

# “If Things Are To Go On...” – Potentiality and Entropy in Magdalena Tulli’s Early Prose

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One of the consequences of accommodating elements of language and including them in syntactic and, later on, textual sequences, is the implication of continuity and the presumption of emphasis<sup>1</sup>. A prose text, especially a novel, announces a reconstruction of a point of view, perhaps even a few simultaneously, by exhibiting the role of the storyteller. At the same time, it contains a reference to a particular design of the world, which is determined by the choice of narrative. Whether this world can be referred to as ‘setting’ or merely a ‘suggestion’, embedded into an irremovable tension between a reader’s idea and a typical reference to lexicalised elements of language – this is a different issue. Suffice it to point to the metaphoric potential of a communicative situation, orchestrated by means of consecutive utterances occurring within a coherent text. In other words, it partly invokes the problem of reference<sup>2</sup>. In literary studies this issue has been considered at the level of fiction: Roman Ingarden’s concretisation or Jerzy Ziomek’s concept of FPR (fictional point of reference), on the one hand, pointed to the potenti-

<sup>1</sup> See Z. Saloni, M. Świdziński, *Składnia współczesnego języka polskiego [Syntax of modern Polish]*, Warszawa 2007, pp. 108–122.

<sup>2</sup> See D. Davidson, *Inquires into Truth and Interpretation*, Oxford University Press 1991.

ality of a text (by the same token – to its ability to radiate an ontological coating of its own being, its rooting in a fictional world), and, on the other, they demonstrated its relations with the real world, i.e. insufficiency, incompleteness and the openness of a reality created with words<sup>3</sup>.

In light of the above, this article focuses on the literary syntax in the prose of Magdalena Tulli. The originality of the author's language has been the focus of numerous publications<sup>4</sup>, but we would like to propose a closer look at a few specific phenomena, which require an interdisciplinary, i.e., a linguistic/literary approach<sup>5</sup>. This is not a new idea; Roman Jakobson advocated including poetics within literary studies. In translating this well-known theoretical demand into practice, we will try to answer the question "How does the form speak?" or, more precisely, "How does the author build senses, utilising the possibilities of the linguistic material?". Among the phenomena observed in Magdalena Tulli's prose it is worth listing first stylistic accommodation<sup>6</sup>, elements of metasyntax or the project of 'arranging syntax'. All of

<sup>3</sup> See R. Ingarden, *Z teorii dzieła literackiego*, in: *Problemy teorii literatury*. ["From the theory of a literary work", in: *Problems of literary theory*] vol. 1, ed. by H. Markiewicz, Wrocław 1987; J. Ziomek, *Fikcyjne pole odniesienia a problem quasi-sądów*, in: *Wypowiedź literacka a wypowiedź filozoficzna* ["Fictitious field of reference and the problem of quasi-judgements", in: *Literary statement vs. Philosophical statement*], ed. by M. Głowiński, J. Sławiński, Wrocław 1982.

