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POETICS, the EXTREME, MEASURE

Encounters between literature and the extreme, in the past and today, give new momentum to poetological analysis in a field where poetics has always been particularly qualified to formulate its claims.

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Poetics, the extreme, scale, and measure

Tomasz Mizerkiewicz

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Contemporary poetics eagerly undertakes the study of texts which are related to the extreme. In the past, the motivation behind such works was the belief that borderline, transgressive, experiences allow the modern subject to learn something new about themselves, society, and the material world. Later, the extreme was the motivation behind every meaningful text and, for example, in postmodern poetry, the extreme plays of/with language demonstrated how all distinctions are constantly being challenged and redefined. Even though it might seem that today we are long past such eruptions of the extreme, both the term itself and different works of literature provoke poetological reflection on their excessive nature. Poetics once again craves the literary extreme, as it triggers new ways of thinking about writing and its encounters with different realities.

Etymologically, “extreme” means both “the most external” and “of the highest degree.” This complex origin of the word points to the tradition of literary encounters with something that is radically external to the word, something violently different. To this day, the accounts of natural disasters move the reader with reports about a sudden and unpredictable eruption of something of gigantic proportions. Concurrently with this intrusion of externality, however, something less obvious takes place: this externality turns out to constitute something of the highest degree, and therefore challenges all known measures and scales. It forces us

to face it, to adjust to it, and consequently to redefine the scales and measures we employ. Indeed, the confusion caused by the climate crisis, including the Anthropocene, may be partially motivated by the fact that, in its radical externality, it also disrupts all proportions and scales. From its very beginnings, literature has asked questions about meter, feet, and rhythm, and its inventiveness in this respect has provided and continues to provide a foundation for literature in general. Extreme poetics reveals its constant attempts to measure and test other scales – they emerge at the intersections of writing and radical externality.

Articles in this issue of Forum of Poetics discuss poetics which emerges as a result of a clash with the extreme. Elżbieta Dutka writes about the visions of mountains in European art history. Othered for centuries, they became a space in which one could come face to face with the extreme experience of climbing that Dutka discusses in a dialogue with Robert Macfarlane. In turn, the Chinese specialist in Japanese studies Tong Shuai proposes an eco-psychological analysis of a text which describes, as if in real time, the experience of a catastrophic earthquake and tsunami which resulted in the destruction of the nuclear power station in Fukushima. The externality and the gigantic scale of the cataclysm forced the characters of the analyzed book to try to face the unknown, to look for new measures and scales in and through literature.

The question of extremity and measure is discussed through a different lens by Katarzyna Szopa. Her book entitled Wybuch Wyobraźni [The Explosion of Imagination], devoted to the poetry of Anna Świrszczyńska, is reviewed by Agnieszka Waligóra. Świrszczyńska's ecstatic poetry forced her readers to constantly re-scale thinking and sensitivity. Marian Bielecki reflects on the radical experience of disgust found in Thomas Bernhard's works. Bernhard certainly wanted to bring post-war Austria to justice and passionately searched for new scales for the shocking abjectivity of depravity he witnessed there. Marek Hendrykowski tries to capture the poetics of insinuation, the disgusting phenomenon of libelous texts, and in this case, too, he looks for measures which could help one fathom the number of libelous statements prevalent in contemporary autocracies. Agata Ostrówka-Dombkowska describes the poetological phenomenon of parenthesis in Krystyna Miłobędzka's poetry. An astonishing number of parenthetical sentences, and their sheer excesses, point to the practice of innovatively framing – bracketing – phenomena in and through poetry, thus questioning the scales and measures most deeply rooted in language. Grzegorz Pertek discusses a still different question, as he uses the problem of measures in a comparative description of the evolution of trends in literary studies. He explains how structuralism transitioned into post-structuralism in the West, pointing out that structuralism in Poland was never the subject of an informed discussion which, in turn, turned post-structuralism in Poland into a peculiar phenomenon located in a strange "critical gap" – one which is still looking for measures that could help define it. Finally, Gerard Ronge writes about Jerzy Madejski's book Poetyka ekstremalna [Extreme Poetics], whose title refers to Andrzej Sosnowski's postmodern poetry. Meanwhile, as it is revealed in the book, the tradition of Polish structuralism turns out to be equally extreme, because it redefines poetological analysis. Located in the radically external "critical gap" of contemporary literary studies, it fosters an efficient and diligent analysis of artistic forms.

One of the most valuable aspects of literary innovation was, has been, and is related to the fact that it creates new scales, measures, and proportions. Encounters between literature and the extreme, in the past and today, give new momentum to poetological analysis in a field where poetics has always been particularly qualified to formulate its claims.

Eco-psychological Analysis of Literary Descriptions of Catastrophe.

The case of the Fukushima
tragedy in *2:46 aftershocks,*
stories of Japan earthquake

Shuai Tong

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History of psychoanalysis in Japan and its cultural applicability

When we mention the term “psychoanalysis”, the first person that comes to mind is apparently Sigmund Freud and its clinical or medical applications. Conceivably few people would associate psychoanalysis with culture or literary fields. However, for a better integration of psychoanalysis and literature, by 1907, Freud was already expanding the area of psychoanalytic literary criticism that he had begun in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) with his investigation of Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex* (425 B.C.) and Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (1603) for their oedipal aspects and the effects the plays had on their audiences. Robert N. Mollinger¹ in his book *Psychoanalysis and Literature: An introduction* (1981) argued “Creative Writers and Day-dreaming,” contained Freud’s first theory on the structure of the literary work and began the psychoanalytic enquiry into what literature is.

¹ Robert N Mollinger, *Psychoanalysis and Literature* (Burnham Incorporated Pub, 1981).

Besides, shifting our perspective from Europe to Asia, Nina Cornyetz and J. Keith Vincent suggested in their monograph² that utilizing psychoanalytical perspectives can lead to advantageous and captivating discoveries while studying Japan within the Western Japan studies framework. Additionally, they argued the psychoanalytic approach requires self-reflection that forms an essential part of the analysis. And this self-reflective dimension of psychoanalytic interpretation bears considerable significance for scholars whose focus lies in Japanese studies. According to *Perversion and Modern Japan: Psychoanalysis, Literature and Culture* (2010), psychoanalysis was introduced to Japan in 1912 through a series of articles, which emerged just seventeen years after Freud introduced the term “psychoanalysis” to describe his method of psychological interpretation. In the following year, Morooka Son, a psychiatrist, published three articles in the literary journal *Eniguma*. One of these articles, “Concerning the volume of Nowaki of the *Tale of Genji*,” utilized Freudian theory to interpret *The Tale of Genji*, a classic piece of Japanese literature.

Morooka’s introduction of psychoanalysis as an analytic methodology with intrinsic theoretical worth, rather than solely as a medical or psychological therapy for treating neuroses, contrasts starkly with the history of psychoanalysis’ reception in the United States, where its medicalization stripped it of its broader cultural applicability. Conversely, in Japan, four men, specifically Marui Kiyoyasu, Kosawa Heisaku, Ohtsuki Kenji, and Yabe Yaekichi, three of whom studied abroad with Freud’s followers, made Japanese translations of Freud’s writings available, with some even receiving Freud’s enthusiastic endorsement of their endeavors. However, it was an arduous task to spearhead a psychoanalytic movement in Japan, as it was widely disparaged as irrational and insufficiently scientific, while culturalist theories of Japanese uniqueness critiqued psychoanalysis from the opposite perspective, claiming it needed to be nuanced by Buddhism or other Eastern sensibilities to suit Japanese temperament. For instance, Nina Cornyetz and J. Keith Vincent³ indicated that Morita Masatake believed that Zen Buddhism is the basis of a “Japanese” therapy. Later, Doi Takeo emphasized the necessity of adapting psychoanalysis to suit the model of “indulgence” (*amae*) in Japanese culture. Kosawa, who was a strong supporter of the Freudian psychoanalytic movement, coined the term “Ajase Complex” to diminish the significance of the Oedipal Complex in Japan and give more importance to the relationship with the mother. Interestingly, Kosawa drew inspiration from Buddhist legend to explain the origins of the Ajase Complex⁴, which primarily depicts Ajase’s enduring attachment to his mother, from initially harboring hostility towards her to eventually developing an endless emotional dependence on her. It is similar to how Freud used Greek mythology to describe the Oedipal Complex. This implies psychoanalysis is closely associated with literary narratives.

In 1953, James Clark Moloney⁵, an American psychoanalyst, authored a scathing article criticizing Japanese psychoanalysis. He argued that unlike occidental psychoanalysis which aims to liberate the individual, the concept of individual freedom is not present in Japan. Moloney’s remarks implied that psychoanalysis may not be suitable for implementation in Japan. However, it is crucial to evaluate the practicality of psychoanalysis by taking into account Japan’s position as a recipient.

² Nina Cornyetz and J. Keith Vincent, *Perversion and Modern Japan* (Routledge, 2010), 1–2.

³ Nina Cornyetz and J. Keith Vincent, *Perversion and Modern Japan* (Routledge, 2010), 5–6

⁴ Keigo Okonogi, “Japanese Psychoanalysis and the Ajase Complex (Kosawa),” *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics* 31, no. 1–4 (1979): 350–56.

⁵ Moloney Jc, “Understanding the Paradox of Japanese Psychoanalysis,” *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 34, no. 4 (1953): 291–303.

This means that we must adapt a foreign culture and infuse it with a distinctly “Japanese” essence. When discussing “Japanese culture,” it is important to acknowledge the influence of Chinese culture, which Japan absorbed during the Heian period and through its interaction with the Tang Dynasty. As a result, Japan has a fundamental connection to “Chinese culture” that is expressed through its language, architecture, artworks, literature, and religion. On the other hand, Following the Meiji Restoration that occurred in 1868, the nation was confronted with the decline of China’s national power and the ascent of Western countries, leading Japan to reevaluate its cultural standing in Asia. Japan initiated a cultural assimilation of Western values, which gradually became integrated into Japanese culture. As a consequence, present-day “Japanese culture” is perceived as a composite of both Eastern and Western cultural elements. This amalgamation provides insight into the absence of individual freedom within the psychoanalytic context of Japan. In other words, Japan, which once advocated for the slogan of “*Datsua Nyuo* (breaking away from Asia and joining Europe)” at the end of 19th century, still cannot shake off the core of traditional collectivism in East Asian culture. In this collectivist society, the Japanese people prioritize the individual’s role within the group and emphasize a strong hierarchy. As a result, individuals may frequently experience feelings of inferiority. It can be said that Adler’s individual psychology is a more accurate reflection of the cultural acceptance in modern Japan compared to the psychology of Jung and Freud. This can also explain why the widespread popularity of the book *The Courage to be Disliked* (2019) written by Ichiro Kishimi and Fumitake Koga⁶ in Japan as a social phenomenon.

According to J. Carlson and M. Englar-Carlson⁷ in their volume *Adlerian Psychotherapy* (2017), the introduction elaborated that Adler’s theories appear to have endured, and they are key components of most current approaches to psychotherapy. For instance, in order to help people reach their full potential, Adler engaged in cutting-edge research on a variety of topics, including his belief in the equality of all people, encouragement, the pursuit of what is good or right, an emphasis on relationships and mental health, the idea of social interest, and the necessity of taking cultural and contextual considerations into account. Adler envisioned a psychology of growth, where people could strive to overcome low self-esteem and actually change their lives. Moreover, Adlerians are concerned with holism and how each individual goes through life, recognizing that one cannot comprehend an individual by examining their components, but that all elements of the person must be understood in relation to the overall pattern and in relation to social systems. In other words, Adler stressed the significance of connections and being linked to others, especially the greater community in which individuals live. People are considered as always attempting to belong and fit into the social surroundings. The outside world molds their awareness, as does the world of the family. The emphasis on social interest, or a sense of belonging to and contributing in the common good, is a hallmark of Adlerian thinking.

Development of ecocriticism in Japan and harmony with nature

Since the start of the 21st century, the study of literature with an environmental focus has become highly comparative. It is no longer limited to just Britain and the United States. Ecocriticism now

⁶ Ichiro Kishimi and Koga Fumitake, *The Courage to Be Disliked: How to Free Yourself, Change Your Life and Achieve Real Happiness* (London: Allen & Unwin, 2019).

⁷ Jon Carlson and Matt Englar-Carlson, *Adlerian Psychotherapy* (American Psychological Association, 2017), 3–9.

encompasses research on the literature and cultures of numerous countries. Meanwhile, scholars from various institutions around the world are actively involved in this field of study. For instance, Ursula K. Heise⁸ mentioned in the book *Ecocriticism in Japan* (2018) that German ecocriticism originated from Germanist scholars who were based in England and the United States. It later gained interest from Americanists in Germany before spreading to German departments within Germany itself. Furthermore, As Yuki Masami⁹ has highlighted, the development of ecocriticism in Japan can be divided into three stages: the first phase focusing on translation, the second stage introducing comparative approaches, and the third involving ecocritical interventions in Japanese literature, where Americanists and Japanologists have played significant roles at different times over the past two decades. In the introduction part of volume *Ecocriticism in Japan* (2018), Yuki Masami stated that the earliest scholarly attempt to define Japanese ecocriticism is most likely the joint essay by David Bialock and Ursula Heise. They identify three themes as characteristic of Japanese ecocriticism: perceived harmony with nature, response to major environmental crisis, and attention to “slow” injustice, which is an important milestone in defining Japanese ecocriticism.

The expansion of ecocriticism on a global scale has prompted the examination of how environmental issues, noteworthy events, and approaches studied by ecocritics vary across different regions, countries, and languages. Karen Thornber¹⁰, a scholar specializing in Japan studies, has put forth the viewpoint that global crises like climate change, ocean acidification, and biodiversity loss are increasingly reducing the importance of regional and national distinctions. Especially, the two most prominent environmental catastrophes in Japan are the Minamata Bay mercury poisoning caused by the Chisso Corporation from the 1940s to the 1960s and the Great Tōhoku Earthquake in 2011, which resulted in devastating technological failures and nuclear radiation. These large-scale environmental accidents and disasters have deeply impacted the cultural imagination of the nation. It is worth noting that Bialock and Heise¹¹ recognized the perspective that the idea of being in harmony with nature is more of a cultural and ideological construct rather than an actual practice. They also believe that this perceived harmony is not solely rooted in Japanese culture, but is also influenced by the enduring fascination that Westerners have with Japan. As a result, this perception of harmony can sometimes be contradictory to the social reality in Japan. Thus, we can deduce that the term *kyōsei* employed in the Japanese language signifies not just the harmony with nature itself, but also the alignment with the surrounding components of the human-created living environment. In other words, in Japan, there is a strong belief in the concept of harmony, which is seen as a distinct cultural characteristic. Nakazawa Shinichi¹², a prominent anthropologist and thinker, emphasized this Japanese view of harmony in contrast to the Western perspective that focuses on conquering nature. Nakazawa’s argument is rooted in his deep understanding of Buddhism, and he explored how the reciprocal relationship between humans and nature has influenced the unique mindset and attitude found in Japanese culture.

⁸ Hisaaki Wake, Keijirō Suga, and Masami Yūki, *Ecocriticism in Japan* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2018).

⁹ Yuki Masami, *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism*, ed. Greg Garrard (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 519–26.

¹⁰ Karen Laura Thornber, *Ecoambiguity: Environmental Crises and East Asian Literatures* (Ann Arbor: University Of Michigan Press, 2012).

¹¹ Hisaaki Wake, Keijirō Suga, and Masami Yūki, *Ecocriticism in Japan* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2018). 4

¹² Nakazawa, Shinichi. “Futatsu no ‘shizen’” [Dual nature]. *Gendai shiso* 43. no.1 (2015): 35–41.

The intersection between psychoanalysis and ecocriticism

Sigmund Freud gave a well-known series of lectures titled “The Psychopathology of Everyday Life” in 1901. His goal was to introduce the public to the nascent and somewhat enigmatic discipline of psychoanalysis. Likewise, a comparable series of lectures today may be inspired by findings on ozone depletion, toxic waste, and the greenhouse effect. These shared environmental issues have evolved into the psychopathology of our daily lives. They show a state of the soul that Freud would not have named. Theodore Roszak¹³ mentioned in the preface of *The voice of the Earth* (2001) that we have learnt a sobering lesson in the century since psychology was officially recognized as a branch of medical research. The human values that bind us to one another in society, involving honor, decency, and compassion, are not generally the same virtues that bind us companionably to the species we share the Earth with. The agony of what Theodore Roszak terms the “ecological unconscious” has risen in our time as a deeper imbalance.

Many terms these days have the prefix “eco” attached to them. Eco-politics, eco-philosophy, eco-feminism, and eco-consumerism are all topics of discussion. This small, unique, and specialized flag floats over our language as a sign of the times, intended to signify our tardy concern about the destiny of the earth. Therefore, the perspective of ecopsychology seeks to reconcile our culture’s long-standing, historical divide between the psychological and the ecological and to understand the demands of both the world and the individual as a continuum. According to Theodore Roszak¹⁴, Previously, all “psychologies” were “ecopsychologies.” Those who attempted to cure the soul assumed that human nature is intimately connected to the universe we share with animals, plants, minerals, and all the invisible forces of the cosmos. It is particularly contemporary Western psychology that has separated the “inner” life from the “outside” world, as if what was inside of us was something real, important, and inextricably linked to our study of the natural world. We shall attempt to bridge the gap between the two worlds of existence—huge and small, lofty and negligible, outward and inward. Theodore Roszak believed that such a rational and emotional conversation would develop along the ecological line, and he discussed and reviewed two significant concepts mentioned in his work: the Anthropoc principle and the Gaia hypothesis¹⁵. From the perspective of ecopsychology, we must confront the larger implications of the universe’s organized and developing complexity sooner or later. It is possible that the underlying systems of nature, from which our psychology, culture, and science eventually arise.

Therefore, in this paper, we explore and examine Japanese literary works through the lens of Adlerian psychology, with the Great East Japan Earthquake serving as a societal backdrop. Meanwhile, combining with environmental issues, we intend to uncover the diverse possibilities of the eco-psychological aspect of contemporary writing within the realm of world literature.

¹³Theodore Roszak, *The Voice of the Earth: An Exploration of Ecopsychology; with a New Afterword* (Grand Rapids, Mi: Phanes Press, Cop, 2001).

¹⁴Theodore Roszak, *The Voice of the Earth: An Exploration of Ecopsychology; with a New Afterword* (Grand Rapids, Mi: Phanes Press, Cop, 2001).

¹⁵Theodore Roszak, *The Voice of the Earth: An Exploration of Ecopsychology; with a New Afterword* (Grand Rapids, Mi: Phanes Press, Cop, 2001), 17.

Japan's response to the Great East Japan Earthquake disaster through literature

It has been over a decade since March 11, 2011, when the Great East Japan Earthquake disaster occurred in Japan's Tohoku region. Even now, the vivid memories of the disaster and the emotional accounts of its consequences continue to be deeply ingrained in the collective cultural awareness of people in Japan. The combination of the earthquake, tsunami, and meltdowns at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, commonly known as the 'triple disaster' or '3.11', has resulted in significant and enduring impacts. The events of 3.11 brought nuclear power and its associated concerns into even greater focus. For instance, the challenges related to decontaminating areas exposed to radiation are still unresolved. According to McCurry¹⁶ stated in the Guardian, over 40,000 Fukushima refugees remain unable to return to their homes as of 2022. Furthermore, the nuclear power plant is expected to release over a million tons of contaminated water into the Pacific Ocean once the tanks reach their maximum capacity in summer or autumn 2023¹⁷. This will have severe impacts on the local fisheries, agriculture, and the surrounding environment.

The triple disaster has not only had a significant effect on Japan, but it has also had a profound influence on Japanese literature, art, and film. Literature produced in the aftermath of the Fukushima disaster focuses on maintaining the ongoing dimensions and global implications of the event as central topics in public and scholarly discussions. Over the past decade, the literary community has gradually created works that respond to the catastrophic series of events. However, Linda Flores and Barbara Geihorn¹⁸ claimed in their edited volume that some authors have felt a strong urge to write, but often faced the challenge of not knowing the most effective way to address a crisis of such magnitude. These reactions bear similarities to those of authors of *genbaku bungaku* (atomic bomb literature) who grappled with the unprecedented experience of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. For numerous authors, the occurrence of 3.11 marked a momentous shift; the sequence of catastrophic incidents announced a fresh age, a post-3.11 existence that indicated, primarily, essential changes in the structure of society after 'that day' (*ano hi*), as March 11, 2011, is often mentioned in both the media and the arts. Tragedies offer the opportunity for renewal and progress.

Various cultural and creative influencers have contributed to political and intellectual conversations about tragedy. Literature, in particular, has played a significant role in this context. Following the events of 3.11, many writers felt compelled to write about the process of recovery. They describe how the Japanese people mourn, cope with the tragedy, and confront the challenges that have been exposed after years of being hidden beneath society's surface. Mentioned by Jordi Serrano-Muñoz¹⁹ in his article that there is a wide range of literary works that explore the disaster, including poetry, short stories, novels, and creative essays. We can view the literature of 3.11 as a way

¹⁶Justin McCurry, "Japan Marks 10 Years since Triple Disaster Killed 18,500 People," The Guardian, March 11, 2021, sec. World news.

¹⁷"IAEA Finds Japan's Plans to Release Treated Water into the Sea at Fukushima Consistent with International Safety Standards," www.iaea.org, July 4, 2023.

¹⁸Linda Flores and Barbara Geilhorn, *Literature after Fukushima* (Taylor & Francis, 2023), 2–3.

¹⁹Jordi Serrano-Muñoz, "Reading after the Disaster: Japan's Reaction to the 3/11 Events through Literature," *Association for Asian Studies*, 2019.

to comprehend a society that may be at a pivotal moment in its history. For example, Novelist Furukawa Hideo²⁰, a native of Tōhoku, penned the short story “Horses, Horses, Despite Everything the Light Is Still Pure” in the aftermath of the disaster. Rather than seeking refuge in shelters or leaving the evacuation zone, Furukawa and a companion chose to go against the flow of displaced individuals and documented their expedition through the ravaged region. Wagō Ryōchi²¹, another resident of Fukushima, chronicled his thoughts and experiences in a poetic manner through his Twitter account in the immediate aftermath of the events. His posts garnered a significant following and he eventually published his writings under the title “Pebbles of Poetry.” In 1993, Kawakami Hiromi²² authored a short story titled “Kamisama.” This story revolves around a highly courteous and traditional bear who relocates to an apartment neighboring the protagonist. In light of the Fukushima incident, she chose to revisit this story and created “Kamisama 2011.” In this revised version, she delves deeper into the difficulties and outcomes of seclusion for both individuals and communities, with a specific emphasis on those impacted by the catastrophe.

The triple disaster in Fukushima was exceptional, but it’s crucial to understand that it occurred in the broader global context of our world, which is prone to disasters. According to the introduction part of the book *Literature after Fukushima* (2023), Kimura Saeko and Anne Bayard-Sakai’s collaborative collection of essays titled *Post-disaster Fiction as World Literature*²³ (2021) demonstrates the international scope of research on literary works inspired by the events of 3.11, positioning it within the broader context of world literature. That is to say the events of 3.11 not only sparked creativity in the arts, but also led to the emergence of new terminology and new perspectives on the world after 3.11. Literature after the Fukushima disaster serves as evidence of this significant shift, indicating how the aftermath of the disaster has reshaped social reality and discourse in several fields, such as trauma studies, disaster studies, ecocriticism, regional identity, food safety, and civil society.

The reception of 2:46 aftershocks, stories of Japan earthquake (2011)

*2:46 Aftershocks: Stories from the Japan Earthquake*²⁴ (2011) is an anthology written by bloggers as well as a few famous people, including Yoko Ono and William Gibson, that encompasses reflections, personal accounts, artwork, and short stories from renowned and unknown artists, whether they are Japanese or not, and whether they are situated near or far from Fukushima.

The book titled “2:46” is named after the exact time when the earthquake occurred. Furthermore, the accounts in the book are real-time narratives that offer small reflections. These reflections serve to highlight the realization of human insignificance in the face of natural disasters. While we may feel powerless, it is crucial that we do not lose hope. Those who have experienced such extreme events often describe it as a rebirth, similar to the phoenix’s nirvana, where the

²⁰Hideo Furukawa, *Horses, Horses, in the End the Light Remains Pure a Tale That Begins with Fukushima* (Columbia University Press, 2016).

²¹Ryōichi Wagō, “Pebbles of Poetry: The Tōhoku Earthquake and Tsunami--,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, July 19, 2011

²²Hiromi Kawakami, “God Bless You, 2011,” *Granta*, March 20, 2012.

²³Saeko Kimura, and Anne Bayard-Sakai, *Sekai bungaku toshite no ‘shinsaigo bungaku’* (Tokyo: Akashi Shoten, 2021).

²⁴Patrick Sherriff, *2:46: Aftershocks: Stories from the Japan Earthquake* (London: Enhanced Editions, 2011).

focus shifts from suffering to a renewed sense of hope. The collection provides insight into how people were affected both during and after the events of that fateful Friday afternoon in March.

Jake Adelstein²⁵ once mentioned in his review of this book that a British teacher who blogs under the name Our Man in Abiko was searching for a way to assist the survivors of the Great Tōhoku Pacific Earthquake and Tsunami and overcome his own feeling of helplessness. Eventually, while washing up one evening a week after the earthquake, he had an idea. The British teacher realized that although he lacked medical skills or the ability to fly a helicopter, he had the ability to edit. He decided to compile a book featuring voices from various individuals. He said, “I am utilizing my editing skills to contribute in any way I can.” Another novelist Barry Eisler²⁶, one of the contributors to the book, authored the foreword section. According to his account, when he arrived in Tokyo in 1992, his initial impression of the city was that it was metropolitan. He struggled to articulate his affection for Tokyo while also recognizing that its rapid development had caused it to be cruelly impersonal. However, following the 3.11 disaster, the collective aid and solidarity among the city’s inhabitants became an oasis in the desert, enabling him to witness and experience the innate compassion of humanity.

Application of Adlerian psychology and the ecocriticism in Anthology

Human’s powerlessness in the presence of nature

At 2:46 pm, on March 11, 2011, a powerful earthquake with a magnitude 9.0 struck the northeast coast of Japan. This devastating event resulted in a tsunami that claimed the lives of over 18,000 individuals²⁷ and also led to a nuclear meltdown in Fukushima. Simultaneously, the shocking calamity also profoundly impacted the adjacent community. Numerous individuals residing in regions impacted by the seismic event were compelled to make the decision to relocate to more secure areas. Experiencing anguish, apprehension, and a feeling of helplessness in the presence of formidable natural forces, many residents chose to temporarily avoid and depart from the affected areas. Throughout the short story *forget* written by Michiko Segawa in the book, we encounter depictions as the following:

Every time we face a horrible natural disaster, it makes me think that the land, sky, seas, and mountains are exploding in anger. Tsunamis swallowed houses, cars, electric poles, schools, buildings, parents, grandparents, and children so quickly. More than ten thousand people’s lives were taken. Can’t the super technologies we created in this modern world prevent a disaster?²⁸

Countless lives have been tragically taken by the devastating forces of earthquake and tsunami. Humankind’s once firm belief that “man can conquer nature” has been shattered in the face of these natural disasters. Despite our efforts to harness advanced technology, such as nuclear power plants, in an attempt to control nature and benefit humanity, we are sometimes confronted with outcomes that surpass our imagination. Our pursuit of dominance

²⁵Jack Adelstein, “#2:46 Aftershocks: Stories from the Japan Earthquake Published. Give a Little, Learn a Lot, Help Some People.,” Japan Subculture Research Center, April 12, 2011.

²⁶Barry Eisler, “#2:46: Aftershocks: Stories from the Japan Earthquake,” Truthout, April 22, 2011.

²⁷Justin McCurry, “Japan Marks 10 Years since Triple Disaster Killed 18,500 People,” the Guardian, March 11, 2021.

²⁸Patrick Sherriff, 2:46: Aftershocks: Stories from the Japan Earthquake (London: Enhanced Editions, 2011), 68-69

over nature can sometimes be seen as a manifestation of our own feelings of inferiority. More often than that, we find ourselves powerless and humbled by the overwhelming power of nature. Alfred Adler and Colin Brett mentioned in their monograph that the feeling of superiority is the opposite of feeling inferior and the two are closely connected. It is not surprising to find a hidden motion of inferiority in individuals who exhibit a superiority complex²⁹. Hence, through the establishment of human civilization and our desire to demonstrate our remarkable achievements and superiority over nature, we have inadvertently demonstrated that we still possess an underlying sense of inadequacy when confronted with the forces of nature.

On the other hand, we cannot discount the role of catastrophic description and aftershock in the work. In the stories *evacuated* and *help* written by Takanori Hayao and Shizue Nonaka, we encounter a narrative where numerous residents who were directly impacted by the earthquake catastrophe sought to flee the areas that were severely affected. However, they were confronted with the unexpected disruption and destruction of communication systems and public transportation, which they had previously taken for granted. This sudden realization came as a major surprise to them and left them feeling shocked.

When the first explosion happened at the Fukushima Plant, we decided to leave within a week at the most while monitoring the situation. However, Sendai is in complete isolation, with no prospect of reinstatement of the train service at Sendai Station, the airport is completely destroyed, and access to highways is restricted to emergency vehicles only.³⁰

I switched the TV on to find out what was happening. There were lots of aftershocks and a second big one. I was so scared and didn't know what to do. I rang and rang and tried to email, but didn't work for some time.³¹

It becomes apparent that the aforementioned descriptions appear to be disconnected from everyday experiences and leave us feeling amazed. Rita Felski³² advocated for this literature of shock slips through our frameworks of legitimation and resists our most heartfelt values. She even argued that when experiencing shock, it can lead to a noticeable absence of emotion, creating a state of numbness or blankness that is often discussed by trauma theorists. Shock represents a sudden and forceful collision or encounter. It forcefully enters consciousness and challenges the reader's or viewer's defenses. Meanwhile, like a blunt instrument, it enters the mind and disrupts our usual ways of organizing and comprehending the world. Thus, in the context of this case, the portrayal of shock serves as a catalyst for illustrating the devastating events caused by nature. It leads us to reflect on our respect for the natural world and also prompts us to reconsider the dynamic between humans and nature.

²⁹Alfred Adler and Colin Brett, *Understanding Life* (Center City, Minn.: Hazelden, 1998), 32-33

³⁰Patrick Sherriff, *2:46: Aftershocks: Stories from the Japan Earthquake* (London: Enhanced Editions, 2011), 52-53

³¹Patrick Sherriff, *2:46: Aftershocks: Stories from the Japan Earthquake* (London: Enhanced Editions, 2011), 84

³²Rita Felski, *Uses of Literature* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 110-113

Embrace the reality, confront the disaster with composure and courage

In response to the unforeseen catastrophe, certain individuals made the decision to promptly evacuate the hazardous area in order to mitigate the potential threat of subsequent events such as aftershocks and tsunamis. Conversely, a significant number of Tohoku residents opted to remain in their respective hometowns and demonstrate their unwavering support. The remarkable poise and serenity exhibited in their reaction to the catastrophe were truly astounding, as if they were prepared to confront it head-on and adapt to its presence. The account in story *care* written by Yuki Watanabe as following provides evidence of this.

When people living towards the coast were confronted with the threat of radiation, the whole town decided to evacuate without waiting for government instructions. Nobody in my hometown will evacuate. Why? What's more, they took in people evacuating from the town next door, so now they feel they can't evacuate themselves and leave those people behind.

People of the Tohoku region are stoic, compassionate, calm and humble. They have always just dealt with the situation without complaining. Of course, they have questions and fears, but they hesitate to show them as they know other people are experiencing far worse.³³

When a calamity occurs, the individuals in the Tohoku region do not voice their grievances, but rather embrace the reality and display resilience and fortitude. They are even willing to forgo their own comfort to assist refugees from nearby regions. This demonstrates immense bravery and an optimistic outlook on life. Ichiro Kishimi and Fumitake Koga³⁴ emphasized in their best-seller that in Adlerian psychology, trauma is completely dismissed, which was pointed out as a groundbreaking and revolutionary idea. The perspective on trauma in Freudian psychology is certainly intriguing. Freud believed that a person's psychological wounds (traumas) are responsible for their current unhappiness. However, Adler, in opposition to the concept of trauma, asserts no experience in itself is the cause of our success or failure. We do not suffer from the impact of our experiences, also known as trauma, but rather we shape them to serve our own purposes. Our experiences do not determine us, but the meaning we ascribe to them is what determines our actions. In other words, Adler highlights that our self is not solely shaped by our experiences, but rather by the meaning we give them. Traumatic events and difficult experiences like disaster can influence our personality, but they do not have ultimate control over our lives. Therefore, for those individuals in the Tohoku region who have shown resilience and who have courageously accepted the harsh reality of the disaster, they are now contemplating strategies to utilize it as an opportunity to help others in their community. Instead of dwelling on what they have lost, they are directing their attention towards how they can bring about positive changes within their own capacities. They are absorbing the profound impact of the extreme experience, all while holding onto a firm belief in facing challenges with sincerity and composure.

The "living in the present moment and starting from now" lifestyle in Adlerian psychology is similar to the Stoic school of philosophy in Western philosophy. In the book *Reasons Not to*

³³Patrick Sherriff, 2:46: Aftershocks: Stories from the Japan Earthquake (London: Enhanced Editions, 2011), 17-18

³⁴Ichiro Kishimi and Koga Fumitake, *The Courage to Be Disliked: How to Free Yourself, Change Your Life and Achieve Real Happiness* (London: Allen & Unwin, 2019), 11-14

Worry: How to be a Stoic in chaotic times (2022), the author Brigid Delaney³⁵ offers a contemporary interpretation of the ancient philosophy of Stoicism. She reminds us that the word “stoic” has been distorted from its original meaning. We often use it casually to describe individuals who suppress their emotions, but the true Stoics were not like that. Their goal was to reduce unnecessary suffering by cultivating the mind to acknowledge several truths, including the awareness of one’s own mortality and that of others. Furthermore, she points out that another principle of Stoicism is to evaluate what is within our control and what is not, and direct our attention towards the things we can control. We can only have control over our own character, actions, reactions, and how we treat others. Everything else is beyond our personal sphere of influence. Hence, she claims the reason for striving to develop indifference towards our health, wealth, and reputation is because ultimately, these aspects are outside of our control.³⁶

Based on the analysis provided, it is evident that Adlerian psychology and Stoic philosophy both advocate for the concept of “embracing the present moment.” They share a mutual ideology, which is not only widespread in Western countries, but also in Eastern countries such as Japan, where it is highly valued and acknowledged. Building upon this belief, the Japanese people have embraced the principles of accepting reality while remaining hopeful, and responding calmly to situations by taking appropriate actions within their control. As Kosuke Ishihara mentions in his story *experience* as following:

This disaster has made us appreciate the importance of life, of things, the bonds of family, the things we take for granted in our daily routines. To the victims—I know you’re in dire straits, but keep your hopes up!³⁷

Collaborating within a horizontal social network community

During the occurrence of the triple disaster involving an earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear power plant meltdown, there was a significant disruption in communication and transportation. As a result, many individuals were filled with anxiety and possessed an urgent desire to ascertain the safety of their families. They turned to various social media platforms like phone calls, emails, and Twitter to seek information. This remains the utmost priority for anyone who witnesses or experiences the devastating impact of a disaster. In response to such crisis situations, individuals in unaffected areas of Japan have been working tirelessly, racing against time, to ensure their personal safety and the safety of their loved ones. Simultaneously, they are additionally providing assistance to those in need to the best of their abilities.

For example, Yumiko Takemoto shares her personal account of the events that transpired between her and her neighbors in the aftermath of the earthquake. After the earthquake, she lost all her means of communication and could not even watch TV. It was too scary to stay inside, she spent the night in her car, constantly feeling the aftershocks. Two days later, the

³⁵Brigid Delaney, *Reasons Not to Worry: How to be a Stoic in chaotic times* (Allen & Unwin, 2022).

³⁶Brigid Delaney, “Inject That Stoicism into My Veins!': 10 Tools of Ancient Philosophy That Improved My Life,” *The Guardian*, September 19, 2022.

³⁷Patrick Sherriff, *2:46: Aftershocks: Stories from the Japan Earthquake* (London: Enhanced Editions, 2011), 61

electricity and gas in her house came back on, and she and her family were relieved to have warm food and bright lights. Although they still do not have running water after ten days, they feel grateful to still have their house, especially considering the people in Ibaraki who cannot contact their families in Fukushima Prefecture.

While there was no running water, she relied on her neighbors for water from their garden well. The neighbors not only provided drinking water but also offered instant noodles and dishes for her meals. Their help was invaluable, and words cannot adequately express her gratitude. She and her family are extremely grateful for the kindness they received, from her neighbors who provided well water and even strangers who shared water to fill their bathtub. At the end of story, Yumiko Takemoto utters the following statement:

My neighbors' kindness reminded me that it is very important to stay connected with our neighbors, and to help each other. I would like to urge everybody to be more actively involved in their local community in their everyday life. Because nobody can survive without the support from others.³⁸

Here, the author emphasizes the significant impact that neighbors and communities have on the mutual collaboration link after a disaster. It is indisputable that in times of dire circumstances, we must depend on our local communities and neighborhoods for assistance. This is particularly evident in Asian countries like China, Japan, and Korea, where collectivism is deeply ingrained in society. In China and Japan, for instance, there exist age-old proverbs like "A close neighbor is better than a distant relative," which serve as a testament to the significance of community and neighborhood support.

