

How Much Crime Novel is there in the Crime Novel?

On Genre Reflexivity in Gaja Grzegorzewska's *Stony Night*

Klaudia Pilarska

The contemporary Polish crime novel is a fascinating but unusually complex phenomenon. It would be difficult to sketch out a Polish school of crime literature, as we might do more easily in the Scandinavian context. Nor is it easy to identify commonalities among Polish authors. Although it may be counterintuitive, we have the best chance to identify signature features of Polish crime novels if we turn to works modeled after classical crime novels but substantially diverging from them. However, to examine these formal discrepancies, we must first identify the recurring features of the traditional genre. As Ryszard Handke has noted:

One factor that has inspired some literary scholars to turn to popular literature (while dissuading others) is the fact that this literature has a very different relationship to standardized patterns. While a masterpiece is, by its nature, something that can never be replicated, for it can never be collapsed with the works it has surpassed (...), the texts of popular culture offer a fertile field for observing recurring genre components, archetypal characters, migrating motifs and narrative schemas. The repetition of these elements means that while a masterpiece will always be tethered to the name of its author (...), in popular literature (especially for the average reader), it is the subgenre itself that takes precedence (be it the detective novel, western, or romance), (...). This repetition might discourage some scholars, for literature that does not bear the imprint of human idiosyncrasy might make for an uninspiring object of analysis, as would a genre that only requires one to read a few works to then be able to identify nearly identical themes and motifs in subsequent ones. On the other hand, this repetition also comes with a certain potential, for it allows one to extrapolate generalizations that shed light on broader fields of interest than the literature at hand.¹

¹ R. Handke, *Fabularność współczesnych form narracyjnych*, [in:] *Studia o narracji powieści popularnej*, ed. J. Błoński, J. Jaworski, J. Sławiński, Wrocław 1982, pp. 14-15.

Intertextuality is a requisite feature of the contemporary crime novel, and the genre's Polish variant is no exception in this regard. It is with this in mind that I wish to examine Gaja Grzegorzewska's *Stony Night* (*Kamienna noc*), for intertextuality operates as a major point of reference for its author. All references to the genre and (popular) culture are relevant, since they affect the formation of the characters who serve, alongside unconventional narrative techniques, as a defining feature of this novel. Grzegorzewska's novel is also distinct for its heavy dose of brutal violence. Bearing in mind that its author is a woman – and it is specifically novels by women that interest me – this seems even more remarkable.

Gaja Grzegorzewska's *Stony Night* is not to be confused with the half-baked crime novels that have flooded the market. While the book is firmly situated within the genre parameters of the crime novel, it experiments with genre conventions and strays away from well-trodden schemas. The author herself has opted for the back roads, for her latest novel spurns the conventions of the crime novel and turns the historically change-resistant genre on its head.

Grzegorzewska started off on this path as early as her novel *Reaper* (*Żniwiarz*, 2006), which is the first in a series of novels revolving around Julia Dobrowolska. Dobrowolska's character becomes an integral link between this series and the trilogy featuring the professor who is the protagonist of *Stony Night*.² The next books to appear were *One night between Thursday and Sunday* (*Noc z czwartku na niedzielę*, 2007), *Water Demon* (*Topielica*, 2010) and *Grave* (*Grób*, 2012). The series reflects Grzegorzewska's gradual departure from the traditional crime genre and her turn to a more experimental form, which has matured by the time she writes *Stony Night*.

Grzegorzewska's early novels make explicit references to the work of Agatha Christie as well as many mechanisms visible in the majority of her oeuvre. In the Julia Dobrowolska cycle, these genre standards stand out on the structural and narrative level. *Reaper* is modeled after widely read detective novels by the queen of the genre, such as *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, *The Hollow*, and *The Murder at the Vicarage*.³ Grzegorzewska uses the "cozy mystery" structure that inevitably ends with the detective revealing the truth behind the crime. In a manner that evokes Christie, she sets a particular tone for her novels by relying on plot elements such as the village, a hermetic community with a great deal of secrets to conceal, and finally, murder and the subsequent disposal of all witnesses to the crime.⁴ In *Water Demon*, however, Grzegorzewska waits until the middle of the book to introduce the corpse, which is another device borrowed from Christie. In fact, in terms of its scenery, the narrative bears an overall resemblance to *Death on the Nile*. The sharpest about-face, however, comes up in Grzegorzewska's fourth novel, *Grave*. The author leaves Agatha Christie behind as her source of inspiration and creates a particular ambience of horror that has its origins in the Gothic novel and the major

² The trilogy consists of *Concrete Palace* (*Betonowy Pałac*, 2014) and *Stony Night* (*Kamienna noc*, 2016). The trilogy's main hero-narrator is the Professor, who also appears in *grave* (*Grób*), the fourth book in the Julia Dobrowolska cycle. The publication date of the trilogy's concluding book has not yet been announced.

³ The chapters in *Reaper* are named after titles of Agatha Christie novels, such as *By the Pricking of my Thumbs*, *Cards on the Table* and *The Murder at the Vicarage*. *Reaper* is stockpiled with veiled references to Christie's oeuvre (although pop culture references show up as well, such as the notorious shower scene from Hitchcock's *Psycho*). The book can be read as an homage of sorts to Christie.

⁴ Agatha Christie was of the mind that "there is no better way to enliven a novel than to give it one more corpse." Gaja Grzegorzewska seems to take this same principle to heart, for she shares Christie's penchant for killing off victims right before they have a chance to divulge the identity of the culprit.

pop culture phenomenon that is *The Walking Dead*.⁵ All this being said, none of Grzegorzewska's earlier novels intervene on the genre to the same extent as *Stony Night*.

