



Anna Gawarecka

Steward King

Ewa Kraskowska

Klaudia Pilarska

Gerson Schade

summer 13 | 2018

The Crime Novel in the Archive of Poetics

The detective novel tests the usefulness of poetics that were prevalent until recently as well as poetics that had long been condemned to obsolescence.

The crime novel opens up the archive of poetics and sorts their contents into entirely new orders

assassinat de M^{re} V. Bal 25.3.04 6926 32.8

FORUM
POETYKI

FORUM OF
POETICS

Projection sur un plan vertical

Editor in Chief

Prof., PhD Tomasz Mizerkiewicz

Editorial Board

Prof., PhD Tomasz Mizerkiewicz, Prof., PhD Ewa Kraskowska, Prof., PhD Joanna Grądział-Wójcik,
PhD Agnieszka Kwiatkowska, PhD Ewa Rajewska, PhD Paweł Graf, PhD Lucyna Marzec
PhD Wojciech Wielopolski, PhD Joanna Krajewska, MA Cezary Rosiński, MA Agata Rosochacka

Publishing Editors

PhD Joanna Krajewska
MA Agata Rosochacka

Linguistic Editors

MA Cezary Rosiński – Polish version
MA Eliza Cushman Rose – English version

Scientific Council

Prof., PhD Edward Balcerzan (Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland)
Prof., PhD Andrea Ceccherelli (University of Bologna, Italy)
Prof., PhD Adam Dziadek (University of Silesia, Poland)
Prof., PhD Mary Gallagher (University College Dublin, Ireland)
Prof., PhD Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht (Stanford University, United States)
Prof., PhD Inga Iwasiów (University of Szczecin, Poland)
Prof., PhD Anna Łebkowska (Jagiellonian University, Poland)
Prof., PhD Jahan Ramazani (University of Virginia, United States)

Proofreaders:

PhD Joanna Krajewska – Polish version
Thomas Anessi – English version

Assistant Editor:

Gerard Ronge

Cover and logos design:

Patrycja Łukomska

Editorial Office: 61-701 Poznań, ul. Fredry 10

Editor: Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland

„Forum Poetyki | Forum of Poetics” summer 2018 (13) year III | ISSN 2451-1404

© Copyright by „Forum Poetyki | Forum of Poetics”, Poznań 2018

Editors do not return unused materials, reserve rights to shortening articles and changing proposed titles.

T A B L E O F C O N T E N T

introduction	<i>The Crime Novel in the Archive of Poetics</i>	p. 4
theories	Anna Gawarecka, <i>The Mystery in the Image. Czech Writers Solving Crimes in the Art World</i>	p. 6
	Klaudia Pilarska, <i>How Much Crime Novel is there in the Crime Novel? On Genre Reflexivity in Gaja Grzegorzewska's Stony Night</i>	p. 26
	Bernadetta Darska, <i>The Contemporary Crime Novel as a Variation on the Superhero Theme. Preliminary Thoughts</i>	p. 42
practices	Gerson Schade, <i>The strange case of early Mock and the Classics</i>	p. 50
	Wiktoria Klera, <i>Noir Poetry</i>	p. 62
	Michał Larek, <i>Bonda and storytelling</i>	p. 72
poetics dictionary	Ewa Kraskowska, <i>The academic murder mystery</i>	p. 82
critics	Adrianna Woroch, <i>Scandinavian Crime Fiction, or: A Few Words on Snow, Myth, and Murder</i>	p. 88

The Crime Novel in the Archive of Poetics

Tomasz Mizerkiewicz

One standout phenomenon of literature from the turn of this century is the detective novel with its relevance and sharp rise in popularity. This trend has played out similarly in the literature of so many countries that scholars of world literature have had good reason to seize the genre as a new impetus for their global assessments of literary production (Steward King suggests as much in the article whose translation appears in this issue).

For reasons worth exploring, the readership of detective novels exhibits a growing trust in the genre as a means to encounter other cultures as well as one's own. The crime novel serves readers as a prism for examining repositories of niche areas of knowledge, historical episodes, accounts of events long past, scientific achievements both celebrated and forgotten, infinite lists, databases, registries and catalogues. Nearly all detective novels feature some instance of inquiring into various reservoirs of knowledge that will potentially play into the criminal investigation. In this way, using genre conventions to win the reader's trust and exchange knowledge reveals much about how this literary form has shaped contemporary attitudes, emotions and needs. The reality of local and distant threats not only coaxes the readers' Stimmung into the set of moods appropriate for crime novels, but also prompts readers to learn more and pursue knowledge according to this new key and these new critical premises.

We can find an analog to these processes in a certain feature of the contemporary detective novel and its poetics. Winning the reader's trust also implies securing their approval to test the usefulness of poetics that were prevalent until recently as well as poetics that had long been condemned to obsolescence. The crime novel opens up the archive of poetics and sorts their contents into entirely new orders. An excellent example of this is the revival of the militia crime novel. Until so recently, this would have seemed implausible, but this genre variation is now known and beloved to Polish fans of crime fiction. In its time, the subgenre was a straightforward product of the cultural politics of the communist regime, for it was a conducive vessel for the state's ideological messages and therefore

soon became the object of disparaging and often irreverent critiques that emphasized its unimaginative and derivative character (Stanisław Barańczak's major study on the subject makes this argument). Alongside detective novels by authors such as Ryszard Ćwirlej, the militia crime novel has made a triumphant comeback in Polish literature, proving that it can hold its own as heir of this reviled and near-dead literary form. It has even begun to exert an ineluctable yet undeniable charm.

The authors of the articles featured in this issue of "Forum of Poetics" set off on precisely this path. Their essays and surveys emphasize the poetological boldness and unpredictability of the contemporary crime novel that engages the archive of poetics. Anna Gawarecka discusses Czech detective novels that unexpectedly revive a formal strategy coined in nineteenth century Czech literature and forgotten in the intervening years. Bernadetta Darska points out the increasingly visible affinities between crime novel protagonists and comic book superheroes. Klaudia Pilarska offers a close reading of one of Gaja Grzegorzewska's finest crime novels and demonstrates how it pays homage to Agatha Christie as master prototype in order to spawn a creative reworking of the intertextual crime novel. Gerson Schade offers a philological commentary on the interpolation of classical literature in Marek Krajewski's detective novels. Ewa Kraskowska takes a close look at the evolution of the campus murder mystery as a genre variation, while Wiktoria Klera discusses Chandler's poetics and their influence on contemporary poets. Michał Larek, an author of detective novels based in Poznań, shares his thoughts on a new approach to the writer's toolkit proposed by Polish crime novel celebrity Katarzyna Bonda in her recently published writer's manual. Finally, Adrianna Woroch reviews Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen's book on the contemporary Scandinavian crime novel and offers a critical analysis of emerging forms of socially engaged prose coming out of contemporary Nordic Noir.

In the archive of poetics, the contemporary detective novel continues to unearth a wealth of mysteries it can solve on its own terms. This process has proven to be decidedly effective in provoking emotional thrills.

The Mystery in the Image.

Czech Writers Solving Crimes in the Art World

Anna Gawarecka

“Sir, if you will, everything but the criminal case is a puzzle; the case becomes a fragment carefully extracted from reality, just a snippet of it, momentarily caught in the spotlight.”¹

The structural parameters for crime literature have been the subject of numerous overviews, critical essays, and recapitulations. Yet rarely do these comments exceed the level of superficial claims that firmly classify sensational prose within the scope of mass literature and merely rehash the same statements on its schematic nature and predilection for redundant and predictable endings. On the other hand, in a radical gesture, Roger Caillois dismissed this kind of prose as a strictly intellectual “jigsaw puzzle” that falls outside the parameters of even the most expansive definition of the literary.² Mirroring the conclusion Karel Čapek

¹ K. Čapek, *Povídky z jedné kapsy*, Prague 1985, p. 110. Translation: E. R. Moving forward, all translations from the Czech are Eliza Rose’s, based on the Polish translations by the author of this article.

² For as Caillois argues, in order to expose the perpetrator of the crime, it is necessary to “isolate a specific, human environment from the rest of the world, curtail all external interventions and seepages, rule out a *deus ex machine* explanation for the mysterious event, and disclose all cues that contributed to the scandal and that must be internalized in order to clarify the course of events. When these conditions are all met, there is nothing that fundamentally differentiates the crime novel from the mathematical problem. (...) At the end of the day, the crime novel ceases to earn its name. At its evolutionary limits, its true nature is revealed. It is not a story, but a task. (R. Caillois, *Powieść kryminalna czyli Jak intelekt opuszcza świat, aby oddać się li tylko grze, i jak społeczeństwo wprowadza z powrotem swe problemy w igraszki umysłu*, przeł. J. Błoński, [in:] R. Caillois, *Odpowiedzialność i styl*, Warsaw 1967, p. 191). For an example that supports the thesis on the “mandated” formulaic construction (both thematic and narrative) of the crime novel, we can turn to the words of E. Mrowczyk-Hearfield: “I believe we can provisionally suggest that crime literature is a creative form that centers its concerns around the issue of crime or, more generally speaking, transgression, and the pathway to solving the puzzle of that transgression. This kind of literature does not use crime motifs merely as a pretext for addressing other issues, although it does (depending on the nuances of its subject) often raise moral issues (while consistently relegating them to the background and highlighting the mystery in the foreground). This literature is neither mythical nor sacral. It does not address issues of sin and retribution. It does, however, explore the struggle between good and evil. It is written in a realist mode, and its salient attribute is the explicit formulation of plot and its linear composition consisting of motifs that run in both directions.” (E. Mrowczyk-Hearfield, *Badania literatury kryminalnej – propozycja*, “Teksty Drugie” 1998, issue 6 (54), pp. 97-98)

reaches in the 1920s³ (to name an author unfairly neglected by Polish criticism), Caillois uses this ostracizing maneuver firstly to present a paradigmatic “invariant” of the genre, cleansed of all external traces that might interfere with the “cryptographic” dimension of plot construction, and consequently, to demonstrate that crime literature, having attained its own particular state of emotional barrenness, has once again converged with the “conventional novel that is rambling and expansive, where there is neither a chronological inversion, nor a logical chain of cause-and-effect, nor a reconstruction of an event that has already come to pass. The narration has so much in common with the crime novel that it must certainly be its progeny – through the emphasis of the detective novel’s sensational attributes and the roles played by bandits and detectives, and the space occupied by death and premeditated murder. What had once been a pretext and point of reference has now become an issue of utmost importance. Agitation trumps reflection. The image of violence takes precedence over the difficulty of disjointed reasoning.”⁴ In other words, Caillois proves that crime prose has traced an evolutionary circle that is nearly complete. By reactivating elements that fell by the wayside due to the abstraction of genre attributes, the prose has regained (at least potentially) the right to its place within the world of a “high brow” literary value system. After being held in suspicion for so long (pun intended) and treated dismissively, murder, which has always been the most disturbing and unconditionally condemned signifier of transgression in interpersonal relationships, has ascended to the rank of a “great cultural theme.” The renaissance unfolding today, which has been noted so assiduously among scholars, inhabits a new cultural atmosphere. Literature that relies on simply duplicating original genealogical laws will no longer go unpunished, for it will necessarily be exposed to allegations of being outmoded and clinging to a naive faith in the undying appeal of formulaic narrative strategies. For the postmodernist embrace of “experimenting with pulp,” which involves keeping defining genre markers in scare quotes and bracketing all gravitas, plausibility, and mimetic illusions of the structural templates in parentheses, allows us to elevate investigative crime stories to a “higher level of mediation,” thereby exposing the artificiality and contrived nature of the presented world. Yet at the same time, the conspicuous overrepresentation of these stories on the publishing market might prompt us to follow Anna Gembra and ask, “what, if not the exposure of crime and the crime mystery, is the central objective shared by authors of contemporary sensational crime novels? To what ends do they apply the conventions and structure of the crime novel?”⁵ In both cases, to examine the causes and effects of this “surplus,” we must also account for derivative activations of the motifs comprising the crime novel’s standard thematic inventory. It is also crucial to identify the various prose strategies that have prompted this resuscitation of calcified schemas and endowed

³ See also: „Detektivka (míním zde čistou detektivku a nikoli odrůdu smíšené s románem pasionálním, literárními ambicemi a jinými kontaminujícími vlivy) je literární úkaz stejně jednoduchý jako dejme tomu epická báseň nebo dětská báchorka. (...) Zdá se opravdu, že detektivka už překročila svůj vrchol; byla to jakási přechodná móda. Avšak na každé pomíjivé módě je pozoruhodné to, že obsahuje něco strašně starého.“ (K. Čapek, *Holmesiana čili o detektivkách*, [in]: *Marsyas čili Na okraj literatury (1919-1931)*, Prague 1971, pp. 142-143, 156).

⁴ R. Caillois, *Powieść kryminalna...*, pp. 202-203.

⁵ A. Gemra, *Diagnoza rzeczywistości: współczesna powieść kryminalna sensacyjno-awanturzysta (na przykładzie powieści skandynawskiej)*, [in]: *Śledztwo w sprawie gatunków. Literatura kryminalna*, ed. A. Gemra, Kraków 2014, p. 51. Jakub Z. Lichański makes the direct claim that “the crime/sensation intrigue is only a mask, a convention; authors are in fact describing problems of an entirely different nature.” (J.Z. Lichański, *Współczesna powieść kryminalna: powieść sensacyjna czy powieść społeczno-obyczajowa? Próba opisu zjawiska (i ewolucji gatunku)*, [in:] *Śledztwo w sprawie gatunków...*, p. 20.)

these schemas with surprising semantic values.⁶ As a result, experimenting with conventions turns into a kind of polemic on the reader's "horizon of expectations." And popular entertainment (rather than disinterested carnivalesque stunts) gains the power to stimulate ethical, social or cultural reflection.

In *The Name of the Rose*, Umberto Eco chose to revive the most "canonical" structural template of the detective novel (in the vein of Arthur Conan Doyle) and justified this decision by asserting the genre's epistemological potential. At the same time, he enriched the genre's repertoire of structural elements with more Gothic-in-origin horror tropes and a sense of the uncanny and macabre (among other elements) in order to interrogate the universal relevance of medieval theological disputes today. Since this book's publication, world literature has witnessed a rise in texts that mobilize popular schemas of the thriller and "enhance" them by setting the plots in various "niche" and/or exotic milieus. In Eco's later work and the work of other authors, the hierarchy of importance of certain layers of the text change. Pure "entertainment value" is now prioritized over cognitive ambitions and the attempt to diagnose the deficiencies of contemporary social and political life. One thing, however, remains constant, and that is the readers' fascination with artistic (literary, theatrical, cinematic, multimedia) strategies for explicating mysteries and solving puzzles. As Umberto Eco has argued, "I believe people like thrillers not because there are corpses or because there is a final celebratory triumph of order (intellectual, social, legal, and moral) over the disorder of evil. The fact is that the crime novel represents a kind of conjecture, pure and simple. (...) After all, the fundamental question of philosophy (like that of psychoanalysis) is the same as the question of the detective novel: who is guilty? To know this (to think you know this), you have to conjecture that all the events have a logic, the logic that the guilty party has imposed on them. (...) At this point it is clear why my basic story (whodunit?) ramifies into so many other stories, all stories of other conjectures, all linked with the structure of conjecture as such."⁷

As we know, *The Name of the Rose* persuasively interrogates the notion that the perpetrator of a series of crimes consciously (and with premeditation) governs the logic of facts. As the parameters of the genre require, the text sets up an "iron-cast" causality of events that

⁶ As Magdalena Lachman argues: "Superficial properties of distorted messaging are mobilized in similar practices. (...). The new application of this messaging ultimately runs counter to its original (and often still prevalent) usage. Writing, then, leads to the consequent destruction of the borrowed material with no prompting to respect its cultural position. This move has a fundamentally provocative nature, for it reveals that every message can be relegated to the level of deactivated material." (M. Lachman. *Gry z "tandetą" w prozie polskiej po 1989 roku*, Kraków 2004, p. 191) Teresa Cieślukowska reminds us, on the other hand, that: "The crime novel's influence on contemporary narrative prose does not lead (...) to the widespread transposition of the crime motif or other crime-related themes. It takes on a more sensory nature on occurs on a scale conditioned by social experience, academic and cultural development, and the full adaptation of contemporary culture in terms of both its triumphs and failures. The discovery of the unknown, the investigation of mysteries, is a foolproof stimulus and like all forms of learning, it will always be an attractive objective. The crime novel relates to this function as a miniature model that expresses and represents (within the realm of possibility), and satisfies a certain set of social needs. (...) What has migrated from crime novel writing into other novel-writing practices is not the subject of crime, but the tendency to assess this writing on the basis of its structural achievements." (T. Cieślukowska, *Struktura powieści kryminalnej na tle współczesnego powieściopisarstwa*, [in]: T. Cieślukowska, *W kręgu genologii, intertekstualności, teorii sugestii*, Warsaw - Łódź 1995, p. 77)

⁷ U. Eco, *Postscript to The Name of the Rose*, in: U. Eco, *The Name of the Rose*, trans. W. Weaver, New York 1982, p. 525.

ultimately proves deceiving. The impetus to revive the fossilized conventions of the genre, originally seeded by the work of Friedrich Dürrenmatt, involves calling into question the cognitive illusions on which the genre is based and subverting blind faith in the “benevolent power” of deduction. This mode of revival is not, however, the sole possible method for bringing this material back to life. One discrete albeit often epistemologically complementary way to expand the toolkit of the crime novel’s genre attributes (and one that has been eagerly mobilized by Eco) consists of sampling from the conventions of gothic literature and mystery novels, thus enriching the genre’s creative strategies with plot conventions and compositional devices native to the thriller.⁸ Not so long ago, scholars had a tendency to treat thrillers as purely commercial products “bereft of literary value” (to quote Teresa Cieślukowska, who is referencing Boileau-Narcejac⁹). More recently, however, scholars seem to look upon the genre with growing generosity, for within this material, they have discovered a “blurring” of genres (to use Clifford Geertz’s term).¹⁰ They have also identified this genre as one that aligns, to a certain extent, with socially critical, political, and ecological genres. As a result, they feel justified in taking seriously the prerogative diagnoses of the books.¹¹ This dependent relationship runs both ways: scholars who address such issues do not rehabilitate the “gory trash” that preys on readers’ “most lowly instincts” so much as they respond to transformations unfolding in the genre and to the indisputable fact that today, we find the signature devices of suspense in the work of writers more obviously classified on a “higher plane” of literary messaging.

Czech literature includes a group of prose writers who are broadly read as the heirs of Eco’s variant of the thriller-as-template. This group includes Miloš Urban and Roman Ludva, although

⁸ See also: “Quite often, the thriller features the very same structural elements that we find in the crime novel. After all, for the scholar, common features can be found in the crime novel (crime, investigation, intrigue, the revelation of a mystery) and the thriller (the progression of detailed descriptions of crimes and the suffering they bring about). The fundamental difference not only consists of the thriller’s tendency to generate images of the crime. Most importantly, it consists of the presence of some kind of threat to the protagonist’s life and the link between the hero’s fight for survival and the resolution of the mystery, the attempt to solve the mystery for public opinion, and direct confrontations with the antagonist.” (B. Trocha, *Miedzy thrillerem religijnym a teologicznym – czyli zbrodnie i intrygi swiecie religii*, [in:] *Śledztwo w sprawie gatunków...*, pp. 213–214) Tzvetan Todorov sees the thriller (*roman à suspense*) as a genealogically mediating form that combines attributes of the “mystery novel” with the *roman noir*. (See also: T. Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose*, trans. R. Howard, Ithaca 1978).

⁹ See also: T. Cieślukowska, *Struktura powieści kryminalnej...*, p. 72. Cieślukowska is referencing Pierre Boileau and Thomas Narcejac’s monograph *Le Roman policier* (Paris 1964).

¹⁰ See also: C. Geertz, *Blurred Genres. The Refiguration of Social Thought*, [in:] *The American Scholar*, vol. 49, no. 2, pp. 165 – 179.

¹¹ Describing specific aspects of what is referred to as the Scandinavian variant of crime literature and reflecting on the factors that have led to its global popularity, Anna Gemra has noted that the backdrop for Swedish and Norwegian novels “is an often broadly developed portrait of specific customs, traditions, legal and social systems and cultural conditions. In the crime novel, these things are not so drawn out: crime figures as more of a generality. It has what we might call a universal character. It is committed out of revenge, greed fear, contempt, rage, or for more or less enigmatic “loftier” ends. Yet the narrator usually abstains from seeking deeper driving factors, and instead treats the reader to the simplest explanations. Crimes are committed with the very same motives in more commercial, sensational crime novels, although the author (...) lays bare for the reader the mechanisms leading to the final tragedy. We are therefore dealing with a variation we might refer to as the ‘socio-cultural crime novel.’ The courageous escapades and quagmires the heroes live through explain this genre’s appeal and reveal the mechanisms of power, national institutions, business, the justice department, healthcare, and metnal and social stereotypes, etc.” (A. Gemra, *Diagnoza rzeczywistości...*, pp. 52–53)

the latter falls in this category less consistently.¹² Both figures belong to a circle of writers who, after debuting in the mid-1990s, have now turned their attention to metahistorical fiction, yet they have done so by way of their own nuanced approaches that involve seeking the material traces of the past that exert concrete and powerful effects on contemporary reality. As a result, their interests tend to prioritize architecture and works of art, and they base their sensational plots on texts on alternative (esoteric) methods for interpreting the meaning of these works (a meaning that is, of course, beyond the layman's reach). On an intertextual level (and here we should not forget the phantasmagoria of Dan Brown), writers therefore direct their gaze toward capturing a vivisection of so-called conspiracy theory postulates such as those laid out in *Foucault's Pendulum*, rather than toward the teleological meditation we find in *The Name of the Rose*, whose authenticity is confirmed by the author's scholarly authority on medieval themes.

In Czech literature, however, there is a discrete and entirely indigenous (if I might risk so bold a claim) tradition of combining sensational motifs with the interpretation of the hidden meanings of artistic artifacts. In 1873, Jakub Arbes (1840-1914), a neoromantic public intellectual and prose writer, published the story *Svatý Xaverius* ("Saint Xavier") in the magazine "Lumír." At the suggestion of the publication's managing editor Jan Neruda, who was disturbed by the work's title and its hagiographic connotations, the story given the genre designation "*romanetto*." Thanks to the book's bestseller status and sweeping popularity, the text became a template on which a new genre form emerged. On the other hand, we might just as well view it as a paradigmatic approach (on Czech soil) to situate the narrative structure of a criminal investigation in the art world. The story's title references a painting by the Baroque artist František Xaver Palko (1724-1767 or 1770) located in the St. Nicholas Church in Prague. The painting depicts the martyr's death of Saint Francis Xavier, although the story itself concerns attempts to discover the painting's "actual" meaning. These attempts are motivated by an erroneous or perhaps distorted interpretation of the painter's spiritual testament:

"The painting of Saint Xavier as he dies was not rendered only for the eye and for the sake of ennobling the minds of pious Christians. There is more to it than we might find in the works of old masters. There is something in there that would drive thousands to flinch in contempt, but might nonetheless prove beatific for millions... Who, even after standing guard over the painting for years, might be able to concentrate all their thoughts on the image in order to explicate its mystery? Whoever explains this mystery will be of immense value to humanity, for he will possess a spirit of such strength and experience as are necessary to commit deeds of great benefit for all of humanity. Only one thing is needed here: perseverance, and an iron will. Whoever arms himself with such things in confronting this painting will feel a yearning to unravel the mystery of the painting to which Saint Xavier bestowed his treasure of infinite value."¹³

¹²Urban entered the stage of Czech literature "as an author who was associated from the get go with reworking genres, polemicizing (cultural) tradition, and playing with the reader. (...) Particularly in novels whose plot is set in the spaces of authentic sacral buildings, the contrast between the idealized past and the conditions of modern society portrayed on the brink of self-destruction, is foregrounded by introducing an association between these historical, sacral spaces and crime." (I. Mindeková, *M. Urban: Hastrman*, [in:] *V souřadnicích mnohosti. Česká literatura první dekadý jednadvacátého století v souvislostech a interpretacích*, ed. A. Fialová, P. Hruška, L. Jungmannová, Prague 2014, p. 395).