Additionally, assisting one another within our community and neighborhood allow a transformation of our relationships from a hierarchical structure to one of the equalities. In settings such as schools and companies, we often find ourselves in small groups where there are individuals who hold positions of authority, such as teachers, managers or proprietors. Occasionally, these relationships can make us feel oppressed. However, the bonds within a neighborhood tend to be much simpler, characterized by a horizontal equality. This type of relationship is more likely to foster mutual assistance without any profitable motives. It can be seen as a positive and healthy affinity between equals. Therefore, during times of disaster, this equal and mutual support, cooperation, and management of neighborhood relationships become even more significant. Adler's Individual Psychology Claims the Goal of interpersonal relationships is a feeling of community.³⁹ In other words, if we consider others as our comrades and recognize that we are constantly surrounded by them, it becomes important for us to find our own "refuge" within this life. Additionally, this process should also cultivate a desire within us to share and contribute to the community to understand others as comrades and the realization of having our own refuge is referred to as "community feeling." Meanwhile, "Community feeling" is also referred to as "social interest," that is to say, "interest in

³⁸Patrick Sherriff, 2:46: Aftershocks: Stories from the Japan Earthquake (London: Enhanced Editions, 2011), 116

³⁹Ichiro Kishimi and Koga Fumitake, *The Courage to Be Disliked: How to Free Yourself, Change Your Life and Achieve Real Happiness* (London: Allen & Unwin, 2019), 160

society.” It represents making the switch from attachment to self (self-interest) to concern for others (social interest).⁴⁰

We should shift our perspective and recognize that we are not the focal point of the world. Instead of constantly seeking what others can provide for us, we should consider what we can offer them in return. During times of significant calamity, the concept of equality becomes prominent as it liberates us from the societal divisions and biases that exist in a hierarchical structure. It allows us to view our surroundings without any distorted perceptions. Instead, it fosters a stronger sense of identity as part of a collective and a feeling of belonging. This in turn encourages collaboration and motivates us to make meaningful contributions to those around us.

Conquest or coexistence, revisiting the relationship between human and nature

The tsunami overcame the sea wall and hit the plant and caused the damage, which led to nuclear meltdowns and a number of hydrogen explosions. The initial measures taken to protect the public included implementing evacuation plans, providing shelter, imposing restrictions on food and water consumption, relocating individuals, and disseminating information. It was the worst emergency at a nuclear power plant since the Chernobyl disaster in 1986. If we classify the massive earthquake and tsunami as natural calamities, then we can view the meltdowns at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant as a subsequent catastrophe resulting from perceived factors.

The primary concern we need to address seems to be the reason behind the nuclear power plant’s inability to withstand the forces of the tsunami and earthquake. It appears that one possible explanation, based on scattered reports, is that the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant did not consistently and thoroughly assess its susceptibility to external threats throughout its operational lifetime.⁴¹ Putting aside the technical details, it is crucial to examine how to evaluate and interpret such human-induced disasters from a human standpoint.

In the anthology, we discover a short story called “*expectations*” authored by Miho Nishihiro. In her hometown of Abiko, Chiba prefecture, there was a low-5 grade earthquake recorded, which was smaller than the epicenter. Since she is inland, she did not experience any tsunami effects. However, it was the largest earthquake she has ever experienced, and she has suffered greatly. As a mother of two small children, she is also concerned about the numerous aftershocks. But her greatest worry is the radiation leak from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant. Based on her narrative, she holds the belief that the issue stems from excessive self-assurance and a deficiency in openly sharing information about nuclear leaks.

⁴⁰Ichiro Kishimi and Koga Fumitake, *The Courage to Be Disliked: How to Free Yourself, Change Your Life and Achieve Real Happiness* (London: Allen & Unwin, 2019), 163

⁴¹Hideki Nariai, “The Fukushima Daiichi Accident—Summary of Comments and Lessons from the Report by the Director General,” *Journal of the Atomic Energy Society of Japan* 58, no. 3 (2016): 184–89.

What I really want to know is, if the situation worsens, what happens? How is the condition of the nuclear plant going to affect us, how far is the risk going to spread, and what is the possibility of this happening? We need to know this kind of information but almost nobody has told us anything. If we had that info, everyone could consider all the options and be prepared for action, and public panic could be avoided if a worst-case scenario happened. But because we lack information, people evacuated the capital unnecessarily.⁴²

It is evident from the original quote that there is a lack of sufficient accurate information available to the general public regarding nuclear power plants. This deficiency leads to a situation where the public is unaware and unable to adequately protect themselves. If we delve further into the underlying causes, it becomes apparent that we constructed nuclear power plants with the aim of harnessing nature for the benefit of humanity, and we attempted to employ human intellect to triumph over nature. However, our endeavors did not yield the desired outcomes. It was only in the wake of a catastrophe that we came to the realization that our understanding of nature was inadequate, and we emerged from the illusion that nuclear power plants were entirely secure. The appreciation for the inherent worth of nature has been received differently on a global scale. The Stockholm Declaration of 1972 and the World Conservation Strategy of 1980 both took a human-centered approach. This Anthropocentric perspective is dominant in societies worldwide and is also prevalent in academia as well as domestic and international governance.⁴³ Hence, the initial development of nuclear power plants can be said to have been influenced by our inchoate interpretation of the natural world.

As the story unfolds, the author realizes we have had overly naive expectations for the safety standards of nuclear power plants. Constantly measuring the power of nature with a self-righteous understanding, it ultimately leads to dire consequences. At the end of the story, the author lodges the following appeal.

My wish is that all the electric power companies will learn from this accident and do their utmost to prevent future risks. This accident has given us a good opportunity to take stock of the expansion of the nuclear power plants we Japanese have embraced as a solution to global warming. I hope that, in the future, renewable power sources will supply the bulk of our electricity and we won't depend on nuclear power.⁴⁴

From the original text, it is evident that the author has a strong desire for all electric power companies to gain insights from this incident and implement appropriate measures to mitigate future hazards. Simultaneously, the author expresses a hopeful aspiration for renewable power sources to assume the role of the principal electricity provider in the future, thereby diminishing reliance on nuclear power. In other words, she advocates for a change in how we view nature, moving away from dominating it to coexisting with it. Most people propose abandoning nuclear power plants as a means of generating electricity and instead embracing

⁴²Patrick Sherriff, 2:46: Aftershocks: Stories from the Japan Earthquake (London: Enhanced Editions, 2011), 60

⁴³Paul Cryer et al., "Why Ecocentrism Is the Key Pathway to Sustainability | MAHB," MAHB, July 3, 2017.

⁴⁴Patrick Sherriff, 2:46: Aftershocks: Stories from the Japan Earthquake (London: Enhanced Editions, 2011), 61

lighter energy sources like wind and tidal power. Even exploring more sustainable and recyclable approaches to bring humans and nature closer together.

Japan has long experienced frequent disasters, which has instilled a sense of mental preparedness in most Japanese people. They believe that they are interconnected with nature and are part of a more sizable community that includes not only humans, but also plants, animals, and the environment. This biocentric belief aligns with Adler's Individual Psychology, which emphasizes the importance of belonging and achieving a beneficial impact on our surroundings through the first and foremost principle that says, "Listen to the voice of the larger community."⁴⁵ By living in harmony with nature and contributing to its sustainable development, tragic events like the Fukushima 50 could be prevented, and the number of individuals sacrificing their lives for societal progress could be significantly reduced as well.

By applying the principles of Adlerian psychology and ecocriticism to the analysis and interpretation of the stories in this work, it becomes evident that the mass media and government officials played a significant role in promoting the idea of public solidarity. In public discussions, the concepts of "*kizuna*" (emotional bonds between people) and "*gaman*" (endurance and perseverance) have been used to characterize Japan's historical stance in the face of difficulties. This sense of social cohesion and collective spirit not only motivates efforts to provide assistance, but also offers solace to victims by making them feel that their suffering is shared. However, Jordi Serrano-Muñoz⁴⁶ suggests that Japan is a society where individuals are expected to sacrifice their personal identity for the greater good, while also relieving authorities of their responsibilities. Besides, the Fukushima nuclear accident served as a wake-up call for the Japanese people, highlighting the dangers of overconfidence and underestimating the forces of nature. It also prompted a reevaluation of the relationship between humans and nature, as the Japanese people embarked on the challenging task of rebuilding the afflicted areas.

translated by Gerard Ronge

⁴⁵Ichiro Kishimi and Koga Fumitake, *The Courage to Be Disliked: How to Free Yourself, Change Your Life and Achieve Real Happiness* (London: Allen & Unwin, 2019), 175

⁴⁶Jordi Serrano-Muñoz, "Reading after the Disaster: Japan's Reaction to the 3/11 Events through Literature," *Association for Asian Studies*, 2019.

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KEYWORDS

Great East Japan Earthquake

eco-psychological analysis

ABSTRACT:

This research paper attempts to explore an intersection between psychoanalysis and ecocriticism in Japan. Specifically, applied to the literary descriptions in the work “2:46 Aftershocks: Stories from the Japan Earthquake (2011)” from the eco-psychological viewpoint. The study focuses on interpreting and discussing four aspects of how individuals who experienced the Great East Japan Earthquake dealt with feelings of inferiority, acceptance of reality, human-nature relationships, and equality in a horizontally structured society. Furthermore, the paper emphasizes the potential of using eco-psychology to address environmental issues in world literature, which aims to enhance readers’ understanding of both Eastern and Western perspectives on the environment and underscore the significance and necessity of living in harmony with nature.

THE TRIPLE DISASTER

harmony with nature

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Landscape and Imagination:

A History of Fascination
and an Anatomy of Passion
in Jacek Woźniakowski's
Góry niewzruszone
[Immovable Mountains]
and Robert Macfarlane's
*Mountains of the Mind**

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Introduction: Two approaches

In this article, I compare a (relatively) contemporary bestseller, Robert Macfarlane's *Mountains of the mind*, with a somewhat forgotten essay, Jacek Woźniakowski's *Góry niewzruszone. O różnych wyobrażeniach przyrody w nowożytnej kulturze europejskiej* [Immovable Mountains. Images of nature in modern European culture].¹ What unites both texts is that they reflect on

¹ Robert Macfarlane, *Mountains of the mind. A history of a fascination* (London: Granta Books, 2017). Quotations from this edition will be followed by the abbreviation RM and the appropriate page number; Jacek Woźniakowski, "Góry niewzruszone. O różnych wyobrażeniach przyrody w dziejach nowożytnej kultury europejskiej" [Immovable mountains. The images of nature in modern European culture], in: *Pisma wybrane*, t. 2. *Góry niewzruszone i pisma rozmaite o Tatrach* [Selected writings, vol. 2. Immovable mountains and selected writings about the Tatra Mountains], ed. Nawojka Cieślińska-Lobkowitz (Kraków: Universitas, 2011), 5–330. Quotations from this edition will be followed by the abbreviation JW and the appropriate page number.

mountains as a cultural phenomenon; however, they were written in different languages and almost thirty years apart² by authors who belong to different generations.³

While *Góry niewzruszone* is an academic text,⁴ Woźniakowski exceeds the framework of academic discourse. The Polish art historian, who had worked at the Catholic University of Lublin, also relies on the autobiographical and the personal. Indeed, the book is dedicated “to the memory of Jan Gwalbert Pawlikowski and Wanda Pawlikowska” (JW 8). Jan Gwalbert Pawlikowski was an ecological pioneer, who actively fought for the creation of a national park in the Polish Tatra Mountains. He was also Woźniakowski’s grandfather.⁵ Woźniakowski also declares his own passion for mountains (JW 9). His book is a sweeping treatise on the representation of mountains in art – it “identifies new connections between literature, philosophy and art.”⁶ *Góry niewzruszone* has been reprinted twice,⁷ translated into German,⁸ cited in academic publications,⁹ and become an artistic inspiration.¹⁰

Macfarlane’s *Mountains of the mind* is a hybrid text – it is part a reflection on the cultural history of mountains, part autobiography, and part reportage. Macfarlane recalls holidays spent at his grandparents’ house in the Cairngorms of North-East Scotland and his growing interest in mountaineering triggered, among other things, by reading mountaineering books. A more critical and broader reflection on climbing as a cultural and historical phenomenon, however,

² The first edition of *Góry niewzruszone* was published in 1974 (Warsaw: Czytelnik). Macfarlane’s *Mountains of the mind*. A history of the fascination was first published in 2003 (London: Granta Books).

³ “Filolog polski i filozof z wykształcenia, a historyk i krytyk sztuki z zamiłowaniem” [Polish philologist and philosopher with a degree, and art historian and critic with a passion]. Agnieszka Góra-Stepień, Jacek Woźniakowski 1920–2012, <https://teatrnn.pl/leksykon/artykuly/jacek-wozniakowski-1920-2012/>, date of access: 2 March 2023. Woźniakowski taught art history at the Catholic University of Lublin since 1953; from 1980 to 1990 he was a professor at this university, he was also the founder and editor of “Znak,” and a renowned publicist. Macfarlane, born in 1976, studied at Oxford and Cambridge. He is presently a fellow at Emmanuel College, Cambridge. He is a writer, traveler, and nature conservation activist. Apart from *Mountains of the Mind* Macfarlane also published, among others, *The Wild Places* (London: Granta Books, 2007); *The Old Ways: A Journey on Foot* (London: Hamish Hamilton–Penguin Books, 2012); *Landmarks* (London: Hamish Hamilton–Penguin Books, 2015); and *Underland: A Deep Time Journey* (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2019). See: <https://www.davidhigham.co.uk/authors-dh/robert-macfarlane/>, date of access: 3 August 2023.

⁴ *Góry niewzruszone* was Woźniakowski’s habilitation thesis – see: Małgorzata Augustyniuk, Profesor Jacek Woźniakowski (1920–2012), https://www.bu.kul.pl/jacek-wozniakowski-1920-2012-sylwetka.art_41164.html, date of access: 5 July 2023.

⁵ Jan Gwalbert Pawlikowski (1860–1939) was a lawyer, economist, literary scholar, politician and social activist. He was also the co-founder and editor of, among others, such magazines as “Wierchy” [Peaks], “Ochrona Przyrody” [Nature conservation], “Lamus”. See, among others: Jan Gwalbert Pawlikowski. *Humanistyczna wizja ochrony przyrody i turystyki* [Jan Gwalbert Pawlikowski. A humanistic vision of nature conservation and tourism], ed. Piotr Dąbrowski, Bernadetta Zawilińska (Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza Wierchy, Centralny Ośrodek Turystyki Górskiej PTTK, 2014).

⁶ Marta Jachowicz, “Jacek Woźniakowski jako krytyk sztuki współczesnej” [Jacek Woźniakowski as a contemporary art critic], *Roczniki Humanistyczne* vol. XVI–XVII, 4 (2008–2009): 9.

⁷ In 1995, a revised edition was published (Kraków: Znak). The version of the text reprinted in Woźniakowski’s *Pisma wybrane* [Selected Writings] in 2011 is based on the 1995 edition.

⁸ Jacek Woźniakowski, *Die Wildnis. Zur deutungsgeschichte des Berges in der europäischen Neuzeit*, trans. Theo Mechtenberg (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1987).

⁹ See, among others: Maria Janion, “Kuźnia natury” [Nature’s forge], in: *Gorączka romantyczna* [The Romantic fever] (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1975), 249; Martin Korenjak, “Why Mountains Matter: Early Modern Roots of a Modern Notion”, *Renaissance Quarterly* 70 (2017): 181, 204.

¹⁰ In 2019, an exhibition of paintings by Aleksandra Rudzka-Miazga entitled *Góry (nie)wzruszone* [(Im)movable mountains] was organized in Zakopane. See: *Wystawa “Góry (nie)wzruszone”*, <http://cojestgrane24.wyborcza.pl/cjg24/Zakopane/1,43,600163,Wystawa--Gory--nie-wzruszone-.html>, date of access: 2 March 2023.

dates back to one of Macfarlane's climbs in the Alps, during which he nearly died. The British writer's debut book was a success¹¹ among the general public and scholars alike.¹² It has been reprinted and translated into many languages,¹³ and the screenplay for the film *Mountain* was based on it.¹⁴

Despite the differences mentioned above, both books have a lot in common, and not only in terms of subject matter. Both are, quintessentially, essays. It is clearly visible in Macfarlane's book, and Woźniakowski calls his work an essay in the introduction, insofar as his "observations often go beyond the visual arts, venturing into literature, philosophy, and even theology" (JW 13).

What renders both texts distinct and at the same time complementary, and in that sense worthy of comparative analysis, is the focus on different timeframes. Woźniakowski analyzes the period from antiquity to the 18th century. Mountains were being discovered at that time, and ideas about them were being formed, as demonstrated by various texts of culture. Woźniakowski goes in his reflections as far as to the 1780s, just before the advent of Romanticism, and the first ascents of Mont Blanc. It was the beginning of the era of conquerors, which gradually led to the transformation of the natural landscape and dramatic changes in human imagination. Macfarlane picks up where Woźniakowski left off. The British writer connects the first ascent of Mont Blanc in 1786 with the tendency, which developed in the second half of the 1700s, to explore mountains not only out of necessity, but also because "a coherent sense began to develop of the splendour of mountainous landscape" (RM 15). By the mid-1800s, climbing as a sport had already emerged: "Mountains began to exert a considerable and often fatal power of attraction on the human mind" (RM 16). It is this fatal influence, the "mountains of the mind" which overshadow the real landscape in human imagination, that Macfarlane analyzes. The British writer studies how ideas about mountains have changed and developed in the past centuries.

Woźniakowski asks: "What role do mountains actually play, not only in painting, as an inspiration, an embodiment, and a sign of our viewpoints, choices, and dreams?" (JW 12). He further argues that how we see mountains, especially at a given time, "gives us a new insight into culture;" it shows "its scale, style, and quality" (JW 13). Woźniakowski analyzes what led

¹¹See reviews: Kevin S. Blake, "Mountain Symbolism and Geographical Imaginations", *Cultural Geographies* vol. 12, no 4 (October 2005): 527–531; Maciej Krupa, "Góry – historia wyobraźni" [Mountains – a history of imagination], *Nowe Książki* 4 (2019): 45.

¹²See among others: Anna Dziok-Łazarecka, "Tekstualne doświadczenie krajobrazu górskiego – o funkcjach intertekstualności w książce Roberta Macfarlane'a *Mountains of the Mind*" [A textual experience of mountains – the role of intertextuality in Robert Macfarlane's *Mountains of the Mind*], *Białostockie Studia Literaturoznawcze* 11 (2017): 275–288; Przemysław Kaliszuk, "Wertykalna izolacja. Górská proza Tadeusza Piotrowskiego" [Vertical isolation. Tadeusz Piotrowski's mountain prose], *Napis* 27 (2021): 134; Ilona Łęcka, "Szaleniec czy taktik? Wizerunek alpinisty we współczesnej literaturze górskiej" [A madman or a tactician? The image of a mountaineer in contemporary mountaineering literature], *Nowy Napis Co Tydzień* 30 (2020), <https://nowynapis.eu/tygodnik/nr-30/artukul/szaleniec-czy-taktyk-wizerunek-alpinisty-we-wspolczesnej-literaturze>, date of access: 5 July 2023.

¹³Macfarlane's book was republished by Granta Books also in 2004, 2008 and 2017. It was awarded the Guardian First Book Award, The Somerset Maugham Award, and The Sunday Times Young Writer of the Year Award. It was also nominated for The Boardman Tasker Prize for Mountain Literature and John Llewellyn Rhys Prize. *Mountains of the Mind*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mountains_of_the_Mind, date of access: 15 April 2023.

¹⁴*Mountain*, dir. Jennifer Peedom, script Robert Macfarlane, Australia 2017.

to the “romantic transformation” that is so important for modernity. He also points out that culture is currently undergoing another transformation, the symptoms of which are “ecological movements, as well as a boom in literature devoted to environmental protection and nature conservation” (JW 12).

When George Mallory was asked why he wished to climb Mount Everest, he famously responded “Because it’s there.”¹⁵ Macfarlane returns to this simple yet fascinating answer¹⁶ and further investigates what makes people sacrifice what is most precious for them, their own lives and the happiness of their loved ones, for the sake of climbing. Why are mountains so fascinating? What cultural role do mountains play? He looks for reasons behind this fascination in history, literature, and scientific (for example, geological or philosophical) texts.

Both writers adopt different points of view, but they ask essentially similar questions, and the parallel reading of both essays gives rise to a complementary history of fascination, which has played and still plays an important role in European culture. Woźniakowski and Macfarlane not only write successive “chapters in a book about men and mountains” (JW 304), but also devise their unique typological approaches. Woźniakowski distinguishes between different approaches towards mountains. Their respective rises and demises indicate subsequent stages of seeing and discovering mountains in culture. Still, the boundaries between them are not strict; different attitudes can be observed in different periods, and sometimes they function simultaneously. Macfarlane also systematically describes “imaginary mountains,” that is the most important reasons for the fascination with height, in the respective chapters of his book. They are historical in nature because they have emerged and prevailed at a given time, but they also permanently marked how we see and imagine mountainous landscape. The key problem in both essays is the gap between natural landscape and imagination.

A history of a fascination

If we want to reconstruct a history of the fascination with mountains, we need to start with Woźniakowski’s essay, which is more focused on the past, and then move on to Macfarlane’s text, which focuses on post-romanticism and the present. This notwithstanding, both writers do not strictly follow chronological order. They do not present a linear cause-and-effect sequence, but rather combine diachronic and synchronic perspectives, zooming in on the most important issues.

Woźniakowski writes about the ways of seeing which are reflected in the way subsequent generations, social groups, and individuals approach “that strange thing that has remained virtually unchanged for millennia and yet has been subjected to constant interpretations, that is mountains” (JW 13). Woźniakowski writes about the Classics first. The approach which emerged in Antiquity gained special importance in the 17th and the 18th centuries,

¹⁵Macfarlane calls his essay “an extended variation on George Mallory’s famous response.” Adam Robiński, “Dobra droga do pogadania” [Good way to talk], *Tygodnik Powszechny* 37 (2018): 95.

¹⁶Marek Pacukiewicz writes about the possible interpretations of Mallory’s answer in: *Grań kultury. Transgresje alpinizmu* [The ridge of culture. Mountaineering transgressions] (Kraków: Universitas 2012), 8–11.

and continued to play an important role until the 19th century. Seen as chaotic and disorderly, mountains defied the classical canons of beauty. The towering irregular landscape aroused fear rather than interest. Woźniakowski writes that the classical approach to nature is “anthropocentric, utilitarian even to the point of hedonism, normative – especially when it comes to biological or ethical arguments, often allegorical, synthetic, static” (JW 15). Man and his products take center stage, and mountains may only act as a background. They are useful because they complete the picture. Moderation and order, which were both highly valued, could not be found in mountains. Attempts were made to tame the chaotic landscape, for example, by explaining how it could be useful for humans (e.g. as a water reservoir). The classical vision of the world was static and stable.

Almost simultaneously, an enthusiastic, as Woźniakowski puts it, approach emerged. Although Woźniakowski does not provide an explanation, it is worth recalling the origins of the word “enthusiasm.” It comes from Greek and originally meant “inspired by a god.”¹⁷ Today, it is used to describe “eagerness, a state of elation, joy, delight.”¹⁸ The enthusiastic approach towards nature is “selflessly epistemic as regards two different but often intertwining contexts, namely the empirical and the theocentric one” (JW 15) and allows one to “connect with the world” (JW 84). The enthusiastic approach can be seen in biblical texts. Mountains were cherished as products of divine creation – as an expression of God’s wisdom, goodness, and power, they must be good. But we also find in this attitude traces of a different, more pessimistic interpretation – mountains are also a product of a disaster or a punishment for sins. The search for knowledge renders this approach “enthusiastically epistemic,” and the religious motivation renders it essentially theocentric. Mountains remain in the background; God is in the center. The enthusiastic approach comes to the fore especially in the 15th, 16th, and the 17th centuries. Woźniakowski, quoting Saint Augustine, writes about “mountains clothed with light” (JW 73), that is illuminated by God, surrounded by an aura of mysticism and mystery. Leonardo da Vinci provided instructions on how to paint mountains in his *Treatise on Painting* (JW 92–97). In keeping with the enthusiastic convention, mountains should be painted using different shades of blue. Earthly (closer, darker) mountains and heavenly (more distant, brighter, illuminated) mountains should be rendered chromatically distinct. Woźniakowski also noticed such duality in Petrarch’s letter from 1336 (considered the first mountaineering account), in which the poet described his ascent of Mont Ventoux in Provence. The artist experienced the hike “both realistically and metaphorically,” and when he reached the top, he contemplated the view, was overcome by divine power, and began to read Saint Augustine’s *Confessions* (JW 75).

Woźniakowski then moves on to describe the sentimental approach. The name points to one of the Enlightenment trends, which was characterized by a focus on man’s inner life, feelings, and states. The Polish art historian further defines the sentimental approach as an egocentric, aesthetic, and analytical attitude towards nature which “oscillates between a desire to anchor oneself in a pleasant place and a hunger for new impressions” (JW 15). Man wants

¹⁷<https://polszczyzna.pl/entuzjazm-co-to-jest-co-to-znaczy-definicja-synonimy/>, date of access: 3 August 2023.

¹⁸“Entuzjazm” [enthusiasm], in: *Słownik wyrazów obcych* [Dictionary of foreign words], ed. Jan Tokarski (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1980), 194.

the landscape to either reflect his emotional state or inspire emotion; mountains constitute a background for the subject's experiences. The goal is not to get to know or to get closer to mountains, but to express one's emotions as best as possible.

Woźniakowski writes that in the second half of the 18th century, what he calls a liminal approach emerged. It combined "the still classical sublime with enthusiasm. It is also unexpectedly picturesque, somewhat sentimental" (JW 15–16). Woźniakowski therefore further distinguishes between the sentimental and the picturesque attitude, explaining that in accordance with the picturesque conventions nature is a raw material of a work of art, and not a source of experiences. "Both the emotions and the mind are to be stimulated; such stimulation may not be found in a beloved little place but rather in a varied landscape that is, objectively, pleasing to the eye" (JW 16).

The above-mentioned approaches led to a romantic breakthrough. The romantic attitude, according to Woźniakowski, is nature-centric – man gets closer to mountains and discovers their true nature. Images of wild and untamed and therefore beautiful mountains appear. Mountains arouse fear and delight. Romantics discover the "terrific charm of wilderness" and began to climb. The sublime plays a very important role. What was groundbreaking was, literally and metaphorically, getting closer to mountains – finding them interesting for their own sake. Paradoxically, however, man also began to move away from mountains. The natural landscape began to be overshadowed by art, which had been elevated "to the status of second nature" (JW 16). Woźniakowski ends his essay just before the threshold of the Romantic breakthrough, stating that "it is enough if in this book we manage to show the paths that led to it" (JW 17).

In describing subsequent attitudes, Woźniakowski explains how the titular concept of immovable mountains had developed. For one, mountains were immobilized in the background of paintings (primarily as part of the classical and enthusiastic approach). Mountains became immovable because they were "arrested" in treatises on paintings, poetic conventions, and clichéd expressions, and as such remained indifferent to human efforts to represent them. Woźniakowski shows how the metaphor of permanence, which perpetuated distance, respect, and awe towards mountains had developed. Mountains were perceived as dangerous only to be seen as sacred, "clothed with mystical light," beautiful, and transcendental. We went from aversion to admiration.

At the end, Woźniakowski writes about Horace Bénédict de Saussure (1740–1799), whom he calls the first "man in love." The dream of the Genevan physicist was to climb Mont Blanc. He was not the first to ascent the highest mountain in the Alps,¹⁹ but he encouraged others and offered a reward for the first ascent, greatly contributing to this historical achievement.

¹⁹The first ascent of Mont Blanc was in 1786 by Jacques Balmat and Michel Paccard. "A year later, Balmat guided Professor H. B. de Saussure to the top with a team of twenty people that was, for those times, perfectly equipped. The expedition had crampons, tents, ladders, and umbrellas. Many studies and measurements were made at the top and along the way, be it barometric, meteorological, geological, botanical, optical, and chemical. The results were published in world literature." Jerzy Hajdukiewicz, *Dzieje alpinizmu – część pierwsza* [The history of mountaineering in the Alps – part one], <http://www.krakow.ptt.org.pl/www3/archiwum/wolanie/nr28/hajdukiewicz1.html>, date of access: 2 August 2023.

The ascent of Mont Blanc was for Woźniakowski the culmination of all the described attitudes (epistemic efforts, enthusiasm, sentimental infatuation, and growing appreciation for nature), and at the same time marked a change in the perception of nature. Immovable mountains were finally moved. They were no longer unclimbable, pristine. Explored and studied, mountains began to change, and their representations also became more dynamic, moving beyond the previously established framework. Woźniakowski's typology could therefore be extended to include other approaches, be it scientific, conquest-driven, sports-related, tourist, industrial and economic. However, the Polish art historian does not write about the consequences of the romantic breakthrough; he focuses on the image of the enthusiast who, after many attempts, finally reaches Mont Blanc. Is this the ultimate image of immovable mountains – “a statue of man on the statue of the world” – which can also be found in Juliusz Słowacki's *Kordian* and Caspar David Friedrich's *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*? Mieczysław Porębski in a very insightful review of *Góry niewzruszone* reflects on Woźniakowski's decision to end his essay at a time when the domestication and taming of mountains “truly began.”²⁰ This seems incomprehensible, because it was then that mountains stopped to be perceived only from a safe distance and only in terms of difficulties or benefits. It was then that they were moved by romantic admiration, inspiring so many masterpieces. According to Porębski, Woźniakowski's essay is somewhat melancholic. *Góry niewzruszone* is an elegy, a farewell to a certain image. The Polish art historian chooses to end his argument when the era of conquerors, which led to the exploitation and desacralization of mountains, began. Mountains were transformed into an object of study, an arena, a sports ground, or a park. They were no longer mysterious and sacred, and instead became something that must be studied, conquered, and defeated. Respectively, Woźniakowski does not write about human impact on the environment, which has left a deep and permanent mark on mountainous landscape (although he addresses such problems in his other texts²¹).

Macfarlane picks up where Woźniakowski left off. While *Góry niewzruszone* shows the factors that led to the romantic discovery of mountains and their sublime beauty, *Mountains of the mind* focuses on the consequences of this breakthrough. Macfarlane quotes de Saussure who is absolutely besotted with the view: “What language can reproduce the sensations and paint the ideas with which these great spectacles [mountains] fill the soul of the philosopher who is on top of a peak?” (RM 159). Friedrich's *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*, which brings to mind the ending of *Góry niewzruszone*, is according to Macfarlane still “the archetypal image of the mountain-climbing visionary, a figure ubiquitous in Romantic art” (RM 157). The painting and the general scene seem outdated:

He now looks implausible to us, ridiculous even: the little rock hummocks protruding from the nimbus at his feet, his absurdly clichéd stature – one foot raised; a big-game hunter with his foot upon the cavernous ribcage of his dead beast. But as a crystallization of a concept – that standing atop a summit is to be admired, that it confers nobility on a person – Friedrich's painting has carried enormous symbolic power down the years in terms of Western self-perception. (RM 157)

²⁰Mieczysław Porębski, “Góry w końcu ujrane” [Mountains finally seen], *Tygodnik Powszechny* 26 (1996): 18.

²¹They were collected in the second volume of *Pisma wybrane*, in the section entitled *Interwencje* (1952–2002) [Interventions (1952–2002)]. JW 417–452.

Macfarlane reflects on how a fascination with mountains turned into a mountaineering obsession – a desire to conquer peaks at all costs. Instead of focusing on the “first man in love,” he writes about “the first obsessed man,” that is George Mallory (1886-1924), who took part in the first three expeditions to Mount Everest (in 1921, 1922, 1924). The last one proved fatal. To this day, it remains a mystery whether Mallory reached the summit.

Macfarlane analyzes various “mountains of the mind,” that is he tries to establish why we are interested in mountains and mountaineering. He discusses, respectively, the desire to learn about the history of the Earth (geology), the pursuit of fear (the sublime), looking for traces of the past in mountain glaciers (but also premises for formulating apocalyptic visions of the next ice age), a fascination with heights (the desire to reach the peak and see the world from this perspective), interest in the unknown (“walking off the map”), and looking for “a new heaven and a new earth” (natural theology and secular worship of mountains).

The British writer first talks about mountains as “the great stone book” which tells the history of the Earth (RM 49). Macfarlane writes about the beginnings of geology, which Woźniakowski also drew attention to, insofar as it was a factor which led to the romantic breakthrough. One of the first enthusiasts of geology was de Saussure described in *Góry niewzruszone* (JW 287). Respectively, Macfarlane draws on *The Sacred Theory of the Earth* published in 1681 by the Anglican priest Thomas Burnet, who argued that the current appearance of the Earth is a result of many changes, “»The Image or Picture of a great Ruin«, and a very imperfect image at that” (RM 27). Mountains were created as a result of complex processes; they “were in fact the residue left behind when the Deluge retreated, fragments of the earth’s shell which had been swirled round and pile dup by the colossal hydraulics of the Flood” (RM 27). Burnet’s work, Macfarlane writes, definitely changed, even transformed, how mountains were perceived:

Before Burnet, ideas about the earth lacked a fourth dimension – time. What, it was felt, could be more permanent, more incontestably *there* than mountains? They had been cast by God in their current poses, and would remain thus always and for ever. (RM 25)

Woźniakowski also writes about Burnet, stating that this pioneer of geology “helped pave the way to mountains both in aesthetics and in natural sciences. Mountains, as it turned out, confront man with the naked truth about the world and himself” (JW 283). Respectively, Macfarlane argues that “[g]eology provided a reason and an excuse – scientific inquiry – for travelling to the mountains” (RM 35) and further notes that the pioneers of geology, fossil hunters, were also the first climbers. De Saussure was one of them, and his four-volume *Voyages dans les Alpes* “was both a founding work of geology and one of the first wilderness travel books” (RM 48). The development of geology led to a revolution in the perception of mountains: “Suddenly, these effigies of permanence had acquired an exciting, baffling mutability. Mountains, which seemed so durable, so eternal, had in actuality been formed, deformed and reformed over countless millennia: their current appearance was merely a phase in the perpetual cycles of erosion and uplift which determined the configuration of the earth” (RM 35). In the 20th century, geology confirmed the movement and collision of continental plates and as such confirmed the “intuition that mountains moved” (RM 59).

In the next chapter Macfarlane writes about “the pursuit of fear” (RM 66), explaining that already in the 18th century excitement and risk played a significant role in the exploration of mountains. Edmund Burke in his theory of the sublime combines the beautiful and the terrible. The sublime evoked terror; it was “hectic, intimidating, uncontrollable” (RM 74). Jean-Jacques Rousseau, for one, wrote about his love for “precipitous places” (RM 76). In the 19th century, Charles Darwin’s theory of natural selection was used to reflect on mountains. Mountains were perceived as a place of struggle where only the fittest would survive. They tested human abilities and condition (RM 90). Macfarlane points out that men today also pursue fear: “Hope, fear. Hope fear – this is the fundamental rhythm of mountaineering. Life, it frequently seems in the mountains, is more intensely lived the closer one gets to its extinction: we never feel so alive as when we have nearly died” (RM 71). The search for risk and adrenaline characterizes contemporary extreme mountain sports.

Power and deep time were embodied in glaciers. In the 19th century, Mer de Glace and other glaciers became popular destinations. A sea of ice reminded one about the destructive force which shaped mountains and valleys, and the frailty of human life. The idea of a glacier as “frozen movement” pointed to the past. Scholars studied glaciers looking for traces of the past and geologists speculated about the role of the ice age in the history of the Earth. Alas, in the 19th century, hypotheses of global glaciation in the future also began to emerge (RM 121). Mountains were part of apocalyptic visions.

Mountains have been and continue to be fascinating primarily because of their height. One of the most important motivations for hiking and climbing is the desire to reach the summit. Macfarlane writes about how the summit came to be perceived as an allegory of fulfillment and success, especially in the 18th and the 19th centuries. The peak was seen as a visible target, and the slopes leading to it were a challenge. Macfarlane states that “[m]ore recently, the mountain summit has become a secular symbol of effort and reward” (RM 142). Reaching the top was seen as a reward for the effort. One could be proud of it. In the past, the view from the summit – the ability to look from an elevated, almost divine, perspective – was also important. Nowadays, when aerial and satellite photography has become so popular, the views from the summit are no longer so impressive. The summits also became a place of contemplation and creation, of looking beyond, not only in the physical but also in the metaphysical sense (RM 160). Woźniakowski writes about heights and summits – seen as a challenge – when he describes the enthusiastic attitude. The Polish art historian states that such a symbolic ancient meaning of summits and valleys may be found in “the depths of various literary, philosophical, and theological traditions, but also in the depths of the poetics of language itself, which unconsciously uses metaphors of climbing and falling, summits and valleys, elevation and humiliation, high and low intentions” (JW 121).

Unclimbed mountains and unknown summits excited the imagination; they were “blank spaces on the map” that could be filled with hope or fear, onto which anxieties and aspirations could be projected (RM 175). Longing for the unknown emerged with full force in the 18th century, and the 19th century was marked by scientific expeditions, which led to

the development of cartography. Macfarlane, writing about how the image of mountains on maps has changed, notes that “[m]aps do not take account of time, only of space. They do not acknowledge how a landscape is constantly on the move – is constantly revising itself” (RM 184).