<sup>4</sup> One must emphasise that the question of (non-)setting, i.e., of complex reference analysed in the context of Magdalena Tulli's early works has been addressed by Agnieszka Izdebska, who reconstructed the discussion on the problem of metaliterariness or interpretative potentiality ("Proza Magdaleny Tulli – w kręgu wieloznacznej referencji", in: *Inna literatura? Dwudziestolecie 1989-2009* ["The prose of Magdalena Tulli – in the circle of ambiguous references", in: *A different literature? The decades 1989-2009*], ed. by Z. Andres, J. Pasterski, vol. 1, pp. 303–322 (Rzeszów 2010)). The author also quotes extensively from scholars reactant to Tulli's subsequent prose works (e.g., P. Czapliński, T. Kunz or K. Uniłowski). Her methods of building a story are also studied by Elżbieta Dutka (who also writes on the state of art in studies on this topic) in "Historyjki czy historie? Parabole czy alegorie?: o prozie Magdaleny Tulli" ["Stories or histories? Parables or allegories? On Magdalena Tulli's prose", in: *Skład osobowy: szkice o prozaikach współczesnych* [*List of persons: studies on contemporary prose writers*]. Part 1, ed. by A. Nęcka, D. Nowacki, J. Pasterska, pp. 525–550 (Katowice 2014)]. At the same time, one should also mention outstanding commentators of the works by the author of "Skaza", who pointed to issues of language peculiarities, metaphoric potential or incongruence of the phrase, especially P. Czapliński – *Wobec literackości (2): Metafikcja i nieepicki model prozy* ["On literariness (2): Metafiction and a non-epic model of prose"], in his *Ślady przełomu. O prozie polskiej 1976–1996* [*Traces of a breakthrough. On Polish prose 1976-1996*] (Kraków 1997), T. Mizerkiewicz – *Dezautomatyzacja skojarzeń kulturowych i wolność literatury – "Sny i kamienie" Magdaleny Tulli* [Deautomation of cultural associations and the freedom of literature – Magdalena Tulli's "Sny i kamienie"], in his *Stylizacje mityczne w prozie polskiej po 1968 roku* [*Mythical stylings in Polish prose post-1968*] (Poznań 2001), A. Morawiec – "Sny i kamienie" Magdaleny Tulli – płaszczyzny odczytań ["Magdalena Tulli's *Sny i kamienie* – planes of interpretation"], in: *Literatura polska 1990–2000* [*Polish literature 1990-2000*], ed. by T. Cieślak, K. Pietrych, vol. 2 (Kraków 2002), E. Wiegandt – *Postmodernistyczne alegorie Magdaleny Tulli* ["Magdalena Tulli's postmodern allegories"], in: *Nowe dwudziestolecie. Szkice o wartościach i poetykach prozy i poezji lat 1989–2009* [*The new Twenties. Studies on the values and poetics of prose and poetry of 1989-2009*], ed. by P. Śliwiński (Poznań 2011), M. Zaleski – *Za plecami narratora. Rozmowa z Magdaleną Tulli* [*Behind the narrator's back. In conversation with Magdalena Tulli*], "Res Publica Nowa" 1999, issue 5–6 or A. Zieniewicz – *Przedmiot (w) opowieści. Relacja jako stwarzanie wydarzeń w prozie współczesnej (na przykładzie powieści Magdaleny Tulli)* ["The subject in/ of the story. Relation as creating events in contemporary prose (on the example of Magdalena Tulli's novel)", in: *Narracje po końcu (wielkich) narracji. Kolekcje, obiekty, symulakra...* [*Narratives after the end of (great) narratives. Collections, objects, simulacra*], ed. by H. Gosk, A. Zieniewicz (Warszawa 2007)]. Tulli's prose works have also been extensively reviewed, due to their originality (see [http://www.ppibl.ibl.waw.pl/mediawiki/index.php?title=Magdalena\\_TULLI](http://www.ppibl.ibl.waw.pl/mediawiki/index.php?title=Magdalena_TULLI); accessed 30.10.2021 r.).

<sup>5</sup> This perspective on Tulli's prose was adopted by Ewa Sławkowa, who analysed the problem of nominalisation in a broader context of semantic study. Referring to "Sny i kamienie", Sławkowa writes: "In her vision of the world as a history of a town Tulli is thus moving away from the problem of meaning viewed from the perspective of truth-based referential semantics (from an objectivist model), turning towards more recent trends in the theory of meaning, which prefer a subjectivist model. "Sny i kamienie" are undoubtedly sponsored by a cultural theory of language, close to anthropological-cognitive approaches. This involves a way of thinking about language as a phenomenon related to cultural phenomena: on the one hand, as part of social behaviours, in the service of communication, on the other – as a tool of mentally capturing the world by humans" ("Sny i kamienie – *traktat o języku: Magdaleny Tulli ćwiczenia z semantyk* [*Sny i kamienie* - a treatise on language: Magdalena Tulli's exercise in semantics"], in *Tekst literacki w kręgu językoznawstwa* [*Literary text in the circle of linguistics*] vol. 1, Katowice 2012, pp. 15–38).

<sup>6</sup> See T. Skubalanka, *Podstawy analizy stylistycznej. Rozważania o metodzie* [*Principles of stylistic analysis. Studies in methods*], Lublin 2001.

these elements herald an emphasis on literary grammar first, with interpretative propositions coming second. There is a variety and richness of publications available on the latter topic, anyway. The perspective proposed here will be useful for future readings and analyses of this author's interesting and enigmatic writing.

Because of the characteristic features of the writer's works, we will be referring to her first four novels, published between 1995 and 2006<sup>7</sup>. Our initial assumption is that these texts can be analysed with reference to the linguistic phenomena described here; this choice corresponds with previous studies on the literary features of Tulli's works. The four texts considered here are a preview of the writer's later development. Moreover, they have not been too exploited in interpretative terms, which makes them an interesting and inspiring context for shedding light on the author's works as a whole.

The reader's unease resulting from reading Tulli's earlier works, due to their interpretative labyrinth and ambiguity, can be attributed to a few factors. The first is their imitative devices: these include the issue of origins (of a story, a city, an event), the sequence of events (their mutual relations, dependencies, consequences), and, finally – the use of analogy. The latter is probably the central element. This is because her condensed prose works contain reminiscences of Polish history (“Sny i kamienie” [“Dreams and stones”], “Skaza” [“Scar”]), of moral standards (“W czerwieni” [“In red”], “Tryby” [“Cogs”]) or of basic anthropological questions (all four novels). Moreover, all of these texts make literary references (in varying degrees) to Schulz, Kafka, Calvino and others. The above-mentioned unease, however, is not a consequence of this recalling, but results from the effect of the story. The dynamics of reader participation in these prose works also involves dealing with a peculiar abundance: an abundance of meanings and an abundance of signs. That abundance is not caused by a verbal overrepresentation of the text; rather, it stems from the way in which the linguistic image of a scene is construed. This is so because evoking a linguistic image of the world is here the reader's prerogative. The specific properties of a scene, we believe, are a consequence of the way in which the language of the story is organized, i.e., of literary syntax.