¹³J. Arbes, *Newtonův mozek a jiná romaneta*, Prague 2002, pp. 175-176.

After being indoctrinated into the positivist cult of a scientific experiment, the romanetto's hero remains fixated on the message's literal meaning and therefore manages to completely miss its universal and ethical dimension. Using geometric tools and making complex mathematical calculations based on the painting's composition, he attempts to reconstruct the locations of what he has literally interpreted as a "treasure of infinite value." For in the protagonist's approach, the composition figures as a camouflaged stand-in for an eighteenth-century topographical map of Prague and environs. This interest in the numerical values encrypted in the painting allows him to fully succumb to his obsession, which inevitably has disastrous ramifications for his life plans. The (metaphorical) narrative marker of this is the protagonist's ultimate death in a Viennese prison. On a visual level, this death suggests a certain resemblance to the suffering of the Jesuit martyr.¹⁴

František Xaver Palko *The Death of Francis Xavier*

Scholars seem to agree on the point that the model for Arbes' narrative structure grew out of his in-depth examination of the theories and creative tactics of Edgar Allan Poe. As it turns out, for Arbes, the self-reflexive comments we find in Poe's *Philosophy of Composition* proved to be "a great model throughout his whole life that continued to impress him with its originality and unusual knack for evoking fear in the reader via cold logical construction."¹⁵

¹⁴See also: "Partly seated and partly lying down, the friend Xaverius rested on a thick saddlecloth on a gurney. He was dressed in a prison uniform worn somewhat open at the chest. The lower part of his body was covered in an old coat from which bare legs poked out. The friend leaned his head backward. He was morbidly pale, nearly livid face turned up to the azure sky. His left hand rested on his chest while the right was bent at the elbow and hung toward the ground. (...) I stood still for a long while, unmoving, and I could no tear my eyes away from the suffering man; for at this moment it seemed to me that I here, just a few paces away, I was not looking at my dear friend (...), but instead someone whose appearance is entirely familiar, yet at the same time, entirely unknown to me. Namely, I had the impression I was staring at the dying Saint Xavier..." (ibid, pp. 236-237).

¹⁵B. Dokoupil, *Vliv E. A. Poea na tvorbu Jakuba Arbesa*, "Sborník Prací Filozofické Fakulty Brněnské University" 1976/1977, p. 37.

In fact, it is precisely this “ironclad” structural logic that served Arbes in his quest for rational proof. To put it differently, his attempt to encounter everything through intellectual cognition and his refusal to cede any “territory” to the “unsolvable” allow us to situate the romanetto within the tradition of Czech crime literature.

At the romanetto’s origins lies the story of an investigation of the mystery concealed within the subject or diegetic structure of a work of art. To take things further, the painting is endowed with sacred values, and is integrally embedded in sacral space. Its original semantic potential therefore consists of theological and/or confessional meaning in the foreground, while all other values (including aesthetic ones) recede to the background and attain (in the best case scenario) the status of a supportive tool in the work of penetrating the painting’s meaning according to its author’s original intentions.¹⁶ Inverting the hierarchy of values and conceding the status of semantic dominance to other structural elements performs a certain “intensification” of the painting’s textual nature and therefore calls for a different reading strategy that would respect the potential (often making claims, as in Arbes’ case, on the basis of a kind of interpretive usurpation) for alternative readings of the painting’s representation of the world:

“I would say that for the first time, I noticed what was really so remarkable (if not unique) in this canvas. It has nothing to do with painterly technique. It’s all a matter of subject: the reading monk. I mean, all you have to do is look at the title! The monk who reads is the one who will uncover the mystery of the painting! In other words, for the painter, it is enough to have a few indicators of how to create a canvas so that it will persevere through time and coast through the centuries to then become (as only some painters desire, while still others do in quiet suffering) a work of art. But the monk in the painting does not paint – he reads! Later on, in the lower right corner, we find a formula intended to aid painters. (...) At this point, I find that the meaning behind the Tuscan legend expands to great extremes: the painting’s mystery cannot be solved through painting or by scrutinizing the image from up close. It can only be solved in reading. And that’s not all. Perhaps reading is only a metaphor. The endlessness of the chess board that was suddenly spread out before me was fascinating.”¹⁷

Roman Ludva’s novel *Stěna srdce* (*The Heart’s Wall*; 2001) partially replicates the narrative structure of the romanetto by using the device of a compositional frame, the intensification of narrative layers, and the technique of nesting the characters’ statements in “multi-tiered”

¹⁶It is important to note that Arbes, masked by the narrator’s mediating reflections, does not seek to erase these primary meanings, although he does lend them a universal character, expanding them beyond the painting’s religious explication: “I knew what were the prettiest paintings in Prague’s many churches, but this particular painting grabbed my imagination, no magic spell needed. And yet one would be hard pressed to find a simpler painting! A dying man! How many people have already died and will die in a more interesting and poetic manner than this fellow known as Saint Xavier? Yet when I gazed upon that painting, it never occurred to me to wonder who this man really was and what role he played in advancing humanity or perhaps impeding it; in this painting, I saw but a dying man whose faith was solid as stone, who was able to find his salvation within that faith.” (J. Arbes, *Newtonův mozek...*, pp. 154-155).

¹⁷R. Ludva, *Stěna srdce*, Brno 2001, pp. 157-158.

quotations.¹⁸ The unifying force threading through the book's many plotlines is the motif of a painting that, according to the medieval Tuscan legend, is encoded with a hidden message from the artist. Allegedly, this inscription bears a "doctrine" for immortalizing the lifespan of the work of art in the moment of (exegetic) reception. It is no easy task to read the text as a "wholesome" crime novel, for it lacks the majority of the genre's requisite markers (not least the crime motif), but a "guesswork structure," which, in Umberto Eco's opinion, underlies the genre's eternal popularity, commandeers the sequence of events, while references to Raymond Chandler sprinkled throughout the narrative space continue the work of directing the reading process.¹⁹ The mystery's actual resolution turns out to be shockingly banal. The creative formula encrypted in the painting, meant to endow works of art with a relevance impervious to the passage of time, consists of five Latin words: "*PROBITAS, INGENIUM, ASSIDUITAS, GAUDIUM, EVENTUSQUE. MORS* –" (Honesty, talent, hard work, joy and success. Death –), evoking a cosmic whole of basic ethical values and rudimentary anthropological categories. What's more, the mystery noted by critics of the work can therefore never be explicated in full. On the other hand, it successfully fulfills its basic narrative function, which is to direct the novel's protagonist (the Czech painter Josef Hala) who in his youth paid homage to abstract artistic paradigms, towards the "true" artistic road.

This protagonist, who has various sources of protection at his disposal, therefore falls victim to manipulation, for all "good Samaritans" try to stuff him into a pre-programmed framework or identity template and assign him the fixed role of the artist who, while striving toward commercial success, simultaneously works to rehabilitate realist painting that has been cast aside (irrevocably, it would seem) with the rise of avant-garde experimentation. The story of the Tuscan legend has the function of a catalyst of sorts that gives rise to the awareness that art should respond to its viewers' spiritual and aesthetic needs. In this case, this means that art should respect the principles of figurative aesthetics. To realize this goal, tradition and modernity must harmoniously intersect, and in concrete terms: Gothic painting techniques should be renewed.

¹⁸Of course, the author's employment of this compositional strategy does not necessarily mean he was directly referencing the Arbes tradition. After all, as Mieczysław Dąbrowski has demonstrated: "The aesthetic of postmodernism samples from two constructive models, and although they are markedly distinct from one another, they share a common root. For both the jewelry box and palimpsest structures stem from the conviction that it is no longer possible to generate a new or original order." (M. Dąbrowski, *Postmodernizm: myśl i tekst*, Krakow 2000, p. 133) Brian McHale, however, connects the jewelry box compositional structure with painterly techniques of illusion, such as *trompe l'oeil* and *mise en abyme*. (See also: B. McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, New York 2003). *Wall of the Heart* uses the *mise en abyme* device to describe the glass walls of a library on which a bas-relief of an open book has been printed on shrinking scales "into infinity". The device enables the author to reiterate intersemiotic affinities between painting and literature that are essential for the novel's autotelic layer.

¹⁹The criminal investigation schema must not necessarily concern deeds legally defined as crimes or, to speak more cautiously, misdemeanors. For every mystery, cloaked behind an incomplete reservoir of information and demanding explanation, offers a chance to apply detective-like methods in order to penetrate the truth. The crime novel, as Régis Messac has argued in the study *Le « Detective Novel » et l'influence de la pensée scientifique* (1929), "is a story devoted to themethodical and gradual revelation of a mysterious event using rational strategies and strictly defined circumstances." (Cited in: T. Cieślukowska, *Struktura powieści kryminalnej...*, p. 67.)

The characters in the story *Falzum* (“*Counterfeit*”) reach the same conclusions, although this time they are dealing with the conventions of fifteenth-century Flemish painting. The story was published in 2012 within a volume of “classic” crime narratives with this same title:

“In the worst case scenario (...), a few people will write that the contemporary figurative wall painting created by way of traditional techniques does have a future. In the best case scenario, the European elite of art historians will champion what I’ll call the potential for a symbiosis between old and modern painting. And because one will rush to penetrate the ideas of the other, they will unwittingly rally the army, shoot the contemporary wall painting to smithereens, and turn it into a pillar for the next decade of art.”²⁰

In the texts that make up *Falzum*, Ludva does not go to great lengths to transgress the established schemas for detective prose. His protagonists are a pair of police officers who represent different methods for reaching the truth but nonetheless complement one another (Aristotelian logic vs. intuition guided by associative links between seemingly unconnected phenomena).²¹ As scholars have often noted, the author respects the trope of inverting the chronology of events (beginning with the discovery of the murdered victim’s remains, retreating into the past, and ultimately unearthing facts from her life that are “crucial to the case” to finally unmask the perpetrator behind the crime).²² He foregrounds the role of witness interrogations and does not deny the significance of material clues and contemporary crime techniques (although he may downplay them). As a result, he offers the reader all the genre components they “know and love” and, by preserving the hierarchy of values, he (structurally) subordinates all components incidental to these conventions and prioritizes those that play a hand in depicting (revealing to the reader) the social relations of painters, artisans, art dealers, art historians, auctioneers, and curators. The puzzle behind the crime committed in precisely this hermetic (colloquially speaking) and therefore exotic environment continues to expand, thus contributing to the appeal of plot devices. The specific subject matter, meanwhile, allows the author to smuggle in actual news sources on the contemporary state of the art world (which is truly worthy of scorn, if we take Ludva’s word). In this way, Ludva is updating Horace’s maxim: *Aut prodesse volunt, aut delectare poetae*. Having lost touch with the public in any authentic way, the art world is vegetating on the margins of the collective imaginary, now stirring up feelings only among specialists and potentially nouveau-riche snobs who are only interested in a highly assessed “gallery array of commodities.” The writer therefore conveys reliable art history knowledge through the text’s back doors, as it were, availing himself of ekphrastic devices as well. It is against this backdrop that we can explicate (broadly conceived) issues concerning the relationship between the original work of art and its copy. These themes reference the belief – postmodernist in origin – in the impossibility of defining an absolute paradigm as a stable reference point for an infinite series of replicas, pastiches, and modifications. In the *Wall of the Heart*, the mandate to revive medieval painting techniques

²⁰R. Ludva, *Falzum*, Brno 2012, pp. 109-110. .

²¹See also: “Lieutenant, logic is a discipline that is based on so-called cause and effect. One fact produces the next one. Every man is mortal. Aristotle is a man. Aristotle is mortal. Cause and effect (...) Captain, is such a logic really sound? Slivovitz is good. I drink slivovitz. I am good.” (ibid pp. 74, 75) The interlocutor unambiguously protests this claim, but Kryštof Fridrich’s method of “intellectual stretching” (as described by his supervisor, Josef Rambousek) in investigative work proves to be much more effective than dry “Holmesian” deduction.

²²See also: Caillois, *Powieść kryminalna czyli Jak intelekt opuszcza świat...*, p. 169.

(inspired, in this case, by the iconographic imagery of the famous Czech painting Jan Knap) already opens up a pathway for questioning the limits of the right to imitate the old masters, the function of citations, and allegations that art is derivative or lacks original inventiveness. The stories found in the Counterfeit collection braid these issues into a web of criminal intrigues (let us remember, after all, that identifying the theme of falsification with murder is no particularly innovative novum in the history of the genre). Together, these texts demonstrate that the concept of the counterfeit has not, at the end of the day, been definitively mapped (in an ethical sense as well, for appropriating the ideas of others does not necessarily imply theft or plagiarism). The concept's meaning encompasses not only "primitive" exchanges of authentic works with their impeccably executed replicas, but also exercises in style that serve to perfect the artist's skill set, as well as a whole range of essentially literal paraphrases that allude to the continuity of cultural tradition. After all, in these apotheoses of the "eternal life" of the heritage of great art, it is easy to identify echoes of basic theoretical aphorisms supporting (justifying) the dispersed eclecticism of postmodernist painting.²³

Jan Knap, *United*

Miloš Urban also explores themes of the counterfeit, although in his approach, the question of how to situate the evolution of artistic strategies along a trajectory of innovations and repetitions provokes axiological anxiety and aesthetic misgivings. The novel *Stín katedrály. Božská krimikomedie* ("The Shadow of the Cathedral. A Divine Crime-Comedy;" 2003) tells the story of a series of murders building up to an act of vandalism targeting sacral space that reduces Prague's most important spiritual site to the banal status of the "crime scene." The book's protagonist is an art historian named Roman Rops (a surname that explicitly evokes the provocative Belgian symbolist Félicien Rops). Rops is working on the monograph *Kamený hvozd* ("Stony forest"), which discusses an extension added to the cathedral in the nineteenth century. Through this protagonist as mediator, the writer (at least in part) subverts the logic of the cathedral's reconstruction. One character, the stonemason Angelo Fulcanelli (whose surname is also clearly laden with meaning)²⁴ uses only "original" medieval masonry techniques (as one might suspect) and has this to say about the church:

²³For Krystyna Wilkoszewska, the telltale signature of postmodernist painting is the fact that "after the era of neo-avant-garde 'works' in the vein of assemblage, fluxus, performance, and so on, the painting has made a comeback. We now find canvases covered in paint, framed, and hung on walls." (K. Wilkoszewska, *Wariacje na postmodernizm*, Kraków 2000, p. 196) Scholars call the artists behind these paintings postmodernists, for they "tend to depart from formalism and abstraction and return, often ironically, to mythology, history, and narrative. Their materials are the iconographic 'treasure troves' of the past that – once appropriated – accumulate alongside one another on the paintings. It is not unlike the scenario playing out in literary intertextuality: paintings speak among one another. One references another, or perhaps several others." (Ibid., pp. 207-208).

²⁴Fulcanelli (1839-1953) was an alchemist and occult author known exclusively by his French pseudonym. In light of cultural references demonstrating the fictional nature of the world constructed in Urban's tale, it seems most significant that his book *Le Mystère des Cathédrales* (published in 1926) is cited several times in *The Shadow of the Cathedral*.

“You’re just like me. You have a romantic soul. It’s like I’m meeting an old friend. And I’d like to point out, one romantic to another, that just as the original section of the cathedral represents peak Gothic style, so does the new section represent counterfeit Gothic. You will of course be aware that Romanticism, in its fullest bloom, is worth nothing itself, but as a mirror of the whole, nothing can surpass it. Harmony rests within it (...) This murder that took place in the church, I think it has something to do with this.”²⁵

Sacral architecture in the Gothic style, despite the best intentions of its designers who “earnestly” strive (as the maxim from Ludva’s novel demands) to produce an authentic effect, lacks the capacity to provoke the desired spiritual response. For it lacks Benjamin’s aura, since the structure is not saturated with internalized religious experiences, but is merely an expression of expert knowledge devoid of emotion. In a holy place of this order, crime does not necessarily coincide with an act of profanation (and according to the murderer, it is no such thing). The ending is shocking enough in the context of genre parameters, but it does not provoke “terror and mercy,” nor does it allow the reader any feeling of catharsis. The perpetrator of the series of murders (or rather, the person “commissioning” the work) turns out to be the archbishop of the cathedral, Father Urban (again, the choice of surname is not accidental, for Urban is known to sprinkle his “signatures” throughout the fictional space of his texts). The murderer is motivated by the need to restore to the Church the social prestige it deserves but has lost due to the encroaching wave of atheism and his disappointment in the protagonist’s “betrayal,” for he had taken the book’s hero as his spiritual son and heir:

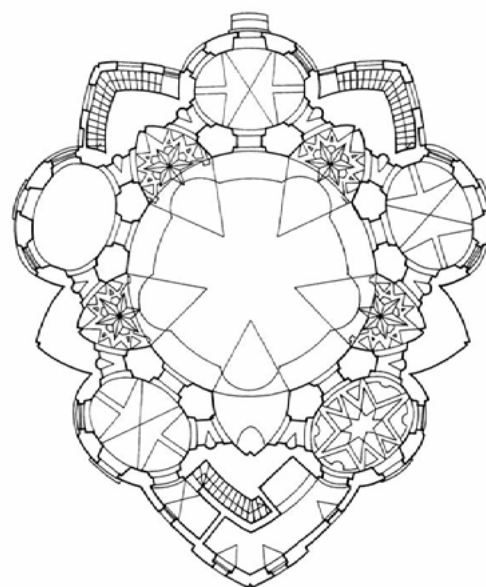
“I raised you to be the best holy man among all holy men, an intellectual who could come to the defense of our affairs. Today, everyone makes a mockery of the Church. So I told myself it was high time for the Church to relearn how to inspire fear. (...) And yet, this didn’t help at all (...). Not these shattered statues, nor the pig released into the church during mass, nor even all this monstrous slaughter. You didn’t see any of my warnings. You didn’t see or hear them.”²⁶

Auratic experiences do, however, accompany the contemplation of the aesthetics of churches designed by Jan Santini Aichel (1677-1723), the Baroque architect who designed his work at the service of the counterreformation agenda and had a profound impact on the cultural landscape of the Czech and Moravian provinces. It was not, however, this aspect of his enormous artistic legacy that inspired the writer to publish the novel *Santiniho jazyk. Román světla* (“Santini’s Tongue. A Novel of Light;” 2005). It was a certain belief, in part fabricated and in part based on archival records (in one might call a game of inversion, or a form of play between *dichtung* and *wahrheit* that has general become an “identifying marker” of Urban’s fictional writing). The belief maintains that these churches’ designs conceal a secret message. According to this belief, it would require deep knowledge of the Kabbalah, Christian numerical symbolism, and the arcana of the freemasons to decode this message, but the reward would be the attainment of absolute wisdom. The message’s meaning, restricted to a tight circle of chosen ones, is passed down from generation to generation and protected from profanity, even if its sentries must resort to crime to keep it safe. In the community of the initiated, an irreproachable law states that “the end sanctifies the means” (and in this case, we must read sanctification literally). Murders are committed with automatized precision and a near-total atrophy of aesthetic sensitivity. The refined aestheticiza-

²⁵M. Urban, *Stín katedrály. Božská krimikomedie*, Prague 2003, p. 64.

²⁶Ibid, pp. 273, 275.

tion of the murders consists of theatrically arranging the victims' bodies in a set of poses (calling to mind the writing of Thomas de Quincey).²⁷ The arrangements take on signification (the corpses' severed tongues suggest ties to the canonization of John of Nepomuk and simultaneously command the message's addressee, the novel's protagonist, to remain silent).²⁸ Aestheticizing murder serves the function of warning those who try "unauthorized" to force their way through the complex "security system" safeguarding the secret message. Martin Urmann, the protagonist and narrator of Santini's *Tongue*, who works as a copywriter for a prestigious ad agency, attempts precisely this. He is motivated not by a desire to attain the highest level of knowledge, but by the threat of losing his job. For he has been saddled with an impossible task (in a nearly folkloric sense): in a business enterprise called The Golden Copy Project, he is to formulate a universal slogan "that can sell any product." Seeking tools to tackle this staggering challenge, he is inspired to contemplate the meaning of Saint John of Nepomuk's silence (to protect the mystery of confession). In a more or less natural thought process, these themes prompt him to reflect on the saint's baroque cult and ultimately directs his thoughts toward Santini's churches, and particularly the church in Zelena Hora, which is built on the template of the five-pointed star (five stars symbolize the letters in the Latin word *tacui* – "I silenced myself").



The pilgrimage church of Saint John of Nepomuk in Zelena Hora

²⁷I am referring to de Quincey's essay *On Murder Considered as one of the Fine Arts*, from 1827. In his story *Gotické zvonění* ("Gothic Bells Ringing"), Ludva explicitly references this work. See also: R. Ludva, *Falzum*, p. 19.

²⁸See also: "In the window (...) the parson stood and watched us, his white face gleaming through the windowpane in the light of the rising moon. It's no good (...) something here has gone terribly wrong (...). The priest moved not even one millimeter from the window and did not turn his head when we stepped inside of the gray room. (...) I tapped him on the arm and this subtle but harried movement set him off balance. Clumsily, the body sank to the floor. He must have been lying this way before someone set him up in the window. The priest was carefully ensnared in wire that had been twisted into a snug cage. He was tied into this cage to prevent him from falling down. A wire brace around his neck propped up his head in a vertical position. (...) From the wire loop tightened around the wrist and hips, a rod dangled downward, resembling a tail. It curled in an arch down to his ankles, and from there rose up again to the belly, ribcage, and face with its bloodied chin. It ended at the eyes, which were cocked open. (...) A darkness breathed from those eyes, and an emptiness that seemed to waft from the depths of a cave. As I had foreseen, the murderer had cut out the tongue and taken it with him." (M. Urban, *Santiniho jazyk. Román světa*, Prague 2005, pp. 207-208)

Urmann's pursuits quickly turn into a private investigation. He is accompanied by his helper and advisor Roman Rops, known to us from *Shadow of the Cathedral*, and Viktoria, a recently graduated architecture student (representing the circle of the initiated) who is fascinated by Santini and dreams of reviving his Baroque-Gothic style. The story obeys the structural parameters of the thriller by endowing its hero with an undefined position that straddles potential victim, detective, and accessory to the crime.²⁹ His narrative role is not limited to unveiling the truth and unmasking the murderer (as it would in a "classic" crime novel). Against his will, he is embedded in a series of incomprehensible and risky events ("It all started with an accident. Or for a while, that's what I believed. Today, I am no longer so sure").³⁰ He is ceaselessly watched and led onward ("marked") by the gatekeepers of esoteric knowledge who seem to be omnipotent (within the fictional space of the text). He becomes the target of manipulative actions that on the one hand fill him with doubts and suspicions (heroes of the thriller are often distrustful, although we might say the same of conspirators and police officers for other reasons; in *Shadow of the Cathedral*, the chief officer of the department of homicide, Klára, falls to the wayside next to Roman Rops, the text's narrator).³¹ On the other hand, these manipulative actions also qualify him for initiation, during which grasping the actual meaning behind the series of murders becomes the indispensable condition for total transgression.