In this novel, the author undermines the conventions of the detective novel so boldly that disgruntled readers have protested that *Stony Night* is not a detective novel at all. This suggests that Grzegorzewska is more interested in seeking out new means of expression than fulfilling her readers' expectations. As she experiments with form, she seems to relate to the conventions of the detective novel only on a superficial level, although she never forgets what genre she is dealing with.

There can be no crime novel without a mystery (usually a murder), an intrigue to cover up the crime, an investigation, and a detective whose task is to unravel the knot these elements make together. In this respect, *Stony Night* fulfills all the genre's essential criteria. Julia Dobrowolska is a private detective already known to us from earlier novels. She is investigating the assault and murder of a young girl, Helenka Karo. As she looks into the case, she must also reckon with the question of whether or not the girl's mother really did commit suicide. The investigation must therefore pursue a double mystery, which is a schema favored by most authors working in the crime genre and could very well be taken as one of the genre's standard devices. As befits all good crime novels, this is not the sole motif constructing the narrative layer.

The personal life and interiority of the detective herself are equally significant. In *Stony Night*, our hero, or rather, heroes (Julia and the Professor) are modeled after an archetype typical of the genre. The crime novel generally has some idiosyncratic attribute or characteristic feature that will stick in the reader's memory. A typical example is an addiction (usually to alcohol), personal strife (e.g. divorce) or an inability to maintain intimate relations (all relationships are eventually destroyed by the detective's commitment to their work). Julia and the Professor are no exceptions to this rule. Julia makes no effort to curb her intake of alcohol. She chain-smokes and is regularly dropping one partner for another, which is a gentle way of saying that she'll sleep with whoever comes her way. She is distinguished by the dramatic scar on her cheek that is not contextualized for the reader until late in the series.⁶ *Stony Night*'s second protagonist shares many of these qualities. Łukasz, usually called the Professor, is embroiled in Krakow's seedy underworld. We eventually find out that he is not only Julia's old friend, but her half brother as well. The incestuous dynamic between the two is what fuels the plot of *Stony Night*. This makes for an interesting strategy, for the incest motif is rarely explored in crime novels (and this is certainly the case in the genre's Polish iteration). The relationship between Julia and the Professor gives rise to emotional and legal problems (incest is criminalized by Article 201 in the Polish Penal Code). Nevertheless, the characters are fully aware of the inappropriate nature of their relationship, and despite the remorse that preys on them, they decide to run away together. As Julia declares:

⁵ This American television show is an adaptation of a comic by this same title. The story is set in a postapocalyptic world plagued by zombies. In Poland, the series is known as *Żywe trupy*, which translates to "living corpses." Grzegorzewska references the series by basing the mystery of the book on necrophilia and the disappearance of bodily remains and by explicitly using the words "living corpses."

⁶ The mystery of Julia's scar and the secret behind her assiduously concealed past are both finally clarified in the fourth novel in the series, titled *Grave*.

(...) It is not normal. We can't fight like a normal couple. We can't even have a normal affair. I don't know what you have in mind, but the thought never occurred to me that "I just cheated on my fiancé." I always think: "I cheated on my fiancé with my own brother." (...) – The whole thing is doomed, she added. We can't just be friends. We can't fuck without feeling bad. We can't even be together, because it could land us in jail. All we can do is give up seeing each other entirely.⁷

The duo's incestuous relationship is not only a controversial conceit meant to draw in the increasingly demanding yet unflappable genre reader with plot twists. Setting aside its ramifications for the characters, the forbidden relationship between sister and brother also invokes the issue of crime and punishment and therefore brings complexity to the novel's ethical layer. According to Stanko Lasić, punishment is a fundamental component of the crime novel that the author can use as a tool for expressing her own views on life and society.⁸ Yet in *Stony Night*, this motif is not explored as extensively as it is in the novels of Agatha Christie, or in contemporary Scandinavian crime novels. Grzegorzewska does not try to diagnose society or present clear-cut opinions on the subject good and evil. She honors the principle that in the crime novel, justice can work on behalf of injustice, and evading justice can be a form of justice in its own right.⁹ Julia herself metes out punishment on the perpetrator implicated in the Basilisk case before fleeing the scene by making a deal with her husband, who happens to be a police officer. Although this kind of plot twist comes as no surprise in a crime novel, in Grzegorzewska's case, it is worth noting how the characters evade the archetypal schemas assigned to them by the genre. The author depicts Julia and the Professor as if they were the heroes of a Greek tragedy. This association is hardly farfetched, for incest as a romantic motif is known to us from Greek tragedies that so often revolve around "star-crossed love." Yet this motif, interestingly enough, is rarely used in crime novels.¹⁰ Grzegorzewska shows us that while they are responsible for their own decisions moving forward, the characters cannot be blamed for falling in love in the first place. Fate has dealt them a cruel hand, for they initially have no idea that they are related. If Julia's father had never lied to her, the whole story might have played out very differently. Grzegorzewska's heroes set off on the wrong track when they are mere teenagers. Already, they have been condemned to their dark fate: "Some are born to sweet delight. Some are born to endless night."¹¹ The path chosen by Julia and the Professor forces them to leave behind everything they know to dodge the consequences of their forbidden love. They are forced to flee the country and must constantly change their names and move from place to place.

Aside from the theme of crime and punishment, Grzegorzewska also explores the motif of the mask, which comes up here in the context of a Venetian carnival. A perpetual game of appearances and relentless contortions of personality leave the characters in a tricky situation:

⁷ G. Grzegorzewska, *Kamienna noc*, Kraków 2016, pp. 340-341.

