugie zaś, z uwagi na swój historycznie młody, lecz silny – formalistyczno-strukturalistyczny – związek ze zjawiskiem określanym często mianem „zwrotu lingwistycznego”, czyli postmodernistycznym zakwestionowaniem (jednolitego) podmiotu oraz naciskiem na formalne uwarunkowania lub systematyczność, a w szczególności powtórzenie, nakładanie itd⁵. Można przewidzieć, że zagadnienie systematyczności będzie istotne dla niektórych komentatorów globalizacji (zwłaszcza dla orędowników teorii systemów-światów), podczas gdy inni, jak choćby Édouard Glissant, subtelnie je krytykują⁶.

Dyskusja o „poetyce” tradycyjnie ma związek z wieloma zachodnimi teoriami reprezentacji, fikcji, wyobraźni, estetyki, literackości, formy, znaczenia itd. – teorii, które rzadko, jeśli w ogóle, dokonują refleksji nad własnym etnocentryzmem lub o prawdopodobnie (kontekstowo) ograniczonym zastosowaniu. Co za tym idzie, każde współczesne odwołanie do pojęcia poetyki z konieczności wiąże się z przeciwstawieniem obecnej ortodoksji kulturalizmu, którego poważanie i quasi-monopol spowodowały awans i wzrost znaczenia „studiów kulturowych”. Termin „kultura” z pewnością tworzy pomost pomiędzy antropologicznym, nieskończone globalnym lub pojemnym pojęciem ludzkiego znaczenia (w rzeczywistości tak wręcz pojemnym, że wyrażenie „różnica kulturowa” stało się niemal tautologiczne) a wyraźnie wykluczającym i szeroko podanym w wątpliwość normatywnym pojęciem kultury wysokiej lub „cywilizacji”. Studia kulturowe są dziedziną, której fundamenty – lub odłączenie od literaturoznawstwa – obejmują dużo szersze pojęcie kultury: nie tylko kulturę jako czynnik różnicujący, ale także, przynajmniej do pewnego stopnia⁷, rehabilitację, jeśli nie uprzywilejowanie kultury popularnej lub/i masowej w opozycji do literatury, poetyki czy estetyki. Asymilując, w gruncie rzeczy dość nietypowo, zróżnicowane wartości pojęcia kultury, Geoffrey Hartman odnosi się do „pamiętnej wojowniczości”, jaką osiągnęła w świecie „kultura”, zauważając też, że „nastąpiło przesunięcie z etyki, lub badań sztuki w obręb ich własnej historii instytucjonalnej, ku (...) *kulturalizmowi*, czyli próbom wykorzystania sztuki do diagnozowania lub uznawania poszczególnych kultur⁸”. Większość definicji kulturalizmu nie będzie jednak podkreślać sztuki jako jedyne go przejawu kulturowej swoistości.

Uruchomienie terminu „poetyka” nieuniknienie kieruje nas w stronę debaty o dyscyplinarnych granicach między i wewnątrz studiów kulturowych, literaturoznawczych, postkolonial-

⁵ Poetyka formalistów zaczęła być kojarzona z autonomią znaku, którego nowe motywacje i silna determinacja zostały utrzymane, by otworzyć go na nieskończoną liczbę znaczeń.

⁶ Zob. poniższe odwołania do teorii systemów-światów (przyp. 9) oraz krytykę myślenia systematycznego Glissanta (strony [90-91]).

⁷ Zob. dalsze omówienie (strony [42-43]) poglądów Simona Gikandiego na relatywną kulturową wagę produkcji literackiej w Afryce.

⁸ G. Hartman, *The Fateful Question of Culture*, Nowy Jork 1997, s. 1.

nich oraz *area studies*, a przede wszystkim podnosi stawki tej debaty w kontekście globalizacji, czyli zjawiska, które ma na celu przede wszystkim – i rzeczywiście propaguje, a przynajmniej umożliwia – rozproszenie kultury masowej, mimo że zadaje (nowe?) pytania o wiarygodność różnic kulturowych. W tym rozumieniu książka ta podważa współczesną ostrożność lub wycofanie z zagadnień estetyki, poetyki, literaturoznawstwa albo przynajmniej konfrontuje się z dostrzeganą trudnością, a nawet niemożliwością rozważenia, jak te wartości i działania można pogodzić z tym, co niektórzy nazywają „Nowym Porządkiem Świata” (globalizacji)⁹. Obejmuje jednak także badanie sposobów, w jakie „globalizacja zakłóciła pojęcie kultury”¹⁰. W tym ostatnim względzie warto wspomnieć teoretyczne wyróżnienie przez Revathi Krishnaswamy budowania „kultury jako uprzywilejowanego *locus* (globalnej) heterogeniczności, pośrednictwa i oporu”¹¹. Dla tej krytyczki „zwrotu kulturowego w teorii krytycznej”, „teoretyczna kategoria kultury zdaje się w świecie neoliberalnej globalizacji zbyt przesadzona i nadmiernie skupiona na politycznej efektywności”¹². Co jednak szczególnie uderza w podejściu Krishnaswamy to sposób, w jaki używa terminu „kultura” – niczym równorzędny ekwiwalent, jeśli nie synonim, literatury. Innymi słowy, zamiast rozróżniać między kulturą a literaturą, zrównuje je obie i definiuje w opozycji politycznie (bardziej) efektywnej krytyki ekonomicznych lub materialnych rzeczywistości, a zwłaszcza konsumpcyjnego kapitalizmu. Zupełnie odwrotnie myśli Timothy Brennan – w artykule o muzyce świata (*World Music*), daleki jest od łączenia praktyk literackich oraz kulturowych:

(...) właśnie muzyka klubowa lub teatralna, taniec i jedzenie – nie zaś obrazy olejne czy literatura – są kulturowymi markerami większej części świata, włączając w to cywilizacje postrzegane przez Europę jako godni konkurenci: Chiny, Indie oraz świat arabski. Status literatury jest stosunkowo rzecz biorąc, silnie regionalnym, sztucznym, intelektualnym sposobem kulturowej wymiany, z przejawskawionymi implikacjami w kontekście cywilizacji. Jego pierwszeństwo w europejskiej i amerykańskiej edukacji – pierwszeństwo, które bezskutecznie podważały studia kulturowe – jest egoistyczne¹³.

Pogląd ów jest w istocie wyraźną manifestacją nie tylko zglobalizowanego myślenia o kulturze i literaturze (pokazuje jeden ze sposobów, w jaki globalizacja rzeczywiście „zakłóciła pojęcie kultury”), ale także idealnej przystawalności globalizacji oraz studiów kulturowych.

Odwołanie do pojęcia „poetyki” oznacza niechęć do współczesnego wymuszonego rozcieńczenia „literatury” w „pisanie” lub do jej relatywizacji i nieokreślonego połączenia z innymi praktykami kulturowymi. To także kwestionowanie doraźnego lekceważenia wartości literackiego na rzecz albo „kulturowego” (Brennan), albo domniemanie nadrzędnej politycznej traktacji nie

⁹ To pojęcie jest szczególnie związane z pracami politycznego badacza Immanuela Wallersteina. Podobne ujęcia „systemów światowych” zob. W.Ch. Dimock, *Genre as World System. Epic and Novel on Four Continents*, „Narrative” 2006, nr 1(14), s. 85-101 oraz odpowiedź G. Spivak, *World Systems and the Creole*, „Narrative” 2006, nr 1(14), s. 102-112.

¹⁰ I. Szeman, *Culture and Globalization, or, the Humanities in Ruins*, „New Centennial Review” 2003, nr 2(3), s. 105.

¹¹ R. Krishnaswamy, *The Criticism of Culture and the Culture of Criticism. At the Intersection of Postcolonialism and Globalization Theory*, „Diacritics” 2002, nr 2(32), s. 107.

¹² Tamże, s. 107-108.

¹³ T. Brennan, *World Music Does Not Exist*, „Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media Culture” 2001, nr 1(23), s. 48.

tyle kultury nieliterackiej, ile przypuszczalnie pozakulturowej krytyki politycznej (Krishnaswamy). Kiedy krytyk Robert Young twierdzi, że „pisanie jest teraz cenione w równym stopniu za przedstawienie doświadczenia reprezentatywnej mniejszości, co za swoją wartość estetyczną”¹⁴, sugeruje, że ta rewolucja na wielu frontach (feministycznym, postkolonialnym...) zmieniła relacje, które dawniej miały obowiązywać między estetyką czy „literackością”, a rozważaniami politycznymi. Terminy „sztuka” i „estetyka” powracają w dyskusjach o wartości literatury. Bardzo często występują także w tej książce, w omówieniach myśli Emmanuela Levinasa, Maurice’a Blanchota oraz Andrégo Malraux. Bardziej ogólnie można jednak powiedzieć, że niezależnie od tego, czy wartość przyznawana estetycznemu wymiarowi literatury jest pozytywna lub negatywna, powszechnie rozumie się ją w związku z wartością polityczną jako inną lub osobną wobec ogólnej wartości „kulturowej”. To znaczy, że sztukę można uważać za wyjątkowo polityczną lub ewentualnie wyjątkowo niepolityczną czy apolityczną, albo rzeczywiście wyjątkowo polityczną właśnie dlatego, że jest niepolityczna. A zatem, próba wyłożenia pojęcia poetyki wraz z pojęciami etyki i globalizacji nie oznacza tylko zaprzeczenia „podstępu estetyki” obecnego w romantycznych ujęciach kultury (literackiej) używanych, by „zastosować i usprawiedliwić polityczną przewagę”¹⁵. Mimo że niektórzy próbują przekonywać, iż poetyka jest całkowicie politycznie skompromitowana, podczas gdy „kultura” nieliteracka może stanowić skuteczniejsze medium dla politycznego oporu, inni zaprzecziliby temu, powołując się na (polityczną) „potrzebę sztuki” (Nicolas Harrison przedstawia bardzo przekonujący opis wielokrotnie sprawdzonego argumentu, że „najbardziej literackie” teksty są w rzeczywistości „najbardziej polityczne”¹⁶).

Omawiając te problemy w kontekście globalizacji, literaturoznawca Chris Bongie przekonuje, że modernistyczna genealogia studiów postkolonialnych powoduje w tej dyscyplinie fundamentalne uprzedzenia wobec kultury popularnej. Zauważa także, że termin „poetyka” zawiera w sobie konotacje „literaturoznawstwa i zdecydowanie niemodnego nacisku na hierarchię wartości estetycznej, która tradycyjnie definiowała [tę] dyscyplinę”¹⁷. Co więcej, twierdzi, że takie konotacje mogą być postrzegane jako przeciwstawne temu, co nazywa „wglądem w transnarodowe studia kulturowe”, czyli „projekt studiów kulturowych obrazujący globalne (zglobalizowane) rzeczywistości geopolitycznej teraźniejszości (a zwłaszcza te związane z kulturą masową)”¹⁸. Bongie uważa, że należy zachować „dozę wiary w wartość literatury (...) jako kłopotliwego innego współczesnych (i oczywiście „progresywnych”) dyscyplin, takich jak studia postkolonialne czy kulturowe”¹⁹. Zaznacza ponadto, że „nie wolno nam [literaturoznawcom] bać się tej (dla nas) miażdżącej prawdy, że „literatura” ma wartość, której inne teksty (czy to powieść brukowa, czy manifesty dotyczące inżynierii genetycznej lub reprodukcyjnej) po prostu nie posiadają, a wartość ta nie zawsze, a pewnie nawet rzadko, będzie zgodna z politycznie „przeciwstawnymi” wartościami, które (my jako) postkolonialni i francuskojęzyczni literaturoznawcy chcemy odkrywać”²⁰.

¹⁴R. Young, *Ideologies of the Postcolonial*, „Interventions” 1998/9, nr 1, s. 7.

¹⁵I. Szeman, *Culture and Globalization...*, s. 100.

¹⁶N. Harrison, *Who Needs an Idea of the Literary*, wydanie specjalne „Paragraph” 2005: *The Idea of the Literary*, red. N. Harrison, s. 1-17. Harrison jest autorem *Postcolonial Criticism. History, Theory, and the Work of Fiction*, Cambridge 2003.

¹⁷Ch. Bongie, *Belated Liaisons. Writing between the Margins of Literary and Cultural Studies*, „Francophone Postcolonial Studies” 2003, nr 1(2), s. 22.

¹⁸Tamże, s. 23-24.

¹⁹Tamże, s. 24.

²⁰Tamże, s. 23.

Pod mimo wszystko przekonującym poglądem Bongiego skrywa się jednak pewna kwestia dyskusyjna. Z pewnością można skutecznie podważyć założenie, że wartość literacka, czyli wartość, która – prawdopodobnie – wyróżnia w równym stopniu to, co Gayatri Spivak nazwałaby „stylistycznie konkurencyjnym”²¹ pisarstwem kanonu postkolonialnego (na przykład, by powołać się na kanon francuski/francuskojęzyczny: pisarstwo Assi Djebar lub Éduarda Glissanta) lub/i kanoniczne pisarstwo metropolitalne (choćby dzieła Paula Valéry’ego) jest często, jeśli nie zazwyczaj, niekompatybilna z „politycznie przeciwnymi wartościami”. Krytyczna, opozycyjna myśl, jaką chce reprezentować pisarstwo Djebar i Glissanta oraz którą czytelnicy dostrzegają w poetyce prozy Paula Valéry’ego lub poetyce subiektywności Marguerite Duras – by wziąć pod uwagę zarówno modernistyczne, jak i postmodernistyczne przykłady dwudziestowiecznego pisarstwa francuskojęzycznego – może być odpowiedzią na wątpliwości Bongiego dotyczące politycznie opozycyjnego potencjału „literackości”. W tym kontekście można przywołać prace Spivak, która ze szczególną ostrożnością podkreśla politycznie efektywną wartość tego, co nazywa „głębią literacką” w odróżnieniu od (zwykłej) „społecznej naukowej płynności”²², opowiadając się bardzo wyraźnie za „mocą fikcji”²³. A czym jest ta moc, jeśli nie mocą do podważania, do przeszkadzania, do niepokojenia pewników, porządków, granic, rozróżnień, a zwłaszcza rozróżnienia między politycznym i niepolitycznym czy apolitycznym? Ta różnica oraz związek między literaturą a szeroko rozumianą kulturą, między literackim a studiami kulturowymi oraz między „literackością” a kulturą w ogóle, włączając w to kulturę popularną i masową, może być równie dobrze, jak proponuje Bongie, wielką *impensé* studiów postkolonialnych. Podobnie jednak można powiedzieć, że globalizacja, czyli zjawisko nie tyle towarzyszące, ile warunkujące, a nawet determinujące rozkwit studiów kulturowych i postkolonialnych, bywa często pretekstem do unikania lub przeoczenia nie tylko kwestii wartości literackiej, lecz także historyczności (bez wątplenia zmiennej w zależności od kontekstu) definicji sztuki, literatury i kultury oraz związku pomiędzy poetyką a etyką, poetyką a polityką oraz, może jeszcze bardziej krytycznie, między etyką a polityką. Wielu współczesnych krytyków, jak Gayatri Spivak czy Derek Attridge, czerpie z etyki Emmanuela Levinasa, by uzasadnić radykalnie specyficzną i potencjalnie – choć problematycznie – politycznie opozycyjną wartość literatury. Attridge uważa, że „jednostkowość dzieła sztuki nie jest wyłącznie kwestią różnicy względem innych dzieł (...) ale przekształcającej różnicy (*transformative difference*), czyli różnicy, która, zawiera w sobie wtargnięcie na pole kulturowe *inności* i *odmienności* w obszar kultury”²⁴. Jego zdaniem, literatura istnieje jako „prowokacja kulturowych norm”²⁵ bardziej za sprawą etyki niż polityki, a w rezultacie znajduje się jednocześnie wewnątrz i na zewnątrz kultury.

Jeśli prymat kultury popularnej w kontekście globalnym jest bez wątpienia pierwszym symptomaticznym lub głównym wektorem tego, co zwykle określa się jako niepowstrzymane zrównywanie lub nawet homogenizację, proces kulturowej globalizacji, to z pewnością można twierdzić,

²¹G. Spivak, *Teaching for the Times*, [w:] *Dangerous Liaisons. Gender, Nation and Postcolonial Perspectives*, red. A. McClintock, A. Mufti, E. Shohat, Minneapolis 1997, s. 483.

²²G. Spivak, *Death of Discipline*, Nowy Jork 2003, s. 106. Warto tu wspomnieć o przystępnym omówieniu poglądów Spivak na etykę: S. Ray, *Ethical Encounters. Spivak, Alexander, and Kincaid*, „Cultural Studies” 2003, nr 1(17), s. 42-55.

²³G. Spivak, *Death of Discipline*, s. 49.

²⁴D. Attridge, *Jednostkowość literatury*, tłum. P. Mościcki, Kraków 2007, s. 186.

²⁵Tamże, s. 74.

iż wartości literackiej odmienności lub poetycznej nieprzejrzystości mają przynajmniej pewien – a może i znaczący – (polityczny lub/i etyczny) potencjał oporu czy kontestacji. I rzeczywiście, chociaż pełen obaw, by przeciwstawić się temu, co nazywa „instrumentalnym podejściem do literatury”²⁶ – podejściem, które zredukuje „inwencję” tekstu, zakładając, że jego znaczenie lub wartość jest w pełni wytłumaczalna w ramach wartości opozycyjnej, Attritdge mimo wszystko stawia „jednostkowość” literatury w związku z podważaniem przez nią norm kulturowych.

To, co Bongie uznaje za „fetyszystyczny nacisk na fikcję lub poezję (...) jako uprzywilejowaną metonimię kultury”²⁷ – pogląd będący echem narzekania Alaina Badiou, że filozofia we Francji pozwala sobie na pewien „fétichisme de la littérature”²⁸ i jest (zbyt) „szyta” na miarę poetyki – nie ma żadnego związku z kwestią dotyczącą opozycyjnej (politycznej lub/i etycznej?) wartości poetyki. Prezentowana w tej książce analiza po-etyki Blanchota i Malraux autorstwa Douglasa Smitha podkreśla wrażliwy na kontekst pogłos pojęć kultury, literatury oraz przestrzeni zapośredniczonej przez obu pisarzy, pochodzący, podobnie jak oni, ze szczególnego historycznego oraz geograficznego momentu zależności różnych politycznych osi oraz sił. Czyż w takim wypadku nie jest dość prawdopodobne, by konkretne typy pisarstwa w naszym młodym tysiącleciu zabierały się do kontestacji „imperium” w rozproszonym globalnym, przenikającym wszystko, wręcz totalitarnym sensie Michaela Hardta oraz Antonia Negriego – czyli globalnym imperium samego rynku²⁹? Z pewnością to, co literackie, w przeciwieństwie do postulatów Bongiego, może być potencjalnie – oraz z uwagi na sam sposób znaczenia – politycznie przekorne, nawet jeśli niekoniecznie specjalnie, wobec pochodzenia nowego (czyli globalnego) porządku świata. W tym kontekście można przytoczyć poglądy Jean Ricardou – pisząc o *nouveau roman*, której część twórców była oficjalnie politycznie zaangażowana, odważnie twierdzi ona, że „paralela między reprezentacją (...) a ideologią imperializmu jest tak silna, iż samo stworzenie antyfiguracywnego tekstu stanowi kontestację imperializmu”³⁰. Paul Valéry oraz jego współcześni zwolennicy³¹ powiedzieliby podobnie o związku między pewnym typem wysoce zrozumiałego i normatywnego pisarstwa figuracywnego, a udziałem w faszyzmie. Krytyk Robert Pickering odczytuje zatem pisarstwo Paula Valéry’ego jako na swój sposób wysoce opozycyjne wobec kolaboracyjnej Francji Vichy w okupowanej Francji: „ce genre d’écriture affirme l’indépendance de la pensée et la liberté de l’imagination créatrice, qualités qui sont particulièrement vulnérables dans ce contexte d’uniformisation, de résurgence et de transformation psychologiques qui est celui de la Révolution Nationale” [ten typ pisarstwa domaga się niezależności myśli oraz wolności wyobraźni twórczej – wartości szczególnie bezbronnych w kontekście standaryzacji, odrodzenia oraz psychologicznej transformacji, czyli rewolucji narodowej³²]. Pickering w istocie postrzega złożoność intelektualnej i artystycznej

²⁶Tamże, s. 21.

²⁷Ch. Bongie, *Belated Liaisons...*, s. 16. Dla szerszego omówienia tej kwestii zob. Ch Bongie, *Exiles on Main Stream. Valuing the Popularity of Postcolonial Literature*, „Postmodern Culture” 2003, nr 1(14).

²⁸A. Badiou, *Manifeste pour la philosophie*, Paryż 1989, s. 33.

²⁹A. Negri, M. Hardt, *Imperium*, tłum. A. Kołbaniuk, S. Ślusarski, Warszawa 2005.

³⁰C. Britton, *The Nouveau Roman. Fiction, Theory, and Politics*, Londyn 1992; zob. F. Jameson, *Modernism and Its Repressed. Robbe-Grillet as Anti-colonialist*, „Diacritics” 1976, nr 2(6), s. 7-14.

³¹R. Pickering, *Écrire sous l'occupation. Les mauvaises pensées et autres de Valéry*, „Revue d’histoire littéraire de la France” 1998, nr 6(88), s. 1090.

³²Tamże.

prozy Valéry'ego jako „une attaque en regle contre des concepts basés sur la normalisation et la totalization” [formalny atak na koncepty oparte na normalizacji oraz totalizacji]. Łącząc polityczny opór z etycznym, za przykład kontestacyjnego myślenia przywołuje następujące stwierdzenie Valéry'ego, zadające kłam binarności, od której zależy pewna totalizująca i bardzo wątpliwa przejrzystość moralna: „Il y a de ca victime dans le bourreau et du bourreau dans la victime (...) il y a de quoi passer de l'un à l'autre; et c'est peut-être cette puissance de transformation qui est l'essence même du véritable Moi” [Jest coś z ofiary w rzeźniku i coś z rzeźnika w ofierze (...) wystarczy, żeby jedno mogło uchodzić za drugie i być może właśnie ta transformacyjna moc stanowi właściwą istotę prawdziwego Ja³³]. Nawet bez rozwodzenia się tu nad uderzającym podobieństwem między słowami Valéry'ego a umiejscowieniem przez Attridge'a tego, co literackie w (etycznej) mocy przekształcenia oraz „innego”, to krótkie odwołanie do pisarstwa Valéry'ego skupia naszą uwagę na kluczowym, a zarazem wysoce problematycznym rozróżnieniu między politycznym i etycznym wymiarem literatury. Kwestia łączenia estetycznych, politycznych i etycznych aspektów literatury oraz jej konsekwencje na przykład w pracach Spivak, Jacques'a Derridy oraz Jacques'a Rancière'a zostały zbadane przez Nicholasa Harrisona³⁴.

„Teoretyczny” lub spekulatywny wymiar literatury – jej, by tak rzec, filozoficzna wartościowość – jest centralnym tematem wielu zawartych w tej książce esejów, choć najbardziej są nią prześiąknięte: esej Julii Kristevej o *French Theory*, prace o Édouardzie Glissant, Maurice Blanchocie, André Malraux czy Emmanuelu Levinasie. Nieustające zainteresowanie tą kwestią można przyjąć za kolejny dowód tego, co Badiou uznaje za niezdrowy związek (francuskiej) filozofii z literaturą. Ponieważ jednak ta książka w przeważającej mierze porusza, głównie za sprawą pochodzenia różnych współautorów, właśnie (francuską/francuskojęzyczną) sferę myślenia, które Badiou uważa za beznadziejnie zszyte z poetyką, pozwala podkreślić coraz częściej uważaną za kluczową kwestię dotyczącą związku między etyką i poetyką, a mianowicie to, że „literackie nie może zostać w pełni zrozumiane teoretycznie, lecz musi się angażować w szczególną czynność (słowo po słowie, linijka po linijce odsłanianego tekstu)”³⁵. Należy oczywiście zauważyć, że praca Julii Kristevej najczęściej polega na czytaniu, bardzo często na **czytaniu** tekstów literackich (na przykład Prousta lub Collette). Mimo tego pisze ona wyłącznie teorię (i o teorii) – co uruchamia i ilustruje w tej książce jedno z najgłębszych pęknięć poetyki, czyli granicę oddzielającą poetykę jako metadyskurs od poetyki jako praktyki werbalnej/estetycznej. Dla wielu współautorów równie istotne są jednak bardziej „empiryczne” techniki, na przykład *close reading* prozy fikcjonalnej lub autofikcji, zwłaszcza u Richarda Serrano i Davida Palumbo-Liu, ale także u Mary Louise Pratt i Douglasa Smitha. Wywód Roba Wilsona został z kolei oparty zasadniczo na czytaniu tekstów filmowych i poetyckich. A zatem sensem poetyki, jaki wyłania się z tej książki, jest sprzężenie zwrotne teorii i praktyki (jak choćby pisanie/czytania). Innymi słowy, indywidualne odczytania, które aktualizują etyczne działania konkretnych możliwości lub wymiarów pisania – na przykład etyki literackiej reprezentacji lub fikcjonal-

³³Cytat pochodzi z aforystycznie i znacząco zatytułowanych *Złych myśli* (*Mauvaises pensées*) Paula Valéry'ego w: P. Valéry, *Œuvres complètes*, t. 2, Paryż 1960, s. 862. Stwierdzenie to można powiązać z po-etyczną dyskusją skupioną wokół pisarstwa Roberta Antelme'a i Marguerite Duras (zob. dalej, s. ? [18]).

³⁴N. Harrison, *Who Needs an Idea...*

³⁵Komentarz Timothy'ego Clarka o Dereku Attridge'u: *Singularity in Criticism*, „Cambridge Quarterly” 2004, nr 4 (33), s. 395. Timothy Clark jest autorem książki *Derrida, Heidegger, Blanchot. Sources of Derrida's Notion and Practice of Literature*, Cambridge 1992.

nej czy narracyjnej mediacji – ciągle przecinają się z szerszymi teoretycznymi lub spekulatywnymi podejściami. Na przykład rozróżnienie między autorem a narratorem/protagonistą w marokańskim pisarstwie francuskojęzycznym zostało wskazane przez Richarda Serrano jako *locus* semantycznej złożoności oraz podstawę wyobraźni literackiej światów alternatywnych lub subiektywności. Ponadto relacja autor – narrator – protagonista, tak kluczowa dla „mocy fikcji”³⁶, jest równie istotna dla Smitha i jego ujęcia etyki w relacji ja – inny w fikcji oraz innych pracach Blanchota oraz Malraux, a także analizie po-etyki autorstwa Palumbo-Liu w powieści J.M. Coetzego *Elizabeth Costello*. W tym kontekście warto wspomnieć o Morettim, który w artykule *Conjectures on World Literature* zauważa, że ponieważ „głos narratora” jest kluczową zmienną w formach powieściowych z „literatury światowej”, to nie sposób dokonać prawdziwej formalnej analizy, bez wymaganej kompetencji językowej w niezliczonej liczbie języków – „francuskim, angielskim, hiszpańskim, rosyjskim, japońskim, chińskim i portugalskim na sam początek”³⁷. Jak przekonuje Moretti, badanie „literatury światowej” będzie z konieczności „z drugiej ręki”, „bez żadnego bezpośredniego odczytania tekstu”. Dostrzega on tu nieodzowne następstwo osłabienia, a nawet zaniku funkcji literackiego kanonu (na którym polega cała czasochłonna technika *close reading*). Podkreśla cenę, jaką płaci się za wiedzę teoretyczną: „rzeczywistość jest nieskończenie bogata; pojęcia zaś abstrakcyjne, biedne”³⁸. Proponuje zatem dwuogniskowe podejście do literatury światowej: podejście, które bierze pod uwagę zarówno geograficzne, jak i historyczne braki ciągłości (drzewo) oraz globalne ciągłości przestrzenno-czasowe (fala), łącząc specjalizację etnolingwistyczną i translingwistyczne oraz transkulturowe komparatystyczne poglądy na krytykę. Te konieczne napięcia między szczegółem a ogółem, empirycznym a teoretycznym, wzorcowym a jednostkowym w tekście literackim, którego czytanie (*close reading*) jest niezbędną częścią, leżą, co już zauważyliśmy, u samych podstaw poetyki i są wyraźnie wpisane w kompozycję tej książki. Aby uhonorować pogląd, że literaturoroznawstwo lub poetyka, wedle Spivak, „zależy od tekstury”³⁹, a także uszanować spostrzeżenie, iż „tylko rozsądny system, jak rodzaj analogicznej klasyfikacji przewidywany przez *distant reading* nie podda się jednostkowości”⁴⁰, znaczna część tej książki jest poświęcona językowi tekstu oraz zamiarom czytania (od nowa). Znów w zgodzie ze Spivak i jej akcentowaniem „raczej nauki języków, czyli starego dostępu do literackiego szczegółu, niż budowania analogii z samych opisów geometrii fraktalnej czy teorii chaosu”⁴¹.

W swojej (czysto teoretycznej) pracy „francuska” pisarka Kristeva pokazuje myślenie poetyczne lub *poiesis* w erze globalizacji. Stawia podobną tezę co Glissant, który powołuje się na poetykę relacji – kreatywne budowanie związków lub zderzenie heterogenicznych elementów – jako proces zapowiadający i wierny globalnej epistemologii naszej epoki. Glissant zauważa jednak, że poetyka relacji nie musi być etyczna – ustępstwo to wykazuje pewną rozbieżność między widoczną wiarą w nieskończony etyczny i dysydencki potencjał poetyki według Kristevej a wysoce uprawnionym optymizmem dotyczącym etyczno-politycznych konsekwencji poetyki według pisarza z Martyniki. Co więcej, zamiast określać, jak Glissant, globalną rela-

³⁶Zob. przyp. 23.

³⁷F. Moretti, *Conjectures on World Literature*, „New Left Review” 2000, nr 1, s. 57.

³⁸Tamże. Wnioski z cytowanej w bibliografii książki Morettiego opierają się na tych samych argumentach.

³⁹G. Spivak, *Death of Discipline*, s. 108.

⁴⁰Taż, *World Systems and the Creole*, s. 105.

⁴¹Tamże, s. 107.

cyjność oraz kulturową nieprzejrzystość mianem klucza do poetycznej oraz etyczno-politycznej wartości poetyki, Kristeva waloryzuje (zasadniczo?) „rewolucyjną” oraz (w swej naturze?) emancypacyjną wartość poetyki; to znaczy transgresję składni i logiki za pomocą transwerbalnego, prewerbalnego, semiotycznego lub poetycznego znaczenia. Przekonując ponadto – w sposób przypominający nieco wywód o języku figuratywnym czy metaforyzacji w *Alegoriach czytania* Paula de Mana – że *French theory* zajmuje się przede wszystkim transferem metaforycznym, Kristeva wskazuje poiesis jako uprzywilejowaną metodę *French theory*. Związek pomiędzy politycznym a poetycznym jest zatem oparty na jej poglądzie z gruntu zadającego pytania myślenia, na które zezwala lub które wprowadza poetyka „już w momencie wystąpienia języka”. Zatem dla Kristewej poetki, a także libertynki, psychoanalitki czy rewolucjonistki, to podstawowy przedmiot owego „pragnienia opozycji”. Mimo wszystko jednak wyrażone powyżej obawy dotyczące poglądu Bongiego na poetykę, kontestacyjne zamiary lub wartość wywrotowa politycznie nie muszą określać poetyki ani aksjomatycznie, ani empirycznie (na początku, z upływem czasu czy w kontekście globalnym). Tym samym, podejście bardziej historyczne, bardziej dyskryminujące kulturowo lub mniej wykraczające poza kontekst, może prowadzić do innej oceny celu lub potencjału poetyki.

Nie ma jednak pewności, czy to, co Attridge nazywa „jednostkowością” literatury jest rzeczywiście „uniwersalne”, ani czy ta uniwersalność jest deskryptywna, czy normatywna. Nie wiadomo też, czy definicja „literackiego” Spivak, które może, lub nie, być tym, co ona sama nazywa (z natury etyczną?) „przeszkodą” lub „innością” zrozumienia⁴² – uważa przecież wyobrażnię za „wielkie wbudowane narzędzie inności”⁴³ – co jednak z pewnością jest tym, co nazywa „głębią literacką”⁴⁴, może właściwie rościć sobie uniwersalność w czasie i przestrzeni. Jeśli „jednostkowość dzieła sztuki nie jest wyłącznie kwestią różnicy względem innych dzieł (...) ale przekształcającej różnicy (*transformative difference*), czyli różnicy, która, zawiera w sobie wtargnięcie na pole kulturowe inności i odmienności w obszar kultury”⁴⁵, i jeśli to twierdzenie uniwersalnie słuszne, w takim razie użycie przez Attridge’a terminu „jednostkowość” nabiera nowej, zgoła ironicznej wartościowości. Jego rzekomy antyesencjalizm zostaje bowiem, przynajmniej w pewnym sensie, obalony przez ukryte założenie, że literatura jest globalnie i historycznie jednostkowa, a jej głębia, moc i etyka wykraczają poza czas, przestrzeń oraz różnice kulturowe.

(...)

Po-etyka

Skoro książka ta próbuje łączyć etykę i poetykę, z pewnością musi się zatroszczyć również o problematyczne połączenie etyki i polityki. Powinna jednak obejmować również historyczny związek poetyki z pojęciami dyskursywnej oraz intelektualnej wolności i odpowiedzialności (wolności tworzenia, wyobrażania, krytykowania oraz odpowiedzialności odpowiedzi na kry-

⁴²Idąc za myślą Emmanuela Levinasa, Spivak pisze: „...to właściwie przekonujące, że nagle pojawienie się etycznego stanowi przeszkodę i odkłada epistemologiczne, czyli próbę zbudowania innego jako przedmiotu wiedzy”. G. Spivak, *Ethics and Politics in Tagore, Coetzee, and Certain Scenes of Reading*, „Diacritics” 2002, nr 3/4 (32), s. 17.

⁴³G. Spivak, *Death of Discipline*, s. 13.

⁴⁴Literacka głębia, zdaniem Spivak, stanowi przeciwieństwo zwykłej „społecznej naukowej płynności” (*Death of Discipline*, s. 106).

⁴⁵Zob. powyżej, s. ??? [9].

tykę), a także pojęcia złożoności i nadmiaru. Jak zauważyliśmy wcześniej, do kwestii dyskursu i subiektywności, znaczenia i odpowiedzialności podchodzi się czasem z punktu widzenia nie-subordinacji zarówno imperatywu etycznego, jak i literackiej wyobraźni języka poetycznego wobec imperatywów politycznych lub wręcz hermeneutycznych. Na przykład Joseph Hillis Miller twierdzi, że „urok intelektualnej maestrii obiecywany przez wszystkie (...) hermeneutyczne teorie znaczenia, niezależnie od tego, czy są one społeczne czy historyczne”⁴⁶, jest podejrzany. Jedną z najbardziej błyskotliwych intuicji tego projektu była właśnie hipoteza, że imperatywy etyczne i poetyczne nie tylko są kompatybilne, lecz także połączone, a ich wspólna zawilść zależy od obopólnego niezdyscyplinowania, a przynajmniej krytycznego zaangażowania w pokusę lub imperatyw zamknięcia i totalizacji, zwykle nieodłącznego w spiskach i procesach polityki oraz hermeneutyki. Chociaż w niektórych omawianych tu szerzej pracach Levinas zaprzecza takiemu uwikłaniu poetyki oraz etyki, przynajmniej dwa podejścia zaprezentowane w tej książce – a zwłaszcza ustanowiona przez Julię Kristewą opozycja między etyką gościnności lub emancypacyjną kreatywnością poetyki a procesem zrównywania amerykańskiego liberalizmu, a także omawiana później poetyka różnorodności Glissanta – zdają się potwierdzać tę po-etyczną intuicję. Nie są jednak w stanie uciszyć radykalnie niepokojącego i pozostającego bez odpowiedzi pytania o włączenie w ten związek polityki. A zatem, z całą pewnością należy szczególnie pamiętać o tym, co nazwaliśmy aporetycznym napięciem wokół związków między etyką a polityką.

Jeśli chodzi o neologizm „po-etyka”, pozwala on utrwalić pogląd, że poetyka i etyka, literackie i etyczne, są złożone w sposób niemożliwy dla polityki i etyki⁴⁷. W swojej pracy na ten temat Michael Eskin postrzega literaturę i etykę jako „części kontinuum, w obrębie którego różnice w sposobie i stopniu określają różnice impetu etycznego”⁴⁸. Biorąc pod uwagę liczbę myślicieli, postulujących związek etyki i literatury, Eskin twierdzi, że „ze względu na zależność od pewnych ram teoretycznych i podejścia danego autora, etyczna wartościowość literatury (i sztuki w ogóle) została umieszczona (...) w czymś, co można z grubsza podciągnąć pod jej związek z prawdą, tematyką, strukturą oraz użyciem języka, siłą oddziaływania na zmiany percepcji, nieodłączny apel do odpowiedzialności czy możliwość dyskursywnej subwersji”⁴⁹. Podejście Eskina opiera się w dużej mierze na Arystotelesowskim rozumieniu poetyki jako mowy nie-apofantycznej. Rozróżnienie między dyskursem apofantycznym a nieapofantycznym polega na „referencyjnym związku danego wypowiedzenia z rzeczywistością i światem”⁵⁰. Arystoteles twierdził przecież, że „nie jest rolą poety odnosić się do wydarzeń rzeczywistych, ale do tego, co może się wydarzyć i jest możliwe w ramach prawdopodobieństwa i konieczności” (przypis). Zdaniem Eskina, „większość współczesnej filozofii moralnej oraz literaturoznawstwa nadal polega na zapośredniczonej wersji (...) semiotyki oraz poetyki Arystotelesa, a więc przyjmuje za pewnik, że fikcyjny, nieapofantyczny, „niepoważny” charakter literatury oraz jej jednoczesna zdolność do robienia spięć w tym, co uniwersalne i szczególne, ostatecznie otwiera pole dla

⁴⁶J.H. Miller, *The Ethics of Reading. Kant, de Man, Eliot, Trollope, James, and Benjamin*, Nowy Jork 1987, s. 5.