The success or failure ("You didn't see any of my warnings. You didn't see or hear them," Father Urban reminds Rops) of the hero's engagement in this process therefore depends on his acceptance of the very idea of the right to murder, which loses its status as an unethical deed and becomes instead a tool for rehabilitating fundamental values. This therefore leads to an interrogation of one of the "core premises of the crime novel: crime is a disruption of the 'world order,' or rather, in the crime novel, this order will always be inverted."³² Urban inverts this premise, as if through a mirror's reflection. The destabilization of the existing order occurs earlier, and is perceived as an immanent property of the contemporary moment, while the present appears as the domain of an encroaching entropy. Crimes can either confirm entropy or perhaps mark it as a kind of warning to see things from the other side (in this case, the victims would be entirely arbitrary, like in *Santini's Tongue*) or as "justified punishment" for a social misdemeanor (here, modernization correlates to the loss of the

²⁹Evoking Jerry Palmer's schema, Mariusz Kraska notes that "three basic indicators determine the identifying marks of the thriller: 1. The existence of a conspiracy perceived as the "unnatural" or pathological destruction of the normative world organized against it; 2. The presence of a competitive hero endowed with special abilities and powers, who is nonetheless a loner and outsider who resembles his antagonists; 3. The significant status of suspense as the narrative's basic driver." (M. Kraska, *Co by było gdyby... czyli dlaczego powstała* political fiction, [in:] *Literatura i kultura popularna IX*, ed. T. Żabski, Wrocław 2000, p. 145. Kraska is referencing Jerry Palmer's *Thrillers. Genesis and Structure of a Popular Genre*, London 1978, p. 100).

³⁰M. Urban, *Santiniho jazyk...*, p. 13.

³¹As Bogdan Trocha writes, in thrillers based on religious motifs (and Urban's novels belong within this category) the narrative schema "calls for the coexistence of two kinds of investigation: the classical typology led by the police and seeking to expose the perpetrator of the crime using the forensic toolkit, and a second investigation that compliments the first one and seeks to explicate the function of religious symbols present at the scene of the crime and to define their potential role in the event." (B. Trocha, *Miedzy thrillerem religijnym a teologicznym...*, p. 223)

³²W. Bialik, *Friedricha Dürrenmatta polemika z konwencją typowej powieści kryminalnej*, [in:] *Śledztwo w sprawie gatunków...*, p. 80.

spiritual dimension of existence). In this way, crimes point the way to a kind of restoration of the cosmos, or a return to a specific moment in the past and its resultant reconstruction.³³ Art that has been preserved in it is original form, and historical sacral architecture most of all, can evoke cultural memories that update axiological certainties that have been lost in today's world (undeservedly, if we take Urban's word). Art can also restore to these truths an appropriate number of metaphysical guarantors of immortality that govern the laws of reality.

With bold panache, Urban approaches the genre templates of the thriller, horror literature, occult literature, gothic literature, and even the decadent dandy novel (Rops, who adores pre-Raphaelite painting, thinks of himself as a "latter-day Victorian")³⁴ inherited from Arbes and discernible among his contemporaries. Yet this does not eliminate the validity of the anti-modernist message mediated by these sensational plots from the reader's (scholar's) field of vision. To be fair, he treats all his inter- and architextual sources with a typically postmodernist ironic distance that ultimately demonstrates the contrived nature of narrative devices. The author does not, however, shy away from pushing the borders of good taste ("I stood with my left leg in the monk's ribs, while my right leg was lodged in the nun's crotch,"³⁵ says Urmann as he relates the tale of breaking into the church's crypts, where he was forced to tread on the rotting coffins). Instead of using tools economically, he chooses an excessive and multilayered proliferation of cultural echoes and reminiscences.³⁶ We should not, however, identify this strategy with a disinterested experimentation with genre conventions, as we might do in the case of Roman Ludva's crime stories.

In this sense, both writers offer the reader a compelling cocktail of mystery, suspense and (in Urban's case) the abject and macabre, enriched (deepened?) with an assessment of the

³³In other novels by Urban, this dream to turn back time takes the form of a regressive utopia brought to fruition. *Sedmikosteli* ("The Curse of the Seven Churches," 1998) discusses restoring the conditions of the fourteenth-century ("pre-hussite") medieval period, and *Hastrman* ("Water Sprite," 2001) discusses restoring proto-Christian beliefs, customs and rites.

³⁴See also: "Those artists called themselves pre-Raphaelites and created a brotherhood under the spiritual patronage of Dante Gabriel Rossetti. As adherents of the style prevailing in painting before the advent of the school of Rafael Santi, they proposed a paradigm of art that would have shocked its contemporary society with its awesomeness, sensuality, and dreamy quality, but also with its naivety. In the age of steam, colonial wars, academic realism and the first symptoms of emerging impressionism, such an art would be charmingly anachronistic in its simplicity. To make matters worse, they indulged in something unheard of: equip art with a new and courageous quality, thereby condemning the Avant Garde as a whole. They wanted to create Beauty in an era that has gradually ceased to appreciate such a thing. For them, beauty has become a godhead, and all else must be subordinated to it. And I, in fact, belong to this brotherhood. I am an unfortunate Victorian too late for his time. I belong among the last adorers of their art, and most of all, of the canvases of Rossetti who so stupidly forgot about the twentieth century and all its expressionisms, cubisms, and abstractions." (M. Urban, *Stín katedrály...*, p. 38)

³⁵M. Urban, *Santiniho jazyk...*, p. 193.

³⁶Marcin Świerkocki emphasizes that excess, akin with transgression and one of the constituting aesthetic categories of postmodernism, "signifies the transgression of a defined border in the sense that it is an escape from a singular and closed system and/or an annexation of foreign territories. Excess therefore also signifies all postmodern forms of multiplicity: all artistic multiplications, copies, permutations and combinations, along with all forms of pluralism (...). Surplus is therefore the only "presence of multiple things at once," for it simultaneously means excess, exaggeration, going too far (beyond the bounds of convention), and extremeness, or often, the "excess" presence of one thing at one time, as if multiplied in a chamber of mirrors, with its various potential meanings actualized (and multiplied)." (M. Świerkocki, *Postmodernizm. Paradygmat nowej kultury*, Łódź 1997, p. 73)

disadvantages of the postmodern world. This world has witnessed the downfall of traditional value systems and a crisis of logocentric epistemology, and is therefore left with feelings of loss and alienation. The distortion of reality, meanwhile, provokes a longing for a former order and transparent cognitive schemas, thereby motivating one to seek out alternative orders. It is not by chance that Lieutenant Kryštof Fridrich, one of the protagonists of *Falzum*, is fascinated by the regularity of train timetables, and that Josef Hala from *Wall of the Heart* translates the generalizations of a Latin maxim into a concrete algebraic equation (death=life -> death=the mystery of the image -> life=image). Nor is it accidental that the protagonists of Urban's novel take equal delight in the incontrovertible mathematical precision of sacral buildings and the medieval, Christian and Kabbalistic mysticism of numbers.

With regard to the twentieth-century epistemological sensibility, Aleksandra Kunce has argued: "These failures to grasp the whole do not point back to the illegible nature of the world, but merely to the insufficiency of our methods."³⁷ We can say the same of attempts to revive schemas of crime literature. These attempts allow us, at least "momentarily" or for the duration of the reading experience, to revive our faith in the effectiveness of the "correctly chosen" cognitive path. By limiting representation to an isolated fragment of the world that is bound by a strictly outlined framework and submitted to detailed semiotic analysis (if we can risk the claim, for Mariusz Czubaj has written about the Saussurian provenance of the deductive logic of the crime novel),³⁸ we bolster this illusion, although these authors (taking their cues from Eco and Dürrenmatt) attempt (and here I am mainly thinking of Urban) to undermine the non-negotiable validity of linear causality (by evoking, for example, categories of contingency or reflections on the inverted logic of insanity, which is a typical device in thrillers about serial killers). They do so in order to provoke

³⁷A. Kunce, *O dwudziestowiecznej wrażliwości epistemologicznej*, in: *Dwudziestowieczność*, ed. M. Dąbrowski, T. Wójcik, Warsaw 2004, p. 115. Kunce is countering the macrological claim to reason that deems itself capable of grasping the whole, which resembles "self-limitations" of the nonconventional investigative methods laid out in the contemporary crime novel that rise out of the "desire to raise doubts and highlight its powerlessness to grasp the epistemological and moral man." (Ibid, p. 116) This position engenders a micrological sensibility "that would show the disintegration of every whole that has been dragged down through chaos, dispersion. (...) In this sense, sensitizing thought – a process that encounters a twentieth-century aspect in its self-reflexive approach, would veer in the direction of a mind defined by suspension of beliefs, trusting all shades and undertones, softening contours, quieting its impulses to classify contours, trustful toward makeshift descriptions that lie close to cultural experience." (Ibid).

³⁸See also: "The Sherlock Holmes stories are therefore stories that deal less with traces and more so with signs. These texts are manifestations of a semiotic system that, in its paradigmatic version, was first proposed by Ferdinand de Saussure. The essential premise of this pioneer of structural linguistics was his thesis on the monolithic structure of signs that invariably break down into elements of the signified and signifier. This essence of the sign, according to which *signifiant* is inextricably linked to the *signifié*, is obsessively expressed in the figure of Sherlock Holmes. (...) the logical rule ordering Holmes' world is his faith in the absolute and non-negotiable stability of the sign." (M. Czubaj, *Etnolog w Mieście Grzechu. Powieść kryminalna jako świadectwo antropologiczne*, Gdańsk 2010, p. 193) Miroslav Petříček argues that "Murder within the text is necessarily 'signifying,' for it is located in the position of the *signifiant's* relation to the *signifié*, regardless of whether we understand the 'signifier' as a sign, symbol, or function." (M. Petříček, *Majestát zákona. Raymond Chandler a pozdní dekonstrukce*, Prague 2000, p. 188)

“reasonable doubt” in the reader, while offering a repertoire of potential alternative interpretations of events.³⁹

To activate this effect that simultaneously counters and extends the parameters of one of the most popular genre forms, it is not necessary to draw from themes tied to art history and to “overcrowd” the narrative with pseudo-scientific asides using niche terminology (as Urban is wont to do) to the point where it becomes necessary to provide subsequent novels with bibliographies that guarantee the reader a certain referential reliability for the information conveyed.⁴⁰ The question thus arises: what purpose is served by these countless cited biographies of artists, analyses of traditional iconographic systems, and ekphrastic operations? The answer requires, firstly, that we recall the postmodernist passion for citations, palimpsests, the apocryphal and the counterfeit, which will then direct our attention toward those periods in the history of architecture and painting that include “conscious eclectic duplications” within the system of acceptable artistic strategies (already, Santini cited the architectural strategies of the Gothic style, not to mention the builders of the nineteenth-century St. Vitus Cathedral). On the other hand, reflecting on the mimetic or figurative nature of historical conventions in the fine arts open up a discussion on the relevance and potential rehabilitation of realist literary representation. Intersemiotic affinities make use of the belief that we can define the ontological community surrounding the universe of art (in terms of its function, for example) and therefore open up a pathway towards renewing the totalization of narrative (its cognitive, aesthetic, and last but not least, communicative

³⁹It is interesting to note that while they avoid locating Urban within the scope of mainstream sensational genre literature, scholars and critics (perhaps not entirely consciously) accuse him of a lack of normative logic in the way he constructs the sequence of narrative events (whether or not he deserves these allegations is another matter): “The essential problem in *Santini’s Tongue* remains its ornamental nature, which stems from the absence of a valid causal order. The novel is based on the schema of the incremental revelation of a mystery. It does, however, demand this kind of validity. For the reader must believe the author’s assertion that not only the investigation, but the detective’s sequential steps obey a certain logic: that A comes before B, and that both, of course, are followed by C. This logic must not be covered up by the logic of the outside world, for the provocative work ought to reconstruct its own order of events. One way or another, there must be some kind of logic.” (E. F. Juříková (P. Janoušek), *Dvě a jedna je dvacet jedna aneb reklama na Santiniho aneb těžko nositelné boty*, in: P. Janoušek, *Kritikova abeceda*, Prague 2009, p. 298)

⁴⁰From this perspective, Urban’s thrillers, which juxtapose elements and markers of heterogeneous discourses, should fall within the space of so-called blurred genres that seek – as Clifford Geertz suggests – to be “more than a matter of odd sports and occasional curiosities, or of the admitted fact that the innovative is, by definition, hard to categorize. It is a phenomenon general enough and distinctive enough to suggest that what we are seeing is not just another redrawing of the cultural map – the moving of a few disputed borders (...). We need not accept hermetic views of *Écriture* as so many signs signing signs, or give ourselves so wholly to the pleasure of the text that its meaning disappears into our responses, to see that there has come into our view of what we read and what we write a distinctly democratic temper. The properties connecting texts with one another, that put them, ontologically anyway, on the same level, are coming to seem as important in characterizing them as those dividing them; and rather than face an array of natural kinds, fixed types divided by sharp qualitative differences, we more and more see ourselves surrounded by a vast, almost continuous field of variously intended and diversely constructed works we can order only practically, relationally, and as our purposes prompt us. It is not that we no longer have conventions of interpretation; we have more than ever, built – often enough jerry-built – to accommodate a situation at once fluid, plural, uncentered, and ineradicably untidy.” (C. Geertz, *Blurred Genres. The Refiguration of Social Thought*, [in:] *The American Scholar*, vol. 49, no. 2, pp. 166).

values). Both writers (in keeping with the tenets of postmodernism)⁴¹ discern a remedy for an escalating dissonance between artists (regardless of the materials they use) and their audience. In *Counterfeit*, Roman Ludva therefore reminds us that “Art is for people, not angels,”⁴² and in *Wall of the Heart* he argues that as a living organism, the painting should narrate a legible story to its viewer.

Urban is able to draw more far-reaching conclusions from the rehabilitation of the narrative potential of all cultural texts. In his novel *Lord mord. Pražský román* (“Lord Mord. A Prague Novel,” 2008), which is set at the very end of the nineteenth century, he relates the story of a serial killer who pretends to be the ghost figure Masíček, infamous from Prague folklore. The story also concerns Count Arco, a wily aristocrat, pimp, and narcotics dealer.⁴³ In the constructed world of the text, the count embodies the archetype of the “detective by chance” so typical of the thriller. He falls prey to conspiratorial intrigues as he strolls around Josefov. Josefov is Prague’s Jewish quarter from 1895 to 1914, when it underwent a process of “ghetto clearance” (in Czech, “Asanace”). To put it bluntly, it was destroyed. The writer reminds us of the heated discussions leading up to the decision to rebuild the city. We read:

“And then, a cry for help tore away from the open entrance gates; a woman’s voice begged, followed by a yelp, and then suddenly, silence. I came out into the courtyard to join the people who had emerged from nearby homes. Lamps were lit beyond the windows, and in their frames, one dark head emerged after another. Around the wooden annex, a group of poorly attired people had gathered together. There were perhaps eight of them, and they spoke excitedly, in terrified voices. Close by, next to the rain barrel, we saw a girl lying in a puddle of blood. Judging from the position of her body and the unnatural torque of her head you could deduce that her neck had been broken.”⁴⁴

Deceivingly, this narration never seems to diverge from stereotypical descriptions of the scene of the crime so typically found in crime literature, with the exception of the fact that the reader can find a concealed ekphrasis in the passage (and this analytical trope will be reasserted later on in the novel, for the writer offers a list of paintings used to build the narrative). The ekphrasis brings to life the acclaimed painting of Jakub Schikaneder (1855-1924), *Vražda v dome* (“Murder at Home,” 1890):

⁴¹See also: “The nostalgia for a classic hero also indicates an interesting nostalgia for the traditionally structured story, or for the emotionally moving narrative and reliable narrator who was degraded by the Avant Garde and antinovel: this is surely why we observe among contemporary writers an increasing tendency to concede to realism and popular literature.” (M. Świerkocki, *Postmodernizm*..., p. 72).

⁴²R. Ludva, *Falzum*, p. 172.

⁴³Roger Caillois writes more on undermining the detective’s competency (particularly with regard to private investigators or, as we see in the case of Count Arco, amateurs): “Ever since Sherlock Holmes, the detective has remained an aesthete, if not an anarchist, at the very least – a defender of morality or of the rule of the law still less. (...) Generally speaking, his attitude toward society is located somewhat on the margins, like that of a sorcerer or folkloric demon who appears under the guise of a foreigner, cattle merchant, doctor, peddler, or finally, as an invalid: a one-eyed hunchback or gimp. The detective’s mien also possesses – albeit to varying degrees – some disturbing element that is difficult for the social organism to absorb.” (R. Caillois, *Powieść kryminalna*..., pp. 198, 199)

⁴⁴M. Urban, *Lord mord. Pražský román*, Prague 2008, p. 144.



Jakub Schikaneder, *Murder in the House*, 1890

Here, the classic trope of *ut pictura poesis* entails a specific operation of inversion: the value of the realist (figurative) painting lies in its literariness. Thrillers exploiting motifs of the encrypted language of painting and architecture thus attain the rank of authoritative self-reflexive statements, while investigations in the art world demonstrate that the mystery of the image lies in the stories it inspires.

transl. Eliza Cushman Rose

KEYWORDS

aestheticizing crime

critique of modernity

ABSTRACT:

The structural parameters for crime literature have been the subject of numerous overviews, critical essays, and recapitulations. Yet the renaissance of this literature unfolding today calls for new interpretations. To be more specific, this renaissance takes place in a climate of post-modern penchants for popular narrative and structural schemas, a blending of genre categories, and a predilection for heterogeneous discourses. This very fact should compel us to reflect on the factors contributing to the thriller's appeal as a genre form that writers so often evoke to provide the reader with a fictional and "deep" statement on the various deficits of the contemporary world. In Czech literature, prose writers such as Roman Ludva and Miloš Urban have taken cues from Umberto Eco and Dan Brown's tendencies to experiment with well-worn narrative strategies, as well as their local tradition (the tales of the 19th-century neoromantic Jakub Arbes). Following suit, Ludva and Urban embed the templates of the thriller in a broadly organized interrogation of the contemporary condition of art. Simultaneously, using the strategy of "amplified" intersemiosis, they impart an autothematic dimension to their narratives.

CONSPIRACY THEORY

T h r i l l e r

INTERSEMIOSIS

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR:

Anna Gawarecka (1963), PhD, is a Senior Professor at UAM, Czech scholar and literary scholar employed at the Institute for Slavic Philology at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. Her main research interests include: Czech literature and culture, the national imaginary, modernism, postmodernism, the massification of art, cultural geography, and intersemiosis. She has published two monographs (*Marginy i centrum. Obecność form kultury popularnej w literaturze czeskiej dwudziestolecia międzywojennego*, Poznań 2012; *Wygnańcy ze światów minionych*, Poznań 2007) and a few dozen articles on Czech literature from the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries. She can be reached at: gawarecka@gazeta.pl.

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, Trzyście*). 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* (*Bazyliszek. 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 Bachleda-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 twists 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 Cushman 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.

The Contemporary Crime Novel as a Variation on the Superhero Theme. Preliminary Thoughts

Bernadetta Darska

Although it may seem counter-intuitive to discuss the crime novel in the context of superhero stories, this impression is deceiving. Once we attend to the several registers on which it operates, the superhero figure turns out to be a complimentary designation. The archetype's story carries a universal message that is consistent with the defining features of the crime fiction hero. In the simplest possible reading, the detective and superhero are both clasped in a struggle with evil while they themselves represent good. Yet the attributes they share do not stop here, as I will try to demonstrate later on in this article. The crime novel detective operates within literary space, which is to say, in the domain of the word. The superhero, meanwhile, is associated with comic books and therefore linked to images. The action that unfolds in the crime novel as one sentence follows another plays out in comics through images. Plot develops through sequential events: in the novel, images are generated by the imagination, and in comics, the visual sphere is supplemented with words.¹

In both cases, the usage of hyperbole, understatement and literality turn out to be of utmost importance. In the crime novel, hyperbole seems to be particularly out of place. What we colloquially call "exaggeration" usually affects the quality of a literary text and taints our assessment of the author's talents. In comics, it is just as important to avoid abusing language. In this case, speech is usually packaged in the unit of the short dialogue. When the characters' statements run on too long, the reader suspects they are meant to compensate for a weak illustrator who relies on dialogue to gloss over his patchy skill set. In comics, we are most affected by what we see and not what we read. We can say the opposite of the crime novel: the written text allows us to visualize all that the author describes. Understatements are instrumental for building tension in the crime novel. Comics are also based on a form of fine-tuning that stems from a lack of literality. Illustrations allow us to multiply meaning and do not restrict potential readings to a predetermined template. Genre literature relies on narrative schemas for character construction. It is no different in the case of the superhero comic. The recipe for success – with both readers and publishers – often proves to be the law of the golden mean: stay faithful to genre conventions, but simultaneously prove you are willing to renegotiate them.

The suggestion voiced in the article's title to affiliate the crime novel with the superhero story would involve eliminating differences derived from different methods of visualization. It would

¹ Bartosz Kurc stresses: "The basic component of the comic is the image and word linked together and inseparable. Assessing one of these inextricable features without attending to the other would be in error." ("Podstawowym składnikiem komiksu jest obraz i słowo, połączone ze sobą nierozdzielnie. Ocenianie jednej z jego nierozdzielnych cech bez zauważania drugiej jest błędem"). B. Kurc, *Komiks – opowiadanie obrazem. Od narracji do znaku*, Koluszki 2016, p. 47.

also require defending the claim that the detective is the trademark of the crime novel, and that the superhero has an analogical function for comics. In *Bloody Hundred* (*Krwawa setka*), Wojciech Burszta and Mariusz Czubaj dispel all illusions: “Another feature of the good crime novel – and this can likely be said of no other literary subgenre – is the fact that its heroes are memorable. Indeed, we might even go so far as to say that the good crime novel that lacks distinctive characters does not exist.”² In this sense, we should remember that both the crime novel and comic have the potential to broaden their reception through potential film adaptations. In both cases, mass marketing becomes critical: established fans will be curious to see what the filmmakers come up with, and for those yet to be converted, the popularity of a particular fictional character is a good enough impetus to head to the theater or settle down in front of the laptop or television to watch the film or show. Finally, even those who are not persuaded to watch will still have some rapport with the figure, for the marketing machine is so powerful that some of the information targeting potential viewers will trickle down to them as well.³ As a result, popular culture’s ability to amplify content stages an encounter at the intersection of genres based on a shared idea governing the heroes’ deeds, a consensus on how to represent the world, and finally, a message transmitted through the narrative that evil can (at least for now) be overcome.

One pertinent example of complementary activities tied to the comic and crime novel that also reveals a literal tie between the two genres is the James Bond series. This franchise includes novels, a series of films bringing even more fame to the hero and the man who conceived him (Ian Fleming), a comic book series, and an ever-expanding product line of Agent 007 gadgets. All these things not only demonstrate an existing union in terms of Bond’s usefulness as fodder for diverse genres and marketing activities, for they also allow us to discern a specific form of character construction based on a dual affiliation with the crime novel and superhero. This double identity, which enables a broad and rather complex form of identification, has been instrumental for Bond’s popularity. The guarantee of repetition promised by the episodic story structure offers a stable point of reference for an audience that has grown accustomed to the chronic obsolescence of content that is endemic to popular culture. Yet this particular hero archetype represents a fashion that will never fade but will reach future generations of viewers, becoming a fundamental part of the canon and therefore of tradition.⁴ As a special agent whose deeds are legitimated by

² W.J. Burszta, M. Czubaj, *Krwawa setka. 100 najważniejszych powieści kryminalnych*, Warsaw 2007, p. 16.

³ Writing on the superhero movie as a film genre and the movie *Superman* in particular, Bartłomiej Paszyk argues: “The effect was electrifying: fans of the Superman comics could not believe what they saw with their own eyes, for it was exactly as they’d imagined. And even filmgoers who had no interest in comics were quick to admit they had never before seen such exhilarating, entertaining cinema.” (“Efekt był piorunujący: wielbiciel komiksów o Supermanie nie mogli uwierzyć, że oto wyrósł przez ich oczami – i to właśnie taki, jakiego sobie wyobrażali. Z kolei wielbiciel kina niezainteresowani komiksami przyznali zgodnie, że z tak ekscytującym kinem rozrywkowym nie mieli dotąd do czynienia”). B. Paszyk, *Superhero movie*, in: *ibid*, *Słownik gatunków i zjawisk filmowych*, Warsaw-Bielsko-Biała 2010, p. 246. Tomasz Żaglewski has made interesting remarks on the expanding field of meaning for comics through various kinds of marketing activities tied to movie promotion. See: T. Żaglewski, *Kinowe uniwersum superbohaterów. Analiza współczesnego filmu komiksowego*, Warsaw 2017.

