

“Justifying description” in Zygmunt Haupt’s works

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1.

Contemporary discussions about the return of description as the object of literary studies, which are sometimes summarized under the label “the descriptive turn,” are rooted in new philosophical and methodological thought.¹ They have been directly inspired by the new materialism, the return to things, the philosophy of presence, ecopoetics, as well different realisms, especially speculative realism. They make us reconsider different literary forms and the transformations they have undergone in the 20th and the 21st centuries, that is at the time of a severe representational and mimetic crisis in literature. While it became increasingly difficult for literature to “hold on” to its descriptive obligations and needs, it managed to do so in dialogue with very diverse, and not necessarily or exclusively modern, intellectual and artistic traditions.

Hauptology is also part of this discussion due to the role played by description in Zygmunt Haupt’s works, as well as due to the fact that many interesting self-referential remarks on the power of description may be found in his works. This is by no means a new question; on the contrary, the question of description – its unique status and innovative framing – has attracted the attention of the first insightful critics of *Pierścień z papieru* [The Paper Ring]. When *Pierścień z papieru* received the “Kultura” Literary Award, it was praised for its use of description:

¹ The discussions surrounding the descriptive turn are recapitulated and creatively reimagined by Heather Love in her article “Shimmering Descriptions and Descriptive Criticism”, *New Literary History* 1 (2020): 1–22. Post-conference articles in the special issue of *Representations* 135 (2016) are also important manifestations of the new descriptive literary studies. The methodological foundation was provided by, among others, Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus’s article “Surface Reading: An Introduction”, *Representations* 1 (2009): 1–21.

The memory of his homeland – Eastern Galicia – inspired him to take a kind of material inventory. It seems that in the wild mountains and forests of Galicia, in the farmyards, sheds, monasteries and marketplaces, there was not a single object that the author could not name and describe.²

Description is linked here to such non-literary practices as taking “material inventory;” therefore it has, so to speak, a special right to exist. At least some doubts as to the limits of representation are removed – description is granted indisputable privileges. Moreover, it is noted that the writer is able to produce credible, complete, and professional descriptions, and, as such, it is once again possible to legitimately correlate words with things. In the opinion of the jury, Haupt was able to produce descriptions that were both potent and vast in scope. His descriptions were not constrained or limited by the 20th-century mimetic crises; they are large-scale projects which tackle the multiplicity and the multifacetedness of things and their material environments.

This unique ability to “rehabilitate” credible literary description was thus described by one of the members of the jury, Jerzy Stempowski, in a letter to Haupt:

Literature today is remarkably omphaloscopic; it has no vision of the outside world. Dostoyevsky, who traveled so much by rail, never mentioned seeing anything from the window of his train. [...] For half a century, Dostoyevsky had been the favorite author of the European elite, and with him began the era of omphaloscopia in literature. [...] In this perspective, your stories are a revelation.³

Stempowski reads Haupt’s works against the background of the dominant trends in modern literature, and the ironic metaphor of “omphaloscopic” writing (from the Greek word *omphalos* – the navel) concerns self-referential works in which the writer focusses on and writes about himself. And compared with Dostoyevsky, Haupt is a “revelation;” he shows how literature can offer us new insights into the outside world. Indeed, Stempowski writes about two perspectives of accessing the outside world. The first is a large-scale “vision of the outside world,” and the other is a “glimpse,” a snapshot of reality, available in and through a little “window.” Stempowski accuses Dostoyevsky of not paying attention to and thus not being able to describe what he saw out of the window of his train. It can be surmised that Haupt achieved his descriptive revelations by combining both perspectives – he did not shy away from the philosophical vision of the whole, this fundamental cognitive and epistemological task, but at the same time he delighted as the creator and discoverer of numerous descriptive frames, windows, cracks, and openings by means of which he counterbalanced his somewhat omphaloscopic writing. In this respect, the description of how the world in the eye of a storm appears to the protagonist of one of Haupt’s short stories is almost symbolic. A strikingly vivid, graphic, and detailed vision of the outside world, however, appears but for a moment and may be only observed through a little “window.” Therefore, it can be tentatively assumed that in Haupt’s works description is based on both a visionary project of philosophical reflection which encompasses the entire outside world and, respectively, moments during which one is able to observe things as they are (the “things themselves” in phenomenology) through