⁴⁷„Odkąd na zachodniej scenie intelektualnej i kulturowej tradycji starożytnej Grecji pojawiła się etyka jako dziedzina filozoficzna, była zawsze, co wcale nie dziwi, uwikłana w literaturę” (M. Eskin, *On Literature and Ethics*, „Poetics Today” 2004, nr 4(25), s. 575.

⁴⁸Tamże.

⁴⁹Tamże, s. 576.

⁵⁰Tamże, s. 578.

etycznych stylów, bliskich apofantycznemu⁵¹. Eskin utrzymuje jednak, że musimy zrewidować pogląd Arystotelesa, że literatura działa jako medium etyczne par excellence właśnie ze względu na swój nieapofantyczny status (czyli ponieważ pokazuje obrazy rzeczy, pozostawiając je poza dziedziną „rzeczywistych zdarzeń”). Jego zdaniem, jednym ze sposobów wyprowadzenia poglądów Arystotelesa naprzód będzie przypomnienie tego, co wypracowała poetyka formalistów. Powołuje się zatem na formalizm rosyjski i Romana Jakobsona, według którego każda wypowiedź jest „wynikiem wzajemnej zależności między sześcioma funkcjami językowymi”, a więc „różnice gatunkowe (...) nie są kwestią ontologii czy substancji, ale stopnia przewagi” tych różnych funkcji językowych. Więc „podejście Jakobsona niezauważalnie przenosi nas do „arystotelizmu bez substancji”, który pozostaje w pełnej zgodzie z „przypisaniem literaturze etycznie wzorcowej funkcji performatywnej”⁵². Odczytujemy tekst jako literaturę (nieapofantyczną) na podstawie konwencji instytucjonalnej lub tradycji. Jednak ponieważ dyskursy nie występują „w kontekście natychmiastowej interakcji słownej”, zarówno etyka, jak i literatura są, według Eskina, „strukturalnie fikcyjne”. Jego zdaniem, apofantyczność jest zatem „fikcją pewnych typów wypowiedzi (np. filozoficznych, naukowych, historycznych), podczas gdy fikcjonalność jest fikcją innych rodzajów wypowiedzi, kiedy to fikcja okazuje się sama ekwiwalentem znaczenia w ogóle”⁵³. Ponieważ jednak właściwy temat „fikcji” etyki i poetyki stanowi „człowiek we wszystkich swoich związkach, aspektach i subtelnościach”⁵⁴, literatura oraz etyka dzielą to samo kluczowe zainteresowanie. Eskin przekonuje dalej, że skoro język werbalny jest semiotycznie najbardziej „pojemnym” medium, literaturę można postrzegać jako etykę drugiego stopnia, „etykę lub krytykę etyki jako dyskurs, który dosłownie interpretuje etykę”. Powołując się na teorie interpretanta Pierce’a, uważa, że literatura może tłumaczyć etykę na „bardziej rozwinięte [bardziej «pojemne», bardziej uniwersalne i **konkretne**] znaki”⁵⁵.

Inną idealizację literatury (w bardziej lingwistycznym ujęciu) wyraźnie widać w odczytaniu Rousseau przez Paula de Mana, w którym stwierdza, że skoro „polityczny los człowieka strukturalizowany jest jak model językowy i z niego wyprowadzany, a przy tym model ten istnieje niezależnie od natury i niezależnie od podmiotu”, polityka pochodzi z „napięcia między człowiekiem a jego językiem”⁵⁶, a więc „daleka od represji tego, co polityczne, jak chciałby Althusser, literatura skazana jest na pozostanie prawdziwie politycznym typem dyskursu”⁵⁷. De Man sugeruje zatem, że „jedyną prawdziwie „polityczną” formą aktywności jest pisanie, czytanie oraz omawianie literatury (teraz definiowanej jako specyficzne, świadome użycie języka) – stanowisko to podjął Miller i zamienił po prostu „etykę” na „politykę”⁵⁸. Kluczowy, zdaniem Vincenta Pecora, dla tej „oświeceniowo/romantycznej wiary w naturę i moc *poiesis*”⁵⁹ jest pogląd na literaturę reprezentowany nie tylko przez de Mana, ale także Jeana

⁵¹Tamże, s. 580.

⁵²Tamże, s. 583.

⁵³Tamże, s. 586.

⁵⁴Tamże, s. 587.

⁵⁵Tamże, s. 587-588.

⁵⁶P. de Man, *Alegorie czytania. Język figuralny u Rousseau, Nietzschego, Rilkego i Prousta*, tłum. A. Przybysławski, Kraków 2004, s. 189.

⁵⁷Tamże.

⁵⁸V.P. Pecora, *Ethics, Politics and the Middle Voice*, „Yale French Studies” 1991, nr 79: *Literature and the Ethical Question*, s. 213.

⁵⁹Tamże.

Baudrillarda. Z tego punktu widzenia, literatura to **najbardziej polityczny** styl dyskursu, bowiem język literacki jest „najbardziej świadom swojej fikcyjności”⁶⁰. Jednak, jak proponuje praca Eskina oraz na co bez wątpienia przystaliby pozostali wspomniani wyżej myśliciele, dyskursy: polityczny, naukowy i etyczny, są wszystkie zależne od siebie u swych podstaw, bowiem powstały na fikcyjnych apostrofach. Etyka w perspektywie historycznej zajmuje się znaczeniem wypowiedzi (ich słusnością, niesłusnością, cnotą, wadą itd.) oraz tym, czy owe wypowiedzi są prawdziwe. Jednak zdaniem innych – na przykład Thomasa Keenana – najwidoczniej nie tyle chodzi o fikcję (jej stopień), ile raczej semantykę nadmiernego zdecydowania, niezdecydowania albo trudność „nieskończoność”, lub „niezdecydowanie różnic”, „niemożliwość totalności”⁶¹, które wyróżniają język literacki.

Postmodernistyczna przerwa w humanistycznych i subiektywnych paradygmatach, jak to ujmie Keenan, wydaje się zatem umacniać zgodność poetyki i etyki: „doświadczenie nieznośnej złożoności połączone z ciągłą nieuchronnością decyzji jest (...) **otwartością na innych, niemożliwością** lub po prostu trudnością”. Jeśli jednak rozumieć decyzję jako imperatyw polityczny – polityka to w końcu, zdaniem Keenana, „kwestia znaczenia i wiedzy, zamykania i naprawiania”⁶² – wtedy praca polityki pojawia się tu, gdzie leżą granice poetyki i etyki, gdzie mają koniec. Zarówno polityka jak i po-etyka są jednak z tej perspektywy niezgodne z subiektywizmem: „etyka i polityka – a także literatura – zostają odsunięte, jeśli polegać na konceptualnym pierwszeństwie podmiotu, pośrednictwa lub tożsamości jako podstawy naszych działań”⁶³. Ów pogląd na poetykę w związku z hermeneutyką jest, do pewnego stopnia, zgodny z poglądami Williama Connolly’ego, który w *The Augustinian Imperativ* zaleca, by jednocześnie zaakceptować „niezbędność interpretacji oraz ograniczonego, nieszczelnego i problematycznego charakteru każdego wysiłku”⁶⁴. Widać to także, kiedy Connolly proponuje krytyczny pluralizm jako „etykę” polityki⁶⁵. Jednak podczas gdy Connolly niekoniecznie odrzuca podstawowy status „podmiotu, pośrednictwa czy tożsamości”, Levinas i Keenan bez wątpienia to robią. W tym miejscu należy podkreślić, że podczas gdy Levinas przychylnie mówi na temat sztuki jako podburzającej krytyczną odpowiedź w formie komentarza lub dyskursu (a dalej zobaczymy, że to pojęcie odpowiedzialności jest w rozumowaniu Levinasa nierozdzielnie związane z etyką), odpowiedzialności nie tworzy pluralistyczna natura czytania, komentowania lub krytyki, do której zachęca sztuka, którą on akceptuje, ale raczej prosty fakt, że sztuka zachęca do werbalnej odpowiedzi⁶⁶.

Julia Kristeva przypomina w tej książce, że „w świecie coraz bardziej zdominowanym przez technologię, wolność staje się zdolnością adaptowania do przyczyn, zawsze zewnętrznych wobec jednostki, przyczyn coraz mniej moralnych, a coraz bardziej ekonomicznych”. Wolność jest, jej zdaniem, uwieńczona „logiką globalizacji oraz niepohamowanego wolnego rynku”. Kristeva podkreśla fakt, że poetyka zakłada inny rodzaj wolności. Ta inna wolność, wolność

⁶⁰Tamże.

⁶¹T. Keenan, *Fables and Responsibility. Aberrations of Predicaments in Ethics and Politics*, Stanford 1997, s. 176.

⁶²Tamże, s. 176 (wyróżnienie – M.G.).

⁶³Tamże, s. 3.

⁶⁴W. Connolly, *The Augustinian Imperative. A Reflection of the Politics of Morality*, Londyn 1993, s. 11.

⁶⁵Tamże, s. 30.

⁶⁶Zob. powyżej, przyp. 61.

dialogu lub relacji werbalnych, nie podlega żadnej przyczynie, a zamiast tego opiera się na „l'être de parole qui se livre”, czyli wyzwoleniu bycia od języka, które następuje podczas spotkania ja z innym. Kristeva łączy tę dyskursywną wolność z etyką poprzez greckie pojęcie *ethos* jako wybór schronienia, a więc postać (postać danego gatunku wybierająca takie schronienie lub miejsce zamieszkania a nie inne). Jednak o tyle, o ile Arystoteles w swojej *Retoryce* definiuje *ethos* jako moralny skutek wytworzony przez styl mówcy lub dzieła sztuki, dzięki pojęciom dyskursu i reprezentacji można dostrzec jeszcze silniejszy i bardziej bezpośredni filologiczny związek między etyką a poetyką. Co więcej, jeśli podążać za tą filologiczną myślą, można też powiedzieć, że etyka – słowo początkowo oznaczające wybór „zamieszkania” – jest pozornie sprzeczna z ideą globalizacji, która oznacza dynamiczne przeniesienie lub rozprzestrzenienie, w przeciwieństwie do stabilności sugerowanej przez mieszkanie czy habitus.

W pierwszym dziesięcioleciu XXI wieku etyka, poetyka oraz *a fortiori* ich koniugacja z pewnością mogą się wydawać nieodwracalnie zdewaluowane. Oba dyskursy można uważać za nieco nie z tego świata, a ich transcendentny moralizm i estetyzm odpowiednio sprawiają nierozsądne, niemal szalone wrażenie w czasach, kiedy skonfliktowane bliźniacze skrajności relatywizmu i fundamentalizmu prowadzą do utraty cierpliwości i tak już dręczącej polityczny dyskurs. Można jednak postrzegać poetykę i etykę – zarówno zwrot etyczny, jak i lingwistyczny – jako świadków lub sumienie, a nie alibi polityki XXI wieku. Słoweński filozof Slavoj Žižek poleca wartość „etyki politycznej, pozapolitycznego wysiłku, by chronić polityczne”, chociaż Keenan nie akceptuje takiego oddzielenia politycznego od polityki i uznaje je za donkiszotowską fantazję „kolejnego końca ideologii”⁶⁷.

Tłum. Anna Rogulska

⁶⁷T. Keenan, *Fables and Responsibility...*, s. 155, 186.

Opening Up Space

Everyday Life Practices and the Work of Piotr Paziński

Cezary Rosiński

Marta Mizuro suggested in her review of Piotr Paziński's *The Boarding House* that the residents of the Jewish rest home visited by the main character, supposedly his old friends, might in fact represent creatures of his memory, ghosts who haunt that place, rather than fully embodied characters. That interpretative ambiguity can help us to look at all of Paziński's prose as a way of opening up a space that today no longer exists, but yet continues to form one layer of its former location, its vanished character.

In order for that interpretative ambiguity to achieve the status of a coherent reading, certain preliminary assumptions need to be clarified. Performative space, in keeping with Erika Fischer-Lichte's thesis, is understood here as fleeting and ephemeral, not existing before, outside of, or after the performance, taking form during the performance and through its agency. Performative space, furthermore, should not be confused with the space in which the performance takes place.¹ For the sake of clarity, I will refer to all the activities of the main character as performance. He constitutes the third element in the equation – the character defined as a dynamic performative subject, self-creating through his actions as the initiator and agent of change.² Focusing our attention on the question of agency enables issues relating to practice and action to enter the discussion; I will primarily address the theme of space and all of the subject's actions in relation to space.

The destination of the main character and narrator's journey is a boarding house near Warsaw

¹ See E. Fisher-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetic*, trans. Saskya Iris Jain, New York 2008, p. 107.

² See E. Domańska, " 'Zwrot performatywny' we współczesnej humanistyce" (The "Performative Turn" in Contemporary Humanities), *Teksty Drugie* 2007, 5, p. 56.

where most of the guests are Jews and where he used to stay with his grandmother as a small child. He sets off as a wanderer in two senses: firstly in the physical and geographical sense, leaving the city to visit the provincial vacation setting where he first went hiking, explored the nooks and crannies of a strange building, and met a lot of old people. He now wants to check whether the place's former life has been restored, and that is the second layer of his journey: into memory, imagination, discovery, and, finally, creativity.³ The man opens himself up to the otherness of the place, and the result is a wandering exile from the present and from the reality of the space. Only then can he bring back what today is absent from the familiar place;⁴ that absence is the source of his sense of alienation, a certain inadequacy, and pessimistic awareness that what is passing away is old and has no chance of continuing.⁵

The most problematic aspect of *The Boarding House* remains the protagonist's position in captivity to the past, his inability to break away from the world of his forebears and simultaneous desire to remain among them. The nameless man is the "last in a chain of generations, attached at the very end" (p. 134), and his actions are to some extent brought about by necessity and by his lack of self-reliance. He must live the life of the dead, "with its imprint of what was and what, at the moment when they left, fell back into nothingness. Their life and mine," he says, "among the shadows, among ghosts and with ghosts – in place of the fresh sun's rays" (p. 74). Toward the end of the story he tries to escape, but cannot, held back by his ancestors in a steely embrace that keeps him rooted to the ground and joins him to his grandmother's generation by force. Condemned to remain mentally stuck inside the boarding house, he attempts to bring the abandoned building back to life – "everything that I'm doing here is an archaeology of memory that has fallen into darkness" (p. 73); a way of dreaming about the place. Lack is connected here with subjectivity – everything that appears on the stage of memory has a distinct hallmark of individuality. Paziński has an awareness of the fact that the places where we live are presences of absence, so what he needs to do is show something invisible.⁶

But in order to do that, he must find a point of departure, explore the texture, define the status of the space as it exists now. Here is the protagonist's reaction when he arrives at the boarding house:

The front door is closed. The buzzer probably doesn't work. Anyway nobody came when I rang it. The whole building seemed to be in a deep sleep. The windows latched firm, nobody on the porch, balconies empty. (p. 10)

Throughout the novel, there are many signals that the building has been abandoned: "the hall and the cafeteria remain vacant" (p. 26), "it's quiet here (...). Dead" (p. 29). Finally, the boarding house's manager, the only living person the narrator encounters (not counting a certain Jakub towards the end), observes that "everything was asleep here" (p. 70). The narrator also has his

³ See Ł. Najder, "Z pamięci" (From Memory), *Tygiel Kultury* 2010, 4/6, pp. 169-170.; M. Olszewski, "W gabinecie figur woskowych" (In the cabinet of wax figures), *Akcent* 2010, 4, p. 114.

⁴ See Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall, Berkeley 1984, pp. 107-108.

⁵ See P. Paziński, *Pensjonat* (The Boarding House), Warszawa 2010, p. 103. All quotations are taken from the same edition.

⁶ See de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 109.

doubts and asks, “but is anybody still here?” (p. 104); his intuition intensifies the ever-present darkness that rules over the vacation house.⁷ The dead-end finality of the boarding house stands opposed to nature and its vital forces, which “want to take revenge on its old walls for their abjection and decrepitude and swallow them up entirely, leaving not even the faintest flicker of memory in their wake” (p. 127).

The narrator’s encounter with the building itself elicits a reaction; the empty rooms are still filled by words spoken there in the past. Perhaps due to its very decrepitude, everything that the narrator has experienced comes back to him, the past surprises him and overtakes him at every turn. He increasingly feels bitterly aware of the transitory nature of his heritage, the sense that it will only exist as long as he is alive. The space of memories and phantoms, that whole spectacle, takes shape in the intersection between his memory and the artifacts he discovers in the building. The story told, or rather played out on the pages of *The Boarding House* is that of the last moment of presence before annihilation. The man is taking advantage of the opportunity to experience that, because restoring the place in its previous incarnation is— if only in the theater of the imagination – something he needs in order to preserve continuity, weighed down as he feels by the obligation to bear witness for the benefit of succeeding generations. He realizes too late that he should ask questions about things, and there is nobody left, everyone has gone. The essence of continuity lies in the fact that each element fits inside the space between what came before and what comes later. Found photographs from the previous era, ancient newspapers, even an outdated telephone book with the names of Jewish city-dwellers must remain available, someone must be able to explain them, to save them from anonymity and oblivion. That is precisely why the ghosts of the former residents of the boarding house appear, characterized not by presence, but by mere appearance, being apparitions. These figures from a bygone era become activated when the protagonist decides to restore the old reality of the boarding house. The state in which they dwell is one of potentiality. According to Michel de Certeau, a place exists when it is haunted by various ghosts hidden within it, who can be summoned forth. This “young man” – as the ghosts in the boarding house refer to the main character– takes advantage of the different layers of space in the house, its palimpsest quality, and finds passageways leading to the previous reality of the place. He feels that “right near, beyond the wall, they are hiding” (p. 101), that they are living in secret.

Creative work and the work of memory require movement, stamping the impression of one’s own presence in an existing space, and that is why Paziński’s protagonist is a dynamic character, first traveling to the boarding house, then moving through its corridors, walking around the surrounding forest. Through his dynamism and engagement with his memories, he makes the place become real. The vacation home he creates through action, wearing the space into reality, truly comes into existence and becomes visible; we no longer have before us a deteriorating, abandoned building. Foremost among the criteria defined by de Certeau as signs of individual agency is walking; because of it, spatial elements become transformed, are given a chance to develop, and create spatial “expressions.”⁸

⁷ See P. Paziński, *Pensjonat*, pp. 70, 89, 106.

⁸ See de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, pp. 99, 100.

Space is created in a much more sophisticated procedure in *Bird Streets*, consisting of four mutually interconnecting stories; it should be read as a novel in four acts. Here, the dominant themes are absence, disappearance, the search for traces and getting lost in the labyrinth of memories and of sweeping historical change seen through the prism of an individual life. Paziński describes the Jewish world that, because it no longer exists, is hidden at the margin, at the intersection of things, where stitches and fractures are more visible. It is a world of shadows penetrated by streams of soft light that appear wherever reality has imposed itself, where the conviction that a new beginning is possible has only triumphed on the surface. He opens up or perhaps creates worlds that – as they mutually exclude each other – reveal secret passageways, narrows that let us see more, assembling a whole from the scattered traces of postwar Warsaw. The places he describes, secret alcoves and networks of back-streets, are not stuck to the ground. The conceptual city produced by theory, rational functionality and history, as encountered in de Certeau's work, is opposed to the place experienced in practice – present though invisible, erased from maps, emanating an afterlife so intense that contemporary reality pales and dwindles, giving life back to phenomena; the personal, metaphorical city in this way penetrates the comprehensible text of the planned and readable city.⁹

Footsteps, according to de Certeau, create and shape a space; here again, he reminds us of the importance of movement.¹⁰ In *Bird Streets*, movement occurs across a much bigger space than in *The Boarding House*: the landscape of Warsaw, with old streets named for birds such as Orla (Eagle), Gęsia (Goose), Kacza (Duck), where movement allows elements excluded from urban planning to surface:¹¹ in the book, the “refuse” rejected by the functional administration, these streets’ Jewish past, returns from exile.

The return of the past becomes particularly clear in the story “Izaak Feldwurm’s Manuscript” – an interesting example of how text and action can intersect, appearing in juxtaposition but simultaneously creating a continuum of cause and effect. In the story, each year the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising is marked by a ritual remembrance of Izaak Feldwurm and his manuscript, a lost and possibly nonexistent novel of world history: “the book ... presented an incomparable panoramic view of an era, even several areas. Wars and revolutions, uprising and periods of prosperity, birth and death – everything flowed together” (p. 112).¹² There was no escape from Feldwurm, he was a shadow, not clearly visible, but an almost tangible reflection of the fates of Jews in bygone times. His story was transmitted orally, and the continual changes to his pregnant legend led to his importuning presence. Not ready to give the world up to the living, he disturbed everyone without exception, appearing in distant parts of the city, haunting places and vanishing.

The main character of the story decides to trace the presence of Feldwurm in present-day Warsaw, running after him through the whole city, following the footsteps and activities of the Jewish writer. The correlation between walking around the city and the act of speaking generates the space,

⁹Ibid., p. 95.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 98.

¹¹Ibid., p. 96.

¹²P. Paziński, *Ptasie ulice* (Bird Streets), Warszawa 2013. All quotations come from this edition.

as the manuscript and its ritual remembrance accompany the wanderings of Feldwurm and the nameless protagonist. de Certeau has shown that the act of walking is for a city what speech is for language, that is, a process whereby the pedestrian *takes possession* of the topographical system;¹³ in Paziński's case it is a spatial actualization of Warsaw. In other words, walking around the city in search of Feldwurm and moving along the same paths as he traveled, the character creates a space that derives half from the current face of the city, half from fantasies, memories, and documents. It becomes a fissure, a tunnel connecting the current with the vanished.

One rambling stylistic device connects both of Paziński's books: the synecdoche, which de Certeau claims elongates a part of space by making it portray something bigger and put itself in the place of that bigger whole.¹⁴ The space created by Paziński reveals its palimpsest essence as it chooses one form of embodiment among all the potentialities available. The space in *The Boarding House* and *Bird Streets* is elongated, the whole is replaced by fragments, the carefully gathered remnants of memory. Synecdoche adds density to them, enlarging each detail and at the same time reducing the whole. That means that the space created has global ambitions, and becomes—here, in this moment, in this performance of memory and imagination— one complete embodiment.

Paziński's work proves that the performative turn can encompass more than human agency. The performative space— the space of spectacle— is created by both subjectivity and geometrical space that acts as a container for momentaneous actions. But performativity also presupposes repetition, as Ewa Domańska has written, since only repetition guarantees that phenomena can come into existence.¹⁵ In Paziński's case, repetition assures a new iteration of the protagonist's reading of space. What he offers the reader, on the other hand, is a portrayal of a place becoming fragmentary and convoluted histories, pasts offered to the reader, accumulated ages, capable of developing, but appearing here as potential stories, riddles to be solved.¹⁶

The language of Paziński's work is shaped in such a way that it not only presents reality, but also produces changes in it. History is recreated and repeated. Furthermore, as Anna Krajewska writes, in literature, "dreams, whether real or illusive, slow down, transforming events, manipulating sequences of images, and also experienced physically as fear, desire, horror, bliss, or rapture."¹⁷ In the act of reading, the created space is liberated, no longer restrained by the material text; that is a good point of departure for putting the viewers in the state experienced by the protagonist, juxtaposing memories with the real shape of a place. Particularly since each act of reading begins the representation of creating space anew, giving the reader his share in the process and making him a co-author, since it offers material for arranging on one's own. That is precisely why each of Piotr Paziński's novels can be read not as a whole but as a collection of fragments that can be set in a different order each time.

¹³See de Certeau, p. 99.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 102.

¹⁵See Domańska, p. 49.

¹⁶See de Certeau, p. 109.

¹⁷A. Krajewska, "Zwrot dramatyczny' a literaturoznawstwo performatywne" (The "Dramatic Turn" and Performative Literature Studies), *Przestrzenie Teorii* 2012, 17, p. 49.

„Where Did I Wake Up”

Joanna Grądziel-Wójcik

Stanisław Barańczak's
Morning in
an Apartment Block

Stanisław Barańczak, "Where Did I Wake Up" (transl. Clara Cavangh)

Where did I wake up? where am I? Where's
my right side, where's the left? where's above, and
where's below? Take it easy, that's my body
on its back, that's the hand I use
to hold my fork, there's the one I use
to seize my knife or extend in greeting;
beneath me are the sheet, mattress, and floor,
above me are the quilt and ceiling; on my
left the wall, the hall, the door, the milk bottle
that stands outside the door, since on my right I see
a window, and beyond that, dawn; under me
a gulf of floors, the basement, in it jars of jam
hermetically sealed for the winter;
above me other floors, the attic, laundry
hung on strings, a roof, TV
antennae; further to the left, a street
leads to the western suburbs, beyond them
fields, roads, borders, rivers, ocean
tides; on the right, already bathed in gray splotches
of dawn, other streets, fields, highways, rivers,
borders, frozen steppes and icy forests;
below me, foundations, earth, the fiery abyss,
above me clouds, the wind, a faint moon,
fading stars, yes;
relieved,
he shuts his eyes again, his head at rest
where the perpendiculars and planes all meet,
pinned to every cross at once
by the steady nails of his pounding heart.

It makes sense to begin with what the poem conveys in the most literal sense, with the “unique truth of the concrete” at the level of the world presented in the poem, the truth that Stanisław Barańczak prized so highly. The psychosomatic and perceptual situation of the poem’s subject (its persona) is made possible by the delineation of the temporal and spatial relations in which he found himself: the text locates the “I” in the concrete “here and now,” determining his way of expressing himself and offering the reader an interpretative angle—there is nothing in the poem that the speaker would not have experienced with his five senses,¹ and his complex monologue, developing *in statunascendi*, constitutes an answer to the question in the title, “Where am I?” the driving force of the lines that follow. The answer appears simple enough: the subject finds himself in his apartment block, in his apartment, in his bed; his awakening is completely physical, conveying the everyday experience of spatial disorientation that we usually feel in a new, unfamiliar place— as we open our eyes, we’re not quite grounded or able to define where we are. The poetic persona’s depth perception fails him, and his sense of proprioception, linked to the awareness of the body’s place in space, is impaired, which is why the first two lines are full of short questions, five in a row, as if in a panic, nervously repeating the interrogative pronoun. The text thus begins with a specific “system of abbreviation” in which phrases are shortened to make their meanings more precise (the opposite of Tadeusz Peiper’s concept of a system of expansion²): “Where did I wake up? where am I? Where’s” and the cognitive reductionism implied in those words continues throughout the poem, despite the fact that it revolves in ever-widening circles in space. The persona attempts to determine his position and his relation to his external environment – “Where’s / my right side, where’s the left? where’s above, and / where’s below?” – and this effort takes up almost the entire text, while the poem clarifies the reason for that disorientation – the man’s problems with proprioception are linked to a specific architectural context that influences his way of understanding the world in language.³ The persona’s sense of being lost and the incoherence of his body-image are reflected in the disintegration of his syntax.

Our ideas about the world begin with our bodies. In attempting to explore an aspect of the world, the subject finds a reference point in his own body, in a sense newly discovering and labeling it. The situation is extremely Gombrowiczque: the poem’s “I,” like Józio in *Ferdydurke*, wakes up in his own room with a feeling of strangeness and tries to rebuild his identity starting from bodily: “that’s the hand I use / to hold my fork, there’s the one I use / to seize my knife or extend in greeting.” To wake up means to be conscious, and that becomes possible through the persona’s re-corporealization (location is dependent on embodiment) and his re-instatement or imposition of order on his world: “The presence of the body here coordinates the experience of space, defines the axes of perception and measures existential distances.

¹ See A. Nasiłowska, *Persona liryczna* (The Lyrical Persona), Warszawa 2000, p. 49.

² On Barańczak’s system of expansion, see D. Pawelec, *Poezja Stanisława Barańczaka. Reguły i konteksty* (The Poetry of Stanisław Barańczak. Rules and Contexts), Katowice 1992, pp. 60–62. I have engaged in a broader discussion of connections between Barańczak’s early poetry and Tadeusz Peiper’s concept in *Dziennik poranny*, which is an offshoot and a critical continuation of the thought of the leaders of the early avant-garde, in “‘Zmiażdżona epopeja’. *Dziennik poranny* Stanisława Barańczaka a twórczość Tadeusza Peipera” (The “Crushed Epic.” Stanisław Barańczak’s *Dziennik poranny* and the Work of Tadeusz Peiper) in: J. Grądział-Wójcik, *Przestrzeń porównań. Szkice o polskiej poezji współczesnej* (Space of Comparisons. Sketches on Contemporary Polish Poetry), Poznań 2010, pp. 114–130.

³ See M. Rembowska-Pluciennik, “Propriocepcja” (Proprioception) in: *Sensualność w kulturze polskiej* (Sensuality in Polish Culture), <http://sensualnosc.ibl.waw.pl/pl/articles/propriocepcja-394/> [last accessed: 26.01.2015].

Movement and time become basic components of such an experience, and inseparable from space."⁴ For the subject of the poem, the question about his location thereby becomes simultaneously existential, metaphysical, and concerned with identity, and his corporeality, fragmented and inscribed in space (arms open wide, eyes shut, heart beating) begins the process of encoding meanings. The strenuous expression of his long-winded answer thus signifies a resistance to physical and psychic disintegration, and can be understood as a process of self-awareness taking place within the subject, in which the chaos of existence and feebleness of the body are overcome. The poem then represents an effort to create cohesion within the body, the one reference point and sure source of an answer, by which the world can be made palpable and real.

The situation comes under control in the third line, where the persona clearly feels relieved: "Take it easy, that's my body." This passage shows Barańczak's poetry, typically difficult to read out loud (because of the strong flow of enjambent and the phonetic complexity) use the diction, intonation, and emotional dramatization of spoken speech: this line demonstrates the poetic *mimesis* of language, insisting that we reconstruct the pragmatic situation of the utterance, which here functions as action – a calming gesture, as the speaker subdues his emotions and concentrates. At the same time, significantly, in this line the subject begins to signal his distance from his own body: the persona not only speaks from the perspective of soma (speaking as the body) but also looks at it from the outside (speaking about the body), treating it as an object of observation. Only when he becomes aware of its/his presence does he begin to place other, increasingly remote objects in space. The next segment of the poem, beginning in the third verse (in the original, the transition is marked by a colon), begins a phase of identifying the space surrounding the persona, generating questions about the multi-dimensionality and complexity of the human condition, deriving from its corporeality, and about the relationship between matter and metaphysics, between the body and consciousness.

In noting that third line is semantically divided into panic and reassurance, we should also observe the structure of the text in terms of versification. Jerzy Kandziora has written about "the irregular contour of a stichic poem" and the "baggy space of the work."⁵ Here, however, it seems that the text's structure has been carefully thought out, and the spatial opposition and expanding list are part of that structure, serving the poem's intersecting lines of division. The "perpendiculars and planes" crossing in the text also include the irreconcilably divided claims of versification and syntax, typical in Barańczak's poems; here, his line endings are moderately harmonious with semantics. The text is divided into three parts: the syntactic structure of the first two lines (and the beginning of the third) emphasizes the persona's nervous agitation, as we have seen; next, the body is localized in space, expanding fragmentarily, evoked by phrases divided by semicolons that form a single sentence, up to the final semicolon (in the original, a colon) in line 23. That place marks a second semantic turning point, when after the long descriptive section, the subject becomes conscious of his condition: "yes; relieved..." Here, the poem is divided by a caesura and a fundamental shift takes place, from first-person to

⁴ E. Rewers, *Post-polis. Wstęp do filozofii ponowoczesnego miasta* (Post-polis. Introduction to the Philosophy of the Postmodern City), Kraków 2005, pp. 67-68.

⁵ J. Kandziora, *Ocalony w gmachu wiersza. O poezji Stanisława Barańczaka*, Warszawa 2007, p. 105.

third-person narration. The poem's stichic nature is based on a poetics of speaking "in one breath"⁶ – the articulation of questions that resemble an inner monologue slows down when the monologue changes into one long, scrupulously punctuated sentence. At the same time, the poem is not as challenging to recite as, for example, "In One Breath"; the asyntactic flow, typical for Barańczak, is neutralized or softened here by the flow of the list intersecting with it, and there are relatively few strong enjambments. In the original, half of the 28 lines are 13 syllables long, with a caesura after the seventh syllable and a fixed paroxytone accent in the clausula and before the caesura. It occurs interlaced with 11-syllable lines with an equally classical arrangement (5 + 6), appearing nine times, observing accentual regularity in the caesura and the clausula. The remaining 5 lines consist of two 12-syllable lines (lines 2 and 4), one 10-syllable line (line 1), and two 9-syllable lines (lines 11 and 15). The greatest syllabic irregularity occurs in the first four lines (10-12-13-12), but when the subject recognizes his situation and his persona becomes stabilized in space, those more recognizable syllabic formats begin interweaving, with only two lines shortened to 9 syllables. Lines of 11 or 13 syllables are perfectly suited to long, complexly structured sentences with a tendency toward prosaicism; they allow narrative expansiveness and provide a dynamic of space without letting the verse become syllabo-tonic, i.e., become rhythmized, which could have the effect of exposing its metaphysical subtext too nakedly.⁷ The subject's monologue thus becomes suspended in the irregular variation of the phrasing, at times becoming regular for more sustained lengths: six lines in a row, from 17 to 22, describing portions of the landscape to the left and right of the speaker, are regular 13-syllable lines. We are not fully conscious of the meter, because the poet effectively camouflages it, moving syntactic divisions inside lines and thereby weakening the clausulas. At the same time, there is a specific kind of "battle with rhythm" here, in a sense analogous to the one described by Barańczak in his interpretation of Miłosz's "Świty" (Dawns)⁸: the flow, noticeably mellow when the poem is read aloud, of the 11- and 13-syllable lines, overlaps with the interrupted syntactic progression, and the renewed syntactic flow counteracts their measured smoothness. A total of seven semicolons break up the sentence, shredding it into fragments, each of which begins with a glance at a different side of the persona's world, distinctly marked by unequal distribution: "beneath me" and "on my left" appear earlier than "above me" and "on my right." The apparent bagginess of the poem is thus revealed to be illusory, and the stichic outline clearly thought out and logical: it organizes the content of the poem. While Polish poetry's two dominant and most recognizable forms intersect in the poem, the syllabic meter is also defied by a small number of irregularities.

⁶ Here, we are of course dealing with Barańczak's signature poetics of the poem, heralded by the title of the poem "In One Breath," with which he opened the eponymous collection, first published in December 1970, and reprinted two years later in *Dziennik poranny* (Morning Diary). The poem consists of one long, unfinished sentence, broken up into lines of irregular length, structured with a system of expansion, spoken in one breath and ordered only by punctuation, placing commas in the middle of lines; enjambment here works against syntax, rendering the words left in the clausula ambiguous through the tension generated between line intonation and sentence intonation. See Grądział-Wójcik, *Przestrzeń porównań* (Space of Comparisons), pp. 121-123.

⁷ On the importance of rhythm in Barańczak's poetry in relation to his metaphysical worldview, see Joanna Dembińska-Pawełec, "Poezja jest sztuką rytmu". O świadomości rytmu w poezji polskiej dwudziestego wieku (Miłosz – Rymkiewicz – Barańczak) ("Poetry is the art of rhythm." On the Consciousness of Rhythm in Polish Twentieth-Century Poetry [Miłosz – Rymkiewicz – Barańczak]), Katowice 2010.

⁸ S. Barańczak, "Tunel i lustro. Czesław Miłosz: *Świty*" (Tunnel and mirror. Czesław Miłosz's *Świty*) in Barańczak: *Pomyślane przepaście. Ośiem interpretacji* (Thought Abysses. Eight Interpretations), afterword by I. Opacki, ed. J. Tambor and R. Cudak, Katowice 1995, pp. 9-21.

Let us take another look at the initial semantic turn (after the first colon), where the persona manages to define the position of his body: "to jest mojeciało, / leżąc enawznak" (that's my body / on its back). The persona sees the world from a horizontal, inactive position, looking on from his bed, motionless as if crucified; and indeed, in Polish "nawznak" means "on one's back" but also includes the meaning "w znak," "in a sign," and the persona in effect becomes a sign with his arms spread out left and right– the sign of the cross. This man, the poem's subject, finds himself "where the perpendiculars and planes all meet," and his body becomes the center of the universe, an anthropocentric reference point around which the landscape described gradually in the lines that follow expands. Before the sacral references and metaphysical contexts of the poem, its use of Passion imagery and, in the original, the polysemy of the verb "krzyżować się" (to cross oneself, or to intersect),⁹ become apparent, however, its conditioning point of departure and poetically constructed "speaking space" features the scenery of an ordinary Polish apartment block of the 1970s.