⁴ See also: Noël Carroll does not deny that repetition is a crucial element for defining popular culture: “A taste for easily accessible art will not evaporate soon, nor will the pleasure to be had from sharing artworks with large numbers of our fellow citizens. For people like to have commerce with the same artworks as their neighbours – far and wide – do. It is part of what Kant called the sociability of art. We enjoy reading, seeing, and listening to the same things, and then talking about them. We enjoy working references and allusions to them into our conversations. That our lovers and co-workers grew up with the same songs and the same TV shows we did is significant to us. It is an important element of possessing a common culture.” N. Carroll, *A Philosophy of Mass Art*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1998, p. 13. In this case, repetition is not only embedded in the schema of the protagonist’s experiences, but in the very construction of the figure we might describe as the superhero.

a license to kill, James Bond operates according to the parameters of the crime genre or sensation novel. He is always solving a crime, and in this sense, he embodies the genre attributes of the detective, who is always asking questions, searching for clues, and finding himself in places where he doesn't belong. At the same time, he actively reacts to reality and takes advantage of his extraordinary skills to defend the world from evil. These skills seem to qualify him as superhero. To combat his nemeses, Bond also relies on his intelligence and the latest inventions of cutting-edge technology. In this sense, his actions justify linking him to comics and the superhero archetype.⁵

Superhuman capacities are not the only feature that links the superhero to the detective. These figures' commitment to the war against evil is often the result of traumatic experiences accumulated in youth or childhood. A fraught past leading to a choice in adulthood that defines the present engenders a scenario where detectives and superheroes both live at the crossroads of the ordinary and the extraordinary, daily life and the bizarre, and peace and terrible suspense. For the superhero, the moment you fulfill your duty to the city, nation, planet, or society as a whole is marked by a moment of transformation: usually, a man (for the superhero tends to represent this gender) turns into someone whose remarkable stature, implicit strength, and costume signal the approach of the inevitable. In the case of the superhero, this attire literally indicates the splitting of identity mentioned above. Yet when the detective takes on the role of the opponent of all things evil, this same transformation plays out with more subtlety. Certain details modify the detective's external appearance to foreshadow this moment. For an example of this, we might turn to the description of Lisbeth Salander from Stieg Larsson's novels as she prepares for the court hearing that will decide her future and profoundly affect our assessment of her past. We should also note the author's stated intention revealing how he originally shaped the hacker's character around the transformation motif:

"I have tried to swim against the tide compared to ordinary crime novels. I wanted to create main characters who differ dramatically from the ordinary crime characters. My point of departure was what Pippi Longstocking would be like as an adult. Would she be called a sociopath because she looked on society in a different way and did not have any social competences? She turned into Lisbeth Salander who has many masculine features."⁶

Irene Lind has noted a contingent relationship between the construction of the hacker figure and images of women in comics:

"Not only is she the first hacker-detective – she is also the first real action woman, and has no real equivalent in earlier literature. Until Lisbeth Salander, such an extreme level of female aggression was the sole property of female heroes of movies and comics, although these figures were usually packaged in the suggestive silhouettes of Catwoman or Lara Croft."⁷

Barbara Limanowska has also emphasized the comic-like attributes and complex identity of Larsson's heroine. She maintains the opinion that Lisbeth's resemblance to strong and powerful female superheroes conceived by popular culture is no accident:

⁵ See: M. Grzesiek, *James Bond. Szpieg, którego kochamy. Kulisy najdłuższego serialu w dziejach kina*, Warsaw 2011.

⁶ Cited in: D. Jakobsen, *Lisbeth Salander alias Pippi Longstocking*, trans. by the author, "DJ's Krimiblog," <http://djskrimiblog.blogspot.com/2009/01/lisbeth-salander-alia-pippi-langstrmpe.html> (last accessed: 06.17.2018).

⁷ I. Lind, *Tajemny klucz do Millenium skandalisty Stiega Larssona*, trans. K. Jachimska-Małkiewicz, Gliwice 2010, p. 126.

"A certain prototype for Salander can be discerned in adventure novels. In this case, however, these connections are not so obvious [as they may be in the case of the male hero – B. D.]. A certain resemblance comes up in the Count of Monte Cristo, but we could just as well look to the vampire sagas of Anne Rice, the heroine of Tarantino's *Kill Bill*, and assorted characters from comics and computer games. Salander is Catwoman and Lara Croft with a knack for computers. She also transcends the paradigm of the conventional crime novel heroine in that Larsson generously endows her with "masculine" attributes, giving her power (money) and a strong fist (literally), and stripping her of feminine attributes such as empathy, indecisiveness, and emotional sensitivity. Salander falls in love with Blomkvist but is also drawn to lesbian sex. This results in a hybrid of male and female attributes and fantasies that is prevalent in feminist – and particularly lesbian – detective novels and science fiction."⁸

The character of Kathy Mallory from Carol O'Connell's crime series also offers a compelling perspective on transformation. The heroine is described as follows:

"Only one streetlamp was lit. In its pale light stood a figure in high boots wearing a long, black coat. Her face fell in the shadow of the brim of a black hat."⁹

And further on:

"They were all staring down the dark road where only one streetlamp was lit. It went out. Farther down the street, another lamp switched on, and there was Mallory again. And so she moved toward them, in and out of the dark. The last lamp at the foot of the road went on, but the pool of light was empty. Yet the crowd was riveted, staring at it, waiting for her. [...] Mallory stepped out from the thick of the crowd, and stood at the rim of the stoning circle. The men closest to her backed away as she lifted the side of the duster and swept it back over the holstered gun riding low on her hip."¹⁰

Both heroines evoked here come from a difficult past fraught with traumatic childhood experiences and the experience of rejection. What seems settled in the past resurfaces in adult life to demand retribution. The heroines must take matters into their own hands. They cannot allow the past to be forgotten and go to great lengths to finally settle their accounts. In the struggle between good and evil, time is merely the criminal's false ally. Victims do not succumb to the power of passing time, for they gain agency and actively demand we revisit the deeds of those they hold in contempt. This position links the crime novel investigator to the comic book superhero.

By observing the private lives of female and male detectives, we can come to the conclusion that engaging in the war against evil necessarily has a negative impact on one's close relationships and capacity to enjoy daily life in a state of domestic bliss. For women, this scenario tends to be fraught with severe conflict. Their devotion to their work precludes their ability to actively embody stereotypical roles as mother or wife. As a result, they are often driven to leave their partners or restrict their relationships with their children. The life complications that arise for men look no different. Due to their vocation, they too are scarcely at home and cannot be relied

⁸ B. Limanowska, *Mężczyzna, który pisał feministyczne kryminały*, "Pogranicza" 2009, issue 6, pp. 94-95.

⁹ C. O'Connell, *Flight of the Stone Angel*, Arrow, London 2006

¹⁰Ibid.

on, for they prioritize work over family, often fall prey to addictions of various kinds, and are besieged with constant health problems. In this way, the attempt to save the world from evil seems to coincide with the failure to save oneself from solitude, abandonment, and the stigmatized role of one who fails his loved ones in trying moments.

All these entanglements also constitute the basic parameters of crime fiction. For a nuanced and pertinent portrayal of these complications, we might turn to the travails of police officer Kurt Wallander from Henning Mankell's crime series, or the adventures of the journalist Annika Bengtzon, whose tales are brought to us by Liza Marklund. At the end of the day, these figures are rather ordinary, but the moment they choose to rise up against evil, they become superheroes. In a literal sense, they may gain no superhuman skills, but metaphorically, we might say they experience the same process that allows Superman, Batman and Iron Man to come to the rescue of society as a whole (or its metonym). The repetition of the transformation motif seems meaningful, particularly since it is embedded in the fight between good and evil. It seems reasonable to claim that engaging in the war with the dark side of existence comes hand in hand with the need to don a mask or costume that endows its wearer with symbolic strength. This potential to undergo the same dilemmas and feelings that preoccupy the superhero suggests that detectives tend to operate in isolation and are thereby condemned to live in a perpetual state of suspense. The continuity and relentlessness of the mental process of investigation boxes one out of daily reality as defined by the typical routines of family life.

As a result, female and male detectives, just like superheroes, must regularly face situations that restrict their ability to feel integrated in the group with which they identify. They forego privacy in their work. When they try to nurture their relationships with their loved ones, they perpetuate a fraud: they are incapable of fully entering into the role of father or partner, for their minds constantly drift back to their vocational duties.

I have already mentioned the link between crime fiction and the superhero archetype in the case of Agent 007. Wojciech Burszta and Mariusz Czubaj describe Kurt Wallander (who can theoretically be read as an inverted superhero archetype) as an antihero:

"[...] in fact, he is an antihero. He is an embittered man in his forties who is constantly afflicted with one thing or another: today it's a stomachache; tomorrow it's a cold. His personal life is a train wreck. He cannot communicate with his daughter, nor can he get through to his father, who obsessively paints the same landscape over and over again. The nondescript police officer calls in his team for a meeting and awaits the next breakthrough. And perhaps it is precisely due to the "averageness" of the character that journalists often call up Henning Mankell and ask him how Wallander would vote in the upcoming elections."¹¹

Burszta and Czubaj's argument casts the protagonist in a different light by drawing out its negative features, and also offers a compelling pretext for determining to what extent the superhero and antihero are actually that different. As it turns out, it seems entirely viable to interpret both patterns of behavior positively (or at least sympathetically) and critically. Depending on how we judge these characters, we can classify them as antiheroes or superheroes. They are both fundamentally isolated – this much is certain. It also seems that their engagement in ethical struggle

¹¹W.J. Burszta, M. Czubaj, *Krwawa setka*, op. cit., p. 17.

fails to qualify as a differentiating feature. Even the superhero finds himself in situations that require him to choose “the lesser evil.” What is more prominent in the superhero, however, is his conscious ethical accountability for all that he does, even under coercion. This particular statement seems less applicable to the antihero. Although he manages to save the world, as a social companion, the superhero leaves much to be desired. If we peer into his daily life and note the constant pressure he is under to conceal a major part of himself, we might say that deceit is a non-negotiable piece of the identity of anyone who transforms (literally or symbolically) in order to fulfill her duty to society. It becomes difficult, then, to defend the claim that the superhero and antihero both reckon with the same moral relativism. What stands out here are the ramifications of bad decisions and the rejection of a certain ethical order in one’s private life at the service of the common good and the safety of the collective. We should also consider the ordinary life of the hero. This normal reality becomes a marker of the hero, but as he fulfills his social role and wages his solitary war against evil, this reality transforms. It becomes a constituent part of the environment that revives and reveals the superhero, and later on lulls him back to sleep.

If we examine the crime novel detective in terms of her resemblance to the superhero, this by no means implies we mean to glorify the archetype. It would be more fitting to interpret this gesture in the context of a mutual dialogue between different cultural texts and the fluid circulation of archetypal schemas and behavioral patterns in popular culture. The superhero’s exceptional abilities might have some counterpart in the case of crime fiction heroes, with the exception of the fact that these figures are embedded in everyday reality and are not marked by recognizable attire. Their willingness to save the world from evil turns out to be a binding mechanism by which an ideological social order is restored to its dominant position. This levels out the differences in the methods for constructing these two archetypes and allows us to see their inbuilt complimentary qualities.

On a cultural level, the superhero figure embodies the fantasy there will always be some noble opponent to counter evildoers. The detective, throwing off the mask and/or disguise that are the identifying markers of the superhero, finds himself firmly rooted on the same side of the barricade as his comic book counterpart. To speak informally, they play for the same team, although they may reach for separate metaphorical coats of armor when they set off for the next battle, thus betraying a divergence of tastes. The detective chooses camouflage and hides in the shadows in the early stages of investigation. The superhero, meanwhile, reveals himself as soon as he intervenes, for his costume creates him. In the lives of both detective and superhero, it becomes crucial to be able to accurately recognize when it is strategic to take cover under the ordinary, and when it becomes necessary to show one’s face, which is inevitably marked by the extraordinary. Yet regardless of the potential to postulate some visual identity marker that binds them, their common goal compels us to examine both figures in light of their resemblance rather than differences.

transl. Eliza Cushman Rose

KEYWORDS

superhero

crime novel

ABSTRACT:

In the article “The Contemporary Crime Novel as a Variation on the Superhero Theme. Preliminary Thoughts,” I draw attention to the detective as the key figure of stories narrating the fight against evil. The detective’s behavior, decisions, and mentality all make him a figure quite compatible with the comic book superhero. I attempt to lay out features common to the detective and superhero, placing emphasis on the symbolism of the mask and disguise donned either metaphorically or literally in the confrontation with evildoers. I also discuss the complex nature of ordinariness and weakness as defining features of the contemporary detective, for they allow us to view the crime novel hero as an antihero, a figure that simultaneously (and somewhat paradoxically) is embodied in the role of the superhero.

detective

ANTI-HERO

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR:

Bernadetta Darska was born in 1978. She is a literary critic and received her PhD and habilitation in literary studies. She works at the Institute for Journalism and Communications at UWM. She is a lecturer at the School of Masters of the Pen at Collegium Civitas. Between 2002 and 2009, she edited the literary and cultural journal "Portret." She has written nine books. Recent publications include "Pamięć codzienności, codzienność pamiętania. Szkice o reportażu polskim XXI wieku" (2014), "Maski zła. (Nie)etyczność postaw i zachowań jako temat współczesnego reportażu polskiego" (2016) and "Młodzi i fakty. Notatki o reportażach roczników osiemdziesiątych" (2017). Starting in 2009, she spent six years directing the literary criticism blog, "A to książka właśnie!," and she now invites you to read "Nowości książkowe:" www.bernadettadarska.blogspot.com

The strange case of early Mock and the Classics

Gerson Schade

Eberhard Mock is a really fictitious figure. Marek Krajewski invented him. He made Mock the protagonist of a series of crime novels, that Krajewski started to publish at the beginning of this century. They are hugely successful and translated into many languages. The action takes place mainly in Wrocław, and the six novels translated into German cover a period from 1919 to 1945. In the following, I try to give a picture of Eberhard Mock's early years, i.e. before the Nazis came into power.

Three novels are closely analysed.¹ Chronologically speaking, they are the first cases of Mock's career. Classics play a major role,² but in a very peculiar way. Three layers can be distinguished: in addition to references to antiquity in general, and to references to classical literature in particular, one can also observe how Classics connect immediately, directly, permanently, with Mock's daily work as a police officer. Since Krajewski often chose to tell the story 'from within', however, not clearly distinguishing between the narrator's 'voice' and his protagonist's mental perception, it is time and again difficult to ascertain who thinks what. One may well think that this poetic practice is due to design, and not an accident.

A preliminary remark

Paradoxically, it turns out that classical education is lost on Mock. Once, in his early life, he fell in love with Classics. As it may happen to anyone, however, if love is unrequited, it may turn into hatred – not necessarily of the object once desired, in a way mildly despising what was not or is no longer available, but violently turned into a hatred of – oneself. Perhaps, this cycle is established because one regards oneself as guilty of making others unhappy. To a certain degree, Mock shares this

¹ Krajewski's novels are cited according to their German translation. The first is *Gespenster in Breslau* (*Widma w mieście Breslau*, 2005), the second is *Pest in Breslau* (*Dżuma w Breslau*, 2007), and the third is *Der Kalenderblattmörder* (*Konec świata w Breslau*, 2003). The novels are translated by Paulina Schulz, and the German editor equipped the well printed pocket books with wonderful illustrations on their cover.

² Despite their importance, Classics and their influence on Mock have not been studied amply. K. Zieliński treated the theme, quite recently: *The ancient quotations in Marek Krajewski's detective novels*, in: K. Dominas, E. Wesołowska, B. Trocha (edd.), *Antiquity in Popular Literature and Culture*, Newcastle 2016, 51-64. The author regards Krajewski's novels as proof that there once was a 'citation culture' that included Classics to a much larger extent than it does nowadays. This may well be true, since Classics were of more importance to European culture in general, at least until the Great War. In our particular case, it is a circular argument, however, because it mixes up the poetic reality Krajewski created and the reality that really was. In other words, Krajewski's fictitious Breslau policemen (and their jargon) cannot be regarded as proving anything else than what Krajewski wanted them to 'prove' (by making them speak their jargon). And in Mock's case, it's not simply showing off; a poor devil lurks behind his facade.

narrative, without knowing it, without alluding to it, without profiting from it, with the Homeric character Achilles.³ To a certain degree only, however, since Mock also reminds of the strange case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, as well as of drug-addict, well-read Sherlock Holmes. Thus, in an instant, we may turn to completely other horizons, as it happens in the case of such multi-layered texts as these. To begin with, let's stick to Classics. Classics appeal to those who love crime, as will be shown.⁴

|.

For the first time, we meet Kriminalassistent Mock in 1919. He is in his mid-thirties. One morning he is confronted with the atrocious murder of four young men. The fact that debauched Mock suffers from a bad hangover doesn't help him much. Mock meets his colleagues. Among them we get to know a senior police pathologist, who is called "Charon of Breslau" (*Gesperster* 8) – and this is how the references to things classical begin. The boatman of the dead, the ferryman of corpses, a *psychopompos* who crosses the lake Acheron in his two-oared skiff, known from Euripides' *Alcestis*,⁵ now resides in Breslau in an office, which he rarely leaves: a sclerotic, slightly eccentric, and probably constipated expert in cutting up corpses. Of course, in a way he resembles the man who takes the souls of the dead to Hades. The contrast sets the tone, however, and it goes on like that.

Mock, for example, is mockingly labelled 'scourge of the Lord', as if he were Attila, known as such a 'flagello di Dio'. Mock, though, by no means frightens half of Europe, as did the king of the Huns – he is just the "tamer of all the indifferent whores and syphilitic pimps in town" (*Gesperster* 45). A woman who walks her dog during the early hours, for example, can be seen in the "rose-coloured gleaming of goddess Eos" (*Gesperster* 98). The cumbersome expression renders this morning expedition by Mock and his myrmidon Smolorz almost Homeric. Obviously, it's an awkward paraphrase of a so-called Homeric formula, i.e. 'rosy-fingered Dawn'. Again, it sounds somehow mock-heroic. And indeed, the contrast between pompous language and (less than) trivial meaning is often stressed by Mock. He cannot wash himself regularly at the place where he lives, he says, a fact that he expresses by claiming that he cannot bring offerings to Hygieia, i.e. personified Health, on a daily basis (*Gesperster* 81).⁶

Mock is not the only one who effortlessly refers to Classics. There is a police informer, for example, who learnt by heart all the Latin phrases from a reference work, because it was the only book at hand on a long sea voyage (*Gesperster* 44) – perhaps the nadir of education at all. And there is Mock's newly appointed superior Mühlhaus, who wants to play with him the "little Socratic game", which would help Mock to find the solution by himself. He, however, refuses, bluntly stating that there is no time for this kind of 'grab-assing' (*Gesperster* 109). Finally, his superior gives in, since

³ Noted by Zieliński (2016, 59, as preceding note), not developed, though.

⁴ Similarly, those who adore crime-novels claim to have a penchant for classical tragedy and poetry, as Patrick Raynal, the editor of Gallimard's *Série Noir*, put it. He wrote a few introductory lines to Didier Lemaçon's re-telling of Sophocles' *Oedipus rex: Œdipe roi*, Paris 1994, 5 (shortened in the book's second ed., Paris 2017, 7). Lemaçon, a teacher of classical languages, transformed the well-known Sophoclean tragedy into a thriller. The recent, second edition is accompanied by Lemaçon's translation of the play.

⁵ Cf. T. Gantz, *Early Greek Myth: A Guide to Literary and Artistic Sources*, Baltimore 1993, 125.

⁶ In a similarly deflationary way, prostitutes checked "*in flagranti*" by Mock and his colleagues are called "daughters of Aphrodite" (*Pest* 132), or "priestesses to Venus" (*Kalenderblattmörder* 166). And again, in a mock-heroic way, the protagonist, angrily fighting with a whore, suddenly turns round "like a discus thrower in antiquity" (*Pest* 137) – an image evoking Myron's famous Greek statue of such a *diskobolos* (now in the Vatican Museum), or the *Discobolo Lancelotti* (from the Palazzo Massimo alle Terme in Rome).

Mock refuses to be Alcibiades, as he states. To this, laconic Mock adds that Alcibiades ended badly (*Gesperster* 110).⁷ The whole scene alludes not only to Socrates' so-called 'maieutic' method, by which he made people find out logical errors committed by themselves,⁸ but also to the famous anecdotes connecting the teacher of Plato (among many others) with his unruly disciple Alcibiades, a well-connected upper-class boy of uncertain tastes. We hear much about, and can guess more of their relationship in Plato's *Symposium*. The text depicts a drinking-party, to which Alcibiades arrives lately. In the *Symposium*'s final part, he confesses having tried to seduce Socrates.⁹

Mock's own method of interrogation is much less refined. During one such interrogation of his friend from army days, who turns out to be the serial murderer, Mock puts him into a bath. The interviewee is terribly frightened by dead bodies, and that is the reason why Mock lets two corpses float into the water (*Gesperster* 307sq.). Eventually, the suspect kills himself. He is evil incarnate, and his knowledge of classical texts is extraordinary. This fact may indicate that Classics are not regarded, by definition, as something that makes a man a better human being. This observation is already suggested by Mock's frame of mind, thrown off balance by his daily experience, or by earlier trauma.

A manipulative pervert, the serial killer not only slaughtered the four young men from the novel's outset, but he also murdered his own daughter and Mock's father. He is enormously well-read, and Classics appealed much to him, indeed. He keeps a kind of diary, a note-book, which contains protocols from a secret society's meetings. In these notes he mentions, for example, his translation from Latin (*Gesperster* 60sq.). Furthermore, he remembers how he did translate from Latin already at high-school (75-7), remarking that he regards these translations as useless (75), i.e. merely "an inhumanly perfect brain exercise". Obviously, he is mad, using Latin words, being about to kill a prostitute (168-70). He also engages in contemplative thought on the Furies, who play a major role in Aeschylus' *Oresteia* (235-7, 242-4 & 250-2). Doing so for the last time (270), he reveals to be the secretary of a secret society.

In the very end, the murderer declares Mock's nightmares to be his Furies (307 & 309). Already earlier, not yet discovered, but somehow suspected, he proposed to Mock hypnosis as a means to discover one's real self. He cites the ancient oracle in Greek "gnothi seauton" (288), appealing to Mock to 'come to know yourself', i.e. to 'form a judgment of yourself'. A piece of paper, on which "gnothi seauton" is written, is discovered later, proving him to be the murderer (305). Needless to say that the secret order, the Brotherhood as it is called, worshipped gods from ancient Greece (283). The serial killer who acted as their secretary read Hippocrates in Greek, which was fairly dif-

⁷ Mock becomes quite angry. He can hardly contain himself. As it is usual with him, he remembers a text. This time "suddenly" an adjective from a phrase by Livy turns up in his mind: *impotens*, i.e. "powerless, and not master of oneself" (*Gesperster* 109). As a matter of fact, Livy uses expressions that combine *impotens* with *rabies* or *ira*, the Latin words denoting 'anger' or 'rage' (cf., e.g., 29. 9. 6): people are 'suddenly (*sic*) fired to a much more uncontrollable madness' – *in multo impotentiorum subito rabiem accensi* (cf. below n. 15).

⁸ Another high ranking civil servant, a director of an archive and/or library, is not only familiar with but also fond of the "Socratic midwife-method"; thus, Mock knows what he has to expect (*Kalenderblattmörder* 286). Literally, the Greek word means 'obstetric', referring to the acting of a midwife. It is metaphorically said of the Socratic way of discussing problems, often displayed in Plato's early dialogues, i.e. helping to bring forth ideas and truths from a pupil's mind by a series of pertinent questions.