² P.H. [Paweł Hostowicz – Jerzy Stempowski], “Nagroda Literacka «Kultura» za r. 1962 – Zygmunt Haupt” [1962 “Kultura” Literary Award – Zygmunt Haupt, in: *Jerzy Giedroyc, Zygmunt Haupt. Listy 1947–1975* [Jerzy Giedroyc, Zygmunt Haupt. Letters 1947–1975], ed. Paweł Panas (Warsaw: Biblioteka Więzi, 2022), 292.

³ *Jerzy Giedroyc, Zygmunt Haupt, 273.*

“little windows” provided by modernity. I shall discuss these two perspectives separately, and, let me add, the following remarks are at most prolegomena for further studies on the phenomenon of descriptiveness in Haupt’s works.

2.

Haupt’s characters often struggle in their search for justifications and philosophical reasons for their descriptive practices. In addition, in many descriptions studied by other Hauptologists, the descriptions of “real” events intertwine with conjectures and even outright fabrications. The narrator of “El Pelele,” among others, tries to explain the (elusive) reasons for such a peculiar combination of the real and the unreal:

Co każe mi powtarzać anegdoty, doszukiwać się porównań, wynajdywać paralele, popisywać się pseudoerudycją, usprawiedliwiać tym wszystkim mój opis wobec mnie samego i innych przywoływanych na świadków? Czy ma być to dopełnieniem szczerości podjętego zamiaru, wierności prawdzie, która to prawda jest tak nieuchwytna, tak względna, tak niepokojąca i tak nie zaspakajająca, ale bez niej świat, jaki mnie otacza, [i] ja sam nie istnieję, bo albo coś jest prawdą, albo nią nie jest, a więc wtedy nie istnieje. A znowuż sztuka, mająca nam tę prawdę objawić, jest przecież ustawicznie na pograniczu oszustwa, złudy, udawania, mizdrzenia się, sugestii, w sztuce zawsze jedno coś ukazujemy przez coś innego, prawdę chcemy ukazać przez kształt udany albo przez wymyślny porządek – jak w muzyce przez uszeregowania dźwięków, jak w poezji przez słowa, ich rytm, aliteracje, asonanse, współbrzmienia, tonikę, akcenty, patos, wymysł. Czemu jest tak, że posługujemy się całym arsenałem (gdzieś przeczytane, zasłyszane, zapamiętane) zmyślenia, nieprawdy, ażeby wyrazić prawdę?

Wobec czego niech mi będzie wolno domyślać się i narzucić własne wyobrażenie o tym, jak to panna ksieni pochwała i przytakuje okrutnej zabawie dziewcząt, kiedy tą maskarą, tym pajacem jak ze szkicu gobelinowego Goi w Muzeum Prado, tym El Pelele jestem ja sam. To przecież mnie te panny żywcem dręczą, nabijają się ze mnie, kiedy tak po koszarowemu całkiem „dają mi koca”, odbijają sobie na mnie swe panięskie trwogi, zahamowania, zawstyżenia, marzenia, zachcenia, mszcząc się za wszystkie byłe i przyszłe panięskie klęski i zniewolenia

[What makes me repeat anecdotes, look for comparisons, for parallels, show off with my pseudo-erudition, and thus justify my description to myself and others – my witnesses? Is it meant to prove the sincerity, the truthfulness of my intentions? And the truth is so elusive, so relative, so disturbing, and so unsatisfactory, but without it the world that surrounds me, [and] I myself do not exist, because either something is true or it is not true, and therefore it does not exist. And, art, which is supposed to reveal this truth to us, is constantly on the verge of deception, delusion, pretense, make-believe, suggestion; in art we always show one thing through something else; we want to show the truth by means of an agreeable shape or an elaborate structure – in music through the arrangement of sounds, in poetry through words, their rhythm, alliterations, assonances, consonances, the tonic, stress, pathos, invention. Why is it that we use this entire arsenal of fabrications, untruths (something we’ve read, heard, remembered) in order to express the truth?