The text is architecturally organized around spatial terms of definition, "stuffed with words and expressions connected with space and movement in space," divided by oppositions between right and left, high and low, leading the reader "to search for the key to the poem's overall meaning in its treatment of space,"¹⁰ to quote what Barańczak wrote about Przyboś's poem "Notre-Dame." If we adopt this interpretative strategy from Barańczak, who in that poem saw the cognitive transformation of the persona's record of his experiences and impressions inside a cathedral, then the apartment block in Barańczak's poem, like the cathedral in Przyboś's poem, ought to be understood in terms of the relationship between the person and the apartment block: the space of the cathedral or apartment block is both experienced corporeally and exerts influence on the interior of the subject interacting with it. Let us also attempt to reconstruct the lyrical situation, passing Barańczak's own text "through a sieve that retains precisely such spatial-kinetic units of meaning, words and expressions naming or defining location, movement, direction, position with regard to something, size, and so on, whether of the observer or of any of the objects of description."¹¹ In the poem, these elements have been selected to be arranged in contrasting pairs (each of which is heavily freighted with cultural symbolism): left – right, up – down, inside – outside, open – closed, motion – immobility.

The persona's process of situating himself begins at the horizontal plane: on the left side we have a fork, on the right a knife; "on my left" his gaze reaches through the wall to the hall to the door and the milk bottle; on his right, he sees only the window and the gray dawn. Next, the speaker analyses the vertical axis: "beneath me" are the sheet, mattress, floor, [above him] the quilt and ceiling, and further down beneath the floor– more floors, the basement and the jars of compote (in Cavanagh's translation, changed to "jam"); above the ceiling– other floors, the attic, strings with laundry, the roof and TV antennae. Here we should pause for a moment, before the persona's gaze wanders beyond the concrete walls: the poem conveys the architec-

⁹ Krzysztof Kłosiński deals with this in his interpretation; see Kłosiński, "Ponad podziałami" (Beyond Divisions), in: *„Obchodzę urodziny z daleka...”. Szkice o Stanisławie Barańczaku* ("I'm celebrating my birthday from far away...". Sketches on Stanisław Barańczak), ed. J. Dembińska-Pawelec, D. Pawelec, Katowice 2007., pp. 24-25.

¹⁰ Barańczak, "Wzlot w przepaść. Julian Przyboś: Notre-Dame" (Ascent into the Abyss. Julian Przyboś's "Notre-Dame") in Barańczak: *Pomyślane przepaście*, p. 31.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 31-32.

tonic realia of an apartment in a multi-storey block, filled with typical hardware and props, and selects those elements that indicate domesticity and practical everyday activities: cooking, storage, laundry, and watching (TV, the propagandistic window on the world). This poem from *Dziennik poranny* (Morning Journal) is one of many texts by Barańczak in which the scenery consists of a residential building from the PRL (Communist) era, a challenge to both the aesthetic and the humanistic aspects of architecture. The theme of the experience of living in an apartment block surfaces discreetly in that book, develops further in *Sztuczne oddychanie* and returns with increased intensity in *Tryptyk z betonu, zmęczenia i śniegu*, particularly in the cycle *Kątem u siebie* (*Wiersze mieszkalne*). In the poem discussed herein we get a foretaste of the metaphors to be used in those later works, a kind of template of the apartment block at a particular (but not favorite) time of day (morning, dawn) that will be continued in later texts.

In designating the space, the speaker attempts to situate himself in the building's three dimensions, but also reveals the existence of a "fourth dimension," expanding solid geometry to include the relationship that develops between the apartment block and the human being, marking the way a building conditions the behavior and attitude of an individual inside it.¹² This fourth, anthropological and potentially metaphysical dimension becomes the most important one in the poem. To what extent do the apartment block and its internal spatial dynamics organize the social existence of each of its residents? How do they influence the behaviour and feelings of the persona, how do they shape his experience?

A few years later, in his review of the book *Odczepić się* by Miron Białoszewski, Barańczak notes: "New housing projects, box-blocks, sky-scrapers and cookie-cutter high-rises rising up out of the marshes driven through by trucks, for better or for worse, that is the permanent dominant of our landscape, the overpowering (though not particularly attractive) symbol of our contemporary life, the illustration of life as it goes on here and now."¹³ Where the Białoszewski poems discussed in that review can be read as a document of life in Communist Poland, poetical transformations in verse of the poet's experiences living in an eleven-storey skyscraper on Lizbońska Street, Barańczak's aim is clearly something other than recording the events, onerous attractions, and difficult but gradual, possible process of making a home for oneself. The author of *Dziennik poranny* has no wish to live in an apartment block, because it has become for him a symbol of captivity, indoctrination, and subordination to the authorities. Late twentieth-century modernist residential block architecture, disregarding the local and historical specificity of a place, lacking respect for the emotional and aesthetic needs of its inhabitants, brought with it a particular vision of the social order and expressed a belief in social planning—architectural projects were supposed to be capable of transforming human nature. Architecture that relied on abstract, geometric shapes could become the perfect base for the formation of a collective susceptible to ideological control, stifling individual expression. In the same year that *Dziennik poranny* was published, a housing project was begun in St. Louis, Missouri, designed by Minoru Yamasaki as a model example of modernist style and

¹²See Mildred Reed Hall, Edward T. Hall, *The Fourth Dimension in Architecture: The Impact of Building on Behavior: Eero Saarinen's Administrative Center for Deere & Company, Moline, Illinois*, Santa Fe 1975, p. 15.

¹³S. Barańczak, "Widok z dziewiątego piętra. Pożegnanie z Białoszewskim" (View from the Ninth Floor. Goodbye to Białoszewski) in Barańczak: *Przed i po: szkice o poezji krajowej przełomu lat siedemdziesiątych i osiemdziesiątych* (Before and After: Sketches on Polish Poetry of the Late 1970s and Early 1980s). Londyn 1988, p. 21.

recognized in 1951 by the American Institute of Architecture.¹⁴ It was the symbolic "death of modern architecture,"¹⁵ while in Poland that architecture was experiencing a second youth.

One of the negative social effects of residential block construction was the formal and functional uniformity which it created, failing to satisfy social and cultural needs and not allowing the expression of individual aspirations. Importantly, the inhabitants of such architecture were not "able to feel an identification not only with their city, but also with their immediate vicinity."¹⁶ The difficulty of making one's home, the regularized and geometric organization of the surrounding space, the monotonous repetition of the structures that impose vertical and horizontal order on space are not so much thematized in the poem as shown via its structure, arising from the intersection of various systems, illustrating Zygmunt Bauman's words: "All it takes to regiment the desires and activities of city dwellers is to make the system of streets and houses regular. All it takes to stop people from acting in disorderly, capricious and unpredictable ways is to rid the city of everything haphazard and unplanned."¹⁷ Unlike Białoszewski, Barańczak does not seek to explore the "poetic possibilities that paradoxically lie hidden in the sterile, boring landscape of a new housing project";¹⁸ he is not interested in the interaction between literature and architecture, as in the case of the poems written on Lizbońska Street, expressed through the adaptation of the poetic form to a new spatial situation,¹⁹ he is not attempting to fight the "boredom of apartment blocks." The author of *Wiersze mieszkalne* on the contrary is trying to expose the degrading and oppressive nature of such buildings. The poem discussed here is situated at the beginning of Barańczak's trajectory down that path, unmasking the inhuman fourth dimension of the "residential machine," using a long list to reveal the elementary and (intellectually and emotionally) shabby interior of the building.

When the persona begins to gradually take in the surrounding space, recognizing its regular features ("beneath" or "below me" and "above me" are mostly at the beginning of lines, while "on my left" and "on my right" are later in the line), he begins to look out on what lies beyond his apartment. The intersecting vertical and horizontal axes here function to impose order on space, and the four sides of the cross thus created are identified with the four directions, composing a basic figure of the division of space that spreads out to become increasingly abstract and vague: on the left we have a street that leads to the western suburbs, further on there

¹⁴See K. Wilkoszewska, *Wariacje na postmodernizm* (Variations on Postmodernism), Kraków 2008, p. 159; J. Wujek, *Mity i utopie architektury XX wieku* (Myths and Utopias of Twentieth-Century Architecture), Warszawa 1986, p. 10.

¹⁵Wilkoszewska, *Wariacje na postmodernizm*, p. 165.

¹⁶See A. Basista, *Betonowe dziedzictwo. Architektura w Polsce czasów komunizmu* (Concrete Legacy. Architecture in Poland in the Communist Era), Warszawa – Kraków 2001, p. 121.

¹⁷Z. Bauman, "Wśród nas, nieznajomych – czyli obcych w ponowoczesnym mieście" (Among Us Strangers, or On Outsiders in the Postmodern City) in: *Pisanie miasta, czytanie miasta* (City Writing, City Reading), ed. A. Zeidler-Janiszewska, Poznań 1997, p. 148.

¹⁸Barańczak, "Widok z dziewiątego piętra," p. 21.

¹⁹Instead of horizontal poems like "Leżenie" (Lying Down) in his book *Było i było* (Been and Been), Białoszewski writes poems in vertical columns about skyscrapers, tower-poems – verticalized, adapted in graphic shape to the form of a building, conveying spatial relations as well as the subject's placement within them. On the poetry he wrote after moving to Lizbońska Street, see.: J. Grądział-Wójcik, "Blok, ja w nim". Doświadczenie architektury a rewolucja formy w późnej poezji Mirona Białoszewskiego" (Apartment Complex, Me Inside It. The Experience of Architecture and the Revolution in Form in the Later Poetry of Miron Białoszewski) in: *W kręgu literatury i języka. Analizy i interpretacje* (In the Sphere of Literature and Language. Analyses and Interpretations), ed. M. Michalska-Suchanek, Gliwice 2011.

are fields, highways, borders, rivers, and ocean tides; on the right “a window, and beyond that, dawn,” or rather “gray splotches of dawn,” further on “other streets, fields, highways, rivers, / borders,” as it gets increasingly cold: “frozen steppes and icy forests.” The world outside is neither optimistic, nor varied, but rather anonymous, monotonous, and disheartening. Perhaps its division conceals a reference to the geographical and political layout of the world, evoking the countries beyond the western “wall” opening on the ocean on one side and the space of the steppes and the frozen tundra on the other. The space expanding along the vertical axis may elicit stronger emotions, stretched out, in keeping with the symbolism of the cross, between earthliness and immortality; there is a menacing undertone to “under me / a gulf of floors” (in Polish, the effect of the enjambment is intensified, coming after a much shorter line that disrupts the irregular syllabication), the basement and the “hermetically sealed” jars (the agglomeration of words broken up by enjambment underscores the evocation of closed spaces), and particularly what is located lowest of all: “foundations, earth, the fiery abyss.” Looking up, we find the attic, the strings, and the roof (and, somewhere in the ether, fear—in Polish, “strach,” featuring assonance and alliteration with regard to the previous words) and the ungraspable clouds, wind and increasingly pale and almost invisible moon and stars. The gulf and the abyss below seem considerably more tangible and convincing than this misty vision of the silent sky, and all of this cosmic imagery, catastrophic in origin, becomes trivialized by the perspective of the housing project.

The poem’s imagery invokes all of the elements: the ocean, waters, rivers, ice, frost, earth, the fiery abyss. It creates a panoramic, almost cosmic perspective, as if the persona suspended in his apartment block were able to see more and farther than is humanly possible. The world around him is unattractive and abstract, it is frightening, even blood-chilling. We find an internalized, private catastrophism here, devoid of visionary metaphors, a sense of community or the redemptive nature of annihilation – its apartment incarnation resembles a kind of “little apocalypse,” an artificial “catastrophe-flavored” prophecy. The superficially stable, banal and rather boring everyday reality of the era of the “little stabilization” (the 1960s) with milk delivered to the doorstep every morning, stores of food ready for winter and laundry drying conceals disquieting signals that emerge in a lexicon of negative references, using the opposition “open-closed” (closedness, hermetic sealing, wall, border – gulf, abyss, steppes, wind).

In the Christian symbolic tradition, the arms of the cross represented the four directions, and each detail of the environment was incorporated into the plan for salvation and endowed with sense: the Church Fathers taught that the right beam of the cross pointed east because light (and therefore salvation) come from that direction.²⁰ The right side of Christ corresponds to *vita aeterna* (eternal life), suggesting his godliness, while the left side betokens *vita praesens* (temporal life), with the important condition that these sides are always designated from the point of view of the Crucified One. In Barańczak’s poem, the left side of “my body” shows a street leading to the western suburbs, and the light coming from the east is “in gray splotches” and portends a severe winter; the landscape around the cross is deprived of divine power and light, faded and bereft of hope, and only the abyss takes on the expressive color of fire. If the

²⁰M. Lurker, “Misterium krzyża” (Mystery of the Cross) in: *Przesłanie symboli w mitach, kulturach i religiach* (Meaning of the Symbol in Myths, Cultures, and Religions), trans. R. Wojnakowski, Kraków 1994, p. 395.

man lying on his back is meant to remind us of Christ on the cross, however, that symbolism is adapted to the realities of the apartment complex –trivialized, desecrated, and immobilized like the poem's persona. There is a crucifixion, but without the prospect of salvation; there is "wznak" (lying on one's back), but no "znak" (sign). We can state, in Barańczak's phrase, that being in this apartment contains "something of life after death,"²¹ a sleepy "half-life" without the promise of resurrection. The persona remains horizontal, shutting his eyes back up...

The text's emotional dominant is the persona's unconditional consent to remain motionless, his passivity, both physical and mental. "Relieved" at the intersection of vertical and horizontal, he says "yes" to his life; he not only cannot, but rather does not want to and makes no effort to change his situation, though he is also far from being a "praiser of recumbency,"²² like the persona of a verse cycle Białoszewski wrote even before his move to the high-rise on Lizbońska Street. If we accept that the "fourth dimension" in space forces us to act a certain way, influences our emotions and causes our feelings to adapt to the place,²³ then in Barańczak's personathis space elicits mainly passive states of mind (precisely the opposite of what happens in the apartment complex poems of Białoszewski²⁴). "The human being experiences moods in relation to a place. A church has associations with moods of solemnity, calm, and ceremony, while a circus or busy street are the opposite, places of joy, amusement and merriment" – analogously, the apartment complex in this poem, whose crossing vertical and horizontal lines bring to mind a prison,²⁵ does not elicit any reaction in the persona, whether emotional or intellectual, besides disorientation and fear. The subject makes no attempt to change anything in his reality, he does not spring into action, makes no effort to take initiative, to take control of or shape the space he describes; he simply occupies it, taking a submissive stance towards reality, even though that does not entail acceptance of his psychophysical condition.²⁶ The subject is crucified, or rather paralyzed– by infirmity, passivity, or fear? Shut up "hermetically" in the apartment complex, dwelling somewhere in between the strings in the attic and the gulf of floors, he does not "stand out," he does not stick his head outside as did Białoszewski,²⁷ also because the glaciated landscape and gray, uncertain dawn are rather

²¹Barańczak, "Widok z dziewiątego piętra," p. 22.

²²Z. Łapiński, "Psychosomatyczne są te moje wiersze". Impuls motoryczny w poezji J. Przybosa" ("Those Poems of Mine are Psychosomatic." The Motor Impulse in the Poetry of J. Przyboś), *TekstyDrugie* 2002, 6, p. 11.

²³See H. Buczyńska-Garewicz, *Miejsca, strony, okolice. Przyczynek do fenomenologii przestrzeni* (Places, Pages, Surroundings. A Contribution to the Phenomenology of Space), Kraków 2006, pp. 237-238.

²⁴In his Lizbońska Street poems, Białoszewski abandoned the recumbent lifestyle and took on an upright stance, ceaselessly standing by the window, running down the stairs, wandering the corridors, leaning out of the window physically and looking outside metaphorically also, living in the place by means of the meaning with which he endowed it.

²⁵"The grid replaces the distinct and diverse places of the city, tightly packed with meaning and meaning-giving, with anonymous intersections and sides of identical squares; if the grid symbolizes something, it is the priority of the outline over the reality, of logical reason over the irrational element; the intent to subjugate the whims of nature and history by forcing them into the framework of relentless, irrevocable laws," Bauman wrote. "Wśród nas, nieznajomych," p. 148.

²⁶According to Yi-Fu Tuan, "the body not only occupies space, but rules it through its intentions." Yi-Fu Tuan, *Przestrzeń i miejsce* (Space and Place), trans. A. Morawińska, introduction by Krzysztof Wojciechowski, Warszawa 1987, p. 52.

²⁷In the book *Odczepić się* (To Disconnect) a persona locked out on the stairway of an apartment complex declares: "so what if / I stick out with gazes / fears / ecstasies" ("bo co iraz / wystaję / wyglądaniami / obawami / uniesieniami"). See M. Białoszewski, "Odczepić się" i inne wiersze opublikowane w latach 1976-1980 ("To Disconnect" and Other Poems Published 1975-1980), Warszawa 1994, p. 73.

forbidding. In the world represented there is no long-term perspective, because the persona, rigidly solidified in his apartment, has nothing to wake up for – in the poem's metaphysical space, there is crucifixion, but no resurrection.²⁸

The cross represents “shameful humiliation and praiseworthy elevation, human suffering to the point of death and (as a result) the ascension into heaven of the Son of God”²⁹ – the problem is that in the apartment complex version of reality that second part of the picture does not come into being. The room seems to be a prison, and the bed a tomb, from which it is impossible to rise. On the other hand, crucifixion can here be understood as a death sentence, the customary punishment for criminals and slaves that the Romans used from the time of the Punic Wars.³⁰ And in fact this non-religious meaning appears to dominate in the text; the building's horizontal and vertical planes are filled up by earthly life, but nothing begins or opens in it, and the architecture reveals itself to be soulless and godless, containing totalitarian repression and captivity. Jerzy Kandziora claims that in Barańczak's earlier work, the body becomes “a tool for the demystification of ideology” and represents “a pose of consenting to captivity,” and if it also registers “his ineffective, reduced existence within the four walls of the apartment,” that leads “to a generalization about the human condition,” sublimating the persona's life.³¹ At the same time, Kandziora remarks that the persona of *Dziennik poranny* (Morning Journal) and *Sztuczne oddychanie* (Artificial Respiration) “experiences his stations of the cross in the everyday reality of the PRL. In the sphere of poetics, this corresponds to the narrative formula of looking in from the outside. Only the narrator, situated outside the world of the poem, a visionary, moralist commentator who performs a metaphysical diagnosis, can inscribe his persona in the tradition of the biblical and sacral, and compare his fate with that of the Crucified One.”³²

Throughout the poem “Where did I wake up” the speaker is engaged in an effort to locate his position in space: the first-person narrator places himself next to, over, and under, in the middle of the situation being described. In line 24 the persona's declaration suddenly finishes with the word “yes” (“tak”), a pause after the caesura; from that point on, the perspective of the narration changes to the third person. The subject now looks at himself from the outside, taking the perspective that dominates later texts by the author on similar themes. The change in the persona's point of view does not signify his mobilization, however, as would be typical for the modernist vision of urban space;³³ movement here does not become a source of knowledge-

²⁸In contrast to how dawn functions in Białoszewski's poems, in Barańczak's poetic universe it cannot turn into day. Likewise in other poems in *Dziennik poranny*, at daybreak “darkness thickens,” “at dawn each day night must begin” (“ciemność gęstnieje,” “o świcie codziennie noc musi się zacząć” in “Och, wszystkie słowapisane” [O, all written words]), and “At half past four in the morning [...] the naked bodies of lovers” (“O wpół do piętejrano [...] ciało kochanków nagie”) are sweaty “from dark consciousness” (“od jawy ciemnej,” in “O wpół do piętejrano” [At half past four]). Also, in “1.1.80: Elegii trzeciej, noworocznej z Tryptyku” (1.1.80: Third Elegy, at New Year's, from a Tryptych) we read: “like a garbage chute / the abyss waits below us: / at the feet of a crowded apartment building / at the feet of the hungry globe” (“jakżsyp do śmieci / przepaśczeni pod nami: / u stóp ludnego bloku, / u stóp głodnego globu”) and the request: (“send me long sleep / and let me open my eyes / when it's all over” (“**ześlij mi** długie spanie / iniechoczy stworzę, / gdy już będzie powszystkim”).

²⁹Lurker, *Misterium krzyża*, p. 389.

³⁰Ibid., p. 390.

³¹Kandziora, *Ocalony w gmachu wiersza*, pp. 40-41.

³²Ibid., p. 102.

³³See E. Rybicka, *Modernizowanie miasta. Zarys problematyki urbanistycznej w nowoczesnej literaturze polskiej* (Modernized Cities. Outline of the Urban Problematic in Modern Polish Literature), Kraków 2003, p. 109.

and does not open a perspective on the external world. The subject's re-embodiment does not render him dynamic, intellectually or otherwise: the persona is placed in a particular spatial, architectural, and existential situation, which he describes, but is he capable of interpreting it? The "relieved" man says only "yes" and "shuts his eyes" to reality, perhaps from fatigue, but more likely in a refusal to awaken, since awakening would mean accepting responsibility. On the other hand, the "I" who observes the man appears to understand more—he not only senses and registers the external world, but understands it; it is no accident that the head is placed at the intersection of all perpendiculars and planes. The overpowering force of the building's and thus the system's oppressive (crucifying) grid exerts its influence with particular strength on his way of thinking: the persona inhabiting the "concrete cave"³⁴ becomes homeless, when he stops thinking and surrenders to the architecture of the complex, when he "shuts his eyes," when he does not resist. The detached "I" looking at his body from the outside completes the process of his objectification, while claiming for itself the right to evaluate and pronounce judgment.

The metaphysical interpretation offered by the body suspended in the anonymous space of the cosmos does not invalidate the other, horizontal body: the persona, crucified by the perpendiculars and planes of the complex, inscribed into its modernist geometry and worldview, becomes pinned to "every cross at once / by the steady nails of his pounding heart." If one of the two is being privileged here, it is the one closer to the body—the anatomical one, the spine, our most private axis of the world, the support of the body that is unable or unwilling to stand upright or to rise from the dead. A crucified man cannot find the strength to change his position, since he does not have external support; the reason for the lack of meaning in the world appears to be the hazy and uncertain presence of Transcendence – the moon has grown pale and the stars are barely visible. The human being must then endow things with meaning himself and that is why his position provokes another question, concerning his moral spine – his social stance, the values he holds, and the strength of character that would allow him to get up and resist. The persona, lost in the space of the complex, recovers only his bodily form, and the description of his state of being remains remarkably psychosomatic: the rumbling, intensified, accelerated and loud rhythm of his heart may indicate fear, his terror of his situation – "he" appears pinned to the cross by his own fear, overcome by impotence, and only his heart "emits a sound of cheap mortality," to paraphrase a later poem in the cycle *Kątem u siebie* (Sheltered at Home).

Subsequent texts in *Dziennik poranny* say clearly and straightforwardly why the persona is afraid: in "Kołysanka" (Lullaby) "a faint trail of blood flows from my temple," and when the time comes to get up, "you must force your neck into a collar of thorns"; in "Śpiący" (The Sleeper) "the day is heavier," "the day is crafty, / without warning it goes [...] for the jugular." In a later poem from *Sztuczne oddychanie*, "N.N. budzisię" (N. N. awakens), the situation analyzed above repeats itself: the persona "Awakens. I am here. He is there. He opens his eyes," and the internal voice reminds him of the question that he dreamed about, that has disturbed his sleep and thrown him off balance: "Who / am I?" "Just take it easy. Take it easy," comes the answer, familiar to us, and the speaker, distancing himself from the main character, called N.N., diagnoses the situation: "he woke up on a new day, a new fear (am I here?), a new / uncertainty (who?)" Barańczak's apartment complex poems from *Dziennik poranny* are far

³⁴From the poem "Mieszkać" (Living) in the cycle *Kątem u siebie* (Sheltered at Home).

from optimistic: “I don’t know whether it’s possible now to read in those poems even a trace of faith that something will change– if there is any such trace, I suppose it’s based on the idea of *credo quia absurdum*, stubbornness not supported by any empirical data,”³⁵ the poet himself has said. The change that appears in *Wierszy mieszkalne* is based on the attempt to refuse to say “yes” and to express opposition through the gesture of the persona’s standing upright, taking an active position, open to the world: in the poem “Dykto, sklejk, tekturo, płytopaździerzowa” (Plywood, pulpwood, pasteboard, particle board), the persona wishes to stand up and be like a “simple prayer,” (“pacierzprosty”), despite the difficulty of attaining such a position. The persona of *Dziennik poranny* finds himself at the moment before the definitive awakening of his consciousness, but it is only a matter of time: “Sleep. A little while longer, / lift up your sleepy heads, your heavy heads / lift them up, all who labor by day” (“The Sleeper”).

³⁵S. Barańczak, *Zaufać nieufności. Osiem rozmów o sensie poezji* (Trusting Distrust. Eight Conversations on the Sense of Poetry), Kraków 1993, p. 114.

KEYWORDS:

metaphysics

poetry of twentieth century

STANISŁAW BARAŃCZAK

modernist architecture

Intonacja w wierszu

średniowiecznym
i sylabicznym

Agnieszka Kwiatkowska

Ćwiczenie:

Proszę zbadać bieg linii intonacyjnej w przywołanych niżej wierszach. Jaki jest jej związek z budową wersyfikacyjną poszczególnych utworów? Czy napięcie między intonacją a podziałem na wersy ma wartość semantyczną?

1 Przetoć stoł wieliki świeboda:

Staje na nim piwo i woda,
I k temu mięso i chleb,
I wiele jnych potrzeb,
Podług dostatka tego,
Ktole może dostać czego.

(P. Słota, *Pieśń o chlebowym stole*)

2 A jacy to źli ludzie mieszczenie krakowianie,
Żeby pana swego, wielkiego chorągiewnego,
Zabiliście, chłopci, Andrzeja Tęczyńskiego!
Boże się go pożałuj, człowieka dobrego,
I że tako marnie szczedł od nierownia swojego!
(*Pieśń o zabiciu Andrzeja Tęczyńskiego*)

3 Tyś Pan wszytkiego świata. Tyś niebo zbudował
I złotymi gwiazdami ślicznieś uhaftował.
Tyś fundament założył nieobeszłej ziemi
I przykryłeś jej nagość zioly rozlicznemi.

Za Twoim rozkazaniem w brzegach morze stoi
A zamierzonych granic przeskoczyć się boi.
Rzeki wód nieprzebranych wielką hojność mają,
Biały dzień a noc ciemna swoje czasy znają.
(J. Kochanowski, *Pieśń XXV z Ksiąg wtórych*)

4 Królowi hymn możnemu śpiewajmy, Kameny!
Bogu naprzód, bez Boga nic nie godno ceny.
On stworzył, On sprawuje, On oświeca tego
Żywotem, szczęściem, sławą. Król sam zna samego.

I to cel jego sprawom. On w pierwszej ojczyźnie,
Gdy moc błąd wziął bezbożny, sam się oparł, iż nie
Zgasła powszechna wiara. Stąd go łaski swojej.
Pan naczyniem uczynił, w pokoju, we zbrojej,

Więtszym obojga szczęścia. (...)

(M. Sęp Szarzyński, *Pieśń VII*,
Stefanowi Batoremu, królowi polskiemu)

Ad 1 Wiersz Przecławia Słoty, znany jako Pieśń o chlebowym stole, powstał w średniowieczu i zachowuje wszystkie cechy systemu intonacyjno-zdaniowego, w którym intonacja współtworzy konstantę wierszotwórczą. Intonacja to brzmieniowy odpowiednik składniowej segmentacji wypowiedzi, który polega na zmianach wysokości tonu głosu zależnie od budowy i znaczenia wypowiedzianych zdań. Intonacja opadająca to kadencja, a wznosząca – antykadencja. W przywołanym wierszu linia intonacyjna wynikająca z budowy składniowej (we współczesnej edycji dodatkowo podkreślona interpunkcją, w polszczyźnie zdeterminowaną przez syntaksę) w żaden sposób nie koliduje z podziałem na wersy. W każdym wersie mieści się kadencja (np. w szóstym) lub antykadencja (wersy 1, 2, 3, 4, 5). Wyliczenie nieskomplikowanych potraw kuchni staropolskiej ujęte zostało w szeregu antykadencji. Ekwiwalencję wersów dodatkowo podkreślają polisyndeton i paralelizm składniowy (sygnalizujące enumerację) oraz deklinacyjne rymy gramatyczne. Utwór napisany jest frazą małą – linia intonacyjna nie zmienia swojego biegu w żadnym z przywołanych wersów. Rozmiar wersów oscyluje wokół ośmiozgłoskowca (waha się od 7 do 9 sylab), wyraźnie dążąc do wtórnego wyrównania melicznego, dodatkowo wiążąc intonację składniową i wersową. Taka długość wersu dobrze współgra z naturalnym tokiem języka polskiego, w którym – zgodnie z zasadami składni – budowane są całości intonacyjne o zbliżonym rozmiarze.

Ad 2 Pieśń o zabiciu Andrzeja Tęczyńskiego to wiersz średniowieczny intonacyjno-zdaniowy, napisany dużą frazą. W obrębie tego systemu wersyfikacyjnego w dłuższych wersach granica składniowa wyznacza nie tylko klauzulę, ale również przedział wewnętrzny (choć tu zawsze jest słabsza niż koniec zdania). Linia intonacyjna wynikająca ze składni nie kłóci się z podziałem wersowym – klauzula jest zawsze tożsama z finałem kadencji lub antykadencji, a w wierszu brak przerzutni. W obrębie jednak pojedynczego wersu intonacja zmienia swój bieg, a przestrzeń wersową wypełniają antykadencja i kadencja, uzupełniające się wzajemnie pod względem semantycznym. Wyrazista intonacja sprawia, że zmiana przypadająca w połowie wersu jest wyraźnie słyszalna i stanowi swego rodzaju intonacyjną średniówkę (6/7 + 6/7/8). Wiersz oscyluje wokół trzynastozgłoskowca. Nie jest to jeszcze sylabizm względny, ale można przypuszczać, że taka długość wersu wydawała się anonimowemu autorowi stosowna do opiewania nieszczęsnego losu dzielnego Andrzeja Tęczyńskiego przez analogię do antycznej wierszowanej epiki heroicznej. Zmiana biegu intonacji w obrębie każdego wersu buduje paralelizm intonacyjny (często wsparty paralelizmem składniowym) w partiach poświęconych opłakiwaniu rycerza, a dynamizuje tekst we fragmentach opisujących niecną napaść.

Ad 3 Hymn Jana Kochanowskiego o incipicie „Czego chcesz od nas, Panie” opublikowany wraz ze zbiorem *Pieśni*, to regularny trzynastozgłoskowiec ze średniówką po siódmej sylabie, z paroksytoniczną stabilizacją akcentu przed średniówką i w klauzuli. Intonacja składniowa zasadniczo pozostaje tu zgodna z wierszową, choć nie jest to typową cechą sylabizmu. W wierszu nie ma przerzutni. Bieg linii intonacyjnej (kadencja lub antykadencja) obejmuje cały wers lub – rzadziej – przestrzeń przedśredniówkową bądź pośredniówkową. Budowane układy intonacyjne są symetryczne, dychotomiczne, układane w dystychy, cięte regularną średniówką. Harmonia struktury odzwierciedla wizję opisywanego świata, doskonale zaprojektowanego przez Boga-architekta. Silna meliczność tekstu i liczne paralelizmy składniowe sprzyjają zgodności podziału wersowego i składniowego. Jest to jeden z pierwszych polskojęzycznych utworów Kochanowskiego (powstał prawdopodobnie w latach 1558–1559), możliwe więc, że jego układ intonacyjny zachowuje jeszcze cechy typowe dla liryki średniowiecznej¹. W późniejszych pieśniach Kochanowskiego pojawiają się przerzutnie, ale są one tylko niewielkim zaburzeniem w zgodności toku składniowego i wersowego, zazwyczaj ilustrującego harmonię otaczającego świata.

Ad 4 W *Pieśni VII* Mikołaja Sępa Szarzyńskiego w obrębie jednego wersu intonacja zmienia się czasem trzykrotnie (w wersach: 3, 5, 6, 8), a nawet czterokrotnie (w wersie 4). Wiersz jest sylabiczny, napisany trzynastozgłoskowcem ze średniówką po siódmej sylabie oraz z paroksytoniczną stabilizacją akcentu przed średniówką i w klauzuli, ma więc identyczną budowę jak wyżej analizowany utwór Kochanowskiego, ale pod względem intonacji bardzo się od niego różni. Dynamika wiersza Sępa Szarzyńskiego ujawnia się nie w budowie wersologicznej, ale dopiero w napięciu pomiędzy wersyfikacją a intonacją². Układ linii intonacyjnej, operowanie różną długością pauzy, unikanie paralelizmów składniowych budują – specyficzną dla tego poety – niesymetryczną strukturę utworu. Taki sposób operowania intonacją ma znaczenie również w planie treści. Szarzyński użył systemu sylabicznego w zupełnie innym celu niż Kochanowski – nie aby oddać harmonię świata, ale by ukazać jego zmienność i nieustanny ruch. Nawet w pochwalnej, dydaktycznej pieśni poświęconej Batoremu uderza zmienność linii intonacyjnej. Celowe, daleko idące rozbieżności pomiędzy tokiem składniowym a wierszowym, rozejście rytmu wiersza i zdania dalece odbiegają od renesansowej twórczości i czynią z Szarzyńskiego prekursora baroku.

¹ J. Pelc, *Wiersze Jana Kochanowskiego w rękopisie Osmolskiego a wczesne wydania hymnu „Czego chcesz od nas, Panie, za Twe hojne dary”*, „Archiwum Literackie”, t. IV, pt. *Miscellanea Staropolskie*, Wrocław 1972, s. 66.

² J. Błoński, *Mikołaj Sęp Szarzyński a początki polskiego baroku*, Kraków 2001.

Ars poetica

– in Latin, the art of poetry. Using the criteria of genre and theme, it can be used to define at least three types of literary and metaliterary texts that form a clearly defined continuum from antiquity to the present day in the cultural universe of the West: 1) classical normative and descriptive poetics, codifying the rules governing literary creation in various genres; 2) a specific type

of self-reflexive modernist lyric poem devoted to expounding diverse views on the essence of art, often – but not necessarily – entitled “Ars poetica”; 3) self-instruction manuals and guidebooks for creative writing, intended for amateur authors, as well as essays devoted to the secrets of the writer’s craft. The ars poetica is connected with such terms as metaliterature, self-referentiality or self-reflexivity, and *mise en abyme*, used more generally to define certain literary techniques, but it refers to specific texts.

Ad 1 The genre of the ars poetica, popular in ancient times, involved laying down the rules and norms that writers should observe and included pointers on authorial technique. These were usually theoretical treatises, and often took the form of a long didactic poem.¹ Aristotle’s *Poetics* and Horace’s *Ars Poetica* are commonly considered to be the first works of this type. The classical understanding of poetry as an art (gr. *techne*) was conducive to the development of instructional texts defining the rules of poetic creation. A potential author of literary works had to know the codified rules and master the related skills. In the Middle Ages the most important versions of the ars poetica emerged from the cultures of Paris and Orléans. The most well-known productions of that era include Mathieu de Vendôme’s *Ars versificatoria* (in the 12th century) and Jean de Garlande’s *Poetria* (in the 13th). The genre did not truly blossom until the Renaissance, which heralded a return ad fontes, to the classical perception of poetic art. In that period, treatises appeared that directly referenced the thought of Aristotle and Horace: Vida’s *De arte poetica* (1527), Scaliger’s *Poetices libri septem* (1561), Ronsard’s *Abrégé de l’Art Poétique* (1565) and many others. The development of French classicism in the seventeenth century brought further treatises of that kind, among which the most important and influential was Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux’s *L’Art Poétique* (1674). The strong normative element in this poem took precedence over descriptive poetics, and had an enormous influence not only on French literature of the time, but also on the literary accomplishments of the entire European Enlightenment.

In Poland, the history of the ars poetica begins with Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski’s poem *De perfecta poesi* (*On perfect poetry*, approximately 1630), which enjoyed popularity throughout Europe. The production of such treatises reached its height during the Enlightenment, in connection with the revival of ancient literary theory doctrines. The most famous examples include *Sztuka rymotwórcza* (*The Art of Rhyming*) by Franciszek Ksawery Dmochowski (1788), an adaptation of Boileau’s *L’Art poétique* N. Boileau; Filip Neriusz Golański’s *O wymowie i poezji* (*On Speech and Poetry*, 1786) and Wacław Rzewuski’s long poem *O nauce wierszopiskiej* (*On the Science of Writing Verse*, 1762). Attempts to codify the rules governing literature had previously been undertaken, using similar literary forms, in late classicism (by, among others, Ludwik Kropiński and Euzebiusz Słowacki).