In the 16th century, “the idea that the world of mountains was a world entirely apart” first emerged, Macfarlane writes, mountains were “an upper realm in which physical laws operated differently and where conventional, lowland ideas of time and space were turned topsy-turvy” (RM 202). Therefore, it was believed that it was impossible to describe the experience of height and endless space to others (RM 204). Natural theology spread across Europe from the 1690s to the 1730s. This influential doctrine held that the world was given to man by God, and discovering and studying nature was therefore a form of worship. Mountains were considered one of God’s greatest creations (RM 207); they were a promise of “a new heaven and a new earth:”

The natural theology movement was crucial in revoking the reputation of mountains as aesthetically displeasing, for it forced intellectual Europeans into a more specific experiencing of the physical world. A new way of looking at wild landscape established itself, which combined sweeping experiences with a close attention to the micro-phenomena – the tiny special effects – of the mountains. (RM 208)

One of the most important descriptions of mountains as “an upper realm” was Rousseau’s *Nouvelle Heloise*, which “created secular mountain-worship” (RM 209). As a result, more and more people began to explore mountains, and there were more and more casualties. Every new subsequent account which praised mountains inspired new people to embark on a dangerous journey.

In the penultimate chapter, entitled *Everest*, Macfarlane reflects on Mallory’s obsession with the highest mountain in the world and comments on mountain metaphors related to madness, possession, addiction, but also tragic love story. The British writer notes that Mallory was “was the inheritor of a complex of emotions and attitudes towards mountainous landscape, devised long before his birth, which largely predetermined his responses to it – its dangers, its beauties, its meanings” (RM 226). The “emotional traditions” he inherited and cultivated “made him so susceptible to possession by Everest” (RM 273).

In the end, Macfarlane draws conclusions about the contemporary significance of mountains. The writer notes: “[m]ountains seem to answer an increasing imaginative need in the West. More and more people are discovering a desire for them, and a powerful solace in them” (RM 274). Mountains make us realize that we cannot control everything: “mountains refute our excessive trust in the man-made. They pose profound questions about our durability and the importance of our schemes” (RM 275). Finally, mountains “return to us the priceless capacity for wonder which can so insensibly be leached away by modern existence, and they urge us to apply that wonder to our own everyday lives” (RM, 276). Such a personal ending, in which the British writer also returns to his childhood memories of the Cairngorms, proves that mountains of the mind cannot compare with *being* in the mountains.

Landscape and imagination

In Woźniakowski's and Macfarlane's complementary histories of fascination, two issues recur, namely landscape and imagination.

Woźniakowski traces the development of the modern landscape, that is a way of seeing nature conditioned by many different factors (including concepts of space). "Landscape is not self-explanatory," the Polish art historian writes, and further quotes Delacroix who said that "Nature is a dictionary; one draws words from it" (JW 79). Woźniakowski, referring to the findings of, among others, Georg Simmel, postulates that we can only talk about landscape when we see nature as a "meaningful whole."

What consciousness builds on the basis of elementary sensory impressions is therefore a creative mental act... We usually see in nature only what we have learned to see in it, and we see it in the way that the style of a given era requires. (JW 79)

Attitudes described in *Góry niewzruszone* show such ways of seeing – the eye creates a whole, which, "melted into artistic" (JW 79) as well as literary visions, give rise to mountains of the mind in the respective eras.

Macfarlane, who emphasizes that our responses to mountains as a form of landscape are largely culturally conditioned, seems to agree with Woźniakowski:

That is to say, when we look at a landscape, we do not see what is there, but largely what we think is there. We attribute qualities to a landscape which it does not intrinsically possess – savageness, for example, or bleakness – and we value it accordingly. We *read* landscapes, in other words, we interpret their form in the light of our own experiences and memory, and that of our shared cultural memory. (RM 18)

Macfarlane emphasizes that "[w]hat we call a mountain is thus in fact a collaboration of the physical forms of the world with the imagination of humans – a mountain of the mind" (RM 19). *Mountains of the mind* "tries to plot how those ways of imagining mountains have altered over time" (RM 19); it is not a history of climbing but "a history of the imagination" (RM 21). The book argues that mountains "exert a considerable and often fatal power of attraction on the human mind" (RM 16) and points to the gap between the imagined and the real:

Stone, rock and ice are significantly less amenable to the hand's touch than to the mind's eye, and the mountains of the earth have often turned out to be more resistant, more fatally real, than the mountains of the mind. (RM 19)

Macfarlane strongly emphasizes the differences between the physical form of the world and its image, which he became aware of during his climbs, when he nearly lost his life:

[...] the mountains one gazes at, reads about, dreams of and desires are not the mountains one climbs. These are matters of hard, steep, sharp rock and freezing snow; of extreme cold; of a ver-

tigo so physical it can cramp your stomach and loosen your bowels; of hypertension, nausea and frostbite, and of unspeakable beauty. (RM 19)

The role of the imagination is emphasized in the subtitle of Woźniakowski's essay: *O różnych wyobrażeniach przyrody w dziejach nowożytnej kultury europejskiej* [The images of nature in modern European culture]. The Polish art historian, like Macfarlane, draws on his personal experience and writes about the difference between real and imagined mountains:

It has always been a great joy for me – especially in the spring, when the snow begins to melt and the streams begin to thaw, and also in the fall, when the beeches turn golden – to travel to the mountains. I have also always liked to look at paintings for a long time. But these two passions rarely came together. (JW 9)

Woźniakowski adds: “However, I did not find mountains in painting” (JW 9). Like Macfarlane, he explores the difficulties of representing this form of landscape and highlights the differences between the mountains he explored physically and the mountains that were represented in art:

How can we convey in oil or watercolor the crystalline resistance of the rock, the jagged line of the ridge, the striking whiteness of the snow, the stark color contrasts, how to enclose the colossal differences in size within the frame? (JW 10)

Woźniakowski notes that the attitudes towards mountains he described are both – scientifically and academically – factual and accurate and “symbolic, idealistic, imagined” (JW 16), because, as he further writes, “imagination takes over what reason has abandoned” (JW 292). This seems to resonate with Macfarlane's belief that apart from mountains which we do not always understand and see, there are mountains that “have been *imagined* into existence” (RM 19).

Conclusions: An anatomy of passion

Woźniakowski and Macfarlane show a fascination with mountains from two different perspectives (Polish and English culture), focus on different metaphors (immovability and obsession), and analyze different examples (de Saussure and Mallory). Differ as they may, a parallel reading of both essays proves that they are for the most part complementary not only in terms of timeframes explored but also in terms of questions addressed. Woźniakowski's and Macfarlane's reflections complement one another, and the combination of both gives one a better insight into the phenomenon. The critical focus is more than analytical; I would say that both essays may be read, in their respective ways, as an anatomy of fascination with mountains. They dissect the experience and the phenomenon. Macfarlane's essay is also a kind of vivisection, because the British writer also analyzes his own infatuation and obsession with climbing. He actually says that this book is his farewell to mountains and the dangers of climbing.²²

²²Robiński, 95.

Both books tell a dramatic story of disgust and reluctance which eventually leads to a fascination that borders on obsession and madness. Woźniakowski and Macfarlane, in fact, present an anatomy of passion, because passion, as in both desire and suffering, seems to best reflect the essence of the relationship between man and mountains.

Finally, I would like to reflect on the significance of the analyzed essays in the wider context of contemporary mountain studies.²³ Both books draw attention to the humanistic dimension of man's relationship with mountains, exposing the mutual relations between nature (landscape) and culture (imagination). As such, they can be read in the context of the dynamically developing cultural history of mountains.²⁴

When it was first published, Woźniakowski's essay, as an interdisciplinary comparative piece of research with a unique thematic focus, was considered innovative. There had been no other such extensive and reliable studies on mountains in Poland before. Indeed, very few had been published in Europe (the exception is Marjorie Hope Nicolson's *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory*,²⁵ which Woźniakowski repeatedly quotes). The comparison between *Góry niewzruszone* and Macfarlane's book confirms the pioneering nature of the Polish art historian's book. His theses and the proposed typology of attitudes are still valid and, in the light of new contexts, have been further confirmed and expanded.

Mountains of the mind was so successful because it combined compelling storytelling, autobiographical confession, a comprehensive take on anthropology and cultural history, and non-fiction with literary studies. Comparing the British bestseller with the Polish essay from the 1970s allows us to identify new cultural phenomena and new trends in mountain studies. A critical approach to mountaineering, especially competitive and extreme mountaineering, seems particularly significant. Macfarlane turns the spotlight on the metaphors related to madness and obsession, emphasizing that mountaineering can be a deadly passion. The British writer highlights what the Polish art historian did not say directly, namely that tourism – the rise of the climbing industry – has changed mountains. Mount Everest:

²³ Mountain studies in Poland have been popularized as part of the Seria Górska [Mountain Series] published by Universitas: "Seria Górska is a response to the growing interest in mountains, as well as the multifaceted, global reception of mountains, defined as a space and unique culture, in literature, art, and social life. In recent decades, a separate field of study devoted to mountains has appeared in the global academia – mountain studies. Conducted primarily from an ecological perspective, mountain studies confirms the importance of mountains, seen as natural and cultural enclaves crucial for the development and survival of modern civilization. As such, we need to expand this perspective, tapping into the broadly defined humanities and related fields, because the history of the discovery, exploration, and conquest of mountains (alpinism, Andeanism, Himalayanism) plays a very important role in the history of civilization and culture. See, for example, Jacek Kolbuszewski, *Góry. Przestrzeń i krajobrazy. Studia z historii literatury i kultury [Mountains. Spaces and landscapes. Studies in the history of literature and culture]* (Kraków: Universitas, 2020), fold-out page, inside back cover. The editor of the series, Ewa Grzęda, writes about mountain studies and mountain methodology, in: "Wstęp" [Introduction], in: *Od Kaukazu po Sudety. Studia i szkice o poznawaniu i zamieszkiwaniu gór dalekich i bliskich [From the Caucasus to the Sudetes. Studies and sketches about discovering and living in mountains near and far]*, ed. Ewa Grzęda (Kraków: Universitas, 2020), 7–15.

²⁴ See, among others, Veronica della Dora, *Mountain. Nature and Culture* (London: Reaktion Books Reprinted, 2016).

²⁵ Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory; The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1963).

is now a gargantuan, tawdry, frozen Taj Mahal, an elaborately frosted wedding-cake up and down which climbing companies annually yo-yo hundreds of under-experienced clients. Its slopes are studded with modern corpses: most lie within what has become popularly known as the Death Zone, the altitude bracket within which the human body enters a gradual but unstoppable process of degeneration. (RM 17–18)

Macfarlane is also critical of the mythologization and idealization of climbers, especially those who died climbing, because contemporary culture sees such men as heroes (RM 6). He also writes about racism, sexism, snobbery, and egoism in mountaineering (RM 6) and about the tragedy of those who are left behind – orphaned children, widowed spouses, and devastated loved ones (RM 98, 271). Last but not least, Macfarlane points out that that the expeditions to Mount Everest in which Mallory participated were essentially imperial and nationalist (RM 239, 241).

A parallel reading of Woźniakowski's and Macfarlane's essays proves that mountains play a significant role in the past and present culture of many different European countries (not only Alpine countries!) and the entire continent. This also points to an issue that is particularly important in contemporary mountain studies. Both works are clearly Eurocentric, and do not really engage with the significance of mountains in other cultures. Challenging Eurocentrism is therefore a task for the next generation of scholars.²⁶

translated by Małgorzata Olsza

²⁶Julie Rak, *False Summit: Gender in Mountaineering Nonfiction* (London–Chicago: McGill-Queens University Press, 2021).

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KEYWORDS

Jacek Woźniakowski

mountains

LANDSCAPE

culture

ABSTRACT:

Mountain studies in the humanities concentrates on the relation between people and mountains. Robert Macfarlane explored that topic in *Mountains of the Mind* (2003). In this article, Macfarlane's bestseller is compared with Jacek Woźniakowski's *Góry Niewzruszone* [Immovable Mountains] (1974). The Polish art historian writes about the history and the place of mountains in culture and art since Antiquity to Romanticism. Macfarlane's book picks up, as if, where Woźniakowski left off. Both works are complementary in this regard, and allow one to reconstruct a history of a fascination, which starts with aversion and often leads to a deadly and dangerous obsession. Both authors dissect a passion for mountains: Woźniakowski comes up with a typology of cultural approaches to mountains, and Macfarlane lists and explains the reasons for the fascination with height. These two approaches are also complementary.

Robert Macfarlane

mountain studies

IMAGINATION

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR:

Elżbieta Dutka – prof. dr hab., works at the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Silesia in Katowice. Her primary field of study is contemporary Polish literature. Her research interests center around the issues of space (mythical lands, cities, regions, landscapes, mountains) in different perspectives – geopoetics, new regionalism, and mountain studies. She is the author of: *Ukraina w twórczości Włodzimierza Odojewskiego i Włodzimierza Paźniewskiego* [Ukraine in the works of Włodzimierz Odojewski and Włodzimierz Paźniewski] (Katowice 2000), *Okolice nie tylko geograficzne. O twórczości Andrzeja Kuśniewicza* [Not only geographical spaces. The works of Andrzej Kuśniewicz] (Katowice 2008), *Zapisywanie miejsca. Szkice o Śląsku w literaturze przełomu wieków XX i XXI* [Recording place. Sketches about Silesia in literature at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries] (Katowice 2011), *Próby topograficzne. Miejsca i krajobrazy w literaturze polskiej XX i XXI wieku* [Topographical sketches. Places and landscapes in Polish Literature of the 20th and 21st Centuries] (Katowice 2014), *Centra, prowincje, zaułki. Twórczość Julii Hartwig jako auto/bio/geo/grafia* [Centers, provinces, alleys. Julia Hartwig's works as auto/bio/geo/graphy] (Kraków 2016), *Pytania o miejsce. Sondowanie topografii literackich XX i XXI wieku* [A question of place. Probing literary topographies of the 20th and 21st centuries] (Kraków, 2019). She is also the co-editor of collective volumes, including *Proza polska XX wieku. Przeglądy i interpretacje* [20th-century Polish prose. Reviews and interpretations] (Volume 2, Katowice 2012; Volume 3, Katowice 2014). She published, among others, in collective volumes as part of the *Nowy Regionalizm w Badaniach Literackich* [New Regionalism in Literary Studies] series (Universitas). |

“Heightened World.”

The conversation
with Robert Macfarlane
about mountains, nature
and literature, conducted
16th of June 2023
in Emmanuel College
in Cambridge*

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Introduction¹

Robert Macfarlane is a professor of Environmental Humanities at Emmanuel College, Cambridge. He is also a traveller and a world-famous author of best-selling books about nature, relations between “landscapes and the human heart” (as he says), places and imagination: *Mountains of the Mind: A History of a Fascination* (2003); *The Wild Places* (2007); *The Old Ways: A Journey on Foot* (2012); *Holloway* (2013 with Dan Richards and Stanley Donwood); *Landmarks* (2015); *The Lost Words: A Spell Book* (2017 illustrated by Jackie

¹ I would like to thank Katarzyna Strębska-Liszewska for her help in preparing the transcription of the recording of the interview.

Morris), *Underland: A Deep Time Journey* (2019); *Ness* (2019 illustrated by Stanley Donwood); *The Lost Spells* (2020 illustrated by Jackie Morris). His literary works have been published in thirty languages, also in Polish: *Góry. Stan umysłu* (2018); *Szlaki; Opowieści o wędrówkach* (2018) *Podziemia: W głąb czasu* (2020). Macfarlane's books won many awards (e.g., Guardian First Book Award, the Boardman-Tasker Prize for Mountain Literature), were adapted for films (*Mountain*, 2017 and *River*, 2021, both films were directed by Jennifer Peedom). As far as publishing announcements are concerned, his next book is entitled *Is a River Alive?*², which will explore the rights of nature. Macfarlane's literary works are usually categorised as nature writing, mountain literature, travelling and others.

The conversation took place in the inside courtyard of the Emmanuel College in Cambridge. Before talking, Robert Macfarlane drew my attention to some interesting specimens of trees and flowers on the green college grounds. There is an amazing old willow – in traditional imaginary – considered a tree of sorrow. However, what was most incredible was a plane tree, more than 250 years old, which looks like a whole forest, because its branches take roots and form new trees. There was a site of bee orchids (*Ophrys apifera* L.) – an extremely rare small flower that had just started blooming then. The writer spoke with great commitment about the jays flying by and the carps in the college pond. His stories about the nearest college settings clearly show how close he is to nature, not only the unique type of nature, which can only be found in the remote wilderness but also the seemingly ordinary nature that surrounds us every day.

Conversation

Elżbieta Dutka: Please tell me something more about your new book *Is a River Alive?* At what stage is the work, and when can we expect its publication?

Robert Macfarlane: I still need to finish this book. *Is a River Alive?* will be published definitely in 2025, probably in English and in Polish in the same year. I must admit that I am delighted with the cooperation with the Polish editor (Wydawnictwo Poznańskie), which is so supportive and so inventive, active on social media to attract young readers. I am pleased they will plan to publish my next book as well. My plan is to finish *Is a River Alive?* in 2024. The editor will have a year to work on and translate it.

E. D.: Simultaneously with the work on this book, you wrote the screenplay for the movie *River*. When I was watching this film at the cinema, I noticed many similarities with the previous movie with your script entitled *Mountain* (the same director, your screenplay, nature-related issues, Willem Defoe as narrator and the participation of the symphony orchestra in both productions). These common elements create the impression of an inevitable continuation, perhaps even a series, a pair. Will there be such clear connections between the books *Mountains of the Mind* and *Is a River Alive* either?

² <https://www.davidhigham.co.uk/books-dh/is-a-river-alive/> (access 30.06.2023)

R. M.: No, not exactly. I think they will be connected only to some degree – as all of my books – it also grows from previous works. *Mountains of the Mind* existed in strong relations with *Underland*, because they depict two poles on a vertical axis: top and down. But *Is a River Alive?* will be quite different from all my books. It will be much more political and legal than my previous books. In this work, I wonder what can be done for nature in terms of law, but I also raise big, key philosophical questions: what is alive, and what are its rights? To the question: is a river alive, I answer: yes. To the question: has a river got the rights, I also answer: yes, it should have rights. To summarise, it will be another book about how we imagine the world around us.

E. D.: When I was watching *River*, I also thought that *Mountains of the Mind* and your new book could be a kind of frame in your oeuvre. The first book proposes a reflection on a specific element of nature (a specific kind of landscape). The latest maybe will depict nature in a more holistic way (in movie screenplay you wrote about river, but you also notice that springs are usually located in the mountains, you mention issues connected with glaciers, forests, human impact on them, etc.).

R. M.: Yes, to some degree, it is true. Rivers make mountains, and the mountains are the beginning of the rivers... It is difficult to separate the individual parts of the natural world because they are closely interrelated. Regarding my books, I would rather suggest the following framework. Each of them has a main idea and key question that continually returns on its pages. *Mountains of the Mind* was a book about mountain and human imagination, about deep thinking of time in historical and economic senses. I ask why we love the mountains and don't respect them. The main question in *Underland* is: what does darkness mean, why do we hide underground things that are the most valuable or things we want to hide? The *Landmarks* shows how words and literature shape our perception of the world. *The Old Way* is about how we use paths to think with. And now, *Is a River Alive* – what is life and what is death, what is a being and what are its rights? Of course, all these questions can't be answered... but attempting to answer them generates my books. They all add up to one fundamental question; what does it mean to be a human in a world which is also alive?

E. D.: Man's life and the living world around him have a time dimension. Is a mountain, like a river, alive? Or maybe the question should be: is a mountain still alive?

R.M.: Of course, yes! I add the next question: does the mountain remember, and does it tell, and the answer is also: yes. Nan Shephard's book *The Living Mountain*³, which is very important to me, is about this. This novel is the key text in mountain tradition, actually not about mountaineering but about the relationship with the living mountain. The title of Shephard's book is meaningful. The life of the mountain is not only itself part of life, but it also contains a lot of individual lives. The mountain is living. It raises life. It gives life in more senses than just the individual biological life it contains. It is one of the oldest ideas. For many ancient cultures (certainly for the Chinese culture), it was obvious that a river or a forest are alive

³ Nan Shepherd, *The Living Mountain*, introduced by Robert Macfarlane, afterword by Jeanette Winterson (Canongate Books, 2019).

and that they could, for example, speak, sing, and communicate with themselves and with humans. And so I am also writing about it in that complex way in which Shephard was writing about them. The idea that nature is alive needn't be named until we had fallen from perception [until we have lost this type of perception]. It happened when the Post-Enlightenment worldview (which is rationalist, which is arithmetic, and which has systematically reduced the living world to resource, to object) won. And now, when we try to subjectify the living world, it is not to colonise it and make it a subject, but it involves a great output range of the mind and imagination [crossing our ordinary thinking frames]. Shephard in *Living Mountain*, and I hope that I also in *Is a River Alive?* try to campaign for/ argue for mind and imagination, which recognise life there, where philosophers and historians said there is no life.

E. D.: However, the belief that the mountains are alive requires more work in mind and imagination than the idea of living rivers or forests. I agree that mountains are alive, but on the other hand, peaks for a long time (and today also quite often) have been perceived as heaps of dead stones, something lifeless, unmoving, unchanging, and static. The mountain in culture usually symbolises constancy and immutability.

R. M.: You are right. As river flow moves and the forest changes with the seasons, it is easier to think about life and the passage of time regarding them. But of course, mountains do that too. The peaks change, but the scale of that process is different than the scale our human perception is used to. We easily agree other humans are alive, and we agree that animals and other creatures, like birds, for example, are alive – no problem. The trees are alive too but they are a little bit more complicated. When we move into non-organic there is more work involved in mind and imagination. The river is the easiest to think of as alive, the forest, as the whole, too, but the mountains and stones are harder, definitely. A lot of legal, primary legal cases in the rights of nature movement have been around the rivers. Like the Whanganui river in New Zealand (the river revered by the Māori) was recognised by the Parliament Act in this country as a legal entity in 2017. The Whanganui will be treated as a minor in court.

E. D.: It will be interesting to see if the same legal personality will ever be granted to the mountains. Treating a river as a juvenile legal personality makes me return to the time of individual life and the idea of deep thinking about time. There is a whole part in *Mountains of the Mind* about the beginning of geology and researching the origin of the mountains. As you wrote, people started to call mountains "the great stone volume" in the XVIII and XIX century⁴. You also mentioned recognising the different types of rocks, fossil collecting and stones ("each stone had a story attached to it: a biography which stretched backwards in time for epochs")⁵. These aspects are related to "deep thinking on past time". The mountains are an archive of Earth. However, how should we understand "deep thinking on future time" in the context of mountains? To what extent are the contemporary real mountains (or mountains of the mind) a project of the future world?

⁴ Robert Macfarlane, *Mountains of the Mind. A History of a Fascination* (London: Granta Books, 2017), 22–65.

⁵ Robert Macfarlane, *Mountains of the Mind, Mountains of the Mind. A History of the Fascination* (London: Granta Books, 2003), 50.

R. M.: When I wrote *Mountains of the Mind*, which was more than twenty years ago, I was thinking only about the past and the present time. In the *Underland*, where I returned to the subject of deep thinking on time, I became much more interested in deep time future. For me in the underground world, deep time is effectively activated. When I wrote about the mountains, I focused on the aesthetic side of human perception of them. My main question was how it happened that for three hundred years, people stopped seeing mountains only as obstacles and began to see beauty in them, sublimate them. The mountain gives us a kind of vertigo, interesting fear, but first and foremost, the mountain allows us to look deep into the past. But looking at the future through the lens of deep thinking of time becomes more ethical. In *Underland*, the question is, what will we leave the next generations, and will we be good ancestors? Looking underground leads to ethical issues. One of the things that happened in my oeuvre over more than twenty years is moving from a kind of historical aesthetics (*Mountains of the Mind*) to more contemporary ethics (*Underland*) and finally to political issues in *Is a River Alive*?

E. D.: So you are now more a campaigner and an ecological activist than earlier when you wrote *Mountains of the Mind*?

R. M.: Yes, definitely. It is partly because climate change, ecological crises, the poly-crises⁶, and environmental disasters have just accelerated in my writing life in twenty-two years. Environmental catastrophe and biodiversity collapse were not talked about so loudly at the beginning of my literary work. Now practically everyone who writes about nature and places must raise this issue, must mention ecology.

E. D.: What do you think, what will the mountains of the future be like, and what will the mountains of the mind be like in the future? Is it now possible to say something about the specificity of the mountains of the Anthropocene?

R. M.: In the mountainous culture there are so many fragile frontlines connected with ecology and human and nonhuman life. One example is enough – the glaciers are just disappearing. There is no “the ocean of the ice” that some of the first tourists in Chamonix saw. They just went away. The mountains have changed so quickly. Mountaineering is transforming very fast, too. It is now so resource-intensive activity, just look at what is happening on Everest...

E. D.: It is very telling that the highest peak in the world is now often called Mount Trash, instead of Mount Everest. Do we need a new imagery of the mountains, a new symbolism?

R. M.: Yes, there are two ways of thinking about mountains, which I learned from Nan Shepherd (but I read her *Living Mountain* only after I had written *Mountains of the Mind*). One of them is resignation from reaching the top. Summiting is no longer the only form of being in the mountains or the only aim of being in the mountains. My book is

⁶ According to economist Adam Tooze, a poly-crisis means overlapping various crises (economic, social, political, etc.). The poly-crisis became widely known after the Covid 2019 pandemic.

about summit fever, about people who repeatedly try to reach the top, like George Leigh Mallory. But reading Shephard's book convinced me that you can go to the mountains for friendship, to be with a living mountain. So you can be the "local mountaineer" instead of a summit conqueror. The second way involves a kind of Anthropocene responsibility. It is seeing mountain rather as deep than wide, to get to know this area, to enter it, be inside it, and protect it. I've said that the *Mountains of the Mind* is my resignation from high-altitude, extreme, dangerous climbing, partly for the sake of my family, wife and children and for fear of death, but also for the abovementioned reasons. The end of extreme climbing and summit fever is the beginning of the wonder, responsibility and another mountain passion.

E. D.: You highlighted the differences between real peaks and mountains of the mind in your book. Paradoxically, the latter (mountains of the mind) seem more durable and immovable than real mountains. The crowds at the Mount Everest base camp and on its slopes prove that the dreams/ideas about the highest mountain in the world are still attractive to many people. But at the same time, this peak no longer looks like it did in the days of George Mallory. Do you agree with this interpretation that mountains of the mind are also immovable mountains?

R. M.: No. Both are changing. The mountains of the mind are not the same as earlier. The people who want to climb Mount Everest may have a different imagined mountain than Mallory. The real peaks, in particular Everest, are now under huge pressure, connected with mass tourism, climate change, etc., so they may look more movable, but mountains of the mind are also dynamic. I suppose it depends on whose mind and imagined mountains we talk about. The mental relations with Mount Everest and other mountains are historically specific. Of course, there are some similarities, but there are so many changes at different times...

In the mountainous literary tradition, the way of seeing peaks was often frozen, a kind of cliché. For example, in the eighteenth century, it was sublime. Everything the spectators saw in the mountains was sublime, magnificent, splendid, and wonderful. There was a language of perception. When it comes to modern tourism, there are also very fixed, controlled ways of seeing the mountains. Any literary tradition develops its habits and agreements, according to which it must be written. The job of the next writers' generation is to break them. When I wrote *Landmarks*, it became clear that every hour spent on reading is also spent on learning how to write. Reading is a way of knowing how others see and how habits and traditions of language influence them. So now, when I start to write a new book, I think about how to skip these frozen ways of seeing and what I can change. In this sense, imagination in nature or mountain writing is rebellious.

E. D.: In the mentioned book, entitled *Landmarks*, you created a kind of dictionary collecting various words that denote and mark the mountains, our way of seeing this form of landscape. Metaphors also play an essential role in your writing. What are your favourite mountainous landmarks and metaphor or comparison/parallel? What mountainous imagery is the most important in contemporary culture, in your opinion?

R. M.: Aristotle defined metaphor as “likeness and unlikeness”. For me, it is the best definition of metaphor that has ever been coined. The critical question is how to recognise the strangeness of the mountains in language because the peaks exceeded us in so many ways: in time, scale, form, and matter. Hence the urge to domesticate the mountains in language. It was what the sublime discourse in the eighteenth century was doing. For me, the interesting metaphors regarding the strangeness of the mountains, recognise their strangeness. The mountain is like this..., but also unlike this... Nan Shepherd wrote that when she was on the plateau, she visited mountains like a friend⁷. The “friend” means she was familiarised with the mountain, like with another person. She also wrote that on the plateau, she acts like a dog⁸. The dog is a metaphor for her presence in the mountains. But when you read the mountaineering literature, you must discover that it is always about the siege or battle. The military metaphors dominate, and the metaphor of rape is also present– the mountain is like a virgin, and the climbers want to possess them. These female metaphors are so oppressive and aggressive. They are the worst but the most popular mountain metaphor.

E.D.: There are sometimes metaphors connected with love too.

R.M.: Yes, people fall in love with mountains, but for many years in the Western tradition, the most important was battles and fights with mountains.

E. D.: What do you think about personification of the mountains? Do you like these kind of tropes?

R. M.: I am interested more in mountainifications than in personifications. Aldo Leopold said we should “think like a mountain”.⁹ So maybe, let’s personify mountains less, and try to mountainify more.

E. D.: But is it possible for us to have a common language with the mountains?

R. M.: I have just returned from Cuillin Mountains in Scotland. The most famous peak there is Cuillin Skye; wonderful is The Inaccessible Pinnacle. I mention it because we climbed for two days, and it was such an intense time in the mountains, the most engaging mountain trip for me the last time, and I felt changed by it. It was like an encounter which was very consequential for me. There may be no conversation with a mountain, but as Nan Shepherd said, it is something moving between the mountain and me.¹⁰ It is a very complicated influence acting in two directions.

⁷ “Yet often the mountain gives itself most completely when I have no destination, when I reach nowhere in particular, but have gone out merely to be with the mountain as one visits a friend with no intention but to be with him”. Nan Shepherd, *The Living Mountain*, 15.

⁸ “So I am on the plateau again, having gone round like a dog in circles to see if it is a good place”. N. Shepherd, *The Living Mountain*, 22.

⁹ Aldo Leopold, *Think Like a Mountain. Essays from A Sand County Almanac* (Penguin Books – Green Ideas 2020).

¹⁰ “No, there is more in the lust for a mountain top than a perfect physiological adjustment. What more there is lies within the mountain. Something moves between me and it. Place and mind may interpenetrate till the nature of both is altered. I cannot tell what this movement is except by recounting it.” N. Shepherd, *The Living Mountain*, 8.

E. D.: In your writing, encounters with mountains are often melancholic in nature. You say goodbye to high-mountain, extreme climbing, you write about losses related to this passion, and you evoke many melancholics. Why so much melancholy in dealing with the mountains?

R. M.: I write about melancholics like Edward Thomas, George L. Mallory and Eric Ravilious. They all died at almost the same time (in the first half of twenty century), they all left their families, and each of them fell in love with the different kind of landscape (Thomas – with the paths, Mallory – with the mountains, Ravilious – with the Arctic)¹¹. They are all melancholics. I am interested in melancholy and depression; however, I am a very happy person. But we live in such a depressive time, a time of loss in so many aspects. I am always interested in the relationship between landscape and the human heart, a kind of passion. Melancholy marked this passion and obsession too.

E. D.: You talked about Scottish mountains and mentioned the names of specific peaks. In your literary works, you usually locate the place you write about. How vital is topography to you?

R. M.: Once again, I cite Aristotle. He said that the particular is a way to general, which leads to the universal. I am an Aristotelian because, for me, it is essential to speak precisely. It is a form of comprehension and respect, so I write about a particular hill and the specific aspects of this hill, for example. I always write specificity first before I make some generalisations.

E. D.: How do you categorise *Mountains of the Mind* in terms of literary studies or literary genology?

R. M.: I think it is rather a mountain than mountaineering literature. Partly it also can be accounted to mountain studies because I write about the cultural history of the mountain and mountaineering. This book is hybrid, partly a reportage, essay, autobiography, and memoir.

E. D.: You wrote in the introduction to *Living Mountain*:

Most works of mountaineering literature have been written by men, and most male mountaineers are focussed on the summit: a mountain expedition being qualified by the success or failure of ascent. But to aim for the highest point is not the only way to climb a mountain, nor is a narrative of siege and assault the only way to write about one. Shepherd's book is best thought of, perhaps, not as a work of mountaineering literature but one of mountain literature.¹²

¹¹ Edward Philip Thomas (1878–1917) was a British writer of poetry, and prose. Macfarlane wrote about him in *The Old Ways*. George Herbert Leigh Mallory (1886–1924) was an English climber, he participated in the first expedition into Mount Everest. Macfarlane wrote about him in *Mountain of the Mind*. Eric Ravilious (1903–1942) was a British painter, illustrator, lithographer, war-artist. Macfarlane wrote about him in *The Old Ways*.

¹²Robert Macfarlane, "Introduction", in Nan Shepherd, *The Living Mountain*, XVI.

In this preface, you point out the difference between mountain literature and mountaineering literature. You place Shepherd's book in the first of these categories. Please explain in more detail how you understand mountain and mountaineering literature; what is the difference between them?

R. M.: For me, mountain literature is much more interesting than mountaineering writing. There are so many repetitions in mountaineering literature; the relations from high mountain expeditions are very similar to each other. Quite often, they are boring. However, according to the etymology, the word "mountaineer" originally meant "somebody who lives in the mountains", no like today, "somebody who climbs in the mountains for sport, for achievement etc." Mountaineering literature has a clear purpose – always the plot is: "how we reach the top or not". However, when it comes to mountain literature when you read it, you lose that plot of the top, but you gain the depth and height, the width, and... breath of everything that is mountain. There are natural history, ecology, human relations... Mountain literature is probably more decolonising than mountaineering literature. As we know – many classical British mountaineering books were written by men who went to Himalayas, and their expeditions had an imperial character – they were part of national, imperial project. In contrast, mountain literature represents rather a decolonisation movement. In England, we have Boardman Tasker Award for Mountain Literature, which has been given for forty years, since 1983.¹³ When you check the list of awarded books in subsequent years, you will see that at first, they were typical mountaineering books, and recently more and more books that can be classified as mountain literature are awarded. It is a tendency we can look at for maybe the last fifteen years that the winners are books, which are very different from classical mountaineering accounts. There are even some discussions whether the awarded books can be considered as mountain books at all.

E. D.: What role do the emotions and sensory experiences play in writing about the mountains? Are these essential elements in mountain literature and mountain studies?

R. M.: They all are very important in mountain literature. These are books about living in a heightened world, not only because of the height above sea level but also because of the high level of emotions and experiences. Everything is more intense in the mountains, the body is active, and there is exposition, fear, pain... I was in the Cuillin Mountains for two days, and it seems to me that it was two weeks. It was such an intense time, saturated with so many experiences. I was so focused on the next step, next move... The question for the writer is how to write about it. When you are climbing, you can't write or read. I wrote *Mountains of the Mind* here, in Cambridge, in the little, dark cellar room below the sea level. So, usually, we write and read about the mountains far away from the mountains, but the language must carry these intense emotions, feelings and sensory experiences. It is a great challenge – language is so important in mountain literature...

¹³<http://www.boardmantasker.com/> (access 01.07.2023).

E. D.: Could you tell me more about contemporary British mountain writers? Who can be included in this group? Who creates this part of literature?

R. M.: Particularly interesting are works written by women because before that, mostly men wrote about the mountains. Interesting is Helen Mort book *A Line Above the Sky*,¹⁴ Jessica J. Lee *Two Trees Make a Forest*.¹⁵

E. D.: Thank you very much for the conversation.

¹⁴Helen Mort, *A Line Above the Sky. On Mountains and Motherhood* (Ebury Publishing, 2022).

¹⁵Jessica J. Lee, *Two Trees Make a Forest, Travels Among Taiwan's Mountains & Coasts in Search of My Family's Past* (Canada: Penguin, 2020).

KEYWORDS

Robert Macfarlane

NATURE WRITING

ABSTRACT:

This is an interview with Robert Macfarlane – a professor of Environmental Humanities at Emmanuel College, Cambridge. He is also a traveller and a world-famous author of best-selling books about nature, relations between “landscapes and the human heart” (as he says), places and imagination. Macfarlane’s literary works are usually categorised as nature writing, mountain literature, travelling and others.

mountain literature

TRAVELLING

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Elżbieta Dutka – prof. dr hab., works at the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Silesia in Katowice. Her primary field of study is contemporary Polish literature. Her research interests center around the issues of space (mythical lands, cities, regions, landscapes, mountains) in different perspectives – geopoetics, new regionalism, and mountain studies. She is the author of: *Ukraina w twórczości Włodzimierza Odojewskiego i Włodzimierza Paźniewskiego* [Ukraine in the works of Włodzimierz Odojewski and Włodzimierz Paźniewski] (Katowice 2000), *Okolice nie tylko geograficzne. O twórczości Andrzeja Kuśniewicza* [Not only geographical spaces. The works of Andrzej Kuśniewicz] (Katowice 2008), *Zapisywanie miejsca. Szkice o Śląsku w literaturze przełomu wieków XX i XXI* [Recording place. Sketches about Silesia in literature at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries] (Katowice 2011), *Próby topograficzne. Miejsca i krajobrazy w literaturze polskiej XX i XXI wieku* [Topographical sketches. Places and landscapes in Polish Literature of the 20th and 21st Centuries] (Katowice 2014), *Centra, prowincje, zaułki. Twórczość Julii Hartwig jako auto/bio/geo/grafia* [Centers, provinces, alleys. Julia Hartwig's works as auto/bio/geo/graphy] (Kraków 2016), *Pytania o miejsce. Sondowanie topografii literackich XX i XXI wieku* [A question of place. Probing literary topographies of the 20th and 21st centuries] (Kraków, 2019). She is also the co-editor of collective volumes, including *Proza polska XX wieku. Przeglądy i interpretacje* [20th-century Polish prose. Reviews and interpretations] (Volume 2, Katowice 2012; Volume 3, Katowice 2014). She published, among others, in collective volumes as part of the *Nowy Regionalizm w Badaniach Literackich* [New Regionalism in Literary Studies] series (Universitas).