Therefore, I shall speculate and impose my own idea of how the Abbess applauds and approves of the girls' cruel game, when I am this monstrosity, this clown as if from Goya's tapestry sketch in the Prado Museum, this El Pelele.

These girls torment me alive, make fun of me, they haze me, they take their revenge on me for their female fears, inhibitions, embarrassments, dreams, desires, they take their revenge on me for all their past and future defeats and oppressions].⁴

The narrator is fully aware that he lives in an era when description and describing *per se* are not appreciated and acknowledged for what they are; therefore, description must be "justified," "legitimized," and connected with the "truth." We can assume that we are talking about a continuous practice, and not an individual gesture; Haupt is constantly occupied with justifying description in his works, and at the same time he wonders "what makes him" do it. On the one hand, the growing criticism of the mimetic abilities of literature "makes him do it." Indeed, Haupt himself often shared his doubts in this regard, drawing attention to the referential power of language and the danger of being trapped in a world of signs. On the other hand, in the quoted fragment, the narrator also talks about how he is constantly looking for these justifications and we can see that he is trying to find them in philosophy, ancient and contemporary poetics, musicology, psychology, and the history of painting. In the vast archives of thought and art, he finds and tests arguments for description, challenges and rejects them, tries to find others, constantly advancing new arguments and examining further evidence which could prove the validity of description.

The narrator is particularly worried about, but also intrigued by, the fact that he needs to employ an "entire arsenal of fabrications" to justify his vision of life at a boarding school for girls haunted by the ghost of an Abbess who died a long time ago. Fabrication, the work of imagination, thus helps justify description – the narrator makes his characters function in a defiantly ahistorical way. This does not necessarily make him an advocate of constructivism – the descriptive attempts of Haupt's narrator could just as well function in the critical context of contemporary speculative realism, which, thanks to philosophical reflection, reinvigorates the discussion on the possible relations between objects outside consciousness. This is based on the conviction that in order to justify reflection on the relationship between the mind and the extra-linguistic realities, we must move beyond correlationism,⁵ i.e., the philosophical standpoint that we can only speak of beings in terms of how they are given to us or our mode of access. The limitations of correlationism are that we rule out the possibility of, and the basis for reflection on, the relations that actually take place outside consciousness in various discrete active and causative forms. The practice of speculation, creating imaginary projections of references and processes which constantly take place in various dimensions of reality, is thus justified. Imaginative speculation is one of Haupt's favorite and most often used narrative formulas. Stories which explore "what would happen if" his relationship with Stefcia or Anusia, with whom the protagonist flirted in his youth, had been different or recurring direct references to Hans Vaihinger's philosophy of "as if" thus do not have to be discussed solely in the context of the solipsistic and subjective world of fiction, which

⁴ Zygmunt Haupt, "El Pelele", in idem: *Baskijski diabeł. Opowiadania i reportaże* [The Basque devil. Stories and reportages] (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 2007), 327–328.

⁵ Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier (London and New York: Continuum, 2010), 19–20.