¹ See *Słownik terminów literackich* (Dictionary of Literary Terms), ed. J. Sławiński, Wrocław 1988.

Most seventeenth-century treatises on poetry were products of monastic schools, where they were a method sanctioned by tradition for transmitting knowledge about literature. The Jesuit teacher Juwencjusz's well-known book *Institutiones poeticae et rhetoricae* (1735) and Stanisław Konarski's *De arte bene cognitandi ad artem dicendi bene necessaria* (1767), aimed at helping adepts of rhetoric perfect their craft, were both prepared for didactic purposes.² The activities of the National Education Commission convoked in 1773 at the initiative of Stanisław August Poniatowski, prompted many eighteenth-century writers to prepare successive textbooks devoted to poetry and speech, more or less guided by the premises of education reform. Works not driven by didactic concerns remained decidedly a minority. Among the crucial texts presenting knowledge about literature, we must mention Łukasz Opaliński's *Poeta nowy* (1661) and the above-mentioned poem by Waław Rzewuski, *O nauce wierszopiskiej* (1762). Most eighteenth-century ars poetica were integrally linked with instruction, although the most important among them – *O wymowie w prozie albo w wierszu* by Franciszek Karpiński (1782), Grzegorz Piramowicz's treatise *Wymowa i poezja dla szkół narodowych* (1792) and Filip Neriusz Golański's *O wymowie i poezji* (1786) – distanced themselves from rigorous formulations of principles and rules of writing. In his treatise, *O rymotwórstwie i rymotwórcach* (written 1798–1799), Ignacy Krasinski kept his presentation of the norms and rules of poetic production to a minimum in order to focus on a discussion of the achievements of European literature.³

During the same period, the most famous didactic poem of the Polish Enlightenment was written – *Sztuka rymotwórcza* (The Art of Rhyming) by Franciszek Ksawery Dmochowski (1788), a work which enjoyed unfading popularity until the early 19th century. The poem was published twice in the 1780s by the Warsaw Piarists, a third time in Wilno (now Vilnius) in 1820, and a fourth version, corrected based on the author's notes, was edited by Franciszek Salezy Dmochowski for inclusion in the publication of his father's letters (Warszawa 1826). The most illuminating critical edition, based on the one developed by Stanisław Pietraszka for the Biblioteka Narodowa in 1956 – is the text printed by T. Kostkiewiczowa and Z. Goliński in the book *Oświeceni o literaturze* (Warszawa 1993). Dmochowski's poem was intended to serve as a textbook for the pupils of Piarist colleges, but the range of its influence turned out to be much broader. The poem's synthesis of his perspectives as a literary theorist, codifier, and critic made it possible for him to present the totality of poetic experience of his era.⁴ Dmochowski based his work on Boileau's *L'Art poétique*, but dealt with the newest tendencies in literature, to faithfully reflect the actually existing state of things⁵ He illustrated his views on the theory of literature with discussion of Polish works, thereby making a contribution to the development of Polish literary criticism. He called for the abandonment of zoilism and the development of a new model of evaluation, in which the wise critic would be an advisor to the author and his teacher at successive stages on his creative path. Dmochowski's didactic

2 See T. Kostkiewiczowa, "Wstęp" (Introduction), in *Oświeceni o literaturze. Wypowiedzi pisarzy polskich 1740–1800* (Enlightenment Authors on Literature. Polish Writers' Opinions 1740–1800), vol. 1, ed. T. Kostkiewiczowa, Z. Goliński, Warszawa 1993, p. 7.

3 Ibid., p. 8.

4 See M. Klimowicz, *Oświecenie* (The Enlightenment), Warszawa 1988, p. 283; T. Kostkiewiczowa, Franciszek Ksawery Dmochowski, in *Pisarze polskiego oświecenia* (Writers of the Polish Enlightenment), vol. 2, ed. T. Kostkiewiczowa, Z. Goliński, Warszawa 1994, p. 259.

5 See Z. Libera, *Rozważania o wieku tolerancji, rozumu i gustu. Szkice o XVIII stuleciu*, Warszawa 1994, p. 231.

poem went considerably beyond the bounds of its design, becoming both a rhyming literary theory treatise and a testimony to the modern view of literary creation. The Piarist lecturer saw poetry as a treasure-house for storing the wisdom of generations and assigned it a vital role in shaping the principles of social concomitance. The guidelines set down by Quintilianus and his definition of rhetoric as *vir bonus dicendi peritus* (the good man speaking well), were extended in the age of the Enlightenment to include literature. Eighteenth-century iterations of *ars poetica* demanded from the poet not only fluency in his art, but also service to the common good and a focus on ethical values.

The most important task that the authors of *ars poetica* set themselves was the formulation of theories of literary genres, setting down the rules governing each genre by particular conventions, and establishing a hierarchy among the genres. With regard to genres, references to antiquity had an instrumental function, though most of these Enlightenment treatises and poems expressed a longing for a Polish heroic epic poem, as that genre was unquestionably ranked highest. For the Enlightenment sensibility, the heroic epic poem would constitute a demonstration of poetic craftsmanship and a proof of the artistic development of the Polish language, showing it to equal classical Latin and Greek in its possibilities. Unfortunately, eighteenth-century ideology, relying on empiricism and rationalism, to a large extent made it impossible to create the sense of the miraculous crucial to the functioning of the much-desired genre's conventions.

The prescriptions of Enlightenment classicism for creating a successful work that were contained in popular treatises on rhyming, while disappointing with regard to the heroic epic poem, were straightforward and easy to implement within the conventions of other genres. Anyone, contemporary opinion held, could write a clever occasional poem, a love elegy, a joking epigram or a faultless panegyric, as long as he possessed a minimum of talent and practiced his craft diligently. Versificatory skills were valued in the world of the gentry and at court, poems were given as gifts to neighbors (by, for example, Mikołaj Sęp Szarzyński), presented at competitions (like the short poems about the king's dog written by, among others, Stanisław Trembecki), presented as messages attached to keepsakes (including, probably, Adam Naruszewicz's poem "Filizanka" [The Teacup]), recorded in the annals of the nobility, often giving a poetic form to reminiscences or reflections. Varied poems written with varying degrees of success by unknown authors testify to the universality of writing competencies, developed in the course of education at Jesuit or Piarist colleges. The abundance of easy tasks on which pupils daily had to concentrate their attention for a half hour or more allowed even the least gifted among them to form the habits of a journeyman author. In the age of the Enlightenment, the ability to write occasional verse was as universal and useful as drawing up an SMS message or holiday greetings in our day. The diverse levels of skill in these areas, from functional competency to a demonstration of undoubted creative talent, reflects their universal, ubiquitous use.

Innate abilities of varying magnitude (sometimes reaching the level of genius) need to be shaped through the analysis of good models and the study of the rules of writing. Imitation should serve toward the development of one's own creative choices and individual style. Blind observance of rules can lead—according to the theoreticians of the eighteenth century—to de-

rivative, artificial work. The injunction of classical antiquity to practice *imitatio* receives a different interpretation in the Enlightenment than it did in the Renaissance, and the individual nature of creative work gradually takes on greater significance. Breaking existing rules in a justified manner in order to introduce some new artistic quality becomes desired and opens the door to the modern view that prioritizes originality and individualism. Subsequent eras failed to produce new renditions of the *ars poetica*. The old *ars poetica*s nonetheless remain a valuable document of how literary consciousness and aesthetic sensitivity were shaped in the past. The formal demands were revived to some extent in the modernist poetic manifestoes, but their largely avant-garde aesthetic and strong ideological tendencies discourage us from treating them as a continuation of the earlier *ars poetica* poems, which exuded the optimistic belief that though immortal masterpieces are few, the basics of writing poetry are available to pretty much anyone.

Ad 2 In the nineteenth century the need to codify and instruct through literary works yielded to a heightened need for authorial reflection on personal creativity and the new role of poetic art in general. The Romantic view of poetry as an individual creative act, independent from formal rules, put an end to the popularity of didactic and theoretical treatises on the art of rhyming. For modern (post-Enlightenment) poetry, broadly defined, however, the new type of poem that became dominant can, by analogy with ekphrasis, a poem about an image, be considered an *ars poetica*, or poem about poetry. The basis on which the category is thus defined is in this case not a formal criterion, but a thematic one.

An *ars poetica* lyric poem can be said to be a modernist statement par excellence, emerging from the idea of the autonomy of aesthetic values and the thematic use of the search for new means of expression in order to convey the variously understood problem of “modernity,” relativized to a historically defined time and place. The popularity of the *ars poetica* genre resulted from numerous dominants in modernism: essentialism (the *ars poetica* as an attempt to answer the question of what constitutes literature’s essence from the perspective of its autonomy), poeticism (insistence on form and metatextuality), and constructionism (the sense of the poet’s craft and the thematic use of the rules of verse in accordance with the view that meaning is found not in the content but in its new organization).⁶ The structuralist and phenomenological view of literature that privileges a centripetally-oriented model of poetry, emphasizing the linguistic character of the utterance, its form and structure, is relevant here. The *ars poetica* problematizes those issues with particular intensity, subjecting them to extensive consideration, and at times illustrating by its own example the understanding of poetry it is proposing. The modernist sense of the crisis of language and difficulties with the expressibility of the modern subject’s experiences, the break with mimesis and tendency toward the programmatic and toward providing theoretical justification of creative choices⁷ fundamentally privilege self-conscious poems of the *ars poetica* type, which aspire to the

⁶ See W. Bolecki, “Modernizm w literaturze polskiej XX w. (rekonesans)” (Modernism in Twentieth-Century Polish Literature [an exploration]), *Teksty Drugie* 2002, 4, pp. 24-25.

⁷ See J. Ziomek, “Epoki i formacje w dziejach literatury polskiej” (Periods and Formations in the History of Polish Literature), in Ziomek, *Prace ostatnie* (Last Works), Warszawa 1994, p. 53 onward.

status of a prototypical genre of modernism. A work which is “thinking about itself”⁸ is here understood as a program or plan for a particular understanding of and approach to literature, a model of construction, built to demonstrate the possibilities offered by that view of poetic art. This pertains to both individual, “personal” authorial proposals and philosophically engaged ones belonging to such key currents in modernism as Symbolism, Futurism, the avant-garde, or classicism. If we place the autonomous, elitist school of modern literature at the center of the artistic and cultural constellation we call modernism,⁹ then the *ars poetica* will constitute its model representative. It establishes the exclusionary approach commonly attributed to modernism, here based on the definition of the separate status of “poetry,” a “poem,” or “writing” on the basis of its differentiation from what is not proper to the form of literary art thus defined. It thereby assimilates the bipolar tendency typical of modernism: even if the author’s proposal contradicts the very idea of the programmatic, refuses to offer a definition, or declares an anti-poetic stance, in so doing the author still takes a position against what poetry is not, polemicizing or playing with an “other” version of literariness. This modernist *ars poetica* thus would rightly abdicate its normative and didactic function in favor of innovation and individuality, a kind of anti-instructional quality setting it apart from both the old Polish version and later guides to creative writing.

A poem signals its function as an *ars poetica* by referring in its title to the semantic field to the lexeme “poetry,” though this is not obligatory; one of the most well-known programmatic, metapoetic nineteenth-century poems is Charles Baudelaire’s sonnet “Correspondances” from his book *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857), translated into Polish by Antoni Lange as “Oddźwięki” (Resonances). In the canon of French lyric poetry, crucial to the development of modernist poetry, the following *ars poetica*s also have a permanent place: Théophile Gautier’s “L’Art” (1852), Artur Rimbaud’s “Voyelles” (1872), Paul Verlaine’s “Art poétique” (1874) and Guillaume Apollinaire’s “La jolie russe” (1919). Works entitled “*Ars poetica*” number among the accomplishments of Jorge Luis Borges (Argentina), Eliseo Diego (Cuba), Blaga Dimitrova (Bulgaria), Norman Dubie (US), Vicente Huidobro (Chile), Dana Levin (US), Archibald Macleish (US), and Rafael Felipe Oteríño (Argentina). The editor of a contemporary anthology presenting “poems about poetry” (Wiegiers 2003) included in it 108 poems from various national literatures (mainly in the West) and under a multitude of titles. Poland is represented in the anthology by Anna Swir (Anna Świrszczyńska)’s poems “Literatka robi pranie” (A Woman Writer Does Laundry, translated by Czesław Miłosz) and “Spotkanie autorskie” (Poetry reading, translated by L. Nathan).

Twentieth-century Polish poetry includes poems entitled “*Ars poetica*” by Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński, Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński, Stanisław Grochowiak, Czesław Miłosz, and Leopold Staff. These works are among those poets’ most frequently quoted and interpreted poems, but the total number of works of poetry in Polish devoted to poetic art would be difficult to calculate; among the most well-known we can name Tuwim’s “Poezja” (Poetry), and his fragment

⁸ M. Głowiński, “Powieść jako metodologia powieści” (The Novel as Methodology of the Novel), in Głowiński, *Porządek, chaos, znaczenie. Szkice o powieści współczesnej* (Order, Chaos, Meaning. Sketches on the Contemporary Novel), Warszawa 1968, p. 64.

⁹ See R. Nycz, “Literatura nowoczesna: cztery dyskursy (tezy)” (Modern Literature: Four Discourses [Theses]), *Teksty Drugie* 2002, 4, p. 38.

“Kwiaty polskie” (Polish Flowers), beginning with the line “Poezjo! Jakie twoje imię?” (Poetry! What is your name?), W. Broniewski’s “Poezja” (Poetry) or Szymborska’s “Radość pisania” (The Joy of Writing). An experimental poem by Zenon Fajfer shows the vitality of this lyrical tradition; Fajfer is the inventor of so-called “liberatura” (liberature), “total literature, in which the text and the space of the book become an inseparable whole.”¹⁰ One form of liberature is the “emanational poem” and its electronic version, the “kinetic poem.” Fajfer’s “liberary” *ars poetica*, entitled “ten letters” (translated from the original, entitled “dwadzieścia jeden liter” [twenty-one letters], by Katarzyna Bazarnik) can be found at the website www.ha.art.pl.¹¹

Ad 3 Although the original formula *ars poetica* is now associated strictly with lyric poetry, in the works of the codifiers of antiquity it was by no means limited to that domain; on the contrary, the lyric lay at the margins of its purview. Aristotle devoted his treatise to the mimetic arts: tragedy and (in the part of his *Poetics* lost to posterity) comedy, as well as the heroic epic poem; dramatic art is also the focus of Horace’s attention in his *Ars poetica*.

As late as the eighteenth century, and even at the beginning of the nineteenth, the term “poetry” could be used to mean literature in general— that is the sense in which Gotthold Ephraim Lessing uses it in his 1766 study *Laocoon, An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*. The term “ars poetica” can thus be used more broadly in the context of the theory of genres, extending to include treatises on fiction writing, or what Kundera, writing in French, called *L’art du roman*, the art of the novel (Kundera 1986), i.e., the art of storytelling. In this sense, the form would include essays by writers of both genders and various ranks, dealing with the secrets of their own or others’ writerly craft, a general or more detailed history of the genre, and meditations on its current state, as well as the popular and plentiful “how to” books of self-instruction, the “ABCs of writing.” In the first category, we would have to place both masterwork essays on the novelist’s craft (such as Thomas Mann’s *Die Entstehung des Doktor Faustus*, 1946), and the autobiographical and career reflections of talented horror and thriller writer Stephen King (*On writing: a memoir of the craft*, 2000).

In the Polish context, this type of *ars poetica* never achieved the level of popularity that it did in Anglophone culture. A classic of the genre is Jan Parandowski’s 1951 *Alchemia słowa* (Alchemy of the Word), reprinted many times since. In the preface to the fourth edition in 1965, the author wrote: “Some of my readers sought to find here the story of my own writing craft, masked by examples of other writers, and a desire to shape young literary men who have not yet learned the secrets of their trade. In truth, I had such an intention once, but I sought to fulfill it in a different way, namely, by creating an institute called the School of the Art of Writing. The project was met with astonishment, outrage, antipathy. I was accused of wanting to establish a ‘nursery of geniuses,’ and nobody thought of the fact that an introduction to the art of writing is something needed not only by future geniuses, but by many who, using words in their work, will never be writers.”¹²

¹⁰<http://www.liberatura.pl> [dostęp: 30.01.2015].

¹¹Dostęp: 30.01.2015.

¹²J. Parandowski, *Alchemia słowa*, Warszawa 1998, pp. 10-11.

The reaction that Parandowski describes was rooted in the view, still active in Polish literary culture, that writing is only an art, not a craft. The subjection of literary communication to the rules of the market which accompanied the systemic transformation of Poland in the late 1980s and early 1990s, however, radically changed the situation. Today, in spite of statistics indicating a crisis of readership, an increasing number of people are engaged in producing texts that aspire to the status of literature, and thus the need for self-instruction manuals to guide them through the basics of the writing profession is also growing in Poland. One of the first home-grown books of this type was *Twórcze pisanie dla młodych panien* (Creative Writing for Young Ladies) by Izabela Filipiak (1999), whose title jokingly references the wave of excellent first books by female authors in Poland in the mid-1990s. Still, the publications of that sort available on the shelves of Polish bookstores largely remain translations from English, such as Nigel Watts's *Writing a Novel* (translated by E. Kraskowska, 1998) or, in the same "Teach Yourself" series from Wydawnictwo Literackie, *Screenwriting* by Raymond G. Frensham (translated by P. Wawrzyszko, 1998) and *Writing Crime and Suspense Fiction* by Lesley Grant-Adamson (translated into Polish by M. Rusinek, 1999). It should be noted that these authors continue to rely on the undying Aristotelian rules for creating a plot. Unlike the modernist cult of high art, the contemporary dictates of the market and the postmodern erasure of the boundaries between literary currents have created perfect conditions for developing one's writerly craft. The guidebooks that encourage such development may be seen as a throwback– if not necessarily a deliberate one– to the tradition of the old scholastic treatises on "the art of rhyming."

Poland has also seen the rise of creative writing schools and courses, so popular in the United States, on its soil; one of the longest-operating of the institutions in the business is the Department of Literary-Artistic Studies at the Polish Studies Faculty of Jagiellonian University, created in 1994 at the initiative of Professor Gabriela Matuszek. Another space in which literary advice has found splendid conditions for growth is, obviously, the Internet: look at the way it has expanded new genres of writing such as the blog or fan fiction. Today, with the help of an internet search engine, one can find guides on how to write all different kinds of texts: from the practical (CV, letter, application) to book reports and senior or doctoral theses, up to every type of popular genre novel: detective story, fantasy, historical fiction, novel of manners, romance, etc. Most of the publishers who specialize in belles lettres include on their official websites formal guidelines for the presentation of texts and advice for potential authors, including, among other pointers, "Write one word at a time. When you find the appropriate word, write it down."¹³ The Internet, as a medium of instantaneous communication, has stimulated a particularly powerful and universal need to externalize individuals' writing possibilities; there is, therefore, no indication that contemporary iterations of the ars poetica will die out anytime soon.

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¹³<http://www.artefakty.pl/8-zasad-dobrego-pisania-autorstwa-neila-gaimana> [Last accessed: 2.02.2015].

Letter

A survey of theoretical statements concerning the letter in twentieth-century Polish literature studies discourse can help us bring into relief all of the elements of the transmutations in theory

whose continuation (but not culmination) is the so-called cultural turn and a variety of interpretative practices that together form the panorama twenty-first century literature studies. This opportunity does not arise from the cumulative, dialectic or procedural development of Polish humanities, but is a result of the paradoxical ontology of the letter (the first study of the letter in this light was written by Stefania Skwarczyńska,¹ 1975), which either generates problems by overstepping the boundaries of what is recognized by a particular theory as literary or undermines and demands the undermining of the theory's basic tools of understanding and interpretation. The very paradoxicality of the letter's ontology lends itself to description in the languages of various theories (from phenomenology through communications theory and structuralism to deconstruction or performativity), the problem of the letter interests many areas of literature studies (literary history, theory, the study of biography and documents, as well as literary scholarship), and parallel investigations of the letter's importance have also been made by various other knowledge disciplines (including the history of communications, media studies, and sociology). For this reason also, scholars interested in the letter have, as a rule, taken one of two approaches: either limiting their study to one particular story² (Trzynadłowski, 1977; Maciejewski, 2000) or demonstrated the multi-layered nature of the problem, complicating the existing knowledge³ (Cysewski, 1997); some have also combined the two strategies⁴ (Czermińska, 1975, 2000).

Skwarczyńska's 1937 *Teoria listu* (Theory of the Letter) represents an unprecedented attempt to probe the phenomenon in all of its complexity, and has become at least a point of reference, and often a conspicuous and weighty presence, in every work written on the problem of the letter since. The new 2006 edition of Skwarczyńska's monograph can be interpreted as expressing a need, running parallel (or perhaps in opposition) to the hermeneutics of suspicion and post-theory theory that dominates scholarly journals, to actualize or strengthen literary theory overall, overcoming the "weakening" alleged by Gianni Vattimo. A very different position from Skwarczyńska's is taken by Kazimierz Cysewski, who, in a series of publications on the theme of letters, argues that "the hope for a conflict-free transfer of the categories and tools of literature studies scholarship to the study of correspondence is illusory"⁵ (Cysewski 1997). From the point of view of "post-poetics poetics" it is particularly interesting to bring

¹ See Skwarczyńska, "Wokół teorii listu (Paradoksy)" (Concerning the Theory of the Letter [Paradoxes]), in Skwarczyńska, *Pomiędzy historią a teorią literatury* (In Between Literary Theory and History), Warszawa 1975.

² See Jan Trzynadłowski, "List i pamiętnik. Dwie formy wypowiedzi osobistej" (List and Diary. Two Forms of Personal Utterance) in: Trzynadłowski, *Małe formy literackie* (Small Literary Forms), Wrocław 1977; Janusz Maciejewski, "List jako forma literacka" (The Letter as a Literary Form) in: *Sztuka pisania. O liście polskim w wieku XIX*, Białystok 2000.

³ See Kazimierz Cysewski, "Teoretyczne i metodologiczne problemy badań nad epistologafią" (Theoretical and Methodological Problems with the Study of Epistolography), *Pamiętnik Literacki* (Literary Diary) 1997, 1.

⁴ Małgorzata Czermińska, "Pomiędzy listem a powieścią" (Between Letter and Novel) in *Teksty*, 1975, 4; *Autobiograficzny trójkąt: świadectwo, wyznanie, wyzwanie* (Autobiographical Triangle: Testimony, Confession, Challenge), Kraków 2000.

⁵ Kazimierz Cysewski, "Teoretyczne i metodologiczne problemy badań nad epistologafią," *Pamiętnik Literacki* (Literary Diary) 1997, 1.

into relief crucial problems of the letter that particular scholars have dealt with, revealing areas that had been deemed peripheral, and the attempt to outline perspectives offered by inter- and transdisciplinary studies of the letter and new theoretical and interpretative proposals. For this reason, too, an article Skwarczyńska wrote thirty years after the publication of *The Theory of the Letter, Wokół teorii listu (paradoksy)* (On the Question of The Theory of the Letter [Paradoxes]) seems particularly inspiring, and the titular paradox reveals itself to be a singularly operative term for describing the phenomenon, while Kazimierz Cysewski's synthetically drawn map of essential (unresolved) problems relating to the letter should be acknowledged as a landmark in the work done on this category so far.

Every effort to create a synthesizing definition of the letter conjures up a series of problems or requires numerous amendments, qualifiers, or reservations. The clay tablets from the era of cuneiform, the oldest remnants of human communication, prove that the history of letters is almost as ancient as that of writing itself, and generally has aided the long-distance exchange of information. The letter is a product of the existence of writing, the absence of the addressee, and the distance between correspondents, though these last two conditions are not obligatory (the redundancy of the actual addressee is shown by the practice of Oscar Wilde, who threw letters out the window of his London house onto the sidewalk, addressed to no one in particular; and the superfluity of distance between correspondents is proven by many letters such as Witkacy's famous letter to his wife, sent from one room to another⁶; see Degler 2009, Schmidt, 2014). The "substitutive" nature of the written utterance in relation to spoken communication elicits a number of reservations, however, beginning with the question of the division between voice and writing. The literary nature the letter appears unimpeachable as long as we recognize the advent of e-mail as the bookend closing off the history of the letter, closely linked to the culture of writing.

A general problem connected with the most basic attempt to define the letter is its parallel existence in several dimensions:

1. practical everyday circulation, understood very broadly, both in its public dimension (i.e. the open letter in the newspaper, the pastoral or diplomatic letter) and its private one (family correspondence, letters between friends);
2. literary worlds of representation (e.g. an epistolary novel or a letter in verse);
3. and, most interestingly of all from the theoretical perspective: when a letter from the first category functions as literature (a case in point would be Madame de Staël, who besides her letters, acknowledged to be distinguished works of literary art, created no other literary works; or the many literary artists who were also letter-writers).

The Protean Ontology of the Letter

Scholarly studies have primarily focused on the third of those categories, and the conditions or complications of displacing the practical (the everyday) into the realm of the literary (and vice versa: the simultaneous introduction of the literary into the practical, conventional, everyday). In 1937 Skwarczyńska placed the letter within the field of applied literature (as opposed to pure literature), and systematically linked the aesthetic theory of the letter with

⁶ Janusz Degler, *Witkacego portret wielokrotny. Szkice i materiały do biografii (1918-1939)* (A Multiple Portrait of Witkacy. Sketches and Biographical Materials [1918-1939]), Warszawa 2009; Olga Schmidt, *Korespondent Witkacy* (Witkacy as Correspondent), Kraków 2014.

a conception that privileges the utility and pragmatics of the letter over its literary properties, with at the same time the reservation that “the life that the letter grows into and that it creates, must form the point of departure for the aesthetic evaluation [...]”⁷ (Skwarczyńska 2006, 29-30). The concept of “life,” in phenomenological terms understandably set in opposition to “literature,” rejected by the structuralists and communications theorists as inoperative, and treated by post-structuralists, especially constructivists, with distance, subject to critical analysis, is a pivotal one for Skwarczyńska:

A letter is a part of life. It comes into being in the area of life, joined directly to it. In this it differs from most other types of literature, which originate in a world spiritually detached, somehow removed from the “clatter” of immediate reality. [...] A letter has a line of living, practical purpose, [...] its ambition is to get results. [...] Literature accepts the letter only when it has fulfilled all of its tasks in relation to life. A letter against the background of life is not an end but a means. The relation between the letter and the life that flows through it can vary greatly. Sometimes it can be a receptor of life waves [...], or it can be an unequivocal life argument, a life act. (Skwarczyńska 2006, 332-333)

It is that very connection between the letter and life that engenders a whole set of methodological problems and calls for the distance of the scholar, who treats a literary work as an aesthetic object. Jan Trzynadłowski, interpreting the letter as a “literary small form,” and searching for the systematic properties of the letter and of correspondence, came to the conclusion that correspondence has no structure (a body of laws governing the formation of the whole), which in the case of the letter is conventional, incomplete, and if intentional, then not from the correspondents’ perspective, but thanks to the editor or publisher’s design. The letter’s connection with “life” destabilizes the structural framework of theory, and Trzynadłowski, evidently fascinated by the letter, defines it as a “form of personal utterance,” a “genre of literary output,” or a “diary in spite of itself,” whose structure is secondary wtórna (letter as treatise, letter as feuilleton, letter as compositional component of a novel). The primary aspect of the letter is its connection with life, though Trzynadłowski does nothing to problematize that theme: “a letter [...] as a literary reaction to certain actual states of affairs catches hold of them in their perceived or presumed continuation, but most of all in their ‘momentaneous condition’”⁸ (Trzynadłowski, 1977, 82). This contact with the empirical means that as a usable text, the letter, close to all kinds of “personal papers,” is a literary phenomenon demanding to be considered in its social and historical aspects and has no existence outside of them. On the other hand, Trzynadłowski claims that the letter “is characterized by complete autonomy, in that it requires no other text, but only a certain causative situation”⁹ (Trzynadłowski, 1977: 83) – which makes the letter one form of “personal utterance,” a rather imprecise category, but expressive of the desire to escape from the methodological impasse. Trzynadłowski’s reflections are accompanied by the suggestion that some of the problems relating to the letter should be dealt with by other areas than literary studies, namely sociology and history.

⁷ Stefania Skwarczyńska, *Teoria listu* (Theory of the Letter), Białystok 2006, pp. 29-30.

⁸ Jan Trzynadłowski, “List i pamiętnik. Dwie formy wypowiedzi osobistej,” (Letter and Diary. Two Forms of Personal Utterance), in: Jan Trzynadłowski, *Małe formy literackie* (Small Literary Forms), Wrocław 1977, p. 82.

⁹ Jan Trzynadłowski, “List i pamiętnik. Dwie formy wypowiedzi osobistej,” in: Jan Trzynadłowski, *Małe formy literackie*, Wrocław 1977, p. 83.

The precise nature of the letter, call it “documentary” or “living,” but in any case definitely problematic for literary theory, is the result of among other things its parallel ties with such seemingly unrelated matters as print journalism (the institution of the post office and the courier who was able to relate public information while delivering letters made it hard for the newspaper to succeed; see Mielcarek, 1999)¹⁰ and autobiography. The interest in the letter (open letter, letter to the editor, etc.) as an element in the history of print journalism has been particularly great among linguists studying the rhetoric of letters, while the importance of letters to the formation of public attitudes, as an element of literary life (e.g. open letters from groups of authors and artists, joint letter 34), and that element’s place within literature from this perspective have not been much touched on or disputed. That issue appears to be relevant, however: if the newspaper came into being as a collection of extracts from letters, then a letter is a kind of newspaper of which only one copy is printed, particularly in situations where political censorship is involved. This question can be considered from the perspective of a change of focus between statements about the world and self-expression, the domination of a particular function in a communicative situation; its context may be theoretical reappraisal, typical for the twentieth century, the “century of the document,”¹¹ (Ziątek 1999) of such genres derived from journalism as the reportage or the feuilleton. What is crucial is that the theoretical thought strikes rather at the letter’s connection with “personal utterances,” issuing from the importance of the authorial subject (“the causative instance”), and its connection with honoring intimate genres: the diary, journal, reminiscences, witness testimony, etc. If the letter has oscillated between the non-literary and the literary, this has coincided with the transformation of the private (personal and non-literary) into the public (literary), but that still leaves the issue of how what is public, already included within the understood framework of journalism, can complete the transition to literariness. Roman Ziemand, in his classic, influential work *Diarysta Stefan Ż.* (Diary-writer Stefan Ż., 1990)¹² makes a gesture similar to Skwarczyńska’s – he defines journals and diaries, but also letters with the umbrella term “literature of the personal document,” which is “composed of two cosmoeses: the world of writing directly about oneself and the world of eyewitness testimony” (Ziemand 1990, 17)¹³ theoretically summarizing the publishing and interpretative accomplishments of the last century in this field, brought about in large measure by readers’ demands.

From the perspective of what readers expect from documents, it seems that private letters that “document” the “life” of an individual or an individual and his or her circle, have greater potential for literariness or being read as literature. The narrative potential of correspondence has been brought out in Małgorzata Czermińska’s articles, which, though they are by no means a continuation Trzynadłowski’s thinking, are linked with it by a similar initial situation, the connection between the letter and autobiography; Czermińska then significantly develops the problematic of the letter as a pivotal context in introducing the novel. Czermińska does not seek to define the letter or its determinants, but focuses on the area

¹⁰ Andrzej Mielcarek, *Historia łączności w zarysie* (Outline of the History of Communication), Szczecin 1999.

¹¹ Zygmunt Ziątek, *Wiek dokumentu* (Age of the Document), Warszawa 1999.

¹² Roman Ziemand, *Diarysta Stefan Ż.* (The Diarist Stefan Ż.), Warszawa 1990.

¹³ Ibid., p. 17.

where novel, letter and “intimate letters” overlap, which means that “the prototype of the epistolary novel [...] has not aged, that is, the block of letters, on the contrary, is attracting ever greater interest in a time where there is a search for the novel concealed outside the bounds of the novel and when autobiography can become the measure and guarantee of the practical value of literature’s existence”¹⁴ (Czermińska, 2000: 271). One expression of the “hunger for truth” and “authenticity” that Czermińska underscores, and of the narrative potential of autobiography, is the reading practice of Helena Zaworska: “Over time, life and career experience led me to keep some skeptical distance and understand that diary or epistolographic confessions also have their conventions, conscious and subconscious games, stylizations, and poses. They did not interest me any less because of that, but I began reading them differently and I knew that each one contained not only sincerity to the point of tears but also sincerity to the point of lies.”¹⁵ (Zaworska 1998: 5). Similarly, Anna Pekaniec in her work on intimate works by women (autobiography and epistolography) asserts that “in terms of the letter’s dependence on life, women’s correspondence in particular is predestined to be a mirror or register of women’s experiences, not only related but interpreted [...] A distinctive feature of women’s epistolography is how it arises out of the feminine experience of the world and how it records – even in cases where the understanding of femininity is marked by a high degree of conventionality”¹⁶ (Pekaniec 2012: 359-360). The title Pekaniec gives to the chapter dealing with the most frequent topics of women’s epistolography reads like a summary of her theoretical and interpretative approach: “The Letter and Existence – An Unbreakable Bond.” Letters can also be read as “documents of the era” or the “laboratory of the soul” of the writer when they are being used for purposes of biography (editions of poets’ love letters influenced the shape of the first literary monographs, for example, Antoni Małecki’s pioneering work *Juliusz Słowacki. Jego życie i dzieło w stosunku do współczesnej epoki, 1899-1867*, see Przybyła 2000,¹⁷ but they in fact fulfill the same functions simultaneously, as in Hanna Malewska’s biography, see Głąb 2009,¹⁸ or numerous studies in the volume *Sztuka pisanie. O liście polskim w wieku XIX*, 2000)¹⁹ or the reinterpretation of literary texts (such as the new reading of Maria Konopnicka’s poetry and prose through the prism of the author’s letters to her children; see Konopnicka 2010, Magnone 2011).²⁰

The linkage between letter and life, literature and document, is being drawn out by studies of “imagined communities,” intellectual and social circles, and literary generation. In *Miłosz*

¹⁴Małgorzata Czermińska, *Autobiograficzny trójkąt: świadectwo, wyznanie, wyzwanie*, Kraków 2000, p. 271.

¹⁵Halina Zaworska, *Szczerść aż do bólu. O dziennikach i listach* (Painful Sincerity. On Journals and Letters), Warszawa 1998, p. 5.

¹⁶Anna Pekaniec, *Czy w tej autobiografii jest kobieta?* (Is There a Woman in This Autobiography?), Kraków 2012, pp. 359-360.

¹⁷Zbigniew Przybyła, “List w metodologii pozytywistycznego literaturoznawstwa” (The Letter in the Methodology of Positivist Literature Studies), in: *Sztuka pisanie. O liście polskim w wieku XIX* (The Art of Writing. On the Polish Letter in the Nineteenth Century), Białystok 2000.

¹⁸Anna Głąb, *Ostryga i łaska. Rzecz o Hannie Malewskiej* (The Oyster and the Weasel. The Theme of Hanna Malewska), Kraków 2009.

¹⁹Zbigniew Przybyła, “List w metodologii pozytywistycznego literaturoznawstwa,” in: *Sztuka pisanie. O liście polskim w wieku XIX* (The Letter in the Methodology of Positivist Literary Studies), Białystok 2000.

²⁰Maria Konopnicka, *Listy do synów i córek* (Letters to Her Sons and Daughters), ed. L. Magnone, Żarnowiec 2010; Magnone Lena, *Maria Konopnicka: lustra i symptomy* (Maria Konopnicka: Mirrors and Symptoms), Gdańsk 2011.

i rówieśnicy. Domknięcie formacji (Wyka 2013)²¹ Marta Wyka performs a gesture of “opening an archive of letters” that constitute “the timber that builds the awareness of generation” (Wyka 2013, 218),²² with the central figure of Czesław Miłosz, subject of heterogeneous epistolography, whose letters “stake out their own boundaries – the boundaries of the genre as well” (Wyka 2013, 277).²³ Jerzy Borowczyk, working on a new interpretation of the Philomaths’ correspondence, follows Roland Barthes in aligning “friendship practices” and “friendship writing,” through which he finds discovers in the letters “a tool that enables the image and feeling of a generational community to be maintained in their minds. The group of contemporaries became a small imagined community, and the experience of friendship and love (and reflections on those experiences) provided the raw material for creating an imaginary of epistolary and poetic artifacts of the Philomath collective.”²⁴ (Borowczyk, 2014: 110). Collective correspondence (e.g. of a literary generation), even more than letters between two correspondents, problematizes the letter as a form of the “technology of presence”²⁵ (Milne 2010): both the Philomaths and the Parisian Kultura circle successfully functioned for years purely by means of letters, “on the page,” limiting the material aspect of their relationship to paper and ink. The problem of presence and absence emerges as a theme not only of collective correspondence, but is also played upon in analyses of widely read love letters such as those of Abelard and Heloise, Chopin and George Sand, Hannah Arendt and Martin Heidegger, Ingeborg Bachmann and Paul Celan, or the conspicuous case of Franz Kafka’s letters to Milena Jesenská, the translator but also the epistolary beloved of the author of *The Castle*; the compositional frame of their romance consisted of two meetings in person, the first leading into and the second breaking off the sequence of their love letters. Reading the rich correspondence of the Trappist monk Thomas Merton, or of the famously solitary Emily Dickinson, complicates the question of “participation in culture” or the “community of experience.” The paradox of presence and absence of correspondents can be formulated in the categories of Derridean deconstruction: a letter is something more than absence, but something less than presence (Derrida, 1980, 1987);²⁶ the category of experience itself (generational, editorial, political), however, can be decisively revealed to be just as protean as that of the letter (Nycz 2012).²⁷

In recent years “life” and “reality” have been invoked with increasing frequency by scholars of “impure” literature. Paweł Rodak on the writer’s diary as a daily literary practice or recording, opposing this autobiographical form to literature as the autonomized art of the decontextualized word written; and Rodak’s diagnosis can be applied to describe the letter, which is also “action through the help of the word”²⁸ (see Rodak 2011). Likewise, Elżbieta Rybicka, relying on

²¹Marta Wyka, *Miłosz i rówieśnicy. Domknięcie formacji* (Miłosz and His Contemporaries. Closed Formation), Kraków 2013.