⁸ See: S. Lasić, *Poetyka powieści kryminalnej. Próba analizy strukturalnej*, Warsaw 1976, p. 125.

⁹ In his book, Lasić points out that the lines dividing good from evil and justice from injustice are often blurred. See: *ibid*, p. 126.

¹⁰ See: A. Gemra, *Diagnoza rzeczywistości: współczesna powieść kryminalna sensacyjno-awanturzysta (na przykładzie powieści skandynawskiej)*, [in:] ed. Anna Gemra, *Śledztwo w sprawie gatunków. Literatura kryminalna*, Kraków 2014, p. 47.

¹¹ This quote alludes to the Agatha Christie novel *Endless Night* and paraphrases a couplet from William Blake's poem *Auguries of Innocence*, [in:] G. Grzegorzewska, *op. cit.*, p. 351.

Carnival. Reality turned on its head. She herself tries to avoid the holiday, which is no easy task in this town. She has no need for this constant reminder that the world is but a game. For her, pretending to be someone you are not is a game that lasts much longer than a month. And when you take off one mask, it is only to don another.¹²

For Julia and the Professor, donning costumes and masks becomes an act that bleeds into their daily reality until they no longer remember their true selves. After all, “why wear a mask when you no longer have a face?”¹³ In reality, Julia adopted her own mask much earlier in life: “And for a moment she was exactly as they saw her. Elegant, cocky, self-possessed. Maybe she could stand to be a touch more depressed, but (...) surely she’s just putting up a front. I get the impression that she never lets her guard down, even when she thinks nobody’s watching.” This is how Julia comes across in the eyes of reporter Eliza Florek, who decides to join her investigation of the Basilisk case despite the fact that they are complete strangers.¹⁴ Julia’s intricately woven façade of lies only begins to come apart at the seams when the Professor shows up. The longer their fugitive life goes on, the more he realizes he does not know Julia as well as he had thought.

The pair’s atypical relationship is matched by the idiosyncrasies of the characters themselves. While the reader experiences the story mostly from the Professor’s perspective, they learn much more about Julia. All of Łukasz’s thoughts revolve around either Julia and her behavior or the ongoing events of the plot. In fact, we know very little about our main hero, the Professor. He seems to be a loner. Aside from his mother and Kojak, his buddy from the block, Julia is all he has. He is undeniably intelligent (hence the nickname Professor). He is clever, and when necessary, uncompromising and ready to resort to violence. Yet unlike Julia, he lives by a set of principles. Perhaps this explains why the two characters never fully understand one another. The Professor will not judge people without basis, even when there is no substance behind his reasoning. When he ruminates over the past deeds of Julia’s life, he makes it very clear what kind of person he takes her for.¹⁵

Violence also enters into their relationship. This becomes a critical component of the novel, and perhaps the condition of its success.¹⁶ Grzegorzewska deliberately shocks the reader with the macabre and portrays hyperbolic acts of violence that recall the *giallo* movement in Italian film. This technique contributes to the cinematic sensibility of the novel.¹⁷ Both Julia and the Professor are steeped in violence. Even their own dynamic has an aggressive edge, and descriptions of their interactions often take a brutal turn:

Anger engulfs me. I put my hands to her throat. She beats me at random, but she is running out of air. I push her away. She falls to the ground and coughs, covering her neck with her hands. She

¹²Ibid, p.13.

¹³E. Cioran, *Zeszyty 1957-1972*, p. 549.

¹⁴G. Grzegorzewska, op. cit., p. 137.

¹⁵Ibid, p. 232.

¹⁶Wacław Forajter has written about how crime can placate the sadistic imagination of the reader and sadism as a condition of a novel’s success. See: W. Forajter, *Zły Leopolda Tyrmanda jako literatura środka. Teksty i konteksty*, Kraków 2007, p. 68.

¹⁷A. Mazurkiewicz, *Tendencje rozwojowe współczesnej polskiej literatury kryminalnej*, [in:] ed. A. Gemra, *Śledztwo w sprawie gatunków...*, p. 151.

looks at me. Now she's afraid. I've seen all this before. I yank her up by the hair. She screams from pain. But the scream cuts off when she remembers we are not alone in the house. Well, marvelous. How handy. Let her keep up appearances. I pull her to the bed. I open a drawer and find the handcuffs. She sees this and starts to struggle free, but she does this in total silence. I can only hear her harried breathing. There is something terrifying about this mute scream. One cannot help but wonder what would have to be done to her to make her lose control and start to scream out loud.¹⁸

In spite of all the cruelty, constant lying, and dramatic revelations of the truth, the relationship between Julia and the Professor goes on. The characters cannot live without one another. They go to impossible lengths to stay together and have no regard for the legal ramifications they face. They protect one another and are prepared to make all kinds of sacrifices. When Julia becomes convinced that the Professor has been killed, she even pursues a personal vendetta to avenge her beloved (her brother).¹⁹

Both Julia and the Professor put themselves first. Their goal is to survive. In Julia's case, however, this takes on a rather radical edge, as we see in a conversation between Julia and Aaron, the husband she left behind:

"(...) You know me. It's just to survive."

"How far will you push yourself to survive?"

"However far I need to. You can't scare me; you can't humiliate me. You probably have all these ideas in your head about all the things I'm capable of, all the things I could do, according to you. Is that right?"

"I was thinking nothing of the kind."

"Well whatever you were thinking, you should know that the truth is much worse."

"I see you're very proud of yourself. So what? Was it worth it?"