forever replaced reality, leaving the I melancholic and afraid. While Haupt's characters know this state well and often realize the fictionality of their stories and visions, at the same time "something tells them" to imagine things, to create bold visions. The fact that the characters are free to creatively explore their imaginary visions and that they can create truly "vast" speculative descriptions of many aspects of the world should also be read in the wider context of acknowledging the discreet yet palpable presence of the real beyond the correlationist control of the mind. Haupt's narrator creates his descriptions not because he believes in the real in literature but because he feels that he must accompany the world in its ontological multiplicity. The feeling of presence, often the presence of something absent, as is often the case in the writer's émigré memories, must be matched by a description that boldly explores "pretense, make-believe, suggestion." Often inaccessible or only partially accessible reality calls for devices which combine various descriptive literary techniques. Indeed, this description must boldly speculate about the relations between objects that may or must occur outside the character's/narrator's/writer's consciousness. All available modalities of writing, all levels of probability and improbability, and mixing actual "facts" with increasingly "unreal" plotlines help one tentatively enter and explore the discrete dimensions and dynamics of relations which occur outside consciousness. Just like in the famous story about Stefcia, one can and should ask about the relationship between the protagonist's former love interest and his later life. A forgotten love story, even if it is not recorded in someone's memory and even if it is not "part" of consciousness, is still an "object," and the relations it enters into with other objects may only be described speculatively because we do not have direct access to this object. As such, instead of emphasizing the narrator's melancholy mood or analyzing his fear of the uncanny, we should focus our interpretation of this story on the speculative projections which bring the narrator closer to the numerous worlds which are discreetly or secretly active. In any case, we can see that the narrator functions in a sphere which may be reached only through daring speculation, "illicit" or limited description, which looks for reasons and rationale to "justify description" beyond correlationism.

What is at stake has been explicitly formulated; it is nothing short of a fundamental ontological question. The narrator says that "the truth is so elusive, so relative, so disturbing, and so unsatisfactory, but without it the world that surrounds me, [and] I myself do not exist, because either something is true or it is not true, and therefore it does not exist." Therefore, by bravely and knowingly entering into the sphere of the elusive and the relative, which can also be defined as literary speculation, the descriptor addresses the controversy over the existence of the world, explored in the 20th century by Roman Ingarden. What "makes" Haupt's narrators/characters constantly look for justifications for their descriptions is the controversy over the existence of the world and subjectivity. They ultimately agree to accept the "unsatisfactory" truth, which can be understood as reality that is elusive and often accessible only through speculation; still, even in such a discrete form, this reality is constantly present, waiting for an attentive and patient narrator, that is one who would be willing to accept such limitations. As we know, Ingarden did not ultimately find proof of the existence of the world. And in Haupt's short stories "something tells" one not to give up, which is why other traditions, philosophies, and artistic trends are active in them.

Even among the representatives of the Lviv-Warsaw school, with which Ingarden was associated, one can find thinkers who seem to understand Haupt's narrators, determined to justify their descriptions. Indeed, one of the founders of speculative realism, Graham Harman, looks

for inspiration in the writings of the Polish philosopher Kazimierz Twardowski,⁶ specifically, in Twardowski's *On the Content and Object of Presentations*. Harman, who wishes to move beyond constructivism, draws on the work of the founder of the Lviv-Warsaw school as an alternative to Husserl's view of the relation between the judgment and the object. Harman discusses Twardowski's *On the Content and Object of Presentations* in detail arguing that twentieth-century philosophy could have distanced itself from Husserl's idealism, which focused so much on human subjectivity and its correlates. Twardowski proposed and justified an alternative system of relations between consciousness and the object. He argued that every action or judgment is a presentation of the object, in which we must distinguish between the content and the object. The content of presentation is the recorded way of perceiving it, but the object is something more than the content of presentation. The Lviv philosopher gave an example of a painting,⁷ which corresponds to the content of presentation and differs from its model, that is the object of presentation. Twardowski listed three arguments to support his distinction, one of which has already been indicated above – the object has more qualities than the content of presentation. The second argument was that the act and the content of presentation always exist, but the object may or may not exist. Finally, the third argument is essentially linguistic and proposes that several names for the same place (such as "Mozart's birthplace") can refer to the same object.

Let us return to the quote from "El Pelele," where the narrator dramatically asks why he must resort to anecdotes and parallels in order to "thus justify my description to myself and others – my witnesses." After all, his descriptive efforts can also be described in Twardowski's philosophical terms as **exploring and maintaining a difference between the content of presentation and the object of presentation**. The narrator struggles in his efforts and cannot ever be sure of the result, which is signaled by the many different contents of presentation. Ewa Wiegandt was probably right when she wrote that Haupt in his writing wished to express "non-relativized existence,"⁸ since even when one is surrounded by contents (appearances, images, etc.) one is constantly reminded that the writer writes only to distinguish the object from its content, difficult as it may be. Only the hope of finding the "truth", of connecting – often only in and through speculation – with an object that exists beyond the game of references, allows one to still believe that the world and one's world exist. Haupt asked questions similar to Twardowski's questions at a time when it was more difficult to uphold some of his assertions, but at the same time perhaps they were easier to discuss in a work of art than in a philosophical dissertation. Exploring the difference between the content and the object of presentation opened literature up to complex speculations about the nature of reality and its various discrete forms, and, respectively, the relations between objects that exist outside consciousness.