²²Ibid., p. 218.

²³Ibid., p. 277.

²⁴Jerzy Borowczyk, *Zesłane pokolenie. Filomaci w Rosji (1824-1870)* (Heaven-Sent Generation. The Philomaths in Russia, 1824-1870), Poznań 2014, p. 110.

²⁵Esther Milne, *Letters, Postcards, Email. Technologies of Presence*, New York - London 2010.

²⁶Derrida Jacques, *La carte postale: De Socrate à Freud et au-delà* 1980 Paris 1980; *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. A. Bass, 1987.

²⁷Nycz Ryszard, *Poetyka doświadczenia: teoria, nowoczesność, literatura* (The Poetics of Experience: Theory, Modernity, Literature), Warszawa 2012.

²⁸Rodak Paweł, *Miedzy zapisem a literaturą. Dziennik polskiego pisarza w XX wieku* (Between Record and Literature. Journal of a Polish Writer in the Twentieth Century), Warszawa 2011.

Skwarczyńska's conception, redirects the question of the letter's utilitarian and teleological nature toward the concepts of performativity and communication with the Other (Rybicka 2004).²⁹ The letter (whether literary or non-literary) acts in many different ways, and the performative practices of correspondents have a personal and private dimension as well as, in terms of the existence of a receiver a social and communicative one, equal in potency to John Austin's performative acts. Sylwia Panek, in her discussion of the complicated relationship between Karol Irzykowski and Zofia Nałkowska, which centered around the letters they exchanged, not only demonstrates how close Austins's popular theories were to Irzykowski's (the theorectician of "unofficial literature" and "the letter as action") discussions³⁰ (Irzykowski, 1999) but above all shows the close connection between the vision of correspondence as a "dramatic social form" and Irzykowski's practices as a correspondent, in which equal importance alongside letter-writing was held by gestures demanding the return or destruction of letters (Panek, 2015)³¹. Rybicka, for her part, demonstrates that the practice of writing letters in the twentieth century is expressive both of the crisis in communication and the means to remedy and repair it: action, turned toward the Other and "the discovery of self and/through the Other"³² (Rybicka 2004, 50).

Rybicka's and Rodak's reflections take place in the context of the symptomatic "return of the author," understood as author and person, to theoretical thought. Magdalena Popiel, in discussing the letters of Stanisław Wyspiański, states that "in epistolary communication the dialogue with a concrete recipient renders the entire situation fundamentally different from a journal, diary, or autobiography; it is a specific kind of provocation for the artist's creative identity"³³ (Popiel 2004, 116). However, she recognizes the "artist's letter as a genre of epistolographic narration" and indicates that Wyspiański's letters can be defined as "the greatest novel of Polish early modernism"; for her, Wyspiański is the central figure, as an artist-author in communicative relation to his addressee, rather than the narrativity of the letter (Popiel 2008).³⁴ Olga Schmidt, thinking along similar lines, interprets Witkacy's letters to his wife as an "unconscious Hauptwerk (...) [which] for Witkacy became the basis of his subjectivity"³⁵ (Schmidt 2014, 10): the work of life, which the artist had dreamed of, and which simultaneously shaped his subjectivity, not seen in this reading as a communicative or relational kind of subjectivity. Incidental theories formed using particular interpretations show that the study of the history of the letter enables us to trace the transformations of modern subjectivity with its extreme forms: from the reflexive "I" who requires the letter in order to take shape and reveal his form to others, to the I who becomes with the other, who requires above all an addressee and the addressee's reply to his letter.

²⁹Rybicka Elżbieta, "Antropologiczne i komunikacyjne aspekty dyskursu epistolograficznego" (Anthropological and Communicative Aspects of Epistolographical Discourse), in: *Teksty Drugie* 2004, 4.

³⁰Irzykowski Karol, *Pisma rozproszone* (Vagabond Writings), vol.4, 1936-39, ed. J. Bahr, Kraków 1999.

³¹Panek Sylwia, "Gesty nie tylko niepozorne. Irzykowski – Nałkowska" (Gestures, Inconspicuous and Not Only. Irzykowski – Nałkowska) in: *Twórczość niepozorna* (Inconspicuous Work), Poznań 2015 (manuscript).

³²Rybicka Elżbieta, "Antropologiczne i komunikacyjne aspekty dyskursu epistolograficznego," (Anthropological and Communicative Aspects of Epistolographical Discourse), in: *Teksty Drugie* 2004, 4, p. 50.

³³Magdalena Popiel, "List artysty jako gatunek narracji epistolograficznej. O listach Stanisława Wyspiańskiego" (The Artist's Letter as a Genre of Epistolographical Narration. On Stanisław Wyspiański's Letters) in: *Teksty Drugie* (Alternate Texts) 2004, 4, p. 116.

³⁴Magdalena Popiel, *Wyspiański. Mitologia nowoczesnego artysty* (Wyspiański. Mythology of the Modern Artist), Kraków 2008.

³⁵Olga Schmidt, *Korespondent Witkacy* (Witkacy as Correspondent), Kraków 2014, p. 10.

The dominant status of the readerly perspective can, however, lead to completely different conclusions the letter's exclusion from the documentary sphere and full inclusion within literature, as Janusz Maciejewski has done: "I see the letter as entirely within the area of literature. Literature, and not mere writing, although its literariness is often not entirely embodied, it remains in an embryonic state. Yet inside the material of the letter always exists its peculiar potentiality. If certain conditions are met [...] each letter can become literature in the full sense of the term"³⁶ (Maciejewski 2000, 213). The most important condition for making a letter literature is the concrete communicative situation (the interaction between sender and receiver, who, for the reader of the letter, become characters), and next to that, the cultural context. In his search for the most appropriate term for the letter, Maciejewski chooses "a genre of correspondence distinctly possessing separate genre forms, at the same time using the structures of all genres of literature"³⁷ (Maciejewski 2000, 215) and rules out placing the letter in the area of "practical literature." The complete transfer of the letter into the field of literature stifles the problem of its connection with "life" and cultural and historical conditions, while bringing out parallel theoretical difficulties, this time to do with genre theory. The letter, according to Maciejewski, is a transitive, hybrid genre, not belonging to any literary genre, not precisely defined in relation to other genres, though it has relationships with them. It seems, however, that the letter, a protean genre, demands the language of a new theory of genres, unrelated to typological classifications and evaluation of genres and that makes use of the cognitive tools of genre theory for descriptive and identificative purposes (Sendyka 2006),³⁸ in which "life" (the social, cultural, historical, and ideological aspects of the letter genre) will be next to the linguistic (rhetorical) and literary, treated as coordinate, and not separate languages of description.

The literature-creating power of the letter

The problem of the letter's existence in the world it depicts has been recognized as a separate, less controversial and theoretically intricate one, but it is difficult now to reduce it to a question of stylization and formal mimesis. The letter has simultaneously the power to generate literature and the ability to absorb literary conventions, strategies, and styles. The literature-creating power of the letter springs from its status as a protean, paradoxical oddity: it is grounded in a basic communicative situation (someone wants to convey something to somebody in writing), and yet continually undermines and transforms these communicative conditions (as in the earlier-mentioned cases of Oscar Wilde and Witkacy), giving them different degrees of importance, changing their context and status. If, then, the first (practical) dimension of the letter can be presented within the categories of the art of letter-writing, i.e. epistolography, developed in antiquity, and belonging to concepts of rhetoric, that can only be done through certain historical over-simplifications and the subordination of other areas of the question.

Perhaps an attempt to create a history of the letter (or at least of the letter in a given culture or linguistic sphere) that would bring into relief the ways, conditions and contexts

³⁶Janusz Maciejewski, "List jako forma literacka," (The Letter as a Literary Form), in: *Sztuka pisania. O liście polskim w wieku XIX*, Białystok 2000, p. 213.

³⁷Ibid., p. 215.

³⁸Roma Sendyka, "W stronę kulturowej teorii gatunku" (Toward a Cultural Theory of Genre), in: *Kulturowa teoria literatury. Główne pojęcia i problemy* (Cultural Theory of Literature. Main Concepts and Problems), ed. M.P.Markowski, R. Nycz, Kraków 2006.

of chronologically successive, reciprocal shifts of the letter between the rhetorical *ars epistolandi*, the practical guide to writing letters used in homes and offices, and the letter as an element of the literary text, could provide more inspiration for the theory of letters than simply tracing changes in theory over time. As an example, one of the crucial points in that story is undoubtedly *Dangerous Liaisons* (1782), chiasmatically linked with its conditioning setting and substratum, the *Respublica literaria*; a second is comprised by the origins of the nineteenth-century travel letter, inseparably linked with the influence and development of journalistic writing (Sienkiewicz's *Letters from America*, apart from which the author wrote abundant private letters to friends; he also used the letter format in his novel *Without Dogma*, see Rólkowska, Sztachelska, Bujnicki 2000).³⁹ It appears that the letter owes its age-old power over the imagination and creative expression to its heterogeneous origins and use. Jerzy Schnayder, without intending to create a theory, wrote from the perspective of a historian of ancient epistolography and classical philology on the impossibility of drawing a boundary between private and literary letters, because no such boundary was marked in antiquity: an educated person, writing letters, stylized them, and "the letters of well-known persons became a kind of literature, regardless of whether their authors had any literary intentions," see Schnayder 1959, 2006, XXXII),⁴⁰ and his *List antyczny. Antologia* (The Letter in Antiquity. An Anthology) discusses and reprints private, official, scholarly, poetic, and fictional letters. Schnayder divides the letters in terms of thematic and contextual categories, including in the fiction "insertions in the works of historians and poets," such as for example the letters of the rulers in Herodotus's *Histories*, whose genesis can be found not only in the ancient historian's narrative strategies, but also in a cultural atmosphere which had no copyright and was characterized by many publications of falsified works created by fictional authors.

In making a list of the paradoxes inherent in the letter, Stefania Skwarczyńska marked, in addition to the seemingly unavoidable problem of whether or not the letter belongs to literature, the following characteristics: oscillation between dialogue and monologue, stylistic hesitation between formal registers typical of written language and other aspects typical of colloquial speech; the ephemeral nature of the letter (of its content) vs. its preservation through writing; the ambiguous role of the "document of the era," given clear cases of disinformation purveyed through correspondence; the difficulty of separating the "subject," "narrator," and "author"; the tension between the writer's individual self-expression and the epistolographic convention of a given time period (Skwarczyńska, 1977).⁴¹ Though Skwarczyńska's aim was to overcome these paradoxes of what she calls the *montrecéleste* (celestial time-piece), it is those very paradoxes that give shape to the epistolary novel (from the path-breaking *Letters of a Portuguese Nun* to Richardson's *Pamela* to Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, to stop at this representative case of "life" and "literature"'s mutual interpenetration – this work of fiction, using the letter's conventions, became the model of real-life personal romantic epistolography) and guarantee its success (to a great extent based on the "impression of

³⁹See articles of Maria Rólkowska, Jolanta Sztachelska and Tadeusz Bujnicki in *Sztuka pisania. O liście polskim w wieku XIX* (The art of writing. Polish letter in the nineteenth century), Białystok 2000.

⁴⁰*List antyczny. Antologia* (The Letter in Antiquity. Anthology), ed. Jerzy Schnayder, Wrocław 1959; Wrocław 2006.

⁴¹See Skwarczyńska, "Wokół teorii listu (Paradoksy)" (Concerning the Theory of the Letter [Paradoxes]), in Skwarczyńska, *Pomiędzy historią a teorią literatury* (In Between Literary Theory and History), Warszawa 1975.

authenticity,” which can lead to theoretical reflection on the problem of mimesis, as well as the question of the psychology of reception, and studies inspired by theories of affect). This same group of paradoxical features of the letter has also stimulated activity in the reverse direction: the use by letter-writers of everything belonging to literature (in a given culture and period) in their everyday epistolography (as in e.g. pre-Romantic epistolography, see Aleksandrowicz 1993;⁴² or the “Sternean” letters of Tomasz Zan, see Sudolski, 1999;⁴³ as well as the letters of Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska); it also gives validity to the parallel action of the everyday letter’s “absorption” into the area of literature (for example, Krasiński’s letters to Delfina have been characterized by Jan Kott as the greatest novel of Polish Romanticism; Kott compares them with the novels of Balzac, Stendhal, George Sand and Proust; see Kott 1966).⁴⁴ The transferability and transitivity of the letter between different systems of discourse or forms of narration (including both grand narratives and micronarratives) appears to be one of its essential properties.

Formulating the problem in this way brings us closer (but not all the way) toward thinking about the letter in terms of a concept from outside literary studies, namely: the medium, understood and interpreted similarly to W.J.T. Mitchell’s discussion of pictures (Mitchell, 2013),⁴⁵ in which he poses the question in terms of what pictures want, what needs and expectations they have. The letter is similar to a medium in many ways it is an “embodied messenger, not the message itself,” it is a material means of intercommunication, a historically and spatially specific “social practice,” materially heterogeneous, (the letter, in addition to recording someone’s writing, also contains drawings, stickers, etc., and can be engraved on a wooden board, inscribed on a servant’s body, written on paper by hand or typed on a typewriter or computer keyboard) and institutionalized (by the post office, archive, and book), can take on the form of art, but by no means must do so. The letter has causative power on many levels: “as a branch of literary genres” (in Skwarczyńska’s term, frequently repeated by other scholars), as an “action” and “gesture” in building a communicative (interpretative) community, but also when it does not reach its addressee(s), when it has results, when it motivates action. Even if the letter does not perfectly meet all the conditions of the medium that figure in Mitchell’s discussion of pictures, by virtue of its transferability and paradoxicality it invites us to ask, in a similar spirit, what do letters want? How do they express desire and in what way do they summon desire? Roland Barthes pursued this line of thinking when he wrote, in *A Lover’s Discourse*, that “Like desire, the love letter waits for an answer; it implicitly enjoins the other to reply”⁴⁶ (Barthes 1978, 158; see also Ganszyniec, *Polskie listy miłosne dawnych czasów*, 1925).⁴⁷ Every letter expects an answer (a reaction), even farewell letters (like Virginia Woolf’s frequently reprinted farewell letter to her husband), lost letters, or those sent to a non-existent addressee (letters to Saint Nicholas) from a sender who has since died (i.e. Witkacy’s letters received by those close to

⁴²A. Aleksandrowicz, “Preromantyczne listowanie jako forma ekspresji uczuć” (Pre-Romantic Letter Correspondence as a Form of Emotional Expression), *Pamiętnik Literacki* (Literary Diary) 1993, 2, pp. 66–83.

⁴³*Korespondencja filomatów. Wybór* (Selected Correspondence of the Philomaths), ed. Zbigniew Sudolski, Wrocław 1999.

⁴⁴Zygmunt Krasiński, *Sto listów do Delfiny* (100 Letters to Delfina), ed. Jan Kott, Warszawa 1966.

⁴⁵W.J.T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want: The Lives and Loves of Images?* Chicago 2013.

⁴⁶Roland Barthes, *A Lover’s Discourse*, trans. Richard Howard, New York, 1978.

⁴⁷Ryszard Ganszyniec, *Polskie listy miłosne dawnych czasów* (Polish Love Letters of Times Long Past), Warszawa 1925.

him years after his death). Each official, apostolic, anonymous or denunciatory letter also hopes for some reaction.

What else do letters want? They want to be re-read many times, they hope to be saved, preserved and made public (in spite of demands from the source that they be destroyed) and they want to provoke emotion from and leave a trace on their readers (the receiver and the broader audience), creating an effect of “life” (see the eclectic anthology of letters, e.g. *Letters of Note. Correspondence Deserving of a Wider Audience*, see Usher 2013⁴⁸ or original histories of the letter, such as Simon Garfield’s *To the Letter: A Curious History of Correspondence*, Garfield 2014)⁴⁹. They want to disturb the stab dichotomy of presence and absence and neat divisions into art (literature) and everyday practice. They definitely cry out for inter- and transdisciplinary study, to create a comprehensive and satisfying theory that does justice to their complexity.

⁴⁸Shaun Usher, *Letters of Note. Correspondence Deserving of a Wider Audience*, 2013.

⁴⁹Garfield Simon, *To the Letter: A Curious History of Correspondence*, 2014.

The Void

1 Emptiness in Science and Art - Philosophical Prolegomenon

philosophy¹; the term has a distinct definition in each area, often with widely disparate connotations. In scholarly texts on the subject, the reader encounters different forms of the void's presence in the structure of existence – crucial ontological and ontic questions are posed: about non-existence and existence and about nothingness and plenitude. One of the first philosophers who undertook to answer them is thought to be Parmenides² – he argued that non-existence does not exist, since the very thought of its possibility converts it into a part of the continuum of what exists.³ Among the ancients, we should also mention Democritus, Plato, and Aristotle; among modern thinkers, we would start with Descartes, Leibniz, and Kant. Since Kant and his *Critique of Judgment*, thought concerning the void has been marked by two distinct aspects, logical (the void as a subject that exists or does not) and methodological (the void as an object, a phenomenon in consciousness, more specifically, a property of space); “Beginning with Kant, it becomes feasible to perceive the void as relative. It was Kant who first explored the possibility of treating space and time as phenomena, and at the same time showed the way toward acknowledging the void within the human being.”⁴ To name all of the philosophers (even European philosophers) who have dealt with the problems of nonexistence and nothingness would take up more space than we have.

The ontological understanding of the void is linked with particular belief systems – among other types of beliefs, the division between metaphysical monism and pluralism is crucially relevant here.⁵ For decades, the monistic Western world identified the void with nothingness and nega-

The concept of emptiness, or the void, is used in various disciplines: from the natural and social sciences (including psychology) to the fields of theology and philosophy

¹ The anthologies of articles written from widely differing perspectives by various scholars on the problem of the void testify to the multidisciplinary nature of this category: see *Wszechświat, bezład, pustka* (Universe, Chaos, Void), ed. M. Czapiga, K. Konarska, Wrocław 2014 and *Człowiek i pustka. Problemy wakuumologii* (Man and the Void. Problems of Vacuumology), ed. Z. Hull, W. Tulibacki, Olsztyn 2000. The latter volume contains two articles devoted precisely to the issue of the void's heterogeneity: R. Nazar, “Uwagi w sprawie statusu metodologicznego terminu pustka” and Z. Hull, “Wielowymiarowość pustki.” A very interesting work of popular science on the subject is John Barrow's *The Book of Nothing: Vacuums, Voids, and the Latest Ideas about the Origins of the Universe*, New York 2009.

² See i.e.: L. Leikums, *Pustka jako fenomen filozoficznej świadomości* (The Void as a Phenomenon in Philosophical Consciousness), trans. A. Bastek; V.M. Tirado San Juan, “Myśleć Bycie i ‘nie’ Bycia przez pryzmat inteligencji odczuwającej,” trans. M. Jagłowski; A. and I. Byczko, “‘Niewidzialna’ natura rzeczywistości w filozofii Grigorija Skovorody” (The “Invisible” Nature of Reality in the Philosophy of Grigorij Skovoroda) in: *Człowiek i pustka*, op. cit.

³ The ancient Chinese philosopher Zhuangzi offered a different interpretation, asserting that posing the question about existence and nonexistence has the effect of actualizing both: “Existence is, non-existence is, that which has not yet become nonexistence is, and so is that which has not yet become that which has not yet become nonexistence.” Many centuries later, yet another take on the question was proposed by the contemporary Russian philosopher A.N. Chanyshv, who in his *Treatise on Nonexistence* writes: “I claim that nonexistence not only exists, but that it is primary and absolute. Existence is relative and secondary in relation to nonexistence.” Chanyshv, *Трактат о небытии*, Moskva 2000.

⁴ See L. Leikums, op. cit.

⁵ In the former category, the sense of a cosmological void is a real possibility, in part because the human being is “existence becoming conscious of, on the one hand, the limitlessness and power of the universe, on the other, of the fragility and smallness of oneself,” deepening the impossibility of referencing other types of existence, particularly the Absolute, whereas in pluralistic systems the metaphysical void is essentially impossible. See J. M. Dołęga, “Człowiek i pustka w refleksji filozoficznej i teologicznej” (Man and the Void in Philosophical and Theological Thought) in: *Człowiek i pustka*, op. cit., p. 18

tive, destructive nihilism.⁶ In the nontheist philosophy of Buddhism, on the other hand, the void is treated as a positive value,⁷ seen as a permanent feature of all aspects of the world: “everything that is found in the realm of object and subject is void, without essence [...] Consciousness is void, the senses are void, the objects perceived by them are void, time is void, essence is void. Void, too, is everything that would be the negation of those things. Even that which appears to be the Buddhist absolute – nirvana – is void. [...] This is not the negation of something, or no-thing, because being void, they are not something which negation could have claims against [...] It is rather about not grasping onto [...] that which in any case provides no support [...]. The philosophy of the void takes nothing away, but changes our view and indicates a middle path.”⁸ The Buddhist experience of the void thus does not connote a frightening nothingness, but is liberating and joyful in nature, turning into something like an experience of plenitude.

The boundary between void and plenitude has also been effaced in contemporary Polish literature – in a prose work with the revealing title *Nic, czyli wszystko* (Nothing, that is, everything), Tadeusz Różewicz writes: “Our contemporary Nothing is different than the Nothing of the past. The structure of our Nothing is the opposite of nothingness. Our Nothing exists and is aggressive. Our Nothing is not in opposition to the real world, to ‘reality.’ It is reality. That is our Nothing. The Nothing of people in the second half of the twentieth century. It is a constructive and affirmative Nothing. A dynamic and active Nothing. Utterly alien to nihilism, actively opposed to ‘nothingness.’”⁹ This Nothing, then, no longer has much in common with nothingness, nonexistence, the abyss, lack, absence, etc., and takes on diametrically opposed associations – with creative action, movement, strength, and above all with presence.

Examined from an ontological perspective, the void often (though not always) encroaches on other areas of reflection; in my considered opinion, these should be looked at separately, independently of metaphysical connections. The void has been the source of intriguing interpretations in epistemological,¹⁰ axiological¹¹ and anthropological (in the broad sense of the word) terms, encompassing its philosophical, religious and spiritual, psychological and social aspects.¹² No less

⁶ H. Romanowska-Łakomy, “Pustka jako wartość dodatnia” (The Void as a Positive Value) in: *Człowiek i pustka*, op. cit.

⁷ See two books by Artur Przybysławski, both of which approach the problem from the perspective of Buddhism, the first in a serious and scholarly manner, the second with carefree lightheartedness: *Buddyjska filozofia pustki* (The Buddhist Philosophy of the Void), Wrocław 2009 and *Pustka jest radością, czyli filozofia buddyjska z przymrużeniem (trzeciego) oka* (The Void is Joy, or Buddhist Philosophy with a Wink of the [Third] Eye), Warszawa 2010.

⁸ A. Przybysławski, *Buddyjska filozofia pustki*, p. 254.

⁹ T. Różewicz, *Nic, czyli wszystko*, in: Różewicz, *Proza*, vol. 3, Wrocław 2004, p. 183.

¹⁰ For example: M. Gołębiowska, “Derridy refleksje na temat pustki. Polemika ze strukturalizmem,” in: *Człowiek i pustka*, op. cit., in which the author underscores how Derrida’s works “are closely linked with the negation of the systematization of human knowledge, subordinated to a center organizing reflections (idee, arche, principium), useful and effective knowledge”; *ibid.*, p. 55.

¹¹ M.in.: H. Romanowska-Łakomy, “Pustka jako wartość dodatnia,” J. Barański, “Pustka aksjologiczna – świat wolności ledwie uzasadnionej” (The Axiological Void—the World of Barely Justified Freedom) in: *Człowiek i pustka*, op. cit.

¹² See among other works: A. Leder, “Nieświadomość jako pustka,” Warszawa 2001. J. Trąbka, “Człowiek wobec naturalnej pustki,” J. Sauś, “Czy istnieje problem pustki społecznej? Uwagi filozoficzno-socjologiczne,” W. Tulibacki, “Notatki o pustce człowieczej,” W. Słomski, “Pustka jako kategoria filozoficzna w poglądach Antoniego Kępińskiego,” in: *Człowiek i pustka*, op. cit.

interesting are studies of the ramifications of the physical void – whether in terms of experimental physics,¹³ biology,¹⁴ or the study of space. The last category has at least three essential sub-categories – starting with those works that treat the void in geographic-cultural terms; among these, particularly noteworthy are studies of Scandinavia, the Arctic, and Japan.¹⁵ Secondly, there are attempts to grasp the issue in what we may call geographic-metaphorical terms – here, the most important empty spaces, attributed manifold meanings, are the world's deserts.¹⁶ Thirdly and finally, the notion of the void can refer to abandoned places, old, decrepit ruins where people once lived and whence they decided or were forced by circumstances to leave.¹⁷ In fact, the void has a strong presence in the aesthetic sphere, appearing in architecture,¹⁸ the theatre,¹⁹ film,²⁰ music and the visual arts,²¹ and, last but not least, in literature.²²

The void takes on different shapes in artistic representation, but all of them share one feature – the presence of spectators who, placed in front of diverse manifestations of the void in art are forced to respond somehow, take a position, grasp the possible meanings, remembering that the void does not direct them toward a fixed range of ideas, but rather sets in motion individual, often fleeting experiences of content.²³

¹³See G. Bugajak, "Próżnia – pustka – nicość. Czy wszechświat jest fluktuacją próżni?" in: *Człowiek i pustka*, op. cit.

¹⁴For example, E. Kośmicki, "Czy zmierzamy do pustki biologicznej? O podstawowych problemach różnorodności biologicznej," K. Łastowski, "Człowiek bez innych. Idea pustki gatunkowej w perspektywie teorii ewolucji," in: *Człowiek i pustka*, op. cit.

¹⁵See W.K. Pessel, "Pustka i wypełnienie. Północ w kulturze i geopolityce," M. Czapiga, "Iluzje pustki w 'Spotkaniach na krańcach świata' Wernera Herzoga," in: *Wszechświat, bezład, pustka*, op. cit.; N. Bouvier, "Pustka i pełnia: zapiski z Japonii 1964-1970," ed. with preface by G. Leroy, trans. K. Arustowicz, Warszawa 2005. See S. Jasionowicz, "Woda, deszcz, śnieg, lód – postaci widzialnej pustki," in: Jasionowicz, *Pustka we współczesnym doświadczeniu poetyckim*, Kraków 2009.

¹⁶See Edmond Jabès' metaphysico-poetic texts, including the extended interview with Jabès: *Z pustyni do księgi: rozmowy z Marcelem Cohenem*, trans. A. Wodnicki, Kraków 2005. See also: A. Bielik-Robson, „Na pustyni”. *Kryptoteologie późnej nowoczesności*, Kraków 2008. See Jasionowicz, "Przestrzeń pustyni," in: Jasionowicz, *Pustka we współczesnym doświadczeniu poetyckim*, op. cit.

¹⁷D. Majkowska-Szajer, "opuszczone.com," in: *Inne przestrzenie, inne miejsca. Mapy i terytoria*, ed. and with an introduction by D. Czaja, Wołowiec 2013. On the void of identity as a result of forced exile (exemplified by the biography of Croatian writer Dubravka Ugrčić), see: I. Fiut, "Pusta tożsamość," in: *Na pograniczach literatury*, ed. J. Fazan, K. Zajas, Kraków 2012. Furthermore, on architectural and attitudinal attempts to fill empty spaces (including the void), see: A. Janus, "Zapełnianie pustki. Muzeum i paradoks upamiętniania," in: *Inne przestrzenie*, op. cit.

¹⁸B. Szady, "Porządek w bezładzie – o koncepcji Formy Otwartej Oskara Hansena," in: *Wszechświat, bezład, pustka*; A. Mielnik, *Piękno w pustce*, https://suw.biblos.pk.edu.pl/resources/i3/i3/i1/r331/MielnikA_PieknoPustce.pdf, dostęp: 09.04.2015.

¹⁹See D. Wiles, "The Empty Space," in: D. Wiles, *A Short History of Western Performance Space*, Cambridge 2003.

²⁰For example, see A. Lewicki, "Puste finały. Zakończenie otwarte w literaturze i filmie," in: *Wszechświat, bezład, pustka*, op. cit.

²¹See E. Bobrowska, "Pustka – wzniosłość – nieskończoność, czyli poszerzanie terytorium sztuki" in: E. Bobrowska, *Parateoria. Kalifornijska Szkoła z Irvine*, Warszawa 2013.

²²The only book devoted entirely to the category of the void within the field of Polish literature studies of which I am aware is the work mentioned above by Stanisław Jasionowicz: *Pustka we współczesnym doświadczeniu poetyckim*, Kraków 2009. There are, however, articles on the subject, for example J. Kurowicki, "Artystyczna i filozoficzna obecność pustki," in: *Człowiek i pustka*, op. cit.

²³See: "The word 'void' is used vacantly, but at the same time there is no empirical method for determining the characteristics of a void, and therefore of the truth value of statements using the term. If, however, the word 'void' does not correspond to any reality in the objective world, then perhaps its subjective meaning should be sought in its figurative or peripheral meanings, or those assembled from concrete considerations." R. Nazar, *Uwagi w sprawie statusu*, op. cit. p. 10.

2 The Void as an Artistic Choice

Let us begin our actual study of the void in art with a simple statement by which I wish to formulate the problem *expressis verbis*: the void is a **conscious, de-liberate semasiological artistic choice** used in all spheres of artistic activity by artists working in the space of various currents and traditions. Focusing on works of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, this idea can be considered as operating within three main categories: as a basic concept, a startling interposition, or one of several equal elements in a coherent whole.

The Void as Concept. There are many works in which the void is an essential organizing principle, a crucial device upon which the final effect of the artistic work as a whole depends. The historical and cultural habits of the audience give them the sense that there should be “something” in a certain place; artists, working against the grain of such habits, place “nothing” in that particular place. Not in the sense of eliminating or erasing something that was in fact there before, but in the sense that that expected “something” never existed or existed in a way not directly perceptible to the senses. Some remarkable examples of this are the works presented in London’s Harvard Gallery in 2012 in the exhibit *Invisible: Art about the Unseen 1957-2012*, belonging to the genre of “invisible art”; let us consider two of the works shown there. Andy Warhol’s 1985 *Invisible Sculpture* presents an ordinary plinth with no decorative elements added – a pedestal without a sculpture, or rather with an invisible sculpture, as the title claims. The consciously planned void that constitutes the heart of the work was strongly marked by the one-time, physical, performative act of the artist standing on the pedestal, bringing into relief its deliberate lack. Another work, Tom Friedman’s *1000 Hours of Staring from 1992-1997*, is a clean square sheet of paper (each side about 82 cm long) – the artist is said to have stared at the paper for a total of one thousand hours over a period of five years. That information, however, does not change the fact that we are looking straight into a blank page, an ordinary if rather large piece of paper, difficult to acknowledge as a finish, or even a begun, work of art; therein precisely lies its meaning.

In literature we find one example of a similar use of the void in Bruno Jasiński’s “Nic” (Nothing) in his 1921 book *But w butonierce* (Shoe in a Buttonhole) – beneath the short but significant title the reader sees merely the empty space of the page. It can be read as a literary game based on an original concept or a futurist, avant-garde mockery of language and the reader, but the text can also be treated completely seriously, perceiving the poet’s voice with reference to the then-existing state of art and culture; the problem is that the text provides no grounds (such as a quotable fragment other than the title) for confirming any interpretative exploration. Years later, the text revisited Polish poetry through intertextuality when Ryszard Krynicki, in the book *Nasze życie rośnie* (Our life is growing, 1978) included the poem “Biała plama” (White spot) with the dedication: “to the memory of Bruno Jasiński.” Besides these words (the title and dedication) the page remains empty, enacting the embodiment of the title, exactly as was the case with “Nic.” This completely decipherable literary allusion becomes more complex if we subject it to further interpretation – Krynicki might be continuing the game, entering into a dialogue not only with Jasiński, but with all poetic convention. “Biała plama” can also be seen as a biographical reference to the circumstances of Jasiński’s death, which was believed to have taken place during his exile to the Siberian Gulag, although we now know that Jasiński, as a victim of the purges, was shot in Moscow. Some also assert

that the dedication represented Krynicki's way of poetically commenting on the rigorous censorship of the 1970s or was reflexive and related to the gradual diminution of the word in his own poetry – the extreme of this reduction would be the poet's silence, which here existed in a material form.²⁴

Works created using the void as a device can be interpreted in terms of the lack or absence of something which ordinarily should be in a given place: sculptures on a pedestal, lines or colors in a picture, words in a poem or sounds in a musical composition, as for example in John Cage's *4'33* (1952), also known as *Four and a half minutes of silence*. This path does not lead to any creative discoveries, yet the lack or absence is more a point of departure for further reflection than a destination.

The Void as Interposition. We encounter the void, understood as an attack on a work's integral functioning, an almost violent interposition into its potential wholeness, in such works as Lucio Fontana's series *Concetto spaziale* (1958-1968),²⁵ which can be interpreted as a spatial concept (hence the name for the artistic movement founded by Fontana, Spatialism). The Italian artist would begin with an unpainted or monochrome canvas and would then use a razor or other sharp tools to make incisions in it, sometimes in front of an audience, with the aim of thus overcoming the two-dimensionality of the painted work, introducing a third dimension: a notch, seemingly empty, simultaneously revealing what is hidden behind it, opening access to an "other" sphere of reality. What is more, the initial image, which often lacked not only color but even an undercoat of paint, reveals, thanks to being cut, its primary unity – a unity now violated, but disclosing itself through the physical act of perforation. It thus turns out that only the "destruction" of the work shows its initial coherence, while at the same time forcing us to contemplate its new visual form, inciting us to find in the work and its spaces some kind of peculiar wholeness.

Another example of using the void to interrupt a work's natural continuity is the concept applied by Katarzyna Bazarnik and Zenon Fajfer in their book *(O)patrzenie* ([Pro]visions, 2009). This liberature text was presented in a white, blank (empty!) brochure-type cover, from which the top right corner was torn off of each copy (and placed in between the pages). In such an uncommon situation, many reactions are possible: bookstores sent their copies back, believing them to be damaged, while in libraries care was taken to glue back the defective top right corner²⁶ – it was hard for readers, even the professionals, to accept that this "broken" version was the correct one, which is why they tried to "fix" it. The intervention of physically introducing the void into a book stirs readers to action, and also creates a broad field of interpretation – the space created by the removal of a fragment of the white cover reveals the next page, entirely black, such that there is a powerful contrast of colors, foreshadowing the vigorous use of that dynamic in the whole book. The carefully devised title includes a play on words, indicating simultaneously "visions," i.e., looking, and "provisions" (in Polish, the wordplay is more

²⁴See A. Świeściak, *Przemiany poetyki Ryszarda Krynickiego*, Kraków 2004, pp. 189-190. In the context of this analysis, the chapter entitled "Od poetyki negatywnej do milczenia," pp. 125-194, is particularly relevant.

²⁵See B. Hess, *Lucio Fontana, 1899-1968. "A New Fact in Sculpture"*, Köln 2006, pp. 30-54. <http://www.fondazioneeluciofontana.it/index.php/en/slashes>, last accessed: 09.04.2015.

²⁶<http://www.liberatura.pl/-o-patrzenie.html>, dostęp?

complex, since “opatrzenie” means both making provisions but also becoming disillusioned, no longer feeling attracted to something – T. W.): – exploring the texts inside the book activates each of these meanings for the reader. The void of the torn cover, this clear disruption of its unity, introduces a new quality, a new continuity, a new cohesion, but which need to be sought and found on one’s own.

The Void as Element (in an artistic whole). It is possible to analyze the examples given above, in illustrating the void as concept or as interposition, in such a way as to find the void an integral part of each work. However, with regard to those works, such a reading represents a particular choice, the result of an interpretative approach to the device of the void, and one of several possible choices or approaches, since in them the void can also be understood to signal otherness. We can also look at some works in which the void represents a fundamentally indispensable structural element. It does not take up the entirety of the work, but neither is it introduced therein *post factum* – it is simply a crucial part of the whole edifice.