"It's better to be a master in hell than a slave in heaven."²⁰

This last sentence captures the essence of what distinguishes Grzegorzewska's characters from the typical heroes of crime novels. Neither Julia nor the Professor heed the rules revered by those who act on behalf of the law. Nor do they give credence to the principles upheld by (amateur) detectives.²¹ Unlike Hercule Poirot, Anastazja Kamińska, and Harry Hole, who all share the ultimate goal of bringing the guilty to justice and restoring order, this duo plays by

¹⁸Ibid, p. 59.

¹⁹Julia's feelings toward the Professor change throughout the cycle. *Stony Night* is the first novel where she realizes how important Łukasz is to her, and this is only because she fears she has lost him once and for all: "Victor, Marcelina, Aaron, mom, dad – they're all blurred and unreal. Unnecessary, unimportant. But Łukasz, Łukasz was another story. He will stay with me for a long, long time. Probably forever. That's how it has to be. And the rest of them? They're only pawns in the game." [in:] *ibid*, p. 404.

²⁰Ibid, p. 130.

²¹The detective remains a deeply embedded component of the contemporary crime novel. Yet more and more novels forego this archetype in favor of forensics specialists (Kay Scarpetta from Patricia Cornwell's novels – the series' first book is called *Postmortem*), police psychologists, criminal profilers (Sasza Załuska from Katarzyna Bonda's "Cztery żywioły Saszy Załuskiej" cycle, consisting of: *Pochłaniacz*, *Okularnik*, *Lampiony*, and *Czerwony Pająk*), people who work in criminal justice (Teodor Szacki from Zygmunt Miłoszewski's trilogy, made up of: *Uwikłanie*, *Ziarno prawdy*, *Gniew*), and even journalists (Mikael Blomkvist from Stieg Larsson's Millennium series) – although in this last case, we should mention that Salander's character is more the point of emphasis.

its own rules.²² Grzegorzewska's characters lack an ingrained sense of justice. Their actions are not guided by a moral compass. Julia is more interested in uncovering the truth than bringing the perpetrator to justice. The heroes of *Stony Night* are not two-dimensional, and their motives are never straightforward. Though the world they inhabit may be extreme, vivid and hyperbolic, it also contains many shades of gray: "A world of danger, blood, violence and high stakes coincides with a world of caricature, replete with evil grimaces, hilarious laughter, and hopeless scorn."²³ *Stony Night* is a patchwork world where nothing is quite as it seems.

Stony Night also breaks with the schematic structures typical of its genre in terms of its textual composition and plot structure. Until *Stony Night*, Gaja Grzegorzewska's earlier novels – often referred to as her "Krakow novels" – were set in Krakow.²⁴ Real-world settings seem to be a requisite feature of the genre.²⁵ This device allows the author to contextualize the novel's events in real places, thereby imparting a sense of realism to the reader.²⁶ In this sense, Grzegorzewska's choice to rotate the plot through several locations marks another departure from the genre conventions.

Leaving behind one setting to disperse the action into other spaces is a risky technique, particularly for a crime novel, which is usually known for its internal organization and logical composition. Grzegorzewska, however, introduces divisions into the book's spatial and temporal narrative. The novel has a bookend structure. It begins and ends in Venice, in January of 2016. The narrative events are linked together by Carnival – a holiday that is thematically relevant to the story. Carnival is a time for donning costumes and masks, but the moment it is over, the masks come off. The protagonists go through a similar trajectory. After several ups and downs, they meet to put an end to all the lies and explain themselves to one another once and for all.

The narrative structure can be broken down into three plotlines. The first occurs over six months, the second over six days (detailing the events at the end of the story) and the third, over six hours (the chapter titled *Clasp (Klamra)*). The whole story is conceived and narrated in hindsight (with a linear and retrospective central arc). The novel opens with a prologue that reaches back to 2014 – the earliest events in the book's chronology. The chapter titled *Hour Zero (Godzina zero)* appears twice in *Stony Night* – at the beginning, and at the very end.²⁷ The initial

²²This pattern of behavior is embodied by characters like Philip Marlowe and the Master (the protagonist of Marcin Świetlicki's crime trilogy *Jedenaście, Dwanaście, Trzynaście*). Świetlicki's work has been influential for Gaja Grzegorzewska (*Stony Night* includes three references to Świetlicki's poetry). Of note, Grzegorzewska collaborated on a crime novel called *Orchidea* with Marcin Świetlicki and Ireneusz Grin.

²³S. Lasić, op. cit., p. 100.

²⁴*Reaper* is initially set in Krakow, but the action soon moves to a village outside the city. *Water Demon* is mainly set in the Masuria region. However, *Some Night between Thursday and Sunday*, *Grave*, and *Cement Palace* all take place exclusively in Krakow.

²⁵This is particularly the case with serial novels that revolve around one hero. Readers, like authors, are quick to grow attached to particular cities and characters. An example of this device can be found in the novels of Katarzyna Puzyńska, which are set in the fictional village of Lipowo. Other examples are the books *Redbreast*, *Nemesis*, and *The Devil's Star* from the Harry Hole cycle. These three are singled out from the eleven-volume series as the "Oslo Trilogy."

²⁶In recent years, there has been a growing trend to organize city walks devoted to fictional characters, many of which are from crime novels. In 2017, the inaugural Łódź Crime Novel Festival featured an excursion on the footsteps of Katarzyna Bonda's *Lampiony* that passed through the places that make up the book's setting.

²⁷The chapter title *Godzina zero* is a Polish take on the title of Agatha Christie's novel *Towards Zero* (1944). In Christie's novel, the title refers to the moment a crime is committed and the essence of planning a crime, for "the moment it is actually committed is no longer important," [in:] A. Gemra, op. cit., p. 50.