In order to further draw on Twardowski's second argument, it should be added that in "El Pelele," as well as in other short stories by Haupt, the narrator speculates extensively about

⁶ See: Graham Harman, *The Quadruple Object* (London: Zero Books, 2011), 23-25.

⁷ Bogdan Bakies discussed Kazimierz Twardowski's philosophy in more detail – see: Bogdan Bakies, "Twardowskiego koncepcja przedmiotu jako korelatu aktu [Twardowski's concept of an object as a correlate of an act], *Studia Philosophiae Christianae* 11 (1975): 11–48.

⁸ Ewa Wiegandt, "Wszystko-Nic Zygmunta Haupta" [Zygmunt Haupt's Everything-Nothing, in: *Ulotność i trwanie. Studia z tematologii i historii literatury* [Transience and duration. Studies in Thematology and History of Literature], ed. Ewa Wiegandt, Agnieszka Czyżak, Zbigniew Kopec (Poznań: Wydawnictwo "Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne", 2003): 63.

the objects of his presentations and is keen to make judgments about objects which do not exist. In “El Pelele,” we find judgments and contents of presentation which refer to the 18th-century abbess, the founder of the monastery, who haunts the convent school as a ghost. She even shoots the storyteller with a gun (and she does not miss). Playing with the untrue is yet another, yet different, form of probing the difference between the content and the object of presentation, which is non-existent in such moments. Sometimes we see in Haupt’s short stories multiple examples of probing the difference between the content and the object of presentation in and through the act of writing, where fabrications, that is parts that are in one way or another made up, point to where the objects may appear. The question is not whether one should fantasize, make up, or simulate, but whether this will help create the negative, the outline of the place where the object definitely is.

Let us try to explain one more peculiar aspect of “El Pelele” in this context. At some point in his quasi-philosophical argument, the narrator comes to the conclusion that “I am this (...) El Pelele. After all, these girls torment me alive, make fun of me, they haze me (...)” Twardowski would say that the tension between the puppet harassed by the girls in the convent school, that is the content of this presentation, and the object of this presentation becomes palpable. This situation may be compared to the relation between the painting and the model, which the Lviv philosopher described in order to emphasize that the object of presentation has more qualities than the content. The young ladies, too, knew that the straw puppet was not a real man, was not in fact any man they knew because real men as objects of presentation had more qualities than a puppet made in their likeness. The girls hit the puppet with sticks and thus can be sure that the men who are the object of presentation really exist; when they hit the puppet, they transform their relations with the objects that the puppet presents, that is their relations with those men who really exist. When the narrator says, “I am this (...) El Pelele,” he confirms that there is a difference between the puppet and the object of presentation; *he* proves that this difference exists, albeit in different time and space, because he is one of the many imaginary men with whom the girls relate by tossing and hitting the straw doll. Therefore, the puppet powerfully refers to many painful experiences that exist and will exist in the real life of those girls. At the same time, the girls “take their revenge on me for all their past and future defeats and oppressions.” Therefore, they relate to all the experiences that exist, that are remembered, and that have been forgotten. They relate to all the experiences that exist as traumas or small wounds, as past or current fears of something that, alas, did not take place. They relate to all the experiences that exist in the potential or foreseeable future – all those experiences which other women share with them when they describe their own or someone else’s relationships with men, etc. The puppet which the girls hit is a manifestation of many different ways in which it relates to men as models for the puppet, and they are endowed with numerous, often traumatic or frightful, qualities, which may only be activated speculatively.