Pamiętam że (I remember, 1978, Polish version 2013, translated by K. Zabłocki) – this little book by Georges Perec consists of 480 very short fragments, written as dispatches or bulletins, mostly beginning with the words “I remember...” and continuing with some reminiscences, usually highly insignificant, from the author’s everyday life experience. In accordance with his instructions, the last few pages of the book are left blank, the first of them containing the familiar “I remember” in order that the reader might note down his own minutiae from the past that have occurred to him after reading the author’s or under their influence. Here, the void urges us to fill it: with private, individual meaning or, on the contrary, something general and universalizing; the choice is for the reader to make, as he becomes a co-author of the work and enters into direct, immediate contact with it. Notably, even physically inscribing one’s own notes in those empty spaces does not nullify their status as void, since theoretically, they make an endless number of similar entries possible.

Another example of a work in which the void forms a fundamental component of the whole (and in this case, the void itself, rather than its potential filling-in, is where meaning comes) is Ignacy Karpowicz’s *Sonka* (Sonka, 2014). The eponymous heroine begins a narration of her experiences during the war; just before the story’s bleakest moment, we read the following sentence: “And then everything happened so fast,” repeated on the next, largely blank page as “So fast”; the following two pages remain entirely blank (pp. 152-155). Only after this visibly marked pause does the story continue, very dramatically as expected. This interposition plays an indispensable role in the structure of the text; although it interrupts it on one level, it does not disrupt the narrative, but rather, intensifies its enunciation more than any word could. It is true that the passage can also simply be read without attention to the blank pages, since the flow (syntactic and narrative) of the story continues naturally before and after them, so for the void to appear the reader must stop for a moment and experience its penetrating truth. The empty pages’ position in the story is not random – they appear at the moment when things have not turned bad, when there was still some shadow of hope that they might not turn bad after all. The author highlights the importance of this moment “between”: good and evil, emotion and reaction, decision and result, lack of understanding and its consequences – which in real life

lasts a fraction of a second, but here is substantially prolonged by the use of these pages. The reader thus acquires time to become truly intimate with the book. This conceptual framing allows us to create a definition of the void as: an intentional and semasiological artistic device applied in the work's space or its material form, of a non-linguistic nature, but apparent to the senses, that is, perceivable (by sight, touch, or sound) as a deliberate lack, loss, rupture, interruption, etc. This perceived disturbance of expected continuity, which can be understood as a structural concept, a deliberate interposition, or an element of the whole – is not accompanied by any clear demarcations of exact value; whether the void is a sign of the work's disintegration or coherence, or whether such a reading enters into the discussion, depends on the interpreter.

An encounter with the device of the void in a work of art may generate at least two kinds of reaction from the spectator: 1) a passive ascertainment of absence, generally linking the void with nothingness, the bitterness of existence, and other negative connotations, or 2) active perception of absence (of the void in the individual fact of its own existence!), opening up new meanings that summon him/her toward building creative interpretations. The spectator may choose the first option, but should not be limited to it – that would mean descending into banality by condemning the device to facile one-dimensionality. The void encourages the spectator to live through it, to experience it, and the experience of art or the void in art means instead of passive association with its manifestations, something more active – in Simon Critchley's words: ["An experience can never be entirely passive, but is rather some kind of active behavior, through which new objects appear before the subject, who is involved in the process of their emerging."]²⁷.

3 The Void and Related Conceptual Frameworks The category of the void embodied in an artistic work is not a particular phenomenon separate from others: quite the contrary, in close proximity to it a great number of potential contexts and contiguities are revealed, that cannot be overlooked here.

One closely related concept consists of Ingarden's **places of indeterminateness**, which – understood as moments not precisely defined due to the artist's inability to capture every detail of the world in his depiction of it, to create a flawless description – are not identical with the concept of the void, since it is not their absence that creates meaning, but the individual manner of each one's creation. Places of indeterminateness therefore constitute a lacuna by necessity, not from the artist's conscious choice, and that is a relevant argument for not interpreting them as a kind of void. In connection with them, we should consider the concept of the **open work**²⁸ proposed by Umberto Eco. He argues that every cultural text – including those that are structurally closed and complete – is in a certain sense open, because

²⁷Quoted in R. Nycz, *Poetyka doświadczenia. Teoria – nowoczesność – literatura*, Warszawa 2012, p. 150.

²⁸ Arkadiusz Lewicki refers precisely to this theoretical proposition, in connection with the void, in the article previously mentioned above, "Puste finały. Zakończenie otwarte w literaturze i filmie" (from the volume: *Wszechświat, bezład, pustka* (Universe, Chaos, Void, op. cit.)). He deals primarily with the idea of a work's openness understood as its deliberately unfinished state, however, and does not in fact conceptualize the void as such, leaving the reader with only the adroit metaphor of "empty endings," that is, endings that are suspended, such as we find in literary classics including Prus's *The Doll* and also in certain TV series.

many justifiable **interpretations of it can be made**²⁹; here again, we are not talking about the void, but about a subjective (because it combines the reader's knowledge, predilections or prejudices) actualization of a series of undefined impulses whose absence is typical for almost all works (of literature especially).³⁰ That further suggests an analogy with the phenomenon of the interpretative after-image.³¹ In the context of the reception of a work of art, the after-image – in optics, a momentary visually perceptible remainder in the retina, arising under the influence of a previously seen image or shape – is a projection of personal images, expectations, or reminiscences on the work. In a physiological sense, the after-image represents the filling of the “microvoid” that could arise as a result of moving one's gaze from one place to another; similarly, the interpretative after-image does not allow the possibility of a void in a work of art to spontaneously exist, other than as the artist's concept. If, however, the device of the void has been directly introduced into the work, then one reaction to that fact can be a more or less conscious personal interpretation through the after-image.

A very important concept, often cited in discussions of the void, is **negative poetics**.³² If, following Hugo Friedrich,³³ we designate as negative categories such formal features as: non-linearity, fragmentation, or non-cohesion, the concept becomes close enough to that of the void that we can apply the idea of the void to the interpretation of non-linear, fragmentary, or non-cohesive, seemingly incoherent works. We can, but we are not obligated to – as I mentioned, the void can just as well be understood as signifying plenitude, a new space, or a qualitative change, not necessarily demonstrating a lack of cohesion. Negative poetics, however, present a considerably broader problem. For example, Erazm Kuźma develops it not only in epistemological and axiological contexts, but also ontological ones³⁴ – all spheres in which the void is equally relevant. Particularly with regard to ontology – relating to the question of existence and nonexistence, as well as the problem of nothingness, initially taken straight from apophatic theology and later addressed by philosophers such as Heidegger and Sartre³⁵ – negative categories and the void, understood broadly, are essentially identical. However, accepting my proposed definition means that the void evades such simple identification; only **reticence** and **silence**, considered to be additional expressions of negative poetics, are found to be closely comparable. Alina Świeściak places Krynicki's poem “White Spot” (mentioned above) within the category of the poetics of silence, arguing that “The specific nature of literary silence, which of necessity cannot be total silence, would seem to rule out aphasia. Krynicki nonetheless managed to reach

²⁹Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, trans. Anna Cancogni, Cambridge 1989.

³⁰At one point in Eco's reflections, his concept of the open work gets dizzying close to the void – in the context of a discussion of French Symbolism. Eco notes: “Blank space surrounding a word, typographical adjustments, and spatial composition in the page setting of the poetic text – all contribute to create a halo of indefiniteness and to make the text pregnant with infinite suggestive possibilities.” Eco, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-8. This observation is, however, marginal with regard to his main concept, which is why I have relegated it to a footnote.

³¹In theoretical studies of art and the ways it is perceived, this term has been used by, among others, Władysław Strzemiński, who presented the problem of the after-image in his *Teorii widzenia* (Theory of Seeing), written in the late 1940s and published posthumously in 1958.

³²Or vice versa: the problem of negative poetics often includes in its orbit of discussion the idea of the void.

³³H. Friedrich, *The Structure of Modern Poetry*, translated by J. Neugroschel, Evanston 1974..

³⁴E. Kuźma, “O poetyce negatywnej. Od poetyki do poetologii, od poetologii do metapoetyki,” in: *Poetyka bez granic*, ed. W. Bolecki, W. Tomasiak, Warszawa 1995.

³⁵See M. Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?” in Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, ed. and trans. William McNeill, Cambridge 1998; J.P. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel Estella Barnes, New York 1992; Z. Andersone, *Niebyt i byt*, *op. cit.*, M. Gołaszewska, “Sartre'a filozofia niebytu,” in: *Człowiek i pustka*, *op. cit.*

the aphasic border of language. The proof is ‘White Spot.’”³⁶ Świeściak refers to the two works connected by allusion, Krynicki’s and Jasiński’s, as “non-speaking poems,” although in fact they do “speak” – the titles, as inseparable elements of the text, constitute the true “voice,” and in the case of “White Spot” there is also the resonant dedication, launching its many connotative interpretative threads. I therefore do not agree with her thesis about the silence, much less aphasia of those literary works – to me, the categoria of the void seems much more appropriate here, as it does not negate the existence of their titles; on the contrary, those titles enable the void’s actual presence to emerge and the structural “emptiness” to be accentuated through contrast, intensifying its dynamic energy. Another example of a linkage between silence and the void involves the effort to formulate the connection between the two in terms of sadness, grief, and the crisis of language and representation.³⁷ Weronika Parfianowicz-Vertun has devoted a study to the work of the Czech artists known as the poets of “quiet, time, and death” (F. Halas, V. Holan, J. Zahradníček) – it concerns three books produced by these writers in 1930, viewed by Parfianowicz-Vertun through the lens of the poetics of silence and negative aesthetics; she justifiably invokes St. Jan Nepomucen, who according to legend was condemned to be drowned in the Vltava River for silence, as the patron saint of this current.³⁸ Parfianowicz-Vertun’s analysis does not conceptualize the void in a theoretical context, however, and can be understood as simply the omnipresent (“The whole world is enclosed in the void”) result of a pessimistic diagnosis of the human condition;³⁹ at the same time, it is an interpretative category rather than a formal one. In relation to the device of the void, silence has a similar function to the fascinating category of **transparency**.⁴⁰ Both silence and transparency present the possibility of embodying the void, its imaginative and interpretative incarnation, although they are even more elusive and subjective categories.

The last problem I wish to address here, the concept of “**non-existing**” texts, is connected in a less immediately obvious fashion with the void. Here we deal not so much with the void inside the text, as the void of the text itself, that is, the absence of the work, of which the reader is -- if not at the level of perception, then at least intellectually -- aware. This is clearly a different type of void than what I have been proposing we consider, partly because here the void is not an intentional device in the same way as in the works discussed above.⁴¹ I refer to books that have been lost, are illegible, unfinished or unbegun,⁴² but in any case are non-existent. Polish literature furnishes many examples of this phenomenon, such as the famous thesis written by Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński about a nonexistent English poet, or Stanisław Lem’s *A Perfect Vacuum* (Evanston 1999), a collection of reviews of non-existent books. Another fascinating

³⁶A. Świeściak, *Przemiany*, op. cit., p. 189.

³⁷W. Parfianowicz-Vertun, “Opętani tym smutnym smutkiem. Czeska awangarda wobec kryzysu reprezentacji,” in: *Wszechświat, bezład, pustka*, op. cit.

³⁸To be precise, for refusing to betray to King Wenceslaus IV the secret of his wife Sophia of Bavaria’s confession.

³⁹W. Parfianowicz-Vertun, *Possessed...*, pp. 91-92.

⁴⁰The problem of transparency is too vast and complex to be dealt with in depth here, but I direct readers to the following important texts: I. Calvino, “Visibility” in *Calvino, Six Memos for the New Millennium*, trans. Patrick Creagh, Cambridge 1988; M. Bieńczyk, *Przezroczystość* (Transparency), Kraków 2007; S. Jasionowicz, “Ku przezroczystości” (Toward Transparency), in: *Pustka*, dz. cyt.

⁴¹An exception that proves the rule could be Stanisław Rosiek’s [*nienapisane*] [unwritten] (Gdańsk 2008), which includes a variety of fragmentary works, generally left unfinished for various reasons.

⁴²An extensive and absorbing study of this entire genre is Stuart Kelly’s *The Book of Lost Books*, New York 2006.

and inspiring example is *Widmowa biblioteka. Leksykon książek urojonych* (The Phantom Library. A Lexicon of Imaginary Books) by Paweł Dunin-Wąsowicz (Warszawa 1997)⁴³, about books described in other books purely for the purposes of literary fiction.

These examples unequivocally prove that the void has a firm place among related artistic concepts, and does not represent an isolated category. Nevertheless, when attempting to grasp and highlight it within that rich range of formal and interpretative devices, it's crucial to conceptualize as precisely as possible. My effort, which I believe has achieved some degree of coherence, has been guided by that goal; I am aware, however, that sooner or later art will offer new interpretations, which will necessitate that my no longer cohesive concept be revised.

⁴³Dunin-Wąsowicz's book (as well as works by Brian Quinette, Enrique Villa-Matas, Jean Yves Jouannais and others who have catalogued fictional books) gave rise to Agnieszka Kurant's installation, *Widmowa biblioteka* (The Phantom Library, 2011), consisting of 400 physically manufactured books with fictional titles and the names of fictitious authors printed on their covers and spines, equipped with ISBN numbers and bar codes. Another result of Dunin-Wąsowicz's book was a session organized in 2008 by Poznań's Polish Studies department which led to an issue of *Podteksty* (Subtexts, 2008, nr 2) entitled "The Phantom Library—footnotes to a lexicon of imaginary books."

Synesthesia

– a term used by scholars in various fields, refers to a whole range of related phenomena whose common underlying principle is the interaction of the senses. Generally speaking, it describes a creative “dialogue of the senses,” in which the diverse sensory channels become joined, entangled, and mutually contaminated. The

word “synaesthesia” comes from the Greek roots *syn*, meaning “together,” and *aesthesia*, meaning “perception, feeling,” so in effect it means combined perception; it also denotes an artistic device, in which “certain sensory experiences are presented within the categories proper to other senses,”¹ and a taxonomic category in medicine; synaesthesia is a type of linguistic metaphor, but also a specific creative method. The term refers to a complex of phenomena that feature the interfusion of the senses – understood, depending on the scholarly approach, as cerebral nerve centers, cognitive domains, semantic fields in language, or physical channels of communication.

Before the modern era, interest in the phenomenon of synaesthesia among philosophers such as Locke, Leibniz, and Newton led them to undertake a number of fascinating intersensory projects, the most famous of which is the idea of colored music.² However, the nineteenth century witnessed the development of the first truly scientific studies of synaesthesia and marked the beginning of synaesthesia’s great career in the areas of both science and art.³ Research in the second half of the century, during the emergence of psychology as a new discipline in the social sciences, gradually awakened interest in intersensory perception. This was aided by the simultaneous expansion of the **aesthetics of synaesthesia** – neo-Romanticism was the age in which synaesthesia-driven metaphors triumphed, and were increasingly conceived as not only a means of expression, but also a significant part of the artist’s **worldview**.

Research into the phenomenon of synaesthesia went out of favor in the early decades of the twentieth century as behaviorism grew to dominate science and “banished reference to mental states from scientific language. As synaesthesia could only be defined by self-report and reference to mental states, it was not considered amenable to scientific investigation.”⁴ The 1980s finally brought a renaissance of studies in clinical synaesthesia. New research perspectives were offered by such young disciplines as cognitive science and neuropsychology. The use of new diagnostic technologies and, in particular, innovative brain-imaging methods, made it possible to scientifically investigate the subjective phenomenon of synaesthesia. Since then accepted as an authentic neurophysiological phenomenon, synaesthesia has transformed the traditionally

¹ *Słownik terminów literackich* (Dictionary of Literary Terms), ed. J. Sławiński, Wrocław 2008, p. 551.

² S.A. Day, *A Brief History of Synaesthesia and Music*, 2002, <http://www.thereminvox.com/article/articleview/33/1/5>, last accessed: 12.05.2014; A. Rogowska, “Związki synestezji z muzyką” (Synaesthesia’s links with music), in *Muzyka. Kwartalnik Instytutu Sztuki PAN* 2002, XLVII, 1 (184).

³ One such work is George Sachs’s 1812 academic dissertation, in which the German physician described his own experience of clinical synaesthesia.

⁴ *Synaesthesia. Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. S. Baron-Cohen and J.E. Harrison, Oxford 1997, p. 4.

dominant, axiomatic understanding of the modularity of human perception,⁵ understood (since Aristotle) as the sum of several independent sensory streams. Important figures who made breakthroughs in research on synaesthesia in the 1980s were Lawrence E. Marks and Richard E. Cytowic in the US, and in England, Simon Baron-Cohen and Jeffrey Gray. Contemporary studies of synaesthesia have attracted a great deal of interest in scholarly circles; scholars in the humanities are increasingly looking at synaesthesia as a topic of literary, linguistic and cultural analysis.

Clinical synaesthesia is an anomalous interpretation of a sensory stimulus: where standard sensory reception matches a single impulse with an appropriate representation in the corresponding sensory modality, synaesthetic perception engages other sensory centers in the process of its interpretation as well, doubling or otherwise multiplying the representation of the stimulus. This unusual perceptual aberration, recognized as, depending on one's point of view, a **disorder**, a mental **state**, or an **ability**, is an immeasurably rare feature – it is estimated that about 3% of the population experiences clinical synaesthesia.⁶ Secondary induction of the neurological pattern of synaesthesia is possible through taking hallucinogenics⁷; intersensory perception may also accompany epileptic attacks⁸ or occur as a result of brain damage or sensory deprivation.⁹ Furthermore, recent studies have shown that intersensual perception can also be achieved by means of meditative practices.¹⁰ Successful cognitive attempts to acquire synaesthesia have also taken place as a result of “synaesthetic training.”¹¹ Secondary synaesthesia sometimes develops as a compensatory mechanism in blind and visually impaired or challenged persons.¹²

Over 63 subtypes of clinical synaesthesia have been identified¹³ – among the most frequent are finding associations between letters or numbers and colors, seeing units of time, colored hearing (chromesthesia)¹⁴ and visual music; personification of graphemes¹⁵ (when letters of the alphabet, numbers, days of the week or months acquire both personality and gender) and

⁵ S. Shimojo, L. Shams, “Sensory Modalities are not Separate Modalities. Plasticity and Interactions,” in *Current Opinion in Neurobiology* 2001, no. 11.

⁶ 3.7% according to S.A. Day – see <http://www.daysyn.com>, last accessed: 01.06.2014.

⁷ *Synaesthesia. Classic and Contemporary Readings*, p. 4.

⁸ According to Richarda Cytowic, epileptic discharge in the hippocampus causes temporary synaesthesia in 4% of cases.

⁹ D. Brang, V.S. Ramachandran, “Survival of the Synesthesia Gene. Why do People Hear Colors and Taste Words?” in *PloS Biology*, 2011, vol. 9(11), p. 1.

¹⁰ R. Walsh, “Can Synaesthesia Be Cultivated? Indications from Surveys of Meditators,” in *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 2005, no. 12.

¹¹ O. Colizoli, J.M.J. Murre, R. Rouw, “Pseudo-Synaesthesia through Reading Books with Colored Letters,” 2012, <http://www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0039799>, last accessed: 01.06.2014. See also: N. Rothen, B. Meier, *Acquiring Synaesthesia. Insights from Training Studies*, 2014, <http://journal.frontiersin.org/Journal>, last accessed: 10.05.2014.

¹² Consider the following synaesthetic mechanism of sensory compensation: the “electronic eye” – a device that converts the frequency of light waves into sounds for colorblind people. See Neil Harbisson, “I listen to color,” 2012, http://www.ted.com/talks/neil_harbisson_i_listen_to_color/transcript, last accessed: 06.05.2015.

¹³ The most recent statistics (on the number and frequency of synaesthesia subtypes) are available at S.A. Day's website – <http://www.daysyn.com/index.html>, last accessed: 10.01.2015. This website is the source of the statistical data cited above.

¹⁴ According to other sources, this particular subtype of synaesthesia is the most common (see *Synaesthesia. Classic and Contemporary Readings*, p. 3).

¹⁵ See R.E. Cytowic, *Synaesthesia: A Union of the Senses*, Cambridge 2002, p. 298.

tasting words also occur fairly frequently. The most intriguing subtypes of synaesthesia are those connected with how people experience emotions (the most common variation is feeling emotions as colors; emotions may also be associated with certain properties of taste, smell, and even hearing) and colored pain. Another curious subtype is ticker-tape synaesthesia, involving the visual transmutation of human speech, perceived simultaneously as auditory and graphic stimuli – a kind of transcription in real time (analogous with subtitles in a foreign film). Recent research has uncovered mirroring tactile synaesthesia¹⁶ – those who possess this capacity experience tactile sensations on their own body while observing touch; these individuals also display above-average emotional empathy,¹⁷ indicating possible connections between empathy and touch. Another curious version of synaesthesia, observed in 2011, links different swimming strokes with particular colors¹⁸ – in this case, the basis for synaesthetic perception of color is motor proprioception, the sense of the body's movement and position (and the relative positions of body parts).¹⁹ For those with synaesthesia, the union between two sensory modalities is permanent and the supplementary reaction to stimuli unchanging; it is also idiosyncratic in nature (the system of synaesthetic reactions to stimuli is idiomatic to and unique in each person). Reciprocal linkages (occurring in both directions between two senses)²⁰ are rare, as are multi-modal linkages joining more than two senses in perceptual synchrony. A handful of scholars who define intersensory perception as a cognition-based phenomenon²¹ have introduced the alternative concept of "ideaesthesia" (*idea* with *aisthesis* – perception of a concept)²². A category related to both syn- and ideaesthesia is anaesthesia (insensibilization, from the Greek *an* – meaning "without," plus *aisthesis*).²³

R.E. Cytowic regards the perceptually involuntary character of synaesthesia²⁴ to be one of five diagnostic criteria²⁵ that demarcate a clear line between metaphorical intellectual constructs and associations, on the one hand, and a neurological anomaly of perception on the other. Ac-

¹⁶See M.J. Banissy, R. Cohen Kadosh, W.G. Maus, V. Walsh, J. Ward, "Prevalence, Characteristics and a Neurological Model of Mirror-Touch Synaesthesia," *Experimental Brain Research* 2009, vol. 198; M.B. Fitzgibbon, P.G. Enticott, A.N. Rich, Melita J. Giummarra, N. Georgiou-Karistianis, J.L. Bradshaw, "Mirror-Sensory Synaesthesia. Exploring 'Shared' Sensory Experiences as Synaesthesia," *Neuroscience and Behavioral Reviews* 2001, vol. 36 (1).

¹⁷See M.J. Banissy, J. Ward, "Mirror-Touch Synaesthesia is Linked with Empathy," *Nature Neuroscience* 2007, http://www.daysyn.com/Banissy_Wardpublished.pdf, last accessed: 01.06.2014.

¹⁸See A. Mroczko-Wasowicz, M. Werning, "Synesthesia, Sensory-Motor Contingency, and Semantic Emulation. How Swimming Style-Color Synesthesia Challenges the Traditional View of Synesthesia," *Frontiers in Psychology*, 2012, no. 3.

¹⁹This type is not covered in S. A. Day's list.

²⁰See P.G. Grossenbacher, C.T. Lovelace, "Mechanisms of Synesthesia. Cognitive and Physiological Constraints," *Trends Cogn Sci.* 2001, no. 5; A.N. Rich, J.B. Mattingley, "Anomalous Perception in Synaesthesia. A Cognitive Neuroscience Perspective," *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* 2002, no. 40.

²¹Those who consider synaesthesia a perceptual phenomenon include Vilayanur S. Ramachandran; Aleksandra Mroczko and Danko Nikolic have studied the cognitive foundations of synaesthesia.

²²Other researchers treat the perceptivity or cognitivity of synaesthesia as a variational feature, distinguishing perceptual synaesthesia, activated automatically by a sensory stimulus, from cognitive synaesthesia, which is activated by imagining the stimulus (see the studies by P.G. Grossenbacher and Ch.T. Lovelace).

²³K.O. Eliassen, "The Anaesthesia of Charles Baudelaire's 'Le goût de néant'" in: *Sensual Reading. New Approaches to Reading in Its Relations to Senses*, ed. M. Syrotinsky and I. MacLachlan, London 2001.

²⁴See V.S. Ramachandran, E.M. Hubbard, "Synaesthesia – A Window into Perception, Thought and Language," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 2001, vol. 8 (12): perception operating with a second, competing modality is activated by even a subliminal stimulus (or a "paraliminal" one – barely perceptible, peripheral), and thus is unconscious, transformed without the participation of attention or will.

²⁵R.E. Cytowic, "Synesthesia: Phenomenology And Neuropsychology," *Psyche* 1995, no. 10.

cording to Cytowic, synaesthetic perception also differs from cognitive processes in its spatial character – synaesthetic impressions are in most cases projected onto the environment being perceived; they are physically visible, tangible, palpable, and audible. In view of this fact, additive synaesthetic perception is closer to **hallucination**²⁶ than to association. A third factor that clarifies the contrast between clinical synaesthesia and intersensory metaphor is, Cytowic claims, the invariability and extreme generality of synaesthetic impressions. Whereas metaphoric language feeds on novelty, surprise, and uncommon comparisons, synaesthetic impressions always follow the same typical patterns, unchanging over time. A fourth criterion is that synaesthetic experiences **stay in the memory**²⁷ – people with synaesthesia show above-average mnemonic gifts.²⁸ The fifth determinant of synaesthesia is its inherently affective nature. Tests have further revealed that clinical synaesthesia is correlated with creativity and a high level of intelligence, together with lower mathematical and spatial aptitude.²⁹ Autism, dyslexia and Attention deficit Disorder (ADD) are often noted among synaesthetes.

The etiology of clinical synaesthesia has not been clearly established. At the current moment, two concepts are dominant: *cross-activation theory*, also called *adjacency theory*,³⁰ and *disinhibited feedback theory*. The role of genetics in synaesthesia is seen as very probably significant; scientists indicate that the trait may be localized in the human genome,³¹ while still underscoring the polymorphousness of synaesthesia and the complexity of its inheritance pattern. The formerly held assumption about one-gender (feminine) transmission of the synaesthesia gene, which was thought to be connected with the X chromosome, has been refuted.³² Higher incidence of synaesthesia among women (it was generally accepted that the ratio of women to men among those with synaesthesia may be as high as 6:1³³), the basis for the inference of a one-chromosome disorder, has been revealed to be a myth that resulted from methodological errors and biases.³⁴ According to V.S. Ramachandran and E.M. Hubbard the cortical cross-activation typical in synaesthesia, resulting from excessive neuronal cohesion between adjoining areas of the brain, is probably caused by genetic mutation, modifying the course of apoptosis (“programmed cell death”³⁵), the process by which neuronal connections are cut off

²⁶In view of its perceptual nature, synaesthesia is not a hallucination, because it is caused by a particular external stimulus, while hallucinations do not have external sensory motivation.

²⁷R.E. Cytowic, “Synesthesia: Phenomenology And Neuropsychology. A Review of Current Knowledge,” last accessed: 01.06.2014. <http://www.theassc.org/files/assc/2346.pdf>, p. 8 (“Synesthesia is memorable.”)

²⁸See also: A. Luria, *O pamięci, która nie miała granic*, Warszawa 1970.

²⁹R.E. Cytowic, “Synesthesia: Phenomenology And Neuropsychology,” p. 15.

³⁰S.A. Day, “The Human Sensoria and a Synaesthetic Approach to Cooking,” *Collapse* 2011, VII, p. 14.

³¹In 2009 four segments of the genome were designated as possibly responsible for the synaesthesia trait: J.E. Asher, J.A. Lamb, D. Brocklebank, J.-B. Cazier, E. Maestrini, L. Addis, M. Sen, S. Baron-Cohen, A.P. Monaco, “A Whole-Genome Scan and Fine-Mapping Linkage Study of Auditory-Visual Synesthesia Reveals Evidence of Linkage to Chromosomes 2q24, 5q33, 6p12, and 12p12,” *American Journal of Human Genetics* 2009, vol. 84; see also: S.N. Tomson, N. Avidan, K. Lee, A.K. Sarma, R. Tushe, D.M. Milewicz, M. Bray, S.M. Leal, D.M. Eagleman, “The Genetics of Color Sequence Synesthesia. Suggestive Evidence of Linkage to 16q and Genetic Heterogeneity for the Condition,” *Behavioural Brain Research* 2011, vol. 223.

³²J.E. Asher, J.A. Lamb, D. Brocklebank, J.-B. Cazier, E. Maestrini, L. Addis, M. Sen, S. Baron-Cohen, A.P. Monaco, dz. cyt., s. 279: „Nie znaleziono potwierdzenia związku (synestezji – Z.K.) z chromosomem X; co więcej, zidentyfikowaliśmy dwa potwierdzone przypadki dziedziczenia synestezji w linii mężczyzna–mężczyzna” [przekł. Z. Kozłowska].

³³D. Brang, V.S. Ramachandran, “Survival of the Synesthesia Gene,” p. 2.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵R. Carter, *Mapping the Mind*, Berkeley 1998, p. 21.

in early childhood.³⁶ This theory is based on a hypothesis of **childhood synaesthesia**³⁷ which claims that the “dramatic” synaesthetic view of the world³⁸ constitutes a standard feature of babies’ perception, while clinical synaesthesia is a result of incomplete apoptosis. Some scientists associate the disappearance of childhood intersensory perception with the process of language activation.³⁹ The synaesthetic *sensorium* of childhood, seen as a medium of fluid and holistic experience is aestheticized and poeticized in literature, particularly of the Romantic period.

R.E. Cytowic, convinced of the crucial role of the limbic system in the neurological mechanism of intersensory perception, considers synaesthesia to be “the premature display of a normal cognitive process.”⁴⁰ Synaesthesia is, in his view, an enhanced process of perception, because “we are all synesthetic” but “only a handful of people are consciously aware of the holistic nature of perception.”⁴¹ Clinical synaesthesia results in experiences which the standard mode of perception would subject to further “neural transformation and mental mediation.”⁴² Cytowic’s theory fits with Reuven Tsur’s theory of rapid vs. delayed categorization,⁴³ applied to synaesthesia as a literary phenomenon. Delayed categorization corresponds to Cytowic’s idea of synaesthetic perception as enhanced: it is a pre-linguistic, and even pre-cognitive, strictly sensory and bodily form of perception.

In the realm of language, synaesthesia functions as a description of a sensory experience by means of reference to another of the senses. Linguistic synaesthesia may take the form of an epithet, a comparison, a metaphor, personification, or more complex poetic devices.⁴⁴ This mechanism forms the basis of many lexicalized metaphors, such as the following (ide-aesthetic) sensualized abstract concepts: “white fear, black despair, burning love.”⁴⁵ Stephen Ullmann’s statistical research⁴⁶ is one key contribution to the “semantics of synaesthesia,” as well as later continuations, revisions, and developments,⁴⁷ verifications,⁴⁸ and functional reor-

³⁶V.S. Ramachandran, E.M. Hubbard, “Synesthesia,” p. 3.

³⁷On synaesthesia as a phase of development, see S. Baron-Cohen, “Is There a Normal Phase of Synaesthesia in Development?” in *PSYCHE* 1996, vol. 2; A.O. Holcombe, E.L. Altschuler, H.J. Over, “A Developmental Theory of Synesthesia with Long Historical Roots. A Comment on Hochel and Milan,” *Cognitive Neuropsychology* 2009, vol. 26; see also the recent article criticizing the theory of childhood synaesthesia: O. Deroy, C. Spence, “Are We All Born Synaesthetic? Examining the Neonatal Synaesthesia Hypothesis,” *Neurosci Biobehav Rev.* 2013, no. 37 (7); see also research conducted by: Maurer (2012); Ludwiga (2011); Cohena Kadosha (2009); Rouw and Scholte (2007); Maurer and Mondlach (2005).

³⁸R. Carter, *Mapping the Mind*, p. 22.

³⁹See J.M. Barker, “Out of Sync, Out of Sight: Synaesthesia and Film Spectacle,” *Paragraph* 2008, 31:2, p. 243.

⁴⁰R.E. Cytowic, “Synesthesia. Phenomenology and Neuropsychology,” p. 10.

⁴¹*Ibid.*

⁴²*Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁴³R. Tsur, “Issues in Literary Synaesthesia,” *Style* 2007, 41, pp. 38–39.

⁴⁴*Słownik terminów literackich*, p. 551.

⁴⁵A. Legeżyńska, “Płeć synestezji,” in: Legeżyńska, *Od kochanki do psalmistki. Sylwetki, tematy i konwencje liryki kobiecej*, Poznań 2009, p. 187.

⁴⁶S. Ullmann, “Panchronistic Tendencies in Synaesthesia,” in: Ullmann, *The Principles of Semantics*, Blackwell 1957.

⁴⁷See the detailed development of Ullmann’s model in: J.M. Williams, “Synesthetic Adjectives. A possible Law of Semantic Change,” *Language* 1976, 52.

⁴⁸M. Zawilińska-Janaszek, “Metafory synestezyjne z dźwiękiem jako domeną docelową w językach angielskim i polskim. Kierunkowość i struktura w recenzjach muzycznych i poezji,” 2012, <https://repozytorium.amu.edu.pl/jspui/handle/10593/3526>, last accessed: 01.06.2014.

ganizations⁴⁹ of Ullmann's model of how synaesthetic metaphors work and what they reveal. Linguists are working on the problem of the multifaceted representation of each of the senses in language, describing the phenomenon of interchangeability and (synaesthetic) interference between and among separate sensory categories⁵⁰ in the context of linguistic compensation in domains that are "less clearly delineated in our conceptual framework."⁵¹ The linguistic and psychological aspects of synaesthesia are being explored by the field of psycholinguistics.⁵² In our age of interdisciplinary scholarship, the hypothesis has arisen that "synaesthesia research can bring new insights into our understanding of the neurological bases of metaphor and language."⁵³ V.S. Ramachandran and E.M. Hubbard claim that studies of synaesthetic perception as the foundation of **phonetic symbolism** may make it possible to examine the neurological mechanisms of the formation of language itself.⁵⁴ According to their approach, metaphors, like synaesthesia, involve the joining of two media – in synaesthesia, two separate sensory channels, in a metaphor two interwoven ways of thinking, two concepts. Synaesthesia generates a network of permanent, involuntary and repeatable connections; metaphor, on the contrary, is a bounded encounter between two thought components.

Synaesthesia is a formal procedure used in various types of art: painting,⁵⁵ music, theater,⁵⁶ and literature. Literary synaesthesia is marked by its specific potential, its capacity for effectively representing conflicting, even mutually exclusive creative aims. The paradoxical duality of synaesthesia, lending itself both to the creation of an artistic sense of unity, and to producing a refined effect of particularized experience (as for example in baroque metaphysical poetry, in which intersensory transfers take place through description of visual or auditory phenomena with analytical "differentiation"⁵⁷ from experiences of touch, taste and smell, in a certain way illuminating and mannerizing their lack of linguistic definition), shaping its poetic vitality. I. H. Hassan, citing Svend Johansen's work, calls attention to this

⁴⁹See Tsur, "Issues in Literary Synaesthesia," p. 44.

⁵⁰See S. Żurowski, "Przymiotniki określające cechy dźwięków," 2012, <http://sensualnosc.ibl.waw.pl/pl/articles/przymiotniki-okreslajace-cechy-dzwiekow-181/> oraz <http://sensualnosc.ibl.waw.pl/pl/articles/przyslowki-okreslajace-cechy-dzwiekow-186/>, dostęp: 01.06.2014.

⁵¹R. Bronikowska, "Kierunki przesunięć metaforycznych przymiotników percepcji dotykowej," 2011, <http://sensualnosc.ibl.waw.pl/pl/articles/kierunki-przesuniec-metaforycznych-przymiotnikow-percepcji-dotykowej-131/>, last accessed: 01.06.2014; see also D. Legallois, *Synesthésie adjectivale, sémantique et psychologie de la forme: la transposition au coeur du lexique*, Caen 2004.

⁵²See J. Simner, "Beyond Perception. Synaesthesia as a Psycholinguistic Phenomenon," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 2006, vol. 11.1; see also I. Kurcz, *Psycholingwistyka. Przegląd problemów badawczych*, Warszawa 1976.

⁵³M. Hochel, E.G. Milán, "Synaesthesia. The Existing State of Affairs," *Cognitive Neuropsychology* 2008, vol. 25, p. 113.

⁵⁴According to Ramachandran and Hubbard ("Synesthesia")'s thesis, language is the result of the production inside the brain a network of synesthetic connections, that made it possible for the human being, in the first stages of the development of natural language, to connect articulate sounds with the sensory phenomena of the world around him.

⁵⁵Consider the synaesthetic paintings of Wassily Kandinsky (A. Ione, "Kandinsky and Klee. Chromatic Chords, Polyphonic Painting and Synesthesia," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 2004, 11), as well as sound effects in Monet's Impressionist paintings or the intentional introduction of noise into Futurist images. It is also worth considering the work of painters who experience synaesthesia, such as Carol Steen and Anne Saltz.

⁵⁶For example the German group of artists Der Blaue Reiter, who in the early twentieth century undertook a number of intersensory artistic projects in a collective effort to create a Wagnerian "total work of art" in a vein similar to Kandinsky's theories. Kandinsky's play *The Yellow Sound* is also of interest here.