From the poetics of disgust to meta-literary affirmations, or what Bernhard found in Gombrowicz

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Witold Gombrowicz admitted in his *Diary* that he wished to turn himself into a literary hero, like Hamlet or Don Quixote.¹ That this suggestion is inspiring is perhaps best demonstrated by the gestures of other writers who were eager to turn Gombrowicz into a literary character. Interestingly, most of them were foreign writers,² because Polish authors seem to treat Gombrowicz more seriously, that is, they see him as an ideological opponent and a possible source of inspiration.³ One of the most intriguing transformations of this kind may be found in Thomas

¹ Witold Gombrowicz, *Diary*, trans. Lillian Vallee (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2012), 141.

² Ewa Kobyłecka-Piwońska, *Spojrzenia z zewnątrz. Witold Gombrowicz w literaturze argentyńskiej (1970–2017)* [Views from the outside: Witold Gombrowicz in Argentine literature (1970–2017)] (Kraków: Universitas, 2017).

³ Marian Bielecki, *Historia – Dialog – Literatura. Interakcyjna teoria procesu historycznoliterackiego* [History – Dialogue – Literature: An interactive theory of the historical-literary process] (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo UWr, 2010); Marian Bielecki, *Gombrowicziady. Reaktywacja* [Gombrowicziady. Reactivation] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo IBL, 2020).

Bernhard's novel *Gargoyles*. Prince Saurau at one point mentions "his steward" at Hochgobernitz Castle, "a man named Gombrowicz," who was to "work out a plan for liquidating the entire estate" and who, although his father "disliked the steward's looks, and his mind as well" (G 150), would marry the prince's elder sister. Alas, the plan failed, because "the steward plunged into the gorge and was buried" (G 150–151).⁴ The Polish writer is a side character in the novel, he does not play an important role, and there are hardly any other traces of Gombrowicz-inspired motifs in *Gargoyles*. However, literary critics do write about Gombrowicz and Bernhard together.⁵ In one biographical anecdote, Bernhard recommended *Ferdydurke* to his brother, Peter Fabjan, and in one of Bernhard's houses we can still find *Ivona, Princess of Burgundia*.⁶ While this is the only tangible "evidence" I can refer to, in this essay I intend to argue that the relationship between Bernhard and Gombrowicz may be analyzed in terms of literary influence.

My argument is threefold. Firstly, I argue that in Bernhard's early prose, that is until the publication of *The Lime Works*, the poetics of disgust proves dominant. This affect defines the interpersonal relationships between and the main defense strategy of the characters who wish to protect themselves against others.⁷ *Gathering Evidence: A Memoir* is paradigmatic text in this respect. It is a moving diary of a wounded and abandoned child who processes these emotions in and through a radical critique of institutionalized culture (family, school, politics) that is essentially nihilistic, filled with resentment and disgust. Still, the narrator also tries to work through such negative emotions and arrive at a more optimistic place. Bernhard's early novels have a lot in common: they are all set in the same Upper Austrian province where nature and weather are threatening – both provide a gloomy, sinister, and anti-idyllic background for even more depressing events and even more deprived characters. The protagonist, *homo bernhardus*, is usually a bitter old man, tormented by and suspended in-between pride and a sense of unfulfillment. He speaks in incredible, insane, and monstrous monologues, criticizing everything and everyone, even himself. Arthur

⁴ I refer to Bernhard's novels by means of abbreviations: E – Extinction, trans. David McLintock (New York: Knopf, 1996); OM – Old Masters: A Comedy, trans. Ewald Osers (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); KE – "Eine katholische Existenz", in: Kurt Hofmann, *Aus Gesprächen mit Thomas Bernhard* (Vienna: Löcker Verlag, 1988), pp. 51–60; LW – *The Lime Works: A Novel*, trans. Sophie Wilkins (New York: Knopf, 1973); MP – *My Prizes: An Accounting*, trans. Carol Brown Janeway (New York: Knopf, 2010); B – *Eine Begegnung: Gespräch mit Krista Fleischmann* [A Meeting: Conversations with Krista Fleischmann] (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2006); GE – *Gathering Evidence: A Memoir*, trans. David McLintock (New York: Knopf, 1983); CT – *Cutting Timber: An Irritation*, trans. Ewald Osers (New York: Quartet Books, 1988); G – *Gargoyles*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Knopf, 2010); C – *Correction: A Novel*, trans. Sophie Wilkins (New York: Vintage, 1979). Quotations from these editions will be followed by the respective abbreviation and the appropriate page number.

⁵ Stephen D. Dowden, "A Testament Betrayed: Bernhard and His Legacy", in: *A Companion to the Works of Thomas Bernhard*, ed. Matthias Konzett (Rochester & Suffolk: Camden House, 2002), 67; footnote. 18; Marek Kędzierski, "Dawni mistrzowie: Witold Gombrowicz i Thomas Bernhard" [The old masters: Witold Gombrowicz and Thomas Bernhard], *Kwartalnik Artystyczny* 4 (2007); Marek Kędzierski, *Posłowie* [Afterword], in: Thomas Bernhard, Bratanek Wittgensteina. *Przyjaźń* [Wittgenstein's Nephew: A Friendship], translated and with an afterword by Marek Kędzierski (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 2019), 153, 157; Marcin Polak, *Trauma bezkresu. Nietzsche, Lacan, Bernhard i inni* [The trauma of vastness. Nietzsche, Lacan, Bernhard and others] (Kraków: Universitas, 2016), 213, 217; Paweł Jasnowski, "Świat jako kloaka i udawanie sensu. Paliatywy w świecie prozy Thomasa Bernharda" [The world as a sewer and a quest for meaning: Palliatives in Thomas Bernhard's prose], *Teksty Drugie* 2 (2017).

⁶ Agata Barełkowska, "«Decydujące fragmenty Mrozu napisałem w Warszawie...»." *Polskie wycieczki Thomasa Bernharda*, [I wrote the key fragments of Frost in Warsaw...] *Thomas Bernhard's journeys to Poland*] *Kwartalnik Artystyczny* 3 (2009). Cf. Agata Wittchen-Barełkowska, *Kategoria teatralności w dziele Thomasa Bernharda* [The category of theatricality in the work of Thomas Bernhard] (Poznań: Nauka i Innowacje, 2014), 195.

⁷ I write about it in: "O udręce młodości, resentymentem i wstręciem, a także o tym, czy Thomas Bernhard czytał Witolda Gombrowicza" [The torment of youth, resentment, and disgust, and whether Thomas Bernhard read Witold Gombrowicz], *Rana. Literatura – Doświadczenie – Tożsamość* 4 (2021).

Schopenhauer is an important point of reference here.⁸ Secondly, over time, the writer realizes that this poetics, as well as the emotions that it is based on, namely disgust and resentment, have their emotional, intellectual, and ideological limitations. Friedrich Nietzsche is an important point of reference in this case.⁹ Thirdly, I believe that Nietzsche does help in this process of reflection and Gombrowicz and his meta-literary concepts also prove useful.

A strategy reminiscent of Nietzsche's, implemented on a meta-literary level and over time supported by the poetics of satire, begins to be a dominant feature in Bernhard's works more or less since the publication of one of his most "Gombrowicz-like" works, that is *The Lime Works*. The protagonist is a typical Bernhardian paranoid, deeply affected by the traumas of his childhood: to look into his "childhood was to look into a snake pit, into a hell" (LW 43). He lives in an area that is the "source of every kind of universally infectious disease" (LW 45). He is consumed by chronic states of exhaustion and obsessed with closure and isolation, fearing "the outside" (LW 11), that is misanthropy and hypochondria. Konrad does not believe in understanding (the so-called marital bliss "is a lie" [LW156]). He isolates himself from the world to write a book, but he constantly seems to be looking to find a way to connect with other people, suspended between the "hell of loneliness" and the "hell of togetherness" (LW 156). Such sporadic relations, however, are unique, insofar as they have much in common with observing, rehearsing, directing, and experimenting, especially in the case of Konrad's disabled wife, whom the protagonist tortures with the Urbanchich method and pseudoscientific experimental hearing and pronun-

⁸ The world as representation; pessimism; lack of metaphysical order; salvation through art; the praise of tragedy as the only form capable of representing "the frightful side of life," including "the nameless pain and misery of humanity, the triumph of malice, the mocking mastery of chance, and the hopeless fall of the just and innocent;" in tragedy "the conflict of will with itself that is here, on the highest level of its objectivization, most completely unfolded and comes frighteningly to the fore" (Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*, vol. 1, trans., R. B. Haldane and J. Kemp [London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1909], 144, hereinafter: WWI); human life as suspended "between pain and boredom" (WWI 177), "desire and satisfaction" (WWI 178), and satisfaction always leads to monotony and excess (WWI 150); recognizing that lasting "suffering [is] essential to all life" (WWI 166), and that life is in equal parts comedy and tragedy (WWI 167) – this is why Bernhard's frustrated characters eagerly read, quote, and reflect on Schopenhauer's works in their excruciating monologues.

⁹ Challenging Schopenhauer's idealism and aestheticism, Nietzsche said: "art is essentially **the affirmation, the blessing, and the deification of existence**. What does **pessimistic art** signify? Is it not a contradictio? Yes, Schopenhauer is **in error** when he makes certain works of art serve the purpose of pessimism. Tragedy does **not** teach 'resignation.' To represent terrible and questionable things is, in itself, the sign of an instinct of power and magnificence in the artist; he doesn't fear them..." (Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche* [N.p.: Strelbytsky Multimedia Publishing, 2012], n.p.). Nietzsche also accuses Schopenhauer of having a misguided attitude towards pessimism, arrested in its ambivalence, combining "good will" and "disgust," as a result of which he did not allow the latter to shine through (Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Complete Works of...*, n.p.). Nietzsche therefore argues that in "revaluating all values" he also wished to change how one sees disgust (Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Complete Works of...*, n.p.). A change in the perception of disgust would involve moving away from treating disgust as an epistemic element, seen as a marker of distance and distinctness, towards, hopefully, restraining the gesture of negation, and thus developing an attitude of disgust towards disgust, a homeopathic intensification and a courage to look into the unbearable. This was one of the meanings of amor fati, described in *Joyful Wisdom* thus: "I do not want to wage war against what is ugly. I do not want to accuse; I do not even want to accuse those who accuse. Looking away shall be my only negation. And all in all and on the whole: some day I wish to be only a Yes-sayer" (Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Complete Works of...*, n.p.). This sea-change is documented in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, whose protagonist is "the man without disgust, [...] the surmounter of the great disgust" – "disgust" did not "cleav[e] unto [his] mouth" (Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Complete Works of...*, n.p.). To be "without disgust" also means being able to swallow and digest what cannot be digested, and not vomit, by assimilating what cannot be assimilated. It also means being able to dance and laugh because: "Not by wrath, but by laughter, do we slay" (Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Complete Works of...*, n.p.). There is always laughter, release of tension, exclusion and inclusion, further accompanied by a skeptical, critical approach – a genealogical analysis of certain concepts, including subject, reason, work, goodness, truth, beauty, morality (Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", in: *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, edited by D. F. Bouchard [Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1977], 139–165).

ciation exercises as well as the reading of Kropotkin (against her will). A convicted psychopath, a degenerate, and finally a murderer, but with some intellectual and artistic aspirations – this is Konrad. Either way, his frequent comments on meta-artistic topics seem interesting to me and I do not even rule out direct inspirations from the meta-literary *Ferdydurke*.

His quasi-tirade seems somewhat inconsistent, but I think that his remarks may be read in the wider context of critiquing the modernist concept of the Work. Konrad begins by discussing artistic haughtiness and individualism (“The mass denied to the individual what was possible only to the individual” [LW 48]). Then, he postulates that the Work *The Sense of Hearing* shall evolve from “a scientific work” to “a work of art” (LW 63), and finally rejects everything that is structured, everything that is form (LW 53). The very idea of form is questioned, insofar as the work as something intentional, autonomous (“the writer himself was nothing” [LW191]), structuralist (“the number 9, in fact, played a most important part in this work, (...) everything could be extrapolated from 9” [LW 63]), and essentialist (containing a “truly fundamental idea” and not secondary problems [LW 120]) is questioned. There is no “pure form” which hides a hermeneutic secret.¹⁰

The form is further challenged by the impossibility of comprehending the entire project, because Konrad, due to his autistic hypersensitivity, is constantly exposed to “distraction” (LW 67). Just like Józio, as described in the first paragraph of *Ferdydurke*. The possibility of internal and mental disintegration (“for hours on end Konrad sees himself lying there unconscious in the full possession of his completed manuscript” [LW 162]) as well as the outside world (“the country, as such, tended to distract” [LW 189]) are both a constant threat. The writing process does not unify the I; the subsequent syntheses ultimately lead to disintegration (LW 52). Hermeneutical enquiry fails. Academics (“millions of apprentice workmen in science and history” [LW 61]), discourse (“Words ruin” [LW 122]), the very nature of exegesis (“Every explanation led inescapably to a totally false outcome, the more things were explained the sicker they got, because the explanations were false in every case, and the outcome of every explanation was invariably the wrong outcome” [LW 63]), the non-essentialist deconstructivist *différance*, and the ontology of the work (“any final point is a starting point for a further development toward a new final point and so forth, (...) the so-called approach to the subject would get you nowhere” [LW 58]) all fail.¹¹

The work is supposed to be the “goal of lifetime” (LW 183), but Konrad’s life is a series of failures and missed opportunities. The mind is unable to cope, and Konrad constantly complains: “Then it all fell apart, at the very peak of concentration it all fell to pieces again” (LW 52); “Instead of concentration (on his work) (...) nonconcentration (on his work) suddenly manifested itself” (LW 75). The deconstructive writing process brings to mind post-structuralist notions. The endless syntheses, which by no means lead to a final dialectical synthesis, remind one of Roland Barthes’s notion of Text, which “practices the infinite postponement of

¹⁰The ascetic and functionalist architecture found in *The Lime Works* is important here. Cf. Adam Lipszyc, “Inne gmachy. O kilku budynkach u Bernharda” [Other buildings: About architecture in Bernhard’s prose], in: *Korekty Bernharda. Szkice krytyczne* [Bernhard’s corrections: Critical sketches], ed. Wojciech Charchalis, Arkadiusz Żychliński (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2021), 107–120.

¹¹The analogies with *Ferdydurke* are striking. Gombrowicz’s meta-literary tirades also contained anti-scholastic, anti-hermeneutic, anti-structuralist and anti-essentialist overtones. Cf. Marian Bielecki, *Widma nowoczesności. ‘Ferdydurke’ Witolda Gombrowicza* [Specters of modernity. ‘Ferdydurke’ by Witold Gombrowicz] (Warsaw: IBL, 2014), 90–140; 253–296.

the signified, the Text is dilatory.” Indeed, for Barthes the Text is a “man possessed by devils: My name is legion, for we are many (Mark 5:9).”¹² This is also how Konrad is described by the narrator (almost bordering on “madness” [LW 154]). His artistic perturbations demonstrate what Michel Foucault wrote about on the margins of *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, namely “the absence of a work of art.”¹³ Foucault argued that we should talk about an archeology of silence, which is allowed to but does not speak. Consequently, the text about madness does not contain a hermeneutical secret, but rather a reserve, a residue of signification that postpones and suspends meaning. Jacques Derrida also argued that the discourse on madness, on madness untamed by reason and psychiatry, is an impossible discourse due to the rational nature of language, and in this sense the “demonic hyperbole” of madness cannot be expressed by means of an objectifying, pacifying, policing, and coalitional language of reason. Derrida wrote: “By its essence, the sentence is normal.”¹⁴ Regardless of the intellectual or mental condition of the speaker and regardless of the poetics, even the poorest or the most deviant one, they employ, “the sentence is normal” also because communication is based on the assumption that the self is consistent and transparent.

Ludwig Wittgenstein apparently shared this idea when he wrote: “the thought is the significant proposition.”¹⁵ As we know, Bernhard found Wittgenstein, his views, and his family members fascinating.¹⁶ Linguistic reflection in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* centers on describing the relations between the world (objects) and language (names), and it (language) is seen as a clear and crystalline system of arbitrary and differentiating elements, allowing for full and reliable representation and isomorphic transitions between facts, sentences, and thoughts, essentially truthful and logical. In this sense, it is realistic. In *Philosophical Investigations*, linguistic reflection centers on describing relativizing language games, governed by pragmatic feasibility, comprehensibility, and intersubjective verifiability. In this sense, it is anti-realistic. Considering both approaches, Bernhard’s inspirations are indeed rather general.¹⁷ We do not find in his works detailed and consistent references to meta-theoretical linguistic reflection, neither does he write about propositional logic; instead, we find radical linguistic skepticism, which seems to oppose the most famous Wittgensteinian observations. Most often, however, Bernhard seems to question Wittgenstein’s linguistic pragmatism at the level of explicit and rather general statements. For example, in *Correction* Bernhard writes: “Perfect to the degree to which perfection

¹²Roland Barthes, “From Work to Text”, trans. Richard Howard, in: Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), 59-60.

¹³Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Random House, 1965), vii, 286-288.

¹⁴Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: Chicago UP), 54.

¹⁵Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, trans. C.K. Ogden (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1922), 38. Hereinafter: TLP. Dominik Sulej (“Kosmos” jako gabinet luster. Psychomachia Witolda Gombrowicza [“Cosmos” as a house of mirrors: Witold Gombrowicz’s Psychomachia], [Kraków: Universitas, 2015], 53–54) suggests that Gombrowicz engaged in a dialogue with Wittgenstein in *Cosmos*. Some of the interpretative comments are far-fetched, but the suggestion that in one case an epistemological problem is explained by means of *Philosophical Investigations* (triangle = arrow) is probably correct. Cf. Witold Gombrowicz, *Cosmos*, trans. Danuta Borhardt (New Haven: Yale UP, 2005), 24–26; Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. Joachim Schulte, P. M. S. Hacker (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 179-180.

¹⁶Cf. Jakub Momro, “Logiczna składnia obłądu (Wittgenstein, Beckett, Bernhard)” [The Logical Syntax of Madness (Wittgenstein, Beckett, Bernhard)], *Teksty Drugie* 6 (2013).

¹⁷On this linguistic philosophy, see: *The New Wittgenstein*, ed. Alice Cray, Rupert Read (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 9–28.

is possible, anyway, let's sat nearly perfect, 'nearly' as with anything else" (C 165). He thus, as if, engages in a critical dialogue with *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, where Wittgenstein writes "Everything that can be thought at all can be thought clearly. Everything that can be said can be said clearly" (TLP 45). The idea that language constricts thought and that words ridicule thought may be found in many Bernhard's texts (GE 171, 310; LW 112; CT 2–3). The belief that interpersonal communication is a misunderstanding is also a common trope (GE 106).

Such beliefs are communicated at the level of poetics in the form of radically unreliable narrators and their interlocutors' insane monologues. They may be read as expressions of madness, as a form of questioning the possibilities of expression and representation or *vice versa*/ simultaneously as an attempt to express what is impossible or difficult to name. Indeed, constant repetitions might be read as a celebration of speech, a negation of silence, and a command to tell the truth. Perhaps in this way, in line with Wittgenstein, Bernhard honors the unsayable,¹⁸ but he certainly does not observe cultural taboos. However, it has been suggested more often than not that the repetitiveness of discourse in Bernhard's novels points to the shortcomings of language, difficulties in expressing oneself, and the actual failure of communication. It seems to me that Bernhard is somewhere in the middle – between radical critique of language and the belief in the absolute necessity of language and speech, between belief in vague generalizations and the precision of language – because the writer is famous for explicitly naming what he criticizes. Marjorie Perloff seems to combine these two options in a Wittgensteinian perspective, citing two reasons for the poetics of compulsive repetition, namely the Augustinian attempt to distinguish between a proper name and a reference as well as using ironic permutations and recontextualizations to make subversive and political statements.¹⁹

Linguistic skepticism and the state of mind of Bernhard's protagonists are reflected in the poetics of their incredible stories. Repetitions, parallelisms, enumerations, anaphora, ellipses, endless sentences, broken syntax and grammar, idiomatization of individual voices combined with a multiplication and mixing of narrative voices – the most literal stylistic expression of mental confusion – define Bernhard's poetics. Krystian Lupa was right when he said that the aestheticization and artistic elevation of maniacal monologues makes no sense, because "language is often plain, obsessively simple, sterilely schematic, monothematically morbid, full of clichés; it gets lost in the thicket of endless triviality, stupidity, slander, and calumny, language of maniacal anonymous accusations, a language that is broken, unsophisticated..."²⁰ Bernhard's suspicious genealogical poetics criticizes and satirizes banality, tautology, clichés, colloquiality, stupidity, etc. At the same time, it also communicates, though never openly, Bernhard's views.

Meta-artistic questions play an important role in *Correction*. They arise in connection with a number of "works," most importantly, the architectural design of the Cone, situated in the

¹⁸Rüdiger Görner, "The Broken Window Handle: Thomas Bernhard's Notion of «Weltbezug»", in: *A Companion to the Works of Thomas Bernhard*, 96.

¹⁹Marjorie Perloff, "Border Games: The Wittgenstein Fictions of Thomas Bernhard and Ingeborg Bachmann", in: *Marjorie Perloff, Wittgenstein's Ladder. Poetic Language and the Strangeness of the Ordinary* (Chicago and London: Chicago UP, 1996), 157–160.

²⁰Krystian Lupa, "Znowu Bernhard" [Bernhard Again], in: *Thomas Bernhard, Dramaty [Plays]*, vol. 1, trans. Jacek Stanisław Buras, Monika Muskała, Danuta Żmij-Zielińska, selected and with an introduction by Krystian Lupa (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2001), 396–397.

geometric center of the Kobernaßerwald forest, designed and built by the professor of natural sciences at Cambridge, Roithamer, and his intellectual legacy in the form of thousands of slips of paper and a manuscript edited by the narrator. Both intellectual and existential projects end in failure. Instead of living in a concrete building without windows, Roithamer's sister chooses suicide, and the process of editing Roithamer's papers, due to the pressure from the outside world (C 2) and his own obsessive thoughts (C 275), which cloud reflection, does not proceed as planned. The narrator feels disgust ("the mere word edit or edition was always enough to nauseate me" [C 132]) and suffers from chronic insomnia, permanent irritability, and prostration. He is at the verge of "madness" (C 108). This insane reconstruction of an insane project may again be read in terms of questioning a certain concept of the work. The titular "correction" does not only refer to the narrator's ordering and reconstruction of Roithamer's papers, putting it "into some kind of order" (C 132) in order to bring out the internal architecture of the work and its "original coherence as envisioned by Roithamer" (C 10). Indeed "all three of these versions of Roithamer's handwritten manuscript, (...) all three versions belong together, each deriving from the previous one, they compose a whole, an integral whole of over a thousand pages in which everything is equally significant" (C 130), and "all this taken together is the complete work" (C 131). Roithamer's work thus supposedly resembles an organic modernist form; it is ultimately to be synthesized in the process of concretization ("think it through to the end, no aspect of it must be left unclarified or at least unclarified to the highest degree possible" [C 35]). Similarly, the Cone in its design is clearly modernist: it is governed by rationalism, functionality, geometry, and ascetic minimalism. This dialogue extends even further due to the assumed correlation between reading, nature, and life: "nature then it's what we read, it's the life and the nature of what we read" (C 157). We can also see that in the connections between "the most important work or brainchild" (C 131) and the notion of "the complete work," which is why the title of the novel further carries some existential undertones.

This combined impossibility – of turning the perfect cone into a home, of constructing the work, of exegesis – therefore points to the inability to comprehend existence by means of contemporary psychology and morality. Roithamer defies normative patterns. He is portrayed as a radical eccentric: he does not fit in (he was "different" [C 32]), he is distant ("there's always been a total lack of sympathy, nothing but mutual dislike" [C 31]), and he is self-reliant ("Roithamer's conduct and decisions were always in character" [C 31]). As any *homo bernhardus*, he relies on "disgust and dislike" (C 220) towards his family (C 220), especially his mother (and femininity [C 195]), his teachers (C 101) and, of course, Austria as a country and state which breaks the spirit and destroys culture. Austria is a hypocritical, shameless, and economically ruined country which poses a threat to the individual – it limits them and turns them into simpletons (C 18–27). However, there are exceptions, insofar as Roithamer is said to have been fond of his real "relatives, physical and spiritual" (C 28), that is the country folk from Altensam, who are described using homoerotic euphemisms ("how very much he loved their ways" [C 53]). He was drawn to simple people, workers, lumberjacks, servants (C 66), because he preferred "the most unwanted, society's pariahs" (C 67), "the poorest of the poor, men totally excluded from society" (C 66). Roithamer even donated the money from the sale of his Altensam property to help "prisoners released from penal institutions," "so-called criminals, who are actually our sick people (...) those whom society has catapulted into their sickness" (C 67, 149).

Cutting Timber may appear to be a social satire or a comedy, but it takes place in a typically Bernhardian world. The narrator is in a permanent psychophysical crisis, as manifested by a sense of isolation and powerlessness (“mental and physical atrophy” [CT 3]; “I’m the very weakest person with the very weakest character” [CT 3]; “I had momentarily become soft and weak” [CT 15]), self-hatred (“once more (...) I was making myself cheap and contemptible” [CT 15]), as well as humiliation, abuse, and isolation. Disgust, revulsion, nausea, and vomiting are affective reactions that define his relation with the world and the people (WE 1, 2, 8, 10, 11, 12, 14, 28, 38, 41, 44, 55, 63, 78, 111, 138, 139, 143, 153, 167, 187). In a state of great irritation, the narrator attends a dinner party in the Gentsgasse. He visits the Auersbergers, friends with whom he has been once very close. Alas, he has later learned to detest them, and they have grown apart. The narrator unexpectedly renews his friendship with the married couple. He decides to do this, even though he hates them: “I was thoroughly familiar with what they were like – and I know of scarcely anything more repugnant. (...) Only a half-wit devoid of all character could accept an invitation like that” (CT 19-20). His insane and delirious monologue, as he gets more and more drunk, seems as confused and confusing as his feelings, because he thinks about the good old decadent times as he lists the wrongs and misgivings he has suffered. Seemingly, this novel is just like other Bernhard’s texts; one might even say that the paroxysm of disgust seems most intense in *Cutting Timber*. However, this is not the case.

First of all, disgust is initially a tool of deconstruction, of “analysis” (CT 45), that is, observation, exposure, embarrassment. It is merciless and malicious. It is even more drastic because, as we know, Herr Auersberger is actually based on the figure of the composer Gerhard Lampersberger, for whom Bernhard once wrote a libretto. Lampersberger, in turn, supported Bernhard financially. In the novel, he is “little paunchy Auersberger” (CT 64), “a so-called successor of Webern” (CT 5), an alcoholic, and a homosexual (CT 152). The narrator argues that the Auersbergers are stupid, megalomaniac, insincere, envious, and mean. He draws attention to their theatrical airs and graces, their sense of humor, their need to show off (CT 59, 61), as well as their love of clichés (they were friends with “artistic people” [CT 2], they loved “artistic dinner[s]” [CT 5] and “intellectual conversation” [CT 141]). Banality is emphasized by the use of meta-expressions (“she used to call it” [CT 1], “as they say” [CT 2, 5, 10, 17], “so to speak” [CT 2], “so called” [CT 7, 13, 27]), which further point to the conceptual use of language. The Auersbergers love their “cultural goodwill,”²¹ their “shabby-genteel” clothes (CT 5), and their house “filled with Josephine and Biedermeier furniture” (CT 17). The narrator finds it all so pretentious and snobbish. Such a lifestyle is for him a failed attempt at imitating the aristocracy. The Auersbergers want to forget about their actual roots and petit-bourgeois mentality. The narrator does not only criticize, but also demonstrates how social class, as a construct, works and in his attempt, I am almost sure of this, he is inspired by the Młodziaks and the Hurleckis from *Ferdydurke*. The examples of social distinction as well as the process of its deconstruction are identical. The decor of the Auersbergers’ house (tapestries, Josephine and Biedermeier furniture) actually shows how absurd the Auersbergers’ belief that people admire their “shameless life-style” (CT 138) is; in fact, they admire the furniture, the works of art, and the sophisticated design. “It’s not only the emperor’s clothes that make the emperor,” the

²¹Bourdieu, Pierre, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1984), 318.

narrator says, “but the emperor’s furniture and art treasures” (CT 138). His suspicious and skeptical eye notices that the music room is “simply too beautiful, too perfectly furnished, and hence unbearable. (...) I found it merely repugnant (...). Such perfection, which hits you in the eye and crowds in upon you from all sides, is simply repellent, I thought, just as all apartments are repellent in which everything is just so, as they say, in which nothing is ever out of place or ever permitted to be out of place” (CT 137–138).

Secondly, visiting the Auersbergers is supposed to be an effective “therapy” (CT 4), and as such lead to “mental and physical recovery” (CT 4). Unlike in other novels, neither Schopenhauer nor Nietzsche are mentioned, but Montaigne and Gogol do appear. There appears to be a more cheerful, affirmative, satirical, and overall ludic message. And this is *Cutting Timber* in a nutshell. It is, in my opinion, Bernhard’s funniest novel. The great dinner scene unfolds slowly, as the Auersbergers spin out their resentful monologues and suspense tactics, as they wait for a famous actor from the Burgtheater to arrive. The narrator-protagonist, because despite his best intentions, falls asleep drunk, and when he wakes up, he is comically rude towards Mrs. Auersberger. Meanwhile, the famous actor from the Burgtheater, the dominant causeur, arrives. The writer Jeannie Billroth (this character is based on Jeannie Ebner), the protagonist’s former lover, now widely perceived as a poor imitation of Virginia Woolf, is also tormented by a feeling of unappreciation. An aggressive social *agon* begins, a sharp exchange of retorts and provocative questions revealing incompetence and hypocrisy. The respective outbursts are ruthlessly honest and arrogant. The poetics of repetition in this parody of critical exegesis plays a satirical role: the tautological nature of the statements in the dispute between the actor and the writer, who argue about theater and dramaturgy, reveals an actual lack of any substance in the entire argument. Not a single argument is mentioned, and instead both speakers rely on institutional legitimization (CT 105). An even funnier effect is created when the gestures and the poses (especially those of the hostess and the actor) clash. Bernhard uses laughter and satire to tame what the narrator finds repulsive. However, he does not stop there, because he recognizes not only the arbitrariness of disgust, but also its simplifying, evaluative, and, in this sense, foundational nature. First, the narrator draws attention to how he treats others – he is ambivalent in his emotional reactions (“but then I looked into one of the mirrors of the coffeehouse and found myself staring at my own dissipated face, and my own debauched body, and I felt more sickened by myself than I had been by Auersberger and his companion” [CT 12]) – and further describes the resentful nature of his feelings: “I had downgraded (...) all the others (...) and at the same time upgraded myself—and that was contemptible” (CT 56). All these disappointments may be summed up as follows: “the world today is ridiculous and at the same time profoundly embarrassing and kitschy and that is the truth of it” (OM 62). “This is the truth” – this phrase may be found repeatedly in Thomas Bernhard’s last few novels.

The Old Masters focuses on Reger, a musicologist writing for *The Times*, who saves himself from despair – first existential despair and then a feeling of dread caused by the death of his beloved wife – thanks to his visits at the Kunsthistorisches Museum. He becomes friends with the museum guard Irrsigler and the narrator Atzbacher. Both relationships are as superficial as they are important. All three men create a narrative constellation, engaging in a dialogue with old meta-artistic concepts which, ultimately, gives rise to a different vision of art. Such

a form of criticism is the most methodical because it addresses not only the institutional conditions of the meta-artistic discourse but also its conceptual nature. Art history institutions, education, and museums are criticized first. The discourse on art is challenged as boring and exegetically empty: “Thousands, indeed tens of thousands of art historians wreck art by their twaddle and ruin it” (OM 15). Teachers are judged even more harshly, they are “petty bourgeois” (OM 23), “[t]here is no cheaper artistic taste than that of teachers” (OM 23). Also, “[m]ost of our teachers are miserable creatures whose mission in life seems to consist of barricading life to the young people and eventually and finally making it into a terrible disillusionment. After all, it is only the sentimental and perverse small minds from the lower middle class which push their way into the teaching profession. The teachers are the henchmen of the state” (OM 23-24). Teachers force their pupils “to learn a sixteen-stanza Schiller poem by heart” (OM 24). Schools are controlled by the state and produce “a state person, regulated and registered and trained and finished and perverted and dejected, like everyone else” (OM 25). Schools also propagate Catholic religion and/or national socialist ideology.

The critical edge is more specific and more direct. Adalbert Stifter, a widely respected Biedermeier writer and a faithful “subject” of the Habsburg empire, who in his works praises the idyllic atmosphere of the province, which is, however, filled with philistinism and devotion, is most strongly criticized. Reger says that readers “are all now making pilgrimages to Stifter, in their hundreds of thousands, kneeling down before everyone of his books as if everyone of them were an altar” (OM 41). This is, of course, brings to mind Gombrowicz and the way in which he used the rhetoric of the sacred in describing the spectacle of art. Reger tests this hypothesis and conducts a “Stifter experiment” and a “Stifter test” (OM 39-40). He tells his friends to read Stifter’s works and asks for their honest opinion: “And all these people (...) told me they had not liked it, that they had been infinitely disappointed” (OM 40). A similar scene could be found in Gombrowicz, as are questions about Titian’s *Madonna of the Cherries*, which apparently is not a beloved masterpiece: “Not a single person I asked ever liked the picture, they all admired it solely because of its fame, it did not really say anything to any of them” (OM 40). The question of reception is also raised in the case of museums. According to Reger, a snobbish and aspirational compulsion propels them: “People only go to the museum because they have been told that a cultured person must go there, and not out of interest, people are not interested in art, at any rate ninety-nine per cent of humanity has no interest whatever in art” (OM 4).

Reger makes very interesting comments about the ontology of the work of art itself and its interpretation. He coins the concept of “incomplete reading,” reminiscent of Barthes’s reflections in *The Pleasure of the Text*,²² brought to life by a talented “page-turner” (OM 17). Such reading is fragmentary, but extremely intense – conducted “with the greatest reading passion imaginable” (OM 17). It is thus better than a superficial attempt to understand the entire work (“It is better to read twelve lines of a book with the utmost intensity and thus to penetrate into them to the full, as one might say, rather than read the whole book as the normal reader does” [OM 17]). It is supposed to be a dialectical reading and lead from the fragment to the Whole, that is, to “the complete and perfect” (OM 17), and, respectively, reduce the

²²Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 12.

Whole to the fragment. As such – and we also notice this, as if Gadamerian, belief that the strangeness of the text and the author may be overcome in reading: “the book was written for me alone” (OM 128)²³ – this procedure resembles a “hermeneutic circle.” It must be deliberate because Reger turns out to be an avid reader of Friedrich Schleiermacher (OM 130).

The reasons for contesting “The Whole” are fundamental because this concept refers to the plane of understanding, reading, and composition which is an exponent of epistemological and anthropological truths. And this is what makes it problematic: “the whole and the perfect are intolerable” (OM 18), “there is no such thing as the perfect or the whole” (OM 19). That is why Reger comes up with the idea of a “massive mistake” (OM 19), that is something that deconstructs the perfect, challenging the very idea of the masterpiece (OM 19). The masterpiece used to be based on the concept of “originality,” but Reger also questions this notion: “every original is a forgery in itself” (OM 56). He thus, as if involuntarily, references Derrida, who writes about the “non-identity to oneself” in the so-called “originary presence.” The priority, source, and purity of the original are questioned by the very existence of a copy. A copy is supplementary and secondary, but it still refers to its (the original’s) possibility, and therefore impossibility.²⁴ The autonomy of the artifact is most effectively undermined in the process of reception: “I am lying when I say I am not interested in public opinion, I am not interested in my readers, (...) no one writes a work for himself, if someone says he is writing only for himself then that is a lie” (OM 88). It has hermeneutical consequences: “The quality of the piece consists more in the fact that it lends itself to discussion than in itself” (OM 93).

It would be relatively easy to find positives in this anti-hermeneutic method. In his late texts Bernhard goes beyond criticism, negativity, resentment, and disgust – both on an affective and discursive levels. Everything, the whole world, including his beloved wife, is disgusting: “For years I simply made everything abhorrent to me” (OM 32). The death of his wife changes everything. Reger begins to hate museums and has a “deep disgust” for exhibitions (OM 31), meta-artistic concepts (OM 101), gifts (DM 108), art experts (OM 110), literature (OM 120), the state and democracy (OM 115–116), but he cannot and does not want to give up on them: “I am by nature a hater of museums, but it is probably just because of this that I have been coming here for over thirty years” (OM 16). He also says: “Only when, time and again, we have discovered that there is no such thing as the whole or the perfect are we able to live on. We cannot endure the whole or the perfect” (OM 19). It turns out that aesthetic categories have ideological and existential implications. In this respect, parodic strategies are an effective tool for problematizing the notion of a “masterpiece” (“No matter which work of art, it can be made to look ridiculous” [OM 57-58]) and this is important insofar as everything may be subject to parody and caricature: both the people and the world (OM 64, 65). Indeed, Reger further writes that “We truly love only those books which are not a whole, which are chaotic, which are helpless” (OM 19-20). That is why, he argues, we love Bach, Beethoven, Mozart,

²³Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Aesthetics and Hermeneutics”, in: *Art’s Claim to Truth*, ed. Santiago Zabala, trans. Luca D’Isanto (New York: Columbia UP, 2008), 125.