Last but not least, let us focus on Twardowski’s third argument, that is the belief that the difference between the content and the object of presentation is also evidenced in the many different possible names for the same object. Haupt often renewed his efforts to maintain the difference between the content and the object of presentation by means of descriptive recurrence, that is repeating his attempt at describing something. There are many examples of this process. There are stories such as “Deszcz” [The Rain], as well as many variants (versions) of different stories;

also, Haupt often refers to the same object with a number of different names ("A, Anusia, Anusieczka, Anusienieczka..." [A, Anna, Annie, Anoushka...]). Haupt scholars recognize and often emphasize the fact that this obsession was fueled by a melancholic loss of the object, the very experience of loss (defined in psychoanalytic terms). Repetitive and neurotic acts of description of the same object are a response to the perceived "mimetic powerlessness" of literature. However, it is also possible that "what makes" Haupt's narrator describe the same object over and over again is the feeling of a striking, and sometimes even ecstatically experienced (as in the first sentence of "Madrygał dla Anusi" [Madrigal for Anusia]), difference between the content and the object of presentation. The many different names reassure one about the existence of "truth", strengthen one's sense of presence, affirm the existence of the writing I. Indeed, in "Fragmenty" [Fragments], Haupt defines happiness as a set of experiences that "przeżyte na własność, nie do odebrania" [I have lived, they are my own, no one can take them away from me].⁹ In this regard, Haupt not only does not doubt that these objects exist, but also emphasizes that they fill the speaker with joy. Repetitive descriptive efforts should thus be read as mimetizing the activity of objects that exist as ecstasies, i.e., object which transcend themselves as they "enter" the speaker and make him produce testimonies of their "pulsating" existence in and through, among others, multiple descriptive attempts. Haupt's trademark enumerations and lists, which overwhelm and fascinate with the sheer number of objects, may be read in a similar critical context. Using many different names to describe the quality of a given world strengthens the belief that there is a difference between this world as the object and the content of description, and it thus strengthens the belief in the existence of subjectivity and the world.

3.

Twardowski's philosophy is but one example extracted from the great archive of thought and art to which Haupt referred in his efforts to justify the effort to build grand visions of the outside world. Discussing Haupt's works in the context of Twardowski's philosophy was not only meant to show the (consciously or unconsciously developed) connections which might help one analyze the short stories in question but also, perhaps more importantly, demonstrate the great number of possible philosophical and artistic attempts which Haupt carried out in a vast cultural field, where he found new arguments and new ways of justifying his descriptions.

Respectively, as Stempowski and I argued, Haupt's characters sometimes find a "gap" through which they can connect with reality. In such situations, description is justified by the experience itself (or, in phenomenological terms, experience in itself), by the unquestionable manifestation of the violent existence of the world. We find such "memorable" scenes, "telling" details, or moments of revelation in many Haupt's short stories. The narrator creates descriptions that are supposed to convey the complexity of reality as it manifests itself in itself. A good example of this is the story "Cyklon" [The Storm] to which I referred in the introduction. The world suddenly reveals itself in the eye of a cyclone and, as Stempowski pointed out, this revelation is framed by a violent storm that precedes and follows that moment. The narrator does not claim to be able to access such moments at any given moment.

⁹ Zygmunt Haupt, "Fragmenty" [Fragments], in idem: *Baskijski diabeł*: 242.

Still, sometimes he decides to describe, as accurately as possible, such a moment of a sudden and intense encounter with reality.