⁵⁷As opposed to the much more frequent panchronic, ecstatic synaesthesia which enacts a de-differentiation (and hence unification) of experience (see Tsur, "Issues in Literary Synaesthesia.")

bipolar nature of synaesthesia, to its simultaneous “primitiveness and sophistication.”⁵⁸ In Johnsen’s words, “On the one hand synaesthesia allows one to reach the highest degree of refinement, ... on the other hand, it originates in what is most primitive and most original in poetry, the need to convey a complete and concentrated impression.”⁵⁹ According to R. Tsur’s work using S. Ullmann’s statistical model, most of the “upwardly directed” or sublimating intersensory transfers (such as *taste* → *music*⁶⁰) are closer to the pole of primitiveness, unity, and unification, whereas “downwardly directed” or desublimating ones (such as *sound* → *smell*⁶¹) aim toward the quality of sophistication, mannerism, fragmentation of experience.⁶² This particular aspect of literary synaesthesia is the reason for the protean forms of its inscription in various systems of poetics throughout history, among which it occupied a particularly conspicuous place in baroque,⁶³ Romantic (in the context of the idea of correspondences among the arts)⁶⁴ Symbolist⁶⁵ and avant-garde poetics. In the Polish cultural context, the heyday of literary synaesthesia came during the Young Poland period – modernist synaesthetic metaphors were used chiefly by Stanisław Wyspiański, Stanisław Przybyszewski,⁶⁶ and Tadeusz Miciński.⁶⁷

While synaesthesia historically became an instrument of projects aiming at a “total” art, it simultaneously enables the mediatization of utterly subjective, individual experiences of perception, of the body, of ideas. Whereas Symbolist efforts to bring together sensual matter and the extrasensory *au-delà* placed literary synaesthesia at the very heart of a poetics imbued with intense mysticism and dualism inherited from Plato, the avant-garde, essentially an anti-Symbolist project, redefines the value of synaesthesia, tilting its ideological pendant toward materiality, physicality, and the bodily. In Futurist poetry, synaesthesia becomes an instrument of the **embodiment** and physicalization (anchored in time and space) of a segment of reality. In postulating the everyday character, immediacy, and universality⁶⁸ of po-

⁵⁸I.H. Hassan, “Baudelaire’s Correspondances. The Dialectic of a Poetic Affinity,” *The French Review* 1954, vol. 27, 6, p. 439-440n.

⁵⁹S. Johansen, *Le Symbolisme*, quoted in: I.H. Hassan, pp. 439-440n.

⁶⁰The synaesthetic metaphor “taste the music of that vision pale” comes from Keats’s poem *Isabella or the Pot of Basil*.

⁶¹The synaesthetic metaphor “a loud perfume” appears in John Donne’s *Elegy IV* Johna Donne.

⁶²See Tsur, “Issues in Literary Synaesthesia.”

⁶³See I. Matyjaszkiewicz, “Barokowa haptyczność wizji,” <http://sensualnosc.ibl.waw.pl/pl/articles/barokowa-haptycznosc-wizji-670/>, last accessed: 16.06.2014.

⁶⁴On Romantic synaesthesia, see P. Śniedziwski, “Wzrok a inne zmysły w romantyzmie,” 2011, <http://sensualnosc.ibl.waw.pl/pl/articles/wzrok-a-inne-zmysly-w-romantyzmie-132/>, last accessed: 01.06.2014; D. Pniewski, “Norwid – synestezja,” 2012, <http://sensualnosc.ibl.waw.pl/pl/articles/norwid-synestezja-269/>, last accessed: 01.06.2014; Pniewski, “Relacja wzrok – słuch a poznanie nieskończoności (romantyzm),” <http://sensualnosc.ibl.waw.pl/pl/articles/relacja-wzrok-sluch-a-poznanie-nieskonczonosci-romantyzm-616/>, last accessed: 01.06.2014. See also: J. Starzyński, *O romantycznej syntezie sztuk: Delacroix, Chopin, Baudelaire*, Warszawa 1965.

⁶⁵See M. Podraza-Kwiatkowska, *Symbolizm i symbolika w poezji Młodej Polski*, Kraków 1994.

⁶⁶See P. Kierzek-Trzeciak, “Przybyszewski – synestezja,” 2012, <http://sensualnosc.ibl.waw.pl/pl/articles/przybyszewski-synestezja-169/>, last accessed: 01.06.2014.

⁶⁷See A. Kluba, *Synestezja*, 2011, <http://sensualnosc.ibl.waw.pl/pl/articles/synestezja-114/>, last accessed: 01.06.2014.

⁶⁸B. Jasiński, “MAÑIFEST W SPRAWIE POEZJI FUTURYSTYCZNEJ, Futuryzm. Formiści. Nowa sztuka (Wybór tekstów),” in: *Antologia polskiego futuryzmu i nowej sztuki*, introduction and commentary by Z. Jarosiński, edited by H. Zaworska, Wrocław 1978, p. 10.

etry, the Futurists defined a poem as a synthetic (and synaesthetic) “extract”⁶⁹ of modernity. Avant-garde synaesthesia is revealed through its application in the Futurists’ process (aimed at dethroning the visual) of re-embodying the subject, as a figure of **corporeality**. J. Grądział-Wójcik writes that “the futurist turning point in aesthetics was... part of broader turn toward the sensory,”⁷⁰ that simultaneously situates synaesthesia, as Anna Łebkowska argues, at the “intersection” of the discourse of poetics and corporeality⁷¹ – as a point of connection between the body and what is inexpressible.

Zuzanna Kozłowska

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 9.

⁷⁰See J. Grądział-Wójcik, “„Jesteśmy czuli”. Polisensoryczność jako strategia poetycka polskich futurystów,” in: *W kręgu literatury i języka*, vol. 3, ed. M. Michalska-Suchanek, Gliwice 2012, p. 95.

⁷¹A. Łebkowska, “Jak ucieleśnić ciało. O jednym z dylematów somatopoetyki,” *Teksty Drugie* 2011, nr 4, pp. 11-27.

On Franciszek Ksawery Dmochowski's *The Art of Rhyming*

Agnieszka Kwiatkowska

Franciszek Ksawery Dmochowski's *The Art of Rhyming* was published in 1788 by the Warsaw Piarists.¹ Already in the same year, a second edition was prepared, whose popularity would continue unabated until the early nineteenth century.² The work was intended to serve as a textbook for the pupils of Piarist colleges, but although it was prepared with educational purposes in mind, the range of its influence turned out to be much broader. Dmochowski's synthesis of his perspectives as a literary theorist, codifier, and critic made it possible for him to present the totality of poetic experience of his era.³ An ambitious teacher and lecturer at colleges in Radom, Łomża and Warsaw, and the author of an unusually modern ethics textbook relying on a secular hierarchy of values, Dmochowski followed the newest developments and tendencies in literature, and presented them in his didactic poem.⁴ He inscribed his work within the tradition, going back to antiquity, of the *ars poetica* genre. In the dedication to the king that precedes the work and stands as a kind of programmatic declaration, he refers to the sets of rules and poetic art forms written by Aristotle, Horace, Marco Girolamo Vida, Alexander Pope, and Nicolas Boileau. The author of *The Art of Rhyming* took the views of his predecessors into account as he laid out the program of eighteenth-century Polish classicism.⁵ The plan of his poem was clearly indebted to Boileau's "L'art poétique," which was likewise constructed out of four cantos and combined poetic guidelines with literary criticism directed at other

¹ W Drukarni J.K. Mci i Rzeczypospolitej u Księży Scholarum Piarum.

² It was published a third time in Wilno (today Vilnius) in 1820, and a fourth edition revised based on authorial instructions was prepared by Franciszek Salezy Dmochowski, as part of the collection of his father's Selected Writings which he prepared (Warszawa 1826). *Oświeceni o literaturze* (Enlightenment authors on literature), ed. T. Kostkiewiczowa and Z. Goliński, vol. 1, Warszawa 1993, p. 357. The most illuminating critical edition – using the version developed by Stanisław Pietraszko in the Biblioteka Narodowa series in 1956 r. – is the text prepared by T. Kostkiewiczowa and Z. Goliński in the book *Oświeceni o literaturze*, pp. 358-430. All quotations of the poem in this article are taken from that edition; song and line numbers are provided in parentheses in the main body text.

³ M. Klimowicz, *Oświecenie* (The Enlightenment), Warszawa 1998, p. 283; T. Kostkiewiczowa, "Franciszek Ksawery Dmochowski," in: *Pisarze polskiego oświecenia* (Polish writers of the Enlightenment), ed. T. Kostkiewiczowa and Z. Goliński, vol. 2, Warszawa 1994, p. 259.

⁴ T. Kostkiewiczowa, "Franciszek Ksawery Dmochowski," p. 256.

⁵ S. Pietraszko, *Doktryna literacka polskiego klasycyzmu* (The literary doctrine of Polish classicism), Wrocław 1966.

French authors.⁶ But one would hardly call Dmochowski's poem a translation or paraphrase of Boileau's work. The Polish poem was written over a hundred years later, and its author was affected by changes in the perception of literature that took place in the intervening period. He also used Polish examples and discussed many works relevant to the context of Polish literary history, thus providing a foundation for modern literary criticism in Poland.

The poem, divided into four cantos, not only discusses general principles of poetic art, but also deals with questions of translation and literary criticism; it presents models of various genres and analyzes their most accomplished Polish incarnations. Its composition, focused on genre organization, places emphasis on the rank of the literary genre, claiming it to be an integral part of the essence of poetry itself.⁷ The first song presents the basic rules of the art of rhyming and contains a survey of the accomplishments of Polish literature, in which superior status is accorded the works of Jan Kochanowski, Adam Naruszewicz and Ignacy Krasicki. It is they who have reached the heights of literary Parnassus, the author claims, though he adds that one can expect equally outstanding artists to appear under the enlightened rule of King Stanisław August Poniatowski, a great patron of the arts. The poets who preceded Kochanowski, an early humanist in the medieval period, did not find renown in Dmochowski's eyes. Their intonational verse and end-stopped lines, viewed in terms of classical criteria, struck him as disorderly, and medieval consonance did not meet the criteria elaborated and imposed by Kochanowski.

For long our mother tongue was held in low regard
As unfit to write in. But happily a bard
Inspired with genius, came and illuminated
The path: Jan Kochanowski, for greatness fated,
Opened the nation's eyes with his verse creations,
Perfected rhymes deathless, his own fabrications.
He tuned the Slavic lute's strings, that it might now speak
And convey the great classics of Latin and Greek,
He filled the harps of David with resonant sound,
In smart braids the Sarmatian Muses' hair he bound.

(I, 271-280)

Here Dmochowski uses the metaphor of hair care to illustrate his praise for Kochanowski's poetic craft, in which he equalled the poets of antiquity, and by which he brought Polish literature to heights unreached since the ancient Greeks and Romans. Thanks to Kochanowski, the Polish muses do not imitate Greek or Roman women, and are not adorned with delicate weaves or Greek-style chignons. They wear hairstyles typical of Polish daily life, in keeping with Polish customs, but also full of harmony, symmetry, and decorum. A poetic genius who is the equal of Horace does not blindly imitate antique meters, but replaces them with equally harmonious constructions that form naturally within the grammar and sound system of

⁶ Z. Libera, *Rozważania o wieku tolerancji, rozumu i gustu. Szkice o XVIII stuleciu* (Thoughts on the age of tolerance, reason, and taste. Sketches on the eighteenth century), Warszawa 1994, p. 230.

⁷ Z. Libera, *Rozważania o wieku tolerancji, rozumu i gustu*, Warszawa 1994, p. 233.

the Polish language. Among Kochanowski's successors– not flawless poets, but undoubtedly talented and worthy of attention– Dmochowski named Piotr Kochanowski, the translator of Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*, Wespazjan Kochowski, the author of *Niepróżnujące próżnowania ojczystym rymem na liryka i epigramata polskie rozdzielonym i wydany*, Samuel Twardowski, an esteemed epic poet, referred to as the Sarmatian Maron, Wojciech Chrościński, author of heroic long poems, Walerian Otwinowski, translator of the works of Virgil, Wacław Potocki, praised in the poem for his successful adaptations of neo-latin romances, and Szymon Szymonowicz and Szymon Zimorowicz, authors of idylls.

In Dmochowski's poem, reflections on literature are accompanied by remarks on linguistic culture and literary criticism. The Polish language of the Enlightenment era, proficient in literary texts, made increasingly bold use of scientific discourse, and intensively developed its lexical resources as they became enriched by borrowings and neologisms. The author of *The Art of Rhyming* argued against resorting too freely to inventing new words, and advised using the existing repertoire. “Do not create new words, as long as old are suitable,” he writes in the poem (I, 360). He also expressed quite modern views on literary criticism. Among other things, he warned against flatterers, while enjoining his readers to listen to constructive, friendly criticism. A writer, he taught, must retain a vigilant, distanced attitude toward his own work. Popularity, plentiful praise, and multiple editions are not the measure of a work's quality:

The shoddiest work will find many believers,
It will find printers everywhere, and find readers,
Rare is he who weighs a work in the right scales.
The dumb will find a dumber one, riding's coattails.
(I, 449-452)

The next (second and third) cantos of *The Art of Rhyming* present a survey of various genre conventions. Following in Virgil's footsteps, Dmochowski first discusses works written in the low and middle styles: the idyll and elegy. Not finding a satisfactory example of the latter in Polish lyric poetry, Dmochowski cites Kochanowski's *Lamentations* as a work which masterfully gives voice to the “devastation to which human life / is constantly exposed” (II, 100-101). Dmochowski describes particular genres based on an analysis of selected examples, observing that the rules he presents need not be slavishly adhered to. He was conscious of the fact that artistic innovation is necessary in order for masterpieces, which cannot be imitative with regard to existing literary forms, to be created.

Among the conventions taken from ancient literature– together with the song, the ode and the epigram– a special place is set aside in Dmochowski's argument for satire, an important phenomenon in the culture of the Polish enlightenment. Unlike the poets of antiquity and French classicism, Polish poets of the eighteenth century took to writing anonymous satirical criticism, condemning the flaws and shortcomings of society, but avoiding personal attacks. In the passages concerning satire, *The Art of Rhyming* shifts from a normative to a descriptive poetics. Citing the views of Ignacy Krasicki and Adam Naruszewicz, expressed by those poets in their satires “Do króla” (To the King) and “Szlachetność” (Nobility) – Dmochowski writes:

Satire does not attack particular fellows;
 It bows to persons, but at customs it bellows.
 Satire speaks truth, without fear or favor,
 Loves the office, honors kings, judges behavior.
 Satire, keeping close friendship with virtue,
 Reproaches your sins, but will never hurt you.
 This true spirit of satire is crucial to its plan
 To mock foibles, scold errors, and spare the man.
 (II, 189-196)

The principle of anonymity in satirical criticism played a very important role in shaping the Enlightenment approach to the genre. Other poets of the Polish Enlightenment who spoke out in its favor included Waław Rzewuski, Filip Neriusz Golański, Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski and – earlier, in the baroque era – Krzysztof Opaliński. An opposing position was taken only by Franciszek Zabłocki, who spoke out against the strictures of *The Art of Rhyming* shortly after its publication, although he had previously made a scrupulous effort to remove all references to particular persons from Boileau’s satires while working on translating them into Polish.⁸

Dmochowski enthusiastically emphasized the originality of Polish literature, highlighted its specific features and assiduously described all of the achievements that made it exceptional among European accomplishments. In the third canto of *The Art of Rhyming*, he deals with two genres cherished in every national literature, the drama and the epic poem. Here he showed himself to be a partisan of classical drama, preserving the principle of decorum, built on rapid, straightforward action and providing “an outlet for the soul” (the equivalent of Aristotelian catharsis) (III, 301). The Old Polish drama and theater tradition did not meet with approval from this adherent of Enlightenment classicism, who wrote with typical severity that “for many years our theater remained shabby” (III, 175), who criticized medieval dialogues, school dramas, mystery plays, and from whose harsh judgment even Kochanowski’s play *Odprawie posłów greckich* (The Greek Ambassadors’ Expedition) was not exempted. Despite the great admiration he felt for Kochanowski’s oeuvre, Dmochowski did not understand his dramatized history of the “bawdy kingdom,” reading it as a mere replica of ancient drama, an adaptation of a fragment from an immortal epic poem. The timeless character of the work and the universal message of its story escaped him, and he was likewise oblivious to the playwright’s innovative attempts to introduce metric verse into the Polish language. Dmochowski tops off his complaint with a reference to the letter from Kochanowski to Jan Zamojski included in the first edition of *Odprawy*: “One thing only redeemed the work from vainglory, / that the virtuous man confessed it was hoary” (III, 193-194). The phrase Dmochowski refers to in Kochanowski’s letter, the statement that the play is fit to be eaten by moths or used as an ear-trumpet, is not, however, an instance of self-criticism by the great poet of Czarnolas, but rather an exordial topos of modesty and a counterpoint to the praise of the chorus’s third song, which, in the author’s words, “holds its own beside the Greek chorus”—he claims it

⁸ J.T. Pokrzywniak, “Wstęp” (Introduction), in: I. Krasicki, *Satyry* (Satires), Wrocław, p. przypis do uzupełnienia

to equal the stasimons of the Greek tragedians. Dmochowski failed to grasp these subtleties and stated regretfully that “in tragic art we small in stature were” (III, 217), though he was unstinting in his praise for Polish comedians, who were true to the Enlightenment principle of combining instruction and amusement.

The Art of Rhyming devotes considerable energy to discussions of the heroic epic poem. Dmochowski had studied the conventions of the genre thoroughly, as he completed the first Polish translation of Homer’s *Iliad*. He replaced Homer’s hexameter with rhyming 13-syllable lines, and made the Achaeans the “Greek nations,” instilling in Polish culture for centuries to come the belief that the war was fought between Greeks and Trojans. The twentieth-century Polish translation by K. Jeżewska maintained this tradition, though it also describes the anger of Achilles in the invocation as “bringing perdition and innumerable disasters to the Achaeans.”⁹ Many theoretical pronouncements on literature from Dmochowski’s era discuss the question of the proper form for an eighteenth-century epic poem,¹⁰ expressing the unfulfilled longing of Dmochowski’s contemporaries. The Polish language of the Enlightenment era had reached a complex enough stage of development to cope with the conventions of the heroic epic poem – the king of the various epic genres – and thereby confirm that in its artistic possibilities, it was the peer of the Latin and Greek languages. At the same time, the attempt to create a heroic epic poem met with increasing difficulties because it appeared impossible, in an age of rationalism and sensualism, to develop a suspension of disbelief and acceptance of the fantastic that would correspond to the ancient world of the Olympian gods and goddesses.

Dmochowski’s prescription for introducing the plane of the fantastic into the modern epic was to replace ancient myths with Christian stories, and the pagan gods with spirits of hell, since to portray heavenly forces engaged in earthly conflicts struck him as unseemly. On the other hand, he saw that ancient tradition could be useful for creating allegories and enriching the poetic language with various phraseologies and figures of speech. The hero of a modern Polish heroic epic poem would be a great man – wise, religious, great of heart, courageous, and trusting in God. As models for the depiction of such a type, Dmochowski cited not only the works of Homer, but also Tasso’s *Gerusalemme liberata* and Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, both of which built fantastic worlds based on Christian myth. There were no true heroic epics in Polish literature yet,¹¹ but Dmochowski mentioned Krasicki’s comic-heroic epic *Myszeida* and placed its author within the ranks of epic poets.

The fact that Dmochowski cites *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* as the most accomplished examples of the epic genre, and values ancient Greek literature over the Roman classics, unlike Boileau (who preferred Virgil), shows his critical attitudes to be progressive, in tune with the late

⁹ Homer, *Iliada* (The Iliad), trans. K. Jeżewska, ed. J. Łanowski, Warszawa 2005, p. 17.

¹⁰The following texts are particularly important in this regard: *O wymowie i poezji* (On pronunciation and poetry) by Filip Neriusz Golański (1786), *Sztuka rymotwórcza* (The Art of Rhyming) by Franciszek Ksawery Dmochowski (1788), *O rymotwórstwie i rymotwórcach* (On rhyming and rhymers) by Ignacy Krasicki (written 1790-1799), *Wybór różnych gatunków poezji z rymotwórców polskich* (A selection of various genres of poetry from Polish rhymers) by Onufry Górski (1806-1807), *O poezji w ogólności* (On poetry in general) by Tomasz Euzebiusz Słowacki (1826) and *Wykład literatury porównawczej* (Lecture on comparative literature) by Ludwik Osiński (1818-1830).

¹¹Krasicki’s unsuccessful attempt at an epic poem, *Wojna chocimska* (The Khotyn War) is not mentioned in *The Art of Rhyming*.

eighteenth-century tendency. Dmochowski deviated in many aspects from the guidelines laid out by Boileau, and deliberately followed current and new trends in his poem. He did, to be sure, borrow such concepts as taste, genius, wit (*esprit* and *bel esprit*) and nature from French classicism, but made some modifications to their meaning: he portrayed genius as a creative force with the power to undermine norms and defy conventions. Because he believed in the supremacy of artistic values over disciplined observance of rules and was aware of the changes taking place in literature in his time, Dmochowski warned against the petrification of genres and placed a high premium on poetic innovation, and its ability to infuse new blood into poetry.¹² In addition to this view of genius, Dmochowski's selection of literary exemplars also reveals a modern, even pre-Romantic aspect to his thought. His placement of Milton's dark poem beside the well-established epics of antiquity and his references to Young's elegies as examples (together with Kochanowski's *Lamentations*) of lyric poetry that elicits powerful emotions indicate the advanced tastes of the author of *The Art of Rhyming*.¹³ In the second canto, a survey of particular subgenres of lyric poetry, Dmochowski leaves out any discussion of such important forms as the sonnet, the madrigal, the rondeau, which had a prominent place in the French literary tradition and in Boileau's verse treatise. Instead, he devotes attention to forms rooted in the Polish literary tradition: the frasque (viewed as a type of epigram) and the fable. In *The Art of Rhyming*, Dmochowski managed to present a coherent poetic system, a feat most authors of similar works had striven in vain to accomplish. By limiting the poem's scope to the subject of rhyming, he succeeded in producing a tightly-constructed argument, reflecting the actual state of the art of versification and dealing with its dominant tendencies. His didactic poem went considerably beyond the bounds of its design, becoming both a rhyming literary theory treatise and a testimony to the modern view of literary creation. Dmochowski's poem played a huge role in popularizing this modern approach to literature and its tasks, anticipating the manifestoes of modern times.¹⁴

¹²M. Klimowicz, *Oświecenie*, p. 280.

¹³The works of Milton and Young were used by the Polish clergy in its battle against deism. See M. Klimowicz, *Oświecenie*, p. 278.

¹⁴Z. Libera, *Rozważania o wieku tolerancji, rozumu i gustu*, Warszawa 1994, p. 231.

Elżbieta Winiecka

P o e t i c s

as a Praxis of Attentive Reading

C r i t i c s :
Dorota Korwin-Piotrowska, *Poetyka. Przewodnik
po świecie tekstów*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu
Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2011

A discussion on the status and future of poetics as a basic area of literature studies has been going on without interruption now for many years. The richness of textual phenomena and problems concerning textuality, growing and multiplying incessantly, means that any attempts to organize and classify reading experiences elicits manifold doubts, heightened by differences in scholarly perspectives. They start out by demanding that we accept diverging premises, and as a result lead to mutually exclusive conclusions.

The longer this state of dissatisfaction persists, and the greater the impetus for new disciplines and methodologies to play a role in shaping humanists in the university, subjecting each new class of Polish Studies students to fascination and frustration, the more frequently and effectively we hear the view stated that without the formation of a professional skills set, these new, mind-blowing scholarly projects are of no use. The foundation and fulcrum of intellectual work in the humanities remains knowledge of the principles of writing and reading texts, of how they are made and function. All cognitive excursions in the university still begin with attempts to answer these questions. At the same time, these questions have for years been accompanied by methodological uncertainties: how do we confront the complexity and specificity of issues relating to the world of texts in such a way as to avoid oversimplification, idealizing, and rigid classifications, these days rightfully viewed with distrust? How can

we convey to our students specialized knowledge about language material and how to use it in scholarly practice? Answers to these questions have been offered by myriad anthologies, special issues of periodicals and articles on the current state of poetics, which nonetheless function more like prisms refracting light than lenses that bring a spectrum of visual phenomena into focus.

It appears, then, that the days of great syntheses and textbooks presenting clear and comprehensible instructions on how to approach literary texts have vanished for good. So it was a great joy for me to read Dorota Korwin-Piotrowska's 2011 textbook *Poetyka. Przewodnik po świecie tekstów* (Poetics. A Guide to the World of Texts). This is the first effort since the era of those great compendiums by the eminences grises of Polish literature studies¹ to make a synthesis of current knowledge in the area of poetics, encompassing both the state of the discipline and the current shape and scope of its subject matter.

¹ I have in mind here the following classic academic tomes: *Zarys teorii literatury* (Outline of Literary Theory, Warszawa 1972) by Michał Głowiński, Aleksandra Okopień-Sławińska, and Janusz Sławiński; *Zarys poetyki* (Outline of Poetics, Warszawa 1980) by Ewa Miodońska-Brookes, Adam Kulawik, and Marian Tatar; *Poetyka stosowana* (Applied Poetics, Warszawa 1978) by Bożena Chrzastowska and Seweryna Wyslouch; *Poetyka. Wstęp do teorii dzieła literackiego* (Poetics. Introduction to the Theory of the Literary Work, Warszawa 1990) by Adam Kulawik; and Henryk Markiewicz's *Główne problemy wiedzy o literaturze* (Principal Problems in Literature Knowledge, Kraków 1965) and *Wymiary dzieła literackiego* (Dimensions of the Literary Work, Kraków 1984).

Korwin-Piotrowska has set herself the imposing task of coming to grips with the tradition of poetological scholarship and applying its classical tools, categories, and methods to a description of the problems of the contemporary scene. What is particularly noteworthy is her acute sense of the importance of poetics as a subject which, regardless of changing cultural contexts, or perhaps due to those changes, fulfills an essential propaedeutic function in Polish Studies education. This belief of hers is the result of Korwin-Piotrowska's many years of teaching experience. From her perspective as a university teacher, she shows that the aim of poetics is to teach independent and creative thinking connected with passionate reading and the ability to interpret diverse types of texts. At the same time, poetics should teach a set of skills and emphasize the functionality of the tools it employs, which do not impose received ideas and assumptions but rather render the reader sensitive to the complexity and subtlety of the objects under analysis. Texts as a rule resist descriptive categories, demanding a critical approach to any terminology that seeks to categorize and systematize things apodictically. Instead of allowing methodological problems to plague students' reading from the outset (knowing that they are bound to appear sooner or later), it is crucial that we teach attentive reading and restraint in issuing judgments. Such judgments, in view of the dynamic and multivariiegated changes in both the subject of study and its environment, as well as in the theory of literature, are of necessity historically conditioned.

This very sensible premise leads to the following results. Dorota Korwin-Piotrowska strongly emphasizes the connection between poetics and contemporary stylistics and semantics, as well as rhetoric, which is more than just a subcategory of stylistics; it also provides essential training in how to use language creatively and how to be a discriminating reader, taking into consideration the persuasive, even manipulative role of grammatical figures and constructions.

Finally, and crucially, all instructions and counsels offered by Korwin-Piotrowska in her guide to the world of texts are accompanied by the qualification that this work involves creating a mental map, bearing witness

as much to the specific nature of the texts under discussion as to our own situational or historical cognitive condition, which defines our capacities for understanding and defining the meaning of these particular texts, as well as the limitations to those capacities.

Perhaps the greatest obstacle is presented by defining what "the world of texts" means today. This formula (presumably intended to be in dialogue with the Post-Structuralist vision of a "textual world") appears to suggest the possibility of opposing the world of semiotics to the world of reality. Nonetheless, I understand Korwin-Piotrowska here to be deliberately embracing methodological and philosophical self-definition, being careful to demarcate the clearest possible boundaries to her object of study.

Korwin-Piotrowska treats the world of texts as the sphere of humanity's semasiological activity. More specifically: as the sphere of language communication, not limited to literary utterances, whose study is governed by poetics. Still, she repeatedly expresses her conviction that literature exists, despite the difficulty of defining it, and that it is the subject that concerns her.

The trouble is that in today's world the word often has a range of relationships with audio and visual communication, with which Korwin-Piotrowska does not concern herself (the intertextuality she discusses is not the same thing as intermediality). As a result, the journey into the world of texts proposed by her guidebook at times resembles an attempt to return to the Gutenberg galaxy in which the central position is occupied by printed texts, and the main object of interest are those among them that are designated as literary texts. The author, in paying lip service to the emergence of new textual issues relating to the internet that are imparting dynamism to and radically reshaping textual phenomena (e.g. three-dimensionality, multimediality, functionalization, the unique and active nature of the cybertext), seems to underestimate the stature of this change in the culture, defending values and ways of reading that belong to the culture of the printed word. At the same time, Korwin-Piotrowska treats all genres of discourse as material to be absorbed into contemporary literature.

Despite her tremendous sensitivity and competence, despite her receptivity to the current state of literature studies' self-consciousness, Korwin-Piotrowska takes a consciously conservative position, aiming to preserve the identity of the discipline. Because she repeatedly asserts her belief that the effort to guard the stature of poetics cannot be based on the conservation and invariability of its tools, but must emerge from its capability of adapting research methods to the actually existing situation and state of the subject, her proposal presents an ideal point of departure for further reflection on these problems, which transcend her designated scholarly framework of the paradigm of printed literature.

Korwin-Piotrowska explains in the preface that her intention is to give "a certain glimpse into what literature studies means" (p. 11). And we should clarify here that she makes a fantastic job of it, though she—naturally—does not achieve any kind of universal definition of literature. It is difficult not to agree with the diagnosis she makes at the beginning: "The world of texts, that surround us and that we use, forces us to continually redefine what we mean by literature, fiction, genre, style, narrative, composition, or poem." (p. 15)

The structure of the book demonstrates her point, as these same currents, problems and questions, concerning the specificity of literary texts and of contemporary poetics tasked with their analysis, reappear throughout it. The chapters are divided according to specific problems rather than such categories as versification, genre theory, or stylistics; they frequently defy accepted, settled definitions (such as those decreed by typology or genre). This seems to be an excellent idea, justified on the merits and in terms of its pedagogic value. The author initiates the reader into nuances of literature studies scholarship, leading him first with a general description of the place and role of poetics. She then poses a question which is still intriguing, though by no means new: "Do we know what literature is?" and indicates some ways we can define it, finally concentrating on the central problem: "What does it mean 'to be a text'?"

I will give the titles of successive chapters in the order in which they appear, because neither their formulation nor

their succession follow established patterns, and they therefore testify to Korwin-Piotrowska's intuitive grasp of the newest methodological trends and questions. They proceed thus: "Types and genres—spheres of influence," "Narrative as knowledge," "Secrets of composition," "Worlds and characters," "Tonal value—prosody," "Lyric, poetry, or poem?," "The art of the line," "Drama: the word as action," "Space in the text, space of the text," "Textualized time," "Tools of knowledge, conveyors of expression: stylistic means," "From style to stylization (against a background of intertextuality)."

The idea of the *Guide to the World of Texts* is to be of equal service to those who have no knowledge of the problematic it presents and those who wish to deepen and systematize their knowledge. To that end, the book's construction is clear and functional, with the text divided into short, manageable chunks, using a variety of fonts, and, especially, a well-developed system of references among mutually relevant passages dealing with related subtopics. That is a very useful way of dealing with the interconnectedness of different areas within the overall subject, where the same problems recur in a number of different contexts (e.g. time, characters, figurative language, narrative, etc.). The use of different fonts (italics, bold, different sizes) allows the reader to quickly get a sense of which information is most important, and which is skipable (the latter is often in brackets). Also, each chapter ends with a short bibliography of recommended readings that develop the threads discussed and expand their context. The chapter endings also include *Exercises in Thinking (And Not Only)*, aimed at encouraging readers to work independently and creatively with other literary texts in terms of issues discussed in the chapter and to engage with other theoretical concepts. Significantly, there is no "answer key" in the back of the book. The exercises should thus be treated as a task for expanding the reader's sensitivity and imagination, rather than building the ideal adept of the literature studies arts. As one would expect of a solid academic textbook, there is an index that allows readers to flip through and quickly reference whatever information they may need at a given moment.

All of Korwin-Piotrowska's strategies certainly ensure the clarity of her argument. They are not, however, what is

most important in the book. From an editing standpoint, the way she carries out her survey is much more decisive. Korwin-Piotrowska embraces the role of guide, and at the same time that of an obstetrician who, using the Socratic method, elicits self-knowledge from her students. This process depends on the revelation that even the most accomplished knowledge of the instruments of literature studies cannot replace sympathetic, sensitive, attentive engagement in the act of reading, always a singular and unrepeatable event. Even when a text is interpreted using a set of preconceived formulae, it invariably takes scholars by surprise with elements that evade categorization.

Piotrowska effectively demonstrates how poetics introduces a new perspective, an awareness of frameworks, enabling us to confront mechanisms hidden beneath the surface of things. Among these frameworks, she mentions 1) awareness of the incompleteness, subjectivity, and ambiguity of every statement in language; 2) awareness of the mediating role of language, which itself introduces additional subconscious and cultural meanings inside a work, and is therefore an unruly instrument; 3) awareness of the interaction between the reader and the world represented in a work; 4) awareness of the fact that "representation" is not merely a description of the appearance of visual stimuli, but also a form of intellectual organization and search for justifications that strengthen the structure of the representation; 5) awareness of the fact that an apparently realistic (or fantastic) world is in fact nothing more than an outline, a "momentary expression" or "mental construct" influenced by both knowledge of language and the reader's individual experience; 6) awareness of the rhetorical dimension of the text's effect on the reader through suggestion.

The above list enables us to oppose rational and objectivizing thought to contextual thought, which reveals the influence of the various factors of language, culture, the subconscious mind, and so on within our "images of the world." These two polarized perspectives express two completely dissimilar approaches to literature, motivated by different methodologies. At the same time, they each demand that we adapt different tools, that is, a different poetics. Obviously they present extreme

instances, between which, as Piotrowska notes, there spans a whole range of varied solutions. Her conclusion (on p. 142) is that "the art of the scholar is to perceive both positions."

Korwin-Piotrowska underscores that structural cohesion in a literary text is an illusion, since the text is composed of "images, events, themes, scattered about and reconstructed into cohesive wholes" (p. 70). This diagnosis, though it might sound radical, is not an echo of deconstructive skepticism, but rather an emergency resort to semiotic and cognitive science categories. On the one hand, the text is an organized system of signs, while on the other, its cohesion is dissolved by our awareness that it is a projection of a linguistic imagination; first, the writer's, then the reader's. According to Korwin-Piotrowska, the philologist's (or literature scholar's) reading, in keeping with the standards of poetics, is based on both the ability to reliably recognize procedures (including prosodic, grammatical, stylistic, and compositional, among others) used at the level of linguistic organization to express meanings, and readiness to accept the text's status as open, and awareness that interpretation is a dynamic act of meaning creation. Korwin-Piotrowska illustrates this approach in her commentary on her own work: "I treat all sweeping divisions, categorical oppositions or schemata as strictly working models of solutions, exhibiting the extreme possibilities, the poles in between which the whole sea of individual literary solutions plays out." (pp. 11-12)

In her perspective, poetics is shown to be an important and relevant area of Polish Studies, and more broadly, of the humanities, of knowledge and self-knowledge, which should underpin theoretical reflection with technical skills. What is more, poetics is the only one among the branches of knowledge focused on literature that treats literature as a thing intrinsically worthy of study, the one branch that deals with literature on its own terms, making it the most important field of reference in itself.

Korwin-Piotrowska is trying to rescue that separate status of literature and literature studies as a discipline engaged with the identity of the work of art. To this end, she presents philologists with a straightforward ana-

lytical method, enriched by her knowledge of the latest trends. In the end, every work of literature should be examined individually, though the purpose of such a guide is to find common elements. Korwin-Piotrowska manages to do it in such a way as to save what is most essential in analytical explication. She presents her intentions using an image, likening care for literary texts with looking after a garden: "Poetics give us a selection of basic analytical tools – it is worth getting to know them, even or perhaps especially when we intend later to abandon the literary and textual territory of poetics and investigate the world of culture. It is difficult to lay out gardens or otherwise use plants without knowing anything about plants and their properties, without knowing what stalks, leaves, and roots are– and the same thing applies to literary texts." (p. 26)

Korwin-Piotrowska borrows this metaphor from Jonathan Culler's *Literary Theory*, which, in the course of reconstructing the changes in the definition of literariness, asserted that it is the reader, like a gardener, who now decides which plants to cultivate and which ones are weeds.

In any case, this particular analogy is problematic (if for no other reason than that in botany, the singularity of the plant becomes submerged in the traits of its species, while in literature it is the differences that create the singularity and uniqueness of each work, the quality Korwin-Piotrowska is trying to underscore here), and once again shows an understanding of literature bound by traditional categories and distinctions. It is as if the changes taking place in the cultural environment where literature develops touched its condition and shape only superficially, while the essence of literature remained unchanged.