²⁴Michał Paweł Markowski, *Efekt inskrypcji. Jacques Derrida i literatura* [The inscription effect: Jacques Derrida and literature] (Kraków: Homini, 2003), 235–267. Cf. Rosalind Krauss, “The Originality of the Avant-Garde”, in: *Rosalind Krauss, The Originality of the Avant-Garde and other Modernist Myths* (Boston: MIT Press, 1986) 151-170.

Pascal, Montaigne, and Voltaire. We love them because of their failures; they help us come to terms with our own limitations. The following definition of art should be read in this context: “Art altogether is nothing but a survival skill, we should never lose sight of this fact, it is, time and again, just an attempt (...) to cope with this world and its revolting aspects” (OM 138). This explains a fascination with postponed incriminated Austria (OM 121), even if the Austrian is always “a common Nazi or a stupid Catholic” (OM 122), which is why he is “the most interesting European type, yet at the same time he is also the most dangerous” (OM 122). Bernhard also writes that: “I have always exclusively concerned myself with people, nature as such has never interested me, everything in me was always related to human beings, I am, you might say, a fanatic for human beings (...). I loathe people but they are, simultaneously, the sole purpose of my life” (OM 49-50); “We hate people and yet we want to be with them because only with people and among people do we stand a chance of carrying on without going insane” (OM 145).

In *Extinction*, we meet Franz-Joseph Murau who tells his student Gambetti about his past and present life at Wolfsegg. The past is horrific. It revolves around a toxic family, destructive national-socialist upbringing, which breeds fear and intolerance (E 13-14), and Catholicism, which is a “monstrous falsification of nature, a base insult to humanity” (E 13). Most of all, however, the past is haunted by Franz-Joseph’s mother – the “last human being” (“her big ideas have gradually diminished everything” [E 51]) – and his sisters, with whom he had a disastrous relationship based on mutual distrust, misunderstanding, reluctance, contempt, and reproach, not without incestuous overtones. In a broader perspective, the climate in Wolfsegg is “unbearable” (E 54) and the people “are deaf to all that means so much to [Franz-Joseph], to nature, to art” (E 54). They are greedy and xenophobic. The simplest defensive reaction is disgust: towards Wolfsegg (E 54, 102), his mother and sisters (E 51, 77, 101), his relatives on the mother’s side (E 261), his dead parents and brother (E 161), pigeons (E 202), Christmas (E 55), university, medicine (E 33), photography (E 14), sentimentality (E 212), the powerless (E 56), butchers (E 90), hunting (E 93), hunters (E 95), and a hunting lodge where his family hid the Nazis (E 214). The novel seems to be based on the same premises as Bernhard’s other works. Its conclusion, however, will not be the same.

In the present, we witness Franz-Joseph’s journey from Rome to Wolfsegg to attend the funeral of his parents and brother, who died in a car accident. It is also an attempt to reevaluate the traumatic past and overcome affective negativity. Franz-Joseph was a brilliant and intelligent child who often found a way to make his family uncomfortable or self-conscious. The best tactic was to make them feel disgusted with themselves – he “would spy on them and confront them with their unprincipled conduct” (E 19). He looked at them in “disbelief” (E 76), then “stared at them,” and finally “saw through them” (E 76). He “would dissect them and take them apart” (E 76). He was never forgiven.

One is confronted with “unprincipled conduct” also on the meta-literary level, that is at the level of reception. Murau repeatedly mentions how difficult it is to describe Wolfsegg and finally states that such a book, if it is to be written, should be titled *Extinction* (there are many more such auto-intertextual references in the novel; Bernhard’s name is mentioned [E 83] and Murau describes himself as a “a charlatan, a blatherer, a parasite who batted on

them and everyone else” [E 6–7], which is also an explicit biographical trope) – so he is talking about something and doing it at the same time. The novel turns out to be a performative project of itself and a staging of disgust. This is how we should understand the poetics of “exaggeration” thematized in the novel: “The art of exaggeration is the art of tiding oneself over existence, of making one’s existence endurable, even possible” (E 307). Moreover, it saves one from a boring life (E 88), makes things understandable (E 88), and helps once overcome “mental foolery that led nowhere, a mental dead end” (E 186). Writing this “anti-autobiography” (E 94) involves changing the world, “radically destroying it, by virtually annihilating it, and then restoring it in a form that I find tolerable, as a completely new word – though I can’t say how this is to be done” (E 104).²⁵ In a more general perspective: “the old must be discarded and destroyed so that the new can emerge, even though we don’t know what the new will be. All we know is that it has to come” (E 106). The title *Extinction* points to a book “the sole purpose [of which] will be to extinguish what it describes, to extinguish everything that Wolfsegg means to me, everything that Wolfsegg is” (E 99). In the book, Murau “do[es] nothing but dissect and extinguish [him]self” and his family (E 147). One would therefore have to assume that the poetics of criticism, destruction, and negation will be dominant in the novel. However, this is not the case. Murau insists on the documentary function of writing (E 282). At the same time, he says cryptically that the title *Extinction* “exercised a great fascination over” him (E 140). Are there any traces of affirmation in Bernhard’s pessimistic novel?

Franz-Joseph Murau tries to control his emotions at all costs. Before coming back to his hometown, he is overcome with disgust: towards Wolfsegg, towards his father’s lawyer, his law firm, his wife, the surrounding towns and their inhabitants, and their Catholic and national socialist habitus. This experience, however, leads to a simple conclusion that disgust is something unfair, reciprocated, and actually threatening. It is, as Murau puts it, a persecution mania. The character tells himself: “stay calm (...) keep a cool head, stay calm, quiet calm” (E 152). He tries to rationalize his own emotional responses and therefore reconstructs the etiology of disgust. Firstly, he connects the disgusting with the monstrous (“What had at first seemed repulsive came to be seen as entirely necessary (...) and when it is done with consummate skill it deserves our admiration” [E 90]). He admits: “unlike my parents, I regard people outside Wolfsegg not as a necessary evil but as endless challenge, a challenge to get to grips with them as the greatest and most exciting monstrosity” (E 22). Thus, he exposes the rules of his own poetics, as the category of monstrosity returns again and again (E 22, 24, 57, 83). It may be interpreted literally primarily, though not exclusively, in the context of how Austria represents (or hides) its Nazi past; Austria “is unable to emerge from its coma and return to a state of consciousness” (E 186). Secondly, Murau shows disgust is a reaction to a strong stimulus: “we feel hatred only when we’re in the wrong, and because we’re in the wrong” (E

²⁵Stephen D. Dowden (Understanding Thomas Bernhard [Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991], XI, 3, 15) wrote in this context about the poetics of defamiliarization; the world we know is deformed, revealing what is usually hidden under the ordinary way of looking at things; a “different reality” is created, and chaos informs the ordinary. Respectively, Willy Riemer (“Thomas Bernhard’s «Der Untergeher»: Newtonian Realities and Deterministic Chaos”, in: A Companion to the Works of Thomas Bernhard, 209–222) writes about a world that opposes Newtonian linear, mechanical, predictable reality, with some elements of deterministic chaos. Satire may be found in the poetics of exaggeration and in the uncanny, in the intrusive exposure of what should remain hidden. Indeed, Bernhard’s literary realism was relative. Nevertheless, what Honegger calls “the realism of Bernhard’s hyperbole” is evident (Gitta Honegger, Thomas Bernhard. The Making of an Austrian [New Haven & London: Yale UP, 2001], 241).

53). Considering his own reciprocated disgust for his family, he says that “I use this way of thinking as a weapon; this is basically contemptible, but it’s probably the only way to assuage a bad conscience” (E 53). Thirdly, he attempts to empathetically work through hatred and resentment: “all in all we should have most sympathy with poor people (...) because we know ourselves and know how they, like us, lead a miserable existence” (E 53). Murau also says that being honest should be based on an understanding that we are weak, ridiculous, and lacking in character, and we should not just find fault with other people (E 124). He remembers how much he was amused by looking at bad photographs of his siblings and parents. This “reveal[s] how base and despicable and shameless we are” (E 123) – he eventually concludes. A different scene shows it with even greater force. Murau watches his brother-in-law eat. He is disgusted but he tries to control his reaction: “But people like him can’t help it, I thought, they don’t know any better. Then I desisted from such thoughts which suddenly seemed to me improper – not unfair but improper – and I despised myself for entertaining them. We shouldn’t watch these people and observe their every action, I told myself, because it only makes us despise ourselves” (E 314). He then concludes that although he may feel tempted to feel disgust, it is an illusory consolation based on self-deception and denial. Additionally, disgust leads to self-hatred and isolation. Fourthly, he wishes to overcome negativity and find positivity in his relations with others. After all, misanthropy and isolation lead to madness: “I hate it profoundly, because nothing makes for greater unhappiness, as I know and am now starting to feel. I preach solitude to Gambetti, for instance, yet I am well aware that solitude is the worst of all punishments” (E 153). Ever since he was a child, Murau has been fascinated by simple and unsophisticated people (E 45, 95, 158, 170). It is a form of resistance to distinction that breeds revulsion towards anyone with a different social status, which is very characteristic for Wolfsegg, where “strangers are invariably greeted hostility. They’ve always rejected anything unfamiliar, they’ve never welcomed anything or anyone unfamiliar, as I usually do” (E 7). Disgust is, primarily, heterophobia and in this sense the most petty-bourgeois of all affects.²⁶ Murau confesses: “I was always interested in anything that was different” (E 45), and enjoyed the company of the circus people (E 43), foresters (E 69), miners and villagers (E159).

Existential pessimism combined with a rejection of metaphysics, the vile nature of human beings, the disastrous determinism of history, and a harsh criticism of alienating culture, especially religion and education, and, above all, disgust are all Thomas Bernhard’s trademark tropes. Such a perception may seem one-sided and unjustified. Still, challenging a sense of existential stability, the categorical nature of cultural criticism, the unrelentingly negative attitude towards anything that is considered normal and obvious, and reliance on biting satire could suggest that Bernhard writes not so much from a different, as if morally higher, perspective, but that he writes in the name of some axiology or ethics. Searching for an affirmative message in his works is not an easy task, but the positives are there to be found. For Marjorie Perloff, Bernhard’s works are the culmination of literary Austromodernism – while Roth, Casetti, Kraus, Musil and Kafka depict the departing world of the Habsburg Empire with a certain amount of nostalgia and irony, which is devoid of illusions and filled with resignation and cynicism, in Bernhard’s works “nothing is held sacred except the power of language to convey

²⁶Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: The Noonday Press, 2000), 11, 82.

the mendacities of one's neighbors and countrymen."²⁷ Ingeborg Bachmann, commenting on the category found in Bernhard's last novel, wondered what Modernity would be, what the New that Bernhard offered would be. In his latest texts, Bernhard actually went further than Beckett in terms of violence, inevitability, and harshness, and that was his "New:" "And the New is already here. We don't know how to use it, what to do with it, we don't know yet how to absorb it, it contains everything."²⁸ Elfriede Jelinek was a bit more specific; for her, Bernhard was ostracized by critics and politicians, fighting for his voice ("As long as I say: I am"). In fact, Bernhard deeply believed in Austrian society and wanted at all costs to integrate – as a sick person – with the healthy, unfortunately to no avail, because in the end he "choked on his furious breath."²⁹ Stephen D. Dowden seems to agree with Jelinek. He explains why Bernhard's message cannot be reduced to cynicism and reactionary nihilism and gives three main reasons: 1) Bernhard's inexhaustible rancor is the rancor of an outraged moralist – irony and bitterness, lack of compassion and sentimentality point to disappointed hopes and unfulfilled expectations towards human nature, they also arouse resistance and discord among readers; 2) biographical argument – "the story of his life speaks plainly of a passionate will to live:" as an illegitimate child, a school drop-out, and a person who survived a severe case of pneumonia; 3) writing as a struggle against illness and weakness and as expiation for pessimism and affirmation of values.³⁰

Dowden's argument seems inspiring, even if the first point should be expanded, insofar as it is the lack of illusions that allows one to move beyond resentment, and it cannot be a form of resignation. It seems to me that Bernhard's own explicit declarations defy this possibility, because, while his works rely on the poetics of negativity and disgust ("In fact, I write only because everything is very unpleasant" [B 24]), they also nuanced or at least suspended in a certain ambivalence ("I'm usually mad at them, but sometimes I'm not" [B 24]; "Life is nonsense, it sometimes makes some sense, but it is mostly nonsense. No matter whose life. Even when it comes to wonderful, supposedly wonderful people – everything is misery and leads to nowhere in the end" [KE]). Perhaps because he was perceived by critics as a "negative" writer, Bernhard explained that his attitude towards life was "neither [...] solely negative nor solely positive. Because we constantly face *all* kinds of things. This is the stuff of life. The idea that only negative things exist is nonsense. [...] Because although people say that I am a *negative writer*, I am a *positive person*. [...] Everything is negative, there is nothing positive. You can treat everything in life as either negative or positive, depending on your individual circumstances. [...] However, destroying everything makes no sense, and I have never done it. *Great people* may be found in my works, and then there are *others*" (B 25–26, 50, 114).

I tried to point to an ambivalence similar to the one expressed in the statements mentioned above. It is no coincidence that disgust, as an inherently ambivalent emotion, is an effective

²⁷Marjorie Perloff, *Edge of Irony: Modernism in the Shadow of the Habsburg Empire* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2016), 143.

²⁸Ingeborg Bachmann, "Thomas Bernhard, próba. Szkic" [Thomas Bernhard, an attempt. An Essay], trans. Marek Kędzierski, *Kwartalnik Artystyczny* 3 (2009).

²⁹Elfriede Jelinek, "Bez tchu" [Out of breath], trans. Agnieszka Jezierska, in: Elfriede Jelinek: *Moja sztuka protestu. Eseje i przemówienia* [My art of protest. Essays and speeches], ed. Agnieszka Jezierska, Monika Szczepaniak (Warsaw: WAB, 2012), 165, 166.

³⁰Dowden, *Understanding Thomas Bernhard*, 7–8.

way of reacting to what life brings, one that cannot be reduced to simple negativity.³¹ Bernhard himself said to Krista Fleischmann: “When you get up in the morning, you experience almost everything as disgusting and repellent. And yet you get up, get dressed, go to the radio station, do your job, and that’s it. I do that too; the only difference is that I describe it” (B 114). First and foremost, disgust is part of representation and a tool of defense and criticism – of institutions and ideologies that reproduce and weaponize disgust (the Church, national socialism, the petty bourgeoisie), in a word, of anything that stigmatizes, excludes, and exterminates people like Bernhard (the disbelievers, the disengaged, the sick, the misfits, etc.). Disgust is also something on which relationships with other people are based, and one could even speak in this context about an agon of disgust. The overwhelming traumatic nature of such experiences fuels the work of memory, intensifying the remembered in retrospect and producing a discourse of unprecedented rage, resentment, and hatred. The extreme nature of such emotions seems to ultimately wear off, and perhaps for this very reason, they are further thematized and rationalized by the protagonists-narrators. This reflection eventually leads, in Bernhard’s later novels, to what I would describe as the ethics of tolerance. Apart from discovering the resentment mechanism of disgust, it accepts everything that evokes disgust, especially human weaknesses and sins: dishonesty, pettiness, and meanness. The ethics of tolerance is actually based on a cheerful acceptance of human weaknesses, on recognizing that people – that we – are pitiable. We are pitiable despite our mean or at least ambiguous motivations, despite our embarrassing efforts to amass cultural and material capital and cynically exploit it, despite our failed attempts to overcome our own limitations, despite our pathetic attempts to be someone else, despite our hopeless attempts to be “good,” “honest” or “authentic,” and despite stupid reasons which make us forget about empathy, etc. It is not an ethics of resignation, not even of relativism, mainly because of the documentary functions and the expressive power of Thomas Bernhard’s writing. The strong reactions of critics and readers, both positive and negative, are a testament to this. This is not an ethics of capitulation, because it does not mean coming to terms with the hopelessness and frailty of the human condition. It tragically re-evaluates the human condition instead.

translated by Małgorzata Olsza

³¹Research on disgust points to its two basic features: ambivalence (“Disgust is deeply ambivalent, involving desire or an attraction towards, the very objects that are felt to be repellent”) and performativity (“This repetition has a binding effect”) – Sara Ahmed, “The Performativity of Disgust,” in: Sarah Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (London and New York: Routledge). Cf. William I. Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1998), X.

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KEYWORDS

Gombrowicz

humor

Bernhard

ABSTRACT:

This article presents an interpretation of selected novels by Thomas Bernhard based on the hypothesis of literary influence, in the wider perspective of Witold Gombrowicz's meta-literary and anthropological views. The article argues that the category of "disgust" is reevaluated in Bernhard's works, where it originally functions as a strategy of radical cultural criticism, and then undergoes transformation by means of the poetics of satire and comedy. Originally, Bernhard and his protagonists read Schopenhauer, then they rely on Nietzsche and Gombrowicz.

Schopenhauer

DISGUST

SATIRE

Nietzsche

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Marian Bielecki – born in 1975; dr hab.; professor at the University of Wrocław. He is the author: *Literatura i lektura. O metaliterackich i metakrytycznych poglądach Witolda Gombrowicza* [Literature and reading: On metaliterary and metacritical views of Witold Gombrowicz] (2004), *Interpretacja i płęć. Szkice o twórczości Witolda Gombrowicza* [Interpretation and gender: Essays on the work of Witold Gombrowicz] (2005), *Historia – Dialog – Literatura. Interakcyjna teoria procesu historycznoliterackiego* [History – Dialogue – Literature: An Interactive theory of the historical and literary process] (2010; “Literatura na Świecie” award), *Kłopoty z Innością* [Trouble with Otherness] (2012), *Widma nowoczesności. ‘Ferdynurke’ Witolda Gombrowicza* [Specters of modernity: Witold Gombrowicz’s *Ferdynurke*] (2014), and *Gombrowicziady. Reaktywacja* [Gombrowicziady. Reactivation] (2020). He is the co-editor of: *Po(granicza) teorii* [Theoretical border(land)s] (2010) (with Ewa Rychter) and *Po Miłoszu* [After Miłosz] (2011) (with Wojciech Browarny and Joanna Orska). He is also the author of the critical edition of *Trans-Atlantyck* (2017).

A critical gap (in post-1989 Polish theoretical literary studies)

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Polish reception of French poststructuralist thought was determined by its American **mediation**, i.e., “a transformation of the French critique of logocentrism into the American literary theory”¹. The philosophical thought (*la pensée*) crossed our borders in the shape of a literary theory (*la théorie*)², not so much as a source of inspiration, pointing to new directions of transformation, but as a ready set of tools applicable in the interpretation of “domestic research material”³. Domestic tradition of research in humanities and their (historical, social, political and geographical) context was typically ignored in general critical statements, directed (amongst others) at structuralism as one of the versions of so-called strong theory. Poststructuralist critique was thus often reduced to questioning a particular set of basic dogmas of structuralist thought, such as the objectivity of the

¹ This is the subtitle of Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht’s „Deconstruction Deconstructed. Transformations of French Logocentric Criticism in American Literary Theory”, *Philosophische Rundschau* 33 [1986]: 1–35), to which Richard Rorty refers in his „Deconstruction”, transl. by Adam Grzeliński, Marcin Wołk, Marcin Zdrenka, edited by Andrzej Szahaj, *Teksty Drugie* 3 (1997): 183–223. Or as a deconstructive paradigm, filtered through Anglo-Saxon readings. See Joanna Bednarek, Dawid Kujawa, “Jak dziś szukać linii ujścia? Wstęp” [“How to look for a release nowadays? An introduction”], *Praktyka Teoretyczna* 3 (2017): 326.

² This distinction is similarly formulated by Leonard Neuger in his conversation with Magdalena Machała. On one hand he talks about the structuralist dictionary of linguistic terms, which became a dictionary of structuralist theory, and on the other – he mentions a dictionary of post-structuralism, in which philosophical concepts predominate. See „Między rewolucją a restauracją. Z prof. Leonardem Neugerem rozmawia Magdalena Machała” [“Between revolution and restoration. Magdalena Machała in conversation with professor Leonard Neuger”], *Konteksty Kultury* 15 (2018): 207.

³ See Ewa Domańska „Co zrobił z nami Foucault” [„What did Foucault do with us?”], in: *French Theory in Poland*, ed. by Ewa Domańska, Mirosław Loba. (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2010), 79.

sciences, the researcher's neutrality, distinctiveness and unchangeability of the subject of study or the absolutization of theory⁴. It was all done as if it were possible to establish a universally applicable, general and never-changing code, a dialect or jargon of "a structuralist writing"; some kind of *langue*, established on the basis of a presupposed collection of rules ("programmatically structuralism"⁵). In fact, the "real" dimension of that critique was in its status of **reading** – a specific reading of particular texts (*parole*), which was comprehensively characterized in numerous essays introducing the concept to the Polish reader⁶. That critique had its own masters, authorities and, most importantly, authors, whose works – their linguistic shape in particular – were a product of "the shape of their faces". As we remember, this is how in the 1970s Edward Balcerzan justified his opposition to a generalizing reception of structuralism, emphasizing the individualism of the movement's main representatives: Jakobson, Mukařovský, Lotman or Lévi-Strauss⁷. Still, two decades later that attempt at personalization (following Beda Allerman's dictum: "there are as many structuralisms as there are structuralists"⁸) will morph into a de-personalization of poststructural discourse. In order to save the "face" of structuralism, it will be necessary to reinstate the process of **de-facement**⁹, only this time in the shape of a critical reading:

Derrida's early works – those which were the most influential for deconstructionism – were a continuation and intensification of Heidegger's attack on Platonism. They were manifested in critical essays by Rousseau, Hegel, Nietzsche, de Saussure and many other authors, including Heidegger himself.¹⁰

A deconstructionist reading was distinctive for its drive to reveal heterotelic properties within the studied text, i.e., "pointing out discrepancies between what is intended and what is realized, and to revealing the areas in which the text resists the idea which is being developed"¹¹.

⁴ Włodzimierz Bolecki, „Janusz Sławiński: u źródeł polskiego poststrukturalizmu” [„Janusz Sławiński: the origins of Polish poststructuralism”], in his *Polowanie na postmodernistów (w Polsce) i inne szkice* [The hunt for postmodernists (in Poland) and other essays] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1999),

⁵ Bolecki, „PPP (Pierwszy Polski Postrukturalista” [„PPP (Poland's Primary Poststructuralist)”], 12. As suggested by Bolecki, Sławiński could not have differed from programmatic structuralists because they never existed. There is no denying, however, that he did differ from other creators of the movement. But differing from the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure or ethnologist Claude Lévi-Strauss was hardly a contribution to Polish critical thought.

⁶ See, e.g. Tadeusz Rachwał, Tadeusz Sławek, *Maszyna do pisania. O dekonstruktywistycznej teorii literatury Jacquesa Derridy* [The typewriter. On Jacques Derrida's deconstructivist literary theory] (Warszawa: Oficyna Literatów „Ró”, 1992); Ryszard Nycz, *Tekstowy świat. Poststrukturalizm a wiedza o literaturze* [A textual world. Poststructuralism vs. Literary studies] (Warszawa: IBL PAN, 1995); Michał Paweł Markowski, *Efekt inskrypcji. Jacques Derrida i literatura* [The inscription effect. Jacques Derrida and literature] (Bydgoszcz: Homini, 1997); *Dekonstrukcja w badaniach literackich* [Deconstruction in literary studies], ed. by Ryszard Nycz (Gdańsk: Słowo/Obraz Terytoria, 2000); Anna Burzyńska, *Dekonstrukcja i interpretacja* [Deconstruction and interpretation] (Kraków: Universitas, 2001); Anna Burzyńska, *Anty-teoria literatury* [An anti-theory of literature] (Kraków: Universitas, 2006); Anna Burzyńska, *Dekonstrukcja, polityka i performatyka* [Deconstruction, politics and performativity] (Kraków: Universitas, 2013).

⁷ Edward Balcerzan, „I ty zostaniesz strukturalistą” [„You can be a structuralist too”], *Teksty* 6 (1973): 2.

⁸ Beda Allemann, „Strukturalizm w literaturoznawstwie?” [“Structuralism in literary studies?”], transl. by Krystyna Krzemiń, *Pamiętnik Literacki* 3 (1974): 295.

⁹ The formula of de-facement is from Paul de Man's „Autobiography as de-facement” (1979), transl. by Maria Bożenna Fedewicz, *Pamiętnik Literacki* 2 (1986).

¹⁰Rorty, 183–184.

¹¹Markowski, 23.

In the early 1990s that kind of reading was associated with a **destruction**¹² of systemic premises of structuralism. Their falsity was supposed to disqualify automatically and *tacitly* all individual textual instantiations based on them, yet were unable to meet their criteria. This is a meaningful reversal. It was no longer the text itself - a product of the practice of reading - which questioned the system's premise, attempting to reconfigure (and update) it, but it was the system (critiqued previously and elsewhere) that removed the rationale from specific texts (realisations), which demonstrated any possible affiliations with it.

There was no revisiting the structuralist theory (in Poland), not even in the form of debunking any practices whose aim was the exclusion of those component parts which threatened its stability. There was no tracing the characteristically Polish conviction that metalanguage saves the logical coherence of the utterance. Metalanguage was believed to protect the utterance from being entangled in the helplessness of self-referentiality or in faith in basic attributes of science: objectivity of research, neutrality of applied methods and universality of findings. All of these would require activating tiresome, **individual** and unique readings, i.e., ones which change with their subject matter.¹³ That is why it was possible then to deem the process of "reversing" the structuralist theory (one of the incarnations of a modern theory) completed¹⁴. It was also possible to lose sight of **any traces** of restructuring activities, all embodiments of its idea - specific texts of specific scholars. These texts, even if people did read them, were becoming **transparent** (neutralized) for the domestic "critique". Exceeding the boundaries of a critical debate, they were removed from it. One must agree here with Włodzimierz Bolecki, who claimed that this "oversight" - we now know it was not temporary - was also "a result of a gradual decline of open discussions and metatheoretical debates, which marked Polish literary studies in the 60s and 70s"¹⁵. Most importantly, however, it was active in two moments which were **critical** for the development of our discipline, i.e., the pre-War debate with positivism and post-War dispute with Marxism.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to recount here in more detail the origin stories of the two types of critical discourse, particularly important for the following theoretical reflection. Nonetheless, it needs to be noted that **anti-positivism** and **anti-Marxism** did share a common circumstance, which cannot be associated with **(anti-)structuralism**. The former two approaches can both be characterized by means of functionally close yet differently conditioned discursive overloads, closely connected with excesses of their respective historical-

¹²Hans-Georg Gadamer believes that Derrida's "deconstruction" is empty and unnecessary, because it results from a heideggerian understanding of "destruction" as something negative, while its original meaning was that of dismantling a façade (Hans-Georg Gadamer, „Romantyzm, hermeneutyka, dekonstrukcja” [“Romanticism, hermeneutics, deconstruction”, transl. by Piotr Dehnel in his: *Język i rozumienie* [Language and understanding], a selection, translation and afterword by Piotr Dehnel, Beata Sierocka [Warszawa: Aletheia, 2003], 153–154. It became a carrier, or a „victim” of a misunderstanding which created it. Bartoszyński, juxtaposing structuralism („scholarly literary studies”) and deconstructivism will refer to „poststructuralism” and „postmodernism” as purely „negative”, and suggesting a „break with some kind of past, abandonment of some activities, they connote an empty cultural landscape” (Kazimierz Bartoszyński, „Od «naukowej» wiedzy o literaturze do «świata literackości»” [“From «scholarly» knowledge of literature to «the world of literariness», *Teksty Drugie* 5/6 [1990]: 16). Deconstruction taken to be a disqualification of the subject under critique is today the most common understanding the term in literary-theoretical works.

¹³Burzyńska, *Anty-teoria literatury*, 112.

¹⁴Ryszard Nycz, „Nicowanie teorii. Uwagi o poststrukturalizmie” [„Reversing theory. Remarks on poststructuralism”], *Teksty Drugie* 5/6 (1990): 8.

¹⁵Bolecki, „PPP (Pierwszy Polski Poststrukturalista)”, 8. Henryk Markiewicz also addressed the disappearance of debates, which characterizes Polish literary studies in his short commentary „Zręczność bez przekory” [“Grumbling without contrariness”] *Teksty Drugie* 2 (1990): 91–92.

literary practices, which crossed the boundary of their own usefulness. In fact, these are two major and irremovable “sins” of the discipline: **the ease of determinism**, in which nothing is conditioned (a psychogenetic deviation) and **the transparency of reflection**, in which nothing is portrayed (a sociogenetic deviation). Banned from practice, illegal to apply, they have become almost sacral spheres, which makes them methodologically dangerous¹⁶.

In the fragment characterizing Western post-structuralism, which attempts to answer Gilles Deleuze’s question on how to identify poststructuralism, Anna Burzyńska argues that it was born out of “material overload” and that the initial spark for it was French narratology, whose “[d]rive towards scientism reached [...] a critical point”¹⁷. That overload cannot be found in the domestic variant of structuralism, even at the peak moment of its development, i.e., the mid-1970s. There was no structural **deviation** in Poland, because the characteristically “open” Polish structuralism, whose oldest element was the theory of literary communication, was in itself a response to this kind of (Marxist) deviation¹⁸. It is hard then to talk about any kind of “slackening” (Burzyńska’s concept) or “reversal” (Nycz’s term) of theory in the 1990s. Unless we create the foundations for using these terms and demonise structuralism through persistent reference to the 90s, unless we create our own basis to use these terms. We can do this by demonizing structuralism through constantly reproducing a generalized image of its supposed orthodoxy, which in the local debate on the transformation period of “theoretical literary studies”¹⁹ disregards real achievements of local scholars. That in itself does not mean that the “openness” of our tradition is a foregone conclusion.

¹⁶The history of Polish (pre- and post-war) literary theory, whose key moments are the above-mentioned breakthroughs, enjoys more and more interest (see e.g. Dominik Lewiński, *Strukturalistyczna wyobraźnia metateoretyczna. O procesach paradygmatyzacji w polskiej nauce o literaturze po 1958 roku* [Structuralist metatheoretical imagination. On paradigmatic processes in Polish science and literature after 1958] [Kraków: Universitas, 2004]; *Tradycje polskiej nauki o literaturze. Warszawskie Koło Polonistów po 70 latach* [Traditions of Polish literary science. Warsaw Circle of Polish Scholars 70 years later] ed. by Danuta Ulicka, Marcin Adamiak [Warszawa: Wydział Polonistyki UW, 2008]; Maciej Górczyński, *Prace u podstaw. Polska teoria literatury w latach 1913–1939* [Grass-roots works. Polish literary theory 1913–1939] [Wrocław: Wydawnictwo UWr, 2009]; *Strukturalizm w Europie Środkowej i Wschodniej; wizje i rewizje* [Structuralism in Central and Eastern Europe: visions and revisions], ed. by Danuta Ulicka, Włodzimierz Bolecki [Warszawa: IBL PAN, 2012]; Magdalena Saganiak, *Strukturalizm. Pytania otwarte* [Structuralism. Open questions] [Warszawa: IBL PAN, 2016]). A culmination of this interest was an important work *Wiek teorii. Sto lat nowoczesnego literaturoznawstwa polskiego* [A century of theories. One hundred years of modern Polish literary studies], ed. by Danuta Ulicka (Warszawa: IBL PAN, 2020). It is an attempt at a simultaneous and multi-perspective outline of the history of (not only) Polish modern literary theory (the issues of subject, style, genre, narration, space, relation: literary studies – literature, literature – other arts, literature – reality). This is accompanied by a two-volume anthology of source texts. The attempt is a great answer to Ulicka’s question if a different history of literature was possible (see Danuta Ulicka *Literaturoznawcze dyskursy możliwe. Studia z dziejów nowoczesnej teorii literatury w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej* [Literary-scientific discourses made possible. Studies on modern literary theory in Central-Eastern Europe] [Kraków: Universitas, 2007]). Emphasising the distinctiveness of this history, one must mention not only the specificity of modern theory, which is being painstakingly reconstructed, but also its necessary reclaiming, which results from the absence of Polish modern theory on the theoretical thought of the West. This reclaiming contradicts the oft-repeated claims of its provincial, peripheral, or plagiarizing nature, pointing to “precursory non-anachronistic” achievements of Central- and Eastern-European literary studies, which “initiated a study of literature in theoretical categories” (Danuta Ulicka, „Rzut oka na nowoczesne polskie literaturoznawstwo teoretyczne” [“A glance at Polish modern theoretical literary studies”, in: *Wiek teorii. Sto lat nowoczesnego literaturoznawstwa polskiego*], 20–21, emphasis original). Ulicka’s contributions cannot be overstated. Even though the specificity of Polish scholarly tradition is not the main focus here, rather – getting to know it – the considerations in this paper owe much to the above-listed texts.

¹⁷Burzyńska, *Anty-teoria literatury*, 50, 80–81. The main focus here is the eighth issue of “Communications” (1966), the so-called narratological manifesto, which ignored anti-positivist differentiation between the humanities and sciences in its drive towards exactness, which made it akin to mathematics and natural sciences. See Allemann, 297.

¹⁸Ulicka refers to this „openness” as an „emergent identity” of Polish modern literary studies, which is expressed in the “intermethodologism” of the domestic thought (Ulicka, „Rzut oka na nowoczesne polskie literaturoznawstwo teoretyczne”, 117).

¹⁹I adopt Ulicka’s formula, „Rzut oka na nowoczesne polskie literaturoznawstwo teoretyczne”, 11.

But if we tried a critical reading of our “closing opening” in the “inter-era” of the 1990’s (see Balcerzan²⁰) we would be in a different place today. We would also be giving ourselves a change to turn the national tradition of literary studies into a modifier of “theories accepted from the outside”²¹.

1.

In the period of transformation Polish theoretical literary studies was dominated by an unspoken assumption that a critical reading of structuralism was a thing of the past; that some inevitable critical work had already been done (for us?), even though that critique never actually happened. Its repetition (always a **differentiating repetition**) seems like an empty gesture today, as if we were stuck in the belief that if we skipped the path of repetition we would arrive at **the first time** of Western thought. In 2007 the journal “Wielogłos” published a record of the discussion concerning Burzyńska’s 2006 book *Anty-teoria literatury* [*An anti-theory of literature*], which had a tremendous impact on the Polish debate on post-structuralism. One of the more problematic aspects of that debate was Tomasz Kunz’s question about why the turn of the 90s was so mild and conflict-free in Poland, and what happened to Polish structuralism.²² The disputants immediately shifted the discussion to the American context (first stating that the Polish line of development was radically different), which should be read as being in line with the status quo and therefore probably the only possible answer. When Teresa Walas repeated that question, the answers – few and vague²³, seemed inadvertently to reveal this embarrassing **fault** or, as Kunz would say, a “lost trail”,²⁴ speedily hushed during the debate. Perhaps this **deficit** (or renouncement) of one’s own criticism is responsible for **replaying** specific thought patterns, characteristic of our studies, with their inherent sense of **time lag**. Meanwhile, structuralism, neither cancelled nor exhausted itself.

“The debate on structuralism never really began in Poland – as written by Jerzy Świąch – because there was neither time nor a clear need for it”²⁵. This pronouncement concerns the 60’s, but a similar claim – with reference to the 80’s and 90’s – was voiced by Stanisław Balbus²⁶, who pointed to lack

²⁰Edward Balcerzan, „Post” [„The fast”], *Teksty Drugie* 2 (1994): 76.

²¹Maria Renata Mayenowa, „Kłopoty współczesnej poetyki” [„Troubles of modern poetics”], in her: *Studia i rozprawy* [Studies and essays], ed. by Anna Axer, Teresa Dobrzyńska (Warszawa: IBL PAN, 1986), 366, as quoted in: Ulicka, „Rzut oka na nowoczesne polskie literaturoznawstwo teoretyczne”, 57.

²²„Rozmowa «Wielogłosu». O książce Anny Burzyńskiej «Anty-teoria literatury» rozmawiają Anna Burzyńska, Anna Łebkowska, Teresa Walas, Henryk Markiewicz, Ryszard Nycz, Tomasz Kunz i Jakub Momro” [„The conversation in «Wielogłos». Anna Burzyńska, Anna Łebkowska, Teresa Walas, Henryk Markiewicz, Ryszard Nycz, Tomasz Kunz and Jakub Momro in conversation on Anna Burzyńska’s «Anty-teoria literatury»], *Wielogłos* 2 (2007): 23.

²³Burzyńska’s answer is evasive: „I do not know if I am the right person to pass judgement here...” Kunz’s - provocative “Maybe it cancelled itself...” and Łebkowska’s – commonsensical „Maybe it has just consumed itself, exhausted itself...” („Rozmowa «Wielogłosu””, 24). According to Nycz structuralism underwent a gradual decay, whose origins can be traced back to the 1970’s. See Ryszard Nycz „Jakoś inaczej” [„Somehow differently”], *Teksty Drugie* 1 (1990): 3.

²⁴Burzyńska herself mentions an „interrupted flight”, seeking its causes in political circumstances (see *Anty-teoria literatury*, 152). Apparently, a critical return to the theory of literary communication post-1989 and its further development, e.g. through a confrontation with the Western thought, were no longer possible.

²⁵Jerzy Świąch, „Bronię strukturalizmu” [„I defend structuralism”], in: *Dzieła, języki, tradycje* [Works, languages, traditions], ed. by Włodzimierz Bolecki, Ryszard Nycz (Warszawa: IBL PAN, Fundacja Centrum Międzynarodowych Badań Polonistycznych, 2006), 14. This lack of need obviously disguises the common belief in the „open” character of Polish structuralism. This answer, however, seems to combine two dubious premises: first, that there was no need for any critical developments of Polish structuralism and, secondly, that any potential critique would be equivalent to its cancellation.