This was indeed thematized in “Cyklon:” the narrator begins the story with a long critical digression on modernity, which in many ways mediates the relation between the I and the world. In addition, modernity makes one boastful – one can rely on knowledge acquired through “szeregowanie, systematyzowanie zjawisk” [ordering, systematizing], which makes the narrator conclude: “[r]azem z dawną sztuką uogólniania i abstrahowania i logiką dedukcji stworzyliśmy sobie osobny świat w świecie, «*fool’s paradise*», jak mówią Anglicy” [using [t]he old art of generalizing and abstracting and the logic of deduction, we have created a distinct world within a world, “*a fool’s paradise*,” as the English say].¹⁰ When the storm hits, the description the narrator has so elaborately created provokes him to make one more cutting remark:

Więc stworzyliśmy sobie dookoła ten wielki, uporządkowany świat statystyczny, demograficzny, mapowy, biuletynowy, ponazywaliśmy to sobie wymyślnymi imionami i posegregowaliśmy, i poszufladkowaliśmy, i wierzymy sobie w niego na słowo honoru – a tu jesteśmy sami w swoim małym światku dotykalnym.

[So, we have created this huge well-organized world of statistics, demographics, maps, and bulletins, we have come up with fancy names and we have ordered everything, and we have classified everything and we have believed in it just because – but in fact we are all alone in our small tangible world]¹¹

Therefore, what supports and justifies the description of the cyclone is the rejection of the modern temptation to perceive the world as fully mediatized. It is the “small tangible world” with which the individual connects in his solitude and singularity that must be described. Importantly, it is a “tangible” reality, it is material, it can be physically touched; one can connect with it, examine it, feel it. The focus on the sense of touch emphasizes that different senses are active and important in this “small tangible world;” the sense of sight is not the dominant one.

The description of the story reveals the onslaught of the extra-linguistic, material reality of the world. It is so violent that a family locked in a house watches the raging storm only through holes in the boarded-up windows. Once again, one may connect with reality only through a little “window,” but at the same time the active, imposing, and overwhelming nature of the “tangible world” is emphasized. Let me at this point turn to Kathleen Stewart who identified in Annie Dillard’s book *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* “points of precision” which she defined as striking “styles” of the perceived objects.¹² An object or a phenomenon demands a meticulous description of their singularity; they are themselves points of precision – they give rise to precise descriptions. Stewart emphasizes that “[t]he objects themselves have a vital, even explosive, tension and torque of qualities. Their points of precision are not a content but a pause in the very move to represent a finite, categorical reality.”¹³

¹⁰Zygmunt Haupt, “Cyklon” [The Storm], in idem: *Baskijski diabeł*: 648.

¹¹Haupt, “Cyklon”: 651–652.

¹²Kathleen Stewart, “Point of Precision”, *Representations* 135 (2016): 43.

¹³Stewart, 34.

Indeed, Stewart also uses description to challenge "categorical reality;" the "points of precision" she identifies in descriptions can help define what, according to Haupt's narrator, takes place in the "small tangible world." This concept works even better when the points of precision are the raging winds and rainbands of a storm viewed through holes in boarded-up windows. They are definitely endowed with an "explosive tension" and a "torque of qualities." In any case, description is as if governed by the points of precision of given objects and they are described in their self-evident singularity, that is, as they have been imprinted on the mind of the subject who witnessed the storm. The process of imprinting, which provoked Stewart to refer to the category of style which etymologically refers to the *stilus*, the stylus that leaves a mark on clay tablets, should be emphasized. The tornado imprints its material form on the mind of the observer; it is a "point of precision" which must be described.

The final meeting with the eye of a cyclone, that is an area of calm weather at the center of a strong storm (everything is calm for several minutes before the storm begins to rotate the other way with the same intensity), is particularly important for understanding the subject who is "all alone in [his] small tangible world" is. The subject experiences its existence as a situated being; his perspective is radically different from the perspective that extends beyond the eye of a storm. At the same time, the subject can experience life primarily in this "tangible world," which appears for a short time as his fundamental reality, before a routine of modern life, a "well-organized world," returns. The protagonist talks about destroyed houses and trees, walks among them with his neighbors, and finally remarks ecstatically:

A nad tym wszystkim niebo błękitne i śmiejące się i cud powietrza, które, przyniesione z wirem, jak gość niespodziewany, onieśmiela nas aż do wstrzymania oddechu. Ptaki śpiewają w gałęziach drzew i drzewa wsłuchane są i nieśmiałe, wzruszone, czuje się wzruszenie i jakby spazm tych drzew po ich histerycznym popłochu w huraganie.