Finally, in recapitulating the situation of literature in the light of new theories, media and definitions of the text, Korwin-Piotrowska relies on the collective judgment of the community of readers, who feel and know that the word literature is not an empty concept, and therefore should not agree to the erasure of the boundaries between literature and non-literature: "And regardless of whether we are tasters (literature specialists, critics) or mere connoisseurs (lovers of literature), we will not give up the pleasure of recognizing and distinguishing those

items that are essential—who, after all would want to make an ordinary product the object of his fascination?" (p. 32)

This argument for literature not on the merits, invoking the category of essentiality (and thus verging on essentialism) in regard to literature, is her least convincing one. However much I understand the scholar's longing for clear organizing principles and criteria (poetics creates understanding at a level of relative—if illusory—stability of the structures it analyzes), it is difficult to accept her proposed perspective of a division of texts into those that are more and those that are less essential. That approach appears to contradict, at the very least, the cognitive science close to Korwin-Piotrowska's heart—for cognitive science, ways of using language are always connected with ways of understanding and experiencing the world; knowledge of the world, after all, is the goal of the literary analyst as well.

Nonetheless, from the literature studies perspective that she clearly and consistently articulates, the artistic value of the literary text does thrust itself forward as one criterion of literature's specificity. And it is, of course, that feature that allows Korwin-Piotrowska to distinguish which texts are more or less essential for poetics. That is why she defends the identity of the discipline, though she is perfectly well aware that scholarship has no monolithic subject, since the concept of the "literary work" has been questioned and transgressed from various quarters: "(...) yet literature does not want to disappear, in spite of the dozens of doubts as to its definition; it has its own history, and possesses, or rather "is possessed by" a language of interpretation, of evaluation or discussion, which revolves unceasingly around literature." (p. 11)

Let us reiterate: the criterion for distinguishing what is literary from what is not remains, for Dorota Korwin-Piotrowska, the aesthetic function. Only literature, she argues, is characterized by its particular kind of "impartiality" and self-directedness, not subordinated to any private purposes in the way that other forms of communication are. Only literature exists for itself, as a self-sufficient and self-explanatory creation. For that very

reason, in furnishing examples for successive categories, Korwin-Piotrowska uses outstanding and brilliant works as examples, ones which leave no doubt as to their literary pedigree.

Throughout the book, Korwin-Piotrowska consistently invokes the tradition of the structural-semiotic analysis of texts, among other reasons because those twentieth-century theories developed the entire arsenal of analytical tools used in literary studies today. While listing the important descriptive categories, she constantly underscores their programmatic, propaedeutic nature. This humility before the subject of her study is what makes Korwin-Piotrowska's textbook valuable. She awakens her readers to the reality that all organizing principles take shape after texts and that the purpose of all interpretative activities is to serve the understanding of language and the images that emerge from language, and to serve the imagination.

In invoking that tradition, Korwin-Piotrowska consciously distances herself from such concepts as cultural poetics, geopoetics, intertextual poetics, or the poetics of experience. Not because she doubts their utility and cognitive value, but because they are too far removed from the study of language, the stuff out of which literature is made. On the other hand, she stresses the role of linguistic stylistic studies, in particular those that use cognitive science, in the scholarly study of texts. She values cognitive linguistics for its attention to the relationship between language and representation and how it treats all grammatical units as semasiological elements (elements in meaning-creation).

The cognitive studies approach features prominently in the book as Korwin-Piotrowska underscores the connection between an author's language choices and the images that they create in the text and the cognitive processes that come to light as a result. This approach also helps us understand the reader's approach to his tasks: inspired by the mechanisms of language at all levels of its organization, he builds a specific type of relationship with the work of literature and activates certain modes of reception. The emphasis placed here on the linguistic status of the work of literature is recog-

nizable from a straightforward statement in a previous book by the author:

Regardless of terminological nuances or disputes, the point is that in the course of interpreting a particular literary text, we want to better understand its linguistic nature.²

Text (understood at the level of language) and interpretation are activities that bear witness to an understanding of the world, creating an explanation of that understanding in language. That explains why Korwin-Piotrowska takes pains to present exceptions from the rules in the section of her chapter on prosody in which she describes in detail the principles of accentuation and the different types of accents in Polish. That section is also clearly marked by the influence of cognitive linguistics, which attributes great importance to the ties between grammar and representation. All of her detailed remarks lead, however, to the rather obvious conclusion that the text of printed literary works is a prosodic score that can be vocally performed in a variety of ways (including going against the rules of accentuation).

It is worth noting, in connection with that aspect of the book, that a cognitive science approach allows us to describe the individual style of a literary utterance and to reveal the language mechanisms that create representation in literature. The meanings of words do not exist in ready-made form, but are dynamically constructed in the process of communication. Metaphor becomes a cognitive tool, and mental spaces are opened by various linguistic behaviors. Linguistic conceptualization (a basic concept of cognitive science) binds together various humanities discourses. From a literature studies point of view, cognitive science tools allow us to build a bridge between the sensitivity and imagination of the author, the text as an expression of his experiences and understanding, and the reader, who also activates his linguistic sensitivity as he enters into contact with the work. Korwin-Piotrowska therefore strongly emphasizes these subjective aspects of literature studies

² D. Korwin-Piotrowska, *Powiedzieć świat. Kognitywna analiza tekstów*, Kraków 2006, p. 20.

scholarship, highlighting the individual dimension both of reading and of the ontology of the work of literature, which always represents a separate, inscrutable world of values. (The influence of cognitive science can also be felt in many of the Exercises in Thinking offered to the reader, such as: “Be conscious of the trajectory of your reception of a work, taking note of the different stages and the motivations that drove you” – p.74).

We should stress, however, that in the precepts cited here, we find convictions shared among a wide spectrum of theoretical schools. That is a deliberate strategy on the part of the author of the guide, who is attempting to reconstruct the current state of literature studies self-knowledge rather than subscribe to a particular methodology. For, as she writes: “The definition of a work of literature is changing before our very eyes— instead of expecting a complete whole and the representation of a world, there appears a need to experience something astonishing, delivering the opportunity for the reader to independently assemble its elements into a whole, creating a sojourn in space, or offering interaction with the text.” (p. 111)

That is why the most interesting passages in the work are those that take note of changes and attempt to show how literature and poetics have dealt with change. All textual categories now exist along a continuum of gradual change and variation. For Korwin-Piotrowska, poetics is an acute recorder of these metamorphoses, just as literary texts function as their barometers, reflecting the dynamics of cultural and anthropological changes. These changes affect not only the fabric of the text, but also the needs and perceptual sensitivity of the audience, who are shaped by the new, dynamically changing media environment. It would therefore be worthwhile to take that changing world of texts, and their influence on the position of literature, into consideration.

Indeed, a lesson in reading attentively should prepare pupils and students to cross the boundaries of logocentric experience and acquire competencies that allow them to navigate the contemporary multimedia culture, in which they must reckon with such new developments as hypertext, electronic literature, and multimedia

genres, new forms of reading and writing activity based on the interactive, polysemiotic and ephemeral nature of cultural texts.

The author begins from the premise, with which I fully agree, that experience gained in analytical and interpretative work with linguistic texts offers the best possible preparation for critical engagement with all forms of culture. She also correctly notes that old and new ways of making sense of the world exist alongside each other, and thereby brushes up against the essence of contemporary culture, which does not eliminate familiar categories and ways of reading, but enriches them by adding an infinite number of new ones.

In my opinion, the lesson in mindfulness, criticism, and self-awareness that Dorota Korwin-Piotrowska offers to adepts of philology and literature studies is priceless. The remarks that close the extensive and exhaustive exposition of the problem of analyzing and interpreting texts illuminate once more the essential condition of the contemporary humanities: nostudy, even the most reliable, of works made by human hands, can lead us to knowledge of absolute truth. They are a process that allows us to see the complexity of our world, its multidimensionality and fluidity. As Piotrowska illustrates in her summing-up: “A literary text is not a piece of amber with an insect preserved inside, whose identification and dating solves the problem – it is rather scholars who, measuring, naming, and describing, preserve themselves in time, solidifying and “fixing” the state of their analysis on its theme.” (p. 342)

The purpose of analysis and interpretation, then, is not to close the text, but to open up the horizon of questions that can help the scholarly reader learn respect for the work’s autonomy, humility before history, and his or her own cognitive limitations.

With that message, the author sends her readers off to continue their literary journey independently. Those who take the lessons she offers seriously will find themselves thoroughly well-prepared for it, even if their sense of where they are heading is shaky, and their destination uncertain, hidden beyond the horizon.

Jerzy Madejski

A Body of Poetics

c r i t i c s :

Adam Dziadek, *Projekt krytyki somatycznej*,
Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, Warszawa 2014

The new book by Adam Dziadek displays all of the dilemmas and aspirations of contemporary poetics. The title *Plan for a Somatic Criticism* (*Projekt krytyki somatycznej*)¹ has a somewhat familiar ring: in the early 1990s, Maria Janion announced her *Plan for a Phantasmatic Criticism* (*Projekt krytyki fantazmatycznej*)², a study of ghosts (in literature and culture). Dziadek is concerned with the body rather than the spirit. Moreover, he is working with Western (chiefly Anglo-American) currents in literary scholarship such as the New Criticism and the New Historicism. The title should be understood in an epistemological context. In using the term “criticism,” Dziadek is being careful, defining himself in a more traditional humanities paradigm relative to the crisis in scholarly thought. In so doing, he gives priority to philological “interpretation” over literature studies “scrutiny.”

At a first glance, it may appear that Dziadek’s book simply presents a set of interpretations of contemporary Polish poets’ work (specifically that of Aleksander Wat, Eugeniusz Tkaczyszyn-Dycki, Joanna Pollakówna, Edward Pasewicz, Stefan and Franciszka Themerson), using literature studies interpretative tools. This is not the case, however. *Projekt krytyki somatycznej* is essentially a proposal for a new kind of poetics—but not limited to the kind suggested in the title. Successive chapters in the book work present the classical, tectonic concep-

tion of the literary work, composed of sound, lexical elements, style, genre, and iconography of the word. What, then, does Dziadek find in the work of these poets?

Let’s start with the chapter on Joanna Pollakówna. First, we should note that Dziadek’s interpretation of her poems is to some extent based on a remark by Jan Zieliński, author of a preface to Pollakówna’s collected works. Dziadek does not polemicize with his fellow literary historian; instead, he capitalizes on Zieliński’s concept, incorporating it into his own poetics and simultaneously expanding it. Dziadek’s focus is modern poetry, here seen as registering sound, rhythm, and voice. He quotes Paul Valéry’s remark that poetry is an “extended hesitation between sound and sense” (p. 102). His analyses, in this and other chapters, confirm the validity of the French poet’s formulation.

Throughout the book, Dziadek presents his poetics of the body. His conception consists not of one all-embracing poetics for the entire body, but rather a diverse multiplicity of poetics for the senses, presented using various poems. It is not a poetics of synaesthesia, tracing how the poetic word records sense impressions. Instead, Dziadek connects the categories of the body with formal concepts, such as rhythm correlating with the rhythm of the pulse. Instead of simply counting syllables, Dziadek investigates how rhythm in a poem is related to the rhythm of the heart, or more precisely, how the sound of speech is related to the pulse of the blood. In connection with this, he touches on a different set of problems, concerning the poetics of illness.

¹ A. Dziadek, *Projekt krytyki somatycznej*, Warszawa 2014.

² M. Janion, *Projekt krytyki fantazmatycznej. Szkice o egzystencji ludzi i duchów* (*Plan for a Phantasmatic Criticism. Sketches on the existence of people and ghosts*), Warszawa 1991.

In the course of developing his poetics of the body, Dziadek also introduces another thread to follow. He tentatively considers some correspondences between poetry and modern music (such as that of Tadeusz Baird). It goes without saying that Dziadek insists on presenting meter and meaning in the context of subjectivity and genre (including short poems or, as he calls them, “micro-poems”).

In the chapter on Pollakówna, Dziadek presents the sense of touch (he refers at one point to “reading with one’s fingers”), and in the chapter on Edward Pasewicz he takes up questions of sight and looking. In order to extract the theme of (homosexual) lust from the poem “Czerwony autobus” (The Red Bus), he must examine how intertextual references (to a song from the era of Communism, Jan Twardowski’s *Supplications*, and many other texts) function in that poem. Dziadek shows how the poet works at employing and uniting these other voices while recreating the emotions experienced by people riding public transport. Pasewicz presents a “beautiful boy” on the red bus whose looks attract attention to him. The gazes of others (including inanimate parts of the bus) serve to mask the yearning gaze of the subject. The most intriguing aspect of the poem is how Pasewicz fills it with musical forms. As a result, an interpretation that highlights the subtleties of the poem in fact argues in favor of the proposition that poetry comes into being not while being read with the eyes but when read out loud (or even sung). Dziadek reaches the following conclusion: „Listening as a bodily experience is a general formula that can help us move closer to the richness of meanings contained in such complex polyphonic poetry. This is poetry that experiences the world and bears witness as much to the world’s being as to its own singular, unrepeatable existence. It is impossible not to listen to this poetry, because only through listening can we grasp that single, solitary, unique rhythm, designating the remnants of identity that they preserve in writing so that they can come alive in reading. (p. 135).”

Dziadek’s approach changes significantly in the chapter on the sonnet. Where the previous chapters dealt with the poetic systems of individual poets, here he ad-

resses genre and a particular strophic form, whose origins in Polish and European literature reach back many centuries, but which continues to thrive in our day. Dziadek provides a solid history of the genre, showing the varied forms, types, and mutations, until at a certain point the reader questions the purpose of this particular section, suspecting that it is probably meant to introduce a broad selection of contemporary sonnets (broadened by the long exposition), or that Dziadek is attempting to write a history of Polish poetry through the prism of this genre, as others have done using, for example, the ode.³ We are encouraged to read the chapter that way since Dziadek treats the sonnet as an exceptional genre both in terms of its size (14 lines) and with regard to formal rules (which have changed over time). In fact, his narrative about the sonnet is both an account of literary history and an analysis of literature as literature, and to some extent the phenomenon of literariness. Also, given that the sonnet has lasted this long as an active literary genre, it provides abundant material for a comparative study. The genre of the sonnet can be held up as an elementary unit in European and world literary history. What is more, as a result of the “democratization” of literature, the sonnet has entered pop culture. In view of that fact, the story of this poetic genre enables us to explore the intersection of high and low literature, and also to discuss graphomania. All of this is true. But those are not chief among Dziadek’s concerns. In this chapter as in previous ones, what stand out for me are the beginning and the conclusion. In the first paragraph of the chapter, Dziadek reminds readers of the Latin meaning of the word “corpus” (“body”). Thus in discussing a particular genre (or corpus), we are examining the body of literature. In the conclusion, Dziadek considers the “multimedia sonnet,” to use Balcerzan’s term: “The corpus of sonnets is not limited to literary texts, because it extends into other artistic practices, into other bodily practices, into other areas of sensual experience” (p. 165). Here we once again return to rhythm, to the way sonnets sound and the voice of literature.

³ T. Kostkiewiczowa, *Oda w poezji polskiej. Dzieje gatunku* (The Ode in Polish Poetry. History of a Genre), Wrocław 1996.

Dziadek's book superficially appears to be concerned with, above all, poetry. But that is another misconception, because contemporary poetics cannot limit itself to dealing exclusively with one textual field. In perhaps the book's key chapter, Dziadek analyzes the work of Aleksander Wat, discussing both his poetry and his prose. Dziadek attempts an interpretation of Wat's autobiography, quoting from the fragment published in London in 1968 as "News" ("Wiadomości"): „For as long as I can remember, there was a mechanical clock across from my bed. The clock's face with its mysterious symbols, and the movement of its two hands, were my first experience of stillness and the riddle of motion. The difference in the speed of the two hands was my first intuition of relativism and the abruptness with which they shifted was a demonstration of the play of continuity and change. More important was the pendulum, a copper disk with a sharp spindle at the end and sharp edges. The very regularity of its movements was menacing for me. I don't know, now, by what process my infant mind determined from the invariability and regularity of the pendulum's back and forth that it needed to be violated. I'm sure I wasn't yet thinking of how I would do so, but I saw it with certitude and waited for that moment, with a fear, impenetrable in its strength, singularity, and contradiction, that the pendulum would reach across the distance of a few meters toward me, like the arm of my older brother, and cut my throat with its sharp disk, whose weakness, softness, vulnérabilité, and frailty I knew inside-out, and throats have fascinated me ever since (p. 54).”

Dziadek supplements this excerpt with another one that he found in the Beinecke Library's Wat archive, and then offers his interpretation. He shows the difference between what has been published and what remains in the archive, investigating the logic of omission. Could the London émigré press have published the fragment of the autobiography in which Wat's birthday, May 1, plays such a significant role, and which is interpreted through its associations with workers' demonstrations? However, this observation serves merely as a prelude to what Dziadek has to say about the text he discovered in the archive. Though theoretically writing about poetry, here he lays down guidelines for interpreting autobiographical prose. His probing commentary continues:

“Wat's decision to change his name from Chwat was more than simply a change of name, or even a break with and rejection of the “Name of the Father.” The transformation from Chwat to Wat was anything but a simple, ordinary rhetorical gesture of Futurist iconoclasm (“watt” as a unit of mechanical or electric power, a symbol of the power of an electric current; see Miliard kilowatów śpiew Adamów i Ew [The Billion-Kilowatt Song of the Adams and Eves] and its dedication: “To Ola this billion kilowatts plus one Wat[t]”), but on a deeper level, it is also connected with the initiation of a completely new discourse between the sign and the body, between consciousness and desire. Given Wat's rebellious tendency, this second explication is much more persuasive, and the surname itself can also be read anagrammatically, uncovering the meaning of the radical gesture he made at the beginning of his creative trajectory. All of the consonants in the surname “Chwat” are unvoiced, but in “Wat” the w becomes voiced or vocalized. This process of vocalization – even if unconscious – moves in the opposite direction from the words' semantic values, since “chwat” means a “strapping fellow,” “no slouch,” “a brave one,” bearer of the phallus; at the same time, the un-voicing of consonants signifies a kind of castration. The change of surname makes the unvoiced [h] disappear and changes unvoiced [f] to voiced [v]. To continue our psychoanalytical reading, since the name Wat belonged to someone before Aleksandr Chwat appropriated it, and appears to be related to the name of the Scottish engineer and inventor James Watt, in cutting off the letters ch and the sound [h] and thereby symbolically castrating his own father, Wat simultaneously takes on the name of this Other. It is a meaningful gesture of revolt, fitting with the writer's life choices. Transforming one's name in this case is no game or mere phonetic amusement – it is something much deeper, what Saussure defined as the “anagrammatic activity” of the poet, who Saussure defines as “above all a specialist in phonemes.” In Wat's case, as we shall see, that definition is exceptionally applicable, both in relation to his earlier poetic texts, and to those written in the 1950s and '60s. (p. 54).”

This fragment by itself should earn Dziadek a membership in the Polish Biographical Society. I am unable to

devote much space to this excerpt, so I will simply direct the reader's attention to three questions. Firstly, the passage's trenchant biographical interpretation leads into a discussion of the properties of Wat's poetry. Secondly, Dziadek undertakes an interpretation of Wat's biography using the same tools that he uses in explicating Wat's poetry, a decision with far-reaching cognitive consequences (both for the analysis of Wat's biography, and for the methodology of Dziadek's poetics). Thirdly, in analyzing Wat's self-construction, he approaches an area of scholarship whose influence is growing, namely ethnopoetics; and it is worth noting that ethnopoetics can provide some interesting perspectives on Wat as well.⁴

In passing, I will add that Wat's autobiographical prose and Dziadek's commentary both help illuminate why Wat needed an interlocutor—in the figure of Czesław Miłosz—in order to tell his life story in detail (in *Mój wiek* [My Century]).⁵ The texts Dziadek examined in the archive provide material for poems, even longer narrative poems, but not for a comprehensive autobiography.

The separate chapters thus merge with each other to some degree, since they all deal with the problematic of the body (in numerous interpretations) and the topic of rhythm. There is another element, too, that unites the different parts of Dziadek's study. Two sequences devoted to sound illustrate the motif. The first one deals with the tick-tock of the mechanical clock from Wat's autobiography. The second is the "cuckoo" in a poem by Pollakówna, which Dziadek interprets in various ways. These words, their sound and symbolism, give a glimpse of a poetics of rhythm, a poetics of the body, and a poetics of time. They show the theoretical framework in which the analyses in *Projekt krytyki somatycznej* are being conducted. On the one hand there is "tick tock" as a measure of a basic unit of narration, on the other hand "cuckoo" as a unit of sound, a form of onomatopoeia. In this space a poetics of the poem and the

body develops. If we remember the meaning that Frank Kermode attached to a clock's "tick-tock" sound, the matter is far from trivial. For Kermode, the phrase not only presents a model of storytelling, since its parts signify a beginning and an end, but also offers a minimalist version of both genesis and the apocalypse, and, finally, refers to *chronos* and *kairos*.⁶ Thus, in his reading, poetics engages with both mythology and theology. But that is another story.

Dziadek's book, as we have indicated above, is less a work of criticism than of poetics. A poetics in which rhythm, as a property of poetry and of the world, plays an important role. His approach brings to mind one of Bolesław Leśmian's sketches, "Rytm jako światopogląd" (Rhythm as Worldview), or, also from 1915, "U źródeł rytmu," (At the Sources of Rhythm), where we find the following phrases which, paraphrased, would fit perfectly in Dziadek's book: "A song sung once more, a poem recited once more— they take place again from beginning to end and dying on our lips, preserve their capacity for resurrection. Because thanks to rhythm we repeat not only their sound and words, but the entire course of their existence hidden within them."⁷

Projekt krytyki somatycznej gives us opportunities to present other aspects of contemporary poetics. It is important to grasp how Dziadek arrived at his "new criticism," how he came from writing a work devoted to Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz⁸ to writing a book about ekphrasis⁹ and beyond. His work on Wat's poetry for the Biblioteka Narodowa (Polish National Library) is also noteworthy.¹⁰ But we should also give particular attention to

⁴ E. Kuźma, "'Nieświęty bełkot' we wczesnej twórczości Aleksandra Wata" (The "Unholy Murmur" in the Early Work of Aleksandr Wat), in: *Elementy do portretu. Szkice o twórczości Aleksandra Wata* (Elements in a Portrait. Sketches on the Work of Aleksandr Wat), ed. A. Czyżak and Z. Kopeć, Poznań 2001.

⁵ A. Wat, *Mój wiek. Pamiętnik mówiony* (My Century. A Spoken Memoir), ed. R. Habielski, Kraków 2011.

⁶ F. Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending. Studies in The Theory of Fiction*, Oxford 2000.

⁷ B. Leśmian, "U źródeł rytmu. Studium poetyckie" (At the Sources of Rhythm. A Study in Poetry) in *Leśmian, Szkice literackie* (Literary Sketches), ed. with an introduction by J. Trznadel, Warszawa 1959, p. 74.

⁸ A. Dziadek, *Rytm i podmiot w liryce Jarosława Iwaszkiewicza i Aleksandra Wata* (Rhythm and the Subject in the Lyric Poetry of Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz and Aleksandr Wat), Katowice 1999.

⁹ A. Dziadek, *Obrazy i wiersze. Z Zagadnień interferencji sztuk w polskiej poezji współczesnej* (Images and Poems. Some Problems of Artistic Interference in Contemporary Polish Poetry), Katowice 2004.

¹⁰ A. Wat, *Wybór wierszy* (Selected Poems), Wrocław 2008.

Dziadek's research in the literary archive,¹¹ and finally, we would be remiss to leave out his translations of important works of semiology and deconstruction.¹² All of these previous projects fit harmoniously together within his poetics of the body.

But Dziadek's book also typifies a certain kind of Silesian approach to Polish Studies. This school of thought is distinguished by an emphasis on the memory of one's predecessors. In Dziadek's focus on understanding genre, it is not hard to see a continuation of Ireneusz Opacki's genetic studies of literary forms. But even more so, Dziadek's poetics is marked by the influence of the Silesian art of interpretation (as practiced by Krzysztof Kłosiński, Aleksander Nawarecki, Stefan Szymutko, and many others).

In the introduction to his book, Dziadek mentions Maria Peszek and quotes the song "Kobiety pistolety" from the album *Maria Awaria*. He considers her lyrics to be poetry. The only thing I find regrettable in his making such a bold declaration is his failure to develop the idea further. To express his fascination with Peszek more decisively, he would have to develop his poetics in a new direction, toward a poetics of the word in song. Though we have Anna Barańczak's poetological study of literary songs,¹³ we still do not have a poetics of contemporary concert-hall (including hip-hop) songs. It would not be easy to write such a work, which would require describing the position of the bard in contemporary pop culture—and finding a feminine equivalent for the term "bard."

¹¹A. Dziadek, "Aleksander Wat w Beinecke Library" (Aleksandr Wat in the Beinecke Library), *Teksty Drugie* 2009, 6, pp. 251-258.

¹²Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Richard Howard, New York 2013; J. Derrida, "Shibboleth: For Paul Celan," in *Midrash and Literature*, ed. Geoffrey H. Hartman and Sanford Budick, New Haven 1984.

¹³A. Barańczak, *Słowo w piosence. Poetyka współczesnej piosenki estradowej* (The Word in the Song. Poetics of the Contemporary Concert Song), Wrocław 1983.

Paweł Graf

Good Old Reading

c r i t i c s :
Terry Eagleton, *How to Read Literature*, New Heaven 2013

Terry Eagleton's book *How to Read Literature* could not have come out at a better time. The sense of fatigue from the ethical and cultural studies discourse that has dominated in recent years, that minimized the value of literature itself and the art of being a good, attentive reader in favor of an emphasis on the pragmatic and social concerns of literary interpretation, called for some sort of reaction. Obviously, the proponents of those concerns will not greet the English critic and theorist's work with rapture. After all, he is proposing a return to "pure" literary studies, in which knowledge of internal artistic mechanisms, linguistic determinants, and hermeneutic and structural contexts, with a focus on the literary work itself, are crucial for understanding each work; in fact, he argues, to fail to take such an approach results in an unconscionable falsification of the literary text, which, deprived of its subjectivity, becomes merely a facade for use in the service of ideological struggle. It's important to note that this is not a simple, unreflective call for a return to the close readings or formalist analyses of bygone years. Eagleton is too sharp a thinker for that, and completely understands the current climate. One might say that his approach is post-ethical and post-cultural studies taking into account the achievements of theory in recent decades, he offers a new formulation of the question about the basics. It will therefore be gladly accepted by those who simply like literature as literature, and do not see reading as a political or ethical act, but rather, above all, an aesthetic and cognitive task. Moreover,

such readers see that the ethical paradigm is more and more clearly become a noble chase after one's own tail, where literature is overlooked. Eagleton offers precisely those readers (and, most importantly, young literature students; the book has great academic value) simple tools for redirecting the focus of literary studies toward the text. As one of the admirers (if not an uncritical one) of Eagleton's book, I should, with droll thoroughness, acknowledge other opinions. Why droll? Because the defenders of ethical theories, allegedly attacked in their ethical engagement, have unleashed numerous complaints against Eagleton's book, reading it carelessly or rather reading their own antipathy into it; which should underscore the importance of the principle, fundamental to understanding, of reading fairly and carefully. Surveying the internet, one finds evaluations that find the book "dull, repetitive", and "self-indulgent", with "no footnotes, no bibliography" and displaying "a general laziness."¹ Let us disregard those comments and concentrate on what Eagleton is trying to say in his analyses.

Eagleton divides the book into five chapters (plus a short preface), each of which tackles one topic: how novels begin, characters, narrative, interpretation, and evaluation. The preface begins in a minor key by asserting that the art of literary analysis is, like folk dancing, dying

¹ <http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/16073298-how-to-read-literature> (accessed: 02.02.2015)

out. The author of *Why Marx Was Right* here continues his specific poetics of paradoxical comparisons (for example, “Milton’s God speaks like a constipated civil servant” (p. 51); “Moby Dick is not a sociological treatise on the American whaling industry” (p. 120); “Virtue is not like knitting a sock” (p. 59), which either come across as charming or as rather (very?) pretentious. Whatever one’s response to them, they are, I believe, intended to overcome scholarly jargon by means of relaxing the narrative, provoking with contradictions, or telling a joke in order to attract a wider audience than the closed circle of specialists. This kind of performance, still quite foreign to Polish literary studies discourse, is, let us remember, typical for many critical and theoretical texts in the West. Saving the art of analyzing works of literature is the purpose Eagleton has set for himself, choosing here to prioritize his role of literary theorist above the other role he often plays as political analyst, and placing a special emphasis on the word literature.

In “Openings” (and in successive chapters), Eagleton opposes real-life stories to literary renderings, before performing a theoretical analysis that connects to an interpretation (often brilliant) of the literary passages he quotes, and finally confirming the relevance of the titled categories for grasping the meaning of the books discussed. His first point is the question of whether literature constitutes its own category. When we talk about literature, should we use formulations, assessments, and tools that underscore its separateness? Or can we rather assert that a book’s story is no different than the story of what happened at our birthday party or during our trip abroad? And here, Eagleton is quite radical – either we see the linguistic and contextual specificity of literature, or we exist outside its effects. By stating the problem this way, the English scholar marks his stance, in the now rather outworn debate on literature, as “anti-neo-pragmatic” we can read non-literary works as literature (though it will not bring them any closer to *King Lear*), but we cannot do the reverse (pp. 3-4), for it leads to the destruction of a text’s meaning and richness. The world of literature is consistently autonomous and fictitious, as artificial as theater; characters are not living beings, only textual figures, not possessing a real life or capable of having their textual life extended into an unwritten be-

fore or after: “it is important not to confuse fiction with reality,” if it is to have substantial meaning for that reality (p. 6). The text is completely self-contained; introducing outside elements into it destroys its value. This argument now seems truly tired; the obvious truth of the above pronouncements should be universally acknowledged, but they are increasingly in need of being reasserted, as Eagleton shows convincingly, because various critics with political and ethical agendas simply keep stubbornly forgetting these pillars of the study of literature, thereby sliding into incompetent ignorance. What is more, strictly literary analyses not only are far from dull, but can be a perfect form of cognitive play, he claims. Above all, the profession of literary critic requires certain skills, and the Oxford scholar is determined to reclaim their value.

One such skill is detecting the role of a work’s opening in the creation of its meaning (Eagleton does not use footnotes in his essay, as it is not that kind of work, but he is clearly indebted in this section to Amos Oz’s *The Story Begins*). An opening is deeply paradoxical; it establishes something new and nonexistent, but also situates the work in relation to earlier works, building an intertextual context. This Bakhtinesque thesis is demonstrated in a splendid microanalysis of Forster’s *A Passage to India* (p. 14). (For the Polish reader, the examples, drawn primarily from Anglophone literature, are not always persuasively illuminated by linguistic analysis; hence the translator often leaves in the English next to the Polish, in order to show the phonetic effects, important in prose as in poetry.) Eagleton shows how particles of language or barely perceptible syntactic nuances undermine the “obvious” surface layer of the narration. “This ambiguity are the Caves really out of the ordinary or not? lies at the heart of *A Passage to India*. In a shadowy way, the very core of the book is distilled in its opening words.” This last observation is simultaneously an encouragement to read more closely, to engage with the details that work, Eagleton argues, is necessary, in order to understand what a text is really about. Do questions or answers dominate the work? Rhythm or parallelisms? Allusions or invention? Despite such concentrated attention, the text will nonetheless remain cleverer than the reader, becoming the source of endlessly inexhaustible reading. Each element in connection with the other

this is the essential insight of reception theory creates “a paradox of difference and identity. In the beginning was the paradox, the unthinkable, that which defeats language” (p. 20) this passage reveals the other layer of Eagleton’s use of paradoxes in his writing, as he thus embodies in his critical practice the most important aspect of the work being analyzed (“The first line of this is extraordinarily mouth-filling. To read it out loud, with its harsh vowels and stabbing consonants, is rather like chewing a piece of steak.” (p. 29)). Aside from the explicable paradox, Eagleton’s work also features a strong subjectivity, the most difficult thing to achieve in scholarly discourse— for how can one tell if lines in a poem are really gloomy, if a name has a melancholy sound, or a picture is exceptionally powerful? Yet therein lies the appeal of every confidently made theoretical claim, and that is the charm of Eagleton’s argumentation. It is not possible here to list all of the fascinating interpretations that fill the book, but I would like to cite his astonishing and suggestive analysis of the beginning of *Waiting for Godot*. The play, he notes, begins with the words “Nothing to be done” addressed to a character named Vladimir. “The most celebrated figure of that name in the twentieth century was Vladimir Lenin, who wrote a revolutionary tract entitled What is to be Done?” (p. 35).

The next chapter, “Character,” is supposed to convince us not to treat characters in literature like living persons, not to lose track of their fictional nature. This psychologically demanding text is required in order to avoid flattening the meaning of works of literature by turning them into illustrations of life, “true-life reports.” “Literary figures have no pre-history. It is said that a theatre director who was staging one of Harold Pinter’s plays asked the playwright for some hints as to what his characters were up to before they came on stage. Pinter’s reply was ‘Mind your own fucking business’” (p. 46). For the same reason, ethical assessments of the characters are a vain and usually meaningless endeavor. On the other hand, an analysis of a character’s development in the context of the development of literary forms can yield meaning, as it enables us to examine such fundamental anthropological questions as the formation of contemporary individualism, the interdependence of epistemological uncertainty and the surplus of information (the more

facts we have access to, the more indefinite and unclear existence becomes), the correlation between private and public life, and the modernist category of the crisis.

Literature is constructed on conventions. That is why we do not argue with the narrator, when he tells us he knows something (this is explained in the chapter on “Narrative”). We do not argue because in accordance with a tacit agreement we know that nothing in literature happens for real, that we have quite simply arranged to believe in an illusion. We do not accuse him of ill will or immorality, nor do we attribute to him any particular ideology. For Eagleton, various accusations directed at narrators of fictional texts are absurd. That is another important fact misunderstood by ethical critics, who fail to see the importance of illusion. “As Oscar Wilde remarked, art is a place where one thing can be true, but also its opposite. One thinks of the final sentences of Samuel Beckett’s novel *Molloy*: ‘It is midnight. The rain is beating on the window. It was not midnight. It was not raining’” (p. 83). Narration is a sort of metalanguage, the voice of a novel, impossible to question or to criticize. For that very reason, all narration is, in the final analysis, ironic, and combines knowledge with the limitations of knowledge. Whatever those limitations, however, the novel stands as its own authority and confirmation.

“Interpretation” and “Value” take up roughly the second half of Eagleton’s book. If the previous chapters defined what the literary work of art is, these show what the reader, guided by the text, does. The process of interpretation, Eagleton insists, is grounded in awareness of history. “Some works of literature are more resistant to interpretation than others. As civilisation grows more complex and fragmentary, so does human experience, and so too does its literary medium, which is language” (p. 124). If that is true, then interpretation should be guided by something more than our subjective reactions to the text; subjective criticism, recording our sensitivities, is of little use, Eagleton asserts. The meaning of literature is not primarily personal and subjective. “In this sense, a fictional sentence is a bit like a scientific hypothesis” (p. 147). It is concerned with the human condition, civilization and its development, the anthropological importance of aesthetics... But are there good and bad

works of art? Categories like originality, innovation, or readability and enjoyment are, in Eagleton's view, governed by a historically changing, ephemeral perspective and are not objective. "No work of literature is literally timeless" (p. 187)) nevertheless, Eagleton is confident that the worth of a work of literature, nebulous, elusive, and historical, is real. Graphomania is also real, and the example given here is that of the Scottish poet William McGonagall. The Polish equivalent could be Fr. Józef Baka, and the changing status of Baka's poetry indeed challenges any notion of fixed value. "Is it entirely out of the question that one day McGonagall might be hailed as a major poet?" (p.274.). With that highly charged sentence, Eagleton's book comes to an end.

How to read literature? Slowly, with precision, with due reverence... but is there a method? Each text demands a method particularly suited to it, and thus Eagleton in lieu of an answer offers only general strategies for how to approach the process of reading.

The author of *The Illusions of Postmodernism* has long been known for stirring up various controversies.

Biographical materials on Eagleton tend to stress his engagement with contradictions religious Marxist and anti-postmodern postmodernist are two epithets commonly applied to the unconventional, sarcastic Oxford scholar and intellectual. Is the book reviewed here controversial? Unquestionably. The more widely it will be read among contemporary humanities students and scholars, the more profound reflection it will inspire. Andrzej Kuśniewicz once wrote of the importance of choosing carefully which books to shelf next to each other in one's library, since they often don't get along and when shelved too close together, one book can infect its neighbor with poisonous mold. In Eagleton's case, critics have been too hasty in placing his work alongside the writings of Slavoj Žižek. In my book collection, *How to Read Literature* stands quite far apart from the psychoanalytical section, next to such works as Bruno Snell's *The Discovery of the Mind*, the work of Richard Rorty, and books devoted to the category of the imagination. It is certainly worth having in one's library. Each reader will place it with those works he or she finds to be similar... acknowledging the risk of mold, but unfazed.