⁹ Alcibiades figures also in other contemporary literature, as, for instance, in Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* (from book 5 onwards). Plutarchus, a Greek intellectual living in Rome in the first and early second century of our time, collected the anecdotes for his biography. Alcibiades remains, of course, a much disputed figure; cf., e.g., D. Gribble, *Alcibiades and Athens: A Study in Literary Presentation*, Oxford 1999.

ficult (*Gesperster* 185). Thus, classical education is used in order to qualify him as highly perverted, since Hippocrates wrote his medical treatises in order to preserve life, and not to destroy it.

Mock is haunted by his Furies, indeed (281),¹⁰ though they are thoroughly different from those who haunt Orestes in Aeschylus. Again, they are of a lower order, as is Mock, the ‘prole’, but much related to Classics – as they are taught at school.¹¹ Half-asleep and completely drunk, Mock tries to remember the first twenty lines of Virgil’s *Aeneid* (288). Unable to do so, he feels terribly sorry, in his nightmare apologising to his then teacher of Latin, promising to him to learn the first fifty lines for the next day (289).¹² And, shortly before his friend’s death, a friend who turned out to be his worst enemy for years, Mock remembers a lecture on comparative linguistics (308). In a flashback scene, he hears the voice of his then professor, who might have revealed already what is behind all (or, who might have not, we are not to know). The intensity felt by Mock may be due to the fact that Mock feels betrayed by him (and his ilk). Perhaps it was he who betrayed Mock for the first time, thus condemning Mock to remember him every time Mock is betrayed again, by whoever it may be, and in whatever occasion it may happen. This would establish a ‘primary scene’ Mock is to repeat eternally, i.e. the origin of his anger he shares with Achilles. There’s a strong case for seeing common ground between those two.

Given that perspective, Mock’s assistant Smolorz would become a myrmidon in a double sense. Metaphorically, he not only carries out any kind of order without question, since to him Mock’s words are “*suprema lex*”, the highest law, i.e. superior to all others (*Pest* 17 & 20) – just as a myrmidon is expected to do. Literally, Smolorz is one of Mock’s men, as in Homer the Myrmidons were led by Achilles, whom Mock resembles. He is as angry as Achilles, and he is driven by his anger, like Achilles was, too. In moments of distress, Mock tries to calm himself by reciting silently Latin poetry (*Gesperster* 146, 182 & 266). Time and again, while doing so, he hears the voice of his teacher of Latin (*Gesperster* 164).

||.

When we meet Mock for the second time, this analogy becomes more visible. The Achillean parallel, however, was prepared earlier. Once, his best friend, who turns out to be the killer, compared their friendship to that between Achilles and Patroclus (*Gesperster* 87sq.). He did so completely drunk, and the hint is not developed, then.

Now, in 1923, Mock is around forty, and has become Oberwachtmeister. His advancement is singular. At first, Mock is appointed Hauptwachmeister, a career step to which he heroically responded by spending one year heavily drinking in a prison cell, guarded by a friend. Somehow surprisingly covered by his superiors, he was even promoted further (*Pest* 36sq.).

¹⁰Again they pursue him, even more intensely, in *Kalenderblattmörder* 174 & 271. As much as Mock is haunted by his Furies, he is obsessed by ‘red-haired’ women. Effortlessly, he translates the word into ancient Greek, i.e. *pyrrhokomai* (*Gesperster* 205). Much fond of Greek, Mock discusses the meaning of *hetaira* with a prostitute, who uses the word (*Gesperster* 209sq.). Later, during their conversation, Mock mentions Alciphro’s *Dialogues of Hetairas* (*Gesperster* 211). The scenery is re-evoked again, later (233). In another scene, observing a villa and suddenly listening to a female voice, Mock compares her to a siren. He remembers himself at school, reciting from the *Odyssey* (*Gesperster* 267sq.), where the Sirens sing (273sq.).

¹¹Half in jest, half seriously, one superior suggests that Mock should put the Latin word for ‘punishment’, *poena*, on his shield – if he were equipped with such heraldic insignia (*Pest* 227).

¹²Mock attended additional lessons taught by him, on Catull and Sappho (*Gesperster* 214), as Mock kindly remembers. Unsurprisingly, he is said to have a “philologically trained mind” (*Gesperster* 271).

Right from the beginning Mock exhibits his knowledge of Classics, and it is in this context that his Achillean frame of mind is exposed. In a brothel, Mock uses quite elementary Latin expressions, describing his sexual preferences.¹³ Asked by a prostitute why he does so, Mock replies that the ancient Romans were experts in the “*ars futuendi*” (*Pest* 32).¹⁴ His behaviour is quite conceited, because the prostitute could hardly understand what he meant. Mock continues by stating that modern expressions are either purely anatomical or simply vulgar, which is probably right. It sounds, however, a bit too educational, but, perhaps, this is part of the narrative’s irony. In the end, Mock is a German, and is derided for that. We see this behavioural pattern repeated.

A few pages later, still in the context of his daily usage of Latin, suddenly Mock’s Achillean soul comes to light. All happens during an absurd, rather Chaplinesque scene, as is to be expected with low-lifer Mock. Being about to lose his trousers, Mock enters a shop. Asking for a piece of rope, he shouts the Latin adverb for ‘quick’, *cito* (*Pest* 40). To this the shop-assistant replies that he may use such a word in a pharmacy or with a dry-cleaner, but not in this place. Mock becomes incandescent with rage.¹⁵

We meet with an already familiar pattern. Each time Mock has to calm down, he tries to remember Greek or Latin lines he had learnt by heart at school. This time, however, a detail escapes him, he cannot remember properly, and he becomes very angry (*Pest* 67). It comes as no surprise that his superior considers him emotionally unstable (*Pest* 55)¹⁶ – as Agamemnon might have considered Achilles to be. Moreover, there is another parallel: Mock’s superior Mühlhaus, who imitates the pathos of school-teacher who imitates Cicero (*Pest* 52sq.), appears as an awful cynic and pompous idiot – just as Homer portrays Agamemnon. As it happens, he is not as educated as Mock, just as Agamemnon is not as skilled as Achilles: Mühlhaus does not understand what ‘tribade’ means, when Mock uses the word instead of ‘Lesbian’ (*Pest* 46).

There is something else already familiar, and now developed further. As a young man, Mock dreamt of an academic career; he wrote articles in Latin, we were told (*Gespenster* 246). Now we meet Mock, on a Sunday morning, alone in his office, looking at a photograph of his dead father (*Pest* 61sq.), a shoe-maker. Mock imagines him scolding his son for having abandoned his studies. Mock delivered even a speech in Latin at school. In those days, a schoolteacher congratulated his father on his son’s success. However, promising young Mock failed. Naturally, he lived poorly (*Pest* 206), but wanting to become admired, as was his then “Professor Morawjetz”, he was unable to pull himself together.¹⁷ Given that narrative, Mock resembles a degenerate – which he probably is. At least, more and more becomes.

At the end of the day, this second plot resembles Mock’s first case: again he faces a secret brotherhood, and again ‘they’ are educated in the classical sense of the word. Classics appeal again to those

¹³In another scene, examining corpses, Mock uses a Latin expression again, detailing those of others (*Pest* 45).

¹⁴In another text, we read the more decent “*ars amandi*” (*Kalenderblattmörder* 97).

¹⁵Or, as Livy put it (cf., e.g., 29. 9. 9), *impotens irae* – said of a person who is ‘beside himself with rage’ (cf. above n. 7).

¹⁶Sudden changes in the mood of others do not escape Mock, who characterises angry women as “Harpies” (*Pest* 55 & 136). The Harpyiai are winged creatures, agents of the Furies, and a divinely sent punishment. They are known since the *Odyssey*, where the name is used to personify whirlwinds or hurricanes.

¹⁷His low-life and his Latin are combined more funnily, when Mock buys a sausage in a butcher-shop called ‘Carnis’. At the station, he sees the name ‘Carnis’ again, printed on paper used for packing ham-sandwiches (*Pest* 76 & 194).

who love crime. A police-agent, for instance, who wants to establish a contact with ‘them’, has to put an announcement into the daily. He is asked to carefully use the wrong Latin formula “*requiescant in pacem*” (Pest 109 & 115). The new acolyte knows that the brotherhood’s name “The Misanthropists” is a Greek word and has nothing to do with the play by Molière (Pest 124). Thus, the educated are evil, or rather, the evil are educated.¹⁸ Unsurprisingly, they are the “pillars of society” (Pest 125).

In the course of the narrative, Mock’s Achillean features are more and more determining the action, they come to the forefront. Mock, for instance, becomes so angry that his usual method of calming down fails. Neither reciting Virgil on Tityrus (the opening of his *Eclogues*, composed between 42 and 37 BC) nor Horace on mount Soracte (one of his rather famous *Odes* from the first collection, published 23 BC) soothe him down any longer, lines Mock learnt by heart at school in his hometown Waldenburg (Pest 129).

Both texts alluded to are not only considered to be autobiographical reflections of both Virgil and Horace on their own position in life. Both texts also are much indebted to earlier Greek poetry: in Virgil’s case to Theocritus, a Hellenistic poet from early third century Alexandria, and in Horace’s case to Alcaeus, an Archaic poet from late seventh century Lesbos. Thus, the classical texts referenced did not only contain a second layer. They cannot be fully and properly appreciated without taking their Greek forerunners into account. By implication, this means that Mock’s personality contains a second layer, too. Thus, it is strongly suggested, and highly likely indeed, that there is something more that determines his character than one may assume in the case of a police officer in Breslau between the wars. In the same way there was something more, i.e. something Greek, and the knowledge of a great tradition, that determined Virgil’s and Horace’s poetry much more than one might assume from the fact that they were Augustan court-poets, supervised and tutored by Maecenas. At least, a classicist would think so.

Furthermore, like Achilles, Mock feels guilty. Due to the fact that he wasn’t there to help his informant, this man committed suicide, Mock reasons (Pest 131). Achilles thought something very similar about Patroclus. Just as Mock, Achilles, the leader of the Myrmidons, felt guilty (*Iliad* 18), because one of his men died in action – a fact that distinguishes him much from his Trojan counterpart, prince Hector, who only fears to make a bad, i.e. shameful, impression on the women of Troy (*Iliad* 6 & 22). A long-living cliché is established: manly West and effeminate East.

Curiously, Mock is aware that some such Greek models do exist. During an interrogation, a client of a prostitute is chained to the bedpost, while she is at his side, unconscious and chained, too. Mock starts his questioning by asking whether the prostitute’s customer has ever read Lucretius, which he denies (Pest 138). In the following, Mock rapturously lectures on what the client missed, changing to Lucretius’s Homeric model, henceforth speaking of Ares and Aphrodite (discovered while committing adultery, and immobilised by Hephaistos) and no longer of Mars and Venus.¹⁹ In the course of this interrogation, Mock, eventually, rather exasperated,

¹⁸They distinguish themselves from the crowd, referring to Classics. Decidedly, they are not simply odd or a bit strange or somehow eccentric or rather dotty, as one of Mock’s colleagues. He is the convincing caricature of a senior civil service man – a coward and stickler, without any initiative of his own, though able to produce highly imaginative reports, constantly enjoying formulas like “condition *sine qua non*”, or “*nolens volens*” (Pest 85 & 87).

¹⁹Krajewski “regularly goes back to the scene”, Zieliński notes (2016, 55 & 60, as n. 2).

announces that from now on he would be no longer “the friendly academic who converses about Homer” (*Pest* 144). Such sadistically inclined teachers of Classics are widely known.

Having proven his muscular professionalism, Mock desperately needs some pints of beer, which is called “water from the river of oblivion” (*Pest* 146). The expression alludes to the river Lethe, a word that means literally ‘the state of being hidden’, henceforth ‘oblivion’. It is the name of one place of oblivion in the lower world, sometimes imagined as a river, sometimes as a mere plain. What exactly is it that Mock so urgently needs to forget? It cannot be the truth about the murder, because he as a police officer has to discover the truth, the Greek word for which is just *a-leth-eia*, i.e. what cannot be hidden, does not remain hidden, instead, which is apparent, and openly visible to anybody. Thus, one must assume that Mock wants to forget himself, his actions. But why – may it be that he regards them, in one way or other, as disreputable, unworthy of a man of his education?

The enemy, however, has no such qualms about ethics, and never sleeps. The already quick narrative speeds up. There are three ways to join the elitist and educated brotherhood of killers, each expressed in Latin only (*Pest* 153). To make matters worse, these vicious and hellishly clever people make Mock appear as the murderer. Anger “moves swiftly through his body”, we read (*Pest* 160). In the following, humiliated, handcuffed, angry Mock is questioned by his colleagues, to whom he speaks mockingly about the rhetorical device of retardation, “already known to Homer” (*Pest* 165). Entering his prison cell, Mock is gripped by an enormous anger combined with an overwhelming sorrow – both emotions that Homer makes appear to be the driving forces of his hero Achilles (*Pest* 177). Now, at rest in his cell, educated Mock contemplates the Latin names of cockroaches (*Pest* 180), asking his myrmidon Smolorz to send him a copy of Theognis’ *Elegies*, in Greek (*Pest* 185).

Theognis’ book, from which also the novel’s motto is taken, is highly remarkable – given the situation Mock needs to survive. Theognis’ work (of which large parts are not by him) may well have been a collection of drinking songs, composed for the manly symposium. This suits Mock very well. Moreover, some of the most remarkable texts by Theognis are addressed to a close friend, whom Mock desperately misses – as did Achilles miss Patroclus. And Theognis’ texts (or at least those we think that they’re written by him) have a strong aristocratic bias, which certainly appealed to noble Mock, let alone to Achilles. Theognis is also quite disturbingly frank about his emotions, as Mock is, and as Achilles was, unfortunately and much to his disadvantage. Eventually, and perhaps most importantly, Theognis believed in, or at least expressed, “traditional tenets of Greek morality”²⁰ – as Mock and Achilles do. Given all these parallels, it comes as no surprise that Mock knows the text by heart, the text that can be seen in “the light of Selene” (*Pest* 186).

Seen by others, however, Mock’s classical education is reduced to the impression that, well, he speaks too long, citing too much from Latin or Greek, indulging in “Latin aphorisms and Greek anecdotes” (*Pest* 213sq. & 218). Regularly, education appears as arrogance (or worse) to the uneducated.

Mock’s fits of anger continue, becoming ever more severe. They threaten the balance of his mind. It may become unhinged, by the pressure exerted on it. And they are described ‘from within’ (*Pest* 243sq.). A similar *crescendo* can be observed in the stories told by members of the

²⁰Cecil Bowra put it that way, in his article on Theognis in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (Oxford 1949, 894).

murderous brotherhood, which are characterised as full of “*odor mortis*” (*Pest* 245). The collapse is imminent, indeed. Finally, the secret organization is dissolved. In order to honour this moment, Mock’s superior Mühlhaus gives his elegant coat to Mock, from whom he receives his usual, simple jacket – a Diomedean swap, if there is one (*Pest* 263).²¹ Alluding to a famous scene of the *Iliad*’s sixth book, where a Greek and a Trojan, Diomedes and Glaucus, change their weapons because they suddenly recognize that their families, once upon a time, have established a friendly relationship, as it is common in nobility, the author ennobles the narrative.

Few will notice, however, because nothing reveals the allusion. Only because we readers know that Mock took Classics so seriously, as a former fellow-student just confirmed (*Pest* 250), and only because we start to see how a philologically trained mind works, we notice this subtlety. Given that perspective, however, Mock turns out to be not only the protagonist of his novels, but also as their intended, primary reader. He would have been delighted by this comparison. It would not have escaped him, of course, even when he is as drunk as hell.

Since Classics are on the decline, though, meaning only to very few very much, to put it mildly, Mock’s novels must appeal to their many readers for another reason than that of alluding to themes classical. Can it be that these seemingly banal crime novels are for the same reason as attractive as was Homer’s *Iliad*? Notoriously, the *Iliad* focusses on the unpredictability of his hero’s actions, a theme that is made the more interesting because Achilles is distinguished by extraordinary forces, both physical and mental. Just like Mock is.

Moreover, the author of the *Iliad* carefully created an imaginary society, integrating into his work such fantastic pieces as Achilles’ shield, punctiliously described, or even something really surreal, as the boar’s tusk helmet, an object that is on display in some collections still nowadays. The same goes for the author of Mock’s stories.

Famously, the *Iliad*’s author invented an artificial language. Forms originating in different dialects exist side by side, which never happens naturally, and the verbs follow paradigms that differ from each other, a fact which cannot have existed at any time, let alone at the period Homer is supposed to have lived in. In other words, the *Iliad*’s artificiality clashes constantly with its realism, much to the annoyance of Classicists. Isn’t it similar with Mock, who uses these old-fashioned images of Harpies, Sirens, and Furies, all of them long dead and buried? Mock, who speaks Latin and thinks Greek, both languages long dead and buried, too? And does Mock not live in an artificial world of gentlemen who honour each other – as Achilles hoped to do? And are not both terribly disappointed by their peers – drunkards suffering from a bad hangover?

|||.

The third time, we meet Mock in 1927/28. It is his last appearance before the Nazis get into power. We find him married to a beautiful, young, and heavily oversexed Sophie. She is 24 or 25 years old, he is called a 40 years old (*Kalenderblattmörder* 10 & 35). This time, however, Kriminalrat Mock, always with Smolorz as his aide, has not to face a secret brotherhood, as in the preceding cases, but is confronted with a lonely wolf.

²¹A “demonstration of a masculine friendship” it is called by Zieliński 2016, 55 (as n. 2).

Brutally, his young wife reminds Mock of the fact that he once studied Latin, that he wanted to become a professor. His nephew Erwin rubs it in, talking of Uncle Ebi's once published Latin article on Horace (*Kalenderblattmörder* 13sq.). In addition, his wife reveals that her husband secretly reads Horace at home, using a school-edition equipped with a glossary, most welcome by him, who already forgot so much. Perhaps, she muses, he is gay (or not) because of his wish to become a professor. Small wonder that such a dysfunctional family party inspires Mock to heavy drinking.²²

His homecoming is elaborately compared to that of Odysseus (*Kalenderblattmörder* 16): Scylla, Charybdis, a Siren, old dog Argos, and Ithaca are mentioned.²³ At home, Mock keeps editions of nearly all classical texts. His edition of Galen is bilingual, i.e. in Greek and Latin, as it suits an "unfinished classical scholar" (36 & 38).

Mock's usual habit, i.e. to recite poetry once learnt by heart in order to calm down, is referred to again. For the first time, however, we share the experience quite intensely, i.e. minute by minute, in real time. Mock wants to get information from his interlocutor. He starts silently reciting Horace's poem, which concludes his first collection (3. 30). Horace speaks about the poetry he is about to publish, and that it will secure him a position never to be destroyed by time. Mock's interlocutor is a half-wit, a fact that forces Mock to recite five lines – until the moment he cannot remember more and he begins to push the other man heavily. We readers know this only if we know the poem by heart, or look it up, for the narrator only cites the Latin text of line 6.

This text is interesting in itself for the fact that it forms an ironical meta-text to the interrogation: 'I shan't die completely', Horace states. By that he means that only his body one day will die, but never the spirit of his poetry: *non omnis moriar* (*Kalenderblattmörder* 86 = Horace c. 3. 30. 6).

Luckily, Mock remembers a bit of the text. This enables him to continue his silent recitation, heavily beating the other (87). He reaches the river *Aufidus*, which appears in the Latin text in line 10. By now, in case Mock recites rather solemnly, as it fits the poem, the man is more dead and alive. However, it is just now that Mock really explodes, and "at that moment, Mock was no longer able to recite Horace" (89).²⁴ He seems no longer able to follow a "precise grammar" (98), as it is necessary for anyone investigating a murder-case.

In other such difficult moments, however, Mock remembers properly – things that seemed "secure and stable", as were his Latin seminars, as were the poems he learnt by heart (145sq.). Perhaps, this nostalgia drives him on to lecture like a university professor,²⁵ but never too

²²One already guesses that the marriage won't survive the novel for a long time and, probably, the nephew either. And so it is.

²³Quite funnily, in the following, Argos is to turn up regularly: he has become the symbol of a peacefully kept household (*Kalenderblattmörder* 19, 37, 65, 68, 84, 117 & 151). Once the dog is away, everything goes wrong (304). Ironically, in Mock's house 'beware of the dog' is written in Latin on the entrance step (83).

²⁴In another moment of extreme anger, Mock recites Horace's *odi profanum vulgus* (*Kalenderblattmörder* 275). The poetic fiction is that of the poet-priest who asks the uninitiated or unholy to depart. It is expressed often, as, for example, also by Virgil, who makes Aeneas visit the Underworld (*Aeneid* 6. 258 *procul o, procul este, profani*). Still today it is a common joke, and/or can easily become one, among pupils at school who learn Latin.

²⁵In a similar way, Mock speaks of the 19th century as of "a really *saeculum historicum*" (*Kalenderblattmörder* 177), calling a library director "a real historian, as Herodotus was" – an outdated judgment, itself belonging to the 19th century.

convincingly, and only when he is drunk (93). As this pattern of behaviour becomes ever more frequent, one starts wondering what might have triggered it. Is it the immaturity of a self-indulgent adult? Is haughty Mock a self-destructive ‘old boy’, suffering from the weight of obligations, from which he is unable and unwilling to break free?

Who is he? We see a nasty Mock, boasting about his Latin (181). He dismisses one of his collaborators because he has no Latin (230), claiming (rightly) that in order to anticipate the next killing a group of policemen must read Latin documents – and understand them properly (243). We see a caring Mock, helping his nephew’s classmate translating a poem by Catullus, as he did already earlier help some of them, explaining to them Livy’s “complicated style” (265).²⁶ Their teacher at school is a friend of his from his student days, when they both feared their professor (266).

The novel’s climax, the Horatian monument at its end so to speak, is a pitiless portray of educated perverts. One is troubled infinitely by sorting out who resembles more evil incarnate, Mock or the murderer. The serial killer is a teacher of Latin at a grammar school, a respected ‘Gymnasialprofessor’. Mock tortures him, cynically addressing him in Latin. Mock speaks to him about the difference between being disposed to do something while at the same time being unable to do it. In order to illustrate the point he wants to make, Mock cites a phrase known from elementary Latin grammar (295). After a sadistic but successful exercise, which makes his detainee suffer enormously, Mock reveals Ovid to be the source of the quotation: *ut desint vires, tamen est laudanda voluntas* (296).²⁷

A final thought

Having browsed these novels, one wonders a bit what may become of such a lost soul when suddenly forced to live in a tyranny. One may well ask whether he revolts against or whether he takes advantage of it. Many an unhinged mind made a brilliant career, then. Perhaps, he simply would prefer to continue living as he is used to live. In any case, at the beginning of the Nazi-era, at the next novel’s opening,²⁸ we meet well-paid senior police officer Mock in a brothel. Lecturing to tired prostitutes (*Tod* 13sq.), more than ever a degenerate, he reads parts from his essays on human character to whores forced, and paid, to listen.²⁹ At the same time, we see a drunken fool and a pillar of a society, rotten to the core, that is about to murder millions.

²⁶In antiquity, Livy was known for his Latin that time and again departed from the pure Latinity sacred to authors in Rome. Horace’s, and Virgil’s, friend G. Asinius Pollio playfully charged him with ‘patavinitas’, a euphemism coined for him who was born in Venetian Padova, i.e. far away from urban refinery.

²⁷The line is from a letter, sent by Ovid from his exile to a friend in Rome. Ovid speaks of himself. While lacking in strength, he’s still determined, he says (*Epistulae ex Ponto* 3. 4. 79). Mock, however, uses the citation as a caustic comment on his victim’s failing forces. From Ovid, Mock might have cited also Medea’s reasoning. Though discerning and even approving of the good, she chooses the bad, she says, *video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor* (from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* 7. 20sq.), as does Mock. This phrase, however, doesn’t occur in elementary Latin grammar.

²⁸The text, *Śmierć w Breslau*, was published in 2003. Doreen Daume translated it into German, *Tod in Breslau*, published 2009.

²⁹We know from an earlier novel that Mock privately sketches character studies, which resemble those of Aristotle’s pupil and successor, Theophrastus (*Kalenderblattmörder* 31).