Hour Zero refers back to the events of June 29, 2015, which took place in Patras, Greece. The second chapter by this title concludes the novel and pertains to the events of October 2, 2015. Between these two chapters is a sequence of chapters whose numbers are alternatively positive and negative, which conjures associations with levels. The chapters ranging from zero to negative six are devoted to Julia and the Professor's visit to Patras in 2015. Interspersed with these are six more chapters numbered from one to six, taking place that same year, when Julia has returned to Krakow. The events in Patras play out over six months, while the Krakow storyline is condensed into the first six days of August. The epilogue clarifies everything and weaves all the elements together, guiding the reader toward the closing chapter, again titled *Clasp*. The novel, as the author explains, has a frame story structure:²⁸ she develops a set of discrete, standalone narratives that are woven together in the text in a deliberate pattern to create a narratively coherent whole. The discrete subplots can take various forms, but they fundamentally operate according to the same schema. The plot might pertain to story A, but one of its characters will be narrating story B, in which a second protagonist goes on to narrate story C.

These devices contribute to the impression that *Stony Night* is a cinematic novel. Wacław Forajter has noted that "The poetics of the fragment correspond to a rapid, anxious montage: the camera zooms in on details, wide panning shots prevail, and several motifs play out simultaneously."²⁹ While Forajter's comment is made in reference to Tyrmand's *Zły*, his observation is certainly germane to *Stony Night*.

Aside from the direct account of Julia and the Professor's fugitive travels and their stay in Patras, the book also includes passages narrated by Eliza Florek. These sections pertain to the murder of Helenka Karo and the case of the Basilisk (the Basilisk being a man who raped and murdered children). The book also includes tabloid excerpts and interrogation transcripts. These embedded narratives enrich the author's structural experiment. The device is well conceived, for the puzzle pieces come together to form a coherent whole. Both strategies work to distance the novel from the genre conventions, for they complicate the reader's attempts to digest the story as a whole. Instead of gradually explaining things, the author accumulates uncertainties and multiplies the unknowns. Grzegorzewska tests the limits of the reader's patience and forces her to make an effort that does not stop with the question "who did it?" Spatial and temporal displacements disrupt the trajectory of the narrative, but simultaneously allow the reader to accumulate new perspectives on the story being told and its characters.

An Intertextual Journey through (Pop)-Cultural States of Consciousness

It is interesting to examine exactly how Grzegorzewska plays with the conventions of the crime novel. Stanko Lasić, a Yugoslav scholar who has already been cited here, outlines four subgenres of the crime novel that comprise the genre's foundation: the investigation, the pursuit, impending threat, and action. We should therefore consider which of these variants Grzegorzewska departs from, and how she transforms it over the course of *Stony Night*.

²⁸<http://krakow.wyborcza.pl/krakow/56,44425,19997421,gaja-grzegorzewska-kamienna-noc,,1.html>, [online], [last accessed: March 26 2018].

²⁹W. Forajter, op. cit., p. 93.

The investigation model is based on a confounding deed (what Lasić calls the mysterious deed) that is usually a murder.³⁰ We know nothing of who perpetrated the crime or his motives. The novel's objective then becomes to expose the perpetrator and explain the impetus that led to his terrible act. This schema is not limited to a one-note mystery, for the original deed can be supplemented by consequent ones that obstruct the investigation. As Lasić argues, the author who chooses the investigation model with its concluding crescendo should strive to demystify the supplementary mysteries alongside the central one.³¹ Here, it is essential that only one person knows who committed the crime, and that person should be no other than the murderer. *Stony Night* diverges from the investigation model in many ways. Julia is investigating the murder of Helenka Karo. In so doing, she tries to unravel the mystery of the girl's mother and her apparent suicide while searching for the true identity of the Basilisk. In this way, the story has a surplus of mysterious deeds. On the other hand, the investigation schema fails to account for several other issues that surface in the book. First of all, there are multiple murderers, or at least people implicated in the criminal plot. This does not necessarily violate the schema implied by the investigation model. We eventually find, however, that several people are aware of the murderer's identity. This fact does chafe against the fundamental premises of the model. What's more, while the mystery at the heart of the novel is ultimately resolved, not all motifs are explained, and the conclusion (despite being fully resolved) implies that the reader will someday cross paths with these characters again.

Of the four variations outlined by Lasić, the only one relevant to *Stony Night* (aside from the investigation) is the impending threat model.³² According to Lasić, the impending threat model is rooted in a menacing force, or rather, a series of such forces, that contribute to feelings of "uncertainty, fear, or lack of security (...), precipitating unexpected changes and ultimately yielding terror. In the end, they build up to a paralyzing presentiment of death."³³ The model therefore conforms to the definition of the classical thriller. As Lasić shows us, the endangered subject tries at all costs to reinstate the disturbed order, eliminate the threat by demystifying it, and translate the mystery into truth. If we examine the events that play out in *Stony Night*, we must concede that this template is the most applicable. If we follow Lasić's line of reasoning, we can see Julia as an endangered subject who tries to unearth the truth and restore a balance that has been upset. In this sense, as Lasić has aptly observed, the impending threat model is not so different from the investigation. On the other hand: "revelation not only entails the explication of the mysterious or threatening deed introduced by the criminal's perspective. It also involves transforming the structure of the world, restoring order, and gaining control over man."³⁴

Of course, Julia does manage to expose the truth and in the end, justice is served (more specifically, she avenges the death of the Professor, which was what motivated her actions in the first place). On the other hand, her deeds restore no order at all. If anything, it is Julia who dis-

³⁰S. Lasić, op. cit., p. 74.