## 1. The entropic story<sup>8</sup> – simultaneity and aftermath

It is tempting to condense a story which focuses on a main event. A literary example of such a condensed form is the classical novella, a perfectly disciplined genre, in which everything centres around the so-called ‘falcon of the novella’. This equally concerns language – in formal language it often means filtering the message to the necessary (and informatively clear) minimum, which – ideally – creates the impression that the cause-and-effect order is natural for the world. In colloquial language, in turn, one can discern spontaneous signals of multifactoriality: a richness of pronouns, retrospectives or lexical changes in the course of the

<sup>7</sup> These are: “Sny i kamienie” (1995), “W czerwieni” (1998), “Tryby” (2003) and “Skaza” (2006). Relevant quotations will be marked as, respectively, Sik, WC, T and S, with appropriate page number.

<sup>8</sup> See E. Zygan, *Literacka (?) rzeczywistość Trybów Magdaleny Tulli [Literary (?) reality of Magdalena Tulli's “Cogs”]*, in: *Literackie obrazy świata 3. Fikcje urealnione [Literary images of the world 3. Authenticated fictions]*, ed. by A. Luboń, M. Karpińska, Rzeszów 2019, pp. 109–121.

story. Apparent breaks in continuity tend to have a binding effect, however. This is because all elements of a spontaneous complementation are proof of the surprising progress of the narrated story, of partial causes, emerging in the midst of a phenomenon, and of nonlinearity which is not easily extrapolated onto the entire text. The same thing happens in everyday communication. Bearing in mind this differentiation, let us now have a look at a fragment of Tulli's prose:

What if one were to start fencing these stories with a wire mesh; just like that, to keep things in order, so that everybody knows where each story begins, where it ends and to whom it belongs? One thing is certain: the ground would be both inside and outside, on our and not on our side, equally stony. This is no use, too: a fence is no obstacle for earthworms and moles; vagrants jump over it effortlessly when no one is watching. Clouds, when they are set free, at least go wherever the wind blows and never come back, which cannot be said about questions buried in the barren sands of stories. The very thought of their monotonous trickling makes one tired [T 30].

And further on:

There are plenty of stories everywhere; because of an unstoppable demand one can obtain any amount of them dirt-cheap. And yet, nobody wants them; the narrator too, would rather steer clear of them. If, however, an incident like this one attracts their attention, this is only because of some additional possibilities it keeps hidden. Once they are released, they will inevitably change the course of all subsequent sentences; at least until the end of the paragraph [T 33].

Highlighting the "story" also emphasises specific elements of tales, which are organically dependent. Syntax governs the course of events, but this is a consequence of the narrator's awareness of arrangement, establishing dependencies between particular objects, states, activities, which are at best an imitation of the logic of what follows.

Can we then suspect the narrator's utterances in Tulli's prose of being colloquial? Absolutely. In this critical adaptation of the short story as an activity which emphasises the potentiality of choice (of objects, dependencies, stories understood as moments of condensation, specific states of concentration of content) one can find the rationale for considering the prose of the author of "Tryby" as an entropic story. Partial reasons, i.e., ad hoc, accidental arrangements, which are not sequentially justified throughout entire narrative, only in specific moments of condensation – these are basic phenomena which make the narrative similar to colloquialisms, not due to lexicon but, above all, to syntax.

Entropy is understood as a spontaneous dispersion of energy, and the yardstick for the level of chaos becomes here the main source of analogy. It is worth emphasizing, however, that we are focusing on aspects of syntax (broadly incorporating semantic consequences of an extended connectivity) and, consequently, text. This means that it is not so much the figure of the narrator which is important, but the structure of the sentences which tell the story and construe the image of the subject speaking that matters most. Let us now consider another prose fragment:

It is the nature of entirety that is at fault here, for it knows no moderation. Paved with good intentions, supported by broken moral imperatives, the world always starts to crumble here or there. Every such collapse proves to be disastrous for someone; every one is followed by desperate cries for help. The iron laws of acoustics make them inaudible. It is hard to renounce inattention, a well-fed, self-involved dislike for detail. A too intimate knowledge of things always imposes some kind of obligations [S 172–173].