KEYWORDS

reception of Greek and Latin poetry

CRIME-NOVEL

ABSTRACT:

For more than a decade now, Marek Krajewski is publishing crime novels, starring police officer Eberhard Mock. Although son of a shoe-maker, prole Mock went to high-school, even to university. In Wrocław between the wars, we see him remembering his classical texts, which he still reads in the original. He's not the only police man in a crime novel to do so. In contemporary Venice, Commissario Brunetti, the protagonist of Donna Leon's stories, regularly returns to classical texts, too. Good cop Brunetti, however, a calm and settled man, luckily married to a professor of English at Ca' Foscari, differs much from bad cop Mock, a more agitated character, unremittingly aroused by red-haired prostitutes. Once, Mock studied classical languages and published academic papers in Latin. Now, we find him leading a dissolute life, spending more time in brothels than at home, and this not only for reasons of duty. Perhaps, his intense flash-backs make him behave so erratically? In fact, more often than not, Mock remembers his classical education suddenly, involuntarily, as if he is reminded of a trauma. On closer inspection, these at first sight arbitrary citations comment on the narrative, a process intelligible to Mock alone, who more and more imitates the life of a highly classical loner. Since monstrous anger and over-whelming sorrow are his driving forces, Mock mirrors a great Homeric hero, Achilles.

reception of classical education

Achilles

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR:

Gerson Schade teaches Classics at AMU. He studied Greek and Latin, and Comparative Linguistics, at FU Berlin. Aside from textual philology, he's much interested in the reception of classical texts by modern authors. Recently, AMU Press published two volumes of his lectures.

Noir Poetry

Wiktoria Klera

“The noir sensibility is truly international”¹.

Crime fiction’s rising popularity in recent years has revived an interest in more experimental takes on the genre. In Polish literature, there is an emerging trend of authors and poets who have never before expressed an interest in this area of mass culture suddenly writing crime novels. Marcin Świetlicki in particular seems to have warmed up to the idea of crime fiction, for he openly declared his sympathy for the genre as a reader, thus undoing the curse on what has been commonly classified as “pulp” and all that the term implies: texts that can be produced without any special craftsmanship. Świetlicki’s own body of work includes a substantial share of poems that seem to conform to the conventions of “noir poetry” in its Polish iteration. As it turns out, he is not alone in his desire to use these conventions whose provenance leads back to the Polish and English literary worlds alike, for not only do these tropes evoke film noir; they also (and in fact more significantly) betray a general affinity for hard-boiled stories. These source texts (the works of Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett, to single out the authors best known in Poland) were responsible for stimulating a second wave of popularity for film noir, thus giving rise to the phenomenon of neo film noir (“neo-noir”). This mode and its suggestive images influenced poets, who then paid homage to its nuances in texts that were not limited to crime novels (although authors such as Świetlicki and Edward Pasewicz did in fact take this route): poetry noir began to blossom as well.

One indicator of the special status of noir poetry is the fact that from a theoretical perspective, it has drawn scant attention, for theorists typically take the stance that it is a relatively straight-forward reflection of the genre conventions of film, in so far as we can speak of a “simple translation” between two media.² Theme issues of English-language journals tend to fundamentally model themselves as poetry anthologies rather than collections of articles and essays interrogating noir poetics.³ The earliest text I managed to find that addresses the theme of noir poetics is Suzanne Lummis’ article included in the winter issue of *Malpais Review* from 2012-13, titled *The Poem Noir*

¹ N. King, M. Asprey, *Introduction. Organising What We See*, “Contrapasso Magazine. Noir Issue” 2013, November 9, p. 12.

² John Challis has explored this issue in his dissertation, titled *THE KNOWLEDGE. A Collection of Poetry and THE POEM NOIR: Film Noir in Contemporary Poetry*, Newcastle University, School of English Literature, Language and Linguistics, October 2015 [unpublished].

³ Here we might mention “Contrapasso Magazine. Noir Issue” (discussed above) and the Winter 2013 issue of “*Malpais Review*.”

– *Too Dark to be Depressed*.⁴ Lummis reconstructs the origin story of this poetic school. Her major takeaways concern the essence of “good” “poetry noir” that seeks to explicate or cast new light on the darkness that defines the human condition. On the other hand, we are not necessarily dealing exclusively with naturalism, for noir is not only a style, but to a certain degree also functions as a sensibility, and its most consistent feature is its clean break with sentimentality: in fact, Lummis emphasizes that if this last condition is not met, then we cannot speak of the text as a noir poem.⁵

If, however, noir poets of different cultural circles are drawn by the same fascinations, then their work is deeply saturated with local color. The list of subgenres includes “Tartan noir,” “Australian noir” and “Florida noir,” yet there remains no doubt that the essential defining markers of noir poetry are consistent on all continents.⁶ John Challis describes these markers in detail, but I will summarize them briefly here. They include: **anxiety** (fear) instilled by the usurping of power, a socially or politically foreign space, or the impossibility of communication; a **pessimism** either produced by the protagonist/reader’s alienation or estrangement from the brutal world or shielding the protagonist from a past or ongoing trauma, and an **obsession** that can easily escalate into self-destruction.⁷ Challis goes into detail on two British poets: Deryn Rees-Jones (here he flags anxiety as the dominant theme) and David Harsent (in this case, Challis is drawn by the work’s existential pessimism). He also examines the work of the Irish writer Paul Muldoon, who is perhaps the best known in Poland out of this triad.⁸ In Muldoon’s case, Challis emphasizes the role of obsession and its origins in the hard-boiled story.

American takes on noir poetry often reflect echoes of the war (which can also be discerned in poetry of other languages, regardless of how they resonate). This is at least true of the poem that gives the book its title, Michael Spence’s *Poem Noir*.⁹ In this text, as the narrator is setting the scene, he speaks of a “diner” that was “the kind that thrived / Before the Second World War.” A coldblooded private detective kills (although this occurs after a long series of exhausting investigations) his former secretary who had once expressed interest in working for him and has come to seek revenge for her rejection. At first, all signs seem to indicate that it is the woman who will ultimately be the duel’s victor, but in the end, the narrator concludes his own story:

⁴ S. Lummis, *The Poem Noir – Too Dark to be Depressed*, “Malpais Review” 2012/2013, winter, p. 265.

⁵ “The good one [poem noir – W.K.] will throw light, and defining darkness, on some area of the human condition. [...] noir is not only a style but to some degree *stylized*. [...] certain characteristics will always be present; whatever its subject, this poem will speak out of a voice stripped of all sentimentality, a voice of cool detachment. If it does not, it is not noir.” Ibid. I am quoting an unpublished version of the text with the permission of the author since the journal cited here is not available in Poland.

⁶ See also: N. King, M. Asprey, op. cit., pp. 11–12.

⁷ “1. Anxiety created through a usurping of power, border crossings into the past, unfamiliar political or social territory, or the impossibility or over-saturation of communication. 2. Pessimism delivered tonally or thematically as a result of alienation from the world, or to alienate the protagonist and viewer from the violent, dangerous and random world, or to shield the protagonist from past or present trauma. This might be exhibited by the use of indifferent and impersonal narration or clipped and economic language, and also through a nair of detachment, conveyed through a use of an omnipresent, summative narrator. 3. Obsession that can drive a protagonist to become the agent of their own destruction, delivered either from narrative and character action or through *film noir*’s cinematography of angular shots and shadowy ests, or storytelling devices such as flashback and the subjective camera.” J. Challis, op. cit., p. 129.

⁸ Several translations of his texts have appeared in the issue titled “Illusive” (“Złudne”) of the journal “Arterie. Kwartalnik artystyczno-literacki” 2016, issue 24.

⁹ M. Spence, *Poem Noir*, Shenandoahliterary.org, Vol. 64, Nr. 1, Noir, <https://shenandoahliterary.org/641/2014/08/15/poem-noir/> (last accessed 02.13.2018).

[...] I fired down
Once more to be sure. Then I walked off
In the rain and thought: I hate this town¹⁰.

I am citing Spence's poem here as an English-language activation of noir poetry that offers an example from which we might easily extrapolate the style's overall signature features. The poem features a protagonist cut off from his emotions, operating solely in isolation, distrustful of women, distanced from the outside world, and contemptuous towards his own city.

Lummis perhaps played the most decisive role in defining the term "poem noir." Lummis is deeply wedded to Los Angeles, which also happens to be Chandler's hometown. It was Lummis who, in the text *The Poem Noir – Too Dark to be Depressed*, identified the first twentieth-century "poem noir" as *Crime Club*, a poem by Weldon Kees,¹¹ who never received much attention in Poland. Lummis then reinforces this "founding" gesture by rooting it in her own autobiography: she is the granddaughter of an LA Times editor, and is therefore continuing her family tradition. She relays her experience of an assault during which she was held at gunpoint and robbed of a keepsake from her grandmother. This event ultimately influenced the themes she took up in her poetry. She explains: "The film noir sensibility gave me a way to do that [to write about violence – W.K.] without being sentimental."¹²

Writing noir poetry has become more of a trend in English-speaking countries than it has elsewhere. A great volume of websites publish texts in this vein (by established writers and online amateurs alike).¹³ What's more, many creative writing programs now offer courses on writing noir poetry. In its Polish iteration, this branch of writing has taken a somewhat different shape.

Polish poets have applied noir conventions to various effects. It would suffice to examine the tests collected in the anthology *Farewell, My Lovely. Noir Poetry*.¹⁴ It seems relevant that this term hardly appears anywhere else.¹⁵ As the anthologies' editors, Marcin Baran, Marcin Sendeki and Marcin Świetlicki, all concede, the idea for the anthology's subtitle was proposed by the book's editor, Irek Grin (who is also an author of crime novels, yet not of poems). The new 2010 collection included a reprint of texts from 1997. This fact is worth highlighting, for in 2010, the term "noir poetry" was not yet in wide circulation, even in English-speaking countries. The cover of *Farewell, My Lovely* cites Świetlicki: "Just as the dark crime novel brushed close to poetry, so was poetry ashamed to openly approximate the dark crime novel. It's time to put an end to all

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹"Weldon Kees drew upon the visual and tonal qualities of another medium, *film noir*, with its interest in fate, human fallibility and mortality, and its sense of social order undercut by a substratum of delirious disorder. To that mix he added a murder, or, at any rate, a body, and his own icy black irony – and that became the first modern poem noir, *Crime Club*" – writes Lummis. S. Lummis, (*Never*) *Out of the Past: Film Noir and the Poetry of Lynda Hull*, "Los Angeles Review of Books" 2015, November 17, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/never-out-of-the-past-film-noir-and-the-poetry-of-lynda-hull/#!> (last accessed 02.14.2018).

¹²"The film noir sensibility gave me a way to do that without being sentimental". *Writing Noir Poetry, With LA as a Backup*. Suzanne Lummis speaks with Jacki Lyden, National Public Radio, Inc. (US), <https://www.npr.org/2013/09/15/222820591/writing-noir-poetry-with-l-a-as-a-backdrop> (last accessed 02.14.2018).

¹³For an example, see: allpoetry.com, poetryfoundation.org, hellopoetry.com.

¹⁴*Żegnaj, laleczko. Wiersze noir. Z dodaniem legendarnej antologii Długie pożegnania. Tribute to Raymond Chandler*, ed. M. Baran, M. Sendeki, M. Świetlicki, Kraków 2010.

¹⁵For more on issues of nomenclature associated with "dark crime fiction" as the foundation of noir poetry, see: W. Klera, *Kryminal*, in: *Interpretacyjny słownik terminów kulturowych*, ed. J. Madejski, S. Iwasiów, Szczecin 2014, p. 91.

this shame. This book came about to make it clear that film noir and noir literature can go hand in hand with poetry.”¹⁶ From the perspective of today’s great abundance of noir poetry, these words might come as a surprise. Wojciech Burszta and Mariusz Czubaj have written more on the features of dark crime fiction that define language as the basic material of poetry: “[...] we often speak of its realism: of images of vast cities in the throes of economic crisis, the disintegration of social bonds, and the resulting ethical amorphism and complexity of its protagonists. However, the salient feature of this variant of crime fiction is its fascination with daily life in its most tender expression – in manners of speaking and on the layer of language.”¹⁷

The 1997 anthology was an homage to Raymond Chandler, which explains why most of the included texts directly reference his work or signature hero (Philip Marlowe has proven to be a powerfully generative figure).¹⁸ The texts anthologized in 2010, however, are organized by more flexible criteria (or at the very least, the reader gets this impression). Aside from select poems commissioned for the book, the editors included several older works, thereby expanding our sense of what falls under the category of noir poetry and foregrounding the fact that the “noir sensibility” is not by necessity the product of intentional and conscious self-stylization. Among the texts whose affiliation with this mode is less obvious, we find Wisława Szymborska’s *Black Song* (*Czarna piosenka*):

The long-drawn saxophonist, the saxophonist joker,
he’s got his system for the world, he does fine without words.
The future – who can guess it. The past – who’s got it right.
Just blink those thoughts away and play a black song.

They were dancing cheek to cheek. When someone dropped.
Head struck floor to the beat. They danced by him in time.
He didn’t see the knees above him. Pale eyelids dawned,
plucked from the packed crowd, the night’s strange colors.

Don’t make a scene. He’ll live. He must have drunk too much,
the blood by his temple must be lipstick. Nothing happened.
Just some guy on the floor. He fell himself, he’ll get himself up,
he made it through the war. They danced on in cramped sweetness,
revolving fans mixed cold and heat,
the saxophone howled like a dog to a pink lantern.¹⁹

¹⁶Żegnaj, laleczko. *Wiersze noir*, op. cit.

¹⁷ “[...] zwykło się mówić o jego realizmie: o obrazach wielkich miast w czasach kryzysu gospodarczego i rozprężenia więzi społecznych, o – tym samym – amorfizmie etycznym i niejednoznaczności bohaterów. Istotą tej odmiany kryminału jest wszakże fascynacja codziennością w najczulszym z jej przejawów – w sposobie mówienia i warstwie językowej.” W.J. Burszta, M. Czubaj, *Krwawa setka. 100 najważniejszych powieści kryminalnych*, Warsaw 2007, p. 20. Bill Pronzini and Jack Adrian also discuss this important theme: dark crime fiction is about disorder and discontent. Its protagonists’ main feature is their skepticism of the law, the state, and power; the crime or menace perpetrated is only of secondary importance. See: B. Pronzini, J. Adrian, *Hard-Boiled. An anthology of American Crime Stories*, Oxford 1995.

¹⁸ Here we should mention Kamila Czaja’s text on this anthology. Czaja focuses mainly on tracing Raymond Chandler’s influence on Polish authors. K. Czaja, *Wierszem białym o czarnym kryminale. Raymond Chandler w poezji polskiej*, in: *Kryminał. Gatunek poważ(a)ny?*, Vol 1: *Kryminał a medium (literatura – teatr – film – serial – komiks)*, ed. T. Dalasiński, T.S. Markiewka, Toruń 2015, pp. 119–133.

¹⁹ W. Szymborska, *Map: Collected and Last Poems*, Boston & New York, 2015, p. 6.

This poem is given the approximate date of 1949 and betrays a repertory of devices that justify its inclusion in the anthology. The protagonist, a saxophonist described as a “joker” equipped with his own system for the world, is suspended in the present moment, straddling the past and the future, which are both uncertain. Echoes of existentialism ring loud and clear in *Black Song*, offering one of several features that qualify it as a “poem noir.” The mood that dominates the cramped dance hall where people dance side by side but anonymously – all individual figures melting into the crowd – is saturated with a mixture of cold and heat. By joining the dancing crowd that appears as a discrete and rhythmically pulsing organism, the individuals composing it are ultimately isolated. This movement also resembles a kind of Danse Macabre. And in fact, this motif resurfaces in *Farewell, My Lovely* in Marta Podgórnika’s poem *Renewable Dancing* (*Odnawialny dancing*). As a rule, the protagonists of the noir genre are no strangers to death. Detectives experience extreme ups and downs, and their weakness for alcohol makes them fall prey to fleeting romances. The man who falls down drunk is dead to the world – he is useless.

Szyborska’s poem is one of many texts in the anthology in which crime does not appear as an explicit feature of the content. After all, in this world, “[one] does fine without words,” for there is always rhythm, music, and the “dog’s howl” of the saxophone. The man who hits his head on the dance floor, “just some guy on the floor,” must reckon with his own fall, but for him, this poses no problem. After all, “he made it through the war.”

Black Song is preceded in the anthology by Bolesław Leśmian’s poem *Migoń and Jawrzon*, and the third reprinted text is Ryszard Krynicki’s *Blow* (*Cios*). The remaining twenty-eight texts were written specifically for the book by Bogdan Zadura, Andrzej Sosnowski and Tadeusz Pióro. Also in the mix are writers once strictly identified with the ‘60s generation but now read in more flexible terms: MLB, Paweł Paulus Mazur and Cezary Domarus.

What catches the eye in the English-language poems discussed above is the link between signature noir conventions and aspects of local mythology.²⁰ To stimulate their imaginations, Polish writers turned to crime fiction, but they also read Adam Mickiewicz’s *Ballads and Romances* (*Ballady i romanse*). As early as 2007, in an interview published in the book *Demolition* (*Rozbiórka*),²¹ Marcin Świetlicki identifies other sources that shaped his writing. Describing his poem *Karol Kot*,²² he offers his own definition of dark crime fiction. He notes: “evil is a phantasm that is constantly laying siege.”²³ He goes on to say (enigmatically) that the first crime novel he read began with the words: “Crime is ineffable, / the woman kills the man.” Świetlicki’s body of work includes many texts that thematically graze the subject of crime. Not all of them conform to noir conventions.²⁴

²⁰This is perhaps most clear in Paul Muldoon’s volume *Immram*, where the book’s structural concept evokes Celtic mythology. See also: J. Challis, op. cit.

²¹*Rozbiórka: wiersze, rozmowy i portrety 26 poetów*, interview by Magdalena Rybak, phot. Elżbieta Lempp, Wrocław 2007.

²²This poem tells the story of the “Vampire of Krakow,” a murderer whose crimes provoked a wave of fear in the 1960s in Krakow. The murderer was captured right after he passed his high school exams, and two years later, he was executed.

²³*Ibid.*, p. 123.

²⁴I discuss this in greater detail in the chapter: *Jest miejsce, ofiara się znajdzie*, in: W. Klera, *Namolna refreniczność. Twórczość Marcina Świetlickiego*, Krakow 2017, p. 182 et seq.

Echoes of Mickiewicz resound in Świetlicki's poetry and beyond it. A similar pattern emerges in an excerpt from Grzegorz Dyduch's poem *Two Men and a Clown Talk about Chinatown* (*Sketch for a Scherzo*) (*Dwaj panowie i klaun rozmawiają o Chinatown (szkic scherza)*):

Once upon a time in the Chinese district
 The body of a virgin was found
 Without limbs, head clipped off
 A carcass in terrible form.
 All the neighbors ran out to see
 And with them came the usual gaggle of gossipers.
 Tramps and pimps.
 Around the corpse they start to frolic.
 Ufff!!!
 Chinese lanterns burn and oil crackles in woks.
 The police set off on the murderer's tracks.
 The renowned detective appears at long last
 And reveals a slight secret to all present.
 During the autopsy the victim's sex has changed:
 A male body: but without its privates!!!²⁵

These words are recited by a clown who – as the author indicates – “might well be the voice of the people,” but in fact is not, for “he loathes the people.” The allusion to Roman Polanski's film *Chinatown* is repeated in the illustration appearing on the Polish anthology's cover.²⁶ Piotr Sommer's contribution is stylized along similar lines:

Choir

The tragedy had happened
 The woman killed the lad
 The knife was lodged in his larynx
 She must have been strong.²⁷

This poem brings up yet another feature specific to noir poetry (and one that seems to locate the mode even closer to hard-boiled stories): their knack for delivering a specific kind of joke. Black humor and the absurd are prominent throughout the anthology.²⁸ We might take Paweł Paulus Mazur's text *Detective Ragman* (*Detektyw Szmata*) as an example.

²⁵Żegnaj, laleczko. *Wiersze noir*, op. cit., p. 26.

²⁶The anthology's cover features an untitled illustration by Marcin Maciejowski that references Roman Polanski's *Chinatown*.

²⁷P. Sommer, *Października czternastego, roku dziesiątego zdarzyło się, co się miało zdarzyć najgorszego*, i: *Żegnaj, laleczko. Wiersze noir*, op. cit., p. 38.

²⁸Although it goes without saying that this feature is not unique to the anthology. Nearly all of the protagonists of the poems discussed here have a knack for delivering remarks saturated with dark humor, yet the female detective-heroes and femme fatales show scarce signs of this style of humor.

[...] he lived alone like a bit of lard. His only company was a tailor's dummy.
The dummy was over a century old.

So Inspector Ścierwoński assigned the job to Ragman. Ragman had never solved a single case entrusted to him. But he did love soup, cucumber soup [...].²⁹

Even these extremely naturalist descriptions intone a certain distance that allows them to sneak in a hardened laugh at the sad fates of dead bodies, as in Marek K. E. Baczewski's text, which describes a "reclining clod of meat" (*"leżąca kupa mięsa"*) that is "generally none too kind" (*"ogólnie niemiła"*) and "runs off at the mouth" (*"zajeżdża z pyska"*):

According to set theory
this corpse is particularly dead.
We might even say it's the corpse of a corpse,
in all possible respects,
not least rhetorically,
and from every angle:
passive, generative, active.³⁰

The conclusion hardly offers any consolation: *"the corpse of a corpse lives"* (*"żywy jest trupem trupa"*). We might say that Marcin Baran takes this strategy to its most extreme limits in his short work of prose poetry titled *Bałaang* ("Killing Joke Noir"). It would be ill advised, however, to fall prey to the misleading impression that all these jokes mitigate the general mood of the protagonists' infinite hopelessness and pessimism. To the contrary – in this milieu, these feelings become all the more dominant. *Balaang* appears in two versions: one American, and one British. Depending on his background (the narration starts in the first person and then moves to the third person in the second part), the detective suffers from a different set of compulsions. The American detective "drinks substantially, consistently, and diligently," while the British one "thinks compulsively, pedantically, and systematically."³¹ Yet their stories converge as they come to a head in a gesture that lucidly reveals the international nature of noir poetry: "But it was clear to see that it wasn't so. It isn't on the menu and will never be. And into the ages – / the world will always be poisoned by crime...";³² "But it was clear to see that it wasn't so. It's not on the menu and won't be, ever. Until the end of time / crime will always poison the world...."³³

²⁹"[...] mieszkał sam jak smalec. Tylko z krawieckim manekinem.

Manekin miał ze sto lat.

To inspektor Ścierwoński zlecił Szmacie zlecenie. Szmata nigdy nie rozwiązał

żadnej sprawy, którą mu powierzono. Ale lubił zupę 'ogórkową' [...]" *Żegnaj, laleczko. Wiersze noir*, op. cit., p. 27.

³⁰"Z punktu widzenia teorii mnogości

jest to wyjątkowo martwy trup.

Jest to nawet trup trupa,

pod każdym względem,

zwłaszcza retorycznym,

i z każdej strony:

biernej, dajnej, czynnej." Ibid, p. 11.

³¹Ibid, pp. 30–37.

³²Ibid, p. 33.

³³Ibid, p. 37.

The heroes of the poems comprising this noir anthology are all exhausted. Take, for example, Agnieszka Wolna-Hamkało's *At the Last Minute (Pop) Poetry (Spontan (pop) poetry)*: "With the diagnosis 'exhaustion & destruction' / I found myself in the springtime ward. They told me to sleep, / so I slept. I seem to recall being by a river. [...]"³⁴ At times, the protagonists describe themselves from split perspectives, and often they are torn in two, as in Darek Foks' poem *D-Day*: "Suddenly I feel a dizzy spell brought on by a sudden solid / flash of light, women, a purse, a dog, and the splitting of a soul."³⁵ These characters can be found in offices crowded with the accouterment typical of those leading a life of crime. The women who rear their heads in these spaces often have "raw mouths" ("*krwiste usta*"),³⁶ and on the desks we spy "pencils whose ends are bitten through" ("*ołówki z obgryzionymi na wskroś końcówkami*") alongside "fake leather notebooks that look like they've been through a flood" ("*notesie w pseudoskórzanej oprawie z prawdziwym śladem zalania*") and a "battered pack of Gauloises" ("*pomiętej paczce gauloise'ów*").³⁷ In the noir world, even objects lead lives of solitude.