³¹See: *ibid*, p. 75.

³²The pursuit model is not compatible with the structure of *Stony Night* because the murderer's identity is revealed from the outset. The center of gravity therefore shifts to other questions: will the culprit manage to evade punishment? Will he slip free from the clutches of justice? These questions do surface in *Stony Night*, but they are relegated to the margins. Action-based novels operate similarly, for their core component is a potential action that transforms as it unfolds – in step with the progression of the plot – into a realized deed, see: *ibid*, p. 103.

³³*Ibid*, p. 96.

³⁴*Ibid*, p. 97.

turbs the equilibrium in the first place by transforming from victim to executioner and getting off scot-free. This resolution conflicts with the fundamental premise of the crime novel, which states that “transgression is an assault on the ‘order of the world,’ but in the crime novel, this order is always restored.”³⁵ The issue of narration is also relevant here, for it seems to ask: “In the impending threat model, who is the privileged party?” The answer, of course, is the murderer. But there is another option: perhaps there is no privileged party at all. Lasić sheds light on this:

The threatening instigator is a symbol of a future that has been rejected by one of the characters, be it consciously or otherwise; the committed crime returns in the form of the threat. This threat not only targets the perpetrator (who is perhaps long dead, or is no longer relevant) but affects the innocent as well, seeking its new victim.

It would be difficult to make the argument that either paradigm describes *Stony Night*. The paradigm of the murderer (or in this case, murderers) is ruled out because the perpetrators turn out to be minor characters who have little bearing on the plot. On the other hand, we can hardly claim the novel has no privileged characters. Julia Dobrowolska clearly has this status. She is the only figure present for all of the events (those set in Krakow as well as those after our heroes’ escape). She manipulates, lies, and schemes. She is even able to predict certain incidents.

Grzegorzewska has not limited herself to a single variant. The novel integrates components of the investigation model and impending threat model. The narrative is increasingly obfuscated by the disordered chronology of events and unconventional narration. In the chapters with positive numbers, Florek’s first-person narration is complemented by a third-person narrator who informs the reader of Julia’s motives for fleeing Krakow. The negative chapters, meanwhile, are told from the Professor’s first-person perspective. This narrative strategy is common among frame stories. The first narrator is usually an omniscient subject who “opens” and “closes” the text. The second or subsequent narrators (often one of the story’s protagonists) describes the actual events. Narration is a critical component of crime fiction. As Anna Piwowar has shown us:

(...) it appears as an aggregate of signs, and the narrators’ various investigations have (...) a textual nature. It is not enough that the world is conveyed through texts; the world itself becomes saturated with signs. Since the world is perceived as an array of readymade narratives and the line between fiction and reality has been blurred, the only path that leads to meaning is narration – the recycling of existing stories into a story of one’s own.³⁶

The cement that binds together *Stony Night* becomes the narration itself, which supplies the reader with a set of clues for unraveling the mystery. By rotating between three narrators, the reader’s perspective is constantly changing. Events conveyed by the omniscient narrator provide a full sketch of the story at hand. At the same time, when the Professor takes over as narrator, this broad perspective is curtailed. The reader then loses insight into the thoughts and actions of other characters, unless Łukasz witnesses them directly. On the other hand,

³⁵W. Bialik, *Fryderyka Dürrenmatta polemika z konwencją typowej powieści kryminalnej*, [in:] ed. A. Gemra, *Śledztwo w sprawie gatunków...*, p. 80.

³⁶A. Piwowar, *Tropienie innego*, Podteksty, issue 1(15)/2009, <http://podteksty.amu.edu.pl/podteksty/?action=dynamic&nr=16&dzial=4&id=357>, [online], [last accessed: March 26 2018].

the perspectival shift sheds light on Łukasz's interiority and his dynamic with Julia, who had functioned as the story's center of gravity in the preceding chapters. When we observe the events from Łukasz's perspective, a correlation emerges between hero and reader. We too feel lost, distrustful, and left to our own devices, as if we must participate in a narrative we stand outside of. Łukasz himself admits: "It's not that I'm ignoring the signs, or that I don't see them. I'm just not reading them right. When you are always thinking in the back of your head that the owls are not what they seem, you forget that sometimes, a pipe is just a pipe."³⁷

Since *Stony Night* is rife with red herrings, it seems fitting that both protagonist and reader are misled. One such interpretive trap is the character of Eliza Florek, a reporter for the tabloid "The Daily Sniper" ("*Szperacz codzienny*").³⁸ Eliza works with Julia to collect material for her book on the Basilisk. By publishing the book, one of Eliza's objectives is to rehabilitate Julia's public image. We eventually find, however, that there is no Eliza Florek. This is one of *Stony Night's* many shocking twists. Transcripts from Florek's interviews flood us with information that seems irrelevant, but the reader acquainted with Grzegorzewska's books will know that this deluge conceals clues that lead back to Eliza's true identity. As she investigates the crime, the reporter never appears without Julia at her side. This, at least, is the version of the story we get from the third-person narrator. We do not find out until one of the final transcripts that where we believed Julia and Eliza had been together, there were only the fingerprints of one person – Eliza Florek. The multilayered plot thickens.

Aside from the interpretive clues smuggled into the narration, the epigraphs tied to the individual chapters also help to supplement these clues. Grzegorzewska supplies each chapter with an epigraph. Some are literary references (alluding to Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Demons*, Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, and Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*) and others reference popular culture broadly construed, quoting films, television shows, and the lyrics of songs by Iggy Pop, David Bowie, and the Chemical Brothers.