²⁶See Stanisław Balbus, „Metodologie i mody metodologiczne we współczesnej humanistyce (literaturoznawczej)” [„Methodologies and methodological fads in modern humanities (and literary studies)”], *Przestrzenie Teorii* 1 (2002): 100.

of methodological conflict between structuralism and deconstructivism. This non-occurrence can be explained in various way, either with the supporters of Western critique or with its opponents. In the context of the reception of the 90's, an interesting position seems to be one which is intermediary, which makes it highly ambiguous. It proposes such a juxtaposition of the Polish and American-French horizons, which allows one to compensate for the painful lack in an act of self-colonisation²⁷.

A critique of structuralism was unnecessary in Poland because Polish structuralist thought, developed in the 60s and 70s, had already been critical towards a dogmatic or orthodox type of structuralism. One means here a type of interpretation which was ready to define Polish structuralism as a particular version of poststructuralism²⁸ (as Bolecki did), as if were possible to reduce the latter (especially in its earliest phases) to some form of an unorthodox, positive theoretical proposition²⁹. Adopting such a position makes it impossible to declare what is not poststructuralism, if the difference between one and the other seems to be only a matter of the **force** (radicalism), with which specific ideas are formulated. If the programme of an orthodox type of structuralism in its most radical scientific assumptions (French narratologists' building of "the grammar of literature") proved unfeasible, then all attempts at implementing were simultaneously testament against it³⁰. Bolecki will want to classify as Polish poststructuralists all major scholars associated with structuralism: Sławiński, Okopień-Sławińska, Balcerzan, BArtoszyński, Głowiński, Łapiński, Kostkiewiczowa³¹. The claim that „none of the poststructuralist allegations against structuralism is compatible with Sławiński's essays...”³², that, in other words, that critique contrasts with domestic textual realisations, is not sufficient proof that Janusz Sławiński's essays indeed **elude** post-structuralist allegations. The very fact that Sławiński's texts do not meet the strict criteria of orthodox structuralism does not suffice to declare that they are post-structuralist in nature. Poststructuralism is not simply a **negation** of structuralism, nor is it a **weaker version** but, as already mentioned, a complex strategy of **reading**, which caters to the text's "own name"³³. It is likely that Sławiński's texts defy a poststructuralist critique not because they speak a voice which is similar or identical to that critique, but because the critique was never aimed at Sławiński's texts. This argument seems to be particularly meaningful for a critique which, if it ever formulated any allegations of general nature, it did not do it directly but – on the contrary – as a result of a particular reading which operated the same concepts as the critiqued text.

²⁷On self-colonisation see Alexander Kiossev, "Metafora samokolonizacji" ["The metaphor of self-colonisation"], transl. I. Ostrowska, *Czas Kultury* 4 (2016).

²⁸This reclassification was variously supported but mostly repeated without explanation and generally accepted. See, e.g., Andrzej Skrendo, „«General czytania» – Janusz Sławiński i sztuka interpretacji" ["«The general of reading» – Janusz Sławiński and the art of interpretation"] in his *Poezja modernizmu. Interpretacje [Poetry of modernism. Interpretations]* (Kraków: Universitas, 2005).

²⁹Bolecki, „Janusz Sławiński: u źródeł polskiego poststrukturalizmu" ["Janusz Sławiński: at the sources of Polish poststructuralism"], 316–317. That is why, e.g., Balcerzan writes about two parallel paths of structuralism: the linguistic one and the cultural-studies one. (Edward Balcerzan, „Oświecenia strukturalizmu" ["The Enlightenment of structuralism"], in: *Strukturalizm w Europie Środkowej i Wschodniej: wizje i rewizje*, 13).

³⁰Anna Burzyńska, *Kulturowy zwrot teorii [The cultural turn of theory]*, in: *Kulturowa teoria literatury. Główne pojęcia i problemy [A cultural literary theory. Main concepts and issues]*, ed. by Michał Paweł Markowski, Ryszard Nycz, wyd. 2 (Kraków: Universitas, 2012), 46.

³¹Bolecki, „Janusz Sławiński: u źródeł polskiego poststrukturalizmu”, 317.

³²Bolecki, „Janusz Sławiński: u źródeł polskiego poststrukturalizmu”, 313.

³³„Ta dziwna instytucja zwana literaturą. Z Jacques'em Derridą rozmawia Derek Attridge" ["This strange institution called literature. Derek Attridge in conversation with Jacques Derrida"], transl. by Michał Paweł Markowski, *Literatura na Świecie* 11/12 (1998): 215.

In Poland there is a strong sense that critique does not need reading (as a medium) to touch the subject (text) and thus disturb the structure of its concepts. Is it enough to juxtapose in one 1975 issue of "Teksty" two "opposing" studies – Michał Głowiński's programmatic article *Świadectwa i style odbioru* [Witnesses and styles of reception], which reflected the then great condition of Polish communicationism, and Jacques Derrida's *Writing and telecommunication* (a fragment of his study *Signature, event, context*), in which he deconstructed the very notion of communication?³⁴ Will that be enough to spark a relation of critique between the two? Are they close enough for Derrida's arguments to be noticed and for Polish theory of communication to be changed by this fire of critique? Extracting the critique-carrying element from its "matrix syntax" (e.g., the indeterminer) causes its "idleness", as Stanisław Cichowicz wrote in his commentary on Derrida's text. Not **transportable** mechanically, it becomes "a fish on the sand".³⁵

We could invoke Derrida's authority in the text where he proves that every attempt, including those of Austin and Searle, "at differentiating between everyday sphere of a normal language from the «unusual», «non-standard» usage, which undoubtedly includes literature, is doomed to fail"³⁶. This alone suffices to assess Głowiński's attempt at separating literature from socially sanctioned manners of speaking (to which both Austin and Searle make reference) as mistaken, outdated, and therefore a useless reading, unless aims at reconstructing a history of the discipline or a presentation of the so-called state of the art. But we can also read Głowiński's interesting gesture to demonstrate how an arbitrary gesture of separation collides with the postulated integrity of a sociolinguistically oriented research, which supposedly goes beyond unidirectional perspectives, characterizing positivist and Marxist critique, and draw a lesson for the future. Following Austin's and Searle's argumentation, the idea of formal mimetics, which depends on imitation, repetition, assumes that a literary (fictitious) use of, say, a preacher's speech, on losing its illocutionary power, cannot be equated with that same speech in its usual everyday context, i.e., during a sermon. We will agree with Głowiński that fictitious "does not mean «divorced from social practices of speaking"³⁷, but we will also add that the one who accepts the separateness of a literary utterance must also agree with the "abstracted"³⁸, or simply imitative character of the "community" in a fictitious utterance. That community will certainly not be the same as the "community" of the illocutionary act. This reading of Głowiński's text will let us notice that the unsealing of the "hermetic" structuralism does not mean that it was possible to escape any contradictions. These are born probably because, as Sławiński would have said, a certain doctrinal minimum³⁹, which ensures a privileged and separate status to literature, should be maintained. Contradictions, which require constant self-critical work, save discourse from the danger of enmeshing itself in its positivity.

³⁴See Burzyńska, *Anty-teoria literatury*, 152–157.

³⁵Stanisław Cichowicz, „Bez złudzeń” [„No illusions”], *Teksty* 3 (1975): 73.

³⁶Jürgen Habermas, „Przelicytować uczasowioną filozofię źródeł: Derrida i krytyka fonocentryzmu” [“To outbid a temporalised philosophy of origins: Derrida and the critique of phonocentrism”], in his *Filozoficzny dyskurs nowoczesności* [Philosophical discourse of modernity], transl. by Małgorzata Łukasiewicz (Kraków: Universitas, 2007), 222.

³⁷Michał Głowiński, „Poetyka i socjolingwistyka” [„Poetics and sociolinguistics”], *Teksty* 4 (1979): 17.

³⁸See Richard Ohmann, „Akt mowy a definicja literatury” [„Speech act and the definition of literature”], transl. by Barbara Kowalik, *Wiesław Krajka, Pamiętnik Literacki* 2 (1980): 262.

³⁹Janusz Sławiński, „Co nam zostało ze strukturalizmu?” [„What is left of structuralism?”], *Teksty Drugie* 5 (2001): 17–18.

The above-outlined alternative describes the irreducible difference between a poststructuralist critique and that part of its late-20th c. Polish reception which was a product of the latter's relationship with its own scholarly tradition⁴⁰. It seems impracticable to identify that tradition with post-structuralism if the only purpose of this action were to be to justify deviation from structuralist orthodoxy. The painful failure of French narratology is sufficient proof that meeting its demands was never possible, no matter the intensity of efforts and means applied for the purpose. In consequence, all the actual realisations should be regarded as "weak versions" of a general structuralist doctrine⁴¹, i.e., different variants of poststructuralism. The betrayal of ideas seems inevitable here. Why would the Polish variant be privileged in any way? After all, the fiasco of (the narartologists') realization just like Sławiński's positivist temperance, does not mean that we are dealing with a self-critical reflection. Condemned to compromising the structuralist paradigm, which according to Bolecki, became the main object of attacks from poststructuralism, any poststructuralist critique, including Sławiński's poststructuralist stance, would have to be inherently inaccurate, because it would only **hit flaws or failures**.

No matter how many problems maintaining this line of argumentation raises, Bolecki will persist in claiming that "[...] nearly everything which was referred to as «Polish structuralism» in literary theory **was and indeed is Polish poststructuralism**"⁴². This act of renaming is not innocent, however, and it must be followed by changing the outlook on Western poststructuralism of the 90s. Is it not the case that the supposed poststructuralist nature of Polish structuralism, through remodelling the literary-theoretical discourse of the 60s and 70s, deletes that part of the Polish reception of Western poststructuralism which was decidedly against the latter at the turn of the 21st c.? ⁴³ The difference between Western and Polish poststructuralism must have been much more profound if the former was rejected by the authors of the latter. Opponents of Western poststructuralism, the same ones who shaped its Polish version (even though they were able to acknowledge its indebtedness to structuralism without recognizing the importance and function of that relationship), understood that fact not so much as an internally critical reading of structuralism, but took it to be an ineffective, non-referential and therefore unjustified **destruction** (none of the allegations was justified, as argued by Bolecki). However, if "linguistic structuralism, even in Jakobson's version, was for Sławiński only one of a few pre-existing methodological propositions, in which it was possible to find inspiration for formulating a few

⁴⁰Bolecki rightly notes that it is impossible to deem Polish reception of Western post-structuralism (which began in the 1990's) to be a Polish variant of poststructuralism itself (Bolecki, „Janusz Sławiński: u źródeł polskiego poststrukturalizmu”, 314).

⁴¹When asked about structuralism as one of the sources of post-structuralism, Foucault declared that nobody knew what it was, except scholars of more scientific disciplines like linguistics or comparative mythology. See Michel Foucault, „Strukturalizm i poststrukturalizm” [„Structuralism and poststructuralism”], in his: *Filozofia, historia, polityka. Wybór pism*, [Philosophy, history, politics. A selection of writings] transl. and foreword by Damian Leszczyński, Lotar Rasiński (Warszawa – Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2000), 294. Following from this, it would seem that structuralism in literary studies was a „betrayal” of linguistic structuralism; a betrayal of the same volume as psycho- and socio-genetics for natural sciences. The same is argued by Thomas Pavel in his „Porządek języka” [„The order of language”], transl. by Marek Król, *Konteksty Kultury* 15, z. 2 (2018): 163.

⁴²Bolecki, „Janusz Sławiński: u źródeł polskiego poststrukturalizmu”, 318, emphasis original.

⁴³See e.g., Janusz Sławiński, „Bez przydziału (IV)” [„Without assignment (IV)”], *Teksty Drugie* 5 (2000); Janusz Sławiński, „Miejsce interpretacji” [„The position of interpretation”], in his: *Prace wybrane, t. IV* [Selected works, vol. 4] (Kraków: Universitas, 2000). Writing that the reception of poststructuralism was not itself poststructuralism, Bolecki probably had in mind only those scholars who were trying, in different ways, to familiarize the Polish reader with the Western thought in the 1990's.

new theoretical problems, rather than Sławiński's own **scholarly costume**"⁴⁴, if Sławiński "never spoke from the position of a «programmatically structuralist»", which is why his writings lack "a «hard» programmatic methodological declaration"⁴⁵, could it be any different when the poststructuralist costume was concerned? While it is possible to find in Sławiński's works quite a number of positive remarks on formalists and structuralists (Jakobson, Mukařovský)⁴⁶, such affirmation or even benevolence towards poststructuralism is nowhere to be found. On the contrary, his texts from the 80's and 90's contain openly negative statements.

Just as there is no reason to dress Sławiński in a structuralist costume, there is little justification for him to be wearing a poststructuralist robe too, even though that would be a relatively easy way to close the debate on Polish lag behind the West. Bolecki's hypothesis was first and foremost an answer to that lag but it resounded only twenty years later, in a reductive form. If poststructuralism can be referred to as an American literary-theoretical reception of the French philosophical critique of structuralism, then Polish "weak structuralism" cannot be deemed a Polish version of structuralism, despite all kinds of (accidental) similarities with American post-structuralism.

2.

In the 2015 summer edition of "Forum Poetyki" Kunz thus diagnosed the state of the then Polish literary studies:

A post-structuralist-deconstructivist revolt, which happened in Polish literary studies in the 1990's led to a *conceptual* **dismemberment of the modern literary theory and a factual break with the evolutionary continuity of Polish literary-theoretical reflection, preparing the basis for a later turn, which caused a real, in-depth restructuring of both the subject of literary studies and its discourse.** That revolt, seen from today's perspective was in many respects similar to an epistemological **spectacle**, delayed in time, **and following a screenplay** which ignored the political and historical specificity of Polish humanist tradition, as well as a peculiar culture- and identity-making function of literature and of Polish philology, both in their historical and literary-theoretical aspects.⁴⁷

At face value this remark appears accurate. Yet, it is not free from flaws. Therefore, we must repeat the question concerning the specificity of Polish literary studies. One may guess, follow-

⁴⁴Bolecki, „PPP (Pierwszy Polski Poststrukturalista)", 11.

⁴⁵Bolecki, „PPP (Pierwszy Polski Poststrukturalista)", 7.

⁴⁶See Ryszard Nycz, „O (nie)cytowaniu Janusza Sławińskiego" [„On (not-)quoting Janusz Sławiński], in: *Dzieła, języki, tradycje*, 9–13.

⁴⁷Tomasz Kunz, „Poetyka w świetle kulturoznawstwa", *Forum Poetyki* 1 (2015): 6 (emphasis by G.P.). Bolecki evaluated the phenomenon in similar terms earlier, writing: „Suffice it to say that in more than twenty years of Polish reception of such poststructuralist directions as deconstruction or postcolonialism, nothing has been reconstructed yet! Polish adaptations of these trends in literary studies (with the exception of feminism) never moved beyond popularizing their theoretical underpinnings, satisfied with their application to literary texts..." (Włodzimierz Bolecki, „Pytania o przedmiot literaturoznawstwa" [„Questions about the subject of literary studies"], *Teksty Drugie* 1/2 [2005]: 18. Bolecki points to the need of acknowledging the political and social contexts of the poststructuralist revolt in the West, even though he did not mention that context in his "defence" of Sławiński's writings.

ing Kunz's later remarks⁴⁸, that this multidimensional **omission** of Polish complex historical context in the reception of poststructuralism deprived the revolt of the 90s of its **authenticity** and **agency**. Even if it is impossible to recognize it as non-existent, since it did adopt a particular discursive shape, thus provoking resistance from its opponents (in Poland), it did feature elements of **imitation**. That is why it is impossible to declare its occurrence an actual event. That revolt was **reenacted** following a screenplay **written** in a different place and time. Referring to the Polish turn as a "spectacle", so a kind of artificial creation (an image, copy, reproduction, show) is predicated on the existence of an original, i.e., real scene on which the critique of structuralism was voiced **for the first time**. Repetition we are referring to, which allows the spectacle to substitute for a discursive **event**, was perhaps only a **repetition of a repetition**. The event itself, initiated during a famous conference in Baltimore in 1966 (i.e., the transposition of structuralism onto the American context), in which certain significant marks of factuality were recognized, was secondary from the beginning, it was just a mediating reception.

The incorporation of *French Theory* into Polish literary studies, followed by its institutionalization, was mostly based on an uncritical repetition of American interpretations of French texts, and it totally ignored the context in which the two were created, which meant that the differences between the American and French fields were no longer noticed in Poland and hardly anybody cared about them in the 90's⁴⁹.

Would that imitation, which the spectacle undoubtedly was, be capable of giving rise to a **factual** anthropological-cultural turn; one that would change the traditional theoretical-methodological field? Could the spectacle come to an end, "slowing down the critical impetus" of poststructuralism? Does a certain – let us call it this – **critical gap** (resulting from lack of debates about Polish structuralism and its local struggles with hermeneutics), created in the 90s, not determine it from within, even when the change does happen? Is this conditioning not related to the fact that literature as a subject of studies is losing its privileged position in the cultural universe? Is it not the case that because of the need to regain solid footing and order within the discipline, this key **omission** of the historical context **disappears** and is suddenly forgotten? Does it not dissolve in itself, becoming a necessary variant of the local context? In consequence, is it not the case that this key omission, meaningful for our discourse, is itself **omitted**? Suddenly forgotten? And does the anthropological-cultural turn (in all of its manifestations) not mediate that omission of omission, naturalizing it as it were, that is, turning it into an element of the familiar tradition? Paradoxically, then, does the omission of the specificity of Polish humanist tradition become specific to at least part of Polish literary studies? Especially that part of it which again and again declares another turn and another "new" something? Time and again we have forgotten our own past achievements, so that every new introduction of this kind leaves us unimpressed; it has become meaningless. In this imitation we have become natural and authentic. For ourselves.

⁴⁸„A process, which in Western literary studies was taking place through a systematic, intense critical reflection, extended over nearly a quarter of a century, here was reduced to an intensified translation and editorial activity, focused on the presentation and popularization of theoretical assumptions. That activity, however, was not translatable into interpretation and rarely resulted in attempts at an original, critical development of the concepts it was summarizing” (Kunz, 6-7).

⁴⁹Michał Krzykawski, „Co po «French Theory»? Kłopotliwe dziedzictwo” [„What after «French Theory»? A problematic heritage”], *Er(r)go. Teoria – Literatura – Kultura* 1 (2017): 50. See also Michał Krzykawski, *Inne i wspólne. Trzydzieści pięć lat francuskiej filozofii (1979–2014)* [Other and common. Thirty-five years of French philosophy (1979-2014)]. (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2016).

The object of attack is “modern literary theory in its most orthodox, scientist version, which refers to the formalized and technical model of linguistic poetics – poetics in the light of linguistics – mainly, if not exclusively, oriented towards the analysis and description of the systematic dimension of literature”⁵⁰. This theory maintained “an aloof indifference both towards individuality and to an individual act of interpretation”, often imposing on the latter “cognitive limitation and uniform procedures”⁵¹. In that shape, i.e., with the thus perceived point of reference, that critique was transplanted onto the Polish ground by way of “intensified translation and editorial activities, concentrated on introducing and popularizing [its – G.P.] theoretical premises”⁵². This kind of critique, in its imported version, is (rightly) deemed to be imitational, because it does not concern itself with the social, political and historical contexts of Polish humanist tradition. Including it, which would be synonymous with engaging in critical debate with that critique, would demonstrate that not only is that critique an imitation, but so is orthodox structuralism, i.e., the main object of attack, which – as we have already stated – was not manifested in any single text.⁵³

It is because of that circumstance that the difference between the poststructuralist revolt and an anthropological-cultural turn is necessarily charged with the artificiality of the process of modifications. The difference in question rests on the fact that poststructuralism and deconstruction, while “question[ing] the basic convictions of modern literary theory”, “they did not put forward any alternative project for literary studies, which could be applicable for reading practices”. Meanwhile, “the actual change was caused by the anthropological-cultural turn, which deprived the concept of text/ textuality its earlier meanings, introducing a new, cultural understanding of the subject of literary studies”⁵⁴. The difference itself is a product of the critical gap. If one accepts Burzyńska’s periodization of poststructuralism, which distinguishes between two key phases: “critical” or “negative” (1966 till 1985) and “positive” (post 1985)⁵⁵, one can declare that in Poland the reconstruction of the critical phase was rapidly succeeded by the second phase, featuring the anthropological-cultural turn. Thus, the second phase in its Polish version lacked the self-critical power⁵⁶ inherent in the first phase, which permanently reshaped the manners of reading, writing or thinking. Through summarising only the critical phase we were able to enrich

⁵⁰Kunz, 7.

⁵¹Kunz.

⁵²Kunz.

⁵³Kunz also mentions „Polish poststructuralist school”, which derived from the tradition of formal studies but devoted much attention to “the interpretations of individual texts, which were not simply exemplifications of theoretical concepts” (Kunz, 10). Sławiński once said “It seems [...] that that generational structuralism of ours from its beginnings was deprived of orthodoxy and purism” („Odpowiedzialność podszyta nieodpowiedzialnością. Z prof. Januszem Sławińskim rozmawia Agata Koss” [“Responsibility underpinned by irresponsibility. Agata Koss in conversation with prof. Janusz Sławiński”], *Kresy* 4 [1994]: 176–177).

⁵⁴Kunz, 8.

⁵⁵Burzyńska, *Anty-teoria literatury*, 46–47 (footn. 57), 114.

⁵⁶An illustration of „a priori”-led polemics, operating a pre-prepared set of arguments, can be Andrzej Szahaj’s attempt at invalidating Sławiński’s distinction between analysis and interpretation (see Andrzej Szahaj, Sławiński o interpretacji. Analiza krytyczna” [„Sławiński about interpretation. A critical analysis”], *Teksty Drugie* 5 [2013]). Not only does Szahaj not deconstruct that distinction (because he does not adopt the claims on the blurring of the boundary between analysis and interpretation from Sławiński’s texts: “the former – analysis – is always de facto the latter – interpretation”) but he also implements it “from the outside”, by referring to a different theoretical dictionary. Yet, perhaps against his better judgement, he decides to classify his own critique as analysis rather than interpretation. It would be interesting to show that Sławiński assigns the privileged position to analysis only seemingly, that he would have found more affinity with interpretation (i.e., that which is risky and heterogenous).

the discipline with cultural studies, feminism, gender and queer studies, anthropology, ethics, politics, ecology etc., applying to them old and tested forms of programmatic positivism.

Equally important is a transposition made by Kunz, who twice points to the reason why it is hard to define Polish reception of poststructuralism as critical or productive. While in the beginning the author suggests that the source of the gap can be traced to the hurried assimilation of Western criticism (what we failed to do with it), he then proceeds to ascribe that omission of critique to a peculiar feature of poststructural critique, which did not really “propose” any possibility of transfer. This could have led to the weakening of differences between Western poststructuralist critique and its Polish reconstruction. Both, as far as the formulation of a positivist programme is concerned, proved to be impotent.⁵⁷

Grzegorz Grochowski put forward a paradoxical claim that it was the **deepened** reception of deconstruction which proved to be the reason why it never led to a specific practice of reading. Deconstruction could not have been repeated in practice; not because it never proposed a practice of this kind (perhaps one expected a different kind of practice or its specific features were never recognized) but because it never suggested any methods of a simple and mechanical application. Out of reception there started emerging an image of an ambiguous deconstruction, which required high competences from the reader (e.g., Paul de Man demanded from literary criticism reading philosophy) and – importantly – it did not offer any **ready tools** for working on individual texts⁵⁸. It was not, however, a reception which was so deep and ingenious that we would be able to realise that these instruments (if we wish to call them this) needed to be developed on one’s own, through an individual reading, and their usefulness terminates with the moment of a finished reading. Because of this the **reality** of change, ascribed to the anthropological-cultural turn, must carry within the burden of imitation, i.e., a repetition of a mechanical use of tools proposed by that turn. The turn itself could not have developed from a real critique of structuralism, because – in contrast to the West, where the process was extended over a period of time – never happened in Poland, and that is why the anthropological-cultural turn had to inherit (and move, transpose) the critical gap, which was the element of the structure of a spectacle. The critical gap makes us revolve around a certain **critical virtuality, i.e.**, within the boundaries of critique which can hardly be described as being active or not in transforming Polish humanist tradition.

In light of this virtuality it is no longer possible to ask about **the exhaustion** of the critical potential of poststructuralism. It is even less possible if poststructuralism is conceptualized in terms of developing specific “tools”⁵⁹. Is it possible to talk about a **loss** of a real epistemological potential in the context of referencing, with respect to an inevitable peripheral (Poland) imitation of what is in the center (the West), i.e., playing a spectacle from a ready script? That would require an assumption that there was a time in which Polish literary-theoretical discourse had any “real potential” for critical thinking. Is it possible to talk about criticism – to quote Kunz’s

⁵⁷Suffice it to mention that orienting cultural studies towards interpretative-critical pragmatics is a clear heritage of poststructuralism in the West.

⁵⁸See Grzegorz Grochowski, „Blaski i cienie badań kulturowych” [„The ups and downs of cultural studies”], *Teksty Drugie* 1/2 (2005): 5–6.

⁵⁹This question is posed by Michał Krzykowski in his attempt to diagnose the current state of the literary discourse in Poland. See Krzykowski, “Co po «French Theory»? Kłopotliwe dziedzictwo”, 49.

key term again – with reference to an “intensified translation and editorial activities, concentrated on introducing and popularizing [its – G.P.] theoretical premises”? Is it possible to assume the existence (ever) of the creative critical potential (and its later exhaustion) in places which did not experience any “debate” about structuralism? Is it possible to argue with the claim that post-structuralism can still be a source of creative perspectives on the issue of literary theory? Can we thus question its monopoly on thinking against the dominant thought?⁶⁰ Voices concerning the critical potential of poststructuralism (and deconstruction) are the loudest where critical work was not even initiated, where not even a single text is proof of this kind of reading.⁶¹

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Numerous questions posited in this article, concerning changes in post-1989 Polish literary-theoretical studies, inevitably lead one to the assertion that the post-structuralist revolt in Poland did not trigger a critical rethink of the country’s theoretical-methodological tradition; a rethink which would have been part of a broader discussion on the condition of modern theory. It is now hard to imagine what the state of Polish humanities would be if the above-mentioned critique had indeed occurred. Nonetheless, it is possible to talk about a peculiar “disappearance” of Polish structuralism in its narrow aspect. In consequence, we are left with an illusory feeling that the paradigm of thought which was been binding until recently is no longer a reliable point of reference.

It is hard to concur with Kunz’s above-recalled position that the poststructural revolt meant a conceptual dismantling of the modern theory of literature and an actual break within the Polish literary-theoretical thought. It is impossible to agree with this assessment because it would equate that thought with destruction. Derrida himself used to say that he did not believe in “the final break”. Its purpose was neither the destruction of old bases nor the erection of new ones. If one wants to demolish theoretical foundations, one needs to believe they exist in the first place. Meanwhile, analytical work of deconstruction revealed that these foundations were either an expression of a “false theoretical awareness” or just an object of structuralist desires, where all manifestations of the system’s stability and coherence were produced through glossing over internal contradictions. Any dismantling of old structures and their foundations sooner or later turns into a search after “an even deeper foundation”⁶², a harder ground, one which guarantees stability for new, grander constructions. This diagnosis appears to be valuable precisely because it is a convincing piece of evidence that in Poland a modern belief in the final break is alive and well. Perhaps that is the reason why all transformations that can be observed in modern discourse are so suggestive – they are superficial or, to use a metaphor – **open pit-like** – because they do not interfere in the deep resources of their own tradition.

⁶⁰Krzykawski, „Co po «French Theory»? Kłopotliwe dziedzictwo”, 53.

⁶¹See, e.g., Jakub Momro, „Wiedza nienarcystyczna” [„The non-narcissist knowledge”], *Ruch Literacki* 4 (2019): 431–432. The motif of exhausting poststructuralism can be discerned in Jan Sowa’s review of Michał Paweł Markowski’s book *Polityka wrażliwości. Wprowadzenie do humanistyki* [Politics of sensitivity. Introduction to humanities] (see Jan Sowa, „Humanistyka płaskiego świata” [„The humanities of a flat world”], *Teksty Drugie* 1 [2014]). It is exhaustion which provides a justification (as proved by Sowa’s argumentation) for simply forgetting the lesson of poststructuralism, which not so long ago was shaping people’s thinking. Soon there will come a time when we will be rediscovering it.

⁶²Habermas, 205.

Today the new humanist studies, referred to by Danuta Ulicka as “The Third Avant-garde of literary studies”, which break radically with the nearest past (structuralism and deconstructivism) and engage in “issues of the current world”⁶³, places emphasis on the agency of literary studies. “Agency is the high stake in the game of the new humanities”, as Krzysztof Kłosiński wrote⁶⁴. In other words, it is what makes it different or even distinct from the cultural theory of literature. Agency is so radical a feature that it sparked the new humanities into full operational mode before it even came into being, an example of which was “structuralism in action” of the 1990’s. Perhaps it is the most efficient when operating beyond the threshold of our awareness and self-control⁶⁵. This is how modernity visits today’s new humanities.

translated by Justyna Rogos-Hebda

⁶³Ulicka, „Rzut oka na nowoczesne polskie literaturoznawstwo teoretyczne”, 96, 132.

⁶⁴Krzysztof Kłosiński, „Humanistyka nowa” [„New humanities”], *Teksty Drugie* 2 (2021): 143 (this is a review of the book *Nowa humanistyka. Zajmowanie pozycji, negocjowanie autonomii* [New humanities. Taking positions, negotiating autonomy], ed. by Przemysław Czaplinski, Ryszard Nycz, Dominik Antonik, Joanna Bednarek, Agnieszka Dauksza, Jakub Misun [Warszawa: IBL PAN, 2017]).

⁶⁵Ryszard Nycz, *Kultura jako czasownik. Sondowanie nowej humanistyki* [Culture as a verb. Probing the new humanities] (Warszawa: IBL PAN, 2017), 203.

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KEYWORDS

critical gap

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DECONSTRUCTION

ABSTRACT:

The article attempts to describe the transformation of Polish theoretical literary studies after 1989. The author points to a few significant elements which influenced that change. He focuses on the difference between the (anti)structuralist breakthrough and two earlier shifts: the anti-positivist and anti-Marxist one. He also dwells on the meaning of the lack of debate on structuralism in the 1990s and the causes of its “disappearance”, as well as about the role played in the process by the reception of French-American post-structuralism – a peculiar reception, because it was burdened with what the author calls a critical gap. As such, it took on a form of a theoretical-methodological spectacle, enacted until today.

poststructuralism

literary theory

BREAKTHROUGH

debate

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Poetics of insinuation

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“It is the very error of the moon. She
comes more nearer earth than she was
wont. And makes men mad.”

William Shakespeare,
Othello

The poetics of delight in the beauty of human achievements and fruits of those achievements have situated and kept researchers on the light side of the road for centuries¹. Not encouraging anyone to resign from the charms of that situation, we should nonetheless always bear in mind the existence of its rarely taken and explored opposite, hidden in the shadows of the dark side.

Half-truths

Let me illustrate the allusive mechanism of insinuation with the famous example of the Wehrmacht grandfather. The politician in question was born in Gdańsk, and his father's family was from Kashubia. This creates some inducement to insinuate that the politician is not Polish. And if not – what nationality is he? Perhaps German, which seems to be confirmed by the fact that his grandfather served in the German army – regardless of the fact that he was conscripted. The Wehrmacht uniform, combined with Polish prejudices, is enough to perceive the politician's friendly relationships with Angela Merkel and his relative popularity in Germany as a confirmation of his German origin. Thus, despite being a lifelong Polish patriot, he became a “German”, i.e. – an alien, stranger, foreigner. Many people, especially those prone to suggestions, are going to believe it solely on the basis of insinuations. And this is precisely what insidious insinulators count on.

¹ “Knowledge is a source of pleasure, and moreover it is beautiful to discover why and how a given text can produce so many good interpretations” – said Umberto Eco.

Insinuation is a threat. Its social toxicity stems from the poison of a lie – communicated and maliciously spread in order to mislead. But how is it a lie? The politician’s grandfather was in Wehrmacht, and so his grandson’s dubious nationality is a fact.

Insinuation poisons individual thinking. It operates on its appearances, which lead confused minds astray, to madness. An insinuator always hopes for false reasoning and negative emotions. They force us to suppose (“you are intelligent people” – argues Winnicki, a communist politician played by Janusz Gajos in the series *Alternatywy 4*) that there has to be something to it, as Germans want to (gradually) Germanize and enslave us. How? Craftily. Ideally with the help of collaborators and traitors.

Etymology

Before we take a closer look at morphological properties of such messages, we should consider the etymology of “insinuation”. It comes from the Latin verb *insinuo*, *insinuare*, which means “to covertly and subtly introduce into the mind or heart”, from Latin *insinuatus*, “to thrust in, push in, make a way; creep in, intrude, bring in by windings and curvings, wind one’s way into,” from *in-* “in” (from Proto-Indo-European root *en “in”) and *sinuare* “to wind, bend, curve,” from *sinus* “a curve, winding”. In some languages, e.g. in English, there is another Latin word with that meaning: *innuendo*. Latin has one more synonym: *imputo*, *imputare* – literally “to reckon, charge, enter into the account”, i.e. “to attribute, credit to; to impute”.

Similarly to fake news, insinuation has been a tool of the (mis)information war since antiquity. From the perspective of its communication aspects, the meaning of another one of its Latin synonyms is significant: *insimulatio*, which comes from the verb *insimulo*, *insimulare* – “to accuse, blame, charge”.

Rhetoric of acumen

The gullible easily fall for insinuation – after all, *mundus vult decipi*. The ease with which naïve human minds absorb and acquire desired information is a perfect territory for manipulators – both individuals and groups. Rhetoric is of key importance here. Insinulators manipulate information, twist facts, do a snow job, confuse reason; they suggest, convince and inspire suspicion. Using suggestion, they put forward harmful insinuations in bad faith.

We deal with insinuation on a daily basis. It transforms what is doubtful into doubtless, unobvious into obvious, and open into clearly defined. Using a certain set of rhetorical devices, an insinuator operates with an intrigue of vagueness, setting sophisticated traps of the unambiguous final conclusion. It thus deprives individuals of their own reflection; yes, they are supposed to identify the hidden, implied meaning, but without their own interpretation. In insinuation, the safe route of reasoning eliminates the risk of doubts, it misleads by offering a deceptive certainty of alleged truth. By demanding specific conclusions, it changes doubts and twists and turns of complex interpretation into the certainty of the suggested overinterpretation.

Today, communication has no limits. Treated as an incomprehensively extensive repertoire of processes and social practices, it can take various forms. However, due to its nature, each time it opens itself to civilizational, cultural, and – last but not least – ethical problems. Ethics in the communication process – regardless whether in the artistic sphere or not – remains in a close relationship with their poetics, with a given message, its interpretation and poetics of reception.

In a 1990 lecture on Richard Rorty's paper given in Clare Hall in Cambridge, Umberto Eco consistently defended both the value of a work of art as an inexhaustible source of ambiguous interpretations, as well as the fact that possible interpretations intended and designed by the author do not mean that overinterpretations are as justified².

No smoke without fire

Can insinuation be treated as a message with overinterpretation assumed in advance? I would seem that this is indeed the case. Insinuation as a device not only does not require reliable, independent interpretation – it actually avoids and eliminates it. Insinuation demands simple reasoning: taking suggestions for granted, and not bothering about a critical analysis when confronted with facts. A detailed analysis would ultimately unmask the hidden perfidy of its distortions.

Discourse and dialogue based on partnership which aim to establish the facts are useless or even undesirable for insinulators. They aim for suggested overinterpretation of what they imply, rather than for an independent interpretation. It seems logical – it is common knowledge that there is no smoke without fire. In order to see through hidden mechanisms of the rhetoric of insinuation and understand them, it is enough to refer to this saying, known in many languages (e.g. in German *Es gibt Keinem Rauch ohne Feuer*). Every insinuator knows that there is no smoke without fire – it is the quintessence of the false logic to which they refer and appeal.

Apparent coherence

What is this insidiously concocted coherence which guarantees insinuation's success? It is a good question, since a lie combined with truth should immediately undermine the dubious coherence of such messages. As a construct equipped with suggesting meaning, insinuation is internally coherent, as it is neither truth nor false. The two-value matrix of thinking seems natural only to the point when we are able to differentiate and clearly separate truth from false – as two opposite, mutually exclusive values of communicating. So how do we know what is what? Using reading based on reason and acquired skills of our upbringing, education, and the sum of personal experiences. Thanks to them, the axiomatics of binary opposition of truth and false, rooted in culture, regulates our reasoning and resulting constataions, equipping us with a coherent vision of broadly understood reality.

² Umberto Eco, "Replika" [Replica], in: Umberto Eco, Richard Rorty, Jonathan Culler, Christine Brooks-Rose, *Interpretacja i nadinterpretacja* [Interpretation and overinterpretation], edited by Stefan Collini, translated into Polish by Tomasz Bieroń (Kraków: Znak, 1996), 136ff.