Tak więc oko cyklonu, samo oko! Wiemy, że za dziesięć, za dwadzieścia minut zaczniesz dąć na nowo i przepisowo w przeciwną stronę.

[And above all this there is a blue and laughing sky and the wonder of the air which was brought with the vortex like an unexpected guest; it intimidates us so much that we hold our breath. The birds are singing in the branches of the trees and the trees are listening, timid and thrilled; one can feel the emotions and the thrill of these trees after their hysterical panic during the hurricane.

So, the eye of the storm, the eye itself! We know that in ten, twenty minutes the wind will start blowing again and, of course, in the opposite direction.]¹⁴

This description expresses euphoria and "thrill" caused by re-connecting with the world, if just for a moment. The described phenomenon is, as Stewart would suggest, active here. Euphoria gives the impression that the world appears "like an unexpected guest;" it becomes accessible in qualities and forms beyond the expectations of the subject – it arrives from those dimensions of reality which remain beyond the correlationist control of the mind that

¹⁴Haupt, "Cyklon", 659.

wants to anticipate events. Man “holds his breath” because he is not the active force of creation – reality which emerges in all its power is. It is reality which suddenly turns out to be active after many days of apparent apathy, which must now reveal itself as hitherto unnoticed extra-conscious agency. Its current movement is intimidating, and makes the subject stop or suspend his actions, so that he can finally feel and enjoy the world in itself. “A blue and laughing sky” reminds us of the reality of reality; it is the first principle – it may be found at the top of the hierarchy of phenomena. It towers above the well-organized modern “fool’s paradise.” It has destroyed and discarded all the devices of this world in the aftermath of the cyclone, and instead of the “fool’s paradise,” it offers **a moment of happiness in the tangible “blue and laughing” sky.**

It turns out that the moments of connecting with the world recorded in Haupt’s short stories, which may be accessed only under certain conditions and within certain frames, give rise to description, which is its particularly suggestive justification. Indeed, these descriptions point to the alienating qualities of the modern mediatization of reality. All mediations then share the fate of human-made devices destroyed by the storm, because they stood in the way of the manifestation of the world in itself, which always “towers” over everything else; it is the desired “blue and laughing sky” of modern subjectivity.

4.

Zygmunt Haupt in his works reflected on the descriptive possibilities of modern literature. The writer was certainly looking for new reasons to justify description. “Something made him” do it. I discussed the writer’s attempts to find justifications for great descriptive undertakings in philosophy. At the same time, Haupt sometimes took a “short cut” and reinforced his descriptive efforts by recording a fleeting moment of coming into contact with reality in and through accidental openings or “windows.” Certainly, however, the manner in which he engaged in a dialogue, either directly or indirectly, with the 19th-century masters of descriptive prose, that is, for example, Gustave Flaubert and Guy de Maupassant, should be discussed in greater detail. Respectively, the similarities and the differences in experiencing the material world between Haupt’s works and the more spiritual tradition of modern epiphanic prose should be analyzed. However, in order to fully understand Haupt’s descriptive efforts we should further analyze the poetics of his descriptions and the self-referential formulas employed by his narrators. The goal of this essay was the latter.

translated by Małgorzata Olsza

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KEYWORDS

DESCRIPTION

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ABSTRACT:

This article discusses the problem of description in the works of Zygmunt Haupt in the wider context of the contemporary “descriptive turn” in literary studies. First, early critical readings and reviews of Haupt’s exceptional descriptions, which the writer included in his stories even though he acknowledged a crisis of mimesis in literature, are discussed. Indeed, Haupt made a conscious effort to “justify description,” which played an important role in his works, as Jerzy Stempowski noticed, either as part of a comprehensive vision of the outside world with tentatively invokes philosophical justifications or in moments during which Haupt’s characters come into contact with reality in and through accidental openings or “windows.” The article discusses these two respective methods of justifying description, drawing on speculative realism as well as the philosophy of Kazimierz Twardowski, which inspires the contemporary advocates of new philosophical realisms.

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