We are then getting an image of the world in which repetitive, and yet unpredictable phenomena occur. There is also personification at the service of entropy, or rather equality of subjects, because Tulli's semantic connectivity seems to be affected by the entirety of paradigmatic richness. This is a significant sign of entropy being realised at the level of syntax. Nominal categories are not conventionally assigned 'animate' or 'inanimate' labels. Their agency (or, unpredictability) manifests itself in an extended connectivity. This is happening within the boundaries of predicate-argument relations (*stories are becoming audible, nature knows no moderation*), as attributive modifiers (*self-involved dislike for details, collapse of the world*). This manner of questioning the basic categorisation within the boundaries of the common image of the world creates space for emergent events, i.e., such events, which (seemingly for no reason) materialise out of complex, multi-element orders. It is not the (human) narrator who determines the course of events – they happen so independently that the syntax of the managed story (by the moment, by the narrator) becomes a yardstick for chaos. Potentiality, however, is not creativity. Rather, it is an incompatibility of the descriptive tool with the richness of circumstances; an aporia of context. In that case every textual exposition becomes a fragment, a miniature of the world, a transient closed circuit, where linguistic relations operate but only on the rights of a fleeting metaphor. The latter is called to life by the narrator of the story<sup>9</sup>, who is also a function of the text and a metaphor in itself. The existence of the narrator figure (or, the subject) is rooted exclusively in language, although it exists on the boundary of worlds, in an ontological rift<sup>10</sup>.

Let us consider yet another example – this time from “Sny i kamienie”:

Once the tree of the world was ignited with the living fire and the ashen leaves fell off its branches; a lost seed began to sprout not long after. Why then, why there and why like that? It was all dependent on the unique properties of the season, the quality of the soil and the winds. Simply put, it could happen no other way. At the same time, public buildings and housing complexes began to grow; big, medium and small, towering and bulky, ornamental or ordinary [SiK 7].

<sup>9</sup> This issue, in the context of considerations on affects, was taken up by Marek Zaleski in his essay *Niczym mydło w grze w scrabble* (*Like a blank in Scrabble*) in: “Teksty Drugie: teoria literatury, krytyka, interpretacja” issue 6 (144), 2013, pp. 33–47.

The author writes: “Every fact, even one from the world of nature, is accessible only through somebody's story about it. In this way it implies patterns of narrative, i.e., explaining it and contextualizing it against other facts. The “story”. Obscuring the meaning with words directs our understanding of the world and its interpretations. And if there are no pure events, only their interpretations, all our statements about the world are only a fragment of our autobiography – if so, then the question of responsibility for our ideas and the “stories” we produce becomes even more prominent (pp. 42–43).

<sup>10</sup>For the purposes of this text the narrator is both the “I” speaking and the subject of a given work, without differentiating between communicative levels.

Tulli consistently utilises semantic expanded connectivity, which is also – typical for the author – material for metaphoric constructions. It is worth noting that the image of the tree of the world which opens the micronovel "Sny i kamienie" is not an isolated metaphor. The characteristic potential of an entropic story creates the effect of a dispersed metaphor, which makes us consider semantic phenomena in the space of the text, rather than locally. The decompression of metaphoricality is then an effect caused by at least two factors: the already mentioned expanded semantic connectivity, which motivates a redefining of the elements of the setting (simply put, it redefines the meanings of nominal categories because nouns are the basic exponents of categorisation), as well as through the instability of the narrative perspective, expressed by the stylistic variability of the story, and – on a different level – the changeability of the narrative point of view and the already mentioned ontological imbalance of the subject, who creates the setting along with themselves, without renouncing references to a non-textual reality (like, for instance, intertextual references).

We shall define the latter issue by means of the concept of stylistic accommodation.

## 2. Articulation of multiplicity

Before we consider the issue of abundance as a feature of literary expression<sup>11</sup> (from a stylistic perspective), let us recall the issue of redundancy, which provides a broader context for the concept of abundance. This approach is justified, since this phenomenon is motivated by its own theory of information, which, in turn, makes an obvious reference to entropy. At its core, redundancy evokes an abundance – of information, text or stylistic exposition. Studied in reference to informative texts, it allows one to distance oneself from negative valuation, because in any manifestation of abundance – in repetition, paraphrase, self-reference – there is a potential of successful interaction, a change of accents, persuasion or manipulation<sup>12</sup>.

In literary texts redundancy plays somewhat different roles, on the premise that no abundance can be read as objective informativeness. This means that in principle, abundance is

<sup>11</sup>A feature, let us add, which has characterised and defined literariness since the times of Roman Jakobson. The "abundance of literature in literature" in Tulli's works is also pointed to by Agnieszka Izdebska (A. Izdebska, *Proza...*, p. 304).