The sanctioned logics of the commonly accepted order of thinking provides a sense of certainty in the processes of the human mind, such as: judging, defining, comparing, classifying, concluding, deducing, inducing, conjunction, differentiating, identifying, generalizing, excluding, etc. Each of these processes organizes our cognition around the classical, Aristotelian model of analyzing and judging what is true. Referring to the learned model of reasoning, encoded in our working memory, we constantly decide what is true, and what is false. We oscillate between those two poles, accepting what we decide is true, and rejecting what we decide is false. It all seems absolutely right and certain as a result of reasoning – as long as we realize that in communication, apart from truth and false, we also deal with a third category: that which is neither true, nor false³. This category does not suspend cognition dilemmas related to the two-value logics, but it takes into consideration messages based on the duality dilemma, which deliberately play a game between acceptance and rejection on the narrow and steep edge of *verisimilitude*.

Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see
She has deceived her father, and may thee.

(Brabantio in *Othello* by Shakespeare)

Each message containing insinuation causes anxiety; insinuation feels best in the area of uncertainty. You do not know this or that, but you will soon find out – from me. I am going to make sure you know. This is the truth. Think, but not too much, and you shall discover what I have discovered. The reading of a message provided by an insinuator by the assumed addressee should not be skeptical; it is based on the feeling of exclusion from being in the know, which suddenly transforms into learning a mystery via insinuation.

Let us use another example. By scaring society with “the total opposition”, presented by the propaganda as “aliens, foreigners”, the ruling party tried to convince Poles that if Civic Platform were to win general elections, they would immediately ban meat consumption, and force citizens to eat worms instead. The absurdity of this concept is striking, but it does not matter, as the total opposition should be fought with total absurdity. Declared carnivores will believe it (if they really want to).

Just think

It is possible to measure and scale susceptibility to insinuation: it is directly proportional to the level of frustration experienced by individuals and communities. The more frustration, the more susceptible to insinuation people become. Look around and you will feel the same. America is dying, it is no longer America, because foreign politicians, traitors, are in power, and they destroy its identity. We are true, simple Americans, who need to do something about it, even resorting to violence. Our candidate, Donald Trump, did not lose the elections, because the results were in fact falsified. We need to defend the Capitol and chase away traitors.

³ The original concept of the three-value logics was developed by the Lviv philosopher, Jan Łukasiewicz, over a hundred years ago. See Jan Łukasiewicz, “O logice trójwartościowej” [On three-value logics], *Ruch Filozoficzny* (9) 1920.

Insinuation is a product of imagination deriving matrixes and ways of generating the message from creative writing. The visible similarity between the two results from operating with a fictional imitation of the real world, fabrication styled as facts, and half-truths pretending to be real. Insinuation is subversive by default. The hidden conclusion at which it aims remains in suspension. The contents of a message and hidden meaning appeals to bad emotions. Language is used to blur produced meaning in order to enforce the intended meaning.

Rumor has it... In every form, insinuation relies on echo in the form of false reasoning. A rumor, hearsay, conspiracy theory, poison pen, slander, lampoon, libel, fabricated evidence, philippic, speech for the prosecution, political campaign, fake news... they all aim at a certain reception, conviction that even if something is not completely true, there is something to it. Insinuation is fueled by the transmission of probability. An insinuator does not say anything directly to the person they try to manipulate, and they do not bother to separate the truth from lies, since the truth – as is commonly known – does not exist. “None will convince us that white is white and black is black”. We know better. Insinuation simultaneously feeds on truth and false, which makes it highly problematic to read, as in the designed communication process it entwines and ties together truth and false in order to blur any significant differences. Trying to capture its meaning and reject what it suggests, the addressee is therefore forced to see those differences, treating the suggested probability as a form of fiction rather than a fact.

Imagination at work

In insinuation, vagueness – present in all sorts of messages – has the function of a deceitful bait. Using it aims to cast a net of understatements, counting on the addressee’s ignorance and forcing them to resort to suppositions. The relationship between an insinuator and the addressee of insinuation reaches its peak at the moment when the latter’s imagination – excited with the message – is fully captured. There are certain conditions which successful insinuation needs to meet. First of all, the addressee – who is given the role of an ignorant individual – is not supposed to learn everything from the insinuator. Incomplete information they receive requires them to fill in the missing pieces to create a full (suggested) picture. The assumed addressee is a special semantic construct, equipped first and foremost with acumen. However, vagueness as the motor of insinuation is not limited to logos; insinuation lets in on a secret. It concerns all kinds of messages: verbal, iconic, audial, audiovisual, etc., and it is generally based on the addressee figuring out – between the lines – what the secret is about via their own acumen.

The communicator’s role

In insinuation poetics, the key role is played by the schemer’s veiled strategy, just like Iago gradually entangles Othello in a scheme by throwing him into the pit of jealousy. This is to conceal the impressive function, put what is possible on display, make oneself invisible as the communicator of insinuation, put up appearances of giving voice to the cognitive function – to what seems to be real and obvious to everyone on condition they think for a moment. Intentional disinformation results from information based on points of vagueness, suggested to the recipient.

Insinuation is poisoned information, dangerous both for the attacked mind, and to the social environment where it circulates. A serum in the guise of personal mistrust and skepticism which launches the resistance of awareness is needed in order to protect oneself from it and not to succumb to its poison. Without it, individuals and communities become defenseless.

The cognitive processes involved in insinuation differ. In the recipient, insinuation stimulates a process of quasi-individual reasoning that something implicitly discussed is some truth previously unknown to them. This “something” is never fully articulated *expressis verbis* by the schemer. By taking the role of someone well informed, the insinuator only suggests, implies, redirects their victim’s attention, whereas in fact they create an alibi for themselves: “I never said that.” Insinuation communicates in a double way due to beating around the bush. The message expressed *expressis verbis* is simultaneously a part and cover of insinuation. It contains a concealed message, but the only way to protect oneself from it is the ability to crack the code it used. Successful insinuation requires balance between what is revealed, i.e. expressed directly, and what is concealed, i.e. suggested. Depriving the addressee of their liberty, locking their feelings and thoughts in the limits of insinuation is well camouflaged and achieved via manipulation. Insinuation makes the addressee an “insider”, someone “well informed”, who was “not in the know” before; once they are pulled in the manipulative discourse, they are “in the know”.

Insinuating means implying something without saying or communicating it directly. However, insinuation is not the same as subversive communication in general, although it has a lot in common with reading between the lines. Using subtext in communication is not reprehensible *a priori* – in fact, it is fully justified and acceptable. Moreover, in some circumstances it may even be the only possible option, e.g. due to censorship. What makes the fundamental difference between the two? It is elusive, takes place on the verge of poetics and ethics, each time engaging both those aspects of communication. Subtext is considered a certain characteristic of poetics or a message’s construction, whereas insinuation is degenerated due to bad intentions and a perfidious role given to it and arranged by the insinuator. The key difference between persuasion and manipulation in communication becomes intersubjectively tangible only when we recognize it via the tools of poetics of reception – highlighting the roles of the virtual communicator and the virtual addressee. In persuasive messages which aim to convince, the recipient is treated on equal terms, they are partners with the communicator, whereas in manipulative communication – such as insinuation – the addressee is a victim to be beguiled and manipulated. They are easy to confuse due to the used matrixes and rhetorical devices, and the difference, the true meaning is discovered only once the whole message is analyzed. All insinuation is in bad faith, one way or another. In the name of “truth” an insinuator falsifies and destroys it. However, it is not easy to identify it. From the functional perspective, in a regular message such as “brush your teeth”, “just do it”, “early bird catches...” etc. the designed and expressed information realizes the impressive function directly by default. Its meaning lies in what is said *expressis verbis*. On the other hand, in insinuation subtext is skillfully hidden, concealed, and it creates a semantic specter of the primary text – this specter is supposed to be the main message, suggesting (i.e. insinuating) the implied meaning. It is not a complete lie; insinuation always eagerly refers to “facts”, but whatever is true to facts has already been manipulated and reduced to the form of half-truth in order to legitimize suppositions.

It would seem that modern societies are more susceptible to manipulation. The previous century's invasion of destructive authoritarian and totalitarian regimes did not give humanity a lasting lesson. Busy with everyday issues, absorbed by their daily problems, people easily forget where they came from, what their predecessors went through, and what truly matters. This susceptibility seems to be supranational, and mass media – the Fourth Estate – play a major role in that. The problem, already prominent in democratic western countries, is even greater in Putin's Russia, which has been indoctrinating its citizens for generations, resulting in a conviction that genuine culture and faith need protecting from the West. In Poland, too, we often fall prey to collective illusions. *Homo informaticus* seems and believes to be well-informed about the surrounding world, whereas in reality their mind and worldview is often fed with a game of appearances. Hence what is believed to be information proves to be its disorienting substitute – fastfood infopulp.

Insinuation as a social fact

Other-directedness of individuals and communities is a major issue of today's world. It generates and determines susceptibility to insinuation. Reason is not enough – we need to think critically and be skeptical in order to navigate between truth and lies. What modern people consider to be their knowledge is not only industrially produced information, selective, simplified, and oftentimes completely useless. What is worse, this information is perfidiously manipulated to a large extent and in various ways by insinulators with a vested interest. Insinuation proves to be an introduction to creating an alternative reality, which replaces what actually exists. The insinuator is the only person who feels good in it, and everybody else – manipulated individuals and communities – suffers; this means that insinuation as a social fact is a significant threat. Insinulators' success relies on individual susceptibility, and so they have learned how to take advantage of it. For this reason, it is necessary to study its twisted mechanisms and ways in which it works, unmask and fight it, in order to reduce social susceptibility to it. It manifests itself in taking everything for granted, especially when information comes from the media. There are numerous examples – historical and from everyday life – that this uncritical trust of individuals and communities is a costly weakness. None should allow to be lied to, misled, and cognitively captivated – which is what insinuation does. Everyone who feeds their intellect with ideas which they take for granted, and which are in fact fruits of insinuation, will pay a high price for their unlimited naivety, gullibility, and mental laziness. In communication circulation, good money is personally verified: listen and look carefully, and consider it cautiously. There is no other form of securing oneself from someone else's perfidy and deception than our foresight, caution, and common sense, which should adequately react to attempts at manipulation. A crook, concealed prompter in the role of an insinuator always counts on their potential victim's naivety, whom they want to hoodwink and overpower in order to use them

translated by Paulina Zagórska

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KEYWORDS

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POETICS

ABSTRACT:

The paper analyzes communication mechanisms of insinuation, using classical tools of poetics and rhetoric adapted to contemporary needs.

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RHETORIC

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hidden persuaders

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Parentheses in Krystyna Miłobędzka's poetry: Aspects of a linguistic analysis of the poet's late works

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Linguistic analyses of artistic texts often focus on a range of issues concerning specific works or specific writers, with particular attention being paid to idiolectal or idiosyncrastic features¹. A significant number of analyses also considers questions of style or methodology. However, parentheses, which are the focus of this paper, are rarely a topic of scholarly considerations.

Obviously, one cannot limit the analysis of specific linguistic procedures in a literary text to the immediate textual context of linguistic expression because the layout of signifying elements in a work of art is much more complex than in a non-artistic text², as evidenced by the poetic function of texts. Such is the case with parentheses, which are primarily (but not exclusively) defined as bracketed interjections. Theoretical foundations for the analyses of parentheses in poetic texts were developed in Stanisław Bąba and Stanisław Mikołajczak's *Parenteza w polskiej liryce współczesnej*³ [*Parenthesis in modern Polish lyrics*]. The two scholars

¹ See e.g. publications about the language of writers in the Bielańskie prace językoznawcze series.

² E.g. Maria Renata Mayenowa, *Poetyka teoretyczna. Zagadnienia języka* [Theoretical poetics. Language issues] (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 2000), 423–424.

³ Stanisław Bąba, Stanisław Mikołajczak, „Parenteza w polskiej liryce współczesnej” [„Parenthesis in modern Polish lyrics”], in: *O języku literatury* [On literary language], ed. by Józef Bubak, Aleksander Wilkoń (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 1981), 79–105.

listed formal exponents of parenthetical interjections in poems, related to their position within the verse structure. Even more importantly, they also established a classification based on semantics and meaning relations with the non-parenthetical text.

1. Accessory type
 - a. Stage directions-type
 - b. Contextual
 - c. Motivating
 - d. Seemingly motivating
2. Commenting and complementing
 - a. Complementing
 - b. Commenting
3. With reference (recalled)
4. With a chronological remark and digression
 - a. With a chronological remark
 - b. With digression
5. With modal and emotive-emphatic constructions
 - a. With modal constructions
 - b. With emotive-emphatic constructions
6. Defining words, translations
7. Specifying
 - a. With precision
 - b. With detailing
8. Varying
9. Referential⁴.

I am interested in showcasing the semantic scope of parentheses, which I believe to be crucial for a philological analysis. I would also like to draw attention to the functional aspects of parenthetical interjections in lyrics. The linguistic perspective, adopted here, will allow me to shed light on some aspects of the phenomenon under consideration. Both the topic and scope of the analysis are Krystyna Miłobędzka's poems. Her works are likewise oriented linguistically, which may contribute to an interdisciplinary, multiaspectual reflection.

Much has been written about the language of Miłobędzka's works. Some of these analyses assign the author to the linguistic trend (e.g., Agnieszka Czyżak⁵, Anna Legeżyńska⁶ or Marcin

⁴ See Bąba, Mikołajczak, 82.

⁵ Agnieszka Czyżak, „Po-zbierane niepokoje – przemiana i przemijanie” [„Collected worries – transformation and transience”], in: Miłobędzka wielokrotnie [Miłobędzka on numerous occasions], ed. by Piotr Śliwiński (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Wojewódzkiej Biblioteki Publicznej i Centrum Animacji Kultury w Poznaniu, 2008), 154–162.

⁶ Anna Legeżyńska, „Lingua contemplativa według Krystyny Miłobędzkiej” [Krystyna Miłobędzka's *Lingua contemplativa*], in: Wielogłos. Krystyna Miłobędzka w recenzjach, szkicach, rozmowach [Polyphony. Krystyna Miłobędzka in reviews, essays, conversations], ed. by Jarosław Borowiec (Wrocław: Biuro Literackie, 2012), 425–449.

Malczewski and others⁷), although there are also publications which point to the distinctive nature of her poems⁸. Some scholars combine the two approaches⁹. Piotr Bogalecki believes that the relations of Miłobędzka with the activities of other poets are important, but he also recognizes her separateness and the “child-likeness” of her language as a more suitable interpretive context than the linguistic approach¹⁰. There are also publications on the relationship between language and the non-linguistic reality as well as on language and creation, often emphasising the primacy of experience over language in the poetry of the author of *Anaglify* (*Anaglyphs*)¹¹, writing “about not-growing-up, not-coming to terms with words”¹², writing in a way “that words want to chase some runaway thought”¹³. In her conversation with Jarosław Borowiec¹⁴ Miłobędzka also talks about the creation of language, co-occurring with writing a poem, and about “writing herself and the world”, as mentioned by Malczewski¹⁵. Other issues related to the language of her works have also been addressed in numerous texts¹⁶.

Analysing parentheses in a poetic text is a complex issue. Apart from the requirements of a linear inscription of the text and semantics of typical language use, equally important is the very act of reading a poem. This reading is not limited to the writing surface and the plane of reception of the linguistic message. The graphic layer plays a particularly impor-

⁷ See Marcin Malczewski, „Między językiem a światem. O poezji Krystyny Miłobędzkiej” [„Between language and the world. On Krystyna Miłobędzka’s poetry”] (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, 2015), accessed Feb. 25th, 2022, <https://repozytorium.amu.edu.pl/bitstream/10593/14669/1/doktorat.pdf>; Marcin Telicki, „Przyglądanie się sobie” [“Looking at oneself”], in: Wielogłos. Krystyna Miłobędzka w recenzjach, szkicach, rozmowach, 401–409; Elżbieta Winięcka, „Lingua defectiva, czyli język Innej w poezji Krystyny Miłobędzkiej” [„Lingua defectiva or, the language of the Other in Krystyna Miłobędzka’s poetry”]. W Wielogłos. Krystyna Miłobędzka w recenzjach, szkicach, rozmowach, 451–466.

⁸ See Anna Kałuża, Wola odróżnienia. O modernistycznej poezji Jarosława Marka Rymkiewicza, Julii Hartwig, Witolda Wirpszy i Krystyny Miłobędzkiej [The will of differentiation. On modernist poetry of Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz, Julia Hartwig, Witold Wirpsza and Krystyna Miłobędzka] (Kraków: Universitas 2008), 47; Krzysztof Kuczkowski, „Poezja «nocy, nijak, bezgłosu, zadławi»” [„The poetry of «night, no-way, voicelessness, chokings»], in: Wielogłos. Krystyna Miłobędzka w recenzjach, szkicach, rozmowach, 371–377; Aleksandra Zasepa, Czas (w) poezji Krystyny Miłobędzkiej [Krystyna Miłobędzka and time in/ of her poetry] (Wrocław: Warstwy, 2016), 199–201.

⁹ See Karol Maliszewski, „Przed mową jest mowa obszerniejsza». Poezja obok słów” [«Before speech there is a bigger speech». Poetry besides words”], in: Miłobędzka wielokrotnie, 8–13; „Krystyna Miłobędzka. 8.06.1932”, Culture.pl, accessed February 25th, 2022, <https://culture.pl/pl/tworca/krystyna-milobedzka>.

¹⁰ Piotr Bogalecki, Niedorozmowy. Kategoria niezrozumiałości w poezji Krystyny Miłobędzkiej [Unconversations. The category of incomprehensibility in Krystyna Miłobędzka’s poetry] (Warszawa: Narodowe Centrum Kultury, 2011), 30–31, 41–42.

¹¹ Maliszewski.

¹² Joanna Grądział-Wójcik, „«Spróbuj zbudować dom ze słów». O wierszach «niezamieszkanym» Krystyny Miłobędzkiej” [„«Try to build a house of words». On «uninhabited» poems of Krystyna Miłobędzka”], in: Miłobędzka wielokrotnie, 34.

¹³ Tadeusz Nyczek, „Miłobędzka: pokrewne, osobne” [„Miłobędzka: familiar, separate”], in: Wielogłos. Krystyna Miłobędzka w recenzjach, szkicach, rozmowach, 359.

¹⁴ Jarosław Borowiec, „Pisze się tak, jak toczy się życie». Z Krystyną Miłobędzką rozmawia Jarosław Borowiec”, [„«One writes the way one’s life goes». Jarosław Borowiec in conversation with Krystyna Miłobędzka”], in: Miłobędzka wielokrotnie, 178–189.

¹⁵ Marcin Malczewski, „Między językiem a światem” [„Between language and the world”], in: Wielogłos. Krystyna Miłobędzka w recenzjach, szkicach, rozmowach, 393.

¹⁶ E.g. Michał Larek, „Nie. O pewnym aspekcie poezji Krystyny Miłobędzkiej” [No. On a certain aspect of Krystyna Miłobędzka’s poetry”], in: Miłobędzka wielokrotnie, 59–71; Anna Kałuża, „Prezentacje Ja. O Imiesłowach Krystyny Miłobędzkiej” [„Presentations of I. On Krystyna Miłobędzka’s participles”], in: Miłobędzka wielokrotnie, 105–113; Marcin Malczewski, „Krystyna Miłobędzka: wychodzenie z cienia” [„Krystyna Miłobędzka: stepping out of the shadow”], in: Wielogłos. Krystyna Miłobędzka w recenzjach, szkicach, rozmowach, 411–424, Malczewski, „Między językiem a światem”; Legeżyńska; Winięcka.

tant role, at the level of verse-line at that¹⁷. These reasons alone endow a parenthesis with an interesting stylistic potential – its punctuation makes it visible even before reading happens.

Other formal features of parenthesis are typically described with reference to its occurrence in prose and non-artistic texts¹⁸. It is said to be an element of an utterance (a sentence, a clause) and it may (but does not have to) enter into formal and semantic relations with elements of the main utterance. Removed from within the main sentence, it will maintain grammatical accuracy and semantic coherence¹⁹. These conditions may prove unsustainable in poetic texts, especially in poems deprived of formal sentence-creating elements, like verbs, capitalization or punctuation.

This article analyses poems from two books of poetry: *Po krzyku* [*After a shout*] (2004) and *gubione* [*one by one lost*] (2008)²⁰. This choice was motivated by a discernible evolution of Miłobędzka's poetics. As noted by Bogalecki, in her earlier books of poetry one can discern an ever-increasing predilection for specificity²¹. Bogalecki interprets it as “[t]urning towards material aspects of the text’s existence”²². In later books of poetry the orientation of specificity was combined with the “traditional” character of the poem²³. Bogalecki associates other indications of the distinctiveness of *Po krzyku* and *gubione* with a different creation of the “I” speaking: arguably, in these collections Miłobędzka combines the types of the lyrical “I” from her previous books of poetry, e.g., woman-mother, collectiveness, hidden subject or poem as subject. Referring to *gubione*, Bogalecki states that “[o]ne of the recurring topics or techniques are also [...] «disappearance», which becomes a «rule», not only of *Po krzyku* but also of the entire «silencing» phase in Miłobędzka’s works”²⁴. One may assume that *Po krzyku* and *gubione* differ from earlier books of Miłobędzka’s poetry in terms of a gradual reduction of the word and means of expression. This is why analysing parentheses in such peculiar syntactic context opens up a number of investigative possibilities, an outline of which I would like to present in this essay.

¹⁷ Artur Grabowski, *Wiersz. Forma i sens* [The poem. Form and meaning] (Kraków: Universitas, 1999); Witold Sadowski, *Wiersz wolny jako tekst graficzny* [Free verse as a graphic text] (Kraków: Universitas, 2004).

¹⁸ See e.g. Andrzej Moroz, *Parenteza ze składnikiem czasownikowym we współczesnym języku polskim* [Parenthesis with a verbal element in modern Polish] (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2010); Gabriela Dziamska-Lenart, *Innowacje frazeologiczne w powojennej felietonistyce polskiej* [Phraseological innovations in post-war Polish essay-writing] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo „Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne”, 2004).

¹⁹ See Moroz; Zenon Klemensiewicz, *Zarys składni polskiej* [An outline of Polish syntax] (Warszawa: PWN, 1961); Agata Ostrówka, „Idiostylowy charakter parentez w tekstach Antoniego Libery” [„Idiostylistic nature of parentheses in Antoni Libera’s texts”], *Kwartalnik Językoznawczy* 17, 1 (2014): 21–64; Marzena Stępień, *Wyrażenia parentetyczne w strukturze wypowiedzi – właściwości semantyczne, składniowe, prozodyczne* [Parenthetic expressions in the structure of utterance – semantic, syntactic and prosodic properties] (Warszawa: BEL Studio, 2014).

²⁰ Both volumes are from Krystyna Miłobędzka’s, *zbierane, gubione* [gathered, lost] 1960–2010. (Wrocław: Biuro Literackie, 2010). Quotations in this article will be indicated by the first letter of the volume title and page number in brackets.

²¹ Bogalecki, 460–471.

²² Bogalecki, 462.

²³ Bogalecki, 463.

²⁴ Bogalecki, 502.

Insertions in the texts under consideration vary in terms of their position relative to the verse(s), strophoid(s) or the entire poem. Specificity and reduction of linguistic richness, characteristic for the poet, whose writing relies on the very essence of language and words is reflected in the format of her poems, devoid of any formal sentence structure. Punctuation is functional: it features commas, question marks and exclamation points on line-ends, as well as dashes, hyphens, quotation marks, ellipses and, of course, brackets, extended over entire verses and individual elements of the text. Full stops in the closing function occur in only two poems from the *Po krzyku* and *gubione* books of poetry. Except for the single spelling of the first name (“Krystyna”) and personal pronoun ‘you’ (“Ty”) there is no capitalization. Signs used by the poet are suited to their ‘transmitter’ function. Of course, one does not mean here sentences in the formal sense; rather, a syntagmatic structure, compromised by an anti-syntactic poem. This makes the prerequisite for parenthesis as interjection into the main clause unsustainable²⁵. Despite the required “obligatory co-occurrence²⁶ with the main structure”²⁷ there are in lyrics instances of bracketed material occurring in ambiguous, non-specific relations with the surrounding elements of the poem’s structure. For the purposes of this article I take the parenthesis (interchangeably referred to as interjection or bracketed structure) to be an element of a poetic text underscored by means bracketing and characterized by semantic surplus. A close reading of the poem may well indicate the actual significance of the parenthetical fragment. In the following parts of this article I will present my thoughts on the issue.

One of the poems featuring an interesting use of the parenthetical structure is a text from *gubione*²⁸:

dróżki w ogrodzie
 (czarne wgłęb)
 (przeskoki, zgłębienia)
 dom przed zniknięciem w drzewach
 dom znikający w drzewach

(G 357)

It is worth noticing that the author placed two parentheses one after another without separating them by means of a main sentence fragment or a punctuation mark – a practice necessary in a non-poetic text. The “paths” (*dróżki*) opening the poem introduce the motif of movement, elaborated on in two final verses – even without any personal verb, nominal forms represent the gradation of visual impressions which may accompany move-

²⁵Andrzej Moroz in his *Parenteza ze składnikiem czasownikowym we współczesnym języku polskim* quotes Maciej Grochowski’s argument that „no isolated linguistic expression (even if it could operate without any context) can be a priori referred to as parenthesis” (Maciej Grochowski, „Metatekstowa interpretacja parentezy” [„Metatextual interpretation of parenthesis”], in: *Tekst i zdanie [Text and sentence]* [Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1983], 254, as quoted in Moroz, 52).

²⁶This competition is understood as “co-occurrence with another syntactic sequence within the same unit” (Moroz, 52).

²⁷Moroz.

²⁸Translator’s note: English versions of Miłobędzka’s poems are available in Elżbieta Wójcik-Leese’s critically acclaimed translations. In this article only those fragments of Miłobędzka’s poems which are mentioned in the author’s analysis have been translated (word-for-word) for the purposes of this paper.

ment. Interjections execute this motif in slightly different ways. Here the verb “inwards” (*wgłąb*) and nouns “leaps” (*przeskoki*) and “indentations” (*wgłębienia*) imply movement, while suggesting a different, more specific perspective. “Paths”, visible “in the garden” (*w ogrodzie*) and “a house” (*dom*) which gradually “disappear[s] into the trees” (*znikający w drzewach*) recall a more general, synthetic view. A different analysis is offered by taking the perspective of horizontal-vertical relations. While the path, followed by the “I” speaking belongs with the horizontal plane, in the vertical space they notice (perhaps stopping for a while, deviating from the path) certain unevenness of that path. Also, the arrangement of parentheses betrays a gradation of sorts. From this perspective “leaps, explorations” would be modifiers of what earlier, at first sight, was only visible as “black” (*czarne*)²⁹. Controversially, **wgłąb* (‘inwards’) can also be interpreted as a complex preposition³⁰. Then the poem expresses the topic of movement through the paradox of expressing the motif of movement without using verbs, which is another proof of the author’s skill. I interpret this possible ungrammatical usage, as intentional.³¹ Summing up, each of the three above-proposed analyses demonstrates that that interjections introduce a different level of transmission, here – related to space (in the physical sense), which is invoked in the poem.

In a different poem Miłobędzka writes:

mów
nie zatrzymuj się
(nie zatrzymuj siebie)
(G 343)

The content of the parentheses seems to be a variant of the preceding utterance. The difference is the use of the reflexive “się”, which modifies the meaning and highlights other

²⁹The referentiality of the second interjection also opens up the possibility of analysing these elements in the context of verse parenthesis (Krzysztof Skibski, *Poezja jako literatura. Relacje między elementami języka poetyckiego w wierszu wolnym* [Poetry as literature. Relations between elements of the poetic language in a free verse] [Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2017], 260–266)

³⁰Classifying **wgłąb* ‘inwards’ as a preposition is supported by the consistency of grammatical forms and the commonality of usage. Also Paweł Próchniak in his review of *gubione* follows it: „[...] In that dust, in the sand, in darkness the «black inwards» opens up”, as do «leaps, recesses», which engulf everything that is” (Paweł Próchniak, „Przeskoki, zgłębienia” [“Leaps, recesses”], in: *Wielogłos. Krystyna Miłobędzka w recenzjach, szkicach, rozmowach*, 270). An argument against this lexical choice is, of course, grammatical correctness. Dictionaries of Polish, both contemporary and earlier ones (e.g. *Wielki słownik języka polskiego PAN* [The comprehensive dictionary of Polish], ed. by Piotr Źmigrodzki, accessed March 10th, 2022, <https://wsjp.pl/>; *Słownik języka polskiego PWN* [Dictionary of Polish PWN], accessed March 10th, ca 2022, <https://sjp.pwn.pl/>; *Słownik języka polskiego* [Dictionary of Polish], ed. by Witold Doroszewski, vol. 9 [Warszawa: PWN, 1967]; Aleksander Zdanowicz et al., *Słownik języka polskiego*, vol. 2 [Wilno: Maurycy Orgelbrand, 1861]; *Słownik języka polskiego*, ed. by Jan Karłowicz, Adam Antoni Kryński, Władysław Niedźwiedzki, vol. 7 [Warszawa: K. Król and W. Niedźwiedzki, 1919]; Samuel Bogumił Linde, *Słownik języka polskiego*, vol. 6 [Warszawa: Drukarnia XX. Pijarów, 1814]), do not include the preposition **wgłąb*, but only the verb *wgłębić* ‘to deepen’. Corpora of Polish (Narodowy Korpus Języka Polskiego [National Corpus of Polish], accessed March 10th, 2022, <http://nkjp.pl/> and Korpus Języka Polskiego PWN [PWN Corpus of Polish], accessed March 10th, 2022, <https://sjp.pwn.pl/korpus>) define **wgłąb* as a complex preposition (28 hits for the PELCRA NKJP search engine, 30 hits for the Poliqarp NKJP search engine, 1 for Korpusu Języka Polskiego PWN); interestingly enough, none of them quotes examples of using *wgłąb* as an imperative.

³¹On the use grammatical error as a poetica means by Miłobędzka and other linguist-poets see, e.g. Zasepa, 208; Bogalecki, 47, 495.

connotations. “Don’t stop” (Pol. *nie zatrzymuj się*) could be understood – yet again – in the context of movement, but in combination with the initial “speak” (*mów*) it implies a communicative event, in which the subject is really saying “don’t stop talking”. The interjection is expounded as a request towards the interlocutor (or the subject in conversation with themselves?), not to stop “the entire” self, one’s own (self-)expression or not to leave oneself only for oneself. Thus, the content of the parenthesis on one hand points to linguistic ambiguities and possibilities, on the other – to its limitations. Just changing the form of one grammatical word breaks the content of a fixed expression and opens up an entirely new semantic perspective, demonstrating the inadequacy of fixed phrases. The variability of the two expressions appears illusory – we are not dealing with two alternative options but with an expansion and a complementation of one of them by means of a parenthetical interjection.

The status of parenthesis as a secondary element (not in the meaning of hypotaxis but as a semantic and formal ‘excess’, unnecessary for the correctness of the utterance), and as a complementary form, indicates that the bracketed material is, metaphorically speaking, a record of the subject’s whisper or thoughts. One of the functions of parenthesis in poetry would be then demonstrating the unsaid. A parenthetical interjection as a means of poetic expression acquires new properties.

Let the poet speak again:

być sobą tak, że już nie być
 (obracaj to w kółko, w kółko
 aż ci się zrobi pusto)
 (G 367)

The poem might create the impression that it is a manual of how to separate being (“self-being”) from non-being, language from the world and denotation – like a word which is spun around numerous times and finally loses any relation with what it refers to and thus becomes strange, semantically empty. We can also notice in the text a peculiar kind of syntactic parallelism, or syntactic-content parallelism between the non-interjected part and parenthesis. The first part of the opening verse is directly related to existence, which is antithetic to the second part. The interjecting strophoid initially refers to performing an activity, performed by the subject. The second part, through deconstructing the phrase *zrobić się komuś niedobrze* ‘to be made to feel sick’ assumes a passive adoption of the effect of that activity, i.e., the phenomenon of emptiness. The parallelism, present in the text is then a repetition of the juxtaposition “presence – lack”/ “to be – not to be” / “act-be – don’t be”. This procedure emphasizes the value of the parenthetical interjection. That interjection, on one hand appears to be an addition, excess, typical of non-artistic communication, on the other hand, “equal access” of parenthetical and non-parenthetical elements to means of poetic expression questions the redundancy of the former. Moreover, the inserted element introduces a different level of transmission – from the grammatical perspective the imperative mood is an adjustment to the recipient of this communication, an aspect missing from the preceding sentence fragment.

In some of Miłobędzka's poems bracketed interjections relate to the category of parallelism. In one of her works this is executed through symmetry, manifested in graphic structure:

powiedzieć Ty sobą	Twoim jest	Twoim mówię
w kółko dom	w kółko Ty	w kółko mówię
(mówię)	(mówię)	(mówię)
(nie chcę)	(nie jestem)	(nie czekam)

(G 363)

The text can be “read graphically” in many ways. One of the possible interpretative keys are the vertical and horizontal axes of symmetry. In the former case the main axis is the middle column of the text, whose content – except the third verse – is oriented around the verb “to be” (*jest* ‘is’, *jestem* ‘am’). A noticeable change of this orientation occurs in the interjected fragments – the already mentioned third verse with its *mówię* ‘I am speaking’ the negation of the verb “to be” in the fourth one (*nie jestem*). The presence of the horizontal axis enforces the parallelism of individual verses in the first two and second and third lines, creating the following juxtapositions: *powiedzieć Ty sobą* – *nie chcę* ‘to say You yourself’ – ‘I don’t want to’; *Twoim jest* – *nie jestem* ‘is Yours’ – ‘I’m not’; *Twoim mówię* – *nie czekam* ‘with Yours I speak’ – ‘I’m not waiting’; *w kółko dom* – *mówię* ‘nothing but the house’ – ‘I am speaking’; *w kółko jest* – *mówię* ‘nothing but is’ – ‘I am speaking’; *w kółko mówię* – *mówię*; ‘nothing but I am speaking’ – ‘I am speaking’. These open up interesting interpretive perspectives. In the above-quoted pairs one can discern an image of rebellion against the subject’s “over-speaking” themselves and the addressee of the communication. They do not want to speak about the addressee or “to speak the addressee”³², i.e. make them real, agree to their presence in language, and thus – in the world. The speaking “I” emphasizes their separateness from “you”. The world of the subject is “over-spoken”; too many words lead to the loss of the “I” from sight (hearing?). Interjected texts become answers to the reality as it was.

The act of graphic reading also helps notice the functionality of parentheses within the text. The use of only parenthetical interjections in a significant portion of the text underscores the importance of their contents – a reading unlike the one typical of non-artistic communication. Parenthesis, which often conveys that which is ‘extra’, irrelevant, but important for presenting a possibly comprehensive picture of what one wants to convey, here also signals that which is left unsaid but is being thought – a truth which has not come to light. Thus understood the interjection realizes the scheme: “I say *a* (even though the truth is *b*)”. The accumulation of bracketed (hidden) utterances “at the bottom” of the poem and the non-parenthetical (“revealed”) “on top”, brings to mind the structure of a plant, for example a tree, in which the roots balance with their size what is visible but they are also a condition of their existence. Similarly, it is only the second part of the poem which is added so as not to pay greater attention uncovers the conflict of the lyrical “I” with the world and the addressee of the text,

³²See „»Mówienie o« w poezji jako fakcie egzystencjalnym przechodzi w »mówienie siebie« bądź też »mówienie sobą« [„»Speaking about« in poetry as an existential fact becomes »speaking oneself« or »speaking by means of oneself«] (Malczewski, „Między językiem a światem”, 391), as well as: „Temporal distance between the plane of life and writing enables one to discern in the category of life-writing a call for a textualizing existence” (ibid.). Simultaneously, as already mentioned, scholars point to Miłobędzka’s subject’s detachment from creation in a text (e.g. Grądziel-Wójcik, 21–34; Nyczek, 345–370).

therefore it is a carrier of its semantic load. The structure of the work, to put it simply, can be divided into “the factual part” and “the truth part”, thus reminiscent of the sonnet structure, whose opening stanzas are also “the factual part” and the final ones – “the part of pondering the world”. Interpreting the final two lines of Miłobędzka’s text as “the part of pondering the world” seems therefore justified.

A recurring feature of parentheses in Miłobędzka’s works, as proven by some of the above-quoted poems, is their clause structure, which allows for the execution of two functions. The first is the different level of transmission (also visible in the above-analysed texts):

mamy siebie krótko na wieczne zdziwienie
 patrz uważnie, przed tobą nie oddany uśmiech
 (ta twarz z bliska, szeroko rozstawione oczy)
 (PK 296)

The first two verses are reflective in nature, while the interjections pertain to physical, tangible features (*ta twarz z bliska, szeroko rozstawione oczy* – ‘that face up close, eyes wide-set’). This change of reference seems at odds with the rest of the poem, but it closes and complements its content, becoming the climax of the poem because it is within the parenthesis that the gradual specification of the lyrical context is finalised.

The opposite is visible in another text from the same book of poetry:

dokładnie czoło, dokładnie usta, dokładnie dłonie
 z tą samą brudną plamką przy paznokciu
 z warkoczycami
 w żorżetowej sukience
 z dalią przy policzku, truskawką do buzi
 w tamtej błękitnoszarej przepasce na włosach
 (i: czy popiół zakwita?)
 (PK 299)

In the poem above, yet again concluded by parenthesis, the interjection introduces an abstract layer. The rhetorical question (*i: czy popiół zakwita?*) – ‘do the ashes bloom?’ is a reference to something that contrasts with the tangible character of the preceding content, expressed through an accumulation of concrete nouns. It is an interpretative opening of sorts, introduced by the initial conjunction *i* ‘and’, used in the parenthesis.