All the epigraphs included in the novel shed light on the events of the individual chapters. The title of Eliza Florek's book is *Basilisk: In Pursuit of a Shadow* (*Bazyliżek. W pogoni za cieniem*). The passage bearing this title is supplied with a quote from Francisco de Quevedo y Villegasa's poem "Basilisk." When the Professor is shot in the chapter titled *Hour Zero*, Grzegorzewska chooses a fitting quote from the movie *Sunset Boulevard*: "Funny how gentle people get with you once you're dead."³⁹ Yet the second chapter bearing this title but found at the end of the book features a quote from the movie *Frankenstein*: "It's alive! It's alive!" The words hint that the Professor has in fact survived the shooting and what had seemed to be a fall to his death. The chapter titled "Negative Two," which discloses the most information about Julia and the Professor's relationship, is paired with these lyrics from the song "Take Me to Church:"

³⁷The expression "the owls are not what they seem" is a reference to David Lynch's acclaimed television series *Twin Peaks*, which is seen today as a genre hybrid, [in:] G. Grzegorzewska, op. cit., p. 70.

³⁸"The Daily Sniper" is a tabloid whose reporters chase after cheap sensation and scandal to slander celebrities. The articles excerpted from the tabloid are modeled after content from real-life Polish tabloids like "Fakt" and "Super Express." Articles may include typos typical of this kind of journalism – one article refers to Julia's brother as Łukasz B., while elsewhere in the same article, he is called Łukasz D, see, *ibid*: p. 103.

³⁹*Ibid*, p. 30.

“We were born sick”
 You heard them say it
 My church offers no absolutes
 She tells me «worship in the bedroom»
 The only heaven I’ll be sent to
 Is when I’m alone with you
 I was born sick, but I love it

The lyrics “The only heaven I’ll be sent to/ Is when I’m alone with you” capture the essence of Julia and the Professor’s relationship. Their bond is intense, as Julia often reminds us: “I gave in to my feelings and thoughts, which anyone else would surely find deranged. I imagined that I was back in my brother’s arms, lying at his side. Time did not exist. There was no such thing as days or months.”⁴⁰

In the epigraph of the chapter “Negative Five,” we encounter the song “Freedom” from the movie *Django Unchained* (2012):

... But I’ve gone too far to go back now
 ... I am looking for freedom, looking for freedom...
 And to find it cost me everything I have...

These words correspond to Julia’s mood: convinced that she has lost the Professor, she is pursuing her own vendetta and will let nothing stand in her way. Only revenge can ease her pain and provide the freedom she so longs for – that same freedom of which Anthony Hamilton and Elayna Boynton sing.

Intertextuality is not confined to the book’s epigraphs, for it runs through the novel as a whole. The contemporary crime novel seems to be thoroughly saturated in popular culture. Although pop-culture’s influence on crime fiction steadily increases, intertextuality is not the genre’s salient feature. So much is clear from the genre’s Polish variant.⁴¹

Stony Night is somewhat distinct from the majority of contemporary crime novels, which tend to center their plots on an investigation and organize all other threads along this axis. Grzegorzewska is more concerned with the dynamic between her two heroes and their controversial romance than any criminal intrigue. She is playing a game with her reader and therefore sprinkles her book with ample tidbits of (popular) culture. For these reasons, it would be fair to describe *Stony Night* as a “container” whose signature feature is intertextuality.⁴²

⁴⁰Ibid, p. 398.

⁴¹The layering of intertexts is more dense and transparent in Grzegorzewska’s work than it is in the work of other authors, although it can be found there too. In his series of legal thrillers, Remigiusz Mróz makes frequent allusions to the novels of Cormac McCarthy. A minor character of the series is a fan of McCarthy books such as *The Road* and therefore bears the nickname “Kormak.” Zygmunt Miłoszewski sets his novel *Ziarno Prawdy* in Sandomierz and satirically alludes to the Polish detective show *Ojciec Mateusz* and Artur Żmijewski, who personifies the role of the show’s eponymous priest. As of now, examples of this phenomenon in Polish crime fiction are still scarce, but the tendency to incorporate intertexts seems to be on the rise.

⁴²The term “container” (“*worek*,” which literally translates to “bag”) is used by Jolanta Pasterka to describe Tyrmand’s *Zły*. Waław Forajter also uses the concept in his book, see: W. Forajter, op. cit., p. 141.

In terms of its intertexts, *Stony Night* is less straightforward than Grzegorzewska's earlier books, which were stockpiled with literary allusions that mainly came from Agatha Christie novels or Sherlock Holmes.⁴³ *Concrete Palace* is the first book to incorporate sources from music and film. For Grzegorzewska, personal taste enters into her choice of references. She adores the poetry of T. S. Eliot, and the epigraph for the novel as a whole comes from his work. *Stony Night* opens with a line from T. S. Eliot's *East Coker*:⁴⁴

There is, it seems to us,
At best, only a limited value
In the knowledge derived from experience.
The knowledge imposes a pattern, and falsifies,
For the pattern is new in every moment
And every moment is a new and shocking
Valuation of all we have been. We are only undeceived
Of that which, deceiving, could no longer harm.

The poem resonates with the events of the plot and lucidly reflects what will play out on the compositional level of the text ("the pattern is new in every moment"). After reading the novel in full, one no longer feels convinced that every event prompts a "valuation of all we have been," or all that Julia and the Professor have been. In one scene, on a bookshelf with *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Steppenwolf*, *The Stranger* and *Death in Venice*, we encounter a beaten-up volume of Eliot's work that foregrounds the poet's significance.⁴⁵ Eliot was known for his tendency to integrate avant-garde tropes with tradition and to draw his sources from European and Asian culture. Eliot was also interested in man as a subject that has gone astray. His character portraits are bereft of heroism, portraying cynical figures who are out of place in their environments. Even Eliot's early work betrays his fascination with the grotesque and the ugly. Eliot's many preoccupations are reflected in Grzegorzewska's work as well.