<sup>12</sup>Agnieszka Kula in her *Redundancja w mediach. Studium pragmatolingwistyczne [Redundancy in the media. A pragmatolinguistic study]* (Poznań 2017) performed an in-depth analysis of the manners of understanding and defining redundancy. She first noted a specific paradox: "redundancy is not really the concern of contemporary linguists, (...) in library catalogue there is a visible lack of literature on this concept from the perspective of the humanities; more specifically – two disciplines reign supreme when it comes to this notion: theory of information and language culture. This is one of central reasons why abundance as a synonym of redundancy holds sway: for both perspectives this is a sufficient reference, although for different reasons. In the information theory framework abundance is stock, a reserve securing the signal (positive valuation); in the cultural linguistic perspective – it is a transgression of norms (negative evaluation) (pp. 10-11). The issue discussed by Kula is of primary importance, although perhaps the reign she mentions is not supreme: rather, redundancy is interpreted as needless abundance, superfluity.

More recent linguistic approaches to information theory are discussed, e.g., by M. Osiewicz and K. Skibski in "Struktura statystyczna polskiego systemu graficznego. Analiza historyczno-porównawcza" ["Statistical structure of Polish graphic system"] (*Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne. Seria Językoznawcza* 2012, Vol. 19 (issue 2), pp. 87–116).

an organic feature of literary texts as a parameter indirectly proportional to the volume of the text. To exemplify, ellipsis is a phenomenon underlining the potentiality of a multiplicity of solutions to accommodate for a lack experienced at the textual level. Grammatical incompleteness is in this textual case an exponent of abundance, because the multiplicity of possibilities for complementation does not meet the basic criterion, exhibiting instead varied (and justified by the literary nature of the text) solutions (interpolations, explications<sup>13</sup>).

Redundancy in a literary text can also assume other forms. In Magdalena Tulli's prose it manifests itself primarily through a multiplicity of hypothetical perspectives expressed by the subjects, an abundance of elements of language functionalized in descriptions and a multi-threaded narrative.

One might recall here an image from "Skaza": tram rails are arranged around a square, creating a closed circle. One day, some people arrive on a tram, first there are only a few, later there are many more. They arrive and have nowhere to go, because the square is in harmony with the usual ways of thinking about the world of the people living in the area (one could say, it is a tailored world). We are thus dealing with abundance understood simply as the impossibility of justifying specific phenomena in relation to accepted principles of organising a bigger whole. The very emergence of additional objects is unjustified; so is their role in the current order.

Is there not enough old, local worries for everybody? We don't need new problems. One must realise that along with those travellers, with their coats and scarves and ushankas, a colder weather, foreign to present conditions, will arrive in the shape of snow blizzards or bitter frost. One could only hope that, when these threads they have dragged here with them are nipped in the bud, the travellers will sit for a while on their suitcases and then disappear, having nothing left to hold on to. Just like that, they will evaporate, bringing an end to the unexpected breakdown of order and the *status quo ante* will return [S 66–67].

Considering this type of abundance, which orders (by way of simple functionality tests) to accept the incompatibility of the elements introduced to the whole, is only seemingly inappropriate in reference to Tulli's way of construing a story. The foundation of this manner of structuring utterances is the problem of reference and resultant minimal expectations.

Let us assume (following "late" wittgensteinian thought) that the manner of evaluating descriptions is preceded and determined by earlier uses of language<sup>14</sup>. We are not refer-

<sup>13</sup>In this meaning redundancy becomes one of the paradoxes discerned in A. Kula's monograph. By the way, it should be emphasized that the book covers more than abundance in the media, which definitely opens up the perspective for tracing redundancy in artistic texts.

<sup>14</sup>Cf. M. Zaleski, op. cit., p. 35. The scholar, who analyses (following Deleuze) relations between the concepts of essence and cognition through affect ("Essences are something transgressing both the subjective state of the cognizing subject and the properties of the cognized object"), adds: "Does the language, in which meanings become in a game of differences, is not a matrix for such cognition? Every use of language participates in its systematicity, but systematicity manifests itself through use. However, one use is unlike any other. According to Deleuze, it is literature that is such manifestation of language, in which essences (and differences) are most intensely heard by means of individual style".

ring here simply to the category of the linguistic game, because it might just as well be considered in the context of earlier uses as well as current use (including the literary statement, read and interpreted by the recipient<sup>15</sup>). The grammatical (dynamic) stability of the language, emerging from continuous linguistic activities, results in specific receptive expectations. We are not referring here to the formal parameters of linguistic texts (which include the normative aspect in the prescriptive meaning), but a manner of understanding or evaluating a statement as acceptable or not. It is such a non-isomorphic approach that allows us to study the narrative, which does not strictly refer to extralinguistic reality but to a specific area of language use<sup>16</sup>. This manner of framing referentiality is reminiscent of non-referential semantics (in accordance with the current approach in literature), which, in its basic function, points to the emergence of meaning from a network of contextual periphrases, rather than from a structure of linguistic elements endowed with specific semantic properties<sup>17</sup>.

The passage above makes no claim to be a final statement on understanding grammar; it merely emphasizes the fact that in the case of literary grammar (Magdalena Tulli's prose is an original example of such) semantic potentiality of the narrative is inextricably linked to the dynamics of language use, which refers to the space of meanings of language use preceding this narrative.