Świetlicki adopts his hero's voice with great poignancy, in a direct style, as he stands alone, abandoned by his woman, in close proximity to the evil he has conquered (for now) and the crimes (creaking ominously yet again, for we all know that we can never truly conquer them):

I won't play nice. I won't be sweet.
I will be dry in perpetuity.³⁸

The anthology extensively cited here also includes works with more debatable noir affiliations. Contrary to appearances, this is no straight-forward genre, and tacking the descriptor "noir" onto the title is not a permanent solution.

To conclude, I find it interesting that pessimism in noir poetry does not lead to stagnation, immobility, or total resignation. The characters do not suffer from catatonic depression: "*Will we live much longer? After all, our trajectories have been plotted / in advance. [...]*" ("*Czy długo pożyjemy? Trajektorie są przecież z góry / wytyczone*").³⁹ The characters are constantly starting the conquest of evil from scratch and combatting crimes despite their total certainty that at the end of the day, nobody can overcome them. Yet all of them fall prey to an incumbent duty to put in their best effort. They have no time for sentiment. The years go by and "the losses only pile up" ("*dokładają im strat*"),⁴⁰ but this risk is part of the game. An undying willingness to take this risk is what links the heroes of noir poetry from all continents.

transl. Eliza Cushman Rose

³⁴"Z diagnozą 'wyczerpanie & wyniszczenie' / trafiłam na oddział wiosny. Kazali mi spać, / to spałam. Film mi się urwał nad rzeką. [...]" Ibid, p. 14.

³⁵"Czuję zawrót głowy wywołany nagłą solidną / dawką światła, kobietami, torbą, psem i rozdarcie duszy." Ibid, p. 42.

³⁶J. Jarniewicz, *Blat*, in: *Żegnaj, laleczko. Wiersze noir*, op. cit., p. 15.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸"Nie będę miły. I nie będę słodki.

Będę wytrwały wytrwale." M. Świetlicki, *Żegnaj laleczko 3*, in: *Żegnaj, laleczko. Wiersze noir*, op. cit., p. 29.

³⁹G. Wróblewski, *Katastrofy, wulkan, szybkie wycofywanie pieniędzy z banku*, in: *Żegnaj, laleczko. Wiersze noir*, op. cit., p. 49.

⁴⁰M. Melecki, *Krótkie pożegnanie*, in: *Żegnaj, laleczko. Wiersze noir*, op. cit., p. 48.

KEYWORDS

OBSESSION

noir poetry

pesimism

ABSTRACT:

This article explores the term “noir” that has been introduced relatively recently to contemporary poetry, having been borrowed from the film world. The sources of noir poetry do not exclusively lead back to film and neo-noir, for they also – and perhaps most substantially – draw from features that migrated over to film from dark crime fiction, also known as hard-boiled stories. The first usage of the term “noir poetry” I was able to find appears in an article that American scholar and poet Suzanne Lummis published at the break of 2013. In English-speaking countries, the term is substantially more popular than it is elsewhere. Although an anthology appeared in Poland in 2010 titled *Farewell, My Lovely. Noir Poetry* (*Żegnaj, laleczko. Wiersze noir*), the term did not interest the authors on a theoretical level, for they seemed more interested in Chandlerian tropes. The fundamental features of noir poetry include: anxiety, pessimism, obsession, and a rejection of sentimentality. One device employed among Polish poets with particular zeal is black humor. In Poland, authors drawing from the noir tradition include Marcin Baran and Marcin Świetlicki, but we can also trace the genre’s imprints back to earlier work, some examples of which might seem counter-intuitive, such as Wisława Szymborska’s *Black Song* (*Czarna piosenka*), which is cited in this article.

HARD-BOILED STORIES

anxiety

dark crime fiction

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR:

Wiktoria Klera (b. 1984) is a doctor of the humanities and literary critic. Her research focuses on authors of the “Brulion” generation, and in particular, Marcin Świetlicki (she is author of the monograph “*The Stubborn Refrain. The Work of Marcin Świetlicki*, (“*Namolna refreniczność. Twórczość Marcina Świetlickiego*”), Wydawnictwo Pasaże, Krakow 2017). Other research interests include Marcin Baran, Marcin Sendek, and *noir* poetry. She has taught courses at the University of Szczecin, the High School of the Humanities of the Association for Sharing Knowledge in Szczecin, Collegium Balticum and Stargardinum Stargardzka High School. She works at the National Museum in Szczecin Press. Her criticism has been published in the journals “Pogranicze,” “Portret,” “eleWator,” “artPapier,” “eCzas Kultury,” “Arterie,” “Autobiografia,” and “Fragile.” She is also a poet.

Bonda and Storytelling

Michał Larek

In Search of Operational Knowledge

A few years ago, I crossed the barricade and began to write crime novels. These days, I am slowly coming to terms with the extent to which this moment was a powerful turning point in my career as a literary critic.

Why is that?

I'll be frank. In my desire to write popular tales, or those that would reach a broad audience, I was forced to reconfigure my mentality. I had to silence my internal critic, and even my "internal scholar," who was constantly whispering in my ear that this or that can't be written, for it lacks ambition. Before long it became clear that everything the academic disapproves of, the reader adores. This should come as no surprise, but this divergence of tastes had one grave consequence. In texts by friends in my field, I failed to find any (sorely needed!) knowledge I might put to use to conceive new and engaging plots. Even the formalists and structuralists had nothing particularly inspiring to offer. **I would identify the knowledge I sought as operational knowledge.**

I therefore had to change trades and turn to filmmakers, and specifically those with an expertise in screenwriting who write in vivid prose in the vein of applied poetics.

This turned out to be a rather fruitful and incredibly inspiring training route for many reasons, not least the fact that **knowledge on narrative structure was adequately attuned to knowledge of the mechanics of imparting narrative to the audience.** As we know, the scholar tends to relegate the category of the reader (understood as a specific participant in the communicative act) to the second or third order of importance.

When I began to put this knowledge to the test, this time as an author exploring the specific and isolated case of the reception of his own crime novels, I found this body of knowledge to be entirely sound – as it happens, it actually works.

So I got bitten by the bug. Writing, which, for the most part, seeks to operate on the reader's emotions, drew me in and became a passion: a side job.

It was around this time that I began to lead workshops in creative writing on a broader scale. This forced me to compile a list of texts that would be useful for my students.

To my dismay, I became aware of the scarcity of publications by literary critics (with the exception of scripts by Joanna Wrycza-Bekier, who nonetheless has no involvement with academic work). For as it turns out, **the perspective of the writer and university-level instructor perceives literary study as an autotelic activity** – a sophisticated but (yes, I’ll say it) unproductive game for the extremely educated who often boast a refined intellect.

Who, in the end, made it onto this list? I selected screenwriters and directors, marketing pundits, “business storytelling” scholars, storytellers, and even some anthropologists (or at least Joseph Campbell). In other words, to speak in the broadest possible terms, the list consisted of experts in **narrative as a tool of influence**.

Among these names, a certain Katarzyna Bonda appeared. Bonda is a crime novelist who founded the writing school “Typewriter” (*Maszyna do Pisania*) and published a textbook in 2015, right after putting out “Absorber” (*Pochłaniacz*), the novel that launched her prose career. Relevantly, Bonda was trained as a journalist.

The Basic Premise of “Typewriter”

The title gets right to the point: “Typewriter: A Course in Creative Writing” (*Maszyna do pisania. Kurs kreatywnego pisania*). Bonda’s fundamental ideas revolve around the major premise that “it is possible to learn how to write.” This claim quickly runs up against her assertion that “writing can only ever be a gift from God.”

I would like to cite and comment on a few of her preliminary remarks in order to foreground the author’s overall intention.

It is entirely possible - writes Bonda in the introduction. - It is entirely possible to learn how to write. However, as my grandmother often said: ‘It’s not like you can oil up the noggin of just anyone.’ You either are a writer or you aren’t. Many of my students have that ‘special something.’ Sometimes it is obvious from the first scene they write in a warm-up activity, and sometimes it surfaces only after several months of training. It’s true - writing is like a sport. All it takes is to write a single paragraph and the hand is abuzz with sentences. For some, a few words of encouragement and constructive criticism are enough (this feedback has nothing to do with the grades you receive in school). Others work themselves to a pulp throughout the course, for few people know that to write, you have to open yourself up.¹

Literary critics so often respond to the idea of “creative writing” with the reluctant phrase: “talent cannot be learned.” As we have seen, Bonda confirms this while simultaneously proposing different stakes: it is a matter, rather, of training talent.

¹ K. Bonda, *Maszyna do pisania. Kurs kreatywnego pisania*, Warszawa 2015, pp. 16-17.

Perhaps it is about testing your own limits. Honing those skills that have had no chance to rear their heads. Testing the operational knowledge that writers have evolved over centuries and continue to adapt to the public's changing expectations.

I would say that this already sounds entirely reasonable, and even professional. In the desire to make something with consistency, sincerity and success, you must prepare yourself accordingly and remain vigilant to form.

Some Polish universities are changing their attitude toward creative writing and have begun to integrate courses of this sort into their degree programs. As an example: a few weeks ago, I led a writing workshop that was part of a postbaccalaureate program organized by the University of Warsaw. I'll offer a curious fact: the workshop's participants included unpublished writers alongside those with a few books under their name and even screenwriters of popular television series.

Yes, I teach people how to write, Bonda goes on to say. - I love to share my knowledge with others, to help adepts and guide them out of the abyss of graphomania. Surely I make no dig when I say that each writer ought to take care to never "drift" too far from the substance at hand. I am not writing for my pupils, nor do I edit their work or impose my vision of the world on them. I merely try - as a midwife of sorts - to lend a helping hand in their "literary births." After all, writing books is not the same thing as poetry, where a kiss of the muse plants the seed of the verse in the writer (although this kind of enlightenment might be worth more than a workshop). Writing books is an arduous, even physical labor.²

Let us forgive Bonda her unfortunate comment about poetry and instead bracket her suggestion that "learning how to write" is a form of mentorship that is entirely commonplace and even banal in the world of film and television. In these circles, every screenplay undergoes processes known in English as "development." Why should it be any different to work on a novel?

I believe that we literary critics have surrounded ourselves with a cult of our object of study, and that as a result, we have converted our discipline into a discourse that is simultaneously evaluative and "celebratory" to a fault. We are only now beginning to pay the price: fewer and fewer students are drawn to study literature, for despite its potential, the discipline has proven to lack a sense of sorely needed pragmatism and creativity.

In my courses, working on a novel recalls the creative act of conception, however strange that might sound. It bears no resemblance to academic study - Bonda explains. - After all, the writer must give their attention wholesale to the text. Writing is work. A job like any other.³

Scholars of popular culture such as John Fiske write that academics are quick to take on the role of the police: they keep tabs on artists' achievements and confine their focus to the strict

² Idem, p. 15.

³ Idem, pp. 19-20.

evaluation of their aesthetic value. Scholars like Fiske perceive this as a grave error, for people do not turn to art for refined content but rather for stimuli by which the story being told can effectively reel the reader into the fictional world. It is my aim that the instructor of literary criticism should adopt Bonda's perspective and become a coach of sorts. Such a figure would be qualified to help her students make their in-process novels more appealing to the reader.

This, however, would require the instructor to transition from a position of intellectual authority to what we might call a technician of narrative. What difference would this make? The former concentrates on teaching how a given work (already in existence and usually allotted a significant place in the history of literature) should be understood, while the latter offers advice on how to create an emotionally engaging story.

I will include one last quote:

I am only sharing that which I myself arrived at through hard work by training abroad and participating in a number of classes on writing and screenwriting and storytelling workshops led by famous instructors from Poland, Western Europe and the United States. I also arrived at this knowledge by experimenting within the scope of my own life and body. I now seek to pass on the loot I gathered. I open people's eyes to realities that, by now, are second nature for me. If only, at some point before I published my first book, I had had the chance to share my writing, concepts, or even my vaguest ideas with someone who also writes. (...) I would have sung the praises for these creative writing courses that I continue to think of as a kind of medicine.⁴

This succinctly defines the kind of knowledge Bonda wishes to convey in her book.

This knowledge has been put to the test on the literary front, discussed comprehensively with experts of narrative design, and practiced on readers again and again.

Of course, perhaps these sentiments are obvious for academics as well, but in their pragmatic nature, they render a great service for amateur writers.

This passage reminds me of yet another thing that brings me some anxiety. Professional knowledge of story structure is produced and distributed outside the walls of university literature departments.

Why should this bring me anxiety?

Well, Bonda reminds us that representatives of other fields seeking to exploit the power of narrative have gained much out of mobilizing the tools of literary criticism (which are, after all, invaluable rich).

In short: we have lost crucial territory.

⁴ Idem, p. 16.

I'll offer an example. Last year, marketing specialist Paweł Tkaczyk published a book with PWN titled "Narratology" (*Narratologia*), which apparently sold quite well and is becoming a popular reference source for how to create engaging stories. In this way, a term from literary criticism, retaining the credibility of this significant discipline, has been robbed from under our noses.

Knowledge that Inspires

Bonda's book is divided into nine chapters, the majority of which contain a set of (often generative) exercises.

The first chapter explores "narrative" and is a well-conceived introduction to working on a novel.

The second offers essential knowledge for constructing a compelling "hero."

The third informs us of how to go about creating the "depicted world" (the diegesis).

The fourth is a lecture on structuring "plot" in order to build dramatic tension.

The fifth focuses on narrative techniques.

The sixth offers compact instructions for writing dialogue.

The seventh is titled "The Writer's Decalogue" and consists of a list of aphorisms concerning the writer's essential tasks.

The eighth guides us into the enigmatic world of self-editing.

The ninth, titled "On the Way" (*Na drogę*), tries to provide a subjective and emotional response to the question of what the writer's life entails. Essentially, the chapter grounds us in the belief that creating works of literature compels one to lead the life of a monk. Let's face it – a dash of guild mythology never hurt anyone.

So: how would I summarize the content of "Typewriter?"

A learned literary critic will perhaps find nothing new or personally illuminating here. After all, this book wasn't written for him anyway (this being said, I do imagine that writing a "guide to creative writing" would be an intriguing task for an academic). The real addressee of the book – the amateur writer – should find satisfaction and perhaps some inspiration in its pages. For me, however, Bonda's book is the most substantive publication of its kind and has fully earned its designation as a textbook for disseminating operational knowledge on how to construct a popular story.

I would like to dwell for a moment on the notion of "inspiration."

The operational knowledge I keep alluding to should have a very different tenor from academic knowledge.

Originality is by no means the determining factor of its value.

So what is?

My point is that this knowledge must 1) reach the reader's awareness without a hitch; 2) be easy to implement; 3) remind us of basic rules and "cases;" 4) inspire us to devise new strategies; and 5) offer a push of motivation and leave us excited to make new work.

Although it might seem the least substantive, the fifth point is of enormous importance!

Marshall McLuhan has said: "the medium is the message," and there you have it: effective knowledge must "message." It must impact the senses and stimulate or agitate the nervous system.

In this sense, this knowledge lies close to "design thinking" and perhaps somewhat distant from the clever, enlightening, and severely evaluative discourse of the academy so often conveyed through scientific and intensely specialized jargon.

The writer is soldier and poet merged as one, Bonda writes. Some conglomeration of the features of both trades will guarantee your ability to finish a novel. And this – I would argue – should be the goal of any reader of this book. I assure you – if you heed my advice to set aside one hour a day to write, in time you will draw out this pleasure on your own initiative. When you see its effects, it will cease to be a chore. I have no trouble writing for six, eight, twelve, or even fourteen hours a day (especially when I am nearing the end of a novel). I work regardless of whether or not the ideas are flowing. Every morning brings breakfast, coffee, and work, followed by a lunch break (if I don't forget to eat). In the afternoon, I relax. It isn't advisable to neglect your relationships – for they hold the antidote to what ails you. I jest not. If you want to be a writer, you will spend the majority of your life alone, submerged in alternative worlds that exist solely in your imagination. Every demiurge needs someone to bounce off of. Every demiurge must leave the house and live a normal life, like anyone else. After all, how are you supposed to learn about the psychology of your characters if not by observing real people? Observe, learn, continue to grow spiritually and physically. (...) I'll let you in on a secret: discipline. Forget about epiphanies, inspiration, or strokes of creative fortune. There is no cottage on a cliff that opens out onto a view of the sea, where you and your lover will sit and write ceaselessly. Nonsense! Poet + Sergeant = Writer. And remember: you start as a craftsman and only then become an artist. That's all there is to it.⁵

Any scholar would surely sneer at such a passage. But without these asides and their vivid metaphors, instructions, incantations, allusions to daily life, and even personal phrases charged with emotion, no effective "course in creative writing" would be possible.

⁵ Idem, s. 20-21.

From my perspective, Bonda (along with other experts of narrative conception) is proof that literary criticisms ought to broaden its pedagogic offerings.

In his excellent book “Literary Theory,” Jonathan Culler delineates two disciplines: poetics and hermeneutics. For Culler, poetics is concerned with the mechanisms of constructing meaning, while hermeneutics entails interpreting meaning found within the text.

To this pairing I would add a third discipline: storytelling, which I would define in the simplest possible terms as the art of designing engaging narrative.

It is worth noting that in spite of appearances, storytelling is by no means a new field. To the contrary, it has a remarkably long, noble and downright distinguished history. It is simply practiced somewhere on the fringes.

Storytelling as a Field within Literary Criticism

In my attempt to put storytelling on the methodological map of literary criticism, I ought to take note of the phenomenology explored in “reader-response criticism” (Stanley Fish, Wolfgang Iser) and the “aesthetic of reception” represented by “The Constance School” (Hans Robert Jauss).

The patron of this field is clearly Aristotle, the old favorite of screenwriters, whose “Poetics” gave rise to all theories of narrative reception.

Another significant point of reference would be McLuhan’s work. I will merely mention in broad strokes that his books convey a specific conception of the history of literature as an evolutionary tale of techniques for engaging the reader’s attention.

I would hail Edgar Allan Poe as founding father of the discipline. Poe wrote a text that might be taken as the doctrine of operational literary criticism. I am thinking of his “Philosophy of Composition” from 1846, which puts forth the thesis that creating a story is like a mathematical equation whose goal is to call out a particular emotional response.

McLuhan himself defined Poe’s role in the history of literature as follows:

In the first great age of mass production of commodities, and of literature as a commodity for the market, it became necessary to examine the effect of art and literature before producing anything at all – so argues McLuhan in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*. (...) It was Edgar Allan Poe who first worked out the rationale of this ultimate awareness of the poetic process and who saw that instead of directing the work to the reader, it was necessary to incorporate the reader in the work.⁶

One more quote from McLuhan’s book is relevant here:

⁶ Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy. The Making of Typographic Man*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto: 1962, p. 276.

Artistic rule-of-thumb usually anticipates the science and technology in these matters by a full generation or more. The meaning of the telegraphic mosaic in its journalistic manifestations was not lost to the mind of Edgar Allan Poe. He used it to establish two startlingly new inventions, the symbolist poem and the detective story. Both of these forms require do-it-yourself participation on the part of the reader. By offering an incomplete image, Poe involved his readers in the creative process in a way that Baudelaire, Valéry, T. S. Eliot, and many others have admired and followed. Poe had grasped at once the electric dynamic as one of public participation in creativity.⁷

To get to the point: storytelling – as a discipline of literary criticism – should be concerned with what Sergei Eisenstein, the Soviet filmmaker and fantastically innovative literary critic, called the “montage of attractions:” a montage of narratives that attract the reader.

In this light, Katarzyna Bonda’s successful writing career makes a strong argument in favor.

transl. Eliza Cushman Rose

⁷ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, Gingko Press, Berkeley: 2003, p. 430.

KEYWORDS

t h e r e a d e r

Katarzyna Bonda

storytelling

EMOTIONS

OPERATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

ABSTRACT:

This text is a commentary on Katarzyna Bonda's book "Typewriter: A Course in Creative Writing." The well-known writer's book is offered here as an example of an inspiring textbook of operational knowledge for literary criticism as an alternative to typical academic knowledge. These reflections ultimately lead to a definition of storytelling (the art of designing engaging narrative) and a proposal to conceive of this practice as a discipline within literary criticism that has tremendous pragmatic and creative potential.

*creative writing***POETICS**

A l l a n E d g a r P o e

*popular literature***CRIME FICTION****NOTE ON THE AUTHOR:**

Michał Larek (b. 1978) is a writer, literary critic, and teacher. He works at the Institute of Polish Philology of UAM in Poznań (the Faculty of Literature and Modern Culture). He studies techniques for capturing the reader's attention and leads workshops in storytelling. In 2014 he published the book "Dead Body" (*"Martwe ciała"*), a true crime book about Edmund Kolanowski, a serial killer from Poznań, and in 2016 he published his crime novel "The Man in White Shoes" (*"Mężczyzna w białych butach"*) inspired by a true story (both books were co-written with the lawyer Waldemar Ciszak). In August of 2017, his book "Fury" (*"Furia"*) came out, which is the first volume of his crime series "Decade" (*"Dekada"*). In 2018, the next two volumes will come out, titled "On the Scent" (*"Na tropie"*) and "Doom" (*"Fatum"*).

The academic murder mystery

– is a variant of the so-called “academic” or “campus novel” that is popular in Anglophone literary culture and makes sporadic appearances in Polish literature. The defining feature of this (thematic) genre is campus life:¹ into this setting, the academic murder mystery introduces the crime motif (typically involving murder) and the narrative thread of the investigation that then ensues. This can take the shape of two possible narrative models: either the crime has occurred within the academic setting while the investigation is led by someone from the outside world, or the leading figure is an amateur detective (often female) who is a scholar by trade (often of literature). The *Inspector Morse* novels by Colin Dexter (1930-2017) are an example of the first strategy. Their hero, Endeavour Morse, is a police inspector from Oxford, and many of his investigations concern crimes committed at the college. Such is the case in *Death is Now my Neighbour* (1996) and *The Daughters of Cain* (1994). Dexter’s novels have been adapted into a popular television series on the British network ITV. The second strategy is mobilized in the novel *Gaudy Night* (1935) – a brilliant example of the so-called Golden Age of the British detective novel² and a precursor of the academic murder mystery, written by Dorothy L. Sayers (1893-1957). Sayers was a philologist by training (receiving her degree in classical philology, modern languages and medieval literature at Oxford’s Somerville College in 1930).³ Sayers earned her place in the history of twentieth-century British literature not only as the author of crime novels, but as an excellent poet, translator (of *the Song of Roland* and Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, among other texts) and essayist on themes of theological philosophy.

The protagonist of *Gaudy Night* (the title refers to the university tradition of organizing gatherings for graduates, while the word “gaudy” comes from the song “Gaudeamus Igitur”) is Harriet Vane, a female detective and crime author who appears in four of Sayers’ novels. The most consistent amateur detective of her books, however, is Lord Peter Wimsey, featured in a dozen or so novels and several short stories. Vane and Wimsey are caught up in a complex emotional dynamic and simultaneously compete with one another as detectives. In *Gaudy Night*, Harriet is approached by her former advisor from an Oxford college to help shed light on a series of unfortunate events unfolding on campus (anonymous threat letters, acts of vandalism). Under the pretext of researching the work of Sheridan le Fanu – yet in actuality, pursuing the perpetrator behind these deeds – Harriet spends a few months at the college. In the book, this becomes a chance for Sayers to depict the nuances of academic life and the complex and toxic interpersonal relationships endemic to this environment. In the end, however, it is not Vane who solves the

¹ *Słownik rodzajów i gatunków literackich (nowe wydanie)*, ed. Grzegorz Gazda, PWN, Warsaw 2012, p. 149 (the entry for *campus novel* is by Wojciech Nowicki).