The lion's share of the intertexts in *Stony Night* are pop culture references that Grzegorzewska deliberately arranges for the reader. Most references are made outright: "The inscription read: 'Polish *Game of Thrones*. Like Jaime and Cersei for the poor.'"⁴⁶ Although many will be familiar with *Game of Thrones* (at least anecdotally), only fans of the series will be able to trace the simile to its source.⁴⁷ Grzegorzewska's allusion to the iconic characters of *Lord of the Rings* functions similarly: "I watch her as I get up, slowly, hardly moving. And suddenly she jumps me like Bilbo Baggins would Frodo."⁴⁸ Fans of the film adaptation will not pause over what scene Grzegorzewska has in mind. In fact, most of the references in *Stony Night* can be traced back to films. There are allusions to *Predator*, *Thelma and Louise*, *Batman*, *Beauty and the*

⁴³*Stony Night* also includes a reference to Sherlock Holmes. See: *Kamienna Noc*, p. 12.

⁴⁴T. S. Eliot, "East Coker," [in] *Four Quartets*, New York 1971, p. 23 et. seq., cited in G. Grzegorzewska, op. cit., p. 5.

⁴⁵T. S. Eliot's poetry is a recurring motif in *Stony Night*, although direct references to the poet are infrequent. As the writer has said during public readings, the last book of the trilogy about Julia Dobrowolska and the Professor will be based on Eliot's work. The book's publication date and title have not yet been announced.

⁴⁶G. Grzegorzewska, op. cit., p. 78.

⁴⁷The television characters Jaime and Cersei – like Julia and Profesor – are siblings engaged in an incestuous affair (that also yields offspring, as it does for the heroes of *Stony Night*).

⁴⁸*Ibid*, p. 58.

Beast, *Mad Max*, and multiple allusions to *Lord of the Rings*.⁴⁹ Some cultural tropes are veiled: “It’s only a black hole, like what’s under the hood of a Dementor,”⁵⁰ although the Harry Potter universe is so ubiquitous in our culture that every reader will be able to grasp what Grzegorzewska means.

Stony Night is also full of allusions more typical of literary fiction that point to what has been and still is essential for the writer, such as what she grew up on, and what influenced her identity as a writer. Grzegorzewska remains loyal to the queen of detective novels, but in *Stony Night*, this takes the form of explicit allusions to Christie slipped into mildly ironic similes: “She carefully opens the envelope with such gusto it’s as if she’s expecting to find a congratulations letter from Hercule Poirot himself (...).”⁵¹ Grzegorzewska adopts a similarly ironic tone toward the Polish canon by referencing Adam Mickiewicz’s epic poem, and its film adaptation in particular: “As a result, she knows three curse words in Lithuanian, and I, taking Lithuania as my motherland, know: Priest Robak, Bogusław Linda, and Alicja Bachledda-Curuś.”⁵² Alongside those to Eliot, there are references to Shakespeare’s Ophelia, Philip Marlowe, and the work of Marcin Świetlicki, who Grzegorzewska is known to admire.⁵³

Intertextuality functions as a bonus asset for *Stony Night*. The intertexts complement the array of passages, and this additional layer does not distract the reader, as it might in *Concrete Palace*. Most authors writing crime novels in Poland today try to root their narratives in specific socio-political circumstances (in *Okularnik*, Katarzyna Bonda broaches the subject of nationalist separatist groups, while Remigiusz Mróz grapples with refugee issues in one of his novels). They also share a tendency to engage the reader exclusively on the level of the criminal intrigue. Gaja Grzegorzewska, however, makes no effort to diagnose society or foreground Poland’s social problems. She follows the models supplied by the genre while blazing a trail of her own. With confounding logic and mislaid clues, she sends the reader down conflicting paths. All these strategies are embedded in the genre framework of the crime novel. As the mystery gets increasingly complex and obscure and one plot twist follows another, the reader’s pleasure can only grow. Contemporary Polish crime authors are outdoing one another with increasingly inventive experiments to keep their readers wanting more. Gaja Grzegorzewska is no exception, and *Stony Night* earns its status as a genre experiment.

transl. Eliza Cushmert Rose

⁴⁹See: *ibid*, pp. 105, 106, 163, 20, 432 and 138.

⁵⁰*Ibid*, p. 120.

⁵¹*Ibid*, p. 166.

⁵²*Ibid*, p. 171.

⁵³*Ibid*, pp. 27, 425, 128.

KEYWORDS

crime novel

ABSTRACT:

This article seeks to examine the contemporary crime novel by looking at genre reflexivity in Gaja Grzegorzewska's novel *Stony Night* (*Kamienna noc*). Taking the traditional genre and the work of Agatha Christie as reference points, this article identifies commonalities and divergences between Grzegorzewska's novel and the traditionally oriented detective novel. The article analyzes fundamental issues of the detective novel, such as: plot, narration, composition, and the employment of conventions to reference the genre tradition along with Grzegorzewska's experimentation, which is supported by intertextuality – a mode that is becoming increasingly relevant to the Polish variant of this genre.

intertextuality

GENRE REFLEXIVITY

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR:

Klaudia Pilarska (b. 1993) is a graduate of Jagiellonian University's Institute of East Slavic Languages, where she focused on the culture of Russia and its neighboring nations. She is currently in her second year of studies at UJ's literary criticism program. Her interests include contemporary literature, popular culture, and foreign languages.