We are thus faced with two problems. One of them concerns metalinguistic issues and focuses on the reference of the narrator's language to a typical (expected) language used by somebody speaking about some events. In this sense Tulli's narrator is discursive and their utterance requires a special receptive strategy, which will ensure the coherence of the text. The other problem, connected with the above-quoted fragment illustrating redundancy, is related to the events described, whose reference (i.e., justification in the logical, cause-and-effect order of the text) also requires a distinct strategy. Without that strategy it is easy to go from abundance to the allegation of illegibility, a lack of clarity or incongruity of the events exhibited in the description.

Let us discuss this on the example of "Skaza". First, let us quote a longer fragment of the novel.

Meanwhile, the tram has managed to make another round and is halfway through the next one. The servant girl gets off at the stop next to the gymnasium. She carries a basket of vegetables

<sup>15</sup>See E. Chrzanowska-Kluczevska, *Language-games: pro and against*, Kraków 2004.

<sup>16</sup>See E. Bińczyk, *Obraz, który nas zniewala. Współczesne ujęcia języka wobec esencjalizmu i problemu referencji* [An image which captivates. Modern approaches to language versus essentialism and the problem of reference] (Kraków 2007, p. 136–150), A. Gawroński, *Dlaczego Platon wykluczył poetów z Państwa? U źródeł współczesnych badań nad językiem* [Why did Plato exclude poets from the State? Sources of early studies of language] (Warszawa 1984, pp. 65–152); M. Wołos, *Koncepcja "gry językowej" Wittgensteina w świetle badań współczesnego językoznawstwa* [Wittgenstein's concept of "language game" in the light of modern linguistic studies] (Kraków 2002),

<sup>17</sup>Non-referential semantics in the context of Donald Davidson's philosophy was addressed by J. Maciaszek (*Filozofia Donalda Davidsona. Podstawy semantyki* [Donald Davidson's philosophy. Basics of semantics], "Bibliotheca Philosophica" 4 (2019), Łódź 2019, pp. 111–170. See also E. Bińczyk, A. Derra, *Wybrane problemy programu semantycznego Donalda Davidsona* [Selected problems of Donald Davidson's semantic program], "Przegląd Filozoficzny" 2006, issue 2 (58), pp. 179–194; D. Davidson, op. cit., p. 215–226.

and chicken to make broth for the notary and his family. The police officer, perhaps, would gladly grab this basket and carry it up the kitchen stairs, especially if he were younger or plainclothed, but the seriousness of his uniform and his service prevent him from doing that, so he will just snap his fingers against the bill of his cap. She is invitingly sulking and looks at him for a while but does not stop. She disappears in the gate at number seven. She does not care which part of a bigger whole this fragment of the quarter was ripped from, which big city this is supposed to be a part of. One should add that the griffin or the eagle on the police officer's cap is a miniature of the national emblem from above the gate of the municipality; one of those numerous predators, white, black, silver, two-headed and varied, usually sitting on the facades of public buildings. Their posture and shape of talons and wings depends on where the action is taking place. The police officer, teased by the view of belfries and towers in the background, above the roofs, in the mist of separation (therefore not quite obvious) also has the right to know, does he not? But he will never ask about it, satisfied with the soothing sound of the word "here". It is not happening here or there. It all fits in itself like in a glass ball, which contains everything that is necessary in any circumstance [S 21–22].

The narrator's discursiveness emerges almost as a reaction to the impossibility of a simultaneous description from multiple perspectives. Narrating current events is focused on the person leaving the tram (*she alights, carries, looks, does not stop, etc.*) but also includes the potentiality or the consecutiveness of further events (*perhaps, he would gladly grab, he will snap his fingers*). Additionally, there appears a consideration of broader contexts, details, influencing this situation (*one needs to add*) or the perspective of the police-officer, who is a co-participant of this scene (*he has the right to know, he will never ask about it*). Near the end of this paragraph the story returns to the report, but this is already a mediated perspective – of the narrator, whose words imply (typical for Tulli's prose) formula: "if I am a police officer". The strategy of reception requires here the acceptance of the story's multiaspectuality, in which relation is an interpretation, likening the utterance to periphrasis<sup>18</sup>. We do not mean here a simple substitutive description; rather, a non-arbitrariness of a dynamic statement by somebody who hesitates to make a rash categorisation.

We are thus dealing with two problems indicated before. Abundance at the level of the grammar of text (this issue will be discussed in more detail below) and the multiaspectuality of description, combined with a multiaspectuality of the presented scene. We are not certain, however, that all elements remain in a natural kind of relation with one another – this situation is triggered by the peculiarity of the presented space: a round square, a tram circling it, two tram stops, a reinforced *here*, but not just *now*. Reference to the recipient's expectations is put to the test in two ways. First, because the narrator refers to different grammatical exponents of time, depending on added elements of event descriptions; secondly – because of the surprising cause-effect structure of the described events.