² This period describes the 1920s and ‘30s. Its exemplary figure is Agatha Christie, and the canonical women authors of crime novels from the period include Margery Allingham, Josephine Tey (the pen name of Elizabeth MacKintosh) and Ngaio Marsh.

³ See E. Kraskowska, *Akademickie kryminały Amandy Cross*, “Nowa Dekada Krakowska” 2015, issues 1-2.

puzzle but Peter Wimsey, and the novel comes to a close with Wimsey asking for her hand in marriage and the resulting wedding. In spite of the novel's seemingly conventional ending, the theme of the women's struggle for independence and the right to education actually occupy a major place in the novel. As a result, *Gaudy Night* has often been hailed as the first feminist crime novel.

The core themes of the academic murder mystery define the remaining features of this genre variant. The focus of the action is either an individual hero leading the investigation, or a collective hero (the academic community). The novel plays out within the space of the college grounds, on a circumscribed campus or at the venue of an academic conference, for example. The settings often include the private apartments of lecturers and students. By way of this spatial dimension, the academic murder mystery becomes a new incarnation of the English "cosy mystery," brought to fame by the work of Agatha Christie and the television series *Midsummer Murders*, based on the novels of Caroline Grahams. On a temporal level, the action conforms to the specific calendar of the academic year. One idiosyncrasy of the academic murder mystery that binds the variant to the campus novel while differentiating it from other sub-genres of crime fiction consists of its common and semantically oriented layer of intertextual references and allusions to academic themes (theories, methodologies, research projects).

It seems to be the case that these methodological divergences and conflicts between scholars in fact lie at the very heart of the crime under investigation in the narrative. Such is the case, for instance, in several novels by Carolyn Heilbrun (1926-2003), an exemplary figure of late twentieth-century American feminist criticism. In 1963, Heilbrun began writing crime novels under the pen name Amanda Cross,⁴ for she was an Assistant Professor in the English Department at Columbia University and feared jeopardizing her chance at tenure if her activities as a crime writer came to light. The protagonist she conceived, the professor Kate Fansler, is a literary critic with a special talent for exposing the perpetrators of crime. At the same time, Kate is a woman of great beauty, with elegance, affluence, and independence. Elaine Showalter, the author of a study of campus novels written in a remarkably personal voice and a pioneer (alongside Heilbrun) of twentieth-century feminist criticism has described the figure of Kate Fansler as follows:

[...] a professor of Victorian literature at "one of the New York's largest and most prestigious universities" and a sort of "Our Gal Sunday" of the Ivy League. The ever-willowy Kate makes her appearance, "dressed for the patriarchy,"⁵ in a fashionable raincoat, elegant flat-heeled shoes, and an ultra-suede suit with a gold pin on the lapel. If anyone made a movie of this novel, I have a horrible suspicion that Kate would be played by Julia Roberts.⁶

Although Kate Fansler seems to voice no particular stance on feminist slogans, the independence she wields in the hyper-masculine Ivy League climate lends her figure a subversive edge. The most influential academic murder mystery she appears in is undoubtedly *Death in a Tenured*

⁴ See E. Kraskowska, *Akademickie kryminały Amandy Cross*, "Nowa Dekada Krakowska" 2015, issue 1-2.

⁵ A. Cross, *Death in a Tenured Position*, New York 1988, pp. 5, 9.

⁶ E. Showalter, *Faculty Towers. The Academic Novel and Its Discontents*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 2005, pp. 68-69. "Our Gal Sunday" is an allusion to a radio soap opera broadcast from 1937 to 1957 about an orphan in Colorado who marries a British aristocrat. The Ivy League – a term used broadly to describe the eight most prestigious American universities, one of which is Carolyn Heilbrun's Columbia University in New York.

Position (1981). The investigation followed here revolves around the mysterious death of Janet Mandelbaum, the first woman to receive tenure in Harvard's English Department. In this novel, the object of critique is the hardened patriarchy that dominates this exclusive world. The author's fictional literature professors hold up a mirror to their real prototypes, among them Walter Jackson Bate, the "[...] great Johnson scholar Walter Jackson Bate, one of Harvard's most distinguished curmudgeons, and an open antagonist of deconstruction and feminism."⁷

Robert Bernard Martin (1918-1999) was another author of academic murder mysteries, publishing under the pen name of Robert Bernard and working as a professor at Princeton University. Like Heilbrun, Martin was a scholar of Victorian literature. His most famous novel is *Deadly Meeting* (1970). The eponymous "deadly meeting" refers to the annual conference organized by the Modern Language Association (MLA), the most powerful American association of linguists and literary scholars. The novel's narrator is an English professor, and through his eyes, we encounter the tale behind the murder of a certain dean who was "cruel, overbearing, bigoted, philandering, and – worst of all – a critical barbarian."⁸ In an aside to her analysis of the novel, Elaine Showalter writes:

Mysteries also offer some deeper satisfactions, [...] they combine well with satire, and it is more fun to portray your enemy being whacked, or stooping to murder, than to try to write an empathetic life story [...]. The genre also lends itself to exploring small, closed societies, with intense passions lavished on matters that seem trivial to outsiders, long-standing grudges and debts, and almost-forgotten secrets from the past.⁹

In the 1980s, the circle of academic murder mystery authors was joined by Joan Smith, who brought us a series revolving around Loretta Lawson, a feminist and lecturer in English literature at the University of London. In the 1990s, Joanne Dobson, an Americanist from Fordham University, joined these ranks with her novels featuring yet another tenured female detective – Karen Pelletier. Elaine Showalter is particularly biting in her description of Dobson's prose:

In all her novels, Dobson gives a wicked picture of the Enfield English department, which has an extraordinary high homicide rate, the most sexually predatory and unprincipled male faculty members in the world, an unusual number of single parents, abandoned children, and secret affairs, and a large percentage of rich, obnoxious student majors. [...] Enfield English also has faculty members in queer studies, postmodernism, postcolonialism, post-Shakespeare studies, neo-Shakespeare studies, and animality.¹⁰

Showalter's study came out in 2005 and limits its focus to English-language publications. At the turn of the twenty-first century, however, the academic murder mystery subgenre expanded rapidly, and today, the roster of authors who fall in this camp has grown long. The art historian Christine Poulson, for instance, left behind her promising academic career at a Cambridge

⁷ Op. cit., p. 71.

⁸ Op. cit., p. 54

⁹ Op. cit., p. 52.

¹⁰ Op. cit., p. 95

college for the profits she was reaping with her crime novels about Cassandra James, a literary critic who unravels the mysteries behind crimes committed at Cambridge. Allen Simpson, a scholar of Scandinavian Studies at the University of Minnesota, writes crime novels under the pseudonym M. D. Lane. His novels play out in the domain of his home university, and the lead investigator is a female campus security officer. It is also worth mentioning Anne Fleming, a scholar of English Romanticism, whose novel *Death and Deconstruction* (1995) explores a murder committed during an academic conference at Norman Abbey, a monastery described in Canto XIII of Lord Byron's *Don Juan*. The American writer Sally Wright's crime novels, in turn, feature the protagonist Ben Reeves, an archivist (who also happens to be a World War II veteran). In *Publish and Perish* (1997), the opening novel of Wright's series, the archivist solves the riddle behind the sudden death of his close friend – a professor of literature.

The examples above are by no means exhaustive. One thing is certain – in the academic murder mystery world, women take the lead as both authors and heroes. To offer possible explanations for this phenomenon would require a standalone article. This being said, I should add that the first Polish contribution to the subgenre is also the work of a woman author. The debut novel of Professor Zofia Tarajło-Lipwska, a scholar of Bohemian Studies at the University of Wrocław, is written in the style of the satirical grotesque and titled *Death of a Dean. Down In the Well of Bad Feelings* (*Śmierć dziekana. W studni złych emocji*) (2014). In this case, the action plays out in the (fictional) Institute of Antiquity Studies at the Kuropaski University in Pasikurów. The Institute's Dean, Mirosław Korbieluch, is murdered. As one of the book's reviewers has noted: "this novel reflects the gray absurdity of campus reality in a distorted mirror."¹¹ Police commissioner Jacek Cichosz, who successfully closes the case in *Death of a Dean*, solves the riddle of yet another crime in Kurowice in Tarajło-Lipwska's most recent novel, *Recycling* (2017). If we seek some proof that the academic murder mystery can also function as a formula for high literature, we should turn to the case of Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* (1980). The book features a medieval monastery equipped with a labyrinthine library where Benedictine monks laboriously transcribe theological and philosophical manuscripts and a dispute over universalisms, calling to mind contemporary methodological debates, yet these tropes merely restage the hermetic space of the academy. In this case, the motives behind the crime are inextricably tied to emotions that run through the world of scholarship, and the rich inventory of erudite intertextual references offers a source of constant pleasure for the reader.

Ewa Kraskowska

transl. Eliza Cushman Rose

¹¹A. Urbańczyk, *W głębokiej studni*, "Forum Akademickie" 2015 issue 3. ("[p]owieść w krzywym zwierciadle ukazuje absurdy szarej, uczelnianej rzeczywistości")

KEYWORDS

crime novel

academic novel

Dorothy L. Sayers

ABSTRACT:

This article describes the academic murder mystery as a particular hybrid of the campus novel and crime novel. The genre began to evolve in the 1930s in English-language literature and continues to enjoy popularity today. Attempts to write in this genre have recently been taken up in Poland as well.

AMANDA CROSS

Eliza Showalter

*intertextuality***NOTE ON THE AUTHOR:**

Ewa Kraskowska is a Professor at the Institute of Polish Philology at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan. She is a literary critic and scholar of writing by women and literary translation. She directs the Faculty of Twentieth-Century Literature, Literary Theory and Translation Arts. She recently edited a monograph titled *Polish Writing by Twentieth-Century Women Authors: Processes and Genres, Situations and Subjects* (Poznan 2015).

Adrianna Woroch

***Scandinavian Crime Fiction,* or: A Few Words on Snow, Myth, and Murder**

C R I T I C S :
Agnieszka Adamowicz-Pośpiech,
Travels with Conrad: Essays
(*Podróże z Conradem. Szkice*), Kraków 2016.

Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen's book, published in 2017 and not yet translated into Polish, should offer a solid knowledge base for both the scholar of Scandinavian literature and culture and the average amateur reader who is simply a devoted fan of the crime genre. Stougaard-Nielsen ruthlessly deconstructs the idyllic myth of the welfare state. He lays bare the mechanisms of the depraved capitalist system lurking beneath its veneer and tells the story of the historical demise of ideas such as egalitarianism, progress and prosperity.

We should begin with an observation that may seem obvious: Stougaard-Nielsen is by no means original in the array of examples from literature and film he chooses to include in his book. In this sense, he is no different from his predecessors. The book *Nordic Noir: The Pocket Essential Guide to Scandinavian Crime Fiction, Film & TV*, published four years earlier by Barry Forshaw, analyzes the poetics of the Scandinavian school of crime fiction by referencing the exact same pool of novels and television series. Both authors invoke the classics of the genre (Stieg Larsson and Henning Mankell) as well as Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö – the couple who forged a mode of social critique

dressed up as “Scandi noir” in the 1970s. We could say the same of the book *Scandinavian Crime Fiction*, edited by Paula Arvas and Andrew Nestingen, and offering a multifaceted analysis of the genre. All these authors cover the same stylistic conventions and motifs that, taken together, have become the proper territory of Scandinavian crime fiction. In so doing, they paint a picture of the genre's broader cultural, literary and social context. They also all address the question of neoromantic trends (mentioned by Stougaard-Nielsen only twice in the context of the Gothic novel), Icelandic and Finnish prose (omitted wholesale from *Scandinavian Crime Fiction*), as well as issues of queer culture that continue to be relevant today.

The analytical method adopted by Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen follows a somewhat different route. He embeds each novel discussed in its socioeconomic context. He sketches a portrait of an ethnically homogeneous Scandinavian society and reveals the great potential in analyzing the language of crime novels. To give an example: he cites a passage describing homes that once “leaned on each other” and demonstrates how this anthropomorphizing device highlights the impression of bygone times that may have

been tougher, but were at least rooted in a sense of community. Several times, the author will hint at an intriguing idea without following up on it (as in his analysis of the symbolism behind the hero's name (Varga Veuma) in Gunnar Staalesen's series, or Staalesen's allusions to Nordic mythology). These promising interpretive seeds could undoubtedly have enriched the overall effect of *Scandinavian Crime Fiction*, but they are abruptly curtailed to leave room for the author to reiterate – for each subsequent novel – the same set of theses asserting the claim that the poetics of the Scandinavian crime novel and its protagonists' worldviews are all tools for delivering a critique of the social welfare state. Perhaps his most developed section is the analysis of Peter Høeg's novel *Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow*. Smilla, the book's protagonist, is a glaciologist of Greenlandic descent who lives in Denmark yet feels a foreigner. The author continues the trend popular in the '90s to adopt a voice that conveys the foreigner's experience of the welfare state. In this decade, Scandinavia was undergoing sweeping demographic, political, and cultural changes. The collapse of the economy, influx of refugees, and sharp rise of unemployment all contributed to an identity crisis experienced among Scandinavians. They suddenly had to confront the question: "what is my place in this new, dynamic reality?" And since Scandinavian-born populations turned a blind eye to these feelings, we can only presume that it was in fact the newcomers arriving from abroad who found themselves blocked at this major impasse. Stougaard-Nielsen draws our attention to the symbolism of the color white, which figures here as an ambiguous color that can be found on the façade of Smilla's building and simultaneously signifies the systemic veil thrown over the socially abject (associated with the ethnic Others living in white ghettos, if we follow the author's analysis). Stougaard-Nielsen also looks into the meaning behind the names of the concrete housing blocks painted in white, described in Danish as "det hvide snit," which

literally translates to "white cuts" and metaphorically evokes the act of lobotomy. This last term ultimately becomes a form of slang to describe the buildings. This contemptuous phrase was meant to foreground the foreigner's status as a second-class citizen cast out by society. Stougaard-Nielsen does not, however, develop this notion further but leaves it suspended in a sphere of meanings to be guessed at.

A critical reading of *Scandinavian Crime Fiction* yields the unshakeable impression that one crucial concept for the scholar (although it is never explicitly addressed in the text) is myth. This concept brings up a set of issues of social consciousness, and for all its capaciousness, it cannot be summarized in any concise definition. I will, however, allow myself to invoke two descriptions of this feature of social life which, in my opinion, figures as a line prompter hidden in the wings of Stougaard-Nielsen's book, quietly guiding the author's line of reasoning but never showing his face. The first quote comes from Robert Morrison MacIver's *The Web of Government* and designates two categories of tools mobilized to amass power: techniques and myths.

Techniki to wszelkiego rodzaju umiejętności i sposoby dowolnego manipulowania rzeczami i ludźmi traktowanymi jak rzeczy. Mity zaś to „przeniknięte wartościowaniem przekonania i pojęcia, które ludzie posiadają, według których i dla których żyją. [...] każde społeczeństwo jest powiązane systemem mitów, zespołem panujących form myślowych, które określają i podtrzymują wszystkie jego czynności. Każda cywilizacja, każdy okres, każdy naród ma swój charakterystyczny zespół mitów. W nim leży sekret społecznej jedności i społecznej trwałości, a jego zmiany tworzą historię wewnętrzną każdego społeczeństwa”¹

¹ R.M. MacIver, *The Web of Government*, New York 1947, pp. 4-5.

The welfare system wielded a similar power to establish societal bonds in the 1950s, when it was still a relatively new phenomenon. Its task was to shape a society that would be modern, socially democratic, and advanced. In principle, the northern periphery of Europe was to provide an ideal model of the nation that its southern neighbors would ultimately strive to emulate.

Yet for MacIver, myth was a neutral concept, so there is little sense in assessing the accuracy or falsehood of a given myth. It would seem that for the author of *Scandinavian Crime Fiction*, the model of the Scandinavian welfare nation qualifies as a false myth, and it is at this juncture that the two authors' paths diverge. While adopting a traditional conception of the function of myth and conceding its role to sanctify the existing social order, the school of Nordic Noir might suggest, rather, that the welfare nation model falls squarely within this field. In the noir genre, Scandinavian writers found an inexhaustible wellspring of inspiration for spawning increasingly inventive, macabre tales that were singularly expressive of their circumstances.

The second definition of myth I find compelling was conceived by George Schöpfung. He emphasizes the enormous symbolic strength implicit in myth and its effects:

Mit jest jednym ze sposobów, w jaki zbiorowości – (...) zwłaszcza narody – ustalają i określają podstawy swego istnienia, własne systemy moralności i wartości. Tak rozumiany mit jest zbiorem wierzeń zbiorowości o sobie samej, przybierających formę opowieści (...). Członkowie zbiorowości mogą zdawać sobie sprawę, że mit, który akceptują, nie jest w pełni ścisły, lecz ponieważ mit nie jest historią, nie ma to znaczenia. Ważna jest treść mitu, nie ścisłość jego historycznych danych.²

In the golden age of the Scandinavian welfare state, society dreamt up this kind of narrative to make sense of their situation. Among Scandinavian populations, a trend emerged to fulfill one's social duty by assisting the police in their investigations. This cooperation between civil servants and civilians therefore become an instrumental piece of the welfare myth's functionality. Yet little by little, this myth was compromised as its dystopian character came to light. The society of the future suddenly found itself trapped within a state of unending imprisonment, escalating xenophobia, and a bureaucratic system that was slowly encroaching on social life. Stougaard-Nielsen tries to furnish proof that crime novels lucidly reflect this crisis of identity experienced by the Nordic nations.

Scandinavian Crime Fiction demonstrates that Scandinavian writers working in the mode of crime fiction force their readers to confront the illusion lingering in the wake of the welfare system fantasy. For Stougaard-Nielsen, the crime novel becomes an effective tool for describing societies in the throes of drastic change. It should come as no surprise, then, that this genre has found its proper home in Scandinavia, of all places, and in a century witnessing escalating globalization, conflict, and inequality. To shed light on the ramifications of the welfare state crisis, the author focuses on lone wolf protagonists: detectives, victims, and evildoers alike. For all of the above are united by a sense of being stranded within the superficial morass of consumerist reality dominated by the interests of the middle class. In this context, the authors themselves become particularly relevant. Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö, for instance, two forerunners of the genre who based their ten-volume Martin Beck series on actual crimes, used the genre to convey their far-left views of the depraved world of the new proletariat spawned by consumerist society. The authors portray the dilemmas of the welfare state citizen who must constantly struggle for status

² G. A. Hosking, G. Schöpfung, *Myths and Nationhood*, New York 1997, pp. 19-20.

and has no choice but to participate in a career-centered model of social existence.

The very idea of the welfare state system first took shape in an era that witnessed the radical restructuring of urban space and public life in the years following World War II. At the time, sweeping plans were being drawn up to remodel the citizen and her role in her environment. Urban planners attempted a comprehensive overhaul of agglomeration systems throughout all of Scandinavia. Public transportation, office buildings, and residential buildings were to play a role in shaping the “pure society of the future,” eliminating inequalities and subverting archaic traditions and their monocultural model of living. Yet it was not long before fully autonomous “ABC towns” (such as Vällingby in Sweden) were proven to be misguided ideas, for instead of bringing their populations together, they enforced segregation, and instead of engaging them in collective life, they led to alienation.

Stougaard-Nielsen takes the Norrmalmstorg bank robbery in Stockholm in 1973 as the symbolic starting point of the systemic crisis of these northern nations. He argues that this event marks a fundamental blurring of the borders between good and evil that had once seemed so fixed. Upon their release, the hostages spoke of their captor in almost glowing terms. Rather than framing him as a criminal, they saw him as a victim of the system – perhaps a bit lost, but at the end of the day, a good man (we encounter a similar motif of the hero ill-fitted for the new reality and lured by the freeing power of crime in Anders Bodelsen’s *Think of a Number*). The robbery, which played out live on television, triggered a surge of popularity for crime stories in Scandinavia. Crime became a mass spectacle, and the illusion that the welfare state is equipped to eradicate all evil was shattered. Citizens ceased to place their trust in institutions, which in turn burst the bubble of security and protection they had once taken for granted. A wave of anxiety

ensued that was easily converted into xenophobia and nationalism later on, in the 1990s. And so, towards the end of the 1970s, the idea of the “People’s Home” (*Folkhemmet*), postulated in 1928 by Per Albin Hansson, chairman of the Social Democratic Workers’ Party of Sweden, collapsed. To settle accounts in its wake, Nordic Noir was born. Narratives conceived in this emerging genre raise issues of financial crisis, (un)stable families, the search for self-identity, societal bonds, and reasserting the role of the nation in late modernity.

Alongside myth, another critical category for the crime novel is nostalgia. Scandinavian novels are steeped in a deep longing for a once-powerful social order, a feeling of belonging, and values that have since been lost. Yet as Stougaard-Nielsen indicates, these things are features of an invented past painted in the light of a “false nostalgia” for an idealized image of reality as it never, in fact, existed. This kind of counterfeit perception of the past becomes visible in Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö’s *The Man on the Balcony*. In this text, the couple offers a critique of consumerism and expresses nostalgia for local tradition and mom-and-pop stores. Later on, twenty-first century crime novels reorganized this paradigm and did away with its nostalgic mood and its idealization of the authenticity and social unity of bygone times. In lieu of interpersonal bonds, they propose a post-welfare model of individualism and the re-negotiation of traditional gender roles. In the crime novel model that has emerged over the last two decades (most visibly in television production), emancipated women have decided to reject the imperative to conform their priorities to society’s expectations (take, for example, the journalist Annika Bengtzon from Liza Marklund’s series, or the cold and recalcitrant heroines of the television series *The Killing* and *The Bridge*).

In spite of the somewhat redundant and perhaps chaotic nature of *Scandinavian Crime Fiction*,

the book as a whole conveys a certain coherent portrait of the Scandinavian crime novel. The genre consists of elements such as: nostalgia, realism, action set in snowy or rainy landscapes, social critique (with a scope that looks beyond local concerns and attends to issues like capitalism and neocolonialism), a critique of the prison system and social welfare system, an authenticity established by referencing actual crimes, the promotion of socialist ideas, and finally, lone wolf heroes skeptical of the justness of national institutions.

As I mentioned earlier, Stougaard-Nielsen's book might offer a valuable point of reference for research on the Scandinavian crime novel. The question is merely: to what extent? At a moment when this genre has grown vastly popular and the volume of bibliographic publications on the subject is equally vast (in relation to the genre's short timeline), there is still a need for basic analyses and preliminary overviews that are presumably already available in multiple articles and publications, not least those by Barry Forshaw.

transl. Eliza Cushman Rose

KEYWORDS

Scandinavian crime fiction

Scandi noir

JAKUB STOUGAARD-NIELSEN

myth

the welfare state

ABSTRACT:

This article is a review of Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen's book *Scandinavian Crime Fiction*. The author takes a firmly critical position towards the welfare state in practice and as an idea. He demonstrates that it is the consequence of the rampantly developing capitalist system and merely intensifies class differences rather than effacing them. Stougaard-Nielsen analyzes examples of Scandinavian crime fiction from both literature and television and presents them in their expansive cultural and economic contexts. The author identifies crime fiction's capacity to reflect the identity crisis of Scandinavian society and in so doing, expose the idea of the welfare state as a false narrative.

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR:

Adrianna Woroch is a graduate of the Film Studies and Media Criticism program at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. Her research interests include: contemporary cinema of the Middle East, auto-reflexivity in film, and film's relationship to other media. Under the auspices of the Diamond grant program, she is working on the project *The Disintegration of Internal Frames in Film. Techniques of Disillusionment in Contemporary Cinema* (*Rozpad wewnętrznych ram dzieła filmowego. Techniki deziluzyjne w kinie współczesnym*).