Another interesting and recurring aspect of Miłobędzka’s parentheses is their retarding function. A particular “holding one’s breath” and delay can be listed as features of parenthesis. It can also be seen in the following texts:

wyrwać z siebie ten lichy dzień ten niski las ten mokry cień,
 to zgniło-mokro

żeby biec żeby biegło żeby ci się to wszystko naraz zbiegło
 (tu jeszcze coś, zapomniałam), chwilko chmurko
 dziecino motylowa górko
 (PK 314)

najprędzej gubię czasowniki, zostają rzeczowniki, rzeczy
 już tylko zaimki osobowe (dużo ja, coraz więcej ja)
 a imiona? giną, spójniki giną
 trzy słowa, dwa słowa
 wreszcie mój, mój we mnie
 mój ze mną
 świat
 ja w pierwszej i ostatniej osobie
 (PK 286)

Yet again parenthesis is used to introduce a distinct level of transmission in first of the two poems above, written in the style of everyday speech. This causes a stylistic break in the text – it seems that the aim of this procedure is to break the accumulation of metaphors and, at the same time, to distance oneself from the lyrical character of the poem through a self-critical act of questioning the absolutism of the act of creating the world in a poem, perhaps even an attempt to denounce the lyrical “I” which is too distant from a naively perceived reality...

Metalinguistic and metatextual, as well as metaidiostylistic reflection, which can be found in the second poem, is highlighted by means of a reductive layout, correlating with the content of the poem. This time the text of the parenthesis does not contrast with the remainder of the text. Following the formal expressions of bracketed interjections, it refers to the neighbouring text. Interestingly enough, its topic (the pronoun “I”) recurs in the final verse, which is a change in the way of reading parenthesis and its “ennoblement”, raising its status to that of a semantically and formally equivalent element.³³

One might wonder if treating parenthesis in a “democratic” manner, equal to the rest of the text, as far as the use of anaphors is concerned, in the text below is proof of a similar “nobilitation” of the interjection to that which occurred in the above-discussed poem

³³ Scholars analysing parenthesis and its defining features also focus on the issue of syntactic relations between the interjection and the main clause. Zenon Klemensiewicz points out that the inserted element is neither hypo- nor parataxically related to the main clause (Zenon Klemensiewicz, *Zarys składni polskiej* [Warszawa: PWN, 1961], 104). Similarly, e.g. Stanisław Karolak (*Encyklopedia Językoznawstwa Ogólnego* [Encyclopedia of general linguistics], ed. by Kazimierz Polański (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1999), entry „parenthesis”). Also Marzena Stępień in *Wyrażenia parentetyczne w strukturze wypowiedzi* [Parenthetical expressions in the structure of an utterance] claims that „the basic utterance does not connote syntactically a parenthetical expression; parenthesis is not accommodated by it [...]”; if a parenthetical expression takes the form of a clause, then the utterance it co-creates does not belong with traditional division into main and subordinate clauses (Marzena Stępień, *Wyrażenia parentetyczne w strukturze wypowiedzi – właściwości semantyczne, składniowe, prozodyczne* [Warszawa: BEL Studio, 2014], 12). Andrzej Moroz distinguishes between interjection and parenthesis, taking the former to be a more general phenomenon, whereas parenthesis is characterized by “formal independence from the elements of the basic structure” (Moroz, 84).

jej moje biegnące
 bez stąd
 bez dotąd
 bez jest
 (bez tej która usiłuje być mną)
 (G 337)

It is hard to come to a definitive answer. On one hand the final verse is a continuation of the anaphorical pairing, on the other – its content is formally distinct because its pronoun is made specific by a grammatically correct relative clause. Moreover, this sentence might well appear in a prose text, or even in a non-artistic one. Therefore, the hypothesis concerning the “ennobling” of parenthesis cannot be verified.

Another important technique, relevant for the present analysis, concerns the relationship between parenthesis and the main text:

ciągle ta sama nieopowiadalność!
 (świecenie światła, szarość papieru)
 światło papieru, kolor tej szarości
 labirynt – w którym tylko każdy z osobna szczegół może być
 nazwany
 (PK 290)

Following the definition of interjection, *świecenie światła, szarość papieru* ‘the shining of light, the grayness of paper’ refers to “undescribability”. Here, the introduction of brackets may influence the interpretation of the work, reinforcing the relationship between the first two verses. Paradoxically, this fragment is not the most important one for our reflections upon interjections. The middle verse, which is also a strophoid, refers directly to the preceding line, which is the bracketed fragment. This dependence suggests that the words *światło papieru, kolor tej szarości* ‘the light of paper, the colour of that grayness’ are parenthetical with respect to the words they refer to. This is a second degree parenthesis, introduced without appropriate punctuation. Such ‘unmarked’ interjection in a poetic text is termed verse parenthesis³⁴.

The poem below presents a case in which interjections are one of many indications of correspondences between the verses:

że jesteś w rozłożystym powietrzu
 otulona w chmury
 (otulające cię chmury)
 (chmury)
 (G 350)

³⁴Skibski, 260–266.

drzewo tak drzewo
 że drzewa już nie ma
 chmury (chmury)
 (G 351)

In *gubione* the two poems are printed on facing pages, which provides an additional clue of their relationship. Both follow the same pattern, using the word *chmury* ‘clouds’, which is then repeated inside the brackets, with additional variant in the first poem. In the latter case the structure is also reductive. In both texts parentheses are an expression of metatextual, metalinguistic and ontic-referential reflections³⁵. Seemingly, in the first example the interjections mirror deeper thoughts on the expression *otulona w chmury* ‘wrapped in clouds’, or on the ‘clouds’ themselves – if the addressee ‘is [...] / wrapped in clouds’, then the inherent feature of those clouds is that they get ‘wrapped’ around that person. However, the search for the essence of things, for the best description possible, reduces that description to the name itself, because that name comprises all possible features of the designate. In the second text the “transitional parenthesis” was left out – the word ‘clouds’ is repeated, as if echoed in the interjection. This seems to support the conclusions from the previously considered text. The opening strophoid recalls yet another previously considered fragment: *obracaj to w kółko, w kółko / aż ci się zrobi pusto* ‘spin it round and round / until it makes you empty’. Maybe the ‘tree’ is ‘spun round and round/ until it [was made] empty’, which is why ‘the tree is no more’. Rescue may be found in the clouds which disappear before the word ‘cloud’ loses its meaning. Let us again recall the definition of a bracketed interjection: it is a procedure of excess, one which is weak as its form is equivalent to that of the cloud’s ephemeral nature. The graphic dimension of the parenthesis is not meaningless either: the rounded brackets correspond to the oval shape of that atmospheric phenomenon. Similarly, the reductive layout of the parentheses in the first verse may symbolize clouds dispersed by the wind. As it turns out, the “weakness” of a parenthetical interjection may be evidence of its meaning-making properties.

Let us consider one more text with a closing parenthesis:

jedno za drugim, jedno na drugie
 jedno w drugie
 (jedno w jedno)
 (G 338)

Yet again, this is a metalinguistic reflection delivered through a bracketed interjection. The objects of that reflection are colloquial expressions, juxtaposed in an almost mathematical arrangement. A string of alternative expressions is interrupted by parenthesis, which questions the meaning of introducing order and value to things. Prepositions like *za*, *na*, *w* ‘behind’, ‘on’, ‘in’, point to objects but also – in a different perspective – they can relate to phenomena or people. Coincidence or circumstances are the cause, most often – external – for the subject of

³⁵I am referring here to the reflection on the issue of „clouds” revealed in the poem, both in the sense of an actual object and the lexeme along with its reference to that object. In other words, this is reference in the basic meaning of the term. Detailed considerations on this topic can be found in Ewa Bińczyk’s now classical *Obraz który nas zniewala* [The image that enslaves us] [Kraków: Universitas, 2007]).

action, choice of what will be first, more important and what will come after. Meanwhile, the human being is not capable of deciding objectively which of the elements should come first, especially that – as the text suggests – they are coeval.

The following poem illustrates the importance of parenthesis:

(podziwiał sztukę bycia cicho
uderzysz w stół, odezwie się długopis)
(PK 317)

This application of brackets puts into question the traditional definition of interjection because there is no main clause to which the bracketed material would refer and be separated from. The text, as if uttered in passing, is the only element of the poem. The use of punctuation is likewise meaningful – it correlates with the motif of silence present in the poem. Moreover, it impacts the tension between verse boundaries because the coherence of the entire text is emphasized, despite versification.

An exceptional use of the brackets can also be noticed in the text:

w jakim ty świecie żyjesz?
w pędzącym
prędzej widzę, niż powiem
(prędzej powiem, niż widzę)
(*****)
(***)
(*
(G 339)

This text also relies on parenthetical repetitions. Yet again, it is possible to discern the “plant” pattern here, i.e., a two-partite structure in which the interjections comprise the “roots” part of the poem. The reductive pattern also features – parentheses concern minimal content. That minimalism is evident in a gradual reduction of signs: first an expression, then a string of signs, finally – just a single sign. The use of asterisks instead of words also highlights divergence from the accepted definition of parenthesis. In the brackets-fragment interjection becomes a “smuggler of truth”: “I say *a* (even though *b* is the truth)”. Thus understood, the second part of the text is an answer to the first one. The first parenthesis, which is the culminating point of the poem’s semantic tension, introduces an antithetical chiasm. The juxtaposition of graphic signs is a response to this arrangement: *prędzej powiem niż widzę* ‘I say before I see’, changes the expression “to speak faster than to think” and suggests talking about the world without having experienced it first. The asterisks might express “hollow talk”, lacking any referentiality, and one which reduces itself, as it only carries little.³⁶

³⁶It could also be a trace of self-criticism – a serious one at that, because it refers to the manner of experiencing the world and writing about it by the subject. After all, one of the key properties of Miłobędzka’s poetry is the simultaneity of creating and experiencing; a two-track creation – concerning the world and text. A possible support for this thesis might be found in the author’s own words, who thus answered Borowiec’s question „What kind of poet is Krystyna Miłobędzka?” “Lacking self-confidence [...]” (Borowiec, 178).

The above-analysed examples show a range of applications for bracket interjections in Miłobędzka's works. They demonstrate a particular semantic potential of parentheses used in a poetic text, even if its formal features are often not present. Parentheses in Miłobędzka's poems carry more 'functional load' than their non-artistic equivalents. This unique usage of parentheses is an inspiration for considering their functions in other books of Miłobędzka's poetry, as well as in the poetry of other authors. This issue definitely requires further study.

translated by Justyna Rogos-Hebda

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KRYSZYNA MIŁOBĘDZKA

ABSTRACT:

The article focuses on the issue of parenthesis in poetic texts, with focus on selected poems by Krystyna Miłobędzka. The analysis leads to the conclusion that interjection, particularly in its parenthetical form, has a different – broader – function in a poem than in other types of texts and is a significant interpretive signal. These reflections also demonstrate how the potential of parenthesis was exploited by the poet to create multiaspectual meanings.

artistic language

parallelism

LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF POETIC TEXT

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Agata Ostrówka-Dombkowska – born in 1991 r., doctoral candidate at the Faculty of Polish and Classical Philology at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. Her interests revolve around artistic language, especially parentheses in different text types and authors' idiostyles. Her publications include *Idiostylowy charakter parentez w tekstach Antoniego Libery* [*The idiostylistic nature of parentheses in Antoni Libera's texts*] („Kwartalnik Językoznawczy” 17, 1/2014, pp. 21–64) and *Rozważania nad idiostylem Antoniego Libery na podstawie analizy antroponimów w powieści „Madame”* [„Reflections on Antoni Libera's idiostyle on the basis of the analysis of anthroponyms in the novel “Madame”], in: *Nasz język ojczysty – różne oblicza tożsamości* [*Our mother tongue – different faces of identity*], ed. by Rafał Mazur and Barbara Żebrowska-Mazur, pp. 135–150, Wydawnictwo Libron, Kraków 2019).

Ecstasy and matter

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c r i t i c s :

Katarzyna Szopa, *Wybuch wyobraźni. Poezja Anny Świrszczyńskiej wobec reprodukcji życia społecznego* [An Explosion of the Imagination. Anna Świrszczyńska's Poetry and the Reproduction of Social Life], Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, Katowice 2022

*Wybuch wyobraźni. Poezja Anny Świrszczyńskiej wobec reprodukcji życia społecznego*¹ [An Explosion of the Imagination. Anna Świrszczyńska's Poetry and the Reproduction of Social Life] by Katarzyna Szopa is her second individual monograph, published four years after *Poetyka rozkwitania. Różnica płciowa w filozofii Luce Irigaray*² [Poetics of Blossoming: Sexuate Difference in Philosophy of Luce Irigaray] on French feminist thought.

Katarzyna Szopa has been studying works by female Polish poets for years. Apart from feminist criticism, materialism constitutes one of the most significant methodological contexts of her work. In *Poetyka rozkwitania* she analyzed the problem of gender difference in reference to poststructuralism, focusing on discourse and sign qualities, confronting it with the feminism of difference postulated by, among others, Irigaray and Rosi Braidotti. It resulted in a concept of materiality – especially of the body – as something independent of discourses and therefore constituting a real limit to oppressive narratives, naturally immune to the postmodernist, anti-essential vision of language.

However, what is equally important, in Szopa's work materialism also assumes a historical formula – she combines the cultural vision and representation of women with their socio-economic situation, mechanisms of production, or categories of social class and exploitation, which positions her amongst scholars applying Marxist criticism.

Wybuch wyobraźni consistently elaborates on themes from Szopa's earlier work, and focuses on material aspects of women's functioning in culture, society, and economy. It is still a double-track materiality, which includes both the commonly understood "physicality" of subjects, and analyzing those embodied entities in their various political and economic contexts. Simi-

¹ Katarzyna Szopa, *Wybuch wyobraźni. Poezja Anny Świrszczyńskiej wobec reprodukcji życia społecznego*, Katowice: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2022. In the text, I refer to pages from this edition following the abbreviation WW.

² Katarzyna Szopa, *Poetyka rozkwitania. Różnica płciowa w filozofii Luce Irigaray*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2018.

lar motifs appeared e.g., in interpretations of Joanna Mueller's works, which Szopa proposes to read through the prism of embodied language and materialist visions of reproduction³, therefore positioning herself in opposition to, among other things, postsecular visions from Mueller's works⁴. However, according to Szopa, the material – or the materialist perspective – does not exclude this imagination potential. On the contrary: as showcased by *Wybuch wyobraźni*, the feedback of these categories can bring us significant cognitive profits.

The issue of reproducing social life – which goes beyond the narrow understanding of reproduction – is obviously nothing new. *Akuszerki awangardy: kobiety a początki nowej sztuki* [Avant-garde's midwives: women and the beginning of a new art] by Iwona Boruszkowska⁵ is a seminal work demonstrating how the most celebrated – male – works of high modernism and the avant-garde were a product of the exploitation of women. Women did unpaid and virtually invisible work, providing (emotional) care and reproduction (we shall return to this question later) thanks to which the privileged (also by a romantic-modernist artistic vision) could fully devote themselves to creative work. Szopa's previous work seems to have been founded on a similar premise (e.g., the paper *Karmicielki świata. Mamki mleczne w świetle reprodukcji życia społecznego*⁶ [Feeders of the World. Wet Nurses and Social Reproduction]) and it consistently appears in modern criticism of women's writing; Monika Głosowicz's *Maszynerie afektywne* [Affective machineries], awarded with Nagroda-Stypendium im. Stanisława Barańczaka⁷, is one of the most famous and important examples of such analytics practices in recent years.

At the same time, Szopa's book represents the turn towards authors who today are either forgotten, or rarely read critically. It seems that Lucyna Marzec's analysis of Kazimiera Iłakowiczówna's works is another example of this, as well as the renewed interest in Urszula Koziół's and Lucyna Skompka's work, and suggestions to revisit established convictions regarding Wiesława Szymborska's poetry.

Szopa's monograph is thus a well-thought continuation of her individual research path, and a contribution to significant trends of modern literary studies. It should be mentioned that the publications mentioned above – both books (Głosowicz, Marzec), and scattered in the form of papers (Boruszkowska) – represent an unusually high level of academic precision and innovativeness, which poses a challenge for scholars interested in similar topics.

³ Katarzyna Szopa, "Dermografie: poetyka relacji. Wokół związków materii i języka w poezji Joanny Mueller" [Dermography: Poetics of Relationships. On Relationships Between Matter and Language in Joanna Mueller's poetry], *Praktyka Teoretyczna* 10, (2013): 137–160.

⁴ Piotr Bogalecki, "Od apokryfu do «anarchomistycyzmu». Postsekularne narracje (liryczne) Joanny Mueller" [From apocrypha to «anarchomysticism». Postsecular (lyrical) narratives by Joanna Mueller], *Świat i Słowo* 1, 24 (2015): 129–144.

⁵ Iwona Boruszkowska, "Akuszerki awangardy: kobiety a początki nowej sztuki", *Pamiętnik Literacki* 3 (2019): 5–14.

⁶ Katarzyna Szopa, "Karmicielki świata. Mamki mleczne w świetle reprodukcji życia społecznego", *Wielogłos* 1, 47 (2021): 1–24.

⁷ Monika Głosowicz, *Maszynerie afektywne. Literackie strategie emancypacji w najnowszej poezji kobiet* [Affective machineries. Literary emancipation strategies in contemporary poetry by women], Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2019.

Wybuch wyobraźni is just as excellent: it is a well-written book with an impressive list of references, presenting a deep and interesting analysis of a phenomenon illustrated with adequate literary examples. It is divided into three parts, entitled: *Genealogie feminizmu* [Genealogies of feminism], *Praca reprodukcyjna* [Reproductive work] and *Praktyki ekstazy* [Ecstatic practices]; with an introduction and concluding remarks. The first part discusses relationships between feminist thought with the notion of reproductive work, identifying its origins (e.g. in Engels's texts) and its various (historical) interpretations: narrow, in which it refers to the extension of our species (producing new laborers), and broad, in which it is connected with all ways of sustaining societies; not simply reproduction, care or emotional work, but also all forms of caring about survival, which includes subjects' care for themselves. This part also describes the post-war controversy regarding women's literature, i.e., when literature by women was perceived mostly through the prism of emotional lyricism.

The second part discusses various forms of reproductive work, elaborating on ideas from the first part. Szopa analyzes the issue of the functioning of the family in the context of patriarchy, identifying different ways of oppressing women; she also analyzes different manifestations of love – romantic, maternal, heterosexual, lesbian, and auto-erotic. She concludes this part with care economies. All of the issues discussed in this part are rooted in studies, described and organized with great precision: chapters are logically connected, gradually elaborating on the titular reproduction of social life in its broad understanding. The first two parts are exemplified mostly with poems from *Jestem baba* [I am woman] by Świrszczyńska (which should not be surprising to anyone familiar with her work).

The third part discusses ecstatic practices. Szopa analyzes surrealism and other modernist and avantgarde theories, the titular motif of imagination, and futurist motifs – how Świrszczyńska's poetry is oriented towards the future. That part also analyzes decolonialism in *Czarne słowa* [Black words] and an apocalyptic vision from *Budowałam barykadę* [I built a barricade].

Although the sudden appearance of ecstatic practices in the title of the third part may be surprising, ecstaticity provides an important context for the whole book, and it is significantly connected with all the issues listed above. The key to understanding the close relationship between ecstasy and social life can be found in the introduction, where Szopa explains it using Dawid Kujawa's understanding of that notion: "here ecstasy refers to a specific artistic practice, which is about oscillating between the real and the possible" (WW 14)⁸; "this oscillating motion, as Kujawa explains, results in extending the horizon of social imagination" (WW 14).

Ecstacy refers to art reaching towards the (im)possible: going beyond the limitation of the present towards what only begins to be imaginable. In this sense, ecstatic poetry possesses imaginative potential – it is able to construct, establish or foretell a world that is yet to come; model the (un)expected, and open us to surprise. Of course, this way of thinking results directly from the romanticist, modernist, and ultimately avantgarde tradition of utopian and

⁸ See Dawid Kujawa, *Pocałunki ludu. Poezja i krytyka po roku 2000* [Folk's Kisses. Poetry and Criticism after 2000] (Kraków: Korporacja Ha!art 2021), 27.

futuristic thinking. It is enriched with a “spiritual” vision of ecstasy, which refers to going beyond oneself, transgressing the borders of self – and the system.

Similarly to Kujawa, Szopa highlights the critical value of utopian reflection and emancipatory contexts of art oriented towards the future. In their shared understanding, imagination allows us to construct a model of a better world or to create an enclave of unrestrained freedom in the space of what is currently surrounding us. At the same time, imagination has not only an abstract dimension: it translates into the functioning of a community – even if this is a community of the future.

In Szopa’s understanding – in Świrszczyńska’s understanding – ecstasy is directly connected with social issues: it shows a vision of reality, in which various limitations, hierarchies, and exploitation will disappear. This is of course connected with Świrszczyńska’s pro-socialist ideas, which she made clear on numerous occasions. Such a way of thinking about ecstasity is somewhat more specified than for Kujawa, for whom “engaged” topics are not a major issue⁹; however, as Szopa points out, Świrszczyńska was deeply interested in the reality of functioning during wartime and the post-war era – and that interest is clearly visible in her poetry.

Szopa highlights Świrszczyńska’s critical attitude towards the reality of life in the Eastern Block. In this sense, observations regarding the functioning of former Soviet states, which in fact acted according to the capitalist desire for profit and maximalization of production, but achieved it using different tools than western countries, are among the most interesting if not the most exposed ideas of the monograph. Thanks to this interpretative insightfulness, Szopa does not fall into an idealized vision of People’s Poland period, and also avoids overenthusiasm for the contemporary socio-economic and cultural situation of women. Szopa notices numerous inconsistencies and downsides – from the perspective of excluded subjects, including women – of the classical materialist thought and its extensions, frequently citing various corrections which feminist critics applied to Marx and other theoreticians.

Szopa consistently bases her work on Świrszczyńska’s ideas. In this perspective, Świrszczyńska is a critic of the received social, political, and cultural situation – and like Szopa, a critic interested in the multidimensional materiality of excluded subjects’ condition. Her criticism is specific – in Szopa’s vision, Świrszczyńska very often focuses on showing possible alternative realities, presenting readers with visions in which the world is free from currently perceived limitations. Interestingly, Szopa demonstrates how such dependencies can be seen not only in Świrszczyńska’s “engaged” poems, but also in her famous auto-erotic texts, which clearly show the unexpected tangle of politics, ecstasy and imagination, whose analysis is the goal of her monograph. How does taking care of one’s own happiness lead to ecstatic states? What role does the body play in that process? In what sense does it prove

⁹ I refer to ideas scattered across many papers – examples of ways of thinking about the politics of art, which has nothing to do with topics undertaken by that art can be found in a debate with Paweł Kaczmarek and Łukasz Żurek, conducted in “Mały Format”. See e.g. “Czułość i nieczułość w jednym stały domu” [Tenderness and non-tenderness were in the same house], *Mały Format* 4 (2021), <http://malyformat.com/2021/04/kujawa-kaczmarek-polemika/>, date of access: 10.09.2023.

to be an emancipatory action? Does it produce a certain type of socialized individualism, which the neoliberal discourse cannot appropriate? How does it change our understanding of reproducing social life?

Szopa offers convincing answers to those (and other) questions, using literary examples and detailed theoretical analyses. The monograph is also an excellent starting point for further research into similar topics. Although Szopa seems to continue to support difference feminism, highlighting material dimensions of functioning of subjects doing reproductive work, her book encourages discussion of those issues in different contexts. For example, it seems that it would be a good reference for questions regarding reproducing social life among other excluded subject – even though it is obviously not a problem discussed by Świrszczyńska.

However, what does require a deeper analysis is a closer look at Świrszczyńska's texts as phenomena which have a material (!) form. It seems that Szopa did not appreciate formal interpretations of Świrszczyńska's poetry – ways in which that poetry generates new worlds; systems of words, which facilitate the titular explosions of imagination. This is interesting especially given the fact that Kujawa consistently advocates for the primacy of form in his critical texts. For him, the ecstatic hides in itself potential for vagueness, setting off different, often extremely varied qualities; this leads to an explosion of imagination, generating space for unlimited speculation. It is true that ecstaticity can be perceived differently – and that in contemporary literary criticism it is explored by other scholars. After reading Szopa's brilliant monograph, the key question is: what about Świrszczyńska's poetry makes it so open to the imagination, utopia, to what is new, unknown, incomprehensible?

Katarzyna Szopa focuses mostly on meanings – on what results from a representationalist reading of Świrszczyńska's poetry, even if this representation is specific, open to depriving itself of the subject (the future does not exist yet, and so we cannot refer to it). Meanwhile, Kujawa is clearly against representationalism as a dominating way of reading poetry, postulating to focus on possible sensual arrangement of words – especially syntax and the semantic relationships it introduces (and modifies). And considering Świrszczyńska's minimalist poetry, laconic in terms of stylistic devices and typically associated with explicitness (however, with a lot of lyrical potential), a question about the ecstaticity of such a raw form would seem interesting. Is it set off mostly by the few means of expression, which leave space for movements of imagination? Does its quality differ from ecstaticity of more minimalist poetics? Are such understood texts machineries generating a chemical reaction rather than actually precisely constructing new worlds?

Although Szopa's monograph obviously discusses these questions, confronting a different understanding of ecstaticity and aesthetic concepts of modernism and the avantgarde, and analyzing their connections with politics or different forms of systemic violence (colonialism, war), this issue requires more attention. The unusual insightfulness of Szopa's political, theoretical, and methodological interpretation could therefore be refined with analyses of its relationship with aesthetics and identifying this connection where it seems to take place – in textual mechanisms.

Nonetheless, Szopa constructed an interesting, unusually broad and profound interpretative framework for Anna Świrszczyńska's poetry, which is an excellent basis for similar studies, at the same time representing current considerations of literary studies, and renewing interest in Świrszczyńska's work. And if that discussion focused – at least to some extent – on the question of ecstaticity of forms, this would be even better for Świrszczyńska, whose work found an important advocate in *Wybuch wyobraźni*.

translated by Paulina Zagórska

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KEYWORDS

Anna Świrszczyńska

ecstaticity

feminist criticism

ABSTRACT:

This is a review of Katarzyna Szopa's latest book, *Wybuch wyobraźni. Poezja Anny Świrszczyńskiej wobec reprodukcji życia społecznego* (Katowice 2022). It summarizes Szopa's academic achievements, contextualizes her research (feminist and Marxist criticism), and provides a brief description of the monograph's contents. The paper analyzes the titular notion of reproduction of social life and imagination, which are referred to the ecstaticity category employed by Szopa, ultimately problematizing all three notions in Anna Świrszczyńska's poetry.

social life reproduction

KATARZYNA SZOPA

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Agnieszka Waligóra – Polish philologist, philosopher, literary scholar, literary critic and translator, PhD in humanities. Her research interests focus mostly on Polish poetry of the 20th and 21st century and its theoretical, political, and philosophical contexts, as well as literary studies methodologies, including translation studies. Beneficiary of the Diamond Grant in 2018-2022. Author of *Nowy autotematyzm? Metarefleksja w poezji polskiej po roku 1989* [New mise en abyme? Metareflection in Polish poetry post 1989] (Kraków 2023) and scientific editor of *Nowy autotematyzm? Metarefleksja we współczesnej humanistyce* [New mise en abyme? Metareflection in contemporary Polish humanities] (Poznań 2021). She has published in “Porównania”, “Przestrzenie Teorii”, “Wielogłos”, “Przekładaniec”, “Czas Kultury”, “Kontent”, “Notatnik Literacki”, and co-authored many papers. She has (co-)translated into Polish texts by Elaine Showalter, Emily Apter and Rita Felski. As a critic, she works for WBPiCAK in Poznań. |

Poetics in use

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Jerzy Madejski, *Poetyka ekstremalna oraz inne noty o krytyce i lirycie współczesnej* [Extreme poetics and other notes on lyrics and contemporary critique], Wydawnictwo Pasaże, Kraków 2021

Poetyka ekstremalna [Extreme poetics] is a comprehensive collection of short critical texts published by Jerzy Madejski in various Polish cultural magazines – mostly “Nowe Książki” and “Kwartalnik Artystyczny”, with some reviews reprinted from “Odra” and a magazine from Szczecin, “Pogranicza”. The decision to publish texts written over almost two decades in one volume makes *Poetyka ekstremalna* an intellectual diary of one of the most renowned and influential commentators of contemporary literary life in Poland. Jerzy Madejski is a lecturer at the University of Szczecin who specializes in modern Polish poetry and prose, and autobiography. In recent years he has published two books: *Poetologie poststrukturalne. Szkice krytyczne* [Poststructural poetologies. Critical essays] (Szczecin 2018) and *Praktykowanie autobiografii. Przyczynki do literatury dokumentu osobistego i biografistyki* [Practicing autobiography. On the literature of personal document and biography] (Szczecin 2017). For years he has been an editor in a semi-annual from Szczecin, “Autobiografia”.

The book is divided in two parts. The first, entitled *O lirycie* [On lyric], contains forty-four reviews of poetic books (not just “new” volumes, but also various re-editions, selected editions, and anthologies). The second, entitled *O krytyce* [On critique] – in which the word “critique” is understood very broadly – consists of eighteen texts, including reviews of specialized literary studies books, collections of essays, as well as three extensive interviews.

The concise introduction briefly discusses the contents of the volume, and reveals some technical aspects of the writing process behind subsequent reviews – most were commissioned by magazines rather than chosen by the critic. This is interesting, because – as Madejski observes – the reviews collected in the volume constitute a coherent whole, even though this observation is not accompanied by any methodological declaration or theoretical comment. Madejski only suggests that “perhaps the titular essay reflects the spirit of the whole volume, which is an attempt at understanding Andrzej Sosnowski’s book, but also some aspects of all works by that poet, critic, and translator”¹. Madejski thus does not decide to directly explain

¹ Jerzy Madejski, *Poetyka ekstremalna oraz inne noty o lirycie i krytyce współczesnej* [Extreme poetics and other notes on lyrics and contemporary critique] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Pasaże, 2021), 9.

the program of the titular “extreme poetics”, forcing the reader to undertake the effort of reconstructing the “method” of dealing with poetry applied in that book. The author outlines possible ways of using the volume, which he would like to see as “a reviewer’s (or maybe even beginner poet’s) guidebook”².

Despite Madejski’s declaration that his choice was limited (due to the fact that the reviews were commissioned), *Poetyka ekstremalna* is not chaotic. Based on characteristics shared by the reviewed works, it is possible to recreate his research interests and identify those features of authors and their works which attract Madejski’s attention the most.

In the introduction, the author admits his interest in the figure of “an educated poet”, which apparently realizes itself in the case of poets who are simultaneously scholars. Many of the works reviewed by Madejski were written by distinguished scholars, well-known in the Polish literary studies environment. Apart from historians of literature from Wrocław listed by Madejski in the introduction, there is also Józef Franciszek Fert (review of the 2019 *Dagerotypy* [Daguerreotypes])³, Leszek Szaruga (discussion of the 2015 *Fluktuacja kwantowa* [Quantum fluctuation])⁴ and Anna Nasiłowska (the 2018 *Ciemne przejścia* [Dark transitions])⁵. However, the authors discussed in *Poetyka ekstremalna* who do not work in academia are mostly characterized by their erudition and theoretical awareness, which is showcased by their poems.

It would seem that writing convincing poetry thematizing autobiography and *mise en abyme* – two areas of interest to Madejski – require a broad literary studies toolset: what he believes to be basic functions of poetry is realized in personal lyric, in the fullest meaning of the word.

I understand poetry (in line with what is stressed by contemporary literary theories) also as a record of personal experiences of individuals and communities. Here my attention is occupied by ways of objectifying human experience (love, breakup, loneliness, suffering, despair, pain...). I am especially interested in how a poem sometimes becomes an elementary part of autobiography. [...] It is known that today autobiography knows no limits, and traditionally, lyric has been a textual area for presenting and revealing various personal contents⁶.

Questions regarding which devices allow one to objectify the intimate, and whether and how poetry can be a way of dealing with difficult experiences occur repeatedly in reviews comprising the first part of the volume. However, the most typical characteristic of Madejski’s reviews, which clearly reveals his method of reading poetic texts, is the way he used traditional tools of poetics in its structuralist-formalist variant. A detailed analysis – including that of verse – of the structure of investigated poems, and situating an identified formal solution in a specific historical-literary context is the starting point of most of the reviews included in the volume. Next, Madejski moves on to the semantic layer of a poem, distinguishing key

² Madejski, 11.

³ Madejski, 81–84.

⁴ Madejski, 93–95.

⁵ Madejski, 125–128.

⁶ Madejski, 10.

motifs and topics, and shows what kind of transformations they undergo in the discussed works. Only then does he offer his own interpretation of such described elements of a poetic text. This aspect of Madejski's book is important especially due to the fact that by consistently applying this method he proves that traditional reading of philological literature is useful in reading contemporary poetry. Perhaps this "return to sources" hides the answer to the question what the titular extremity of poetics is about.

As he stresses in the introduction, Madejski often reviews particular poetic volumes through a detailed analysis of individual poems. I would like to illustrate this method by using the same practice on the example of the poetics of one text, characteristic for *Poetyka ekstremalna*. This is how Madejski opens his review of Mieszysław Machnicki's 2014 *jest tylko gradobicie i deszcz Perseidów* [there is only a hailstorm and a meteor shower]:

Mieczysław Machnicki improves in the art of the tenth, i.e. describing the world in the form of a ten-verse strophe. It is not common in Polish poetry; it can be found in Jan Kochanowski's poems, in odes by Kajetan Koźmian, and – sporadically – in other authors. What makes a contemporary poet resort to what would seem to be a used-up and unfunctional verse and aesthetic solution? Come to think of it, Machnicki fills his book of poems with five distiches, which together comprise a tenth⁷.

Later in the text, Madejski cites in full one of the poems, whose predominant semantic feature is the garden topos. When he moves on to analyzing the text, he points out how a description of a specific space becomes a metaphor of cosmic order. Next, he indicates poetry by Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz and Leopold Staffs as possible inspirations. After this extensive discussion of a single poem, he makes some general comments on the whole book of poems:

[...] Is Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, as an author of octaves, Machnicki's patron? Here, too, poetry is a manifestation of formal virtuosity, and the most important aspects of art include: sound, rhythm, euphony. [...] Machnicki seems to try to merge different versions of aesthetics. We can find baroque conceptism in his works. One poem is based on parallelly constructed verses, which open with "if I regret anything..." (p. 26). There is also a poem, in which subsequent verses are connected with one conjunction (polysyndeton). [...] It is true that in this type of aesthetics the subject is blurred. As a result, we ask who is talking to us, and who writes poetry for us⁸.

The second part of the book comprises mostly (although not exclusively) reviews (eighteen in total) of critical publications on various poets presented in a monograph or quasi-monograph style, among others: Tadeusz Różewicz, Stanisław Barańczak, Zbigniew Herbert, Ryszard Krynicki and Ewa Lipska. In each text Madejski tries to familiarize readers with the discussed authors and their academic achievements. Na drugą część *Poetyki ekstremalnej* składają się głównie (choć nie wyłącznie) omówienia publikacji poświęconych konkretnym poetom przedstawianym w monograficznym lub quasi-monograficznym ujęciu. Do wyboru osiemnastu szkiców weszły recenzje książek poświęconych między innymi Tadeuszowi Różewiczowi,

⁷ Madejski, 61.

⁸ Madejski, 62–63.

Stanisławowi Barańczakowi, Zbigniewowi Herbertowi, Ryszardowi Krynickiemu czy Ewie Lipskiej. Należy docenić, że w każdym z tekstów Madejski stara się przybliżyć sylwetkę badacza lub badaczki stojących za publikacją i wskazać na ich wcześniejsze dokonania naukowe.

Most reviews from this part are kind towards the authors, although not without reservations and disputes. However, there is one exception: *Pomiędzy wieżą Babel a wieżą z kości słoniowej O poezji Tadeusza Różewicza* [Between the Babel tower and an ivory tower. On Tadeusz Różewicz's poetry]. (2008) by Jan Marx was mercilessly criticized – Madejski does not find a single argument in its favor. His criticism is elegant and within conventions of critical discourse, however, the fact that this is the only clearly negative review in the whole book is somewhat surprising.

Poetyka ekstremalna is without a doubt a good book. Madejski kept his promise from the introduction, and created a guidebook for literary critics presenting “on examples” how to write about poems and discursive texts on literature. The monograph is specialist, written by an erudite, and as such, it should be treated as a professional, critical-literary book. For this reason, I disagree with Paweł Próchniak, who states that Madejski's essays “seek resonance with the world beyond academia”, który we fragmencie recenzji naukowej przedrukowanej na okładce *Poetyki ekstremalnej* stwierdza, że zawarte w niej szkice „szukają rezonansu ze światem poza akademią” as it is difficult to imagine how this book could be of use to readers who are not skilled in professional humanities. Nonetheless, for all professional literary critics and scholars, *Poetyka ekstremalna* is a collection of model “critical miniatures” (a term aptly used by Madejski to describe his own texts) which can be of use in honing their skills.

translated by Paulina Zagórska

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KEYWORDS

Jerzy Madejski

review

LITERARY CRITICISM

ABSTRACT:

The paper reviews Jerzy Madejski's collection of critical essays *Poetyka ekstremalna oraz inne noty o liryce i krytyce współczesnej*, an anthology comprising forty-four reviews of poetic books, and eighteen reviews of literary studies books previously published by Madejski in various literary magazines, such as "Nowe Książki", "Kwartalnik Artystyczny" and "Odra". Madejski reads the analyzed texts carefully, philologically, and then puts forward his own hypotheses and proposes his interpretations. As a result, *Poetyka ekstremalna* is a *vademecum* which can be used by reviewers as a guidebook for writing critical-literary texts.

philological reading

CRITICAL MINIATURE

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