<sup>18</sup>This aspect of periphrasis was noticed by Michał Głowiński in reference to (predominantly) texts of propaganda. Surely, a distinct interpretative power of periphrasis is meaningful also for literary communication. It is also in this perspective that one should approach the concept of periphrastic style, which requires further analyses, however. (*Nowomowa po polsku*), [*Polish newspeak*] (Warszawa 1990, pp. 31–37).

But this is a superficial conclusion. In reality, this is a clear illustration of a redundancy which is not read as something negative. This is because abundance is a natural consequence of using language in the discursive practice of adapting to the changing conditions of context (this is not unlike spoken language, although, of course, different exponents of coherence accompany speech).

It is now worth recalling an idea which developed from structuralist linguistics, but remains inspiring and corresponds well with the present reflections on abundance. The concept of stylistic accommodation was described by Teresa Skubalanka in reference to two major perspectives: grammatical adaptation, enabling a basic understanding of utterances and, crucially, iterative adaptation<sup>19</sup>. The former (synonymous with the way of thinking about syntactic adaptation) refers to framing elements of language within the rules of speech, whose grammatical order (primarily syntagmatic) guarantees the basic intelligibility of the text. Skubalanka is referring here to simple stylistic accommodation and points out that it is obligatory as transmission realized by means of selection, derivation, linearization, textual composition and aiming at coherence. Otherwise, there is no text or any basic requirements for communication. Stylistic iterative accommodation, in turn, is non-obligatory and manifests itself in more advanced processes, e.g., intensification, reduction, contamination, substitution. This type of adaptation bears traces of transformation, i.e., (in relation to our earlier considerations) to create tension between the expected potential utterance and its situational realisation.

Let us also recall that the processes listed by Skubalanka do not mean that redundancy is only possible as a consequence of intensification or contamination. If we assume (as has been stated above) that ellipsis also has a potential for abundance, then all emanations of added accommodation could be included here. This then allows one to consider abundance in close relations to entropy, as well as with broadly understood periphrasis, because both concepts in this perspective refer to language in use, i.e., to semantics with a non-reifying reference.

Let us consider one more phenomenon in the language of Magdalena Tulli's texts, which corresponds well with our findings. This will help us arrive at conclusions of a more general nature.

### 3. Semblance of assemblage

So far, our considerations on abundance and entropy as features of early novels by Magdalena Tulli have not aimed at joining critical reviews of her prose works, since peculiarities of the language of these texts have not always been appreciated. We start with the premise that the linguistic phenomena identified here prove the originality of style and yet allow for consideration of the poetic value of original narratives, which results from the specific possibilities of language, becoming a pretext to renewed investigations of artistic utterances.

<sup>19</sup>See T. Skubalanka, *op. cit.*, pp. 13–53.

From this point of view this prose, thanks to its distinctive features, becomes a valuable analytical exemplum.

Here we would like to point to yet another detail, characteristic of all four early novels by Tulli, i.e., a peculiar syntactic device used in the narrative, which allows for imitating a multiplicity of voices, and specifying the peculiarity of the story. Let us consider four examples.

Whoever wants to leave Ściegi can do it in one of two ways. **If you are a visitor**, for example, a salesperson of your own virtues, forced to apply for the future of the market, a collector of experiences, whom life has taught humility, should at the break of day rise without thinking in a gondola under the balloon of a blimp. **If that person, before preparing for travel, should like to look at train timetables or prospects of ocean liners**, they will soon find out that the desire to leave has nothing to do with the calendar and the clock [WC 106].

**If the world is a machine**, then separating things from anti-things must begin with sealing the casing. From preparing a vault, which will rest on a steady land. It is this vault which makes the upper and lower waters open up and since then one knows where up and where down is, what is order and stability and what is chaos and change. And it is only then that one can tell day from night [SiK 18–19].

Now the lift will go up, and with it – this sentence in which it has appeared, and the next one, and the next. **If one bound these few sentences together** with a piece of a strong cord, **hang them on a tall building and let them down** a few floors, then from the narrator's point of view, the result would be the same [T 51].

**But if I am one of the tenants watching from behind the curtain**, I understand that problems do not begin with children from the orphanage, nor do they end with them. The very presence of visitors living directly on the pavement is scandalous. IT is hard to look how they settle down on these suitcases, how each of them furnishes a piece of the square with their own luggage [S 118].

Let us call this the effect of arranging syntax, i.e., a manner of construing the narrator's utterances by means of syntactic structures which expose a condition, supposition or probability, but in a special metaphorising function. In the examples quoted above, two properties can be discerned: one of them concerns the semblance of an alternative story, the other – a sequence of events. In both cases, there is an effect of rearranging a story with a frequent reevaluation (*if you are a traveller, if I am one of the tenants, if the world is a machine*) or a contested suggestion (*if one were to bind these few sentences together*). This syntactic arrangement is a gesture with a double meaning (or perhaps even additional multiple meanings), because it allows one to discern intertextual contexts, like a reference to Italo Calvino's novel *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*, a collection of alternative stories bound by the characters of the reader and a woman.

The conditions adopted in the narrative have a peculiar, perhaps a more powerfully arranging, consequence. The functionalisation (the likelihood of coming into being) of a conditional

story implies a disposition of showing events from different perspectives, but, in a sense, simultaneously (or equally). Another implication is that with other initial premises a different effect would be achieved. If so, then this form of narrative makes a semblance of an assemblage understood as arranging the setting from seemingly independent fragments (alternative, potential utterances, events, points of view), which become factors of a single story. This puts to test the linearity of the "story", but triggers an entirely new contextualisation, not unlike the one which constitutes a metaphor. Or perhaps, an *inopiae causa catachresis*<sup>20</sup>. It is then, also in this sense, a story of abundance. At the level of narrative, it becomes a multiversion narrative, i.e., such which reveals the fictitious, illusory nature of the "I" speaking, who loses their power to be a perpetrator as a sender of the utterance, thus becoming not the cause, but a function of the text. On the ontological level, the abundant story causes an imbalance in the usually clear distinction between fiction and extralinguistic reality; an imbalance characteristic for prose that renounces the dominant role of the plot.

It is worth mentioning one more issue, the meaningful consequence of this manner of constructing a story, i.e., the position of the subject losing (as we have already mentioned) its ontological coherence, and thus also featuring in particular requirements for the recipient. In Tulli's prose we are confronted with the category of the "sylleptic 'I'". This concept, introduced to Polish literary studies by Ryszard Nycz, denotes a dissected, antinomous "I", manifesting itself both as authorial subject and fictitious sender of the text. This inner dissection is manifested on the surface of the text when a new

type of subject identity [appears]. The former, inherently hierarchical and vertical, based on the opposition of surface and depth is substituted by a horizontal, interactive and interference-based model, in which the real and the literary "I" affect one another and exchange properties; in which the subject agrees to its own fragmentariness [...] and intersubjective and "artificial" nature of its own identity [...]<sup>21</sup>.

This multiplied meaning of the narrator is also a function of literary syntax of abundance.

#### 4. Rolling things – composition

The linearity of the story is fundamentally harmonized with the reader's expectations. The narrative has its syntactic certainties, which – even when disturbed – create the basics of the reconstruction of the expected forms, which are typical and acceptable. It is the right of a metaphor to depart from these expectations; at the same time, this departure fuels the validity of a search for continuity and sequence. It is these parameters that Magdalena Tulli's early prose challenges. Things are happening because the narrator is capable of operating abundance, which corresponds to the way of thinking about language in use, a non-reifying

<sup>20</sup>See T. Dobrzyńska, *Mówiąc przenośnie... Studia o metaforze*, [Metaphorically speaking... studies on metaphor] Warszawa 1994.

<sup>21</sup>R. Nycz, *Tropy „ja”: koncepcje podmiotowości w literaturze polskiej ostatniego stulecia* [Traces of "I": the concept of subjectivity in Polish literature of recent century], "Teksty Drugie: teoria literatury, krytyka, interpretacja" no. 2 (26) 1994, p. 24.

entity, not referring in a stable manner to any specific semantic whole. The language of narration relativises the sufficiency of a typical message by means of redundancy. The latter can be described from a stylistic perspective, for example, using the concept of stylistic iterative accommodation (studying all manifestations of atypical processing at the level of syntax) or in relation to semantics, whose functional element is a broadly understood periphrasis. Against this background the prose of Magdalena Tulli turns out to be more than ordinary and the recipient's cognitive appetite should in this case be confronted with the degree to which the language of literature has been conventionalised. Perhaps the structure proposed by the author of "Sny i kamienie" maximises the imagery provoked by language in use, joins (ironically?) the communicative pattern emerging from the recurrence of readers' expectations.

translated by Justyna Rogos-Hebda

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# KEYWORDS

*stylistic accommodation*

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**ABSTRACT:**

The article concerns the specificity of the language in early prose works by Magdalena Tulli. The phenomena of literary grammar (a specific manner of operating abundance in the narrative, a particular type of arranging syntax and a creative use of colloquialism) allow one to consider this prose as an entropic story. Predominantly thanks to a characteristic dispersion of narrative energy, as well as chaotic moments, contrasting with readers' expectations. Thanks to quoted examples and references to selected linguistic research concepts, yet another perspective on interpreting textual features in the works of the author of "Skaza", which will in turn allow asking new questions about the exceptionality of stories included in this original poetic prose.

narrative

## COLLOQUIALISM

## PERIPHRAISIS

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